

Isaac of Stella, the Cistercians and the Thomas Becket Controversy: A Bibliographical and Contextual Study

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ISAAC OF STELLA, THE CISTERCIANS AND THE THOMAS
BECKET CONTROVERSY: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL
AND CONTEXTUAL STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT
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Isaac of Stella (ca. 1100-ca. 1169), an English-born Cistercian and abbot, has been dwarfed by Bernard of Clairvaux and other of his twelfth-century Cistercian contemporaries in terms of literary output and influence, giving him a reputation as an elusive and marginal figure. Isaac's 55 sermons and two treatises are modest compared to the productivity of other monastic writers and his position as the abbot of an obscure monastery in western France has not helped to raise his visibility among the luminaries of the twelfth century. He is remembered as a mysterious and often tragic figure in the annals of history.

Recent scholarship has shed light on this elusive abbot. One area of his life that has attracted some attention has been Isaac's involvement in the controversy between Henry II (1133-89) and Thomas Becket (ca. 1120-70), archbishop of Canterbury. Gaetano Raciti in particular has argued that Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy, specifically siding with Becket in the archbishop's quarrel with the king, led to Isaac's exile to the island of Ré and the loss of his abbacy. Raciti's research, which continues to be influential, focused on Isaac's sermons and from them he compiled numerous biographical and historical clues to piece together Isaac's ultimate downfall as abbot.

But Raciti's interpretations have been reconsidered by a few scholars, initially by Claude Garda as well as the subsequent research of Ferruccio Gastaldelli and Elias Dietz. In this dissertation, I continue the reconsideration of Raciti's interpretations. In particular I focus on Isaac's role as a monk as well as his continuity with the Christian monastic tradition. Contrary to Raciti's interpretations, I demonstrate that Isaac's support of Becket was minimal and not the cause of serious consequences affecting his abbacy. This demonstration is based on reading Isaac's sermons not as sources of either biographical or historical data but rather as monastic sermons. Isaac's sermons provide proof of his continuity with his monastic forbears and place them in their proper theological and monastic context. Isaac emerges as neither mysterious nor tragic but rather as a monk who wrote for monks.

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Travis D. Stolz, B.A., M.Div.

The origin of this dissertation can be traced back to the fall of 2002 when I took Dr. Wanda Zemler-Cizewski's seminar on the twelfth century. This was followed by a study of the *Glossa ordinaria*, also with Dr. Zemler-Cizewski, in the fall of 2003. Both of these experiences created in me a love of medieval history and theology, as well as providing me with the armature with which to write this dissertation. Heretofore my interests lay mainly in patristics and early Christian monasticism. I became fascinated, however, by a period commonly dismissed as backward and dark, one for which Gibbon's rather dismal description as being the "triumph of barbarism and religion" remains the standard view.

It was then that I first read the figure who would come to occupy so much of my time, Isaac of Stella (ca. 1100-ca. 1169). The people who have enabled me to write about my Cistercian friend from the twelfth century are far too numerous to mention. I must, however, acknowledge the following to whom I owe a particular debt of gratitude.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Statement of the Problem.....	1
B. Purpose of the Present Study.....	3
C. Objective of the Present Study.....	4
D. <i>Status Quaestionis</i>	5
E. Isaac's Life and Career.....	12
F. Limitations and Scope.....	30
G. Significance and Contribution of Research to Existing Scholarship...31	
H. Organization of Present Study.....	32
I. Summary.....	34
CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	37
A. Introduction.....	37
B. Historical Background of the Problem.....	38
C. Isaac of Stella's Critics and His Place in Modern Scholarship.....	46
D. Analysis of Literature Relevant to the Problem.....	47
E. Relation of Literature to Present Study.....	68
F. Rationale and Hypotheses for Present Study.....	71
G. Summary.....	73
CHAPTER II. RESEARCH METHODS.....	77
A. Introduction and Overview.....	77
B. Historical Background to Becket Controversy.....	78

1. Thomas Becket's Significance.....	78
2. Biography and Background of Thomas Becket.....	80
3. Clash with Henry II.....	86
4. Death and Aftermath.....	91
5. Investiture Controversy.....	93
6. Cistercians.....	104
7. Isaac.....	113
C. Methods.....	117
D. Summary.....	120
CHAPTER III. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH.....	123
A. Introduction and Overview.....	123
1. Restatement of the Purpose of the Present Study.....	123
B. Presentation of Findings.....	127
1. Isaac's Predecessors in Monastic Literature.....	127
2. Monastic Approaches to Scripture.....	128
3. Geographic and Spatial References.....	133
4. Isaac's Sermons.....	138
a. Isaac on Allegory.....	138
b. Circumstantial Details.....	146
c. Historical Details.....	148
d. Geographic Details.....	151
e. Language, Style and the Question of Vernacular Preaching.....	154
f. Exile.....	165

C. Discussion of Findings.....	170
D. Summary.....	183
SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	185
A. Summary.....	185
B. Interpretation.....	192
C. Limitations.....	197
D. Directions for Future Research.....	201
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	208

Introduction

A. Statement of the Problem

While scholars can no longer affirm Louis Bouyer's remark that Isaac of Stella (ca. 1100-ca. 1169) is "a great mystery among the Cistercians," Isaac nevertheless remains elusive.¹ Unlike some of his contemporary Cistercians such as Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-67), William of St. Thierry (ca. 1075/80-1148) or Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Isaac wrote comparatively little: two treatises and 55 sermons. That much of Isaac's time was spent as the abbot of a small and relatively unimportant monastery near Chauvigny doubtless has not helped his cause.

In neither productivity nor profundity was Isaac another Bernard.² "The Cistercian Order was to produce and inspire many excellent preachers, but surely Saint Bernard of Clairvaux is the stellar example," Hughes Oliphant Old observes. "(H)e has been consistently recognized through the centuries as a star of the first magnitude, if not the greatest preacher of the Middle Ages. Even today his sermons are read with abundant profit."³ "The Cistercians wrote under the dominating influence of St. Bernard," R. W. Southern reports, "who...gave a theological background and a doctrinal stability and

¹ Louis Bouyer, *The Cistercian Heritage*, trans. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1958), 161.

² "Read by all men in monastic and ecclesiastical circles, and immensely influential with individuals," writes David Knowles, "Bernard's treatises influenced Abelard and Gilbert de la Porrée no more than Newman's essay on the development of doctrine influenced the European theologians who were about to create neo-Thomism in the late nineteenth century. Bernard indeed was the last of the fathers; when all around him was changing, he continued to compose as monuments of his genius the meditative monographs of a kind that had been the vehicle for all western theology from the days of Augustine to the eleventh century." David Knowles, "The Middle Ages: 604-1350," in *A History of Christian Doctrine*, ed. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 253.

³ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich., and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 256.

consistency to the devotional writings of his followers.”⁴ “Early Cistercian history and biography,” Hugh McCaffrey describes, “especially if emanating from the Valley of Glory that Clairvaux then was, depends very much on the glory that was St. Bernard.”

While Isaac, abbot of Stella, did not altogether escape that glory, he does not, at first glance, much reflect it, and could give the impression of rejecting it. Small wonder, then, he does not shine very extensively in the story of early Cistercian chronicle.⁵

In the decades since Bouyer remarked on the “mysteriousness” of Isaac, the scholarship on Isaac has grown and his mystery has diminished.⁶ One area of his life that has received attention has been his role in the controversy between Henry II (1133-89) and Thomas Becket (ca. 1120-70), archbishop of Canterbury. Gaetano Raciti, among others, has claimed that Isaac’s involvement with and support of Becket led to his exile to the island of Ré, thus ending his career as abbot of Stella.⁷ But neither Raciti nor others have focused their attention on Isaac as a monk. What is not understood is whether

⁴ R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1953), 227. Knowles reports: “He [i.e., Bernard] was widely read, but by monks and churchmen rather than by masters in the schools, and when a century later he became an ‘authority,’ he was cited as the fathers were cited, and like them, his opinions counted for much in the long run, though his influence was perhaps at its greatest in the border country between devotional writing and formal theology.” Knowles, “Middle Ages,” 254.

⁵ *Sermons on the Christian Year*, trans. Hugh McCaffrey (CF 11; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1979), 221. “The Order in its early years attracted some of the most gifted men of their generation,” Pauline Matarasso writes. “There was no lack of fine minds or literary talent. Indeed it has been said of the first Cistercians that they renounced everything except the art of writing well.” *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. Pauline Matarasso (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1993), xiv.

⁶ Among the standard reference works, however, coverage of Isaac leaves something to be desired. On the one hand, one can find Ignatius C. Brady, “Isaac of Stella,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2003 ed., 7: 589-90, as well as Ludwig Hödl, “I. de Stella,” in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 1980 ed., 5: 665. But on the other hand, the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* omits an entry on Isaac entirely.

⁷ I shall devote much of the following chapter to Raciti’s seminal article, “Isaac de l’Étoile et son siècle,” *Cîteaux* 12 (1961): 281-306; 13 (1962): 18-34, 133-45, 205-16. Suffice to say for the time being, this article continues to be of great importance and remains one that influences scholars today in their assessment of Isaac’s career.

Isaac's role as a monk and his continuity with the Christian monastic tradition were factors in this relationship.

But if we look at the evidence from an historical perspective, we see that Raciti's interpretation of the relationship between Isaac and Becket may well be incorrect. Until we have a better understanding of Isaac as a monk as well as the monastic theology that is contained in his sermons in particular, Isaac will remain to some degree "a great mystery." In what follows, I argue that Isaac's support of Becket was minimal and led neither to his exile to Ré nor any other serious consequences affecting his status as abbot of Stella.

I also argue that while scholars have claimed that Isaac provides clues in his sermons concerning his support of Becket and its effects, they rather provide proof of Isaac's fundamental continuity with the Christian monastic tradition. Thus Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy was only slight and while he is on record as supporting Becket, his attention as a monk as well as an abbot was focused far more on the spiritual formation of his monks.

B. Purpose of the Present Study

In this study, I demonstrate on the basis of the historical and documentary evidence, as well as the political and ecclesiastical context of Becket's struggle with Henry, that Isaac's role was a marginal one, and that therefore whatever support Isaac may have given to Becket and his cause was not the reason for official sanction or retribution. An analysis of Isaac's involvement with Becket can provide new answers to old questions and, perhaps more important, set the historical record straight. By

demonstrating Isaac's continuity with his monastic predecessors, I demonstrate as well Isaac's theological purpose and motivation in his sermons.

In this chapter I describe the reasons for this study. I begin with a concise statement of the problem and explanation of its relevance, as well as the thesis that I shall defend. I establish two important points that form the foundation of my argument concerning Isaac. First, that Raciti's theory concerning Isaac, Becket and Isaac's "exile" is a dubious one, built on evidence that fails to consider the historical context. Second, that Raciti's theory overemphasizes Isaac's role, giving him a status or importance he did not have.

C. Objective of the Present Study

The guiding question is whether evidence exists for Isaac's direct role in the Becket controversy as well as his support of Becket. My purpose in this study is to rework Isaac's role in the Becket controversy and argue that Isaac was in reality a minor player. Additionally, he was not forced into exile on Ré or otherwise persecuted. Isaac was, rather, a monk who wrote for monks and endeavored—particularly in his sermons—to instruct and guide concerning the monastic life.

What Raciti and most of the scholars on Isaac have written does not stand up to scrutiny. The internal evidence within Isaac's sermons, the correspondence of Becket himself and other historical documents demonstrate that Raciti's interpretations were fundamentally flawed concerning Isaac. Raciti's thesis of a forced exile to the island of Ré as punishment for Isaac's support of Becket, on which I shall elaborate in the

following chapter, fails due to Raciti's inexorable drive to extract biographical information from Isaac's sermons. Raciti's speculation nevertheless has proved influential, as demonstrated by the basic acceptance of scholars such as Gaston Salet and Bernard McGinn. The result is that Isaac is more often than not seen as a tragic figure who suffered much for his political alignment.

D. *Status Quaestionis*

Much of the scholarship on Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy has focused either on the clash of royal and ecclesiastical power or, more recently and in particular with Claude Garda,⁸ the study of manuscript and other archival material. Relatively little attention, however, has been paid to Isaac's role as a monk and abbot. Practically no attention has been paid to the theological content and context of Isaac's sermons, both of which are monastic as well as in keeping with his predecessors in the Christian monastic tradition.

My own understanding of the Becket controversy defies easy categorization under the heading of church and state. As Beryl Smalley rightly observes, "It is better to avoid the terms 'Church and State': secular and ecclesiastical government overlapped; Catholic rulers belonged to the polity of Latin Christendom and fought out their quarrels in that framework; the secular State was unheard of."⁹

⁸ Garda's article, "Du nouveau sur Isaac de l'Étoile," *Cîteaux* 37 (1986): 8-22, will be treated in the following chapter.

⁹ Beryl Smalley, *The Becket Controversy and the Schools: A Study of Intellectuals in Politics* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 15.

I have attempted, therefore, not to frame my topic in the familiar terms of church and state. While these terms are well known to us it is an approach that is anachronistic at best concerning the subject at hand. As this is a study in historical theology, I focus rather on Isaac as a monk writing for monks, specifically a Cistercian abbot writing for (and preaching to) Cistercian monks and lay brothers. The figure of the abbot-*cum*-preacher was exemplified in Bernard, about whom Old remarks:

Saint Bernard's example of the abbot-preacher produced a number of preaching abbots in the course of the twelfth century. This was a significant facet of his reform. As abbots they were the pastors of congregations of monks. They well understood that a pastor's first responsibility—indeed, one of the services of Christian love he is charged to perform—is to preach the Word of God to his flock.¹⁰

Since my subject is Isaac himself, my focus will be to tease out what information can be obtained from the admittedly small amount that exists. I concentrate in particular on Isaac's sermons and issues such as how and why they were produced, to whom he preached and how he dealt with the text of Scripture before him. My collection of evidence, presented explicitly in Chapter II, will demonstrate that while the sources are hard to come by, much work has been done to collect, analyze and interpret what is available. Much work remains to be done, however, and my research can be only a very modest contribution.

In a letter dated 22 June 1164, John Bellesmains (d. 1204), a fellow Englishman and Bishop of Poitiers since 1162, wrote to Becket. Bellesmains urges Becket to forge closer ties with Guichard, Abbot of Pontigny. He also mentions that their "common

¹⁰ Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 284.

friend,” Isaac of Stella, is joining him in asking the Pontigny houses to pray for Becket’s cause.¹¹

From this brief mention, Isaac became inextricably linked to the controversy between Becket and Henry, what David Knowles has called “probably the most familiar episode in the history of the twelfth century.”¹² The question of the extent to which Isaac was involved in this episode is a crucial one as it forms the *raison d’être* of this study as well as the basis on which I shall make my own contribution.

While I shall deal with Isaac’s involvement in the Becket controversy more fully in Chapter II, here and now I provide a summary of the relationship between Isaac and Becket. The work of Raciti, which looms so large in the following chapter, must be mentioned here. Scholars of Isaac owe Raciti a tremendous debt of gratitude for working through Isaac’s sermons in exacting detail, as evidenced by a series of articles that has influenced more than a generation of scholars.

Raciti argued that Isaac was exiled to the island of Ré in the late 1160s as a consequence of his speculative theology as well as his active support of Becket. While subsequent scholars—most notably Salet and McGinn—have expressed reservations about certain features of Raciti’s argument, they have maintained the general outline of Raciti’s argument as well as his chronology. Only recently have scholars have begun to break with Raciti’s notion of a forced exile, about which I shall elaborate in Chapter I.

¹¹ Letter 31. *Materials* 5: 114; ET: *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canturbury, 1162-1170*, ed. and trans. Anne Duggan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. 2 vols.), 1: 105. (Hereafter *Correspondence*.)

¹² David Knowles, *The Historian and Character, and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 98.

Raciti argued that Isaac's references to a period of "exile" on an island, presumably Ré,¹³ actually referred to an exile into which Isaac was forced. Raciti identified two reasons for Isaac's exile: Isaac's speculative theology and in particular his "concrete and active support toward the cause of Thomas Becket."¹⁴ According to Raciti, Geoffrey of Auxerre (ca.1120-ca. 1188) was responsible for Isaac's exile for both reasons. Indeed, Geoffrey was Isaac's "personal enemy."¹⁵

Geoffrey served as Bernard's secretary and was opposed to Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202) and Gilbert de la Porée (1070-1154). Geoffrey opposed, according to Raciti, the speculation of Isaac, in particular Isaac's use of Plato and Aristotle. Bernard himself dismissed Plato and Aristotle, as well as their followers, calling them "vain inquisitors" (*vani rectius*).¹⁶ Raciti also argues that as the leader of the anti-Becket party among the Cistercians, Geoffrey was a key player in the campaign to depose Isaac and force him into exile on Ré. Geoffrey's campaign, as Raciti puts it, was "to punish the holy and brilliant Isaac because of his political standpoint."¹⁷

When Henry nominated his friend and then chancellor, Becket, to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162, he hardly expected the tumultuous events that would lead to Becket's murder on 29 December 1170. Far from being a compliant appointee, Becket resisted Henry's encroachments on the rights of the church. By the middle of 1163, Becket and Henry clashed over the king's responsibilities and political reach, in

¹³ Franz Bliemetzrieder initially identified the island as Ré; see the following chapter.

¹⁴ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶ *In Die Pentecostis* 3.3. *Sancti Bernardi opera*, eds. Jean Leclercq et al. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1955-77. 8 vols.), 5: 173. (Hereafter *SBO*.)

¹⁷ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 34.

particular the issue of so-called “criminous clerks,” i.e., clerics accused of serious crimes. Henry insisted that such cases were subject to civil law and, therefore, civil courts.

According to Herbert of Bosham’s *Vita* (1184-86), Becket argued that the clergy “because of their orders and distinctive office have Christ alone as their king” and are therefore “set apart from the nations of men.”¹⁸ Becket continued that since clerics are not under secular kings, but rather the King of Heaven (*rex caelestis*) as well as a spiritual law and jurisdiction, they ought to be ruled according to their own law.¹⁹ The normal punishment of mutilation was further deemed inappropriate for clergy since it would deform the image of God. It was sufficient that a priest should be deprived of his orders and status as clergy. A priest could only be subject to the civil courts if he committed a subsequent crime.²⁰

The issue, however, was hardly cut and dried. W. L. Warren reports that “(i)n his firm rebuttal of the king’s proposal Becket was assuming that canon law was much clearer on the subject than was warranted.”²¹ Ever since the fractious reign of Stephen (1135-54), “there had occurred a considerable and unplanned expansion in the fields of ecclesiastical government and jurisdiction. The old framework had been shaken and was threatened with demolition.”²²

The bishops sided with Becket. “The remarkable, and decisive, fact, however, was that the rest of the bishops were apparently unanimous in support of Becket on this

¹⁸ *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: Longman, 1875-85. 7 vols.), 3: 268. (Hereafter *Materials*.)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 271. See also 4: 201-5; Charles Duggan, “The Becket Dispute and Criminous Clerks,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 35 (1962): 1-31.

²¹ Wilfred Lewis Warren, *Henry II* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1973), 468.

²² Frank Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 91.

issue,” Warren continues. “They, it seems, were at least hoping he was right.”²³ Henry, however, declared the bishops had formed a conspiracy and after he questioned each bishop personally, he stormed out of the meeting—the Council of Westminster, early October 1163—and left for London the next day without speaking to Becket or any of the bishops.

Round one went to Becket. Henry was down but far from out. Not long after the council, Bellesmains wrote to Becket and mentioned that “as far as human aid is concerned, you should not expect from the Curia anything that might offend the king.”²⁴ Pope Alexander III, exiled in France at this time, was trying desperately to maintain the support of Henry and Louis VII of France against Frederick I Barbarossa. Bellesmains tells Becket, however, that he is going to Pontigny “to recommend both your intentions and my own to the prayers of the brethren.”²⁵

It was not until early 1164 that Henry counterattacked. At the Council of Clarendon in mid-January 1164, Henry defined royal and ecclesiastical rights as they had existed under Henry I. Henry affirmed, *inter alia*, that no one could be excommunicated without royal consent and that clergy accused of crimes were to be handed over to the ecclesiastical courts after being interrogated by royal officials. Accused clergy would then be tried in the presence of a royal judge and, if found guilty, turned over to the royal courts for sentencing and punishment. The latter, as Becket well knew, included mutilation as well as execution.

²³ Warren, *Henry II*, 468.

²⁴ *Materials* 5: 56; ET: *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1162-1170*, ed. and trans. Anne J. Duggan (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000. 2 vols.), 1: 45. (Hereafter *Correspondence*.)

²⁵ *Materials* 5: 57; ET: *Correspondence* 1: 47.

Frank Barlow sums up the issues at stake in this third clause of the Constitutions of Clarendon:

There are here two threats to clerical immunity. There was to be no automatic release of the clerk to the church christian; and, as we know from later practice, on some charges, for example breach of forest laws, the clerk would be tried and punished in the royal court. But, more important, a procedure was envisaged which circumvented clerical immunity. The guilty clerk was to be degraded and then punished as a layman.²⁶

Becket was furious, arguing that the Constitutions amounted to double trial or punishment for an accused priest. He agreed initially with the Constitutions but quickly did a *volte face*, refusing even to affix his seal to the document.²⁷ Both Becket and Henry had reached their respective points of no return. On 14 October 1164, Becket left for France where he would remain for six years.

Following a brief *rapprochement* between Becket and Henry at Fréteval on 22 July 1170, Becket returned to his see. The reconciliation between king and archbishop proved to be short lived. The tension between Becket and Henry returned as before. By Christmas Day Becket had excommunicated “all violators of the rights of his church and the fomentors of discord in general.”²⁸ Thus set in motion the chain of events that culminated in Becket’s murder in Canterbury Cathedral on 29 December 1170.

²⁶ Barlow, *Becket*, 101-2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

E. Isaac's Life and Career

“When a twelfth-century schoolmaster introduced his pupils to the study of a new author he frequently provided them with a short introduction, or *accessus*,” G. R. Evans offers at the beginning of her study of Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm and a New Generation*. “Among other things,” she continues, “this explained what was the subject-matter of the work, what was the author’s intention in writing it, what branch of study it belonged to, and what was the *utilitas* of profitableness in writing it.”²⁹ Jean Leclercq describes that “the *accessus* is a short history which takes up for each author the following questions: the life of the author, the title of the work, the writer’s intention, the subject of the book, the usefulness of its contents, and, finally, the question what branch of philosophy it belongs to.”³⁰

Providing an *accessus* to Isaac, given the dearth of information concerning most of his life, is a considerable challenge. “What little is known of Isaac of Stella,” Pauline Matarasso discusses, “has been gleaned from his own writings and can be set down in a few lines discreetly padded with conjecture.”³¹ Nevertheless, as McGinn reports, “The modest information we have about the abbot of Stella helps us fill out something of the story of his life, while the rich theology of his surviving sermons and two treatises enable us to locate him in the vibrant world of twelfth-century thought, if not always with

²⁹ G. R. Evans, *Anselm and a New Generation* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1980), 1.

³⁰ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982. 3d ed.), 116. See also E. A. Quain’s still valuable essay, “The Medieval *Accessus ad Auctores*,” *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought and Religion* 3 (1945): 215-64.

³¹ *Cistercian World*, 201.

biographical precision.”³² We know from Isaac that he was English,³³ although his exact date of birth remains elusive.

The scholarly consensus concerning Isaac’s date of birth is around 1100. Franz Bliemetzrieder only goes so far as to state that Isaac was born at the beginning of the twelfth century in England.³⁴ Bliemetzrieder further posits Isaac’s birth into a noble or wealthy family on the basis of *Sermon 27*.³⁵ Raciti concurs: “He was undoubtedly from a noble family. Doesn’t he acknowledge that an extremely talkative demon disturbed him during *lectio divina* by suggesting to him daydreams in connection with his good manners, his lineage, his natural charm, his distinction?”³⁶

Jeanette Debray-Mulatier argues for a later date of Isaac’s birth, between 1110 and 1120. “He was undoubtedly born at the beginning of the twelfth century, between 1110 and 1120,” she writes. “We do not have any precise data that allows us to establish with certainty the date of his birth.”³⁷ Debray-Mulatier, however, objects to Bliemetzrieder’s speculation concerning Isaac’s apparently noble or wealthy background.³⁸ She refers to Isaac’s remarks in *Sermon 27*: “We who in the world appeared to be something, in the assembly of our brothers, in order to be able to become something, we are reduced to nothing.”³⁹ Debray-Mulatier continues: “I believe Isaac is

³² *Selected Works*, 171.

³³ *De officio missae*. “Would that I were not English, or rather that here in exile I would never have seen any English!” *Utinam aut Anglus non fuisset, aut, ubi exsulo, Anglos nunquam vidissem!* PL 194: 1896B.

³⁴ Bliemetzrieder, “Isaak von Stella: Beiträge zur Lebensbeschreibung,” *Jahrbuch der Philosophie und spekulativen Theologie* 15 (1904): 22-3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3; see the following chapter.

³⁶ *DS* 7:2012. Raciti cites *Sermon* 38.8, SC 207: 310; PL 194: 1819B.

³⁷ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie d’Isaac de Stella,” *Cîteaux* 10 (1959): 179.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 180, referring to Bliemetzrieder, “Isaak von Stella,” 3.

³⁹ *Sermon* 27.2. *Qui in mundo aliquid videbamur, in congregatione quoque fratrum nonnihil reputati, ut vere aliquid fore possimus, ecce ad nihilum redacti sumus.* SC 207: 142; PL 194: 1778B.

thinking here not of his secular life, but of his traditional role of abbot of Stella, that it did not leave him to be anything more than but a simple monk on the island of Ré.”⁴⁰

Raciti argued initially for a date of birth of around 1100. Arguing against Debray-Mulatier, Raciti counters: “It is thus necessary to anticipate the birth of Isaac around 1100, instead of 1110-1120, as it is commonly accepted.”⁴¹ Raciti would, however, modify his view in this regard. In his article on Isaac in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Raciti writes: “One can place Isaac’s arrival in France around 1130, and thus conjecture that he was born about 1105-1120.”⁴²

Salet, in his introduction to the first critically-edited volume of Isaac’s sermons in *Sources chrétiennes*, reports: “Isaac was certainly born in England,” adding that “one can place his birth around the year 1100.”⁴³ McGinn initially tilted toward Salet and Raciti as well when he wrote in his study, *The Golden Chain: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Stella*: “On the basis of his becoming Abbot of Stella in 1147 after what must have been more than a few years in the Schools and as a simple monk, it is possible to conjecture that he was born early in the twelfth century, probably closer to 1100 as argued by Raciti and Salet, than the 1100-1120 of Debray-Mulatier.”⁴⁴ In time McGinn would further refine his view, arguing for a date of birth “sometime not long

⁴⁰ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie,” 180.

⁴¹ Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 303n.70. Necessary, that is, since Raciti believes Isaac studied at the Paraclete when Abélard taught there, i.e., 1122-25.

⁴² *DS* 7: 2012.

⁴³ *SC* 130: 12.

⁴⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Golden Chain: A Study of the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Stella* (CS 15; Washington, D.C.: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 7.

after 1100”⁴⁵ and most recently: “We can surmise that Isaac was born ca. 1110, and that he came to France as a young cleric probably in the late 1120s.”⁴⁶

Given the paucity of records at our disposal we are left with much conjecture. Isaac’s exact date of birth eludes us. So, too, do the schools where he studied. While Isaac does refer to his experience in the schools in *Sermon* 48, he provides too little information adequately to determine where he studied and with whom.

Debray-Mulatier argues that Isaac studied at Chartres. She bases this on the philosophical bent of his theology as evinced in his writings. Indeed, Isaac offers at least a brief autobiographical glimpse of his affinity with Plato, to whom Isaac refers to as “that great pagan theologian (*magnus ille gentium theologus*).”⁴⁷ According to Debray-Mulatier, Chartres was the likely candidate for Isaac’s intellectual formation. “This assumption would make it possible to understand how,” she goes on to relate, “although having given up philosophy, Isaac nevertheless keeps a philosophical spirit and enough independence not to disavow what he learned from Plato, Aristotle, and John Scotus when he considers their theories the best.”⁴⁸

Raciti offers a more specific and elaborate argument. He focuses on internal evidence in *Sermon* 48, a sermon of tremendous importance to Raciti as a source for Isaac’s biography. In the first chapter of his important article (“Les maîtres d’Isaac”),

⁴⁵ *Sermons*, xiii.

⁴⁶ *The Selected Works of Isaac of Stella: A Cistercian Voice from the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. Dániel Deme (Aldershot, Hants, England, and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2007), 171.

⁴⁷ *Sermon* 24.6. SC 207: 102; PL 194: 1769C. In the *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury states that Aristotle “merited the title of philosopher before all others” (4.7). McGinn writes: “(I)t is remarkable for a Cistercian abbot, an official in an order generally not noted for its sympathy to pagan philosophy, to pick up on the language of *Plato theologus* and to express it so directly. Bernard of Clairvaux makes several disparaging references to Plato and Aristotle, dismissing them and their followers with the comment, ‘They call themselves philosophers, but we more correctly term them vain inquisitors’ [quoting *In Die Pentecostis* 3.3]. But Isaac of Stella was not an ordinary abbot and his witness shows us that there was no monolithic attitude among the Cistercians toward the usefulness of philosophy.” *Selected Works*, 167-8.

⁴⁸ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie,” 182.

Raciti argues that Isaac's crucial *Sermon 48*, entitled *ysaac abbatis stele apologia* in some manuscripts, contains allusions to Peter Abélard (1079-1142) and Gilbert of Poitiers (1070-1154). Although I shall establish the reasons why Raciti ascribes such importance to *Sermon 48* in the following chapter, brief mention must be made here as it relates to Isaac's biography.

Isaac begins his sermon by complaining of his listeners' inattention. He then refers to the source of their inattention, namely, Isaac's conscious change from his previous, more speculative manner of preaching to a simpler one. Isaac explains this change by referring to the controversies caused by certain anonymous figures he describes as being "men of remarkable talent and extraordinary experience" (*spectabilis ingenii homines et exercitationis mirae*).⁴⁹ "So therefore these became my teachers," Isaac reports, "because the world became their follower."⁵⁰

I discuss in detail the reasons for Isaac's change in his manner of preaching—in particular Raciti's thesis and my critique—in the following chapter. For now it is enough to detail Raciti's determination of the schools at which Isaac studied. According to Raciti, Isaac is referring to Abélard and Gilbert as chief among the "men of remarkable talent and extraordinary expertise."⁵¹ Raciti based his argument on textual parallels between Isaac's remarks at the beginning of *Sermon 48* and contemporary descriptions of Abélard and Gilbert, citing the works of John of Salisbury (ca. 1115-80), Peter the

⁴⁹ *Sermon 48.5*. SC 339: 156; PL 194: 1853D.

⁵⁰ *Sermon 48.6*. *Hos igitur secuti sumus, quia eos sequebatur mundus*. SC 339: 156; PL 194 : 1854A.

⁵¹ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 292-6.

Venerable (1092/94-1156), Geoffrey of Auxerre, Lorent of Poitiers, Ademar of St. Ruf, and Abélard himself.⁵²

Raciti also argues on the basis of Abélard and Gilbert being the most important teachers at the time Isaac would have been a student.⁵³ Lastly, he argues that the controversial topics raised by the students of Abélard and Gilbert in the latter half of the twelfth century were part and parcel of the tense times during which Isaac delivered *Sermon 48*.

Raciti speculates that Isaac initially studied with Abélard at the Oratory of the Paraclete in Ferreux-Quincey, France, between 1122 and 1125, making Isaac one of the first students to study at the new monastery.⁵⁴ “It is probable that Isaac would have heard Abélard when he taught at the Paraclete, i.e., between 1122 and 1125,” Raciti argues. “What leads us to believe this is the explicit allusion that Isaac makes from this period of Abélard’s life and in the *Introductio*, which Abélard composed precisely at the Paraclete.”⁵⁵

Isaac followed this initial period of study with a lengthy stay at Chartres from 1125 to 1142, where he studied with Gilbert as well as Thierry of Chartres (ca. 1100-ca. 1155) and William of Conches (ca. 1080-ca. 1154).⁵⁶ Isaac followed Gilbert to Poitiers in 1142 when the latter was consecrated bishop of that city.⁵⁷ “It is certain,” Raciti

⁵² Raciti cites the following works: John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*; Peter the Venerable, *Epistola 1*; Geoffrey of Auxerre, *S. Bernardi vita Prima*; Lorent of Poitiers, *Eloge funèbre de Gilbert*; Peter Abélard, *Historia Calamitatum*, *Epistola 13*, and *Apologia seu fidei confessio*. The text from Ademar of St. Ruf is from a ms. contained in Vat. Lat. 561, folio 175. *Ibid.*, 293-6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 303. Abélard founded the Paraclete following his departure from the Abbey of St.-Denis ca. 1121.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

reports, “that (Isaac) taught at Poitiers, at the cathedral school, but for only a brief time.”⁵⁸

Raciti later argued in favor of Chartres as well as Paris. He refers to Isaac’s “remarkable literary, philosophical, and theological formation.”

His masters, described as monks, were great and brilliant... their teaching, very personal and of an innovation that caused the admiration of crowds of students, was daring—even dangerous—but certainly not heretical, as someone seems to have believed. These indications direct us without difficulty toward the schools of Chartres and Paris. One thinks of Gilbert, Abélard, and William of Conches. Certain of Isaac’s doctrinal positions seem also to reveal the influence of Thierry of Chartres and Hugh of St. Victor.⁵⁹

Salet accepts the basic outline and chronology of Raciti but was more cautious than the latter and emphasized the conjectural nature of his findings.⁶⁰ According to Salet, Isaac studied at Paris, Laon or Chartres, tilting in the direction of Chartres. “One can conjecture that (Isaac) was a disciple of Abélard at the Paraclete and that he followed, at Chartres, the courses of Gilbert of Porrée and other masters, like Thierry and William of Conches. About 1138, we find at Chartres Thomas Becket and John of Salisbury: Isaac could have known them then.”⁶¹

McGinn argues “from the similarity of (Isaac’s) views with those of the noted Masters of the generation of roughly 1120-1150 to reach some approximate conclusions.”⁶² McGinn reports that Isaac’s thought demonstrates “the most striking affinities” with Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141), who taught at Mt. St. Geneviève in Paris

⁵⁸ Ibid., 305. N.b.: Raciti’s opinion that Isaac “certainly” taught at Poitiers is in reality wholly speculative.

⁵⁹ *DS* 7: 2012.

⁶⁰ *SC* 130: 10-2.

⁶¹ Ibid., 13-4.

⁶² McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 8.

ca. 1120-41⁶³; Thierry of Chartres, who taught at the School of Chartres until ca. 1135 followed by Paris and then returning to Chartres as chancellor in the 1140s; and William of Conches, who taught at Chartres until ca. 1144.

In the end, McGinn determines that “it seems safe to say” that Isaac most likely studied at Paris and Chartres in the late 1120s and 1130s. McGinn nevertheless reports that “to attempt any further chronology on this part of his career, however, seems to go beyond the bounds of a sober attempt to deal with the evidence at our disposal.”⁶⁴ In his introduction to McCaffrey’s English translation of a collection of Isaac’s sermons, *Sermons on the Christian Year*, McGinn refined his thesis and stated that “we shall not be far wrong if we place (Isaac’s) arrival in France about 1130.”⁶⁵

It is unknown precisely where and when Isaac studied, nor can we determine with whom. Commenting on Raciti’s exact chronology, McGinn determines that “there is no real warrant in any documentary source for such precise identifications, which are therefore scarcely legitimate.”⁶⁶ McGinn continues:

In conclusion, it seems safe to say that Isaac studied in France in the late 1120’s and 1130’s, and that he most likely was at Paris and possibly Chartres (after all, it was the thing to do for the bright young student, and these were the places to go). To attempt any further particular chronology of this part of his career, however, seems to go beyond the bounds of a sober attempt to deal with the evidence at our disposal.⁶⁷

⁶³ See also Jean Châtillon, “De Guillaume de Champeaux à Thomas Gallus: Chronique littéraire et doctrinale de l’École de Saint-Victor,” *Revue de Moyen Âge Latin* 8 (1952): 139-62, 247-72.

⁶⁴ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 10.

⁶⁵ *Sermons*, xiii.

⁶⁶ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

Elias Dietz likewise reports: “Attempts have been made to ascertain from internal evidence which masters he studied under and when, but thus far no documentary evidence has been found to substantiate the various hypotheses.”⁶⁸

The surest and most reasonable conclusion, given the sparse nature of the evidence that is available as well as the paucity of information Isaac himself provides, is that Isaac studied in France at some point in the latter half of the 1120s. McGinn revisited the issue most recently in his essay, “Isaac of Stella in Context,” in Dániel Deme’s collection of Isaac’s sermons.⁶⁹ “While we cannot reconstruct Isaac’s academic career with precision, he must have spent some years in Paris, the center of theological learning.” McGinn added:

A peripatetic student could easily move between Paris and Chartres, as well as further afield to educational centers such as Laon and Orleans. The extent to which Isaac may have actually studied with Peter Abelard, Hugh of St. Victor, or the masters associated with Chartres, such as Thierry of Chartres and William of Conches, cannot be determined; but he was certainly quite familiar with their teaching.⁷⁰

While it cannot be determined precisely at which schools and with which masters Isaac studied, his period of study was most likely at least a decade. We know from the *Metalogicon* (1159) of John of Salisbury, Isaac’s friend, the kind of life the students of nascent twelfth-century universities lived. Their life was an itinerant one, as McGinn suggested, wandering from master to master, studying various subjects and making connections. John himself wandered from master to master to learn as well as to make connections: “When, still but a youth, I first journeyed to Gaul for the sake of study, in

⁶⁸ Elias Dietz, “When Exile is Home: The Biography of Isaac of Stella,” *CSQ* 41 (2006): 144. See also Dietz, “Conversion in the Sermons of Isaac of Stella,” *CSQ* 37 (2002): 229-59.

⁶⁹ See note 46, *supra*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

the year following the death of the illustrious King of the English, Henry, ‘the Lion of Justice,’ I betook myself to the Peripatetic of Pallet, who was then teaching at Mont Ste. Geneviève.”⁷¹ John here refers to Henry I (d. 1 December 1135), which places him in France in 1136. John, therefore, arrived in France at about the same time Isaac did.

John’s experience as a young student as well as the *Metalogicon* overall is instructive as it provides an itinerary similar to Isaac’s, “a picture of how young clerics, eager for learning that would lead to ecclesiastical preferment (and sometimes just eager for learning), wandered from master to master to gain knowledge and make contacts.”⁷² John wrote the *Metalogicon* as a defense of the study of logic, grammar and rhetoric against the charges of the pseudonymous Cornificius and his followers. There likely was not an individual named Cornificius. John was rather using the name of Virgil’s detractor and opponent to personify the arguments of those who threatened liberal education.⁷³ “The threats,” writes Stephen C. Ferruolo, “came from those in the schools who were expressly concerned about their own careers.”

According to John, these men were not only refusing to take the time necessary to study the trivium but also justifying their actions with claims that were both false and dangerous. Their essential argument was that since the logical arts do no more than teach the rule of speech, and speech is a natural faculty, there is no reason to study them. For John, much more was at stake than the trivium’s importance in the arts curriculum. Even if used merely as an excuse by scholars to shorten their course of studies for more practical reasons, the arguments had to be taken seriously and refuted thoroughly because of their serious social repercussions.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Metalogicon* 2.10; ET: *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. Daniel McGarry (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), 95.

⁷² *Selected Works*, 171.

⁷³ See Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages, 1000-1200*, trans. Denise A. Kaiser (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 229-66.

⁷⁴ Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and their Critics* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 141.

The *Metalogicon* was John's attempt to provide an outline for integrating Aristotle's entire *Organon* into the liberal arts curriculum. John spends much of his time in the *Metalogicon* criticizing those masters who resisted the adoption of the newly discovered works of Aristotle and still taught the old logic (*logica vetus*) which consisted almost entirely of the works of Boethius. In addition to Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* (as translated and glossed by Boethius), there were four of Boethius' own works: *De Syllogismo Categorico*, *De Syllogismo Hypothesico*, *De Divisione*, and *De Differentiis Topicis*. John reports:

What we have so far said has been directed against Cornificius. Against those who, in their conservatism, exclude the more efficacious books of Aristotle, and content themselves almost exclusively with Boethius, much could also be said. There is, however, no point. The inadequacy of the knowledge of those who have consumed all their time and energies studying Boethius, with the result that they hardly know anything, is so universally apparent that it excites compassion.⁷⁵

The logical curriculum John describes in the *Metalogicon*, however, includes only Aristotle and Porphyry. John criticizes the tradition of extensive commentary on these texts as harmful and providing occasions for self-aggrandizement on the part of the masters who wrote them (2.16). John had read the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* but does not know quite what to make of them. He finds the former overly complex and claims that the same material is covered elsewhere (4.2), whereas the latter is better suited to the study of geometry because of its focus on demonstration (4.6). Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* should be used as practice exercises for younger students (4.22).

John focuses on Aristotle's *Topics* in particular. He provides an introduction, commentary and apology for the work, in which John finds the voice of Aristotle

⁷⁵ *Metalogicon* 4.27. ET: McGarry, 243.

confirming his own conclusions (3.5-10). The *Topics* teach us how to begin with probable principles and form convincing arguments. This is part and parcel of the method of the wise man because it is something he can put into practice with good effect and ought, therefore, to be the curriculum of the schools.⁷⁶

A final caveat concerning the lack of precision when it comes to the biographical detail on where and with whom Isaac studied must be given. There is no universal consensus among scholars concerning the existence of “schools” per se. For example, there is Valerie I. J. Flint’s assessment that a “School of Laon” never existed.⁷⁷ More pertinent to Isaac is Southern’s earlier essay, “Humanism and the School of Chartres,” in which he disputed the existence of a “School of Chartres” as well as the importance of figures such as Thierry of Chartres who may have been associated with the school.⁷⁸ While many of the figures associated with Chartres also taught at Paris, scholars have identified a distinctly Platonizing strand of theology (broadly speaking) emanating from Chartres in the latter half of the twelfth century. There is no consensus as to the significance of this theological strand—and I hesitate to go so far as to call it a “movement”—but few scholars today accept Southern’s views.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ See Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 37; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 49-98, 270-309; G. R. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon and Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁷⁷ Valerie I. J. Flint, “The ‘School of Laon’: A Reconsideration,” *RTAM* 43 (1976): 89-110.

⁷⁸ R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 61-85. Southern revisited the issue in *Platonism, Scholastic Method and the School of Chartres* (Stenton Lecture 1978; Reading: University of Reading Press, 1979); and in his essay, “The School of Paris and the School of Chartres,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 113-37. For background and analysis on Flint’s and Southern’s broadsides against Laon and Chartres, respectively, see Marcia L. Colish’s essay, “Another Look at the School of Laon,” in *Studies in Scholasticism* (Aldershot, Hants, England, and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006), 7-22.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Winthrop Wetherbee, “Philosophy, cosmology, and the twelfth-century Renaissance”; Tullio Gregory, “The Platonic inheritance”; and Peter Dronke, “Thierry of Chartres,” in *A History of*

It is unnecessary to linger too long over speculative chronologies and other conjecture concerning Isaac's early years and education. Scholars cannot overcome a dearth of evidence by marshalling a host of citations from medieval writers, as Raciti so impressively does, since this does not truly strengthen what was dubious from the beginning.

In the face of various *lacunae* and a general lack of certain knowledge on Isaac's early, formative years, there comes a point where you can go no further than beyond that which can be determined reasonably well. For the early life of Isaac—indeed, for the former half—we have little more than a skeleton. Little flesh can be attached to those bones, at least not if a scholar wishes to keep from straying too far into the field of conjecture for which ultimately there is negligible support.

It is unclear exactly when and where Isaac entered monastic life. Bliemetzrieder argued that Isaac became a monk at Cîteaux.⁸⁰ Debray-Mulatier argued similarly, namely, that Isaac became a monk at Cîteaux itself but was transferred subsequently to Stella. "Isaac, like many others, felt attracted: he gave up his studies and became a monk at the same convent of Cîteaux."⁸¹ Isaac entered "at an imprecise date, but certainly before 1147."⁸² According to Debray-Mulatier, Isaac's novitiate was a fairly long one. She bases this on Isaac's remark in *Sermon 50*, where he refers to Christ's obedience to the Mother of God and St. Joseph (Lk 2:51) and to the Father as well (Matt 17:5; cf. 3:17).⁸³

Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy, ed. Peter Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-53, 54-80 and 358-85, respectively.

⁸⁰ Bliemetzrieder, "Isaak von Stella," 6, 7 and 22.

⁸¹ Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie," 184.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 184-5; see SC 339: 186; PL 194: 1859D.

Raciti places the location of Isaac's entry into monastic life not at Cîteaux, but rather Pontigny in 1145.⁸⁴ Raciti refines this in his *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* article by arguing that Isaac's entry at Pontigny followed a brief period of teaching and could not have occurred before 1143. "But since," as McGinn points out, "this is based upon the unlikely supposition of a teaching career at Poitiers when the famous Gilbert became Bishop there in 1142, this seems an unwarranted conjecture."⁸⁵

Salet, breaking with both the options of Cîteaux and Pontigny, argues for Stella itself as the place where Isaac entered into monastic life. While Salet does not argue for a lengthy novitiate as does Debray-Mulatier, he does state that Isaac's period as a monk prior to being elevated to the position of abbot was a long one. "If, as is probable, Isaac lived for several years as a religious before becoming abbot, it should be concluded that he entered the monastery (at Stella) before its affiliation with the order of Cîteaux."⁸⁶

McGinn argued initially for Stella as a possible location for Isaac's entry into monastic life but is uncertain of the date. Concerning the latter, he asserts: "We have no secure information concerning the date."⁸⁷ McGinn becomes slightly more definitive in later years and tilts more toward Salet's view, writing that "(s)ometime not long after 1140, the English scholar entered the monastic life, most likely at the great Cistercian house of Pontigny in the diocese of Auxerre."⁸⁸

McGinn recently has become agnostic concerning the date. "Information about the date of Isaac's entry into the monastic life is lacking," he relates. "The only secure date we have is that of his becoming abbot of Stella, a small house not far from Poitiers,

⁸⁴ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 306.

⁸⁵ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 11.

⁸⁶ SC 130: 15.

⁸⁷ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 11.

⁸⁸ *Sermons*, xiii.

in 1147.”⁸⁹ McGinn continues to argue for Stella as the place of Isaac’s entrance: “Since Stella was a dependency of the great abbey of Pontigny, one of the four daughter houses of Cîteaux, Isaac most likely joined the Cistercians at that monastery.”⁹⁰

A lengthy period as a monk before becoming abbot seems most likely for McGinn as well. “Despite his natural talents,” he writes, “Isaac would probably have had to have been a monk for some years before ascending to the role of abbot, so he may have converted around the same time that Bernard preached his noted sermon.”⁹¹

This sermon, Bernard’s *Sermon on Conversion to the Clergy* (*De conversione, ad clericos*), was delivered in Paris sometime between Lent 1139 and early 1140.⁹² It provides a picture of what a “conversion” to or decision to embrace the monastic life looked like in the mid-twelfth century. In the *Vita Prima* we read that “a great number of the clerics gathered together because they had been asking him to preach the word of God to them. Suddenly, three of them, moved by compunction and being converted from vain studies to the worship of true wisdom renounced the world and became disciples of the servant of God (*et converse ab inanibus studiis ad verae sapientiae cultum, abrenuntiantes saeculo, et Dei famulo adhaerentes*).”⁹³

We are, however, on surer ground when it comes to Isaac’s becoming abbot of Stella. According to Debray-Mulatier: “Toward the end of 1147 or the beginning of 1148, Isaac left Cîteaux for western France. Succeeding the abbot Bernard, he became abbot of Stella in the diocese of Poitiers. The abbey only recently became attached to the

⁸⁹ *Selected Works*, 173.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *SBO* 4: 62n.1.

⁹³ PL 185: 327B; ET: *Bernard of Clairvaux: Sermons on Conversion*, trans. Marie-Bernard Saïd (CF 25; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 13.

order of Cîteaux.”⁹⁴ The abbey was, indeed, not originally Cistercian. Its founder, like Robert of Molesme, left a monastery not ready for reform. Leaving Preuilly and traveling to the southwest, Isembaud founded the abbey in 1124.

Bernard succeeded Isembaud as abbot in 1140, following the latter’s death. It is not until the middle of the decade that Stella begins to attract our attention. Bernard petitioned Pope Eugene III to have the monastery incorporated into the growing Cistercian reform in 1145. According to Debray-Mulatier, the first Cistercian monks entered Stella on 25 July 1145.⁹⁵ She based her argument on the work of Leopold Janauschek, however, whose work was based on documents no longer extant.⁹⁶

In any case, Eugene III granted Bernard’s request on 1 February 1147 and reiterates his decision on 28 October 1147 when Isaac succeeds Bernard as abbot of Stella.⁹⁷ We cannot say with precision, however, that Isaac became abbot of Stella in 1147. We can only say that he was already abbot by 1147; how long before that he served as abbot we cannot say—the documents at our disposal do not allow us to go any further.

The details and date surrounding Isaac’s death are elusive. “The life of Isaac of Stella closes with as much mystery as it began,” as McGinn observes.⁹⁸ By 1169 Stella has a new abbot, Vasilius.⁹⁹ Debray-Mulatier dates the death of Isaac to between 1167

⁹⁴ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie,” 185.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Leopold Janauschek, *Originum Cisterciensiam* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1877).

⁹⁷ See Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 306n.90; McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 11-2; *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* 15: 1287.

⁹⁸ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 22.

⁹⁹ *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* 15: 1288. The tradition of Isaac’s death in 1169 emerges in the eighteenth century with Casimir Oudin’s *Commentarium de scriptoribus ecclesiasticis* (Leipzig: M. G. Weidmanni, 1722. 3 vols.), 2: 1486.

and 1169.¹⁰⁰ Raciti speculates that monastic life and the exile on Ré were especially difficult for Isaac and took its toll on his health. Isaac was “now old and tired and would not have survived a long time.”¹⁰¹

Raciti initially argued that Isaac died on Ré on an unknown date and was buried in an unknown grave.¹⁰² He would later modify his view, arguing for a date of death of 1178.¹⁰³ Likewise McGinn, who initially was hesitant to place an exact date on Isaac’s death: “In his death, as in his life, Isaac of Stella continues to elude while always managing to intrigue.”¹⁰⁴ McGinn would later revise his view and argue, like Raciti, that Isaac died around 1178.¹⁰⁵

While Isaac refers to Bernard as *sanctus Bernardus* in *Sermon 52*, it is untenable to argue as Raciti does that Isaac must have been alive after 1174, the date of Bernard’s canonization by Pope Alexander III.¹⁰⁶ Raciti’s argument is untenable because it is based on an understanding of canonization procedures that are anachronistic. During this time it was still possible for people to be venerated as saints without papal permission or sanction.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Cistercian literature at this time provides examples of the term *sanctus* being applied to individuals who have not yet been canonized. Bernard himself, for example, refers to Malachy of Armagh as *sanctus* in his *Vita sancti Malachiae episcopi*.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie,” 189.

¹⁰¹ Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 211.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁰³ *DS* 7: 2013.

¹⁰⁴ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ *Selected Works*, 175.

¹⁰⁶ *Sermon* 52.15. See Raciti’s remarks in SC 339: 316-9.

¹⁰⁷ See Eric W. Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 82-106.

¹⁰⁸ *SBO* 3: 309.

The efforts of Raymond Milcamps and Anselm Hoste have been invaluable in the study of the editions and manuscripts of Isaac's works.¹⁰⁹ Leclercq's discovery of a new sermon in 1964 as well as Garda's more recent discovery of archival material demonstrates that scholars can continue to hope that ever newer texts will continue to come to light.¹¹⁰ For Isaac's 55 sermons there are only eight extant manuscripts but not one of them provides a complete series.¹¹¹ Jacques-Paul Migne reprinted the 1662 edition of Isaac's sermons by Bertrand Tissier, *Bibliotheca Patrum Cisterciensium*, in *Patrologia Latina* 194.

Two additional works of Isaac need to be mentioned. One is the *Epistola de anima*, which Isaac addressed to Alcher of Clairvaux in, according to Debray-Mulatier, 1162.¹¹² The other, and by far Isaac's most popular work if the manuscript evidence is any indication, is *De officio missae*, an allegorical interpretation of the liturgy he addressed to Bellesmains in 1167.¹¹³ For both of these works, Migne again used Tissier's edition for PL 194.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Raymond Milcamps, "Bibliographie d'Isaac de l'Étoile," *COCR* 20 (1958): 175-86; Anselm Hoste, "Introduction au texte Latin," in SC 130: 69-83.

¹¹⁰ Leclercq, "Nouveau sermon d'Isaac de l'Étoile," *Revue d'ascétique et de la mystique* 40 (1964): 277-88; Garda, "Du nouveau sur Isaac de l'Étoile," *Cîteaux* 37 (1986): 8-22.

¹¹¹ See SC 130: 73-7; see also Milcamps, "Bibliographie," 180-6. McGinn provides a useful summary of Isaac's works in *Golden Chain*, 24-31.

¹¹² Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie," 188n.65.

¹¹³ There are 22 manuscripts extant; see Milcamps, "Bibliographie," 180-2, and McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 30n.129.

¹¹⁴ The Latin text of the *Epistola de anima* is found in PL 194: 1875B-1890A and that of *De officio missae* in PL 194: 1889B-1895B. Neither treatise has been critically edited in the Sources chrétiennes series. For an ET of the *Epistola de anima*, see *Selected Works*, 143-57; for an earlier ET, see "The Letter of Isaac of Stella on the Soul," trans. Bernard McGinn, in *Three Treatises on Man: A Cistercian Anthropology* (CF 24; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 153-77. For an ET of *De officio missae*, see *Selected Works*, 158-64; for an earlier ET, see Chrysogonus Waddell, "Isaac of Stella on the Canon of the Mass," *Liturgy O.C.S.O.* 11 (1975): 21-75.

F. Limitations and Scope

This study's primary argument, that of Isaac's role in the Becket controversy, is necessarily limited. I intend neither to provide a comprehensive outline of Isaac's theology nor treat doctrinal topics with which scholars far more capable than I have dealt.¹¹⁵ Neither do I intend to treat exhaustively Isaac's predecessors in the Christian monastic tradition but only to call attention to its most significant figures. This study, rather, is an examination of an admittedly marginal figure, one who was not among the élite of the twelfth century. But Isaac deserves attention nevertheless since his role and importance heretofore have either been neglected or overestimated.

The period of time with which I shall be especially concerned is from roughly the 1120s until Isaac's death as well as that of Becket. While the scholarship on Isaac is limited compared to the greater lights of the twelfth century, it continues to grow and already comprises no small body of literature. I shall thus limit my attention to those scholars and topics that concern our argument in the most direct and relevant way.

Isaac's affinity with and use of the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, as tantalizing a subject as it is, must be left to others. Likewise Isaac's anthropology, Christology and liturgical theology; worthy topics, no doubt, but ones that will have to wait for another time. As much as I should like to focus on Isaac's antecedents in early Christian monasticism, this will again have to wait as it does not relate to our topic.

In limiting myself I may perhaps be faulted. Given the amount of literature already devoted to the Cistercians, if not Isaac himself, I feel justified in not devoting my limited space to issues that ultimately are not relevant to my argument. Rather than draw

¹¹⁵ The following chapter presents a review of the relevant literature on Isaac.

a detailed overview of Isaac's life and *oeuvre*, my initial contribution to the scholarship on Isaac must of necessity be a limited one.

Not that this study will ignore historical theology. I address the truly theological or religious content by focusing in particular on the theme of *obedience* and to what extent the conflict between ecclesiastical and secular powers is reflected in Isaac's sermons. More important for this study is my focus on the goal and purpose of the monastic life as the *transformation* of the monk himself.

G. Significance and Contribution of Research to Existing Scholarship

Isaac is, to be sure, a minor figure among the twelfth-century Cistercians; he has, however, been overlooked and this has largely been on the basis of how scholarship has tended to treat his involvement with (and presumed support of) Becket. I am expanding the work of Garda, Ferruccio Gastaldelli and others; I am, therefore, hardly doing anything new or revolutionary. Nevertheless, I am looking at Isaac and the Becket controversy in a new light and asking questions of my sources that differ substantially from what previous scholars have asked. By paying particular attention to Isaac's close connection to earlier figures in the Christian monastic tradition, I am putting Isaac and his sermons in a context previously overlooked.

If what I have written in the following does affect subsequent scholarship on Isaac, then it will challenge one of the most widely accepted details of Isaac's biography, namely, that as a strong supporter of Becket he suffered the loss of his monastery and died in obscurity on Ré. I am studying Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy

because I am trying to discover the extent to which Isaac was a participant in order to understand how certain scholars have overestimated his support of Becket. I wish to set the historical record straight on this point and expand Isaac's biography beyond "a couple of dates and a few hypotheses."¹¹⁶

H. Organization of Present Study

In the chapter that follows, I set out the purpose of the literature review and explain how it contributes to our argument. The primary purpose of the literature review is to establish the context for my research, in particular what the scholarly literature has stated over the years concerning the nature and extent of Isaac's relationship with Becket. A closely related purpose is to offer a critical analysis of prior and relevant scholarship related to the central questions of the dissertation. I then locate my work on Isaac in this chain of scholarly literature, demonstrating where my thesis converges and diverges and how it relates to modern scholarship. In other words, I explain how I place my own work in the chain of scholarship that precedes it.

In Chapter II, I deliver an historical overview of the Becket controversy, paying particular attention to the English investiture controversy, the Cistercians' involvement with Becket in general and Isaac's involvement with Becket in particular. I briefly restate the *status quaestionis* and objective of the dissertation in order to describe my research methods. I also discuss my collection and analytical strategies in order to explain how my research was conducted and give my readers the ability to evaluate my conclusions. In addition, I restate the guiding questions of the dissertation. The reasons

¹¹⁶ *Cistercian World*, 201.

for my methodology will be described as well, namely, to reevaluate the general conclusions of modern scholarship on Isaac and suggest a new look at Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy.

Chapter III begins with a brief review of the reasons for writing the dissertation, its guiding questions and the research methods that I stated earlier (i.e., Chapter II). I discuss my research and its outcome in the form of an overview and then continue in greater and more complex detail. The material from Isaac's sermons and monastic charters will be kept apart from my actual interpretation, analysis and evaluation. This will be seen most clearly in sections B and C (presentation and discussion of findings, respectively). I cite continually the references and scholarly literature to which I referred in Chapter I to support my analysis and demonstrate its coherence.

In the final chapter I elaborate on this study's contribution to the scholarly literature on Isaac. I begin by summarizing the essential points of the dissertation I made in the Introduction and Chapter II, namely, the relevance of the topic and its contribution to my understanding of the topic. The core of this chapter is my articulation of the implication of my findings, findings that will be grouped according to those related to the scholarly literature on Isaac, my own research and analysis and future research. I then discuss the implications of the dissertation and its contribution to scholarship. This will be determined by the guiding questions that have formed the rationale for the study.

I also evaluate and delineate the study's strengths, weaknesses and limitations. Part and parcel of this will be a retrospective examination of the conceptual framework I presented in Chapter I in the light of the implications of my findings. The recommendations for future research will be based on two implications: what the study

did and discovered; what it did not do and did not discover. I report where future research should be performed as well as recommend changes in research methods and conceptual frameworks. I also suggest which of these are likely to be most fruitful and why.

I. Summary

When a subject has left so few clues concerning his or her life, it is difficult to present a thorough if not complete biography. Such is the case with Isaac. Interest in his life and works has grown over the past several decades, as demonstrated by a number of articles by European and American scholars. The use made of Isaac's works, his sermons in particular, by the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council and more recently evinces this interest and, indeed, usefulness of his works for theology. Nevertheless there is much over which scholars continue to puzzle. The paucity of biographical information in his sermons certainly gives to Isaac an air of the "mystery" with which he is often associated.

The matter of Isaac's involvement in Becket's controversy with Henry, however, is a subject that has attracted sufficient interest among scholars and serves as the basis for this study. Raciti's thesis that Isaac's paid dearly for his support of Becket—the loss of his abbacy and forced exile on the island of Ré—continues to be a commonplace in the scholarly literature. Isaac is described in the end as a tragic, lonely figure who died alone and in disgrace in his place of exile.

Fortunately for scholars, there is anything but a paucity of information concerning the Becket controversy; the correspondence from Becket alone amounts to a plethora of information to mine. Becket's role and that of Henry are well known and clearly attested. Isaac's role, however, is less clear. While there is reference to his support of Becket via intercessory prayer, neither Becket's correspondence nor other relevant materials portray Isaac as a supporter of great significance. Becket undoubtedly had greater allies on which to rely than the abbot of Stella.

What can be stitched together of the facts concerning Isaac's life is much in keeping with his times. Isaac made his way to the Continent at some point to study and eventually became a monk in the Cistercian Order. Concerning the latter, there is enough evidence to suggest that Isaac came to France but to cite specific schools and masters is difficult. When and where Isaac became a monk is also elusive. He rose to become the abbot of Stella, where he wrote the 55 sermons and two treatises attributed to him. The information concerning the end of his life, however, is as spare as that of the beginning.

This study is necessarily limited in its scope. By focusing specifically on Isaac and the Becket controversy, I have cast my net widely enough to entail engagement with the sources but I have been careful not to describe a thesis that is too far-reaching and all-encompassing. This ensures, on the one hand, topics for future research that will be reported in the final chapter (i.e., Summary and Concluding Remarks) and, on the other hand, that I shall be able to handle competently a specific topic and body of literature.

While no scholar can fill every gap, I do hope I am able to expand our knowledge of Isaac in at least some small sense. The work of Raciti and others, as valuable as it is,

needs to be addressed in certain areas. I aim to do just that in this study, as well as lift the cloud of mystery that has obscured the monk Isaac of Stella.

Chapter I. Literature Review

A. Introduction

Scholarly interest in Isaac is much higher now than in recent years. This renewed attention represents quite a change. Not only did Bouyer describe Isaac as a “great mystery among the Cistercians” but he added: “We know only a few scattered facts about his life. Of his works we have only fragments.”¹¹⁷

While Isaac cannot reasonably be faulted for his literary output, the modest biographical information available to scholars no doubt contributed to Isaac’s “mysterious” character. We know enough, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, to devise a rough outline and chronology of Isaac’s life. What is lacking, however, are the details with which to achieve biographical or historical precision.

In this chapter, I establish the plan of the following literature review and demonstrate how it contributes to my thesis. I summarize the literature on Isaac before turning to the relevant literature itself in Section D, “Analysis of literature relevant to the problem.” The primary purpose for my review is to establish the context for my research, in particular to identify the major scholars on Isaac, what their research has stated over the years concerning Isaac’s relationship with Becket and to present a critical analysis of the relevant scholarship related to the central questions of this study.

¹¹⁷ Bouyer, *Cistercian Heritage*, 161.

B. Historical Background of the Problem

Modern scholarly interest in Isaac began just over a century ago with Bliemetzrieder's 1904 article, "Isaak von Stella: Beiträge zur Lebensbeschreibung."¹¹⁸ Bliemetzrieder's brief, "Eine unbekannte Schrift Isaaks von Stella," was published in 1908 and documents his discovery of a previously unknown manuscript of *De officio missae*.¹¹⁹ He would not return to Isaac until 1932 with "Isaac de Stella: Sa speculation théologique."¹²⁰

Following Bliemetzrieder's early studies, scholarly interest waned for a time. Interest in Isaac's ecclesiology, however, was an exception. Such interest began as early as Émile Mersch's 1933 study, *La théologie du corps mystique du Christ*.¹²¹ Henri de Lubac quotes from Isaac's *Sermon 51* in his seminal work, *Catholicisme*.¹²² *Catholicisme* was not only Lubac's programmatic work. It proved to be the programmatic work for the *ressourcement* movement in Roman Catholic theology during the mid-twentieth century.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Bliemetzrieder, "Isaak von Stella: Beiträge zur Lebensbeschreibung," *Jahrbuch der Philosophie und spekulativen Theologie* 15 (1904): 1-34.

¹¹⁹ Bliemetzrieder, "Eine unbekannte Schrift Isaaks von Stella," *Studien und Mitteilungen aus dem Benediktiner und dem Cistercienser-Orden* 29 (1908): 433-41.

¹²⁰ Bliemetzrieder, "Isaac de Stella: Sa speculation théologique," *RTAM* 6 (1932): 132-59.

¹²¹ Emile Mersch, *La théologie du corps mystique du Christ: Études de théologie historique* (Louvain: Museum Lessianum, 1933. 2 vols.). The first thesis on Isaac focused on his ecclesiology as well: Edmund Weinheimer, "The Mystical Body of Christ According to Isaac of Stella" (S.T.L. thesis, St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, Md. 1945).

¹²² Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1938).

¹²³ For an overview of the figures and issues, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *TS* 51 (1990): 579-602. Three recent books on the *Ressourcement* movement are well worth mentioning here: Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Dissertationes 3; Rome: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2001); John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

Lubac's work would also become a means by which Isaac came to the attention of scholars. *Catholicisme* and Lubac's subsequent works, in particular *Exégèse médiévale*, undoubtedly brought to the attention of his readers at least selections from Isaac's writings.¹²⁴ And yet Isaac remained a mystery.

André Fracheboud wrote four articles on Isaac during the 1940s and 1950s that explored the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite and Augustine on Isaac's use of Plato and philosophy in general, Isaac's possible study at the University of Naples and Isaac's use of Scripture, respectively.¹²⁵ Milcamps' bibliographical essay from 1958 was a pioneering work in the study of the various editions and manuscripts of Isaac's works and one that served as the basis for later scholars who turned their attention to the knotty problem of Isaac's *corpus*.¹²⁶ Jeannette Debray-Mulatier's 1959 article, "Biographie d'Isaac de Stella," was another early attempt—like Bliemetzrieder's—toward a biography of Isaac.¹²⁷

The latter half of the twentieth century has been kinder to Isaac than the former, in particular the 1960s, during which time nine articles on Isaac were published. Leonard Gaggero and Robert Javelet began the stream of articles with their contributions in 1960, closely followed by Raciti's landmark article from 1961 and 1962.¹²⁸ Leclercq and

¹²⁴ Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les Quatres sens de l'Écriture* (Théologie 41, 42 and 59; Paris: Aubier, 1959-64. 4 vols). ET : *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Ressourcement. Grand Rapids, Mich., and Edinburgh: Eerdmans and T. & T. Clark, 1998-2009. 3 vols).

¹²⁵ André Fracheboud, "Le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite parmi les sources du Cistercien Isaac de l'Étoile," *COCR* 9 (1947): 328-41; 10 (1948): 19-34; "L'Influence de Saint Augustin sur le Cistercien Isaac de l'Étoile," *COCR* 11 (1949): 1-17, 264-72; 12 (1950): 5-16; "Isaac de Stella à l'Université de Naples," *COCR* 14 (1952): 278-81; "Isaac de l'Étoile et l'Écriture Sainte," *COCR* 19 (1957): 133-45.

¹²⁶ Raymond Milcamps, "Bibliographie d'Isaac de l'Étoile," *COCR* 20 (1958): 175-86.

¹²⁷ Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie d'Isaac de Stella," *Cîteaux* 10 (1959): 178-98.

¹²⁸ Leonard Gaggero, "Isaac of Stella and the Theology of Redemption," *COCR* 22 (1960): 21-36; Robert Javelet, "La vertu dans l'œuvre d'Isaac de l'Étoile," *Cîteaux* 11 (1960): 252-67; Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile et son siècle," *Cîteaux* 12 (1961): 281-306; 13 (1962): 18-34, 133-45, 205-16.

Robert O'Brien added articles on Isaac's works in 1964 and 1965, respectively.¹²⁹

Thomas Merton provided an introduction to a proposed collection of Isaac's sermons in English translation in his 1967 article, "Isaac of Stella: An Introduction to and Selections from his Sermons."¹³⁰ Leclercq's brief article on monastic economics¹³¹ and Anne Saword's retrospective appreciation closed a decade that witnessed a considerable increase in the scholarship on Isaac.¹³² Perhaps the most important work from this period was the publication of the first volume of the critical edition of Isaac's sermons, edited by Hoste and Salet in the *Sources chrétiennes* series in 1967.¹³³ Isaac, it seemed, was less mysterious as the years went by.

Particular attention must be paid to Bernardo Olivera's 1969 article, "Isaac of Stella: Prophet of Vatican II," which reflected the post-Conciliar *Zeitgeist* but also documented Isaac's influence on the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).¹³⁴ As for the conciliar documents themselves, the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (21 November 1964) cited Isaac's *Sermon 51*.¹³⁵

The 1970s proved no less productive a decade. In the English-speaking world the works of Bernard McGinn dominated the scene. McGinn produced two articles and the first monograph on Isaac in the early part of the decade, followed by an article on Isaac's

¹²⁹ Jean Leclercq, "Nouveau sermon d'Isaac de l'Étoile," *Revue d'ascétique et de la mystique* 40 (1964): 277-88; Robert O'Brien, "A Commentary of the Canticum of Canticles Attributed to Isaac of Stella," *Cîteaux* 16 (1965): 226-8.

¹³⁰ Thomas Merton, "Isaac of Stella: An Introduction to and Selections from his Sermons," *Cistercian Studies* 2 (1967): 243-51. The proposed collection of sermons, begun by Sisters Penelope and Paul and eventually completed by Hugh McCaffrey, was published as *Sermons on the Christian Year*, trans. Hugh McCaffrey (CF 11; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1979). The published collection, which contains *Sermons 1* through 26, does not contain Merton's introduction.

¹³¹ Jean Leclercq, "Isaac of Stella on Monastic Economics," *CSQ* 4 (1969): 267-74.

¹³² Anne Saword, "The Eighth Centenary of Isaac of Stella," *CSQ* 4 (1969): 243-50.

¹³³ *Isaac de L'Étoile: Sermons I*, ed. Anselm Hoste and Gaston Salet (SC 130; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1967).

¹³⁴ Bernardo Olivera, "Isaac of Stella: Prophet of Vatican II," *CSQ* 4 (1969): 251-66.

¹³⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 64.

Christology in 1979.¹³⁶ Ignacio Aranguren's and Patrick Ryan's articles from 1970, both treating Isaac's epistemology, added to the growing body of scholarly literature on Isaac.¹³⁷

Raciti, continuing with scholarship that he had initiated a decade before, produced the biographical entry on Isaac for the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* in 1971.¹³⁸ The same year also saw another article on Isaac by Leclercq, "La travail: ascèse sociale d'après Isaac de l'Étoile."¹³⁹ Moreover, Chrysogonus Waddell published a lengthy article in 1975 on *De officio missae*, "Isaac of Stella on the Canon of the Mass."¹⁴⁰

The edition of the *Liturgy of the Hours* produced by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy in 1975 makes notable use of Isaac's works. Readings from Isaac are included for the Saturday of the Second Week of Advent, the Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter, the Saturday of the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time, and the Friday of the Twenty-third Week of Ordinary time.¹⁴¹ The highlight of the decade may have been the

¹³⁶ Bernard McGinn, "Theologia in Isaac of Stella," *Cîteaux* 21 (1970): 219-235; *The Golden Chain: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Stella* (CS 15; Washington, D.C.: Cistercian Publications, 1972); "Isaac of Stella on the Divine Nature," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 29 (1973): 3-56; "Resurrection and Ascension in the Christology of the Early Cistercians," *Cîteaux* 30 (1979): 5-22.

¹³⁷ Ignacio Aranguren, "Isaac of Stella's Humanism," *CSQ* 5 (1970): 77-90; Patrick Ryan, "Isaac of Stella and Newman on Revelation," *CSQ* 5 (1970): 370-87.

¹³⁸ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," *DS* 7: 2011-38.

¹³⁹ Jean Leclercq, "La travail: ascèse sociale d'après Isaac de l'Étoile," *COCR* 9 (1971): 159-66.

¹⁴⁰ Waddell, Chrysogonus, "Isaac of Stella on the Canon of the Mass," *Liturgy, O.C.S.O.* 11 (1975): 21-75. In addition to the aforementioned articles and monograph, Isaac also featured more or less prominently in the following studies: *The Cistercian Spirit: A Symposium in Memory of Thomas Merton*, ed. M. Basil Pennington (CS 3; Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1970); Hugh McCaffrey, "Isaac of Stella: A Significant Spokesman for the Sanctity of Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Cistercian Ideals and Reality*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (CS 60; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1978), 199-219; Donkin, R.A. *The Cistercians: Studies in the Geography of Medieval England and Wales* (Studies and Texts 38; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978).

¹⁴¹ *The Liturgy of the Hours* (New York, N.Y.: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1975. 4 vols.). The readings to which I refer in the text are found in 1: 251, 2: 856, 3: 195, and 4: 245, respectively.

continuing publication of the critical edition of Isaac's sermons, which Hoste and Salet edited in the *Sources chrétiennes* series in 1974.¹⁴²

A number of articles from the 1980s revisited familiar themes and explored new territory. For the former, McCaffrey returned to the topic of Isaac and Dionysius the Areopagite in his 1982 article, "Apophatic Denis and Abbot Isaac of Stella."¹⁴³ Raciti and Gérard de Martel both continued to unravel the knotty issue of Isaac's works with their articles, "Pages nouvelles des sermons d'Isaac de l'Étoile dans un manuscrit d'Oxford" and "Le commentaire sur le Livre de Ruth du ms. Paris Sainte-Geneviève 45," respectively.¹⁴⁴ Kathleen O'Neill likewise contributed to the scholarship on Isaac's epistemology with her 1984 article, "Isaac of Stella on Self-Knowledge."¹⁴⁵

The crop of scholarship from the 1980s that broke new ground or at least sketched out new directions for research is best seen in Garda's important 1986 article where he takes issue with Raciti, "Du nouveau sur Isaac de l'Étoile."¹⁴⁶ Basil Pennington and Sister Humbeline both wrote about monastic *praxis* in relation to Isaac in their respective articles, "Fasting: Some Thoughts from Isaac of Stella" and "*Lectio Divina* and Isaac of Stella."¹⁴⁷ Last but certainly not least, Hoste and Salet completed their work on

¹⁴² *Isaac de L'Étoile: Sermons II*, ed. Anselm Hoste and Gaston Salet (SC 207; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1974).

¹⁴³ Hugh McCaffrey, "Apophatic Denis and Abbot Isaac of Stella," *CSQ* 17 (1982): 338-349.

¹⁴⁴ Raciti, "Pages nouvelles des sermons d'Isaac de l'Étoile dans un manuscrit d'Oxford," *CC* 43 (1981): 34-55; Gérard de Martel, "Le commentaire sur le Livre de Ruth du ms. Paris Sainte-Geneviève 45," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 29 (1983): 257-82.

¹⁴⁵ Kathleen O'Neill, "Isaac of Stella on Self-Knowledge," *CSQ* 19 (1984): 122-38.

¹⁴⁶ Garda, "Du nouveau sur Isaac de l'Étoile," *Cîteaux* 37 (1986): 8-22.

¹⁴⁷ M. Basil Pennington, "Fasting: Some Thoughts from Isaac of Stella," *Review for Religious* 41 (1982): 118-23; Sr. Humbeline, "*Lectio Divina* and Isaac of Stella," *Liturgy: Cistercians of the Strict Observance* 23 (1989): 87-103. Two additional works from the 1980s that treat Isaac, if not primarily, are the following: André Fracheboud, *Les premiers spirituels cisterciens* (Pain de Cîteaux 30; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1982); Schaefer, Mary Martina, "Twelfth Century Latin Commentaries on the Mass: Christological and Ecclesiological Dimensions," Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, In., 1983).

producing a critical edition of Isaac's sermons for the *Sources chrétiennes* series in 1987.¹⁴⁸

The 1990s were lean years for scholarship on Isaac. Only three articles were written at this time. Fracheboud continued his labors with his 1992 article, "Isaac de l'Étoile et Platon," and his last published work on Isaac shortly before his death, his 1997 article, "Le symbolisme de l'eau chez Isaac de l'Étoile."¹⁴⁹ Vincent Séguret's lengthy article, "La signification spirituelle de la vie insulaire dans les *Sermons* d'Isaac de l'Étoile," makes up for the dearth of scholarship on Isaac during this decade, as he deals with the important issue of Isaac's experience on Ré and how it is to be interpreted.¹⁵⁰ Mention must be made of Matarasso's translation of two of Isaac's sermons for the 1993 collection, *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*.¹⁵¹

The first decade of the new millennium has proven to be anything but lean thus far. As of this writing, eight works have appeared that continue to fill in the gaps concerning Isaac's life and works. Alexandre Joly continued to cultivate the field of Isaac's ecclesiology in her unpublished 2000 dissertation, "Le mystère de l'Église chez Isaac de l'Étoile."¹⁵² While Gastaldelli's 2001 monograph, *Studi su san Bernardo e Goffredo di Auxerre*, treats Isaac only indirectly, his continued criticism of Raciti and

¹⁴⁸ *Isaac de L'Étoile: Sermons III*, ed. Anselm Hoste and Gaston Salet (SC 339 ; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987).

¹⁴⁹ André Fracheboud, "Isaac de l'Étoile et Platon," *CC* 54 (1992): 175-191; "Le symbolisme de l'eau chez Isaac de l'Étoile," *CC* 59 (1997): 75-80. Fracheboud died at the Abbey of Notre Dame de Tamié in 1998.

¹⁵⁰ Vincent Séguret, "La signification spirituelle de la vie insulaire dans les *Sermons* d'Isaac de l'Étoile," I: *CC* 56 (1994): 343-58; II: *CC* 57 (1995): 75-92. In addition to the aforementioned articles, see also Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (Figuræ; Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

¹⁵¹ *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. Pauline Matarasso (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1993).

¹⁵² Alexandre Joly, "Le mystère de l'Église chez Isaac de l'Étoile" (Ph.D. diss., Gregorian University, Rome. 2000). Andrea Janelle Dickens refers to Isaac's Christology in her dissertation, "*Unus Spiritus cum Deo: Six Medieval Cistercian Christologies*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2005).

elaboration on Garda's work deserves attention.¹⁵³ Patrick Terrell Gray focuses on the monastic context of Isaac's work in his 2001 article, "Blessed is the Monk: Isaac of Stella on the Beatitudes."¹⁵⁴

Dietz produced two articles in 2002 and 2006, respectively: "Conversion in the Sermons of Isaac of Stella" and "When Exile Is Home: The Biography of Isaac of Stella."¹⁵⁵ Deme has emerged as one of the major scholars on Isaac. His 2005 article on Isaac's epistemology, "A Reason to Understand: The Epistemology of Isaac of Stella," announced his interest in Isaac and his 2007 monograph, *The Selected Works of Isaac of Stella: A Cistercian Voice from the Twelfth Century*, adds to the scholarly chain and offers translations of previously untranslated sermons.¹⁵⁶

Most recently the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops met in the Vatican from 5 to 26 October 2008. Archbishop Nikola Eterović, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, presented the *Lineamenta* or preliminary guidelines for the synod on 27 April 2007.¹⁵⁷ In Chapter I, "Revelation, the Word of God and the Church," numerous references are made to the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation from the Second Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum*). The Mother of God is described as the *hearer* of God's revelation *par excellence*. Isaac's *Sermon 51* is cited:

¹⁵³ Ferruccio Gastaldelli, *Studi su san Bernardo e Goffredo di Auxerre* (Millennio medievale 30; Florence: SISMELE edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001).

¹⁵⁴ Patrick Terrell Gray, "Blessed is the Monk: Isaac of Stella on the Beatitudes," *CSQ* 36 (2001): 349-365.

¹⁵⁵ Dietz, "Conversion in the Sermons of Isaac of Stella," *CSQ* 37 (2002):229-59; "When Exile Is Home: The Biography of Isaac of Stella," *CSQ* 41 (2006): 141-165.

¹⁵⁶ Dániel Deme, "A Reason to Understand: The Epistemology of Isaac of Stella," *American Benedictine Review* 56 (2005): 286-308; *The Selected Works of Isaac of Stella: A Cistercian Voice from the Twelfth Century* (Aldershot, Hants, England and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2007).

¹⁵⁷ XII Ordinary General Assembly: The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church: *Lineamenta*; retrieved 7 December 2008 from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20070427_lineamenta-xii-assembly_en.html.

In penetrating the mystery of the Word of God, Mary of Nazareth, from the moment of the Annunciation, remains the Teacher and Mother of the Church and the exemplar of every encounter with the Word by individuals or entire communities. She welcomes the Word in faith, mediates upon it, interiorises it and lives it (cf. *Lk* 1:38; 2:19,51; *Acts* 17:11). Indeed, Mary listened to and meditated upon the Scriptures; she associated them with Jesus' words and the events which she discovered were related to his life. Isaac of Stella says: "In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary... The Lord's inheritance is, in a general sense, the Church; in a special sense, Mary; and in an individual sense, the Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb, he dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell for ever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul."¹⁵⁸

After just over a century's worth of scholarship on Isaac, the scholarly literature has grown slowly but surely. The rapid survey of this literature now concluded, I shall proceed with the four main purposes of this chapter. First, I shall describe the history of modern scholarship with particular attention to the issue of Becket. Following this, I demonstrate the areas of consensus and dispute, as well as *lacunae* in the scholarly literature. I then evaluate the work of previous scholars concerning the central questions of the dissertation. Lastly I discuss new insights from the scholarly literature that will offer the conceptual framework in which this study is to be understood.

I am interested primarily in locating my work on Isaac in this chain of scholarly literature, demonstrating where my thesis converges and diverges and how it relates to modern scholarship. In other words, I explain how I place my work in the chain of scholarship that precedes this study.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 ("Mary, Every Believer's Model of How to Welcome the Word"); citing *Sermon* 51.8, 23-4. SC 339: 202, 214-6; PL 194: 1863A-B, 1865C.

C. Isaac of Stella's Critics and his Place in Modern Scholarship

It has generally been observed, due in large part to the research of Raciti, that Isaac suffered for his support of Becket's cause against Henry. Isaac suffered, quite specifically, the loss of his abbacy at Stella and was forced into exile on the island of Ré. The underlying theme is that Isaac was among the more important and influential supporters of Becket among the Cistercians, and that Isaac found himself on the losing side of the ecclesiastical and political power struggle in the late-twelfth century.

Raciti's argument, however, is untenable for the reasons that I shall now elaborate. Isaac was neither important nor influential in his support of Becket. Indeed, I aim to show that Isaac's career and position as abbot of Stella did not suffer due to his position in the controversy between Becket and Henry. Isaac's role, in other words, was a minor one, the consequences for which were negligible at best.

Only since the mid-twentieth century has Isaac attracted significant interest among scholars. Isaac's two treatises have received the most attention but interest in his sermons has not been altogether lacking. Indeed, Raciti has subjected Isaac's sermons to great scrutiny, giving them his close and exacting attention as can be seen in his important article, "Isaac de l'Étoile et son siècle."

But Isaac is no Bernard or even a lesser light among the constellation of Cistercians from the twelfth century. McGinn remarks that Isaac is "less humane, less easy of access than the other great contemporary English Cistercian, Aelred of Rievaulx, Isaac surpasses him in the depth and scope of his theological vision."

Lacking the stylistic virtuosity, the incredible range and the supreme mystical flights of the greatest Cistercian author, Bernard, Isaac is nonetheless more the speculative theologian than the abbot of Clairvaux. In terms of this intellectual power he might be compared with the fourth of the great names among the Cistercian Fathers of the twelfth century, the deep and subtle William of Saint Thierry.¹⁵⁹

Interest in and understanding of Isaac's place in the history of theology has been building slowly. Bliemetzrieder and Debray-Mulatier began the process, collecting materials, sketching out the initial lines and chronologies of Isaac's biography, and setting forth the first crucial hypotheses concerning his life and work. Raciti, meanwhile, did great service to the study of Isaac by combing through his sermons and much in the way of their historical context. A testament to Raciti's importance is the fact that so much of the scholarship following him, in one way or another, a response to Raciti. However, Garda and Gastaldelli began to break with—or at least question seriously—his thesis; Dietz would do so as well. In this study I shall ally myself to the camp of Raciti's critics, not to take issue with Raciti but rather to clarify a significant event in Isaac's career as abbot of Stella.

D. Analysis of Literature Relevant to the Problem

While the scholarly literature on Isaac is modest compared to Bernard and other twelfth-century Cistercians, there has been increasing interest in Isaac in the past century. The research questions posed by this study concern three areas of scholarship: biographical literature on Isaac, the date of the foundation of the monastery of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré and Isaac's stay there, and literature concerning the nature of

¹⁵⁹ *Sermons*, ix.

Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy. What follows is a chronological review of the most relevant literature concerning these three areas, beginning with the pioneering studies of Bliemetzrieder and Debray-Mulatier in the early and mid-twentieth century, and concluding with the recent research of Dietz from 2006.

Bliemetzrieder's article, "Isaak von Stella: Beiträge zur Lebensbeschreibung," is the first modern attempt to gather the documentary evidence and propose the initial hypotheses concerning Isaac.¹⁶⁰ One of the most important of the latter was the identification of the remote island to which Isaac refers numerous times in his sermons. Bliemetzrieder identifies the location of "this distant, arid and rough wilderness" (*semotam, aridam, et squalentem induximus solitudinem*) to which Isaac refers in *Sermon* 14¹⁶¹ as the island of Ré, a small island a few miles off the west coast of France near the port of La Rochelle on the Bay of Biscay.¹⁶²

Bliemetzrieder's judgment has since served as the default setting for subsequent scholars. Indeed, no scholar has questioned, let alone attempted to offer a counterargument to, Bliemetzrieder's conclusion. Documentary evidence that will be reported in Chapter II further confirms Ré as the location of the monastery of Notre Dame des Châteliers.

In addition to identifying the location of the wilderness to which Isaac referred, Bliemetzrieder furthermore argues for the foundation of the monastery of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré around 1151-52.¹⁶³ Isaac's involvement in the foundation of this

¹⁶⁰ Bliemetzrieder, "Isaak von Stella: Beiträge zur Lebensbeschreibung," *Jahrbuch der Philosophie und spekulativen Theologie* 15 (1904): 1-34.

¹⁶¹ *Sermon* 14.11. SC 130: 276; PL 194: 1737A. Salet presents a range of opinions concerning the number of sermons in which Isaac alluded to Ré, from 23 (Debray-Mulatier) to 39 (Gaggero). See SC 130: 27.

¹⁶² Bliemetzrieder, "Isaak von Stella," 6.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

monastery is known through two acts of donation as well as a letter from the donor to the abbot of Pontigny; Isaac, however, does not refer to the date of its foundation in any of his works.

The significance of the approximate date of the monastery's foundation will be elaborated upon in the following chapter. It is important here and now to indicate where each scholar has come down on the matter of the date and in the subsequent discussion of my analytical strategies (in Chapter II) interpret the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments as well as to provide my own on the basis of the extant documents.

Debray-Mulatier continues on the path begun by Bliemetzrieder in her article (based on her research from 1940 but not published until 1959), "Biographie d'Isaac de Stella."¹⁶⁴ Much like Bliemetzrieder before her, Debray-Mulatier attempts to determine the biography of a little-known and elusive figure.¹⁶⁵ Her concern is largely to integrate scattered biographical material into a coherent whole.¹⁶⁶

Debray-Mulatier's contribution to the scholarly literature on Isaac is three-fold. First, she rejects what is of such importance to Raciti, namely, the mining of Isaac's sermons for biographical data. While Debray-Mulatier is quick to acknowledge the importance of Bliemetzrieder's "scrupulous study" a half-century prior to her own, she does part company with him concerning a possible allusion to Isaac's life. Quoting *Sermon 27.2*, Bliemetzrieder understands Isaac's phrase, *qui in mundo aliquid videbatur*, to be an allusion to Isaac's high status in society.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie d'Isaac de Stella," *Cîteaux* 10 (1959): 178-98.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁶⁷ Bliemetzrieder, "Isaak von Stella," 3. SC 207: 142; PL 194: 1778B.

Debray-Mulatier counters: “But the beginning of the sermon shows that Isaac, developing St. Luke (‘We go up to Jerusalem’ [18:31]), points those who came to this distant island to make ascent to Jerusalem...I believe that Isaac here is not referring to his earlier life as a layperson, but as the abbot of Stella, and nothing other than a simple monk on Ré.”¹⁶⁸

Debray-Mulatier’s second contribution concerns Isaac’s involvement in the Becket controversy, in particular the consequences of Isaac siding with Becket. Even though Becket sought refuge in France and Isaac (along with Bellesmains) asked the monks of Cîteaux and Pontigny for their prayers on Becket’s behalf, it does not appear that Isaac suffered for it. “In spite of this intervention,” Debray-Mulatier reports, “it does not seem to have gone beyond the spiritual and temporal activity of an abbot dealing with his monastery. The abbot is not only the pastor of the flock of God, he is also the administrator of the house of God; he must have all things with prudence and justice.”¹⁶⁹

Debray-Mulatier’s third contribution concerns the date the foundation of the monastery of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré, which she argues was around 1155-56. Appended to her article are two documents she discovered in the archives of the Congregation of the Oratory and a letter from a cartulary of Pontigny.¹⁷⁰ The first document is a donation made by Eblo of Mauléon and his nephew to Isaac and John of Trizay, the abbot of a nearby abbey that had been incorporated into the Cistercian Order at about the same time as Stella.¹⁷¹ The letter is from Eblo to the abbot of Pontigny, wherein Elbo asks the abbot to found a monastery on the site (i.e., Ré) he had previously

¹⁶⁸ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie,” 180.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 195-8.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 195-6.

given to Isaac and John.¹⁷² Lastly is the document whereby Eblo confirms his donation following the abbot of Pontigny's visit to Ré.¹⁷³

While Debray-Mulatier's research, like that of Bliemetzrieder, was sketchy and provisional, it demonstrates an early attempt of a modern scholar to treat Isaac on the basis of extant documents. Only with Garda's subsequent research would Isaac be dealt with on the basis of still earlier materials. Her aversion to speculation and penchant for not straying beyond the paucity of evidence at her disposal stands in marked contrast to Raciti's approach.

At the same time, like Bliemetzrieder, Debray-Mulatier filled in far too few gaps concerning Isaac's life and career as abbot. Later scholars would come to find her work nonetheless important, and the foundation laid by both Bliemetzrieder and Debray-Mulatier remains valuable for students of Isaac.

No study of Isaac—his sermons in particular—would be complete without the use of Raciti's landmark article, "Isaac de l'Étoile et son siècle."¹⁷⁴ Raciti, a Cistercian monk from the Abbey of Notre Dame of Orval in modern-day Florenville, Belgium, focuses his meticulous study of Isaac's sermons on *Sermon 48*, a sermon Isaac delivered (according to Raciti) on 24 June 1166.¹⁷⁵ Raciti's selection of *Sermon 48* as the key sermon in Isaac's *oeuvre* is justified since, as Raciti explains, Isaac refers to at least three important issues in the sermon. In particular it is the interpretive key for understanding Isaac, his relationship with Becket and its consequences.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 196-7.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 197-8.

¹⁷⁴ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile et son siècle," *Cîteaux* 12 (1961): 281-306; 13 (1962): 18-34, 133-45, 205-16.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

In *Sermon* 48 Isaac begins by addressing his recent change of style: “As several of you inquire: ‘What has come over this poor man? How has the gold of his intelligence been so darkened and his bright eloquence so changed?’”¹⁷⁶ This is, for Raciti, one indication of trouble for Isaac, namely, that he has had to give up his previously speculative preaching in favor of a simpler, more direct style. Why the sudden change in style? Raciti argues that Isaac was caught up in the theological controversies of the 1160s, specifically those involving Peter Abélard and Gilbert de la Porée, both of whom Raciti identified as among Isaac’s teachers.¹⁷⁷

Following the Councils of Tours (1163) and Sens (1164), theological disputes that had grown heated over the years had finally come to a head. Indeed, at the Council of Sens, Pope Alexander III put more than 3,000 theologians on notice, one of whom (according to Raciti) was Isaac himself.¹⁷⁸ Isaac was, therefore, on guard and keen on toeing the theological line. This is one of the reasons for the abrupt change in his preaching style to which he calls attention at the beginning of *Sermon* 48.¹⁷⁹

The second reason *Sermon* 48 is of such importance for Raciti in understanding Isaac’s life and works is a criticism Isaac makes midway through the sermon. Isaac refers to the appearance “a new and monstrous breed of military” (*novae militiae abortum est monstrum novum*).¹⁸⁰ Raciti understands this to be in reference to the military Order of Calatrava, approved by Pope Alexander III on 24 September 1164. While Isaac does not condemn the order outright, he nevertheless is clear concerning

¹⁷⁶ *Sermon* 48.2. *Quo, inquit vestrum nonnulli, demersus est homo iste? Quomodo obscuratum est aurum intelligentiae suae, mutates est color optimus eloquentiae suae?* SC 339: 152; PL 194: 1853B.

¹⁷⁷ Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 292-6. For a brief background on the theological controversies themselves, see *ibid.*, 24-7.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-6.

¹⁷⁹ What is more, according to Raciti, Isaac is here preaching not in Latin but rather the vernacular. See *ibid.*, 285.

¹⁸⁰ *Sermon* 48.8. SC 339: 158; PL 194: 1854B.

what he thinks of it. And Isaac's attitude toward the order, according to Raciti, doubtless made Isaac unpopular with the leaders of the Cistercian Order.¹⁸¹

The third and certainly most important reason is Isaac's involvement in the Becket conflict. For Raciti, this is the key to interpreting *Sermon* 48 and other sermons, as well as Isaac's subsequent career, death and memory. Much of Raciti's argument will be gone over in greater detail in Chapter II. Raciti's argument, put briefly, is as follows. In his sermons Isaac refers to a period of "exile" on an island, most likely Ré; this exile was one into which Isaac was forced, due to his theological speculation as well as his support of Becket; Geoffrey of Auxerre was an opponent of Gilbert de la Porée and among the anti-Becket Cistercians; Geoffrey, therefore was the prime mover in persecuting and ultimately exiling Isaac to Ré.

Raciti is clear that Geoffrey—abbot of Clairvaux as well as biographer and former secretary of Bernard—was the architect of Isaac's silencing and exile to Ré.¹⁸² Raciti even goes so far to say that Geoffrey's persecution of Isaac on theological bases was a pretext to punish him for his political positions.¹⁸³

Raciti's argument for the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers in 1167 is part and parcel of his argument for Isaac paying the price for his support of Becket. Following Becket's decision to leave the Cistercian monastery at Pontigny, where he had been staying since 1164, Henry continued to seek vengeance.¹⁸⁴ According to Raciti, Henry sought to punish the pro-Becket party among the Cistercians in particular. Raciti

¹⁸¹ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 21.

¹⁸² See especially *ibid.*, 138-9.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 143-5.

quoted a letter likely from December 1166, wherein Henry reminds the abbot of Clairvaux of his promise to punish certain monks who had sided with Becket.¹⁸⁵

Reflecting on all the turmoil and controversy in which Isaac was involved, Raciti concludes:

Thus it was that Isaac—viewed badly by the nobility of Poitou because he was English; by the king of England because he was a friend of Thomas Becket; by Geoffrey of Clairvaux because of his culture; by the abbot of Cîteaux because of his opposition to the affiliation of Calatrava and the decision to send Thomas Becket away from Pontigny—was deposed and sent into exile to the island of Ré.¹⁸⁶

Isaac as well as John of Trizay were exiled to Ré in January 1167 where, humiliated and despairing, they struggled to form a new community for themselves and the disgraced monks with them.¹⁸⁷

In his introduction to the first volume of the *Sources chrétiennes* edition of Isaac's sermons, Salet provides an overview of Isaac's life, works, theology, and sources.¹⁸⁸

While Salet is sceptical of many of Raciti's speculations, he generally follows his outline and chronology. It is in the first section of Salet's introduction, "L'homme," that I will focus my attention.¹⁸⁹

Salet follows Raciti's chronology in arguing for Isaac's birth around 1100;¹⁹⁰ his student days most likely in Chartres;¹⁹¹ unlike Raciti, however, Salet argues for Isaac's

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 143. See *Epistle 188* in *Materials 5*: 365-6.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 144-5.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 207-10.

¹⁸⁸ Salet, Gaston. "Introduction," in SC 130: 7-63.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 7-25.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 13-4.

entry into monastic life at Stella at some point before its affiliation with the Cistercian Order.¹⁹² Salet does concur with Raciti that Isaac died around 1168 or 1169 on Ré.¹⁹³

Like Raciti, Salet believes that Isaac paid a price for his support of Becket against Henry. Unlike Raciti, however, Salet is more cautious and less likely to offer conjecture. For Salet, it suffices to say that following the General Chapter in 1166, when the Cistercian Order withdrew its previous hospitality toward Becket, Isaac nevertheless “remained faithful to the cause of his friend.”¹⁹⁴

The active and continued support of Becket led to the reversal of Isaac’s fortunes and his sojourn on the island of Ré, at time that coincided with the founding of Notre Dame des Châteliers. While Salet is less given to the speculation and conjecture of Raciti concerning the details of Isaac’s “exile,” he does argue for a date of the monastery’s founding around 1167.¹⁹⁵

In striking contrast to Raciti, however, Salet does not leave us with an image of a forlorn and destitute martyr dying alone and forgotten in forced exile. Salet’s image is one of a monk whose love for Christ and the monastic life remained undiminished. “Given generously once and for all to Christ,” Salet writes, “observing strictly and uprightly the Cistercian rule, he requires of his monks—with passionate insistence—humility, mortification, and obedience. If he has escaped to the island of Ré, is it not in the hope of higher contemplation and also in the desire to ‘embrace the naked cross of Christ’?”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Ibid., 14-5.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 24-5.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 24-5.

McGinn's monograph, *The Golden Chain: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Stella*, was the first book-length study of Isaac to emerge.¹⁹⁷

McGinn's main interest "is to show that Isaac's theology of man is best understood in the light of the Platonic tradition organized about the central symbol of the golden chain of being."¹⁹⁸ His study is nevertheless important in tracking post-Raciti scholarship on Isaac.

McGinn is evidently and admittedly dependent on the work of Raciti. While he expresses some reservations and criticisms of Raciti's theories, McGinn (like Salet) accepts Raciti's argument and chronology: Isaac studied in France in the late 1120s and 1130s, most likely Paris and Chartres;¹⁹⁹ Isaac became abbot of Stella in 1147;²⁰⁰ Isaac's exile to Ré in 1167 coincided with the founding of Notre Dame des Châteliers.²⁰¹

Concerning the Becket controversy in particular, McGinn devotes an excursus, "The Place of the Cistercian Order in the Early Years of the Becket Controversy," to the issue.²⁰² McGinn concurs with Raciti that Isaac was a friend of Becket's and a leader of a pro-Becket party among the Cistercians. McGinn calls attention to a letter from 22 June 1164 from Bellesmains to Becket, wherein he assures Becket of his support of his cause against Henry:

I advise your holiness, then, to establish a closer friendship with the abbot of Pontigny, either in person, if you can come to France yourself on the pretext of pursuing your case,

¹⁹⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Golden Chain: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Isaac of Stella* (CS 15; Washington, D.C.: Cistercian Publications, 1972). McGinn is most interested in Isaac's thought "given the gaps in the evidence." *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 18-21. The matter of Isaac's "exile" to and the dates of his sojourn on Ré will occupy much of the following chapter.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 34-50.

or at least by letter, if you cannot secure the license to quit the country, although our common friend, our own Abbot Isaac of Stella and I have arranged that the most holy monastery of Pontigny should keep you continually in their prayers. You will find that Pontigny is also ready to serve you even in temporal affairs, if it should be necessary; much indeed can be achieved through the diligence and holiness of the abbot of Pontigny and the other abbots of the Cistercian Order.²⁰³

Of particular importance to McGinn is Bellesmains's reference to their "common friend," Isaac, which he takes as "evidence of Isaac of Stella's role in these negotiations."²⁰⁴ McGinn is unequivocal concerning his agreement with Raciti in the following:

Surely, G. Raciti...is correct in seeing here an allusion to active political adhesion to the cause of Becket on Isaac's part, and not only the remembrance in prayers envisaged by Mlle Debray-Mulatier. The lack of any further direct evidence renders suspect imaginative speculation about what forms—visits, letters, etc.—Isaac's work on behalf of Becket may have taken in the period 1164-66; but this does not lessen the assurance that Isaac was an active member of the pro-Becket party in the Cistercian Order whose history fortunately can be traced with some degree of precision.²⁰⁵

McGinn does, however, part company with Raciti when it comes to Geoffrey's campaign to silence Isaac. He initially casts doubt on Raciti's argument that Geoffrey was "the chief agent in this campaign," adding:

Admittedly, the hypothesis does not conflict with what we know of the character and capabilities of Geoffrey; but could the Abbot of Clairvaux have had that much direct authority on a son of Pontigny, especially at a time when he himself was apparently fighting for the maintenance of his position? Furthermore, the situation of theological tension would seem to correspond better with 1165 than 1166. Raciti's only reason for the choice of the later date is because he sees political, not theological, motives as dominant in Geoffrey's mind—another unprovable assertion.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Letter 31. *Materials* 5: 114; ET: *Correspondence*, 1: 105.

²⁰⁴ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 37.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

McGinn returns to Raciti's theory of Geoffrey's supposed role in the consequences of Isaac's support of Becket as being "almost certainly mistaken."²⁰⁷

McGinn concurs, however, with Raciti (as well as Salet) concerning the date of the foundation of the monastery on Ré as well as Isaac's sojourn there: "a date early in the year 1167 is the most probable one for Isaac's retirement to Ré."²⁰⁸

In 1981 Raciti published some newly discovered fragments of Isaac's sermons.²⁰⁹ Raciti begins by recalling Leclercq's discovery in 1964 of a sermon by Isaac that helped to fill the gap in Tissier's collection in PL 194.²¹⁰ Raciti's own discovery of several fragments in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University further sheds light on the knotty question of Isaac's sermons.

Raciti's discovery is a collection of several manuscripts from the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, the provenance of which (according to Raciti) was either northern France or Flanders.²¹¹ The attribution of these sermons to Isaac seems undoubted.²¹² In one of these sermons, Isaac refers to his return from a brief exile.²¹³ According to Raciti, the exile to which Isaac refers must have been toward the end of Isaac's abbacy, between 1165 and 1167, and formed part of the process that led to the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré.²¹⁴ Raciti refers to the controversy

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 43.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 21.

²⁰⁹ Raciti, "Pages nouvelles des sermons d'Isaac de l'Étoile dans un manuscrit d'Oxford," *Coll* 43 (1981): 34-55.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 34-5. Raciti cites the following article by Leclercq: Jean Leclercq, "Nouveau sermon d'Isaac de l'Étoile," *Revue d'ascétique et de la mystique* 40 (1964): 277-88.

²¹¹ Ibid., 35-6.

²¹² Ibid., 39.

²¹³ Ibid., 51; cf. SC 339: 294.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

between Becket and Henry, and how beginning in 1165 the latter began a policy of banishing those who had supported Becket.

This exile “probably consisted of a stay in the territories of the king of France, which does not seem to have taken too long—perhaps only a few months.”²¹⁵ Raciti continues:

It is natural to suppose that Isaac would have gone to Pontigny, Stella’s mother house, which would take the direct responsibility for the foundation of Ré, which Isaac initially considered. Pontigny had agreed to be the refuge for Becket in 1164 and always remained attached to his cause.²¹⁶

In the end, Raciti leaves his theory of a forced exile to Ré and a definitive departure from Stella intact. These fragments, he argues, “do not shed new insight on Isaac. But they do make it possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of Isaac’s doctrine and a more precise understanding of the events of his life.”²¹⁷

Garda’s article, “Du nouveau sur Isaac de l’Étoile,” marked a turning point in the scholarship on Isaac, in particular the matter of his supposed exile on Ré.²¹⁸ Garda’s research was based on archival material that was removed from Stella in the eighteenth century. Some of the material indicates that Isaac died as abbot of Stella; other material supports the dating of Isaac’s time on Ré in the 1150s. On both points Garda seriously questions and undermines Raciti’s earlier research.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 44-5.

²¹⁸ Garda, “Du nouveau sur Isaac de l’Étoile,” *Cîteaux* 37 (1986): 8-22.

Garda begins by setting his sights squarely on Raciti. Previous studies of Isaac were too quick to assume too much on the basis of Isaac's sermons.²¹⁹ The result of this research, Garda wrote, is that speculation "is now taken uncritically as historical fact."²²⁰ Garda intends, however, to focus on documents that have been overlooked until now in order to provide a contribution to a more meticulous study of Isaac's life.

Garda critiques the earlier work of both Debray-Mulatier and Raciti, arguing that they had limited themselves to the scanty notes of the Maurist Claude Estiennot (d. 1699), preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale.²²¹ Other sources exist, however, that are older and, indeed, comprise a more complete set of information from which to draw conclusions about Isaac.

Garda enumerates 12 such documents, all from the mid- to late twelfth century, that relate directly to Isaac.²²² The documents include, *inter alia*, the confirmation of Isaac becoming abbot of Stella in 1147; a letter from Pope Eugene III from 1149; an agreement between Bellesmains (then bishop of Poitiers), Hugh of Chauvigny, and Isaac (referred to in the documents as "Isaac, abbé de l'Etoile") from 1167; and letter from Isaac to Bellesmains from sometime between 1162 and 1169, to which is attached Isaac's seal.²²³

None of these documents, however, shed light on the most obscure event in Isaac's life, namely, the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré. If we wish to follow Raciti's thesis, Garda argues, that Isaac definitively left Stella around 1167 or 1168, then it is necessary—"in the absence of any other proof," as Garda remarks—to be

²¹⁹ Ibid., 8. Garda specifically mentions the studies of Raciti as well as Salet in 8n.1.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 9.

²²² Ibid., 10-7.

²²³ Ibid., 10-11, 14-5, 17.

satisfied with Raciti's reasoning that since the tradition of Stella does not record Isaac's departure to Ré, this proves that the event was of such sadness and significance that it was all the better left unrecorded.²²⁴

Garda cites two documents (one undated and one from 1188), however, that demonstrate the memory of Isaac not as a disgraced and deposed abbot, but rather refer to "the blessed memory of Isaac."²²⁵ In the end, Garda concurs with the earlier research of Debray-Mulatier and argues for a dating of Notre Dame des Châteliers to around 1156, making Isaac's time on Ré a brief parenthesis during an otherwise unbroken tenure as abbot of Stella.²²⁶

When it comes to mining Isaac's sermons for historical and biographical information, Garda argues that "the metaphorical style of Isaac" must be considered "and not take for historical fact a certain number of hypotheses deprived of concrete support."²²⁷ Garda clearly has Raciti in mind and cites Salet's similar reservations toward Raciti's speculative arguments.²²⁸

Garda's final criticism of Raciti concerns Isaac's death and burial. Raciti, as we have seen, argued that Isaac died in disgrace and on Ré; Raciti also argued that had Isaac been buried at Stella there would have survived some tradition demonstrating this.²²⁹ Raciti's argument, Garda counters, overlooks the devastations that occurred around Stella during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). Garda also demonstrates how conventual life at Stella had ceased by the seventeenth century.²³⁰ Indeed, the monastery was

²²⁴ Ibid., 18, citing Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 209n.267.

²²⁵ Ibid., 18-9.

²²⁶ Ibid., 18, citing Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie," 192-3 and 22n.57.

²²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 212n.276.

²³⁰ Garda, "Du nouveau," 21.

deserted when Jérôme Petit took possession of it in 1621.²³¹ “The memory of Isaac,” Garda concludes, “had perished at Stella.”²³²

Raciti takes into consideration Garda’s discovery in his brief notes in the third and final volume of Isaac’s sermons in the *Sources chrétiennes* edition.²³³ Raciti maintains his basic argument as he did in his article from 1981, noting that only a late dating of the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré can explain Isaac’s forced exile. Raciti does modify his argument, however, in that he omits any mention of Geoffrey as the agent of Isaac’s persecution and ultimate downfall.²³⁴

While Gastaldelli’s article, “Tradizione e sviluppo: La formazione culturae e teologica di Goffredo di Auxerre,” does not focus on Isaac primarily, it is nevertheless an important example of recent scholarship that also argues against Raciti’s central thesis of a forced exile on Ré.²³⁵ Gastaldelli begins by explaining how Geoffrey, not unlike Isaac, has been overshadowed by the luminaries of the twelfth century like Bernard and Abélard. In the medieval sources, he continued, we find occasional and fragmentary references to certain figures and events, but in modern studies we often find judgments based on inconsistent indications or arbitrary suppositions not based on facts. To Gastaldelli this was obviously the case when it comes to Isaac.²³⁶

Gastaldelli rehearses Raciti’s basic argument and pays particular attention to Geoffrey’s role in the Becket controversy. According to Raciti, Geoffrey was the prime

²³¹ See Garda, “Vie inédit de Dom Jéôme Petit, abbé de l’Étoile, l’un de promoteurs de l’Étroite Observance,” *Cîteaux* 38 (1987): 34-58.

²³² Garda, “Du nouveau,” 22.

²³³ Raciti, “Nostrum exsilium,” in SC 339: 316-9.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 318-9.

²³⁵ Ferruccio Gastaldelli, “Tradizione e sviluppo: La formazione culturae e teologica di Goffredo di Auxerre,” in *Studi su san Bernardo e Goffredo di Auxerre* (Florence: SISMEL-Edizinoi del Galluzzo, 2001), 341-74.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 341.

mover in the punitive measures against Isaac due to the latter's support of Becket; Geoffrey's animus toward Isaac in particular was the hostility between Becket and Henry. Gastaldelli argues, however, that Isaac was able to avoid any negative consequences of his support of Becket by accepting Henry's condition of not allowing Becket to remain at Pontigny.²³⁷

Citing the important study of Garda, Gastaldelli presents Isaac's visit to Ré as having been brief (only a few weeks) but nevertheless one that provided him with the opportunity to recall the experience in subsequent sermons.²³⁸ Thus, Isaac's short stay on Ré (the date of which Gastaldelli concurs with Garda) was not an exile into which Isaac was forced but rather little more than a business trip, as Gastaldelli reports, in order to obtain for Eblo of Mauléon the donation of land he had given for a new monastery on the island.

Gastaldelli argues against Raciti in two ways. In the first place, Gastaldelli gives far less credence to the homilies of Isaac as biographical or historical sources than does Raciti. Raciti's thesis, as we have seen, is based on one of Isaac's sermons (*Sermon 48*), wherein Isaac explains how he has decided to change his style and proposes a simpler teaching. Gastaldelli counters, however, that this amounted to a too strong dependence on a literal interpretation of an allegorical witness.²³⁹

Second and more important, Gastaldelli also uses historical documents that were not extant at the time of Raciti's researches. Indeed, not until Garda—a "lucky

²³⁷ Ibid., 342-3.

²³⁸ Ibid., 343n.10.

²³⁹ Ibid., 343.

researcher” (*un fortunate ricercatore*)—discovered the manuscripts described above was it even possible for them to be used.²⁴⁰

Gastaldelli’s article is a useful study of the role Geoffrey played during Isaac’s tenure as abbot of Stella, in particular within the context of the Becket controversy. As we have seen, Raciti argues that Geoffrey was the main opponent of Isaac and ultimately forced him into exile on Ré. Gastaldelli argues, however, that Raciti’s theory lacked any foundation in the historical evidence—chiefly the documents recently discovered by Garda—and, therefore, is to be dismissed.²⁴¹ Indeed, according to Gastaldelli, following the Becket controversy Isaac was not in exile but rather safely in his calm abbey of Stella.²⁴²

A recent article by Dietz, “When Exile Is Home: The Biography of Isaac of Stella,” provides a useful summary of the scholarly literature as well as the *status quaestionis*.²⁴³ Dietz seeks to clarify some of the key points in Isaac’s career as abbot of Stella as well as the extent to which Isaac’s sermons may be used as sources of historical and, indeed, biographical information.

Isaac’s obscurity and the lack of biographical information, Dietz writes, have led to “divergent interpretation” and “wild conjecture.” Certain features of Isaac’s biography have become standardized: “Isaac is presented as a marginal or marginalized figure who, for ideological reasons, either chose or was forced to live in exile on the island of Ré, where he is presumed to have died in obscurity.”²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 344.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Dietz, “When Exile Is Home: The Biography of Isaac of Stella,” *CSQ* 41 (2006): 141-65.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 142.

Dietz begins by focusing on the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré, which he believes occurred around 1156, and argues for a three-stage process: the initial donation by Elbo of Mauléon at the request of Isaac and John, abbot of Trizay; Elbo's subsequent letter to the abbot of Pontigny asking him to found an abbey on the site he (i.e., Elbo) had previously donated to Isaac and John; the abbot of Pontigny visits Ré and accepts the proposal and donation.²⁴⁵

The question of to whom Elbo's letter was addressed is one point of debate. Dietz argues that Guichard, abbot of Pontigny until 1165, was the recipient.²⁴⁶ Raciti, on the other hand, argues in favor of Garinus, who was abbot of Pontigny from 1165 to 1174.²⁴⁷ Raciti overlooks, according to Dietz, the fact that while Elbo's initial letter does not name the abbot of Pontigny, but instead uses the initial "G" of the person to whom it was addressed, "(i)t was during Guichard's abbacy that Pontigny made most of its twelfth-century foundations or incorporations."²⁴⁸

Of great importance to Dietz is the charter that comprised the third and final stage. Although the charter refers to Isaac and John as monks rather than abbots, Dietz points out that Guichard calls them "his monks" as well as the abbots of Stella and Trizay, respectively. "Nothing in this charter warrants the conclusion that Isaac or John changed status as a result of Pontigny's adoption of the Ré foundation."²⁴⁹

Raciti's thesis comes under scrutiny throughout Dietz's article. Dietz summarizes Raciti's argument, in particular Geoffrey's role in persecuting Isaac and ultimately forcing him into exile, and judges that it "lacks any serious historical foundation and is

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 145-6.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 146. Debray-Mulatier shared this view as well; see Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie," 197.

²⁴⁷ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 210.

²⁴⁸ Dietz, "Exile," 147.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 148.

based on premises that recent studies have called into question.”²⁵⁰ Dietz’s argument *contra* Raciti is three-fold. First, Raciti fundamentally misinterprets *Sermon* 48, having read into it indications of external pressure or persecution and ultimate exile. Isaac’s use of simpler speech in preaching was likely to accommodate lay brothers, not because of “external persecution.”²⁵¹

Second, Dietz argues that Raciti’s theory of Isaac as an active supporter of Becket “is based on a relatively insignificant passage in a letter of 1164 to Thomas Becket from John Bellesmains, fellow Englishman and life-long friend, now Bishop of Poitiers.”²⁵² Bellesmains urged Becket to seek close ties with the abbot of Pontigny, mentioning as well that their “common friend,” Isaac, is seeking prayers on behalf of Becket and his cause. Isaac, however, is one of three “common friends” mentioned in the letter and “in the vast documentation preserved from the Becket affair there is no further mention of the abbot of Stella.”²⁵³

For Dietz, the question is not whether Isaac was a supporter of Becket, but rather whether he was a major figure. “There is no doubt that the moral and practical support offered by reform-minded Cistercians was a major factor throughout the affair,” Dietz alleges. “But to see him as a key player in the complex unfolding of events has no documentary support.”²⁵⁴ Guichard and Bellesmains emerged from the Becket affair unscathed. There is no reason, according to Dietz, to believe that it was otherwise for

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

Isaac. “(T)here is no reason to think Isaac would have been singled out for reprisals, especially since none of the evidence points in that direction.”²⁵⁵

Finally, Dietz rejects Raciti’s argument that Geoffrey was the agent of Isaac’s “exile” to Ré. Modern historians have described him as being responsible for condemning both Isaac and Joachim of Fiore but with no solid evidence in either case. “With or without a persecutor in the person of Geoffrey,” Dietz declares, “Isaac was in no more danger than any other Cistercian abbot after the withdrawal of Cistercian hospitality for Becket in 1166.”²⁵⁶ Considering Geoffrey’s own troubles (e.g., having been forced to resign as abbot of Clairvaux in 1165), he “was hardly in a position to engage in reprisals against Becket’s supporters, and in any case would have had no motive for doing so.”²⁵⁷

Dietz also argues against Raciti’s method of mining Isaac’s sermons for historical and biographical data. The theme of “exile” in particular is not to be taken literally, but rather is a literary device in keeping with monastic sermons.²⁵⁸ The circumstantial details and historical information Isaac seems to offer in his sermons are not described for their own sake. Rather, Isaac intends for them “to bolster his argument about the danger of monks being ensnared by a kind of *curiositas* that incites them always to look for new and different experiences.”²⁵⁹

Isaac’s references to “exile,” therefore, are allegorical and used by Isaac to further his teaching on asceticism and the monastic life—not to make a point concerning his life in exile on Ré. “The allegory could apply equally to Isaac’s entrance at Stella (perhaps

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 152.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 154-8.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 154.

with several fellow students in tow) and to the experience on the island of Ré,” Dietz reasons. “There is no need of accurate knowledge about the Ré episode to perceive that it was a ‘spiritual drama’ that left its mark on Isaac, suffused his metaphorical imagination, and became for him a powerful medium for expressing deep theological and spiritual truths.”²⁶⁰

E. Relation of Literature to Present Study

What in fact do we know about Isaac? The details of his biography are, for the scholar especially, frustratingly few. But when we first determine what can truly be known about Isaac, then we can see that Raciti goes too far in his thesis. Reports of Isaac’s involvement in the Becket controversy have been greatly exaggerated, as Mark Twain once said of his own death.

Prior to Raciti, no one had read through Isaac’s sermons as carefully and thoroughly; scholars truly owe him a great debt. But Raciti, so often near the mark, was not always on it. He had a fundamentally flawed thesis when it came to Isaac’s “exile” and his involvement with Becket. And this flaw affected his overall take on Isaac—and it has affected the general drift of subsequent scholarship on Isaac.

Like Raciti, I shall focus on Isaac’s sermons. I shall in particular focus on Isaac’s sermons *as sermons*—something I think Raciti failed to do. He tended to read them literally, as biography, and not as monastic sermons with all the conventions that applied. Raciti’s principle is simple: once a forced exile to Ré is admitted, the reader has the

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 155. Dietz further states: “At no point does Isaac convey details of that episode for purposes of accurate description.” Ibid., 158.

interpretive key with which to read Isaac's sermons and determine his level of support of Becket. How else can we understand not only Raciti's work but also the influence it has exerted on subsequent scholarship?

Raciti's thesis is a grand narrative that attempts to answer everything about Isaac and the Becket controversy. In reality, however, it has only muddied the academic waters. More problematically, it has provided a theory for reading Isaac and the Becket controversy that lacks evidence, contradicts what admittedly little is known about Isaac and makes of Isaac a figure of much greater importance and influence than is allowable.

Such is the scholarly consensus on Isaac, nearly half a century after Raciti's important article. With few exceptions, Isaac is described as an active and, what is more, significant supporter of Becket. The price Isaac paid for his support of Becket and his cause was the loss of his abbacy and exile to the island of Ré, where he died in obscurity.

This study is my attempt to continue the *volte face* begun by Garda when it comes to setting the record straight concerning Isaac and the extent of his involvement with Becket. To misread the sermons and other documents at our disposal is to misread the life and work of Isaac himself. Much worse, such misreading makes Isaac the elusive, "mysterious" figure that is much more of a piece with conjecture than fact.

I propose to question the basis on which Raciti based his theory concerning Isaac's forced exile to Ré. I shall add to the existing knowledge of Isaac's life and works by broadening the research that has already been done to include Isaac's use of allegory in his sermons and specifically the function and role of monastic sermons. The latter is an important point. In recent years, medieval sermon studies has become an academic

discipline all its own and the fruit of this scholarship will be more apparent in the following chapter.²⁶¹

Suffice to say, I shall argue that if we consider Isaac's sermons precisely as sermons, many of Raciti's theories very quickly appear untenable and, indeed, superfluous. While I cannot transport either myself or my reader back to the twelfth century, I can discuss Isaac's sermons against their historical, theological, linguistic, and technological background. This will allow me to demonstrate that as an abbot and a preacher, the vehicle for Isaac's thought—the sermon delivered to monks and lay brothers in the chapter house—was much more complicated than either Raciti or previous scholars have noted.

I shall describe the “variegated experience” of monastic preaching, as Carolyn Muessig writes. “Just as there exists a difficulty in summarizing what constitutes preaching,” she continues, “there is also a similar problem in defining sermons. This is greatly owing to the situation of studying a written genre which is supposed to represent an oral event.”²⁶²

²⁶¹ For a survey of the last forty year's worth of scholarship, see Augustine Thompson, “From Texts to Preaching: Retrieving the Medieval Sermon as an Event,” in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (A New History of the Sermon 3; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002), 13-37.

²⁶² Muessig, Carolyn. “What is Medieval Monastic Preaching? An Introduction,” in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Studies in Intellectual History 90; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998), 4

F. Rationale and Hypotheses for Present Study

In this study I challenge the pervasive assumptions about the controversy between Becket and the Cistercians. In particular I challenge the idea that Isaac actively supported Becket and paid a heavy price. Raciti's thesis, with its overdependence and overemphasis on the Ré incident, has become coterminous with Isaac's biography itself. Raciti's thesis has stamped his undoubtedly brilliant work on Isaac to such an extent that what emerges is something different from the raw material (i.e., Isaac's sermons) on which it is based.

Raciti tries to prove too much. He has overplayed his hand, as it were, in attempting to know and prove everything concerning Isaac and in particular an incident in Isaac's life that will likely remain elusive. What details can be known about Isaac's time spent on Ré, however incomplete they may be, are that it was brief and not the result of an exile or other punitive measures. Raciti's thesis on this score, therefore, is found wanting.

In this study I am offering a look at Isaac from a different perspective. My approach, which I shall elaborate in the following chapter, is a multidimensional one. Rather than seize upon a text as does Raciti, and then treat that as the lens through which to read Isaac's life and work, I aim to take a wider view when it comes to Isaac. To use the metaphor of the microscope, we must always change the scale by which we observe a phenomenon since there are always multiple levels above and below what we are studying at any particular time.²⁶³ What is not in the evidence concerning Isaac's life and

²⁶³ See Cyril Stanley Smith, "Metallurgical Footnotes to the History of Art," in *A Search for Structure: Selected Essays on Science, Art, and History* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981), 242-305.

work looms even larger in some respects than what little we do know, and serves as my response to Raciti's overreaching thesis.

There is more at stake in this study than correcting the inaccuracies of some scholarly theory or other. Likewise, there are more important matters than refining historical minutiae. I am convinced, rather, and take it as axiomatic that to read Isaac on the basis of a flawed biography is little more than to *misread* him.

If we take as our starting point that Isaac was a principal supporter of Becket and, consequently, lost his abbacy and suffered exile, then we have succeeded in doing much more than misunderstanding some detail of Isaac's biography. We have ultimately misread his works—his sermons in particular, as we shall see—and in the end produced a faulty portrait and distorted reading of Isaac's life and works.

While Raciti's theory may seem at first blush to deal with only the superficial, the consequences run deeper. Chenu's comment concerning Innocent III and Lateran IV in his magisterial *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century* is appropriate here. "Yet Innocent presided over, governed, and inspired a church which, with the twelfth-century crisis behind it, now entered upon *the most glorious century of its history* filled with evangelical ardor, confident of reason's place in theology, and with its political power in decline."²⁶⁴ For Chenu, the twelfth century is the great summing up, as it were, of the church's history. The twelfth century, in other words, was the prelude or the "crisis" for which the thirteenth was the resolution. What is important about the twelfth century—according to Chenu, at any rate—is that the thirteenth succeeded it.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Isaac wrote little and does not appear to have been a major figure in his day is because he was not? In other words, Isaac did not have

²⁶⁴ Chenu, *Nature*, 329.

to be a major figure, in the same way that Geoffrey did not have to be a villain. “The forced exile theory provided an attractively dramatic reconstruction of sparsely recorded events,” Dietz argues.

As with most good stories, it featured a villain and a hero. But if those events are reconstructed within the limits of the available data, Isaac’s biography—so often labeled “mysterious”—does not make an especially exciting story. Isaac was not called on to be a hero, and Geoffrey did not earn the reputation of a villain.²⁶⁵

Raciti requires them to be both but the evidence is lacking. What Raciti argues is tempting, however, since his thesis seems to answer everything and solve the riddle or make Isaac, the “great mystery,” seem less mysterious. But Isaac was never that much of a mystery to begin with. He was, rather, a relatively minor character whose involvement in the Becket controversy did not cause any tragic consequences.

G. Summary

Scholarly interest in Isaac has blossomed in the twentieth century to such an extent that Bouyer’s remark concerning Isaac as a “great mystery among the Cistercians” now seems outdated.²⁶⁶ While exact historical and biographical data remain elusive, the pioneering researches of Bliemetzrieder and Debray-Mulatier have established a basic chronology of his life; Milcamps’ work helped to unravel the knotty issues concerning Isaac’s *oeuvre*. Lubac’s *Catholicisme*, so important in the development of the nascent

²⁶⁵ Dietz, “Exile,” 153.

²⁶⁶ Bouyer, *Cistercian Heritage*, 161.

ressourcement movement within Roman Catholicism, made us of Isaac's *Sermon 51* and undoubtedly exposed general, non-specialist readers to Isaac.

Numerous scholars, European as well as American, have thus produced a modest body of work concerning Isaac's thought and works. Throughout the years topics such as ecclesiology, Mariology, liturgy, and Isaac's use of patristic sources have been explored. The Second Vatican Council's use of Isaac's *Sermon 51* in *Lumen Gentium* is a testament to his importance in modern Roman Catholicism, as is the use made of the same sermon by the recent Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. The same may be said for the use made of Isaac's writings in the *Liturgy of the Hours*. The study of Isaac's life and works—his sermons in particular—has been greatly improved by the publication of the critical edition of his sermons in the *Sources chrétiennes* series. The English-speaking world has benefited from the English translations of a good number of Isaac's sermons by McCaffrey and Deme.

The issue of the exact nature of Isaac's involvement in the controversy between Becket and Henry and the related details is another topic that has occupied the attention of scholars over the years. Bliemetzrieder's early article identified the island of Ré as the remote location to which Isaac refers in his sermons. Debray-Mulatier demonstrated that even though Isaac petitioned for the monks of Cîteaux and Pontigny to intervene on Becket's behalf, Isaac does not appear to have suffered for it. She also argued for a relatively early date for the founding of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré.

Raciti's influential and thorough study of Isaac's sermons with the intention of collecting biographical information from them continues to exert its influence even today. Raciti argued, *inter alia*, that Isaac's political fortunes were lost due to his support of

Becket's cause against Henry. In the aftermath of the Cistercian Order's withdrawal of hospitality and Becket's departure from Pontigny, Geoffrey moved against Isaac who was ultimately forced into exile and subsequently died in disgrace on Ré. While Raciti would later modify his view by eliminating Geoffrey's role, his theory would remain practically unchanged: Isaac's time on Ré, which coincided with the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers, occurred toward the end of his life and amounted to a forced exile following the loss of his abbacy.

Salet's and McGinn's subsequent studies, although not uncritical of Raciti's theory, accepted Raciti's basic outline and chronology. For both, a forced exile on Ré as a consequence of Isaac's support of Becket was a given. It was not until Garda's study nearly 25 years later that Raciti's theory was seriously challenged. Garda discovered a cache of archival material that seemed to indicate that Isaac, in fact, died as the abbot of Stella; other material suggested an early date for the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers. Both of these, according to Garda, undermined Raciti's argument and presented a view of Isaac not as the victim of persecution due to his support of Becket, but rather as a medieval abbot who ended his days in peace.

Gastaldelli and Dietz followed Garda in further questioning Raciti, the former arguing against Geoffrey's involvement as well as Raciti's forced exile theory and the latter arguing against Raciti's use of Isaac's sermons as sources of biographical and historical information.

Having set the scholarly foundation on which I am basing this study—both those scholars with whom I agree and those with whom I take issue at certain points—I have made clear where I converge and diverge with those scholars who have covered Isaac in

the past. While I am indebted to them all, I follow Garda, Gastaldelli and Dietz in particular in their criticism of Raciti. Like them I take issue with Raciti's attempt to cull Isaac's sermons for historical and biographical information. I also dispute Raciti's argument that Isaac's time on Ré amounted to a forced exile due to his diminishing political fortunes.

Unlike Garda, Gastaldelli or Dietz, however, I locate Isaac's sermons in the monastic context whence they came. In so doing, I argue that Isaac may appear less mysterious. More important, the significance of Isaac's sermons is fully realized, namely, as the product of a monk for monks, reflecting as they inevitably do the world in which they lived and worked. We are able to approach, if not hear, Isaac's sermons the way in which the elusive abbot of Stella intended.

Chapter II. Research Methods

A. Introduction and Overview

My research provides a previously missing piece in understanding Isaac's role in the Becket controversy. While certain scholars have broached the topic, it has not been explored fully or at least in the way in which I am doing it in my study. Raciti's theory continues to dominate but it provides a limited way of looking at Isaac's sermons and understanding his role.

Thus far in my study I have described Isaac's life and works as well as the literature on Isaac, in particular that which pertains to the Becket controversy. In this chapter I look specifically at the Becket controversy and Isaac's place in it. Following this I describe the historical background against which the controversy occurred, paying particular attention to the Investiture Controversy and the development and significance of the Order of Cistercians. Finally, I describe my collection and analytical strategies, explaining the specific documents I shall use to prove my argument and explain how I am criticizing previous scholarship for arguing differently.

B. Historical Background to Becket Controversy

1. Thomas Becket's Significance

The story of Becket is well known.²⁶⁷ Even in the years immediately following his murder in Canterbury Cathedral on 29 December 1170, tales of his life and especially his “martyrdom” at the hands of four of Henry’s knights proliferated, as did accounts of miracles worked at his tomb. Becket’s life is one of passion, intrigue and above all power politics in the rough and tumble world of twelfth-century England. How the former friend of William the Conqueror’s great-grandson (i.e., Henry) could become his fierce enemy so quickly is a story that continues to fascinate.

Indeed, Becket’s sudden transformation from worldly secular bureaucrat to pious cleric is redolent of the Lives of the Saints or other hagiography. “Thomas’s had not been a model life,” Barlow reports, adding that “his notorious faults had given a handle to his enemies and been a trial to his friends; and the transformation of a supremely worldly man into a stiff-necked prelate, a trouble-maker, who in the end seemed almost to invite martyrdom, was for some hard to forgive, for many hard to understand.”²⁶⁸

While Becket may no longer be the polarizing figure he had been, interest in his life, death and legacy has not diminished. “Becket’s name has remained in the folk memory, so that even if the average citizen could not date him or say much about his outlook, character or ideas, many would probably be able to say that he was murdered ‘in

²⁶⁷ Anne Duggan observes with marked understatement: “It is highly unlikely that any Canterbury prelate from the last century will be so remembered in 800 years’ time.” Anne Duggan, *Thomas Becket (Reputations)*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

²⁶⁸ Barlow, *Becket*, 1.

the cathedral,” writes Anne Duggan. “Stripped down to its bare essentials, the Becket story is a tale of heroic resistance to the point of suffering a bloody and public murder at the hands of what learned contemporaries called ‘the public power’—that is, the State.”²⁶⁹ Indeed, Duggan’s recent biography, *Thomas Becket* (2004),²⁷⁰ adds to the considerable *corpus* of literature on Becket with her attempt to ferret out the reality of Becket as opposed to the myths that have grown up around him.

It is my purpose neither to provide a full biography of Becket nor navigate between the factual and hagiographical. Rather, I intend to describe succinctly the life of Becket and in particular his clash with Henry. Becket is not remembered for his achievements, much less his brilliance. The brevity of his time as archbishop of Canterbury and the time in which he served kept him from being remembered as a great churchman in terms of his intellect or literary output. The polarizing nature of his character and service, however, undoubtedly led to interest in his life.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Duggan, *Becket*, 1. T. S. Eliot’s play, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), and the Peter Glenville film, *Becket* (1964)—the latter featuring Richard Burton in the leading role—testify to the contemporary public’s continued interest in the flawed and ultimately doomed prelate.

²⁷⁰ See note 264, *supra*.

²⁷¹ Duggan observes: “If Catholics could see St. Thomas as a Catholic icon, to Anglicans he was a Roman Catholic idol, a representative of the papal and clerical power that they rejoiced in having defeated in the days of the eighth Henry, and which many seemed to fear might be reinstated if any concessions were made to the remnant of fully practicing Catholics (called recusants, because they refused to take the Oaths of Supremacy) still surviving.” *Ibid.*, 242.

2. Biography and Background of Thomas Becket

Becket was a Londoner by birth, born in that city on 21 December, probably in the year 1120.²⁷² His parents, Gilbert and Matilda, were Normans and surnamed Beket. They were not members of the aristocracy. “Whatever the original name of Beket, it was not an aristocratic type of surname,” Barlow asserts. “Nor was it necessarily hereditary.”²⁷³ Becket himself probably never used his surname. When he left London for school he was Thomas of London until he entered and subsequently rose through the secular and ultimately ecclesiastical ranks. Barlow notes that “there is no evidence that Gilbert’s son ever employed the name; and when it was used of him, it was probably in derision, an allusion to his non-noble origins. After he had left his birthplace he was Thomas of London until he could qualify his name by his office—archdeacon, chancellor or archbishop.”²⁷⁴

We are ill-informed when it comes to Becket’s early years and education. “Among his biographers are men who could have heard him talk, or questioned him, about his youth—or, indeed, found informants after his death,” Barlow reports. “But they chose to pass over this period as quickly as possible. It may not have been one of Thomas’s favourite subjects, either as chancellor or as archbishop, and it must have

²⁷² Duggan observes: “There was far from unanimity about Becket’s age on his death and hence about his date of birth, with suggestions ranging from 1115 to 1123.” *Ibid.*, 271n.2. Note that Duggan follows Raymonde Foreville and Barlow. See Barlow, *Becket*, 10, 281n.1.

²⁷³ Barlow, *Becket*, 12.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Note the following from Barlow concerning Becket’s surname: “But much less tolerable is the ‘à Becket’ surname, which seems to have been a post-Reformation invention, and from which Thomas should be spared.” *Ibid.* Barlow also calls attention to Becket’s seal: “His personal seal, which he had probably acquired while in Theobald’s household, was an antique gem showing a naked figure helmeted and resting against a pillar, with the legend ‘Sigillum Tome Lund’—the seal of Thomas of London.” *Ibid.*, 38.

furnished little grist for the hagiographical mill.”²⁷⁵ What little can be obtained from the biographical-*cum*-hagiographical information at our disposal is that Becket was sent to the Augustinian priory at Merton in Surrey at around age 10.²⁷⁶

When Becket was 20 he spent about a year at Paris. About Becket’s time in Paris we are, again, at a loss to offer much specific information. Barlow calls this period in Becket’s life as “the mysterious Paris episode” and reports:

It is most difficult, however, on the scanty evidence available, to be sure why Thomas went to Paris. The only anecdote concerning this period is furnished by the Saga [i.e., the Icelandic *Thómas Saga Erkebyskups*] and, since most of it is derived from an unrelated Mary miracle story, is in all parts a complete fabrication. When we consider the interest which the next generation of Paris masters took in the martyr and their sympathy for his cause, it is strange that we know of only one person, Everlin, abbot of St. Lawrence at Liège (1161-83), who later claimed to have met the Londoner at Paris; even John of Salisbury seems never to have alluded to any acquaintance with him at this time.²⁷⁷

What we can say is that Becket never became a *magister*. Again, from Barlow: “Thomas was never styled a master. Either, then, he was not a serious student at Paris, a dilettante, who, perhaps on Richer’s advice, went simply to add more polish to his manners—even improve his French—or something went wrong.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 16.

²⁷⁶ The school at Merton was run by the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, a movement that received official approval at Lateran synods in 1059 and 1063. About the canons regular, Barlow has this to say: “Canons regular had lately become popular in those circles which founded religious communities, because these clerks, although observing a quasi-monastic rule, operated more in the world than Benedictine monks and included in their ministry the education of the people and the care of the sick. These aims were admired by the more progressive members of the English upper classes. The royal court patronized the Augustinians; and the newer aristocracy, the rich citizenry and some bishops ensured the rapid spread of the order in the first half of the twelfth century.” Ibid., 17-8. See also Chenu, *Nature*, 202-38, in particular 213-30.

²⁷⁷ Barlow, *Becket*, 20.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 21. Barlow refers to Richer II of Laigle, a Norman nobleman who lived with the Bekets for a time when he was in London. Edward Grim records in his *vita* an incident when Richer and the young Becket were out hawking, during which Becket fell into a stream and was rescued by Richer. See *Materials* 2:359-61. About Becket’s education Barlow states: “Thomas’s rather sketchy education caused the biographers some difficulty...Even if he had been an inattentive schoolboy, in ten years he must have

While Gilbert and Matilda enrolled their son in an Augustinian priory and Becket received the tonsure, there is no reason to believe that Gilbert had an ecclesiastical career in mind for Becket.²⁷⁹ Rather, Gilbert seems to have had a secular career in mind for his son. From early 1143 until 1145, Gilbert got Becket a job working as a clerk for the wealthy Londoner (and possible kinsman), Osbert Huitdeniers. At some point in 1145, Becket was working in the household of Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury (and possible kinsman as well), as a clerk.²⁸⁰

Becket had now entered a world of greater power but an ecclesiastical one as well. While Becket's biographers are unanimous that he lived a celibate life even in his youth, Becket was not known for a terribly religious way of life in his youth, even when he entered Theobald's retinue. Such, however, was not necessary. Barlow observes that "(a) religious conversion was not required as a preliminary to entrance into an archiepiscopal court. More likely Theobald was regarded simply as an alternative patron, an even greater lord, who for some reason or other had now just come within reach."²⁸¹

gone through the whole curriculum at a modest level and acquired some knowledge of the seven liberal arts: the *trivium*—Latin grammar, rhetoric (the art of public speaking and letter writing) and dialectic (logic, or the art of reasoning)—and also the slightly more advanced *quadrivium*—the mathematical subjects which could have been more to his taste, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music." *Ibid.*, 21-2. Barlow, however, goes on to say: "After 1155, however, he operated at the directorial level where he hardly required detailed technical expertise. He always kept a large household to serve him and provide the practical skills. His contribution was judgement, vision and imagination. What can fairly be said is that he was at least as well educated as the average bishop who owed his position to having served the king as clerk. He was equipped to succeed, after a little extra training, in all the posts he held before the archbishopric." *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁷⁹ Barlow writes: "It was not unusual to put an only son into the church; and Thomas was not, as might have been the case with a Benedictine monastery, given as a child oblate. The boy would have been tonsured, for almost all scholars were clerks; but the tonsure and even subsequent minor orders did not prevent a man from marrying or engaging in any other secular activity. From Gilbert's later behaviour it would not seem that in 1130 he was looking very far ahead. He was only making sure that the boy would be qualified to become a clerk in any kind of office or household. And it is most unlikely that Thomas gave any of his masters reason to believe that he had a vocation for the priesthood." *Ibid.*, 18-9. See also Duggan, *Becket*, 8-12, concerning Becket's education.

²⁸⁰ See Barlow, *Becket*, 11 and 23, for Gilbert's possible relation to Theobald.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

Becket was at first intimidated by his better educated colleagues. He was frankly ill-equipped at first for the job. “At the beginning Thomas had no obvious qualifications in (diplomacy and law): fluent spoken Latin was required for diplomacy at the papal curia,” Barlow writes. “Either he was taken on as a financial expert or on the basis of his charm and intelligence. There can be little doubt that he quickly found favour with the archbishop and that his entry into the household caused resentment.”²⁸² Indeed, Becket was quickly sent to study law at Bologna as well as Auxerre.

By the end of 1154, Becket had clearly established himself as a keen and increasingly powerful man. When Theobald appointed his archdeacon, Roger de Pont l'Évêque, archbishop of York, he gave the vacant position of archdeacon of Canterbury to Becket. This meant that Becket, now around 34 years old, was the recipient of a number of benefices. In short, Becket was becoming a wealthy man; William fitzStephen records in his *vita* that Becket earned about £100 a year as archdeacon.²⁸³

Theobald, however, had greater things in mind for Becket. Only a few months after having appointed him archdeacon of Canterbury, Theobald recommended Becket to Henry for the position of royal chancellor. How far Becket had come from his lackluster student days at Paris. Duggan declares that by this time Becket was “already experienced in conducting business at the highest levels in the Latin Church: he was a well-regarded clerk in the household of the archbishop of Canterbury; he had met Pope Eugenius III; he had established contacts with a significant number of leading cardinals; and he had had a

²⁸² Ibid., 33. “At first Thomas had a rough time,” Barlow writes. “William fitzStephen is quite frank. In the archbishop’s household were some very important and excellently educated clerks, many of whom were later promoted through the archbishop’s favour to English bishoprics, and one, Roger of Pont l’Évêque, to the archbishopric of York. By their standards, he admits, Thomas was inferior in education. But, as good morals were superior to a good education, Thomas strove to excel them in virtue; and also he eventually became the best educated of them all.” Ibid., 30.

²⁸³ *Materials* 3: 17.

taste of the highest legal learning then to be had.”²⁸⁴ Barlow offers: “As Theobald’s confidential agent he knew Canterbury and the whole English church, its personnel and institutions, inside out; and, through his association with John of Salisbury and Vacarius and his diplomatic missions to the papal curia, he had acquired not only a good knowledge of the Western church as large but also of its mainspring, the papal household.”²⁸⁵

When Becket became the royal chancellor in early 1155, he continued to move upward in terms of power, prestige and wealth. “The chancellor was the chief ecclesiastical servant in the royal household and received the largest salary of all the household officials,” Barlow writes. “He was in charge of the chapel royal and its subsidiary, the *scriptorium*, or writing office, and so was responsible for the church services at court and for the secretariat and royal archives.”²⁸⁶ According to William FitzStephen, 52 clerks served Becket as royal chancellor.²⁸⁷ In 1158, when Henry sent Becket to France to negotiate what Duggan relates “might have been the marriage of the century”²⁸⁸—namely, that of Henry’s three-year-old son to Louis VII’s infant daughter, Margaret—FitzStephen records in his *vita* that Becket took with him more than 200 horsemen, 24 changes of clothes and eight wagons carrying, *inter alia*, beer and elaborate gold and silver table service.²⁸⁹

Becket proved not only his political acumen but his military worth as well to Henry the following year and again in 1161 during campaigns in Toulouse and Vexin,

²⁸⁴ Duggan, *Becket*, 16.

²⁸⁵ Barlow, *Becket*, 39.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸⁷ *Materials* 3: 29.

²⁸⁸ Duggan, *Becket*, 19.

²⁸⁹ *Materials* 3: 29-33.

respectively. In the former, William FitzStephen records that Becket led a force of 700 knights; at Vexin, Becket led 1,200 cavalry and 4,000 infantry.²⁹⁰

On 18 April 1161, while Becket was on the Continent at Vexin, Theobald died. Henry quickly determined that Becket should succeed him. “One need not agonize over why,” Duggan avers. “Thomas had served him well as chancellor; as chancellor-archbishop he would be able to serve him even better.”²⁹¹ We need not look solely at Becket’s achievements as chancellor. “In looking for a faithful archbishop,” Barlow writes, “Henry also had one other, no less important, aim.”

He was anxious to recover everywhere his “just” rights, many of which he believed had been lost during Stephen’s reign. He was especially anxious to withstand and push back notorious ecclesiastical encroachments. The English church, in step with most others, had since 1100 become more distinct as a separate order, more self-sufficient in government, more connected, although not always willingly, with the reformed papacy, less subservient to the lay powers, more vocal, more self-confident.²⁹²

There was a genuine friendship between the young king and older chancellor. Barlow observes: “Henry as much as Thomas had been an adventurer, with his fair share of reserves; he too was a man of considerable intelligence with a rather sketchy education; both were athletic, with a passion for field sports, and Thomas added warfare enthusiastically when he got the chance. King and chancellor, although always master and servant, became great friends.”²⁹³ Their friendship, however, would not survive for much longer.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 34-5.

²⁹¹ Duggan, *Becket*, 22.

²⁹² Barlow, *Becket*, 68.

²⁹³ Ibid., 43.

3. Clash with Henry II

Becket was elected archbishop of Canterbury on 23 May 1162 and was consecrated as such on 3 June; he subsequently received the pallium on 10 August and resigned as chancellor. The latter was an early indicator of the trouble that was to come. “We do not know whether Henry was hoping that he [i.e., Becket] would sell out the interests of the church or whether he was seen (being both a Canterbury man and a king’s friend) as an agent of an acceptable compromise,” Colin Morris writes. “Both expectations were misplaced. Thomas emerged as an ardent champion of the liberties of the church. He resigned the chancellorship and annoyed Henry by refusing to co-operate about a number of issues.”²⁹⁴ Duggan continues:

If Thomas had continued as chancellor-archbishop, the first office would almost certainly have absorbed the second, and the protection of the king’s interests would have been the overriding priority of both. Henry wanted the able Becket to collaborate with him in the ecclesiastical field as he had so effectively in the secular, and the good relations between king and chancellor-archbishop could have lasted only as long as Becket discharged both offices to the king’s satisfaction...Rather than a search for even greater power, then, the resignation of the chancellorship should be seen as a conscientious choice: not the Satanic denial of obedience to God, but Christ’s rebuttal of Satan’s temptation of earthly dominion.²⁹⁵

Almost immediately Becket caused trouble for Henry. Much has been made of Becket’s “conversion” upon becoming archbishop. Amy R. Kelly goes as far as to say that Becket had been “changed by a miracle of grace.”²⁹⁶ Certainly there was a change

²⁹⁴ Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford History of the Christian Church; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 234.

²⁹⁵ Duggan, *Becket*, 31-2.

²⁹⁶ Amy R. Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 116.

and an abrupt one at that. “(T)he transition from royal favourite to something approaching public enemy of the state was to be swift and brutal,” Duggan observes.²⁹⁷

But Becket’s conversion—and certainly there was a marked change in the man—must be dealt with reasonably. “Becket’s conversion was predictable, given his temperament and circumstances,” writes Beryl Smalley. “The sources point to a theatrical streak in him; but it is not play-acting to take ideas seriously.”²⁹⁸ Zachery Brooke observes:

People have often commented on the great change in him when he turned from chancellor into archbishop; but this was really less violent a change than the previous one from Theobald’s clerk into chancellor. It was not so strange that he should easily have become the great archbishop. He had lived in an archbishop’s circle, and moved in higher circles still when he went with Theobald to the papal Council at Rheims; then he had seen Theobald defy King Stephen and vindicate the archiepiscopal rights. At Rheims he may have pictured himself as Pope.²⁹⁹

The sincerity of Becket’s conversion notwithstanding, it was seen by his contemporaries as the catalyst for his troubles with Henry. In a letter written barely two years after his election as archbishop of Canterbury, John of Salisbury relates to Becket:

I urge and advise that, no matter what the twisted mind of wicked men contrives against your honour, you should strive to obtain and keep the king’s favour for yourself, as far as you can, according to God, because that is best for God’s Church. I cannot see that you can achieve anything worthwhile as long as things remain as they are and the king opposes you in everything—especially since the Roman Church can receive nothing from you except words, and whatever loss it suffers on account of others it ascribes to you, because it will not allow you to be overthrown at the king’s pleasure.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Duggan, *Becket*, 33.

²⁹⁸ Smalley, *Becket Controversy*, 115.

²⁹⁹ Zachery Nugent Brooke, *The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of King John* (Rev. ed.; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 194.

³⁰⁰ *Letter 29. Materials* 5: 92; *ET: Correspondence* 1: 93.

Becket, however, was very much a man in a hurry, something that only contributed to his ultimate clash with Henry. Warren writes that Becket “filled the early months of his archepiscopate with grand gestures; that some of these gestures proved offensive to the king seems almost incidental—Becket was proving himself, justifying his election as archbishop to the electorate, striving to please those on whose respect his reputation would depend.”³⁰¹

Becket seems to have been wholehearted in his commitment to his role as archbishop of Canterbury. He had long since shown that his tenacity as well as charm could more than make up for the inadequacies of his education. Smalley reports that Becket “had equipped himself with all the sacred and profane learning needed to carry out his duties, on a generous interpretation of the latter.” Smalley also notes that Becket “was more interested in the Bible and its glosses and commentaries than in theology proper; that may betray Herbert’s [i.e., Herbert of Bosham, Becket’s confidant and teacher] influence. He specialized in works suitable for devotional reading and aids to preaching.”³⁰²

While he was neither theologically nor administratively brilliant, he was politically astute, moving quickly to assert the prerogatives of the church over and against those of the crown. This would prove to be his undoing. Indeed, in a letter to Becket from Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London, Gilbert reminds Becket:

(A) man of your prudence should have ensured that the disagreements gradually arising between the kingdom and you did not grow too serious, that the tiny spark did not flare up into so great a fire, to the ruin of many. It was managed differently, and from causes

³⁰¹ Warren, *Henry II*, 455-6.

³⁰² Smalley, *Becket Controversy*, 137. See *ibid.*, 135-7, for Becket’s library.

too numerous to list, disagreements were multiplied, indignation was inflamed, and hatred firmly entrenched.³⁰³

More to the point, at least as far as his biographers are concerned, Becket was an ascetic, truly one who had given up worldliness for the kingdom. This was not apparent to everyone following Becket's elevation to archbishop. Barlow observes that "whatever view is taken of Thomas's alleged secret life of piety, on the surface he was not only completely identified with Henry's policy and actions, but was seen to glory in some of those which were most unsuited to the clergy."

Indeed, Barlow continues, "(t)o elect as archbishop a worldling who only two years before had commanded troops on campaign and had taken part in the fighting was almost inconceivable. In his schooling, his career, his conduct and his general demeanour, Thomas was all that an archbishop should not be."³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Becket's biographers—John of Salisbury and Herbert of Bosham in particular—depict Becket as a hair-shirt wearing ascetic who slept little, ate even less and spent a good deal of his time and money on the poor.³⁰⁵

The causes of the clash between Becket and Henry were as much theological as political. Indeed, any neat division between the two is impossible. Becket, "the last Gregorian" as Norman Cantor calls him,³⁰⁶ squared off against a king whose mind, according to Brooke, "was set on restoring the former royal authority, and he began to

³⁰³ *Letter 109. Materials 5: 526-7; ET: Correspondence 1: 507-9.*

³⁰⁴ Barlow, *Becket*, 66.

³⁰⁵ See *ibid.*, 79-81.

³⁰⁶ Norman Cantor, *Church, Kingship, and Lay Investiture in England, 1089-1135* (Princeton Studies in History 10; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 320.

press for a pledge from Becket that he would observe the old customs which his predecessors had observed.”³⁰⁷

“The precise points at issue between Henry II and Becket fall into two principal categories,” Charles Duggan writes, “relating especially to the wider freedom of the Western Church under papal guidance and to the immunities of the English Church within the kingdom.”

Freedom of appeals to Rome and the two-way traffic of intercommunication between England and the continent were the most crucial instances of the former; clerical immunity from secular jurisdiction, freedom of canonical elections, the rights of presentation to ecclesiastical benefices, and clerical incomes and properties were notable aspects of the latter. For the most part issues were not invented by Henry II...His concern with these matters was entirely understandable, since, like most secular rulers, he was accustomed within the traditions of several centuries to a large measure of power over the Church in his kingdom.³⁰⁸

The differences between Henry and Becket were also very personal ones. The friendship between the two would be lost, the alliance severed. Henry proved to be as implacable and intransigent as Becket. While Warren declares that “Becket’s behaviour in the first month of his archepiscopate is puzzling, for it seems at first sight gratuitously offensive to the king...(as if) he was deliberately picking a quarrel with the king,” Henry was no stranger to twelfth-century power politics.³⁰⁹ Southern wryly observes that “(i)n

³⁰⁷ Brooke, *English Church*, 201.

³⁰⁸ Charles Duggan, *Canon Law in Medieval England: The Becket Dispute and Decretal Collections* (Collected Studies 151; London: Variorum Reprints, 1982), 3.

³⁰⁹ Warren, *Henry II*, 453. Warren continues: “Perhaps this should not be surprising, for the process by which Thomas Becket became archbishop was the weakest spot in his armour as a champion of ecclesiastical liberty. At bottom his election was improper. It is true that canonical procedures were carefully observed: the election was made in due form by the monks and ratified by the bishops of the province. But everyone knew that he was made archbishop by the will of King Henry, and even the observances of the canonical decencies could provide no escape from the edict of Pope Adrian IV in 1156 prohibiting the consecration of a bishop ‘who had not been freely elected and without previous nomination by the secular power’ [quoting *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum* II, no. 10139],” *ibid.*

the time of Henry II and Archbishop Becket, John of Salisbury could still complain of ignorant people who believed that the dignity of priesthood belonged to the royal office, and it is possible that Henry II did something to encourage this belief.”³¹⁰

In the end, the clash defies simple explanation. “Almost every newcomer into office causes an unwelcome disturbance,” Barlow notes.³¹¹ Becket’s election, however, soon proved to be most unwelcome for Henry. “The Becket Dispute was not merely a clash of personalities,” Charles Duggan writes, “but a particular quarrel symptomatic of deep-seated conflicts over the nature of authority and its practical applications in Christian society.”

It echoes and prefigures numerous similar crises in the history of the Christian Church. It has its immediate and contextual interest, but it serves also as a temporary expression of a tension of universal and lasting significance. No approach to the Becket controversy will be satisfactory which does not penetrate the surface crust of local and simply individual interests and arguments.³¹²

4. Death and Aftermath

Henry’s portentous statement “What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and promoted in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk!” (as related in Edward Grim’s *vita*) was significant in ways he could scarcely imagine.³¹³ Southern remarks: “Thomas Becket

³¹⁰ Southern, *Making*, 94.

³¹¹ Barlow, *Becket*, 83.

³¹² Duggan, *Canon Law*, 367.

³¹³ *Materials* 2: 429; cf. *ibid.*, 1: 121-3 and 3: 127-9. See also Barlow, *Becket*, 235.

was a man about whom opinions were sharply divided in his lifetime, and these controversies were not silenced by his death.”

We know that there were men who continued to look on him as a traitor, and we are told that the masters of Paris disputed the point, a certain master Roger asserting that he had been worthy of death, while the well-known master Peter Chanter maintained that he was a martyr for the liberty of the church. “But”—our informant adds—“Christ has solved the problem by the manifold and great signs with which He has glorified him.” The whole of Christendom concurred in this judgment.³¹⁴

Almost immediately after Becket’s murder eyewitnesses and others produced a plethora of *vitae*. “The murder was so shocking and the case of such interest that at least ten men were inspired to write about it within a decade of the event,” reports Barlow, “followed by two or three more, including Herbert of Bosham, in the 1180s.”³¹⁵ Almost immediately as well there were pilgrimages to Canterbury following reports of miracles.³¹⁶ Becket was canonized on 21 February 1173 and later that year on the third anniversary of his death, Becket’s feast was celebrated at the cathedral in which he was murdered.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Southern, *Making*, 255. Southern here quotes *Materials* 2: 291-2.

³¹⁵ Barlow, *Becket*, 2. These include the *vitae* of John of Salisbury (1171), Edward Grim (1171-2), Benedict of Peterborough (1173-4), William of Canterbury (1173-4), William fitzStephen (1173-4), Guernes of Point-Saint-Maxence (1172-4), Robert of Cricklade (1173-4), Alan of Tewkesbury (1176), Benet of St. Albans (1184), and Herbert of Bosham (1184-6). Additionally, there are two anonymous *vitae* from 1172-3 and 1176-7, respectively; the *Quadriologus II* (a conflation of the *vitae* of John of Salisbury, Benedict of Peterborough, William of Canterbury, and Alan of Tewkesbury) from 1198-9, which was followed in the thirteenth century by the *Quadriologus I* (an expanded *vita* containing material from Edward Grim’s and William fitzStephen’s *vitae*); and the *Thómas Saga Erkebyskups*, an Icelandic translation of Robert of Cricklade’s *vita* from ca. 1200.

³¹⁶ For the latter, see the two large collections of miracles attributed to Becket by William of Canterbury and Benedict of Peterborough (both from 1174), respectively, in *Materials* 1: 137-546 and 2: 21-281.

³¹⁷ By the time of the English Reformation, the pendulum had shifted: Becket the holy man and posthumous healer had become Becket the traitor and pariah. See Robert E. Scully fascinating article, “The Unmaking of a Saint: Thomas Becket and the English Reformation,” *Catholic Historical Review* 86 (2000): 579-602.

5. Investiture Controversy

The literature concerning the Investiture Controversy is vast and the subject itself, falling as it does outside the limits of this study, is far too complex for me to treat extensively here and now. Some discussion, however, is warranted in order to provide context for the Becket controversy and Isaac's involvement in it. What follows, then, is a brief overview of the issues that pertain to the Investiture Controversy, both on the Continent and in England itself.

John Howe observes that “(t)he first ‘reformation’ began in the mid-eleventh century.”³¹⁸ The “reformation” to which Howe refers is the Investiture Controversy that centers around the person and reforms of Pope Gregory VII (ca. 1020-85). Gerd Tellenbach surely does not overstate Gregory's importance when he writes:

Gregory stands at the greatest—from the spiritual point of view perhaps the only—turning-point in the history of Catholic Christendom; in his time the policy of converting the world gained once and for all the upper hand over the policy of withdrawing from it: the world was drawn into the Church, and the leading spirits of the new age made it their aim to establish the “right order” in this united Christian world.³¹⁹

Southern likewise does not risk overstating the case when he refers to “(t)he many-sided ‘Investiture controversy’” as “the first major dispute in modern history.” He continues:

³¹⁸ John Howe, “The Nobility's Reform of the Medieval Church,” *AHR* 93 (1988): 317.

³¹⁹ Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, trans. R.F. Bennett (Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 27; Studies in Medieval History 3; Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 164.

The discussion rolled and reverberated round Europe for half a century. It was in these years that the characteristic features of the medieval church began to be clear; and on the other side, arguments were heard, which were drowned in the rising tide of papalism and disappeared for nearly three hundred years—arguments in favor of a married clergy and an episcopate not subject to Rome; arguments supporting the rights of the lay ruler over the Church and asserting the superiority of the kingly over the episcopal office, which were to burst out with violent strength at the time of the Reformation.³²⁰

The “right order” to which Tellenbach refers amounted to what Charles Duggan calls “the liberty of the Church in its jurisdictional autonomy, while in the realm of ideas it asserted its superiority over lay power.”³²¹ Duggan elsewhere reports that “(i)n its narrowest and technical meaning, the Investiture Contest was the product of a papal reaction against long centuries of secular control of the Church at all levels, exercised chiefly through a decisive voice in the selection of ecclesiastical officials.”³²²

Chief among the issues during the Investiture Controversy was that of lay or secular control of the church, in particular the lay investiture of bishops. “(T)o the clerical reformers,” Duggan relates, “it seemed an intolerable abuse that bishops and other ecclesiastics should be invested with the symbols of their rank, dependent essentially on its spiritual functions, by secular persons, while...secular rulers felt unable to distinguish so sharply the spiritual and material competence of the holders of these important positions.”³²³ This issue was, as we shall see, an important one in Becket’s dispute with Henry.

In the end, the Investiture Controversy was a prelude to myriad issues on the Continent as well as England. Again, from Duggan: “However important the Investiture

³²⁰ Southern, *Making*, 133-4.

³²¹ Duggan, *Canon Law*, 368.

³²² Charles Duggan, “From the Conquest to the Death of John,” in *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, ed. C.H. Lawrence (Sutton History Paperbacks; Stroud and Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1999), 69.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

Controversy appears in political history, it was merely symptomatic of far deeper problems in the interplay of secular and ecclesiastical forces in the period. It was [quoting Tellenbach] ‘a struggle for right order in the world.’”³²⁴

That the issues with which Gregory concerned himself during the Investiture Controversy would recur is less an indicator of his leadership than it is the sea change in attitudes that occurred during his time. The matter of lay investiture and, broadly speaking, the relationship between lay and secular power in the church would not be solved so easily. Indeed, it proved to be a Gordian Knot over the centuries, the ramifications of which could not have been seen by Gregory.³²⁵ Geoffrey Barraclough remarks that “it might be said that Gregory VII led the church into a blind alley.” He continues:

The attempt to bring the state into subordination to the church, with its inevitable corollary, the immersion of the papacy in politics, brought about a strong reaction, in which the most influential reformers of the next generation played a leading part. No one was more outspokenly critical of the direction of papal policy than St. Bernard, who became abbot of Clairvaux in 1118; but the whole Cistercian movement, with its hostility to study and particularly to the new canon law, and its respect for episcopal authority, which Gregory VII’s policy had weakened, was a sign of the rejection of Gregorian pretensions. With the rise of Cîteaux reform was sought, once again, not by conquest of the world, but by flight from the world.³²⁶

³²⁴ Duggan, *Canon Law*, 71. Duggan continues: “This new religious zeal...conditioned the general state of the Church as well as the minds of Damian and Gregory VII. It played a vital role in effecting a wider movement of reform, and was in the event itself further stimulated by it.” Ibid.

³²⁵ Concerning the durability and ultimate outcome of the Investiture Controversy, Southern remarks: “On both sides there was a great deal of crude and violent talk, and endless pillorying and misrepresentation of opponents; every consideration which could vex and complicate an issue was drawn in at some time or other. But in the main the victory—alike in consistency of thought, seriousness of purpose and practical success—lay with the adherents of the new views. The position of Rome as the legislative and administrative centre of the Church was established; the immunity of clergy from secular jurisdiction and the special position of church lands were recognized, at least in part; the most offensive features in the election and investing of bishops disappeared. To this extent the ideal of a spiritual church became a practical reality. But in the world, which was thrown out of the door, came in at the window. The experience of the hundred years after the end of the Investiture controversy falsified many of the hopes of the eleventh cent idealists.” Southern, *Making*, 134.

³²⁶ Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy* (New York and London: Norton, 1979), 90.

The English church was by and large spared from the tumultuous years during which the Investiture Controversy raged, although its relationship with Rome was already a long-standing one at the time. Indeed, Uta-Renate Blumenthal reports that “relations between Anglo-Saxon England and Rome had been close ever since Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) had sent Augustine, who before his departure had been prior of Gregory’s own monastery of St. Andrew in Rome, as missionary to King Aethelbert of Kent.”³²⁷

England’s relative isolation from the Continent was one reason for its lack of direct involvement in the conflict. Tellenbach refers to the English church’s “tendency towards isolationism as far as the papacy was concerned, and this could be sustained the more easily because of the distance involved.”

Papal claims to lead or determine church affairs met with either rejection or incomprehension. In general king and episcopate showed a united front and managed church affairs without reference to the popes or the legates, in a manner which had to be accepted in Rome given the prevailing circumstances. It was not possible to enforce strict compliance with the decrees of papal councils. English bishops did not appear at foreign councils; they were not even present at the council of Clermont in 1095. The popes had to content themselves with the payment of Peter’s Pence.³²⁸

³²⁷ Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press Middle Ages Series; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 142.

³²⁸ Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century*, trans. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 257. Tellenbach continues: “In the era of William the Conqueror and Lanfranc of Canterbury the pope had exercised little influence in England. William II at first recognized neither Urban II nor Clement III. The attempt to instrumentalise the king’s conflict with Bishop William of Durham for papal purposes proved futile; so did the attempt to use Bishop Herbert of Thetford and Winchester to bring about a rapprochement.” *Ibid.*, 272. Note as well Tellenbach’s comment in *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*: “The relations of the curia with England are typical of the way in which the popes had to concentrate their efforts on the most dangerous opponents, and in consequence to modify or even temporarily to abandon their demands in other directions. They refrained at first from attacking royal theocracy and the proprietary system in England, not only because the Conqueror did at least combat simony and priestly marriage with energy, but also because Gregory hoped that the king would hold

Another reason was that by the time of the Becket controversy, Henry and his two predecessors had assumed and upheld a view of the church and their power in relation to it in a way that was nearly unchallenged by the English church. Since the time of William the Conqueror's (ca. 1027-87) ascent to the English throne in 1066 and the rule of his progeny, strong rule by the king and, more to the point, his involvement in ecclesiastical affairs had become *de rigueur*. Blumenthal reports that "William the Conqueror, his sons, and perhaps his grandson, Henry II, dominated until 1170 what could be called a national church."³²⁹ Blumenthal continues:

Duke William of Normandy set out to conquer England not so that he might reform the church but so that he might claim the kingdom as his inheritance. Among William's preparations was an embassy to Rome to request papal support for his enterprise. He received help from Gregory VII, who was then an archdeacon. When Gregory became pope he pointedly reminded William that he was responsible for Pope Alexander II's giving his blessing to the enterprise despite opposition at the curia because of the expected bloodshed. As ruler of Normandy, William was in firm control of the church.³³⁰

As king of England, William's understanding of the church and the limits of his authority in ecclesiastical affairs was decisive for himself as much as for his successors.

England from him as a fief, and in consequence did not wish to arouse his antagonism." Ibid., 123-4. Blumenthal states: "Roman influence did not increase markedly until the anarchy of Stephen's reign (1135-54). In fact, only the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket by overzealous courtiers of King Henry II prevented the renewed isolation of the English church in the twelfth century." Blumenthal, *Investiture Controversy*, 159.

³²⁹ Blumenthal, *Investiture Controversy*, 153.

³³⁰ Ibid., 146. Charles Duggan observes: "Axiomatically, a strong ruler, as was William I or Henry II in England, resisted ecclesiastical pretensions with greater success than would otherwise have been the case; and, conversely, the problems confronting a given pope, such as Alexander III in his dangerous contest with Frederick I, induced a temporary or diplomatic abatement of the widest papal claims and an opportunity which secular rulers elsewhere could be expected to exploit. Nevertheless, despite all such vicissitudes of papal fortune, the total story is one of gradual and inexorable papal advance throughout the period, within which the power of the papacy over the Church as a whole, as over the Church in England in particular, increased beyond all previous recognition, whatever qualification of this judgement may seem appropriate in any narrower context." Duggan, "Conquest," 68-9.

Part and parcel of his duties as king was the defense of the church and ensuring unity. David Charles Douglas explains how “in the case of a disputed papal election no pope was to be recognized within his realm without his consent; no papal letter was to be received without his permission; no ecclesiastical council within his kingdom was to initiate legislation without his approval; and no bishop must excommunicate any of his officials or tenants-in-chief without his leave. It was a clear-cut position, but it was traditional rather than anti-papal.”³³¹ Morris likewise reports: “In England the right of the king to participate in episcopal elections was clear, and although it is not certain whether the Anglo-Saxon kings invested with the pastoral staff, their Norman successors undoubtedly did so after 1066.”³³²

William’s perception of his role was aided in no small part by the fact that at his coronation on Christmas Day 1066, he was anointed as well. “Unction was reserved for priests and kings,” Douglas writes. “No Norman duke had hitherto been anointed. William’s unction therefore marked a stage in the growth of his authority, and it thus attracted the attention of contemporaries...In this manner was the change of dynasty in England formally legitimized by one of the most solemn of the rites of the Church.”³³³

William’s coronation as well as anointing undoubtedly made an indelible impression of his successors, which just as surely affected their understanding of their office. “Coronation elevated the king above all his subjects but it also involved him in solemn promises,” Robert Bartlett observes. “These could be invoked in political

³³¹ David Charles Douglas, *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact upon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 342.

³³² Morris, *Papal Monarchy*, 23.

³³³ Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, 255-6. Douglas continues: “Two contrasted interpretations of the unction might in fact be made. It might be regarded as a recognition of existing rights pertaining to the divine institution of royalty, or it might be held as the source of those rights. It gave the king a place apart from the laity, and might even vest him with sacerdotal powers. But it might also be held to make his status dependent upon a religious service performed by the clergy.” *Ibid.*, 256.

discussion. Thus, during the course of the dispute between Henry II and Thomas Becket, the archbishop urged the king ‘to be mindful of the promise you made, when you were consecrated and anointed king, to preserve the liberty of God’s church.’”³³⁴

The brief and chaotic rule of Stephen (ca.1096-1154), however, led to the stronger assertion of the English church’s prerogatives and privileges than in the past. Stephen’s persecution of Roger of Salisbury (d. 1139) alienated many in the church; Stephen also allowed the church considerable jurisdiction, building upon the leeway granted by his predecessor, Henry I. “In the course of the reign [of Henry I] the Church had established a real ascendancy,” R. H. C. Davis asserts. “At Stephen’s accession it had demanded and obtained its liberty.”³³⁵

The English church did not find itself in the midst of the polemical and often violent context of many of its counterparts on the Continent. “In Germany the investiture controversy had resulted in a great flood of polemical literature on the freedom of the church, lay investiture and characteristics of kingship—the first instance of organized propaganda in medieval history,” remarks Cantor. “In England,” he continues, “the volume of theoretical literature defending or attacking the Gregorian reforms was much

³³⁴ Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225* (The New Oxford History of England; Oxford and New York: Clarendon and Oxford University Press, 2000), 127; quoting *Materials* 5:282. On the matter of the anointing of kings, note Douglas’s comment: “It was inevitable that at the time of the Investitures Contest, those ecclesiastics who were concerned to subordinate secular authority to the Church should seek to deny that royal unction was an indelible sacrament, giving the king the status of priest, and though the papalist case in this matter was not to be fully set out until the time of Innocent III, most of the arguments he reviewed had been stated by Hildebrandine writers during the previous century. A denial that royal unction was a sacrament was, indeed, implicit in the claim of Gregory VII to be able to depose anointed kings, and it is therefore not surprising that when in the course of the twelfth century the sacraments of the church were defined, graded, and limited to seven, royal unction found no place among them, though the consecration of priests of course remained.” *Ibid.*, 257.

³³⁵ R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen: 1135-1154* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 127. Concerning Henry I, Tellenbach remarks: “The early years of Henry I’s reign were marked by serious tensions over the question of episcopal investiture and homage, though these were eased by the pope’s tactical flexibility and by the courteous respect Henry I and Anselm showed to one another. In the treaty of L’Aigle in the summer of 1105 the king agreed to renounce investiture conditionally.” Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe*, 272.

less than on the Continent, only because the English investiture controversy lasted for half a decade instead of half a century, as in Germany.”³³⁶

The overriding issues of the Investiture Controversy, however, were not foreign to the English church. The matter of lay investiture of bishops was neither unknown nor irrelevant. It had not risen to the level that it had elsewhere. The English Investiture Controversy, therefore, was much more short-lived and far less traumatic than in other countries. Indeed, at the time of Becket’s controversy with Henry the issues had already been addressed. In any case, they were not of enormous importance that they had been elsewhere in previous decades.

The issues mattered nonetheless and, as Charles Duggan writes, “(T)he reforms of the English Church in the later-eleventh century and the introduction of the Investiture Dispute into England are matters which are naturally and validly linked with the policies of the first three Norman kings; but the crucial and epoch-making changes for the whole of the Western Church coincided in time with the Norman Conquest of England; and, in one form or another, the issues they posed would certainly have been raised in England, independently of the change of the English dynasty.”³³⁷

The controversy between Becket and Henry was ultimately a contest between two powerful men neither of whose stubbornness would give way to the other’s. Warren, as we have seen, believes Becket to have been needlessly confrontational and provocative, as if he had been bent on “deliberately picking a quarrel with the king.”³³⁸ Barlow argues

³³⁶ Cantor, *Church, Kingship, and Lay Investiture*, 168.

³³⁷ Duggan, “Conquest,” 66.

³³⁸ Warren, *Henry II*, 453.

that Becket's behavior at the outset of his becoming archbishop was due to his desire to "out-bishop the rest" of the bishops.³³⁹

Duggan interprets the matter differently, however, and does so in a way that sheds more light on the clash between archbishop and king. Duggan sees Becket's first few months in office not as the newly-minted archbishop spoiling for a fight with Henry only too happy to oblige, but rather as Becket's "attempts to discharge the normal duties of the archiepiscopal office in an atmosphere of mounting harassment and opposition."³⁴⁰

Bartlett summarizes the harassment and opposition to which Duggan refers in the following:

Although Becket had been Henry's chancellor and the two men had been friends, as soon as he became archbishop in 1162 a series of disputes began, reminiscent in their mixture of the petty and the principled of those between Anselm and Rufus. There were quarrels over the property of the church of Canterbury, the details of the royal taxation and the extent that clerks could be treated differently from lay people in the law courts.³⁴¹

The issue of clerical immunity from secular courts was the main issue and where the battle lines between Becket and Henry had been drawn most distinctly. "Examples of tension between ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction over crimes committed by the clergy were not new, or confined to Becket's pontificate," Duggan describes. "The core issue in these cases," he continues, "was the clerical claim to immunity from secular trial and punishment, but the question was not proactively raised by Thomas Becket. Like the problems relating to his lordship of Canterbury, it came with the territory; but, unlike

³³⁹ Barlow, *Becket*, 89.

³⁴⁰ Duggan, "Conquest," 36.

³⁴¹ Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 404.

them, the jurisdictional issue had profound implications for the present and future relationship between the English Church and the monarchy.”³⁴²

The Council and Constitutions of Clarendon, about which I have written previously,³⁴³ proved to be the catalyst for the clash between Becket and Henry that ultimately led to the former’s murder. The 16 clauses declared at Clarendon in January 1164, Barlow elaborates, “are expressly recognized as being only a few of the important customs and dignities possessed by holy mother church, the lord king and the barons of the kingdom. They were selected presumably because they had a bearing on current matters at issue between the church and the secular authorities, and they form a heterogeneous and badly organized anthology.”³⁴⁴

Whatever the Constitutions may lack in their organization, they reflect nevertheless what Henry understood to be his rights and prerogatives as king, and he aimed to have them set forth in writing for his posterity. “In this age of increasing literacy and increasing legal definition,” Bartlett argues, “an attempt was made to put the king’s view of the situation in writing, in a document to which the bishops would then subscribe. These Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164 were, in the eyes of Henry II, ‘a record and acknowledgement of some of the customs and liberties and rights of his ancestors.’”³⁴⁵

³⁴² Duggan, “Conquest,” 39. Note Cantor’s comment: “While Lanfranc opened the way for later developments by establishing separate ecclesiastical courts and by introducing continental canon law collections into England, as long as he lived there was no papal interference in the Anglo-Norman Church. The Archbishop believed that the crown should exercise jurisdiction even over excommunications. William I completely refused the Pope’s demand for fealty, and Lanfranc not only rejected Gregory’s repeated summonses to Rome, but even wavered in his allegiance to that Pope.” Cantor, *Church, Kingship, and Lay Investiture*, 31.

³⁴³ See Introduction, *supra*.

³⁴⁴ Barlow, *Becket*, 100.

³⁴⁵ Bartlett, *Henry II*, 403-4.

While Becket initially consented to the Constitutions, he quickly reneged. Henry was furious. Barlow described this as “the point of no return for Henry. Not only had the events at Clarendon and their aftermath hardened his attitude towards Thomas, he had also had to swallow the bitter fruit of Thomas’s ungrateful obstructions.”³⁴⁶ Indeed, in the years following Clarendon up to Becket’s death, few of the issues discussed in the Constitutions would be resolved. Neither would budge and each became more implacable. “The Gregorian ideal of freedom of the church,” Cantor discusses, “was never to be realized in England.”

It was for this ideal that Becket struggled against Henry II, who attempted in the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164 to reassert royal authority over the English Church after the laxity of Stephen’s reign. By Becket’s day, however, the Gregorian doctrines had long since become archaic, and not even the papacy supported him in his bitter controversy with the King and his episcopal colleagues. The papacy used Becket’s martyrdom to expand its own jurisdiction over the English Church, but it was willing to leave most of the provisions of the Constitutions of Clarendon unchallenged.³⁴⁷

“In 1170 each side moved into a more extreme position,” Morris observes.

“Henry secured the coronation as his heir of his son Henry, the ceremony being carried out by Archbishop Roger of York in the absence of the archbishop of Canterbury, whose right it was; and the pope threatened excommunication and interdict. Henry drew back from the brink and came to an agreement with Thomas as Fréteval, but even then there was no real settlement of the issues.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ Barlow, *Becket*, 105-6.

³⁴⁷ Cantor, *Church, Kingship, and Lay Investiture*, 320. Barlow states that even prior to Clarendon, “(f)rom the point of view of the papal curia, Thomas was a liability, even a menace. There was little merit in his cause and all could see that he was a trouble-maker.” Barlow, *Becket*, 97.

³⁴⁸ Morris, *Papal Monarchy*, 235. Bartlett reckons the cost of the dispute to the English Church as follows: “The Becket conflict then disrupted English ecclesiastical life for a decade, so that between 1163 and 1173 no new appointments were made to the episcopal bench.” Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 401.

6. Cistercians

The Order of Cistercians (*Ordo Cisterciensis*) was one of several monastic reform movements that emerged in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Founded by Robert of Molesme (ca. 1028-1111) in 1098 at the abbey of Cîteaux near Dijon, France, the order's humble beginnings belie their massive importance. "The Cistercians occupy the central position in the spiritual life of the twelfth century," Southern observes. "(T)he productions of the monasteries of the older type had in general—despite the influence of St. Anselm on a little group of disciples—a character too staid and stolid to exercise a widespread influence; and, at the other extreme of the religious life, the Carthusians moved in a world too remote and severe to communicate their power and originality of vision to a large circle. It was the Cistercian writers above all who communicated to the spiritual literature of the century the warmth and intimacy and movement, which twelfth-century audiences looked for as well in their serious as in their lighter moods."³⁴⁹

The early growth of the order was also not apparent at the beginning. "No impartial observer during the first 20 years of Cistercian history," Southern remarks, "when the number of foundations rose from one to seven, could have predicted a rate of growth which in little over 50 years raised the total number to more than 300."³⁵⁰ "The first half of the twelfth century stands out, even in the Middle Ages, as a unique era of devotional enthusiasm, when monasticism turned into a mass movement of unparalleled

³⁴⁹ Southern, *Making*, 228.

³⁵⁰ R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Penguin History of the Church 2; London: Penguin, 1970), 253.

proportions,” Louis J. Lekai observes.³⁵¹ “There is no doubt that in the circumstances Cîteaux was bound to succeed,” he continues. Lekai places responsibility for the success of the order squarely upon Bernard’s shoulders:

Its ascetic program was the epitome of everything contemporaries were looking for; it was organized under an inspiring and capable leadership and its constitution insured the cohesion of the movement in the event that it spread beyond the confines of Burgundy. Grandmont, Savigny, Grand Chartreuse and many similar reforms prospered with fewer potential assets than those of Cîteaux. The amazing fact that the Cistercian Order virtually exploded and by the middle of the twelfth century possessed nearly 350 houses in every country of Europe, can be explained, however, only by the dynamic character and activity of the “man of the century,” Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. The often voiced notion that he was the true founder of the Order is a pardonable exaggeration, but the fact that for centuries Cistercians were widely known as “Bernardines” was not without justification.³⁵²

Not without justification, perhaps, but there are additional reasons to which we may refer in order to understand the early and striking achievements of the Cistercians. One reason is that the order was a reaction to what the nascent Cistercians saw as the excesses of the Cluny, e.g., the elaborate liturgies, eschewing of manual labor and ornate architecture. All of this, they believed, carried them far from the life of simplicity and poverty to which their monastic forbears were called.

Lekai notes, for example, Peter Damian’s (ca. 1007-72) visit to Cluny in 1063 and how “he observed that various offices were so prolonged that in a day’s routine there was scarcely half an hour left to engage the monks in conversation. At the same time he

³⁵¹ Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1977), 33. For an excellent study of medieval devotion to Christ and the Mother of God, see Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

³⁵² Lekai, *Cistercians*, 33-4.

deplored the lack of penance and mortification, particularly in food and drink.”³⁵³ There is also Bernard’s treatise from 1125, *Apology to Abbot William*, in which he rails against, *inter alia*, Clunaic architecture and “their expensive decorations and their novel images.”³⁵⁴

Another reason was their desire to follow strictly and assiduously the *Rule* of Benedict of Nursia (480-547) as well as its predecessors. The *Rule* or *Regula Benedicti* (ca. 540) had become the standard rule of monastic life in the West and the Cistercians meant to live it and apply it as strenuously as possible. It had not, however, begun as such. In fact, it was not until the ninth century that the *Rule* became a rule for anywhere other than the monastery Benedict himself founded in Monte Cassino. The *Rule* nevertheless set the standard for Western monasticism and proved to be of inestimable value for the Cistercians in particular.

Southern draws attention to the order’s highly organized structure as being a reason for its early growth and success. “The Cistercian organization was one of the masterpieces of medieval planning,” he writes. “In a world ruled by a complicated network of authorities often at variance with each other, the Cistercian plan presented a single strong chain of authority from top to bottom.”

There was a single supreme legislative body in the triennial General Chapter of all Cistercian abbots; a simple system of affiliation and visitation which embraced every

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4. Lekai also notes how Damian “nourished no admiration for the great builders who embellished their churches and enlarged their abbeys. He could not resist recounting a vision of the famous Abbot Richard of Saint-Vanne in hell, condemned to erect scaffoldings forever in punishment for his extravagant taste for fine architecture. Cardinal Peter had no appreciation for liturgical splendor, and criticised ‘the unnecessary sounding of bells, the protracted chanting of hymns and the conspicuous use of ornament.’” *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux. *Apologia ad Guillelmum* 12.28. *SBO* 3: 104; ET: *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux. Volume One: Treatises I*, ed. M. Basil Pennington (CF 1; Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 63.

house in the order; a uniformity of practice; a wide freedom from every local authority whether secular or ecclesiastical. The Cistercians achieved at one stroke the kind of organization that every ruler would wish to have: a system complete in itself, wholly autonomous, equipped with a thorough organization for internal supervision, isolated from external interference, untroubled by those sources of dispute about services and rights which choked the law courts of Europe. The Cistercian system was the first effective international organization in Europe, more effective even than the papal organization because it had narrower aims and a smaller field of operation.³⁵⁵

Tellenbach concurs, stating that “(t)he connections between the Cistercian daughter monasteries and their famous mothers really were binding and permanent, and the ‘filiation’ was an essential part of Cistercian organization.”

The abbots of mother houses visited their daughter houses regularly; all abbots came each year to the general chapter in Cîteaux, which issued statutes and modifications to them which were binding on all houses. This institutionalisation, characteristic of both the secular and the spiritual life of the twelfth century, was a model for older and younger forms of monasticism alike.³⁵⁶

Yet another reason, and certainly a significant one for this study, was the order’s relationship with the papacy. “The spiritual revival associated with the Church Reforms of the eleventh century and the foundation of new religious orders, above all the Cistercian Order, and the rapid expansion of the orders of regular canons,” Charles Duggan argues, “blended ideally with the development of papal policies of centralization and universal guidance in spiritual as well as jurisdictional spheres.”³⁵⁷

In this we see the difference between eleventh-century monastic movements and those of the twelfth. Morris observes: “One of the features of the monastic scene in the late eleventh century had been the appearance of groups of hermits who lived outside

³⁵⁵ Southern, *Western Society*, 255.

³⁵⁶ Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe*, 110.

³⁵⁷ Duggan, *Canon Law*, 105.

existing rules and customs. The dominant characteristic in the twelfth century was the opposite: the emergence of new orders with clearly defined constitutions.”³⁵⁸

“Early Cîteaux, in sharp contrast to Cluny, sought neither fiscal immunities nor exemption from episcopal jurisdiction,” Lekai alleges.³⁵⁹ They nevertheless received both. The Cistercians were free of interference from local or diocesan clergy and hierarchy, answering only to the pope himself. They were also exempt from tithing and enjoyed other privileges as well.³⁶⁰ Ian Robinson explains how “in 1132 Cîteaux and the other abbeys of the order had obtained from Innocent II the valuable privilege of exemption from the payment of tithes.” Such exemption was not uncommon but, he elaborates, “(i)t was a privilege strongly resented by the episcopate; and this resentment finally succeeded in influencing papal policy during the pontificate of Hadrian IV.”³⁶¹ Pope Alexander III (ca. 1100-81), however, granted a complete exemption to the order in 1169 in return for its service to the papacy.

³⁵⁸ Morris, *Papal Monarchy*, 236. Morris goes on to state: “Paradoxically, these monks were the lineal descendants of the hermits: the Cistercians and Carthusians trace their ancestry back to hermits gathered at Burgund.” Ibid. Morris has the following to say about the shift from eleventh- to twelfth-century forms of monastic life: “There was no one reason for the change. In many cases a simple increase in numbers meant that an unstructured life was no longer possible... There were also times when considerable pressure was applied. Robert of Molesme, who at various stages abandoned all three houses of which he was abbot, was ordered to leave Cîteaux... The monastic orders which emerged from hermit foundations often bore the mark of their origin... In one sense the Cistercians turned their back firmly on the hermit ideal, to which they were less sympathetic than the Cluniacs, but they carried into the cenobitic life features of the hermit inspiration such as the severity with which they kept the Rule, manual labour, the reduction in the weight of monastic liturgy and the stress on withdrawal to the wilderness.” Ibid., 238-9.

³⁵⁹ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 65.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 65-76.

³⁶¹ Ian Stuart Robinson, *The Papacy, 1093-1178: Continuity and Innovation* (Cambridge Medieval Textbooks; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 240-1. Robinson continues: “The Cistercian order enjoyed the particular favour of Alexander III because of the tireless support which the order gave him in the dangerous years 1159-77. Emperor Frederick I had hoped that his close connections with the order would win them to his party; but the Cistercian Archbishop Peter of Tarentaise brought his order into the Alexandrine party. In Sept. 1161 the Cistercian chapter declared for Alexander. The persecution which the order subsequently suffered in the imperial territories, as well as the Cistercian efforts to secure France and English recognition for Alexander, stimulated papal generosity... The historical context of this papal privilege offers a striking illustration of the order’s influence in the later twelfth century and of the importance to the papacy of an alliance with the Cistercians.” Ibid., 241-2.

This exemption was of a piece with the ideals of Gregory VII.³⁶² “Just as Gregory VII and the circle of which he was the most eminent member focused the controversy about the ordering of the life of the Church as a whole, so the Cistercians became the centre of the controversy about the ordering of the monastic life,” Southern writes. “The Hildebrandine Reform of the Church has often been associated with the name of Cluny; but, considered as a principle—in its return to the ancient, Roman, pre-Germanic, past; in its appeal to reason and ancient authority against custom; and in its challenge, not simply to corruption, but to a recognized ideal—the kinship is rather with Cîteaux.”³⁶³

It is fitting, then, that Becket would find support among the Cistercians in his dispute with Henry. As F. M. Powicke pointed out long ago, Becket “turn(ed) at once to the Cistercians, who gave him henceforth his greatest moral support.”³⁶⁴ Bennett D. Hill reports: “Considering the amount of time that (Becket) spent with the monks, and remembering the high Gregorian principles for which the Cistercian Order stood in the middle years of the twelfth century, it is highly probable that the attitudes and the stand of the Cistercians had a direct bearing on the position and the philosophy of the

³⁶² Note Lekai’s comment: “The reclamation of tithes from secular owners and monasteries was an important issue in the Gregorian Reform. During the course of the eleventh century such resolutions were passed at a number of synods, but a good deal of ambiguity remained over monastic tithes. Monastic exceptions seemed to be justifiable because priests increasingly constituted the personnel of most abbeys and some of them actually discharged pastoral duties. Monastic possessions of tithes in some cases, moreover, were based on immemorial customs or papal privileges. Nevertheless, monastic reformers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries unanimously renounced their claims on tithes and determined to exist by their own manual labor. The early regulations of Cîteaux regarding tithes merely echoed the opinion which, among many others, Abbot Odo of Saint Martin in Tournai enunciated about 1092, who ‘was determined to accept neither *altaria* nor churches nor tithes, but to live solely from the labor of their hands...[because] such revenues should be owed only by clerics, not by monks.” Lekai, *Cistercians*, 65-6. Note as well that in *Apology to Abbot William* 6.12, Bernard makes much of how the Cistercians not only dress and eat simply, but live by their own manual labor as well.

³⁶³ Southern, *Making*, 166-7.

³⁶⁴ F. M. Powicke, “Maurice of Rievaulx,” *English Historical Review* 36 (1921): 22.

archbishop.”³⁶⁵ And in his letter to Becket where he refers to their “common friend” (*communis amicus noster*) Isaac, Bellesmains urged Becket “to establish a closer friendship with the abbot of Pontigny”—the Cistercian motherhouse of Isaac’s community at Stella—as well as his advice that “much indeed can be achieved through the diligence and holiness of the abbot of Pontigny and the other abbots of the Cistercian Order.”³⁶⁶

The Cistercians were nearly without peer as agents of spiritual change in the twelfth century. They were also advocates and disseminators of Gregory’s reforms, not least through the indefatigable and prolific Bernard, “the ‘cloistered’ monk who traversed Europe resolving a papal schism, who upbraided pope and emperor, dislodged archbishops from their sees, pursued heretics, and preached the Second Crusade, all the while writing prolifically and leading the broadest reform in monastic history.”³⁶⁷

Charles Duggan refers to the “all-pervasive penetration of the life of the Church through the rise of the Cistercian movement.” “This new religious zeal,” he continues,

with its characteristic emphasis on the monastic virtues and disciplines, conditioned the general state of the Church as well as, in a more particular way, the minds of such leading reformers as Peter Damian and Gregory VII himself. It played a vital role in effecting a wider movement of reform, and was in the event itself still further stimulated by it.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Bennett D. Hill, “Archbishop Thomas Becket and the Cistercian Order,” *ASOC* 27 (1971): 66. See also L. A. Desmond’s earlier article, “Becket and the Cistercians,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Reports* 25 (1968): 9-29.

³⁶⁶ *Letter* 31. *Materials* 5: 114; *ET: Correspondence* 1: 105.

³⁶⁷ Emero Stiegman, “Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, the Victorines,” in *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period*, ed. G. R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 131.

³⁶⁸ Duggan, “Conquest,” 71. Note Duggan’s statement: “The spiritual revival associated with the Church Reforms of the eleventh century and the foundation of new religious orders, above all of the great Cistercian Order, as already discussed, and the rapid expansion of the orders of regular canons, blended ideally with the development of papal policies of centralization and universal guidance in spiritual as well as jurisdictional spheres.” *Ibid.*, 105.

Cistercian support of Becket would prove to be only temporary, however, as I shall report in the following chapter. The seemingly inextricable link between the order and the papacy was not uncontroversial, either in England or on the Continent. “Henry II became much irritated by Cistercian support for Thomas Becket,” Lekai notes, “and Barbarossa was equally resentful toward Cistercians for their rejection of his antipopes and their staunch fidelity to Alexander III. In both countries, under threat of dire retaliation, Cistercians were put under heavy pressure to conform to the royal will.”³⁶⁹ Janet E. Burton likewise notes that “Henry II did not feel it an idle boast to threaten the order with the confiscation of all its English lands.”³⁷⁰

Early in his dispute with Henry, Henry of Houghton informs Becket that “(b)y the Pope’s request, prayers are being offered assiduously at Clairvaux, Cîteaux, and Pontigny for you and the church which God has entrusted to your charge.”³⁷¹ Henry’s anger against the order was evident by 1165, when Becket had taken up residence at the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny in Burgundy, where he was to remain for over a year. Becket wrote series of three threatening letters to Henry in the spring of 1166, two of which were delivered by Urban I, the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Cercamp-sur-Canche in Pas-de-Calais, and the third and final letter delivered by Gerard, a barefoot monk.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 288.

³⁷⁰ Janet E. Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire, 1069-1215* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 179.

³⁷¹ *Letter 20*, dated ca. 9 November 1163. *Materials* 5: 61; *ET: Correspondence* 1: 57.

³⁷² *Letters* 68, 74 and 82, respectively, in *Correspondence*. Barlow states that Becket chose Gerard to deliver the third letter as a way to insult Henry further. Barlow, *Becket*, 145. This seems untenable, however, since on the one hand Urban I may have already died (he died 31 August 1166 and the exact date of *Letter 82* is uncertain). On the other hand, Henry was already furious with the Cistercians and Becket would have been astute enough not to send another member of the order. In any case, I find Duggan’s remark that “Thomas chose the most obviously unworldly messenger he could find to reinforce

In response to the second of these letters in particular, Henry complains to the English-born abbot of Cîteaux, Gilbert. Henry refers to Urban I by name as being the bearer of an “impudent letter” on behalf of “a certain Thomas, who was our chancellor.” More important, Henry accuses not only Urban I or the monks of Cercamp-sur-Canche, but indeed the entire order itself as acting on behalf of Becket.³⁷³

The Cistercians proved to be as influential as they were popular and provided a model for other monastic movements throughout the Western church. The movement grew rapidly in England and on the Continent as well, and one of their own ascended to the papacy in 1145, namely, Pope Eugene III. Cistercian houses multiplied and aspirants joined the order in droves; Isaac, as we have seen, was one of many.³⁷⁴ “The growth of the Cistercian Order was of outstanding importance: the advance of papal power in the mid-twelfth century in the extent of its permeation of the Church was linked with the higher pitch of religious fervour achieved by the Cistercians,” Charles Duggan reports. “At the same time, the religious orders proved the natural and constant allies of the papacy, with which many contracted a special and immediate relationship, and almost all found it useful to seek regular confirmation of their privileges and possessions by the highest ecclesiastical authority.”³⁷⁵

the spiritual quality of the message and escape the wrath of the king” more reasonable. See *Correspondence* 1: 328-9n.1.

³⁷³ *Materials* 5: 365-6.

³⁷⁴ See Introduction, *supra*.

³⁷⁵ Duggan, “Conquest,” 86.

7. Isaac

What, then, are we to make of Isaac's involvement with Becket? It was limited and unremarkable. Bellesmains mentions Isaac along with two other "common friends" of Becket but Isaac is never mentioned elsewhere in Becket's correspondence.³⁷⁶ Considering the enormity of Becket's correspondence, this is an important point. "In addition to [Becket's] biographies or hagiographies," Anne Duggan writes, "the historian has one of the largest collections of contemporary letters assembled in the middle ages."³⁷⁷ Alan of Tewkesbury (d. 1202) compiled the collection of letters in order to establish an accurate documentary record. The collection, which survives in three recensions, contains 598 pieces of correspondence, 329 of which are letters either to or from Becket.³⁷⁸ And yet in "(t)his immensely rich vein of material," there is but a fleeting reference to Isaac.³⁷⁹

That Isaac sided with Becket is not unexpected. Both men were English but more important is Isaac's affiliation with the Cistercian Order. It is less the case that Isaac supported Becket as an individual (English or otherwise) but much more that Isaac came down on the side of the Gregorian reforms. Indeed, it is unclear whether Isaac and Becket ever met.³⁸⁰ Isaac's reasons for supporting Becket—or, for that matter, his reasons for failing to support either Henry or his case against Becket—are unknown. Nothing within Isaac's *oeuvre* directly relates to either Becket or his case against Henry.

³⁷⁶ See Chapter I, *supra*.

³⁷⁷ Duggan, *Becket*, 5.

³⁷⁸ For a thorough discussion of Alan of Tewkesbury's collection, see *Correspondence* 1: lxxx-c.

³⁷⁹ Duggan, *Becket*, 6.

³⁸⁰ Salet, however, offers this as a possibility during Isaac's student days at Chartres. See Introduction, *supra*.

While Isaac does refer occasionally to contemporary events in his works, he nowhere refers either to Becket or his dispute with Henry.

Why, then, did Isaac support Becket, however indirect and passive his support appears to have been? We know from Becket's correspondence that Bellesmains encouraged Becket to forge a close relationship with Pontigny, Stella's motherhouse, and that monks from various Cistercian houses were praying for Becket. We have already mentioned Bellesmains' reference to Isaac as their "common friend." But what of it? To what may we attribute the reasons for any support Isaac may have shown Becket? And if Isaac's support was neither active nor direct, politically speaking, then why would Isaac have cared?

Although Raciti argued, as we have seen, that Isaac's later years on Ré were the result of the loss of his political fortunes in the wake of Becket's death and largely at the hands of Geoffrey, I should like to describe in this study that Isaac's interests and motivations were theological and not political. Further, the proof of this is in the very texts Raciti scrutinized so carefully and thoroughly, namely, Isaac's sermons. As a Cistercian, Isaac naturally and instinctively tilted toward the church and in particular the papacy and its prerogatives.

In Chapter I, I showed the modern interest in, *inter alia*, Isaac's Christology and ecclesiology. The studies of Dickens, Joly, Schaefer, and others treat these topics and their place in Isaac's theology more fully than I am able at the moment. I am limiting this study to Isaac's monastic theology, the focus of the subsequent chapter but here and now I shall make the following remarks to prepare the way forward.

First and most important, for Isaac it is theology that takes pride of place.³⁸¹ As I demonstrate in the following chapter, while he does refer from time to time to events both contemporary and quotidian in his sermons, Isaac's primary interest is theology. Following his monastic predecessors, Isaac seems practically single-minded in his focus on the spiritual. Reason, understanding and knowledge fall on their faces, Isaac states in *Sermon 4*, when they confront Christ's incomprehensibility, incorporeality and invisibility.³⁸²

Second, this dovetails (as I report in Chapter III) with Isaac's attitude concerning the goal of the monastic life, namely, the transformation of the monk himself. Theology is the center and this theology is first and foremost experiential. The monastic life, whether active or contemplative, is of one piece with a life dedicated to living a Christ-like life. The monk, following Christ as his "supreme pattern,"³⁸³ strives to live his life in the present in imitation of Christ, thereby preparing himself for the life to come. This means, for Isaac, sharing especially in Christ's poverty, obedience and suffering. Indeed, the monk's trust rests in nothing other than truly following Christ. "The worth of our trust," according to Isaac, "depends on whether our life in this world is like his, on whether we walk as he walked, and so make good our claim to be dwelling in him."³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Note that *theology* (*theologia*, θεολογία) in patristic usage does not mean first and foremost an intellectual exercise. Rather, a perusal of G. W. H. Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* reveals that theology has to do with, *inter alia*, the Trinity, the liturgy and "mystical knowledge of God." Only later is the word defined as either a subject of inquiry or a rational exercise. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Rev. ed. New York and Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 627-8.

³⁸² *Sermon 4.9. (F)aciem vero ob incomprehensibilitatis, incorporeitatis, invisibilitatis simplicem formam, in qua Patri manet aequalis, non sustineat, immo in faciem suam et ratio, et intellectus et intelligentia cadant.* SC 130: 136; PL 194: 1702B-C.

³⁸³ See Chapter III, *infra*.

³⁸⁴ *Sermon 8.14. Quia in hoc est fiducia, si sicut ille fuit, sic et nos simus in hoc mundo, et sicut ille ambulavit, ita ambulet, qui dicit se in illo manere.* SC 130: 202; PL 194: 1718D.

Third and finally, Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy can only be understood properly in the light of his monastic theology. In other words, in addition to his affiliation with the Cistercian order, what loomed largest for Isaac was his dedication to following Christ in word and deed. Christ is not one datum among others, an example of morality or ethics. He is for Isaac, rather, the very pattern of one's life, the pattern for one's external behavior as well as inner life.³⁸⁵ The life of the Christian and in particular that of the monk must be patterned after that of Christ, the poor, obedient and suffering Christ especially.

Isaac's support of Becket, then, was far from direct or active. He was one Cistercian among others who sided with Becket and his cause. While the Cistercian Order ultimately withdrew its hospitality in 1166 there is no indication that either Isaac or any other Cistercian, for that matter, suffered because of it. Isaac lacked the power of Bellesmains or others to have done a great deal, practically speaking, for Becket, a point overlooked by Raciti who wants to make of Isaac a figure far more important than the evidence allows.

Given Isaac's affiliation with the Cistercian Order and its orientation toward ecclesiastical authority in relation to secular, we should not be surprised that Isaac would side with Becket. But to understand Isaac's "support" of Becket as being active or otherwise that which would have jeopardized his career is untenable for reasons I shall describe in the following chapter. Suffice it to say for the time being, there is no evidence for this. Second, Isaac was not in a position where he could have done much—

³⁸⁵ *Sermon 8.16. (D)e ipso exemplari ipsum in exemplum cordium vestrorum intus, et corporum foris transcribite.* SC 130: 202-4; PL 194: 1719B.

in a concrete, tangible way—for Becket. Far more powerful supporters of Becket were Bellesmains and other abbots, none of whom suffered for their support of Becket.

C. Methods

The foundation of the monastery of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré is a crucial factor in determining Isaac’s career, specifically, to determine whether his “exile” occurred early in his career or later and, more important, as a consequence of his support of Becket. My collection strategy is to focus on the documentary evidence that pertains to the foundation of the monastery on Ré. These are found primarily in Debray-Mulatier’s aforementioned article³⁸⁶ and Martine Garrigues’ *Le premier cartulaire de l’abbaye cistercienne de Pontigny*.³⁸⁷

The guiding question throughout this study is: Does evidence exist for Isaac’s direct role in the Becket controversy as well as his support of Becket? Also, was Isaac truly among Becket’s more significant allies or was he in reality a minor player? I focus on Isaac’s sermons, in particular those places where, according to Raciti, he refers to his literal exile on Ré. The reasons for focusing on both are important to my study. Unlike Raciti, I do not believe Isaac’s sermons are to be read for historical or biographical information, at least not primarily. To read them for such is, as I argue, a modern way of reading or at least a way that is not keeping with the manner in which Isaac intended them to be read or encountered.

³⁸⁶ See Chapter I in particular, *supra*.

³⁸⁷ Martine Garrigues, *Le premier cartulaire de l’abbaye cistercienne de Pontigny* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1981).

My analytical strategy is to read Isaac's sermons as *monastic* sermons. The method I shall use to analyze Isaac's sermons is sermon studies, in particular the study of monastic sermons. Previous research on Isaac's sermons does not rely on either Isaac's precedents in monastic literature or sermon studies. By using both of these approaches I can describe Isaac's sermons in a way that is faithful to both their literary and theological traditions.

Muessig's article, "Sermon, Preacher and Society in the Middle Ages," discusses very concisely the methodology of sermon studies, in particular its interdisciplinary approach.³⁸⁸ Additional work by Muessig,³⁸⁹ Beverly Mayne Kienzle³⁹⁰ and others has contributed to this methodological approach of which I make use.³⁹¹ This will highlight where I believe Raciti's argument to have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Raciti assumed Isaac's sermons could be mined for autobiographical data or clues and based his theory of a forced exile to Ré as a consequence of Isaac's support of Becket because of that. Raciti's reading, method, analytical strategy, etc., determined how he read Isaac's sermons. For Raciti, sermon is nearly synonymous with autobiography.

³⁸⁸ Carolyn Muessig, "Sermon, Preacher and Society in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval History* 28.1 (2002): 73-91.

³⁸⁹ *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Studies in Intellectual History 90; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998; *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (A New History of the Sermon 3; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002).

³⁹⁰ Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "The Typology of the Medieval Sermon and its Development in the Middle Ages: Report on Work in Progress," in *De l'homélie au sermon: histoire de la prédication médiévale: actes du Colloque international de Louvain-la-Neuve*, ed. Jacqueline Hamesse and Xavier Hermand (Publications de l'Institut d'études médiévales; Textes, études, congrès 14; Louvain-la-Neuve: Catholic University of Louvain, 1993), 83-101 ; "Introduction," "The Twelfth-Century Monastic Sermon" and "Conclusion," in *The Sermon*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 81-3 ; Turnhout : Brepols, 2000), 143-74, 271-323 and 963-83, respectively.

³⁹¹ George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig give some indication of the vastness of the literature of medieval sermons studies by their 123-page bibliography in Kienzle, "Bibliography," 19-142.

I demonstrate on the basis of passages from his sermons where it is apparent that Isaac is not providing autobiographical or historical information. This is clear from the way in which things like locations are handled in monastic texts. Adalbert de Vogüé's article on John Cassian's *Conferences*³⁹² and James E. Goehring's article on the desert in early monastic literature³⁹³ are two significant works that demonstrate that in monastic literature, references to place or location are not always literal or historical.

For Isaac's sermons, I argue that his references to "exile" are no more literal than his predecessors' references to the desert. Isaac is not, therefore, referring to his forced exile to Ré. He is, rather, making a theological point which is in keeping with what his sermon is about and consistent with the genre of sermon studies.

My emphasis is on situating and describing the way in which Isaac's sermons function as monastic sermons—in other words, how a monk wrote for monks. Questions I shall consider as I analyze Isaac's sermons include: How did monks "hear" or otherwise use sermons? Were written sermons necessarily intended to be delivered? Was the sermon a genre and not necessarily something that was to be delivered? How did Cistercians in Isaac's time preach and hear sermons? Were sermons delivered orally? If so were they transcribed? Who edited them? When, how and by whom were sermons published? Studies such as Leclercq's *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*³⁹⁴ and Brian Stock's *The Implications of Literacy: Written*

³⁹² Adalbert de Vogüé, "Understanding Cassian: A Survey of the Conferences," *CSQ* 19 (1984): 101-121.

³⁹³ James E. Goehring, "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt", in *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 73-88.

³⁹⁴ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (3d ed.; New York: Fordham, 1982).

*Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*³⁹⁵ will provide much of the conceptual framework for my analysis. The works of Walter J. Ong,³⁹⁶ M. T. Clanchy³⁹⁷ and Harvey Graff³⁹⁸ have also been useful in their studies of, broadly speaking, the effect of literacy in Western society in general.

In the end, I argue that any simple theory to describe Isaac's references to "exile" in his sermons falls apart. I also discuss why I have come to believe that Raciti's theory is fundamentally flawed. The genre of the monastic sermon is a complex and multifaceted one, and those who would seek to engage such a text on its own terms and in the light of how its author intended must be aware of much more than the quest for historical or biographical data.

D. Summary

Barlow offers in the concluding chapter of his biography of Becket, entitled "From Death unto Life," that his "life contains so many contradictions and controversial features that it has always been of interest."³⁹⁹ Becket's life and in particular his death epitomize much of the struggles between the sacred and the profane during his lifetime and the period preceding it. "If one picture is worth a thousand words," remarks Duggan at the close of her own biography of the archbishop, "the depiction of Becket's murder—

³⁹⁵ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

³⁹⁶ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New Accents; London and New York: Methuen, 1982).

³⁹⁷ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (2d ed.; Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993).

³⁹⁸ Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987).

³⁹⁹ Barlow, *Becket*, 274.

with the armour-clad knights brandishing their swords above the unprotected head of the priest—created an unforgettable image, which expressed the tension between religious and secular forces.”

No commentary was required to interpret the dramatic scene transmitted across Europe in manuscripts or on the reliquaries manufactured in Limoges. Detached from the specifics of his dispute with Henry II, that image became a powerful symbol of ecclesiastical steadfastness in the face of secular excess.⁴⁰⁰

In this chapter I have described the historical background of the Becket controversy. Becket rose from relatively humble beginnings as the son of a London merchant to the pinnacle of success in the English church as archbishop of Canterbury. His association with Theobald and later Henry did much to ensure his ascent. But Becket’s relationship with the latter would quickly unravel following his election and consecration as archbishop in 1162. Indeed, by 1164 Becket had fled England and lived for over a year at the Cistercian monastery at Pontigny.

Becket’s conflict with Henry can best be understood when placed against the complicated background of the Investiture Controversy. While the controversy in England did not mirror what it was on the Continent, the interplay between secular and ecclesiastical power was a subject of interest nevertheless. Henry, given what he had inherited from his immediate predecessor, was keen to reassert his control over the English church. He declared this forthrightly in the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164 which Becket ultimately rejected, thereby placing him on what became an inexorable path toward murder.

⁴⁰⁰ Duggan, *Becket*, 268.

That Becket would seek refuge from a Cistercian monastery is understandable, considering the order's dedication to the papacy as well as the reforms of Gregory VII. This dedication along with the order's organization contributed greatly to its growth during the twelfth century. Becket's correspondence reveals the value he placed upon the Cistercians—both spiritual and practical—and while the monastery at Pontigny as well as the order itself would eventually rescind the earlier offer of hospitality, Becket and the order shared much in their mutual understanding of the church's authority and prerogatives.

Isaac's choice of the Cistercians as his home in the monastic life is in keeping with the order's growth and expansion during his lifetime. When Bellesmains writes to Becket of their "common friend," Isaac, he thereby involves Isaac in the Becket controversy. But apart from this single reference to Isaac in the voluminous Becket correspondence, there is nothing to indicate any active support of Becket on the part of Isaac, much less any consequences suffered by the latter.

Following the historical background, I discuss my collection and analytical strategies. My focus is on the documentary evidence concerning the foundation of the monastery on Ré as well as Isaac's sermons. Previous research on Isaac's sermons in particular fails to consider Isaac's predecessors in monastic literature or to understand them as an example of the genre of the monastic sermon. By using both earlier examples from monastic literature and the method of sermon studies, I place Isaac's sermons in their proper historical and monastic context, as well as to explain how Isaac's support of Becket was not something for which he suffered exile.

Chapter III. Presentation and Analysis of Research

A. Introduction and Overview

1. Restatement of the Purpose of the Present Study

My argument, that Isaac's role in the Becket controversy was a marginal one and that whatever support Isaac may have given to Becket was insufficient reason for official sanction or retribution, is based upon Isaac's sermons themselves. Raciti's argument that Isaac's sermons reveal autobiographical details that evince his forced exile to Ré and the loss of his abbacy has been the dominant narrative for over a generation. Raciti's argument includes two components relevant to my study: his evidence and his claim. The former is Isaac's sermons themselves, the most important of which is *Sermon 48*. The latter is that these sermons contain circumstantial, historical and autobiographical details relevant to the Becket controversy and prove that Isaac's support of Becket was such that he suffered considerably for it.

In this chapter, I discuss the evidence for my claim that Isaac's role in the Becket controversy was a minimal one and that he suffered no reversal of his ecclesial or political fortunes. I focus on Isaac's predecessors in monastic literature, in particular John Cassian (ca. 360-435) and the *Rule of Benedict*. It is here that I discuss the monastic approach to Scripture as well as geographical and spatial references in monastic literature and how these are to be interpreted.

In the sections that follow I focus on Isaac's sermons themselves, in particular circumstantial and historical details, geographical and spatial references, the language and style of the sermons, and finally Isaac's use of the theme of "exile" in the sermons. I

then describe my findings where I state specifically where I differ with Raciti and others concerning the nature of Isaac's "exile" as well as the implications of my findings. In particular I discuss the founding of the monastery of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré and the documentary evidence that pertains to it. A summary thereupon concludes this chapter.

What makes this study one of historical theology is my focus on Isaac's sermons as sermons, i.e., focusing on the monastic content and context of Isaac's sermons as well as his predecessors in monastic literature. My argument is that Isaac's sermons are not to be taken as sources of historical information and that, therefore, we should not read them in order to learn more about Isaac's political situation. Not that Isaac's sermons lack historical, circumstantial or geographical information—clearly they do not. But Isaac's primary interest was not to describe any of this and mining his sermons for insights to his involvement in the Becket controversy is a dubious endeavor. It is dubious precisely because we would read Isaac's sermons in a way that Isaac never intended for them to be read or heard.

Practically speaking, I am inverting Raciti's argument. Instead of arguing from the general to the specific, I am considering the specific genre, content and context of Isaac's sermons. Raciti did not do this. Rather, Raciti begins with his thesis that Isaac suffered for his support of Becket, specifically the loss of his abbacy at Stella and his forced exile to the island of Ré. Evidence for this was obtained from Isaac's sermons but Raciti tended to read these as historical and autobiographical documents. Raciti failed, in other words, to read Isaac's sermons as sermons, as monastic sermons in particular.

Raciti did not consider the precedents in monastic literature or the contours, interests, purpose, etc., of monastic theology.

Raciti also failed to consider the lack of external evidence. There exists, *inter alia*, barely a single mention of Isaac in Becket's entire correspondence. Furthermore, Isaac's views of poverty and militarism, as we shall see, would have put him at odds with Becket as well as Bellesmains.⁴⁰¹ Documentary evidence suggests an early date for the founding of the monastery on Ré as the most plausible, the importance of which I shall describe in this chapter. And considering that neither Bellesmains nor Geoffrey faced any ramifications or consequences for supporting Becket, I question Raciti's all too eager explanation for Isaac's purported "exile."

Raciti seized on a theory that seemed to solve everything but was found to be wanting when it came to Isaac's forbears in monastic theology. Raciti has rendered an invaluable service to students of Isaac. His study has not been superseded in terms of close and careful study of Isaac's sermons. Where I differ with Raciti is in terms of his seeming lack of awareness of Isaac's context as a monastic writer. Isaac was a monk who wrote for monks. Raciti's study as well as my own demonstrates that Isaac's main writings were sermons, a genre with a specific context, form and intended audience. This

⁴⁰¹ See Richard Winston, *Thomas Becket* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 73-4, 76-88, 94-5. Note the following: "Thomas Becket had been striving, among his multitudinous other activities, to build up England's sea power. Henry had had only one ship at his disposal until his chancellor presented him with three more. Thomas himself had the use of six and even more vessels when he wished to cross the Channel, and was in the habit of giving free passage to all who needed it. But his seven hundred knights, with the numerous footmen, squires, and pages who attended them, must have strained the shipping resources of England. If all the men of England who owed knight's service had swarmed to the ports, they would have waited months for transportation to Normandy." *Ibid.*, 78. See also Philibert Pouzet, *L'Anglais Jean dit Bellesmains (1122-1204?)*. *Évêque de Poitiers, puis Archevêque de Lyon (1162-1182, 1182-1192)* (Lyon: Camus and Carnet, 1927), 111-3.

was not considered by Raciti, however, and it is my purpose to expand on the fruits of his labors.

The modern interest in sermons studies superseded Raciti's important article on Isaac. I do not wish to find fault with Raciti so much as I wish to indicate where his work could be supplemented. What I argue in this study is that Isaac, as can be demonstrated on the basis of his sermons, stands in fundamental continuity with the Christian monastic and ascetical tradition. While Raciti does not deny this, his argument obscures this nevertheless.

Raciti's scholarship is invaluable and scholars of Isaac and Cistercians in general owe him a great debt. Raciti nevertheless failed to understand or at least appreciate Isaac's continuity with his monastic forebears. Isaac's sermons, under the exacting eye of Raciti, were seen as demonstrating their immediate historical or contemporary concerns as well as Isaac's apologetic interests. They were not understood as being one link in a chain of monastic literature, literature with a unique idiom especially in its approach to Scripture, that stretched back to the beginnings of the monastic tradition.

Understanding Isaac's place in the stream of monastic literature is essential to understanding what Isaac is doing in his sermons. This is especially true when we consider Isaac's use of geographical place and references to "exile." Circumstantial details are few, as are references to contemporary events. Isaac is not providing his monks with the news of the day. Indeed, Isaac's sermons are strikingly free of details on contemporary events. When they do occur (e.g., *Sermon 48*), they are notable as exceptions.

B. Presentation of Findings

1. Isaac's Predecessors in Monastic Literature

Isaac was a monk who wrote for monks. Isaac was also an abbot and was doubtless well aware of Benedict's admonition that "(t)he abbot who is worthy of ruling a monastery ought always to remember what he is called; he should live up to the name of superior by his actions."⁴⁰² An abbot represents Christ in the monastery and ought to "be constantly mindful of the fact that his teaching and the obedience of his disciples, first the one and then the other, will eventually have to be examined in the terrible judgment of God."⁴⁰³

Isaac wrote, therefore, in a specific context without which it is difficult to engage his works fully and in the sense in which he intended to understand them. This context is fundamentally a monastic one and in this section I shall discuss Isaac's predecessors in monastic literature—the Desert Fathers and Cassian in particular—in order to provide a better understanding of the language and imagery he uses in his sermons. I shall address the following topics: 1. Monastic approaches to Scripture; 2. References to geographic and spatial locations in early monastic literature; and 3. Isaac's use of "exile" and other seemingly historical events in his sermons. In so doing I shall place Isaac in his context, not just as a monk writing for monks but also a monk as a part of a continuum, the roots of which extend back to the deserts of Egypt and the branches of which extended well beyond his monastic community at Stella.

⁴⁰² RB 2.1.

⁴⁰³ RB 2.2, 6.

2. Monastic Approaches to Scripture

From the earliest days of Christian monasticism, the prayer book *par excellence* has been Scripture, the Psalter especially. When Pachomius (ca. 290-346) wished to transform the group of ascetics that had gathered around him at Tabennesi in the Thebaid into a monastic κοινῶνια (ca. 320), he wrote a rule for them.⁴⁰⁴ Unlike the unlettered Antony, whom Athanasius describes in his *Life* as “so attentive to the reading of the Scripture lessons that nothing escaped him: he retained everything and so his memory served him in place of books,”⁴⁰⁵ Pachomius mandated a very rudimentary literacy for his monks in order that they may learn the Scriptures—or at the very least, a portion of them—by heart.⁴⁰⁶

Literacy was desired neither for its own sake nor for the purpose of scholarship, but for the sake of acquiring the text of Scripture through contemplation.⁴⁰⁷ A monk

⁴⁰⁴ Pachomius would likewise write a rule for the community he established at Pbou c. 326. See Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Monastic Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

⁴⁰⁵ *Vita Antonii* 3.7. SC 400: 138; ET: *ACW* 10: 21. A quite literate Antony, however, emerges in the letters ascribed to him. See Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁴⁰⁶ Pachomius’s special concern for the Psalter is evident in *Precepts* 139-40:

“Whoever enters the monastery uninstructed shall be taught first what he must observe; and when, so taught, he has consented to it all, they shall give him twenty psalms or two of the Apostle’s epistles, or some other part of the Scripture.

“And if he is illiterate, he shall go at the first, third, and sixth hours to someone who can teach and has been appointed for him. He shall stand before him and learn very studiously with all gratitude. Then the fundamentals of a syllable, the verbs, and nouns shall be written for him, and even if he does not want to, he shall be compelled to read.

“There shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read and does not memorize something of the Scriptures. [One should learn by heart] at least the New Testament and the Psalter.” ET: *Pachomian Koinonia* 2: 166.

⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, Palladius writes in *Historia Lausiaca* 32.12 that the Pachomian monks at Tabennesi “all learn the Holy Scriptures by heart” (*ACW* 34: 95). Horsiesios, Pachomius’s successor at Tabennesi, likewise insisted on a modicum of literacy: “Let us be wealthy in texts learned by heart. Let him who does not memorize much memorize at least ten sections along with a section of the psalter; and let him who does not recite at night recite ten psalms of five of them with a section of texts learned by heart.” *Regulations of Horsiesios* 16 (*Pachomian Koinonia* 2: 202).

read, according to Cassian, for “spiritual knowledge” (*scientia spiritualis*).⁴⁰⁸ And it is this acquisition of Scripture that would form the life of prayer of the monks. In the Desert Fathers this approach to the reading of Scripture is readily apparent. Abba Epiphanius, for example, says: “Reading the Scriptures is a great safeguard against sin.”⁴⁰⁹ “The *Sayings* speak often of the benefits of ruminating and meditating upon Scripture,” relates Douglas Burton-Christie.

These practices are described in the same general terms as the recitation of Scripture at the public or private *synaxis* and should not be too sharply distinguished from it. Such an approach to Scripture involved saying the words of a particular text, mulling them over in the mind, chewing on and slowly digesting the words. And it was a predominantly oral phenomenon.⁴¹⁰

This rumination or meditation (*meditatio*) on Scripture, following the tradition of the Desert Fathers, occupies a place of no little importance in the *Conferences*. Behind Cassian’s use of the term *meditatio* lay a long tradition going back well before the Desert Fathers.⁴¹¹ Cassian follows the Latin appropriation of the Greek term μελετη by translating it as *meditatio*.⁴¹² Μελετη means “attention” or “care” that is given to an activity,⁴¹³ and in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, an example of the tradition that

⁴⁰⁸ *Conference* 14.8-17. CSEL 13: 404-23; ET: *ACW* 57: 509-23.

⁴⁰⁹ Epiphanius 9. PG 65: 165B; ET: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Rev. ed.; CSS 59; Kalamazoo and Oxford: Cistercian Publications and Mowbray, 1984), 58.

⁴¹⁰ Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 122. See especially 107-33.

⁴¹¹ See Heinrich Bacht’s very helpful “‘Meditatio’ in den ältesten Mönchsquellen,” *Geist und Leben* 28 (1955): 360-73 as well as Burton-Christie, *Word*, 122-33.

⁴¹² Especially helpful as far as Cassian’s overall appropriation of Greek monastic terminology is Columba Stewart’s “From *Logos* to *Verbum*. John Cassian’s Use of Greek in the Development of a Latin Monastic Vocabulary,” in *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (CSS 160; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 5-31.

⁴¹³ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Rev. ed.), 1096; *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G.W.H. Lampe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 840-41; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian*

doubtless exerted a great influence on Cassian, μελετη-μελετάω takes on a technical sense, meaning both the recitation of texts as well as meditating on or contemplating them.

Reading Scripture—and, more important, reading Scripture *aloud*—was a crucial part of monastic praxis. It was, furthermore, a commonplace in the classical world.⁴¹⁴

Reading was an active, indeed, physical practice. “Cassian places biblical *meditatio* at the center of both his ascetical and contemplative agendas,” Columba Stewart writes.

He includes it among the basic practices of the monastic life such as fasting, vigils, and manual labor, for there is an ascetical boon in employing the mind constructively with biblical material. Vocalizing the text in *meditatio* was meant to fill body, heart, and mind with nourishing matter even as it blocked dangerous thoughts. Saying the text aloud was a key part of the exercise; by engaging body as well as mind in holy occupation, the intrusion of destructive thoughts was less likely.⁴¹⁵

A monastic approach to reading Scripture is, therefore, a multivalent one.

A monk reads Scripture not only as reportage or a presentation of historical facts.

Literature, ed. and trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 500.

⁴¹⁴ Augustine of Hippo (354-430) famously refers to Ambrose of Milan (ca. 340-97) reading silently and his surprise at observing this in *Confessions* 6.3.3: “When he read his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent.” *CCL* 27: 75; *ET: WSA* 1.1: 137. See also Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 15-7.

⁴¹⁵ Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 104. For the specific *orality* of Scripture, see William A. Graham’s very useful study, *Beyond the Written World: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 117-54. See also Bacht, “*Meditatio*,” 370. Walter J. Ong notes: “The condition of words in a text is quite different from their condition in spoken discourse. Although they refer to sounds and are meaningless unless they can be related—externally or in the imagination—to the sounds or, more precisely, the phonemes they encode, written words are isolated from the fuller context in which spoken words come into being. The word in its natural, oral habitat is a part of a real, existential present. Spoken utterance is addressed by a real, living person to another real, living person or real, living persons, at a specific time in a real setting which includes always much more than mere words. Spoken words are always modifications of a total situation which is more than verbal. They never occur alone, in a context simply of words.” Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 101.

It is not reading per se but rather a reading that is pursued in the spirit of meditation (*meditatio*).⁴¹⁶

Following Cassian's death ca. 435, his influence on the monks and monastic communities of southern Gaul continued, first of all on the small island of Lérins. Indeed, Cassian's close contact with Lérins is known not only by virtue of the close proximity of Marseilles, but also by what he himself elaborates in the *Conferences*. After all, it was to Honoratus and Eucherius—the former the founder and abbot of the monastery at Lérins and the latter a monk of the same monastery—that Cassian dedicated *Conferences* 11 through 17.⁴¹⁷ “Here was a monastery,” writes Peter King of Lérins, “in which Egyptian monasticism was most perfectly adapted to the conditions of Gaul,”⁴¹⁸ an adaptation doubtless through the contribution of Cassian.

It was Benedict, however, who would prove to exert the greatest influence on Western monasticism, but much of his own influence lay in the works of Cassian.⁴¹⁹

When Benedict wrote his *Regula* around 540 for the monks at Monte Cassino (a

⁴¹⁶ This is an important topic for Cassian, one that he expresses straightaway in the *Conferences*: “(T)he mind cannot be free from agitating thoughts during the trials of the present life, since it is spinning around in the torrents of the trials that overwhelm it from all sides. But whether these will be either refused or admitted into itself will be the result of its own zeal and diligence. For if, as we have said, we constantly return to meditating on Holy Scripture (*ad sanctorum scripturarum meditationem*) and raise our awareness to the recollection of spiritual realities and to the desire for perfection and the hope of future blessedness, it is inevitable that the spiritual thoughts which have arisen from this will cause the mind to dwell on the things that we have been meditating on.” *Conference* 1.18.2. CSEL 13: 27; ET: *ACW* 57: 57.

⁴¹⁷ *Preface* 2.1: “O holy brothers Honoratus and Eucherius.” CSEL 13: 311; ET: *ACW* 57: 399. See also *The Life of the Jura Fathers: The Life and Rule of the Holy Fathers Romanus, Lupicinus, and Eugendus, Abbots of the Monasteries of the Jura Mountains*, trans. Tim Vivian, et al. (CSS 178; Kalamazoo and Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1999), 38-9; Peter King, *Western Monasticism: A History of the Monastic Movement in the Latin Church* (CSS 185; Kalamazoo and Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1999), 47-8.

⁴¹⁸ King, *Western Monasticism*, 47.

⁴¹⁹ See RB 42.3 and 5 for Benedict's recommendation to read the *Conferences*. See also RB 73.5 for Benedict's recommendation to read the *Conferences* as well as the *Institutes*. For the Eastern Christian roots of Benedict and Cassian, as well as Western monasticism, see Placide Deseille, “Eastern Christian Sources of the Rule of Saint Benedict,” *Monastic Studies* 11 (1975): 73-122 and Vincent Desprez, “The Origins of Western Monasticism,” *American Benedictine Review* 41 (1990): 99-112, 167-91.

community he had founded ca. 529), he could not have imagined the enormous influence it was to have.⁴²⁰ The influence of the *Regula Benedicti* was not widespread until the ninth century, however, due to another Benedict. Nearly every monastery had its own rule, rather like the one Benedict himself drew up for Monte Cassino, which he doubtless never intended being used outside his community. When Benedict of Aniane (ca. 750-821) produced his *Codex Regularum monasticarum et canonicarum*, a collection of various monastic *regulae*, he understood the *Regula Benedicti* as not just one *regula* among many but also amended and systematized it and, in so doing, established it as the monastic *regula par excellence* for the West.

Benedict's approach to reading follows closely what we have seen thus far. Like Pachomius, Benedict assumed a basic level of literacy. The entire Psalter was recited every week⁴²¹ and reading occupied a monk's free time as well.⁴²² A text was quite literally learned by heart in this manner,⁴²³ reflecting Pachomius as well as (and certainly a more direct influence for Benedict) Cassian.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ "The greatest impact of Cassian on later tradition came through his influence on the emerging Latin monastic rules," Stewart observes. "Even more significant for the Middle Ages and beyond was Cassian's influence on the anonymous legislator known only as the Master and his wise heir, Benedict of Nursia." Stewart, *Cassian*, 25.

⁴²¹ "But whatever is done, be careful that the full number of 150 psalms is sung, and the cycle must begin anew at Vigils on Sunday. For those monks who sing less than the Psalter with its customary canticles in a week's time are sluggards (*nimis intertem*) in the performance of their devotion. Since we read that our holy fathers performed the whole Psalter with great labor in one day, let us at least do so in a whole week, despite our tepidity." RB 18.22-5.

⁴²² "The time that remains after Vigils should be used for the learning (*meditationi*) of psalms and lessons by those brothers who need to do so." RB 8.3.

⁴²³ Leclercq states that "in the Middle Ages the reader usually pronounced the words with his lips, at least in a low tone, and consequently he hears the sentence seen by the eyes." What results, Leclercq describes, "is a muscular memory of the words pronounced and an aural memory of the words heard. The *meditatio* consists in applying oneself with attention to this exercise in total memorization; it is, therefore, inseparable from the *lectio*. It is what inscribes, so to speak, the sacred text in the body and in the soul." Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 72-3.

⁴²⁴ See Terrence G. Kardong, "John Cassian's Evaluation of Monastic Practices," *The American Benedictine Review* 43 (1992): 82-105 and Adalbert de Vogüé, "Les deux fonctions de la méditation dans les Règles monastiques anciennes," *Revue de histoire de spiritualité* (1975): 3-16; "Les mentions des

3. Geographic and Spatial References

A complex and contemplative approach to Scripture—“a prayerful reading,” as Leclercq describes it⁴²⁵—was part and parcel of how monks read Scripture and one with which Isaac would have been thoroughly acquainted. The writings of monks—whether Eastern or Western, fifth- or twelfth-century—must be read with this approach in mind so as not to read into a text our own presuppositions or ask of a text a question that is neither relevant nor even in the mind of the author.

Monastic writers now and in centuries past write neither to obfuscate nor complicate. Rather, they seek to address issues that are above and beyond the physical and temporal; at the very least, such issues are not their primary interest. Consider yet again Cassian. In both the *Institutes* and *Conferences*, Cassian wanted to provide his readers with a practical account of the lives of the Egyptian monks about whom he wrote. “He was not, however, writing a gazetteer of Egyptian monasticism,” Stewart asserts, “and the goal of monastic instruction determined both the structure and the content of his writings. Details about landscape and people are primarily illustrative, included to lend both atmosphere and authority to his own synthesis of monastic theology.”⁴²⁶

Cassian’s primary intention, in other words, was theological and not geographical or historical. Not just in Cassian’s writings but in monastic writing in general the former is superior to the latter. Two examples will illustrate this and, more important, shed light on how we should interpret Isaac’s sermons and the seemingly historical and

Oeuvres de Cassian chez saint Benoît,” *Studia Monastica* 20 (1978): 275-285; “Psalmodie et prière. Remarques sur l’office de saint Benoît,” *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 44 (1982): 274-292.

⁴²⁵ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 73.

⁴²⁶ Stewart, *Cassian*, 7. “When one moves from incidental remarks about Egypt to the narrative level,” Stewart continues, “Cassian’s theological intentions predominate: for him, history is in the details, and the bigger picture is theological.” Ibid.

geographical references he makes therein. The first has to do with the geography of early Christian and in particular Egyptian monasticism. James E. Goehring's collection of essays, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism*, focuses on the variety of ascetic movements in Egypt during the late-third through fourth centuries.⁴²⁷ Goehring has discovered that Egyptian monasticism was not a desert phenomenon. Using leases, tax receipts, sales contracts, correspondence, and other non-monastic sources, Goehring argues that there were numerous ascetics living in inhabited areas and that village monasticism in particular was much more common than has been assumed.

Goehring's essay, "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt," is especially useful for my purposes since he demonstrates that the common narrative of Egyptian monasticism is fundamentally flawed.⁴²⁸ The documentary papyri show that ascetics lived in towns and villages and interacted with their neighbors. More important, Goehring describes the role of *vitae* and later hagiographical accounts of Egyptian monasticism in shaping the common understanding of the desert as the *locus par excellence* of ascetic struggle.

To begin with, Goehring calls attention to the earlier pre-Christian dichotomy between the desert and the city. "The city, the product of human achievement and the *locus* of human habitation, has become symbolically the center of evil," he writes. "Truth has left the city, and presumably only falsehood remains. Truth now resides alone

⁴²⁷ Goehring, James E. *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999).

⁴²⁸ Goehring, "Encroaching Desert," 73-88.

in the desert.”⁴²⁹ The dichotomy was therefore symbolic or rhetorical rather than spatial.⁴³⁰

For early Christian monastic literature the literary or metaphorical juxtaposition of desert and city was an irresistible but not necessarily a literal one. However much references to the desert did not reflect historical reality, they did serve an important purpose. “By connecting the common metaphorical use of the desert/city dichotomy with earlier monastic views of withdrawal,” Goehring argues, “the image necessary for literary production was forged.”⁴³¹

When village asceticism did move to the desert, it inspired the hagiographical accounts that became well known to a wider Christian audience. The less exotic varieties of village monasticism never attained such notoriety or received comparable attention. But village monasticism remained a vital element in the Egyptian monastic *milieu*.⁴³²

The literary device of the desert became a powerful one and exerted a tremendous influence on subsequent monastic literature. But it began as just that: a literary device

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁴³⁰ “Alongside the metaphorical connection of the city with falsehood and the desert with truth appears the earlier and seemingly opposite view that associates the areas of human habitation with life and the desert with death. The importance of this latter image in early monastic literature indicates that its authors did not simply equate the truth of the desert with the absence of evil. Its truth lay rather in the clarity it offered the monk on the reality and nature of evil. The battle against evil was a battle against the demonic, and in the desert the demons had fewer places to hide. If ascetic life in the desert made the struggle with evil easier, it did so only in the sense that it made it more direct. In the desert, there was less to distract the monk from the fight and fewer ways for the enemy to confuse him.” Ibid., 75.

⁴³¹ “In the accounts of early Egyptian monasticism,” Goehring continues, “the metaphorical use of city and desert has interacted with the concepts of withdrawal (*αναχωρησις*) and renunciation (*αποταξις*) in such a way as to impart to these terms a distinct spatial dimension alongside their more original legal or ethical meaning. Christian renunciation of or withdrawal from traditional societal expectations (family, sex, property, business, etc.), which initially could occur within the home, the village, or the city, became in the literary sources of early Egyptian monasticism demands for physical separation from the society at large. Withdrawal to the desert or enclosure behind monastery walls became, in this literature, the visible expression of the ethical, ascetical stance.” Ibid., 77.

⁴³² Note Goehring’s remark: “The term *desert* itself thus represents a continuum of possible ascetic locations defined in terms of distance from the settled social world of Egyptian society; while it is always inarable land, it need not be land beyond the fertile zone. Its meaning in monastic literature has as much or more to do with the concept of withdrawal from the space traditionally occupied by civilization as it does with any precise definition based on annual precipitation.” Ibid., 81.

and not the record of historical reality. “Only when ascetic practices began to express renunciation spatially did literary production ensue, because only then was the necessary ‘literary metaphor’ at hand,” Goehring writes. “The act of individuals withdrawing to the desert found harmonic response in the city-desert metaphor already established in the literary world.”⁴³³

A “literary metaphor” but not something that necessarily conforms to historical reality. The latter was not, however, of great concern to the early writers who produced some of the earliest works of Christian monasticism. Their interests were not primarily in recording a history but rather a theology of monasticism.⁴³⁴

Isaac undoubtedly would have been familiar with some of this monastic literature; his audience as well. Historical reality, therefore, was neither expected nor sought, at least not primarily. What was expected, however, was a theology of monasticism, a theology rooted in Scripture and experience, both of which Isaac provided for his hearers as we shall see.

⁴³³ Ibid., 86. Goehring also notes a fascinating reversal that occurred at this time, one that would be taken by many later historians as historical fact: “The [monastic] literature’s dependence on the desert, however, caused a ‘literary’ reversal of sorts in the expansion process. Whereas the location of ascetic practice had expanded to include the desert, in the literary model, the desert encroached more and more on the portrayal of ascetic space. A literary ‘desertification’ of Egyptian monasticism occurred. While monks in and near the cities and villages continued to thrive, they all but disappeared from the plane of history. The desert hermit became the symbolic center of Egyptian monasticism. The literary icon conquered history.” Ibid., 88. This is redolent of Peter Brown’s comment that “(t)he myth of the desert was one of the most abiding creations of late antiquity. It was, above all, a myth of liberating precision.” Brown continues: “It delimited the towering presence of ‘the world,’ from which the Christian must be set free, by emphasizing a clear ecological frontier. It identified the process of disengagement from the world with a move from one ecological zone to another, from the settled land of Egypt to the desert. It was a brutally clear boundary, already heavy with immemorial associations.” Peter R. L. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Lectures on the History of Religions 2/13; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 216; see also 256-7.

⁴³⁴ “Of interest to the modern historian, historical reality is not the version of Egyptian monasticism which forms the movement’s ascetic heroes. The latter are rather the product of a monastic literature which captures the reader’s interest through the simplicity and power of its myth.” Goehring, *Ascetics*, 85. “Only when ascetic practices began to express renunciation spatially did literary production ensue,” Goehring continues, “because only then was the necessary ‘literary metaphor’ at hand. The act of individuals withdrawing to the desert found harmonic response in the city-desert metaphor already established in the literary world.” Ibid., 86.

In “Understanding Cassian: A Survey of the Conferences,”⁴³⁵ Adalbert de Vogüé focuses on neither the conceptual nor doctrinal framework of the *Conferences* but rather the structure itself.⁴³⁶ Like Goehring, Vogüé argues that historical reality was not Cassian’s primary concern but rather theology. “(T)his quasi-exclusive interest in the thematic content, at the expense of the literary container, limits the understanding of the doctrine itself,” he avers.

The composition of the different themes within Cassian’s works has its importance, just as do the themes themselves. Certainly it is profitable to isolate these themes to scrutinize them more deeply, or to organize them into a system which satisfies our logical needs. But when that has been done, we still have to ask ourselves just why Cassian did not treat them separately and did not assemble them in our way, but connected them in his own way so as to constitute the volumes called the *Institutions* and the *Conferences*.⁴³⁷

Cassian offers the *Conferences* as a record of discussions Germanus and he had with 10 ascetics around Scetis and the Nile Delta. Vogüé asks: “(I)s not the order of the *Conferences* purely historical, that is, fortuitous? Does not Cassian give us these interviews in their chronological sequence, each of them simply occurring in their place in time...?”⁴³⁸ Ostensibly, but Vogüé discerns Cassian’s larger and decidedly theological intention for the *Conferences*. Cassian’s intention is to provide a theology of monasticism in a didactic or pedagogical way:

⁴³⁵ Adalbert de Vogüé, “Understanding Cassian: A Survey of the Conferences,” *CSQ* 19 (1984): 101-121. N.b.: This is John-Baptist Hasbrouck’s ET of “Pour comprendre Cassien: Un survol des Conférences,” *Collectanea cisterciensia* 39 (1979): 250-72.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 101-2.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

On the whole, Cassian's indications about time leave room, expressly or tacitly, for a certain effort of composition. Even if we suppose that his *Conferences* report quite faithfully the interviews with the Fathers mentioned—and sometimes there is reason to doubt this—he himself says in one instance and permits us to think in others that these accounts are arranged, at least in part, in a non-chronological order... The scenario of the meetings of Cassian and Germanus with the old men, the apparently fortuitous circumstances which provoke the questions, the seemingly episodic titles of some *Conferences*—none of all this should conceal from us the unity of design pursued by our author and the method by which he realizes it.⁴³⁹

The *Conferences*, in other words, were neither gazetteer nor reportage but rather history in the service of theology. This is an approach shared by Isaac, who was undoubtedly familiar with Cassian and whose sermons in particular evince a similar complex approach toward historical reality.

4. Isaac's Sermons

a. Isaac on Allegory

At the outset I must mention Isaac's use of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture in his sermons.⁴⁴⁰ Isaac's preference for allegory is manifest. At the end of

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103-4. "Cassian's historical intention was to describe his own experiences as a young monk living in Palestine and Egypt," Stewart writes. "He writes about places he visited and people he met, informing his readers about monastic structures and practices. These 'historical' elements create the framework for his writings. Although he was writing neither travelogue nor history, he grounded his teaching in a tradition he sought to present faithfully even as he adapted and developed it... Therefore, although the great Egyptian monks to whom Cassian attributes the *Conferences* were historical figures, he uses them and the literary structure he creates for them as a monastic allegory designed to lead his readers to true doctrine and traditional monasticism." Stewart, *Cassian*, 27-8. Burton-Christie similarly notes that Cassian was not writing history *per se* when he states (citing Louis Bouyer) that the *Conferences* are "a later systematization" of the *Apophthegmata*. Burton-Christie, *Word*, 94.

⁴⁴⁰ Henri de Lubac's *Medieval Exegesis*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Ressourcement; Grand Rapids, Mich., and Edinburgh: Eerdmans and T. & T., 1998-2009. 3 vols.), remains invaluable for the history of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation. For the Middle Ages in particular, Beryl Smalley's *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (3d ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) remains useful. See also Wanda Cizewski, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 1980 ed., 2: 223-4.

Sermon 11, Isaac tells the monks: “However, brothers, I see that I have not quite satisfied your desires.”

You very much prefer that the moral sense be explained, so that you may be built up on the foundation on which you rest. Be sure that I shall, as far as may be given to me, try to comply with your wishes, although I admit my own preference is for the delight I find in the allegorical sense.⁴⁴¹

Similarly in *Sermon 9*, where Isaac treats the wedding at Cana (John 2), he tells his monks: “As I think about this wedding, brothers, I confess I am delighted not as much by the great and outward miracle as by the inner meaning of the mystery. That [i.e., former] builds up one’s faith, the latter does something even greater. While the first is a sign for unbelievers, the other has a mysterious message for believers. Both help our spiritual life and delight us, each is great, each is divine.”⁴⁴²

In *Sermons 14 and 15*, a pair of sermons on the storm at sea in Matt 8, Isaac’s allegorical approach is abundantly clear. Isaac’s main concern in *Sermon 14* is *acedia* (Greek: ακηδεια), the spiritual listlessness or torpor which Cassian describes in *Institutes 10* as the “distress of heart” (*anxietatem cordis*).⁴⁴³ According to Isaac, Christ slept in order to awaken the disciples “whose hearts were asleep.” Christ taught them “how perilous it was for them if they should allow their Master to be still, to be inactive, to

⁴⁴¹ *Sed video, fraters, exspectationi vestrae non satisfacisse me, qui moralem sensum, quo supraedificemini fundamento, in quo positi estis, avidius bibitis. Geremus ergo vobis, pro facultate nobis indulta, morem, sed fateor, contra nostrum morem, quem utique mysteria magis delectant. Sermon 11.16. SC 130: 248; PL 194: 1729C-D.*

⁴⁴² *Sermon 9.1. Cogitantem me, fraters, de his nuptiis, fateor, magis delectate interius mysterium, quam exterius tem magnum miraculum. Istud enim fidem aedificat, illud supraedificat. Istud infidelibus signum, illud fidelibus sacramentum. Utrumque tamen utile, utrumque delectabile, utrumque magnum, utrumque divinum. SC 130: 204; PL 194: 1719B-C.*

⁴⁴³ *Institutes 10.1. SC 109: 384.*

sleep.”⁴⁴⁴ Isaac opposes leisure and laziness--“Wisdom is learned at leisure, but not by the lazy”⁴⁴⁵--and from these refers to Mary and Martha: “Martha labored, Mary was still but not inactive.”⁴⁴⁶ It was their brother, Lazarus, who was “idle and listless within” and “rush(ed) from inactivity to death, and from death to corruption.”⁴⁴⁷ Many fail at being active like Martha and devoted like Mary: they suffer from, according to Isaac, “the weariness of sloth.”⁴⁴⁸

Christ, Isaac relates, “allowed himself to fall asleep for the benefit of the sickly apostles or whom they signify, so that at least in their peril they might wake him.”⁴⁴⁹ Christ sleeps to show the inner state of the disciples: “Their inner state was shown by his outward state.”⁴⁵⁰ “Sleeping,” Isaac offers to his monks, “he condemns by the word of the tempest that spiritual sloth which is followed by such confusion of mind as makes it a sort of interior and intolerable storm.”⁴⁵¹ By being awake and calm, however, Christ demonstrates “the need for vigilance and spiritual eagerness.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁴ Sermon 14.1. *Quod, dilectissimi, nisi corpore dormiens, operatus est Dominus, unde discipulos quasi corde dormientes excitaret? Dormiens enim operata est virtus, producens ventos de thesauris suis, et omnino silens et dormiens locutum est Verbum, docens periculosum discipulis fore, se magistrum silere, torpere, dormire siverint.* SC 130: 270; PL 194: 1735A.

⁴⁴⁵ Sermon 14.1. *Sapientia quidem in otio, sed non in otiositate discitur.* SC 130: 270; PL 194: 1735B.

⁴⁴⁶ Sermon 14.2. *Laborabat Martha, vacabat Maria, non languebat.* SC 130: 270; PL 194: 1735B.

⁴⁴⁷ Sermon 14.2. *Lazarus vero languebat, de languore mortem, de morte fetorem incurrens. O quanti hodie ab utilitate operas foris quieti, intus desides et acediosi.* SC 130: 270; PL 194: 1735B.

⁴⁴⁸ Sermon 14.2. *...desidia languorem incurrerunt.* SC 130: 270; PL 194: 1735B.

⁴⁴⁹ Sermon 14.3. *Et sicut ibi languentem sinit Dominus in mortem venire, ut inde suscitaretur, ita et hic quasi languentibus, vel tales significantibus apostolis voluit ipse dormire, ut a periclitantibus saltem excitaretur.* SC 130: 272; PL 194: 1735C.

⁴⁵⁰ Sermon 14.3. *Quod intus errant, foris eis ostendit.* SC 130: 272; PL 194: 1735C.

⁴⁵¹ Sermon 14.4. *Dormiens quippe tempestatis verbo detestatur acediam, quam fluctuatio cogitationum sequitur, quasi interna quaedam et intolerabilis procella.* SC 130: 272; PL 194: 1735D.

⁴⁵² Sermon 14.4. *...qui excitatus et vigilans mentis vigilantiam et fervorem spiritus tranquillitatis sermone commendat.* SC 130: 272; PL 194: 1735D.

Isaac complains about monks nodding off and sleeping in the chapter house⁴⁵³ and uses this to press home his point concerning the importance of remaining awake and vigilant. “If you keep from sleeping,” Isaac reports, “(Christ) will always watch over you.”⁴⁵⁴ The monastic triumvirate of reading, meditation and prayer is crucial in the struggle to remain vigilant as Isaac describes. “There are three,” he offers to his monks, “reading, meditation and prayer. By reading or preaching, and that [i.e., the latter] is a kind of reading, God speaks to you.”⁴⁵⁵

Continuing the sleep imagery, Isaac urges his monks to keep awake and guard against *acedia*. He focuses on the deceptiveness of *acedia*: some monks think they have overcome passions and need no longer face them. Others—less advanced (*imperfectioribus*)—think that since their basic needs are met they are secure:

Let us stay awake, brothers, and guard against the plague of spiritual listlessness (*acediae pestem*), that often comes from immature confidence and infects those who have made progress. They tell themselves that, having overcome all bad tendencies, they may lie down to rest in security, with nothing to frighten them; for the less advanced, the fact that their bodily needs are taken care of leaves them nothing more to do.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵³ *Sermon 14.6.* “Where is the excuse of those who sleep over their books in the cloister, or who snore during readings in chapel, or who sleep during the preaching of sermons in the chapter house?” *Ubi sunt, qui super libros suos in claustris conquiniscunt, ad lectiones in oratoriis stertunt, vel ad vivam vocem sermonum in capitulis dormiunt?* SC 130: 274; PL 194: 1736A-B.

⁴⁵⁴ *Sermon 14.6.* *Enimvero nisi illi dormire prius coeperis, semper tibi pervigil erit.* SC 130: 274; PL 194: 1736A.

⁴⁵⁵ *Sermon 14.7.* *Tria sunt, lectio, meditatio et oratio. Lectione vel sermone, qui et ipse quaedam lectio est, loquitur tibi Deus.* SC 130: 274; PL 194: 1736B. Isaac goes on to state that undoubtedly “reading, meditation and prayer are the entire exercise of the spiritual mind” (*lectione, meditatione, oratione, omnis est exercitatio dumtaxat sensus spiritualis*). SC 130: 274, 276; PL 194: 1736C.

⁴⁵⁶ *Sermon 14.10.* *Vigilemus itaque, fratres, et plurimum contra acediae pestem, quam immature securitas parere solet, et in perfectioribus quidem bonae conscientiae quasi iam vitii abactis secure accubent, cum non sit qui extereat; in imperfectioribus vero corporalium necessitudinum, utpote quibus, aliis cuncta providentibus, de facili omnia constant.* SC 130: 276; PL 194: 1736D.

This is why the Fathers advocated poverty both in reality and spirit—“in property and spirit,” as Isaac says⁴⁵⁷—in order that the monks remain humble. The very location of the monastery itself, Isaac relates, contributes to the practice of humility as well: “Therefore, dearest friends, you have the reason why we led you into this distant, arid and rough wilderness. Here you can be as humble as possible and cannot be wealthy.”⁴⁵⁸

Here in the “desert” where Isaac has led his monks one could also seek solitude and silence in which to be with God: “solitude upon solitude, silence upon silence. We are more and more forced to silence among ourselves, but only that we may converse all the more freely and familiarly with you alone.”⁴⁵⁹ In their “exile” (*exsilium*) there is time for prayer, meditation and reading but also the necessity of work.⁴⁶⁰ Most important, as Isaac reports, the monks are to steel themselves and remain vigilant, remaining “vigilant to (Christ), that (Christ) would not sleep to you.”⁴⁶¹

Isaac concludes *Sermon 14* by begging to be rescued from the storm that surrounds him (an allusion to Psalm 54).⁴⁶² He also calls his monks to obey Christ, to remain vigilant and “obey him who lives and rule.”⁴⁶³ This call to obedience, so crucial to Isaac, is fundamental to his interpretation of the text, since one is obedient to Christ by remaining awake and vigilant.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁷ *Sermon 14.10. ...id est paupertatem census et spiritus...* SC 130: 276; PL 194: 1736D-1737A.

⁴⁵⁸ *Sermon 14.11. Eapropter, dilectissimi, et vos in hanc semotam, aridam, et squalentem induximus solitudinem. Callide quidem, ubi humiles esse potestis, divites non potestis.* SC 130: 276; PL 194: 1737A.

⁴⁵⁹ *Sermon 14.12. Superaccrevit etiam, Domine, super solitudinem solitudo, silentium super silentium. Nam et tibi soli disertiores et assuetiores simus, a nobis invicem silere cogimur et cogimur.* SC 130: 278; PL 194: 1737B.

⁴⁶⁰ *Sermon 14.13.* SC 130: 278; PL 194: 1737B-C.

⁴⁶¹ *Sermon 14.14. Vigilate illi, ne vobis dormiat ille.* SC 130: 278; PL 194: 1737C.

⁴⁶² *Sermon 14.16.* SC 130: 280; PL 194: 1737D.

⁴⁶³ *Sermon 14.16. Quod procul dubio, fratres, et nobis et vobis fiet, si obedierimus ei qui vivit et regnat. Amen.* SC 130: 280; PL 194: 1738A.

⁴⁶⁴ See *Sermon 14.14.*

Isaac continues his allegorical commentary on the storm at sea (Matt 8) in *Sermon* 15. At the outset, he again describes his preference for and the importance of allegory. “Let us draw from outer sights a lesson for the inner life,” he tells his monks.⁴⁶⁵ Given the maritime theme of his text, Isaac continues to use seafaring and shipwreck imagery. Isaac states that “coming into a corruptible body means coming into death” and that we are “shipwrecked upon being born.”⁴⁶⁶

Isaac twice refers to the remoteness of the monastery⁴⁶⁷ as being part and parcel of the crosses borne by the monks as well as himself. The remoteness to which Isaac refers, therefore, ought not to be taken literally or as historical data since Isaac’s point is to emphasize his teaching on the monastic life. This is clear when Isaac interprets the meaning of Christ falling asleep on the boat. Christ’s sleeping on the boat is a symbol of death on the Cross: “To sleep in the boat is to die on the cross.”⁴⁶⁸

The death of Christ, however, is likewise not just an historical datum. Isaac interprets Christ’s Passion and death as establishing the monastic life. Ascetic struggle, Isaac tells his monks, is part and parcel of sharing Christ’s suffering: “It must be that all the members should suffer with their Head when he suffers; yes, that the entire Christ should suffer, be made perfect through suffering and thus enter into his glory.”⁴⁶⁹

This is why Isaac can speak of the life of the disciple of Christ and in particular that of a monk as being one of co-crucifixion with Christ. “If persecution from others be

⁴⁶⁵ *Sermon* 15.1. (*E*)*xteriora visa ad interiorem eruditionem trahamus*. SC 130: 282; PL 194: 1738B.

⁴⁶⁶ *Sermon* 15.2. *Unde ex quo venimus in carnem hand corruptibilem, utique venimus in mortem...non prius nati quam naufragi*. SC 130: 284; PL 194: 1738B-C. See also Isaac’s use of maritime imagery in Psalm 68 in *Sermon* 15.3.

⁴⁶⁷ In *Sermon* 15.7, Isaac speaks of the *abditam eremum* (SC 130: 286; PL 194: 1739B) and in 15.12 he refers to the *remotae solitudinis* (SC 130: 290; PL 194: 1740A).

⁴⁶⁸ *Sermon* 15.8. *Dormire quippe in navi, in cruce est mori*. SC 130: 288; PL 194: 1739C.

⁴⁶⁹ *Sermon* 15.10. *Necesse est omnino omnia membra compati, ubi patitur caput; totumque Christum pati, et passione consummari, et sic introire in gloriam suam*. SC 130: 288; PL 194: 1739D.

lacking,” Isaac states, “the outer self of Jesus’ disciples is to be ‘crucified with all its vices and desires,’ [Gal 5:24] while the inner self must hang with Jesus on the pillory of obedience; as a humble disciple should be able in everything to address his spiritual father with the words, ‘Abba, father, not what I wish, but what you will’ [Mark 14:36].”⁴⁷⁰ Or as Isaac puts it bluntly when speaking of obedience: “I pray, what is this dependence on the will of another but for Christ’s love to be nailed, to be crucified with Christ?”⁴⁷¹

Indeed, Isaac is adamant that the monk’s obedience is to follow nothing other than Christ’s obedience to the Father. Isaac is adamant as well that Christ’s obedience was motivated by nothing other than love, even when such obedience led Christ to condemn the scribes and Pharisees. As Isaac avers in *Sermon 8*: “Thus the spirit of fortitude gave him such love for justice, that for its sake, though it cost him his life he spoke out, he made no exceptions, he pronounced repeatedly: ‘Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, and to you, lawyers, woe!’”⁴⁷² Christ is, therefore, the example *par excellence* of obedience motivated by love, a love that can cost one one’s own life and, as Isaac explains, a proof of a love of which there is no greater.

Isaac again stresses the importance of reading, meditation and prayer as important tools in the monastic arsenal. “Reading, meditation or prayer” rouses Christ from sleeping in our regard, especially when monks face typical temptations: “sickness,

⁴⁷⁰ *Sermon 15.6. Et si desit externus persecutor, crucifigendus est a discipulis Iesu homo suus exterior cum vitiis et concupiscentiis; interior quoque patibulo obedientiae Iesu configendus, ut in omnibus omnino dicat patri spirituali humilis discipulus: Abba pater, non quod ego volo, sed quod tu vis.* SC 130: 286; PL 194: 1739A-B.

⁴⁷¹ *Sermon 15.7. Quid est hoc, obsecro, nisi quibusdam obedientiae clavis alienae iussionis rigori affigi pro Christo, crucifigi cum Christo?* SC 130: 288; PL 194: 1739B.

⁴⁷² *Sermon 8.15. Ita spiritu fortitudinis amans iustitiam, ut propter eam usque ad mortem nemini tacendo parceret, sicut saepius repetit: Vae vobis, Scribae et Phariseae, et vobis, legisperiti, vae!* SC 130: 202; PL 194: 1719A.

poverty, hard training, or prolonged dwelling, be it the frustration that results from the remoteness of the monastery and its profound silence.”⁴⁷³ This is so since the monastic practice of reading, meditation and prayer—of reading Scripture above all—seeks to provide the monk, as we have seen, with an *ingressus* or way of entering the biblical world and understanding his own surroundings and experience on the basis of Scripture.

This reading of Scripture patterns the monk’s world and practice. The pattern *par excellence*, as Isaac again asserts, is Christ himself. Christ is our pattern as well as our power to obtain victory in struggle, “not only the pattern in the fight, but also the courage to victory.”⁴⁷⁴ Since Christ is the “supreme pattern” (*formam praetendit*), Isaac encourages his monks to press on and continue their struggle, assuring them that they are partners in Christ’s sufferings as well as his glory.⁴⁷⁵

Lubac observes that while Isaac at times treats *mysterium* and *tropology* together, “when he distinguishes them, his preference is manifest: he does what he can, he says, to meet the expectations of his religious, who always avidly drink up the moral sense, but this is under compulsion; for himself, he pays attention above all to the mystery; it is the contemplation of the mystery which delights him above all.”⁴⁷⁶ In *Sermon* 16, for example, Isaac discusses that his “purpose is not to explain the readings from the holy

⁴⁷³ *Sermon* 15.12. *Ideo fratres, quoties tentatio vos apprehendit, sive infirmitatis, sive paupertatis, sive durioris disciplinae, aut prolongatoris incolatus, taedii etiam tam remotae solitudinis, et profundi silentii, sive cuiuscumque generis, quae prorsus innumerabilia sunt, legendo, meditando, orando, excitemus nobis Christum dormientem.* SC 130: 290; PL 194: 1740A-B.

⁴⁷⁴ *Sermon* 15.13. *(N)on solam formam ad pugnam, sed et virtutem ad victoriam.* SC 130: 290; PL 194: 1740B.

⁴⁷⁵ *Sermon* 15.15. SC 130: 292; PL 194: 1740D.

⁴⁷⁶ Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* 2:158.

Gospels as it is to take the opportunity they offer to say something toward the edification of the brothers and of ourselves.”⁴⁷⁷

b. Circumstantial Details

Isaac often refers to circumstantial details in his sermons, those incidental or quotidian bits of information that seem to provide little more than an aside in the midst of his preaching. References to the monks’ labor,⁴⁷⁸ the lateness of the day in which Isaac preaches⁴⁷⁹ as well as certain monks who have nodded off in the course of the sermon or liturgy dot Isaac’s sermons.⁴⁸⁰ But Isaac often intends more than providing a charming digression or *Sitz im Leben* when he refers to the setting or time of day in which he preaches. “When Isaac mentions contemporary events or incidental details of the setting in which the sermons is given,” Dietz writes, “there is usually a close connection between that information and the message of the sermon.”⁴⁸¹

Isaac frequently refers to how he has endeavored to situate his preaching during a pause in the day’s work so as not to interfere with the monks’ labor. At the end of *Sermon 9*, for example, Isaac refers to the length of his sermon and that “the hour is now so late that only with difficulty shall we be able to fulfill the morning’s allotted work.”⁴⁸² Note, however, Isaac’s comment at the conclusion of *Sermon 7*:

⁴⁷⁷ *Sermon 16.5. Non enim sancti Evangelii lectiones tam suscipimus exponere quam accepta abinde occasione ad aedificationem fratrum, et nostrum.* SC 130: 296; PL 194: 1741D.

⁴⁷⁸ *Sermon 8.1; 9.20; 11.16-7; 19.24; 23.20; 25.10.*

⁴⁷⁹ *Sermon 16.15; 24.23.*

⁴⁸⁰ *Sermon 14.6.*

⁴⁸¹ Dietz, “Exile,” 153.

⁴⁸² *Sermon 9.20. Sed dum detinuimus sermone diem, hora fere praeteriit, ut sine difficultate pensum matutini laboris iam solvere non possimus.* SC 130: 218-20; PL 194: 1723A.

Now, most beloved ones, we must leave off these words and finish what remains of today's work. Perhaps there we may find Jesus. For you remember that Sara, finding Isaac, found laughter in the open. May it be given us to find, inside and outside, the same one (i.e., Christ), very joy, thanks to him who lives and reigns as God. Amen.⁴⁸³

Here Isaac is summarizing the theme of this sermon rather than referring to Stella's daily schedule. Note, for example, Isaac's repeated references to "finding" Christ⁴⁸⁴ in connection with the text (that of finding Christ in the Temple, i.e., Luke 2:42) as well as the importance of continually searching for Jesus: "Nevertheless you will turn back from your evil way, where you walked without Jesus, if your conversion does not become a search. For the joy of finding him is obtained by carefully searching for him."⁴⁸⁵

Isaac likewise begins *Sermon 24* by stating: "And so, very tired with our striving to win a seedling from the earth, let us rest a little under the shade and turn inward to the great effort of threshing, grinding, mixing, baking, and eating the seed of the divine Word, lest we grow hungry and tired."⁴⁸⁶ McGinn, and I think rightly, understands this as "a highly sophisticated allusion to Virgil's First Eclogue ('tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi,' *Ecl.* I, I)."⁴⁸⁷ In any case, accepting Bouyer's suggesting that Isaac here is

⁴⁸³ *Sermon 7.17. Sed nobis hic, dilectissimi, silendum est, ut ad modicum quod restat diurni surgamus. Fortassis et ibi invenietur Iesus. Nam et foris a Sara repertus est Isaac, id est risus, quem nobis et intus et foris praestet invenire, ipse qui vivit et regnat Deus. Amen.* SC 130: 190; PL 194: 1716A. Although Hoste follows Migne in having Sara rather than Rebekah, Isaac apparently refers to Gen 24:62-4.

⁴⁸⁴ *Sermon 7.6, 7, 15.*

⁴⁸⁵ *Sermon 7.17. Frustra tamen reverteris a via tua mala, ubi sine Iesu ambulabas, si non converses quaeris. Nam diligentia inquisitionis laetitiam meretur inventionis.* SC 130: 190; PL 194: 1715D-1716A.

⁴⁸⁶ *Sermon 24.1. Itaque ob terrenum semen nimis fatigati, sub patulae, quam prope cernitis, ilicis tegmine paulisper reclinemus, ubi etiam non sine interno quodam sudore divini nobis Verbi semen excutiamus, molamus, conspergamus, coquamus, edamus, ne ieiuni et fatigati deficiamus.* SC 207: 98; PL 194: 1768D-1769A.

⁴⁸⁷ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 28n.121. ET: "You, Tityrus, lie under your spreading beech's covert, wooing the woodland Muse on slender reed, but we are leaving our country's bounds and sweet fields." Virgil, *Ecl.* 1.1 (Fairclough, LCL).

providing an indication of local color seems to overlook the sophistication of Isaac's use of literary devices in his sermons.⁴⁸⁸

c. Historical Details

Considering how Isaac revealed very little about himself in his works, it follows that he provides little information concerning contemporary events or people. Historical details, however, are not altogether lacking. In the *De officio missae* to Bellesmains, for example, Isaac ends with a complaint about a vengeful neighbor, Hugh of Chavigny, who apparently forced his way into the community during Isaac's absence.⁴⁸⁹ Likewise in the *Epistola de anima* to Alcher, Isaac ends with references to hardships such as plague and famine.⁴⁹⁰

When we turn to Isaac's sermons themselves, we discover only a paucity of historical information. While scholars and historians in particular may find this maddening, it is in keeping with the genre of medieval monastic sermon as well as Isaac's responsibilities as an abbot. "The twelfth-century monastic sermon generally deals with themes relevant to monastic life and theology," Kienzle remarks, "hence it is primarily inward-looking and experiential, that is, directed to life within the monastery

⁴⁸⁸ Bouyer, *Cistercian Heritage*, 167-8.

⁴⁸⁹ *De officio missae*. "(H)e injured some of the community and heaped up in my absence many threats and dishonorable insults. He seized eight oxen and, I suppose, already sold them; and still fights in the same way. Above the roofs he states he will take vengeance on me for everything the English have done." (*De familia quosdam...injuriam...personam absentem contumeliis, et minas multas et inhonestas. De bobus octo rapuit, et, ut putamus, jam vendidit; et adhuc manus ejus extenta. Super tecta jam loquitur quod in me de omnibus Anglis ulciscetur.* PL 194: 1896B.

⁴⁹⁰ *Epistola de anima*. "For this year upon our territories the evils of pestilence and famine have arrived, such as no previous generation, it is believed, has seen." *Venerunt enim hoc anno super regiones nostras mala pestilentiae et famis, qualia omnia retro saecula, ut putatur, non viderunt.* PL 194: 1889D-1890A.

and to the monks' inner spiritual progress."⁴⁹¹ While writing about Middle English sermons, H. L. Spencer's comments are *à propos*:

(P)reachers are rarely topical. That which is of the moment is only momentary. It is worth saying again, as this study and others in this collection have emphasised, that a historian must interpret what appear in sermons to be allusions to the contemporary scene with great care...(A)lthough the sermons are a product of special historical circumstances which are accessible to historians to study, perhaps their most valuable lesson is to remind historians that writers' beliefs about their times, however much the product of historical mythologising, are themselves a part of history.⁴⁹²

Isaac does not refrain completely, however, from referring to certain events of his day. He criticizes certain preachers who "preach themselves, eager to make a name for themselves when speaking of Jesus" in *Sermon* 18.⁴⁹³ In *Sermons* 37 and 48, Isaac criticizes monasteries involved in property disputes.⁴⁹⁴ Isaac refers to "destroyers of truth" in *Sermon* 48, presumably an heretical group that distorts Scripture and the writings of the Fathers.⁴⁹⁵ Again, as we saw with Isaac's remarks concerning obedience, we must first prove ourselves worthy by our behavior before presuming to preach, teach

⁴⁹¹ Kienzle, *The Sermon*, 306.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 634, 635-6. Kienzle continues: "The monastic sermon was (and is) generally inward-looking, that is directed to life within the monastery and to the monk's spiritual progress. The extant texts provide a guide to monastic spirituality and theology and a glimpse of problems with the observance of the *Rule*. Seldom in the surviving sermons does the monastic preacher direct comments to life in the outside world...The sermons of Hélinand of Froidmont are exceptional for their concern with contemporary problems and seem to reflect in part the movement from the contemplative spirituality of the Cistercians to the active life of the friars." *Ibid.*, 271-2.

⁴⁹³ *Sermon* 18.5. *Timeo ne sit hodie qui se ipsum praedicet; sibi, de Iesu loquendo, nomen facere cupiat*. SC 207: 10; PL 194: 1750B. Note, however, that Isaac's older contemporary, Guibert of Nogent (ca. 1055-ca. 1125), suggests in his early treatise, *Liber quo ordine sermo fieri debeat* (ca. 1080; PL 156: 19C-32C), that even those preachers with ignoble or disingenuous motives may still benefit others. See Wanda Zemler-Cizewski, "Guibert of Nogent's *How to Preach a Sermon*," *TS* 59 (1998): 406-19. Commenting on Guibert's treatise, Wanda Zemler-Cizewski states: "Daringly, Guibert suggests that those who ostentatiously preach from the profit motive benefit others and harm only themselves. As such they are preferable to those who haughtily conceal their useful knowledge, thereby doing good neither to themselves nor to others." *Ibid.*, 411. Zemler-Cizewski continues: "Nevertheless, despite the evil intention with which such individuals proclaim the gospel, others do benefit. No one, therefore, who preaches the word of faith is to be rejected, because even the mercenary may usefully serve." *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Sermons* 37.22-5 and 48.8.

⁴⁹⁵ *Sermon* 48.5. See note in SC 339: 310-1.

or otherwise set ourselves up as examples. “What he is in the open, that he is in secret,” Isaac counsels. “What he is in outward appearance, that he is his heart.”⁴⁹⁶

As few and far between as his references to historical events are, Isaac provides more than digressions that “furnish tidbits about the world outside.”⁴⁹⁷ Rather than giving his audience incidental asides, Isaac intends to bolster his arguments or provide an example. In *Sermon* 48, for instance, Isaac says he is not going to go into great detail in order that he does not trap the monks in a kind of *curiositas* that leads them always to wanting new and different experiences: “Curiosity truly is the mother of all vanity.”⁴⁹⁸ The same may be said of Isaac’s brief reference to a military order toward the end of *Sermon* 48.

While not unknown in Isaac’s sermons, historical details are clearly subordinated to the teaching that Isaac means to provide. Historical information, therefore, is a device Isaac uses to form his hearers in the monastic life. In the same way with the circumstantial details to which Isaac refers, historical information serves a larger purpose in Isaac’s sermons than that of identifying contemporary events and figures.

⁴⁹⁶ *Sermon* 31.8. (*Sed qualis in aperto, talis in abscondito; qualis in facie, talis in corde*. SC 207: 196; PL 194: 1791C.

⁴⁹⁷ Kienzle, *Sermon*, 309.

⁴⁹⁸ *Sermon* 48.15. *Curiositas enim mater est omnis vanitatis*. SC 339: 166; PL: 1855D. See also *Sermon* 48.5 where Isaac states: “You are all inquisitive hearers.” *Curiosi auditores omnes vos estis*. SC 339: 154; PL 194: 1853B. The Latin is worth noting, for Isaac as well as Bernard understood *curiositas* negatively. Note that at the beginning of *Sermon* 2, Isaac states: “The evil of curiosity closely follows the vice of pride.” *Sermon* 2.1. *Curiositatis malum sequitur superbiae vitium*. SC 130: 98; PL 194: 1693D. Likewise Bernard, who places *curiositas* as the first of 12 descending steps of pride in his early (ca. 1120) treatise, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* (SBO 3: 13-59; ET: *The Steps of Humility and Pride*, trans. M. Ambrose Conway, in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux: Treatises II* [CF 13; Washington, D.C.: Cistercian Publications, 1974], 29-82).

d. Geographic Details

Not unlike Cassian, Isaac's primary interest was not in providing either a travelogue or gazetteer. Whatever of the circumstantial or quotidian Isaac may reveal in his sermons, they are not his main interest. In *Sermon* 14, for example, Isaac refers to the "remoteness of the desert we have chosen."⁴⁹⁹ Isaac also tells his monks:

On that account, dearest friends, you have the reason why we have led you into this remote, arid and rough wilderness... This is truly solitude worthy of the name, far out, at sea, cut off almost completely from the rest of the world. Here, destitute of all worldly comfort and all human solace, it should not be difficult to give worldliness a rest. What can the world offer us on this little island at the end of the world?⁵⁰⁰

This ought not necessarily to be taken as a literal, geographic reference. Isaac himself reports in *Sermon* 14 that the purpose of their "desert" was to practice humility undisturbed. "Here you can be as humble as you can be," he tells his monks, "you cannot be rich."⁵⁰¹

Here in the "desert" where Isaac has led his monks one could also seek solitude and silence in which to be with God: "solitude upon solitude, silence upon silence. We are more and more forced to silence among ourselves, but only that we may converse all the more freely and familiarly with you alone."⁵⁰² In their "exile" (*exsilium*) there is time

⁴⁹⁹ *Sermon* 14.5. (*R*)emotio^rem eremum elegimus. SC 130: 272; PL 194: 1735D. Note that Garda refers to Stella's remoteness. Garda, "Du nouveau," 21.

⁵⁰⁰ *Sermon* 14.11. *E*apropter, dilectissimi, et vos in hanc semotam, aridam, et squalentem induximus solitudinem... In hanc, inquam, solitudinem solitudinum, ut in mari longe iacentem, cum orbe terrarium nihil ferme commune habentem, quatenus ab omni saeculari, et fere humano solatio destituti, prorsus sileatis a mundo, quibus, praeter hanc modicam insulam, omnium terrarium ultimam iam nusquam est mundus. SC 130: 276-8; PL 194: 1737A.

⁵⁰¹ *Sermon* 14.11. (*U*)bi humiles esse potestis, divites non potestis. SC 130: 276; PL 194: 1737A.

⁵⁰² *Sermon* 14.12. *S*uperaccrevit etiam, Domine, super solitudinem solitudo, silentium super silentium. Nam et tibi soli disertiores et assuetiores simus, a nobis invicem silere cogimur et cogimur. SC 130: 278; PL 194: 1737B.

for prayer, meditation and reading but also the necessity of work.⁵⁰³ Most important, as Isaac argues, the monks are to steel themselves and remain vigilant, remaining “vigilant to (Christ), that (Christ) would not sleep to you.”⁵⁰⁴

In *Sermon* 18 Isaac provides the most vivid description of the remoteness of his setting. Isaac and his monks, having been instructed by holy books so well, have forsaken everything and have become cut off almost entirely from the rest of the world and “(grasp) nakedly to the bare cross of the naked Christ, stripped and shipwrecked, (having) been thrown up on this remote and ocean-confined island, we few have escaped.”⁵⁰⁵

Isaac, however, subordinates the location and poverty of the island to his teaching on freedom from pride and wealth. Isaac laments those preachers in his day who “wish to make a name for themselves when preaching of Jesus.”⁵⁰⁶

Showing truths, they bring vanities; offering antidotes, they drink poison; the better they argue concerning humility, the worse their pride becomes; those who love riches preach concerning poverty; the covetous (concerning) contempt for worldly things; the greedy (concerning) mercy; the ambitious (concerning) being subject; and other similar things.⁵⁰⁷

Isaac also refers to an island setting in *Sermons* 27 through 29, specifically at the beginning of *Sermon* 27 and at the end of *Sermon* 29. There is no indication, however,

⁵⁰³ *Sermon* 14.13. SC 130: 278; PL 194: 1737B-C.

⁵⁰⁴ *Sermon* 14.14. *Vigilate illi, ne vobis dormiat ille.* SC 130: 278; PL 194: 1737C.

⁵⁰⁵ *Sermon* 18.2. *(I)n hanc semotam et inclusam Oceano insulam, nudi ac naufragi, nudam nudi Christi crucem amplexi, pauci evasimus.* SC 207: 8; PL 194: 1750A. See SC 207: 8n.5 for Jerome and Cassian’s use of nakedly following or clinging to the naked Christ. One ought not to assume the automatic identification of Ré as the location of the setting.

⁵⁰⁶ *Sermon* 18.5. *(S)ibi, de Ieso loquendo, nomen facere cupiat.* SC 207: 10; PL 194: 1750B.

⁵⁰⁷ *Sermon* 18.5. *(P)raeferens veritatem, inferat vanitatem; propinans antidotum, bibit ipse venenum; de humilitate quo melius disputet, peius superbiat; paupertatem praedicet, affectans divitias; contemptum mundi, cupidus; misericordiam, avarus; subiectionem, ambitiosus; et si qua possint dici similia.* SC 207: 12; PL 194: 1750C.

that these three sermons—or any of Isaac’s, for that matter—were ever preached on Ré. Note as well the maritime imagery in *Sermons* 14 and 15 to which I have already referred. Isaac’s references to desolation, remoteness and even an island could apply to his entrance into monastic life or Stella itself.

Indeed, in the *Exordium parvum* we read of “the serried company that set out eagerly for a wilderness known as Cîteaux, a locality in the diocese of Chalon where men rarely penetrated and none but wild things lived, so densely covered was it then with woodland and thorn bush.”

When the men of God arrived there and realized that the less attractive and accessible the site was to laymen, the better it would suit themselves, they began, after felling and clearing the close-growing thickets and bushes, to build a monastery.⁵⁰⁸

References to the desert and geographic remoteness, as we have seen, were commonplaces in monastic literature in general. These were terms not to be taken literally, however, as if the authors were accurately reporting on their locations. Eucherius of Lyons (ca. 380-ca. 449) describes in his work, *In Praise of the Desert* (412-20 or 427), the “desert” in which those who sought solitude in which to pursue the eremetical life. “The soil of the desert,” he writes, “is not sterile and unfruitful, as is commonly held; its dry, stony ground is not unproductive.”

A sower has hidden countless tender shoots and hundreds of fruit trees there... There the farmer reaps the harvest of an abundant crop; such a great crop is produced from these stones that the desert’s dry bones are covered with meat... Here is a delightful meadow

⁵⁰⁸ *Exordium parvum* 3. ET: *Cistercian World*, 5-6.

for the interior soul. The untilled desert is attractive with a wonderful pleasantness. The material desert becomes a paradise of the spirit.⁵⁰⁹

e. Language, Style and the Question of Vernacular Preaching

While we have seen what Isaac does in his sermons, I have yet to describe how Isaac understood the sermon or rather understood the purpose of the sermon. Earlier I noted that Cassian, understanding and interpreting Scripture was more than an intellectual or linguistic exercise, but rather what he called “spiritual knowledge” (*scientia spiritualis*).⁵¹⁰ According to Stewart, this knowledge “is not acquired learning but the experience of monastic life brought to the monk’s principal contemplative medium, the text of the Bible.”⁵¹¹

Isaac wished as well to convey to his monks learning not for its own sake but rather that which led to the goal of the monastic life. In this section, I describe Isaac’s understanding of the purpose of the sermon, in particular the scriptural and liturgical dimensions of the sermon, the goal to which Isaac desires to lead his monks in the sermon, and Isaac’s view of monastic life and praxis as described in his sermons. This

⁵⁰⁹ *In Praise of the Desert* 39. CSEL 31: 191; ET: *Lives of the Jura Fathers*, 212. Eucherius continues: “O admirable desert, how right it is for the holy monks to live or desire to live near you and within you, for you are rich and fertile in all the good things of him in whom all things are held. The kind of inhabitant you look for is one who will cultivate his own ground, not yours. You became fruitful in the virtues of those who dwell in you and became sterile in their vices.” *Ibid.*, 41. CSEL 31: 192; ET: *Lives of the Jura Fathers*, 213. See also Cassian, *Institutes* 8.17. I should also add the area in northern Russia, principally around Belozersk and Vologda, known as the “northern Thebaid,” a description taken from the area in Upper Egypt. See *The Northern Thebaid: Monastic Saints of the Russian North*, ed. Seraphim Rose and Herman Podmoshensky (Platina, Ca.: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 1995). William Harmless, however, refers to “Eucherius’s romanticism for the desert.” Was it “romanticism” or rather Eucherius’s understanding of the desert that was on the one hand symbolic and on the other hand—or, perhaps, simultaneously—the place of spiritual combat? See William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford, 2004), 412.

⁵¹⁰ *Conference* 14.8-17.

⁵¹¹ Stewart, *Cassian*, 86.

will offer a more complete picture of Isaac since I will have shown the content of Isaac's sermons as well as their rationale.

“Saint Bernard's example of the abbot-preacher produced a number of preaching abbots in the course of the twelfth century,” Old suggests. “This was a significant facet of his reform. As abbots they were the pastors of congregations of monks. They well understood that a pastor's first responsibility—indeed, one of the services of Christian love he is charged to perform—is to preach the Word of God to his flock.”⁵¹² Leclercq writes that Bernard “was a man of the Bible.”⁵¹³

As scrupulous observers of the *Regula Benedicti*, Bernard as well as Isaac would have spent several hours a day reading Scripture (RB 48) and additional hours in prayer (RB 8-18). Terrence Kardong explains how approximately four hours a day were spent in prayer.⁵¹⁴ Kardong also points out that there is not much emphasis in the RB on “learning for learning's sake”:

St. Benedict does not put much emphasis on learning for learning's sake in his Rule. What he terms *lectio divina* is somewhat akin to our notion of Bible study, but strictly tied to personal spiritual enrichment. Monks are expected to learn the Psalms and other Bible passages by heart so they can recite them in the Divine Office, and also savor them in private prayer. Nothing is said about the intellectual value of probing the sacred text so as to understand what it actually *means*; the systematic study of theology is not even envisaged.⁵¹⁵

Isaac was nothing if not a faithful disciple of Benedict. “Carnal understanding or life is darkness,” he declares in *Sermon 16*. “But on the other hand spiritual wisdom and

⁵¹² Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 284.

⁵¹³ Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, trans. Claire Lavoie (CS 16; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 21.

⁵¹⁴ Terrence G. Kardong, *The Benedictines* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 141.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 144-5.

life are daylight.”⁵¹⁶ Isaac’s desire is for his monks to be among those who hear and accept Christ as tenderly as a mother cares for her children.⁵¹⁷ How clearly Isaac held to what I have earlier reported as the monastic approach to Scripture as evinced by Cassian and the Desert Fathers is seen in Isaac’s statement in *Sermon 22*, that we must choose between “silence or changing words.”⁵¹⁸ Isaac’s preference was undoubtedly for the latter: “God is not for our understanding or comprehending.”⁵¹⁹

I have argued thus far that an allegorical reading of Isaac’s sermons goes against Raciti’s argument that Isaac’s references to exile and being on Ré are to be understood as his forced exile as a result of his support of Becket. Dietz, as we have seen, calls attention to Raciti’s tendency to read Isaac’s sermons literally.⁵²⁰ He writes that “it goes against the nature of Isaac’s sermons to seek in them precise historical information about the Ré episode.”⁵²¹ In this section, I shall discuss three topics that pertain to Isaac’s sermons and monastic sermons in general: the genre of sermons, the language and style of sermons and whether monastic sermons (and Isaac’s especially) were primarily literary or oral products.

To begin with, what is a monastic sermon and how should we understand the genre of monastic sermons?⁵²² “The sermon is a living genre,” Kienzle asserts. “(I)t still

⁵¹⁶ *Sermon 16.9. Carnalis sensus sive vita tenebrae; spiritalis autem sensus et vita dies.* SC 130: 300; PL 194: 1742D.

⁵¹⁷ *Sermon 26.19. Primi ergo non concipiunt, secundi abortivum faciunt, tertii fetum vivum opprimunt, quarti cum pietate ac diligentia maternal nutriunt.* SC 207: 140; PL 194: 1777D.

⁵¹⁸ *Sermon 22.10. Tacere, aut mutuatis uti verbis, necesse est.* SC 207: 70; PL 194: 1762D.

⁵¹⁹ *Sermon 22.11. Totum equidem hoc dixerim, ut non solum credatis aliis, sed ut intelligatis ipsi haud posse intelligi quid sit Deus aut comprehendendi.* SC 207: 70; PL 194: 1762D.

⁵²⁰ Dietz, “Exile,” 153-8, especially 154-5.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵²² I understand *genre* to mean “(a) particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose.” *Oxford English Dictionary* 6: 446. Also, “A literary genre is a recognizable and established category of written work employing such common conventions as will prevent readers or audiences from mistaking it for another kind.” Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford and New York: Oxford, 2008), 90.

exists, is recognizable as such, and resembles its medieval counterpart from an essential, functional and at times formal perspective. Unlike some types of medieval texts that are no longer written, or written only in imitation of their medieval forms, sermons remain: still written, preached, heard by audiences, preserved, read, collected as literary texts and accompanied by preaching aids, including collections of stories not unlike the medieval *exemplum*.⁵²³

Kienzle offers a three-fold definition: “1) The sermon is essentially an oral discourse, spoken in the voice of a preacher who addresses an audience, 2) to instruct and exhort them, 3) on a topic concerned with faith and morals and based on a sacred text.”⁵²⁴ Kienzle’s definition is, I think, a good one but arriving at a fixed definition of a sermon is elusive. There is, on the one hand, the matter of terminology. While we may distinguish between *homilia* and *sermo*, this amounted to a distinction without a difference in Isaac’s time. Jean Longère explains how for medieval writers, the terms had become synonymous.⁵²⁵ Kienzle concurs, adding that “(m)onastic authors generally referred to their sermons with the word *sermo*, reflecting the predominance of that term over others (*tractatus*, *homilia*, etc.) from the fourth century onwards. Benedictine and Cistercian texts give witness to the general usage of *sermo* and its derivatives for oral discourse and its written product.”⁵²⁶

On the other hand, there is the matter of the very nature of sermons themselves.

Muessig writes that monastic preaching was “a variegated experience”: “Just as there

⁵²³ Kienzle, *The Sermon*, 147.

⁵²⁴ Kienzle, *ibid.*, 151.

⁵²⁵ Jean Longère, *La prédication médiévale* (Série moyen âge-temps modernes 9; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1983), 27.

⁵²⁶ Kienzle, *De l’homélie*, 88. Kienzle goes on to report: “Cistercian authors use *sermo* for talks or sermons preached in chapter and for written sermons.” *Ibid.* Kienzle also writes: “Benedictine and Cistercian writers used the same terminology (primarily the word *sermo*) for talks or sermons preached in chapter and for sermons intended to be read.” Kienzle, *The Sermon*, 271.

exists a difficulty in summarizing what constitutes preaching, there is also a similar problem in defining sermons. This is greatly owing to the situation of studying a written genre which is supposed to represent an oral event.”⁵²⁷ Contributing to the difficulty of arriving at a concrete definition of sermon is the fact that medieval writers wrote in a variety of genres and may have been scarcely aware of the distinctions and divisions of later scholars. “The sermon is a fluid genre,” Kienzle continues, “related to the letter, the treatise and the commentary (and also to the speech, the shorter *vitae* and the *principia* of university masters) and often transformed to and from those genres. Many authors of homilies or sermons also wrote exegetical commentaries, treatises, and letters.”⁵²⁸

Concerning the language and style of sermons, Leclercq’s famous remark that sermons are a form of “written rhetoric” comes to mind. In distinguishing between the literary works of the monks and the schoolmen, Leclercq argues that the loquaciousness of the latter made the written record little more than an account of what had been said. “In the monastery, on the contrary, (the monks) write because they do not talk, they write to avoid speaking.”

Their works accordingly take on a more highly fashioned and literary quality. They take time to express themselves in verse. If discourses or sermons are composed, they are often works of “written rhetoric.” These sermons, which were not delivered and never would be, were intended for public or private reading, aloud in both cases.⁵²⁹

While Leclercq’s remark concerns, *inter alia*, the matter of whether medieval sermons were actually preached or rather are literary works that follow certain conventions, here and now I want to discuss very practical matters regarding language

⁵²⁷ Muessig, “What is Medieval Monastic Preaching?” 4.

⁵²⁸ Kienzle, “Introduction,” 168-9.

⁵²⁹ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 154.

and style as well as the setting of sermons. Kienzle, whom I quoted earlier concerning how “(t)he twelfth-century monastic sermon reveals the theology and spirituality of its world,”⁵³⁰ reports that sermons also reveal the more mundane and quotidian, “providing also glances at daily life in the cloister.”⁵³¹

The *locus* of most monastic preaching was the chapter house. “An important event of the abbey’s daily routine was the ‘chapter’ (*capitulum*),” Lekai relates, “held ordinarily after Prime in the chapter hall located next to the sacristy on the cloister’s eastern wing. Present were all professed members of the community; novices and lay-brothers held separate chapters. The meeting was intended to be both a forum for spiritual direction and occasion for administrative decisions.”⁵³² Kienzle remarks: “The readings for the nocturns of Matins included sermons (usually patristic), and sermons and commentaries on the *Rule* were delivered by the abbot or another designated monk.”

In some cases an abbess or another nun preached. The Cistercian Usages describe how the *Rule* was to be read in chapter and followed by a commentary. The lay brothers came in from the granges on those days, and the preacher felt an obligation to simplify his style and probably to use the vernacular in order for them to understand.⁵³³

The lay brothers or *conversi* to whom Kienzle refers were, as Southern describes them, “second-class monks—second class in the sense that they were illiterate and therefore unable to take a full part in the life of the community.”

⁵³⁰ Kienzle, *The Sermon*, 979.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³² Lekai, *Cistercians*, 365. Leclercq explains further: “At Cluny, at Farfa, and at still other abbeys, the ‘sermon’ took place twice a day and in two different locations: the first time in the morning, in the cloister before the beginning of the manual work of the day—then, the sermon would at times have as its topic the book which was being read in the refectory; the second, in the evening when the work was over, at the very place where the work was being done, for example under a tree or some other spot where all could sit around the superior. This talk or *collatio* often had as its theme a text from Scripture, or from the *Rule*, or some patristic writing.” Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 167.

⁵³³ Kienzle, “Typology,” 90.

Moreover they were required to remain illiterate and forbidden ever to aspire to a full monastic status. Yet they were monks in the sense that they followed a simplified monastic regime: they rose at the sound of a bell to listen to the later part of the monastic night-office; their food and clothing were similar to those of the monks; they were required to keep silent like monks and to pray at the times of the divine office, even though they could not be in church; they had their own chapter-houses where they met on Sundays, and they were required to communicate seven times a year.⁵³⁴

It was to these that Isaac preached his sermons. But how did Isaac deliver them or, more to the point, in which language? Did Isaac preach in Latin or vernacular? The assumption often made is the former, at least when sermons were preached in the monastery; outside the monastery preaching in the vernacular was not uncommon.⁵³⁵ Kienzle argues, however, that “(i)n Cistercian houses the vernacular seems to have been used on major feasts when the lay brothers were present.”⁵³⁶

The question of vernacular preaching is not new. Indeed, it was already an issue for Jean Mabillon (1632-1707), who in *Traité des études monastiques* puzzles over whether Bernard preached in French or Latin.⁵³⁷ Tissier similarly puzzles over the language in which Hélinand of Froidmont delivered his first sermon for Palm Sunday (*Sermon 8*).⁵³⁸

⁵³⁴ Southern, *Western Society*, 258. Concerning lay brothers as well as the order’s acceptance of only undeveloped or unmanorialized land, Southern continues: “Their existence made it possible for the Cistercians to organize large areas of undeveloped land, to reject the conveniences of rents and services, and to turn their backs on the world without giving up the ideal of a highly organized religious life. Their numbers varied from house to house, but they normally exceeded the no of monks, sometimes by as many as three to four to one.” Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Longère, *La prédication médiévale*, 161-4.

⁵³⁶ Kienzle, “Twelfth-Century Monastic Sermon,” 287.

⁵³⁷ Mabillon, Jean. *Traité des études monastiques: divisé en trois parties, avec une liste des principales difficultez qui se rencontrent en chaque siecle dans la lecture des originaux & un catalogue de livres choisis pour composer une bibliotheque ecclesiastique* (Brussels: Eugene Henry Fricx, 1692), 422.

⁵³⁸ PL 212: 543n.24.

Mette Birkedal Bruun reports: “That the homiletic style also may have been shaped according to the comprehensive nature of the audience is indicated by Isaac of Stella’s consideration for the rhetorical accessibility of the sermon.”⁵³⁹ Raciti argued, as we have seen, that Isaac preached his sermon on Ré and in the vernacular, and that the sermon served as Isaac’s defense to elaborate on the change of his homiletic style following his political misfortunes.⁵⁴⁰ I agree with Raciti, for reasons that I shall now discuss. But I do not agree with the reason Raciti argues as he does.

A crucial part of Raciti’s argument is that Isaac’s sermons—*Sermon* 48 in particular—demonstrate that Isaac was forced to change the style in which he preached as a result of the consequences of the Becket controversy.⁵⁴¹ When Becket’s political fortunes changed, so did Isaac’s. Isaac was forced, according to Raciti, to reign in his speculative preaching in favor of a simpler style. This is the lens through which Raciti reads and interprets *Sermon* 48.

Internal evidence suggests that while Isaac was keen on preaching in a simpler style on certain occasions, the reason had nothing to do with either political or ecclesiastical duress. Isaac is clear that he is changing his usual homiletic style in *Sermon* 48. He tells his monks that he regrets they have become so used to his subtleties as well as repetitions of earlier sermons, that if “we say something we have already said, or that may be found in writing somewhere, it makes you either sick or angry.”⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ Mette Birkedal Bruun, “Mapping the Monastery: Hélinand of Froidmont’s Second Sermon for Palm Sunday,” in *Prédication et liturgie au Moyen Âge*, ed. Nicole Bériou and Franco Morenzoni (Bibliothèque d’histoire culturelle du moyen âge 5; Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 187.

⁵⁴⁰ Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 285.

⁵⁴¹ See Chapter I, *supra*.

⁵⁴² *Sermon* 48.3. *Si dicimus quod ante nos dictum sit, vel scriptum inveniri posit, aut nausiam vobis aut bilem movet.* SC 339: 154; PL 194: 1853C.

Isaac goes on to state that on feast days such as that of the Nativity of John the Baptist (the occasion for *Sermon 48*), “when a crowd of lay brothers gathers from all directions,” the sermons are “simple and for the simple, and communicated in pedestrian words for the sake of those who have not yet assumed wings but follow Jesus on foot.”⁵⁴³ Here we note the change in usual practice, i.e., the presence of lay brothers to hear Isaac’s sermons.⁵⁴⁴

And yet a close reading of the text, in particular Isaac’s reference to an informal talk or *collatio*, helps to reveal the nature of his sermon to the lay brothers. Kienzle makes the important point that “(t)he sermon is distinguished from the *collatio* (informal conversation) when Isaac of Stella, speaking of the need to address the lay-brothers with simple words, adds: *Non deerit forsan familiarior collatio, ubi vobiscum poterimus altius aliquid et subtilius perscrutari*. At times the *collatio* was probably translated by a listener.”⁵⁴⁵

The audience to which Isaac spoke, in other words, determined the manner in which he spoke and, more to the point, whether he would deliver a sermon or a more informal talk (*collatio*). The latter would understandably be distinguished by simpler speech and vocabulary, if not the use of the vernacular itself.

It is hardly just in *Sermon 48*, however, that Isaac refers to his conscious change in style to reflect his audience. In *Sermon 45*, Isaac also speaks of the necessity of simple

⁵⁴³ *Sermon 48.16. Praeterea cum simplicibus sermocinatio nostra, et maxime in his diebus solemnibus, cum laicorum turba undique cogitur. Non deerit forsan familiarior collatio, ubi vobiscum poterimus altius aliquid et subtilius perscrutari. Sermones vero isti solemnes simplicibus simplices sunt, et pedestri sermone effuse propter eos qui nondum adumpserunt pennas, sed pedites sequuntur ambulantem Iesum.* SC 339: 166; PL 194: 1855D.

⁵⁴⁴ I am taking *laicorum* to refer not simply to laymen (or laywomen, for that matter) in general, but rather as a term to designate lay brothers. See, for example, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, ed. Jan Frederik Niermeyer et al. (2d ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2002. 2 vols), 1: 758.

⁵⁴⁵ Kienzle, “Twelfth-Century Monastic Sermon,” 279-80.

speech. “Brothers,” he says, “let us put all this into easily understood terms, for the sakes of our illiterate brothers.”⁵⁴⁶ Likewise in *Sermon 37*, he refers to preaching on behalf of the illiterate (*vulgari*).⁵⁴⁷ And in *Sermon 50*, Isaac he notes that he must speak slowly as well as repeat himself out of necessity for the sake of the lay brothers.⁵⁴⁸ Note that the editors of the third volume of Isaac’s sermons in the *Sources chrétiennes* series refer to the simple style of *Sermon 50* as well as traces of the vernacular. They refer as well to Stella’s numerous granges as well as lay brothers, both of which indicate that Isaac likely preached this sermon in the vernacular.⁵⁴⁹

These examples from Isaac’s sermons indicate not a change in Isaac’s style due to persecution or any other consequences of his support of Becket, but rather his preaching to lay brothers in a much simpler style with which to accommodate them, if not vernacular preaching itself. There is no evidence of any “change” at all, then, as if Isaac somehow ceased preaching as he typically did in the chapter house to his monks. What we read in his sermons, rather, is evidence of a simpler style employed on occasion for the benefit of lay brothers who would have either known no Latin or who otherwise required a more basic homiletic style.

“The written text is an inexact reflection of a preaching event,” Kienzle writes. “For medieval sermon studies, one of the primary problems for research, if not the primary problem is determining whether there is a relationship between the text and an

⁵⁴⁶ *Sermon 45.8. Dicamus simpliciter, fratres, maxime propter simplices et illiteratos fratres qui supra sermonem trivii loquentes non intelligunt.* SC 339: 102; PL 194: 1842D.

⁵⁴⁷ *Sermon 37.17. (V)ulgari sermone breviter narro.* SC 207: 294; PL 194: 1815B.

⁵⁴⁸ *Sermon 50.2. Olim vero, nisi vobis exciderit, de re ista verbum vobis fecimus; sed quoniam in hoc apostolorum natali, undique fratrum numerus solito copiosior affluxit, repetere nobis haud erit pigrum quod vobis credimus necessarium.* SC 339: 180; PL 194: 1858D.

⁵⁴⁹ SC 339: 180-1n.1.

actual oral discourse and what that relationship is.”⁵⁵⁰ I shall treat the knotty issue of whether monastic sermons were primarily literary or oral products in the following chapter, in particular whether Isaac preached his sermons.

Here and now there is also the matter of to whom the sermon was intended, i.e., to whom it would have been preached in the case of a sermon actually preached.

“Audiences for medieval sermons,” Kienzle observes, “sometimes known and sometimes not, may be ascertained from extratextual indicators such as manuscript rubrics, or from intratextual, deictic references, that is references to the sermon’s actual situation—person, time, and place—which indicate the presence of a real or imaginary audience and at times give clues to the audience’s identity.”⁵⁵¹

“We must remember that the sermons of Isaac are a form of ‘written rhetoric,’ a highly conscious literary genre whose relation to actual preaching is distant and in some cases non-existent,” McGinn advises. “Many of them undoubtedly reflect elements of conferences given in monastic chapter; some even are related to festal sermons given to both brothers and the converse. Even those that were never preached in any way were created for monks as texts for reading, meditation and discussion. We should beware of taking the charming literary fictions that sprinkle some sermons (e.g., Sermons 9, 11, 24 and 25) as evidence of the real life situation.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁵⁰ Kienzle, “Typology,” 87.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵⁵² *Sermons*, xvii. See also McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 25-6.

f. Exile

The theme of “exile” (*exsilium, peregrinatio*) in Isaac’s sermons looms large in Raciti’s argument. According to Raciti, Isaac’s references to “exile” refer to his forced exile on Ré and are, therefore, to be taken literally. Isaac, in other words, is referring to actual events and providing historical and, indeed, autobiographical information. Such a reading, however, amounts to a misreading of Isaac’s sermons for reasons I shall now detail.

If we accept Leclercq’s definition of a sermon as “written rhetoric,”⁵⁵³ then we can expect to find a good deal of rhetorical devices in Isaac’s sermons in particular. Isaac’s sermons feature, for example, instances of hyperbole. The human being affected by sin, for example, has been “changed into a beast.”⁵⁵⁴ In *Sermon 18*, Isaac refers to “our poverty that is so peaceful and lovely brings with it plentiful need, especially of books and commentaries.”⁵⁵⁵ Likewise in *Sermon 22*, Isaac mentions that the monks have requested that he keep talking due to their lack of books: “Because, my brothers, of our lack of books, you demand that I provide for your reading by my words, it rests on me to say something.”⁵⁵⁶ In *Sermon 27*, Isaac calls the monastery a “hell of mercy” in

⁵⁵³ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 154. See also McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 25-9; *Sermons*, xvii.

⁵⁵⁴ *Sermon 6.9. Talis enim qui est, ab homine deletus est, et in pecus mutatur, nisi quod hoc est natura, ipse fit vitio.* SC 130: 168; PL 194: 1710C. Cf. *Sermon 17.3*: “Such people, however clever, skillful, sensible, favorable, and gentle are not truly part of mankind”; *Hi nimirum, quamlibet astuti, callidi, sensati, gratiosi, placidive, nondum tamen homines sunt.* SC 130: 312; PL 194: 1745C.

⁵⁵⁵ *Sermon 18.1. Inter quietae et amabilis paupertatis nostrae copiosas inopias, librorum et maxime commentariorum.* SC 207: 8; PL 194: 1749D. N.b.: Isaac quotes the *Lausiac History* 15-6: “I gave away the Gospel for the sake of the Gospel.” *Evangelium dedi propter Evangelium.* SC 207: 8; PL 194: 1749D.

⁵⁵⁶ *Sermon 22.1. Quoniam, fraters mei, librorum languentes inopia, de nobis lectione vocem vivam exigitis, dicere aliquid necessitas incumbit.* SC 207: 62; PL 194: 1761B. Isaac was insistent concerning poverty. We have seen his criticism of certain clergy in *Sermon 18.5* (supra). Other evidence demonstrates Isaac’s insistence. Garda cites a charter from 1152 that indicates that Isaac was content with a mule for transportation (Garda, “Du nouveau,” 12). This stands in sharp contrast to the Cistercian preference for horses. See David H. Williams, *The Cistercians in the Early Middle Ages* (Leominster,

which the abbot is the father of souls and the torturer of bodies: “Yes indeed, we have been in the world, we are now in hell—however of mercy, not wrath—and we shall be in heaven.”⁵⁵⁷

Turning to the theme of “exile” and related themes, in *Sermon 29* Isaac calls himself a foreigner (*advenam*) and visitor (*peregrinum*) in this world, a son of human parents in appearance only since he is now a child of God whose siblings are the brothers of his community.⁵⁵⁸ In *Sermon 19*, one finds “exile” treated similarly. “And now, dearest friends, we must end here today, fatigued by work and words,” Isaac concludes. “For it is by both kinds of bread we eat in the sweat of our brow while we are away from that house, where is heard ‘the voice of rejoicing and praise, the sound of feasting’ [Ps 41:5]. May he lead us there, he for whose sake we live in exile on this island and in this desert far from nearly everything in the entire world.”⁵⁵⁹

The exile to which Isaac refers at the end of *Sermon 19* clearly refers to the exile from Eden.⁵⁶⁰ Isaac often uses either the exile from Eden or exile in general as a way of describing the human condition in relation to God and our temporal existence.

Concerning the former, Isaac speaks of Adam and Eve in the following way in *Sermon 54*:

Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998), 353. Isaac’s seal was likewise humble and bore no inscription, uncommon for Isaac’s time. For details on Isaac’s seal, see François Eygun, *Sigillographie du Poitou jusqu’en 1515: Études d’histoire provinciale sur les institutions, les arts et la civilisation d’après les sceaux* (Poitiers: Société des Antiquaires de l’Ouest,), 407.

⁵⁵⁷ *Sermon 27.17-8. Immo, in mundo fuimus, in inferno sumus—sed misericordiae, non irae—in caelo erimus.* SC 207: 150; PL 194: 1780C.

⁵⁵⁸ *Sermon 29.8. Ego fateor me iam hic advenam et peregrinum, toto videlicet hoc mundo, tamquam qui de eo oriundus minime sim nec hominis sed Dei filium in hominis specie et similitudine latitantem; haud amodo filium patris mei ac matris meae, vel fratrem fratrum meorum, licet dicant, affirmant ac peierent me suum esse.* SC 207: 172; PL 194: 1785B-C.

⁵⁵⁹ *Sermon 19.24. Sed hic, dilectissimi, pausandum est nobis hodie, cum et labore et sermone fatigati simus. Utrumque enim panem in sudore vultus nostril vescimur, dum peregrinamur a domo illa, ubi est in voce exultationis et confessionis sonus epulantis, ad quam nos perducatur, propter quem etiam in hac insula et eremo ab universo ferme terrarum orbe exsulamus.* SC 207: 40. PL 194: 1756B.

⁵⁶⁰ See SC 207: 40a which cites Gen 3:19.

But when they withdrew from God because of the fault of disobedience, by means of the justice of punishment their flesh withdrew from their minds, and their flesh thrown out of Paradise, and thus the entire human being goes about in exile. For the soul was not created or placed in such a body, and the body was not created or placed in such a world. The soul, therefore, is a wanderer in such a body, and the body in such a world.⁵⁶¹

Isaac uses the image of “wandering” or being estranged from God elsewhere. In *Sermon 37*, for example, Isaac quotes 2 Cor 5:6 when he speaks of himself and his audience as “we who are ‘away from the Lord,’ inasmuch as we are shut out from the feast.”⁵⁶² Likewise in *Sermon 55*, where he states: “But here, while ‘we are away from the Lord’ on earth, our ‘tears’ are our ‘bread by day and by night, as [we] hear it said every day: ‘Where is [your] God? [Ps 41:4]’”⁵⁶³

But all is neither lost nor without hope. The exile or estrangement from God, as sorrowful as it is, is nevertheless an opportunity to engage in the ascetical effort of returning to God. “As long as we are the body ‘which is corruptible and weighs down the soul’ [Wis 9:15] we wander weighed down, far from the delightful refreshment of the Lord,” Isaac declares in *Sermon 31*. “But let us spend the time and exercise the body by observing and obeying the commands of God,” he continues, “pondering his law in our heart by day and by night.”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹ *Sermon 54.14. Sed cum per culpam inoboedientiae recessit a Deo, per iustitiam vindictae recessit a mente caro, et proiecta est ipsa de paradise, et sic agit totus homo in exsilio. Neque enim in tali corpore create vel posita est anima, nec in tali mundo corpus. Anima igitur peregrinatur in tali corpore, et corpus in tali mundo.* SC 339: 258-60. PL 194: 1874D.

⁵⁶² *Sermon 37.18. Nos autem qui adhuc ‘peregrinamur a Domino,’ utpote ad convivantium divitum fores.* SC 207: 296. PL 194: 1815C.

⁵⁶³ *Sermon 55.6. Hic autem, dum peregrinamur in terris a Domino, sunt nobis lacrimae nostrae panes die ac nocte, dum dicitur nobis quotidie: Ubi est Deus vester?* SC 339: 266-8.

⁵⁶⁴ *Sermon 31.3. (U)t quamdiu temporales hic sumus et in corpore quod corrumpitur et aggravate animam aggravate peregrinamur a mensa ac delectabili refectioe Domini....sed expendamus tempus et exerceamus corpus in observantia et oboedientia mandatorum Dei, corde autem in lege eius meditantes die ac nocte.* SC 207: 192. PL 194: 1790D.

The return to God is part and parcel of the monastic life, as well as synonymous with the return from exile. Indeed, Isaac associates *exsilium* and *peregrinatio* with *conversatio* and *disciplina*. In *Sermon* 12, for example, Isaac relates:

Therefore let this be the model of your lives, brothers, for this is the true rule (*disciplina*) of holy living (*sanctae conversationis*), in thought and desire to live with Christ in that eternal country; but to refuse no charity for Christ's sake during this hard journey.⁵⁶⁵

Isaac speaks similarly in *Sermon* 50, where he understands Adam's work following his exile from Eden as being the paradigm for monastic labor. "Better, therefore, to be punished in exile," Isaac comments, "than to be at fault in paradise."⁵⁶⁶

Only once does Isaac appear to speak of "exile" in literal terms. At the beginning of Fragment 2, Isaac speaks of returning to his monastery following a lengthy absence. While we are tempted to understand *exsilium* and *peregrinatio* as referring to Isaac's exile on Ré, a close reading of the text disallows such a precise identification. "Indeed I know, brothers," he begins, "I know and have no doubt that your love bore my exile no less heavily than it happily receives my return."

For I have plain proof of your love that you were disturbed by my absence, you who are now delighted by my presence. And my greatest and only consolation while I was away was to know that I had as many associates in exile as I had friends remaining at home.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ *Sermon* 12.6. *Haec sit igitur vobis vitae forma, fratres, haec sanctae conversationis vera est disciplina, cogitatione et aviditate in illa aeterna patria conversari cum Christo; in hac aerumnosa peregrinatione nullum caritatis officium recusare pro Christo.* SC 130: 254; PL 194: 1731A.

⁵⁶⁶ *Sermon* 50.3. *Melior igitur poena in exsilio quam culpa in paradise.* SC 339: 182; PL 194: 1858D. Isaac continues: "Besides it seems a just way to make amends, that the one who was unworthy to rule as lord under the Lord should in exile serve under a fellow servant." *Sermon* 50.10. *Praeterea recompensatio iusta videtur, ut qui in paradise dedignatus est regnare dominus sub Domino, in exsilio iam serviat servus sub conserve.* SC 339: 186; PL 194: 1859D.

⁵⁶⁷ Fragment 2.1-2. *Novi quidem, fratres, novi nec dubito nostrum non minus graviter exsilium vestram tulisse caritatem quam gratanter suscepisse reditum...Evidens enim habeo vestrae dilectionis*

The precise identification of this place of exile to which Isaac refers eludes us. Given Isaac's use of the metaphor of "exile" as well as its use in earlier monastic literature, identification is unnecessary. While a stay on Ré may have been in the background—or, perhaps, some other stay away from Stella—Isaac's purpose was neither to provide a travelogue nor defense.⁵⁶⁸ "The exile theme in particular has so many far-reaching and complex implications in Isaac's world of imagery," argues Dietz, "that it would be a gross simplification to conclude he is speaking of forced removal, much less of real fetters."⁵⁶⁹ Isaac's point, rather, is to convey to his monks the purpose of the monastic life they have chosen and the goal to which they aspire.

In the end it is contrary to the nature and purpose of Isaac's sermons to locate in them precise historical or geographical information concerning the events on the island of Ré. Isaac nowhere provides details of the time he spent on the island and any attempt to do so is at best speculation and at worst a misreading of the text. Given the multivalent approach to Scripture as well as monastic literature from its origins to Isaac's time, attempting to divide neatly between what is metaphorical or allegorical and what is not is practically impossible. Such an attempt is ultimately unwise and unnecessary, for it fails to see in Isaac's themes of exile his teaching on the monastic life.

argumentum fuisse vos nostra perturbatos absentia, quos tanto opera nunc laetificat praesentia. Et haec quidem summa et sola erat mihi in peregrinatione consolation, quod sciebam totidem habere me exsilii socios quot domi reliqueram amicos. SC 339: 294.

⁵⁶⁸ Isaac's time on Ré, however brief, nevertheless left an impression on him. Vincent Séguret notes the extent to which Ré became a key metaphor in Isaac's sermons his essay, "La signification spirituelle de la vie insulaire dans les *Sermons* d'Isaac de l'Etoile," I: *CC* 56 (1994): 343-58; II: *CC* 57 (1995): 75-92. It is ultimately uncertain, however, when studying Isaac's sermons to determine which ones were preached on Ré and which ones were preached at Stella or elsewhere. Equally uncertain is the very real possibility that material from earlier sermons (whether preached at Ré or Stella) was subsequently revised or otherwise assimilated into edited sermons.

⁵⁶⁹ Dietz, "Exile," 158.

If we read Isaac's sermons in a way that understood these themes literally, then we would nearly miss Isaac's teaching completely. Isaac's sermons would thus be reduced to the writings of an unfortunate and erstwhile abbot who died abandoned and in disgrace. This amounts to little more than a facile oversimplification, however, that is revealed in the light of what follows, where I discuss my findings and, in so doing, the fundamental themes of Isaac's teaching on the monastic life from his sermons.

C. Discussion of Findings

Understanding Isaac's place in the stream of monastic literature is essential to understanding what Isaac is doing in his sermons. This is especially true when we consider Isaac's use of geographical place and references to "exile." Circumstantial details are few, as are references to contemporary events. Isaac is not providing his monks with the news of the day. Indeed, Isaac's sermons are strikingly free of details on contemporary events. When they do occur (e.g., *Sermon 48*), they are notable as exceptions.

Isaac's approach, as I demonstrated at the outset of this chapter, is in keeping with that of his monastic forebears. Cassian, as Vogüé in particular argued, was less interested in the quotidian than the theological. Matarasso remarks: "These men were not historians dedicated to the recording of uninterrupted facts. They wished above all to edify: themselves, succeeding generations of religious, and no doubt the world beyond the cloister, which would furnish them with new recruits."⁵⁷⁰ This, along with the monastic approach to Scripture, demonstrates why in his sermons Isaac was not interested only in

⁵⁷⁰ *Cistercian World*, xv.

recording historical facts. Isaac's sermons explain how he is applying Scripture to the situation of his monks (and himself) and the way in which he is describing Scripture and the life of Christ as the means of their transformation.

From Isaac's sermons I have found that an allegorical reading goes against Raciti's argument that Isaac's references to exile and being on Ré are to be understood as his forced exile as a result of his support of Becket. Dietz has called attention to Raciti's tendency to read Isaac's sermons literally.⁵⁷¹ He writes that "it goes against the nature of Isaac's sermons to seek in them precise historical information about the Ré episode."⁵⁷² Isaac himself admits to his love of allegory, as we have seen, in *Sermon 11*.⁵⁷³

My argument, that Isaac stands in fundamental continuity with the Christian monastic and ascetical tradition, is based largely on a close reading of his sermons. While Raciti does not deny this continuity, his argument obscures this nevertheless. My approach is neither to follow Raciti in offering a similarly detailed and painstaking study of Isaac's sermons nor focus on any one aspect of or topic in Isaac's theology. It is, rather, a more general one in which I place Isaac's work in the context of earlier monastic literature and then respond specifically to the arguments Raciti and others have raised concerning Isaac's sermons.

I have analyzed two sets of documents in formulating and demonstrating my argument: monastic charters and Isaac's sermons. From the former I have determined that the traditional date for the founding of Ré in 1156 is sound and that Raciti's reasons for mistrusting it are unsound. Isaac's involvement in the foundation of the monastery of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré is fairly well documented. Two acts of donation and

⁵⁷¹ Dietz, "Exile," 153-8, especially 154-5.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁷³ SC 130: 248; PL 194: 1729C-D.

one letter from a donor to the abbot of Pontigny are extant.⁵⁷⁴ McGinn has briefly summarized the dating and other minutiae concerning these documents.⁵⁷⁵ In what follows, I provide an outline of the three-stage process of the foundation of the monastery.

To begin with, Isaac along with John of Trizay, the abbot of the nearby abbey at Trizay, ask Eblo of Mauléon to make a donation, to which Eblo agrees.⁵⁷⁶ This request seems to have stalled out, however, since Eblo subsequently wrote a letter to the abbot of Pontigny (motherhouse of both Stella and Trizay) asking that the Cistercian Order and he found an abbey on the site he (i.e., Eblo) had already given to Isaac and John.⁵⁷⁷ Eblo reports that Isaac and John concur with his request and were begging for Pontigny's intervention and acceptance of the donation.⁵⁷⁸ This leads to the abbot of Pontigny's visit to the island and acceptance of the donation. The donation was renewed and formally accepted in the presence of the abbot of Pontigny, Isaac and John. The agreed upon terms indicate that the monastery was to conform to Cistercian regulations as well as agricultural practice.⁵⁷⁹

The reasons for the initial reluctance on the part of the abbot of Pontigny concerning Eblo's donation are unknown. Possible reasons include the fact that the General Chapter had not approved the donation or request to establish a monastery on Ré as well as the document's apparent lack of reference to either animals or granges. Dietz

⁵⁷⁴ See Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie," 195-8. For a more recent edition of the documents, see Garrigues, *Le premier cartulaire*, 181-2.

⁵⁷⁵ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 14-8.

⁵⁷⁶ Debray-Mulatier, "Biographie," 195-6; Garrigues, *Le premier cartulaire*, 181.

⁵⁷⁷ Debray-Mulatier, *ibid.*, 197; Garrigues, *ibid.*, 181-2.

⁵⁷⁸ (*Ipsis hoc annuentibus; immo votes omnibus implorantibus*. Debray-Mulatier, *ibid.*, 197; Garrigues, *ibid.*, 182.

⁵⁷⁹ Debray-Mulatier, *ibid.*, 197-8; Garrigues, *ibid.*, 182.

argues that “it is impossible to deduce from it alone the long-term intentions of Isaac and John. Further information on the beginnings of the new monastery is lacking.”⁵⁸⁰

Eblo’s second letter to the abbot of Pontigny—the second stage of the foundation of the monastery on Ré—is less ambiguous. The problem, however, concerns to whom this letter was addressed. The extant letter in Pontigny’s first cartulary provides only the first initial (i.e., *G*) of the abbot to whom it was addressed. Debray-Mulatier provides the name *Guicardus* without brackets or any indication of the lack of the full name of the recipient.⁵⁸¹ Garrigues, however, provides brackets.⁵⁸²

If Guichard received the letter, then the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliens occurred during his abbacy, i.e., prior to 1165. Raciti, stating that the traditional date of the foundation was unreliable, argued that Garinus was the abbot of Pontigny, not Guichard, and was, therefore, the recipient of the letter.⁵⁸³ The third document, however, explicitly names Guichard as abbot, Garinus’s predecessor as abbot of Pontigny.⁵⁸⁴ The oldest vidimus copy of this third charter, which Debray-Mulatier dates as from the fifteenth century,⁵⁸⁵ clearly names Guichard (in line five: “Guicardus”) as the recipient.

This is an important matter not only because it goes against Raciti’s argument but, more important, because it was during Guichard’s abbacy that Pontigny made most of its twelfth century foundations or incorporations. Thus the adoption of Notre Dame des Châteliens on Ré fits with the pattern of Guichard’s work as abbot. This is especially notable since no foundations or incorporations are recorded during Garinus’s abbacy.

⁵⁸⁰ Dietz, “Exile,” 146.

⁵⁸¹ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie,” 197.

⁵⁸² Garrigues, *Le premier cartulaire*, 181-2. Garrigues also refers to Leopold Janauschek’s *Originum Cisterciensium* (Vindobonae: Alfred Hoelder, 1877) for dating the letter.

⁵⁸³ Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 210.

⁵⁸⁴ Garinus was abbot of Pontigny from 1165 to 1174.

⁵⁸⁵ Debray-Mulatier, “Biographie,” 197.

Raciti's argument against the traditional date of the foundation of Ré (i.e., ca. 1156) rests solely on the use of the first initial *G* in the previous document, despite the fact that the third document refers explicitly to Guichard.⁵⁸⁶ The oldest vidimus copy, as we have seen, leaves no room for doubt.

Turning to Isaac's sermons, in *Sermon* 48 what we find is not evidence of a change in Isaac's style due to persecution or pressure, i.e., Isaac ceasing to be less speculative due to external harassment or pressure, either from secular or ecclesiastical powers. What is Isaac's point, then? See, e.g., *Sermon* 5.10-2 where he criticizes learning for its own sake or for the sake of one's fame or notoriety; as well as *Sermons* 40.20 and 43.12-3 where he speaks against those who seek to profit from religion and become priests for personal gain, respectively.

Isaac is not, therefore, shy in offering criticism where he deems necessary. In *Sermon* 10.17-8 he criticizes the conduct of abbots and includes himself in the process; he likewise criticizes his own order in a matter concerning property disputes when it comes to following the Beatitudes, in particular Christ's teaching concerning poverty, in *Sermon* 2.7-8.

Isaac is similarly critical in *Sermon* 48, albeit in a subtle and nuanced way. The key to understanding what or whom Isaac is criticizing lay in *Sermon* 48.5-8, where he refers to two important events in his day: nascent scholasticism and military orders.⁵⁸⁷ The root of Isaac's criticism, again, is the inability or failure to follow the example of Christ, namely, his meekness, patience, etc.

⁵⁸⁶ Raciti, "Isaac de l'Étoile," 210n.273.

⁵⁸⁷ SC 339: 156-60; PL 194: 1853D-1854C.

The problem Isaac seeks to address in *Sermon 48* and elsewhere ultimately is the inconsistency between the monks' teaching and their lives, i.e., word and deed. What the monks, abbots, knights, schoolmen—indeed, Isaac himself—taught was not always consistent with their lives. Recall, for example, Isaac's comment in *Sermon 18.5* concerning those who "wish to make a name for themselves when preaching of Jesus."⁵⁸⁸ "The little available evidence," Dietz offers, "seems to indicate that, on this point of consistency, Isaac was as demanding with himself as he was with others."⁵⁸⁹ Isaac's insistence on poverty and asceticism, in other words, was not mere rhetoric.

When I first read McGinn's study and his basic acceptance of Raciti's argument, I concurred because I had not read much of Isaac's sermons. Once I had, however, Raciti's argument failed to carry as much weight for me as it did initially. His literal reading of Isaac's sermons seemed to run contrary to monastic literature in general. When Isaac referred to his exile, for example, I did not take him to be any more literally than an early Christian monk referring to the desert.

Raciti, however, did understand Isaac's terms historically. He was convinced he had discovered not only historical clues to the elusive Isaac but also the hermeneutical key (namely, *Sermon 48*) that explained Isaac's mysteriousness since Isaac, Raciti argued, was forced into exile because he was on the losing side of Becket's controversy with Henry. Through the study of the genre of monastic sermons, I realized what Isaac was doing in his sermons as well as his continuity with his immediate and previous tradition. Specifically, I discovered that the terminology Isaac uses in his sermons is to

⁵⁸⁸ *Sermon 18.5. (S)ibi, de Ieso loquendo, nomen facere cupiat.* SC 207: 10; PL 194: 1750B.

⁵⁸⁹ Dietz, "Exile," 162.

be understood allegorically as well as tropologically—part and parcel of medieval preaching—and not historically.

Leclercq's understanding of the monastic sermon as "written rhetoric" has proven helpful. He did not believe that monastic sermons were always or necessarily preached but were rather written along conventional lines, in keeping with the sermon genre. Leclercq believed that some of Bernard's references to interruptions and losing track of time, were literary conventions and not really what Bernard preached.⁵⁹⁰

In *The Implications of Literacy*, Stock reflects on the societal background in Isaac's day as it relates to the theme of exile. "During the period under consideration," Stock writes, "it appeared normal to most thinkers that life-styles should remain unfixed for a certain length of time. *Peregrinus* had not acquired the specialized sense of 'pilgrim,' still less of 'crusader'; it simply meant 'exile' or 'wanderer.'"⁵⁹¹ Stock nevertheless raises the question of whether Isaac's use of "exile" is allegorical or something that reflects the society in which Isaac lived. Is Isaac's sense of "exile," in other words, only figurative? He is not, as I argue, referring to a forced exile to Ré as a consequence of his support of Becket, as Raciti argued. But what does he mean by "exile"? Becket clearly climbed the social ladder but it is unclear if Isaac did as well. Stock continues:

⁵⁹⁰ See Christopher Holdsworth's essay, "Were the Sermons of St. Bernard on the Song of Songs ever Preached?," in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Studies in Intellectual History 90; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 295-318. See also M. B. Pranger's essay, "Killing Time: An Essay on the Monastic Notion of Speed," in *ibid.*, 319-33. Both essays are particularly good in explaining how such things were actually included in Bernard's sermons.

⁵⁹¹ Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 476-7.

However, from the tenth century, the notion gradually began to be looked upon in another light. While retaining its older meaning, “wandering” also started to function as a symbol of psychological indecision. Physical movement, so to speak, gave individuals a period of reflection, not only between the poles of birth and death, but, as became increasingly clear, between the apparently immobile models for behaviour inherited from their ancestors and the new forms towards which they were not always successfully groping. It was a time of testing, of adventure. And, for both sexes, the period of instability was youth.⁵⁹²

Stock’s insights, while interesting and certainly grist for future scholarship in Isaac and his sermons, would detain me unavoidably. He demonstrates nevertheless the complex linguistic and societal background in which Isaac lived and composed his sermons.

More important for my argument is the fact that Isaac was a monk preaching to monks. The monastic life can never be understood solely through the intellect. It must be experienced. This is so because the goal of the monastic life is not the acquisition of academic learning or even virtue, but rather the transformation of the individual.

Kardong observes that “it is not enough to perform acts of asceticism—one must experience personal transformation. One must *become* the value striven for.”⁵⁹³

This is precisely the *raison d’être* for Isaac’s preaching. Man is *transformed*: “made new and formed again to the image and likeness of God.”⁵⁹⁴ Conversion itself is “changing one’s natural powers to God as slaves to doing right until all is sanctified.”⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² Ibid., 477.

⁵⁹³ Kardong, “John Cassian’s Evaluation of Monastic Practices,” 103.

⁵⁹⁴ *Sermon* 16.15. *Propter haec enim factus est homo ad imaginem et similitudinem Dei*. SC 130: 304-6; PL 194: 1744A.

⁵⁹⁵ *Sermon* 17.16. *(S)ic conversus ad Deum exhibet eadem servire iustitiae ad sanctificationem*. SC 130: 322; PL 194: 1748A.

In *Sermon 5*, Isaac speaks of the life of a monk as one dedicated to working and caring for Christ himself as if he were a garden.⁵⁹⁶

Christ himself, as Isaac asserts in *Sermon 15*, is the pattern for the monks to follow, indeed, the pattern of the monastic life. The ascetic struggle is patterned after Christ's Passion: "Our self-denial calls on the death, passion and endurance of Christ our Lord for our model and help."⁵⁹⁷ Christ is the "supreme pattern" (*formam praetendit*) for the monks and they are partners of Christ's sufferings and glory as well. Christ is the gift as well, apart from whom we can do nothing.⁵⁹⁸

The goal of the monastic life is "(j)oy, love, delight and sweetness, sight, light, brightness—these are what God demands of us, the purpose for which he made us."⁵⁹⁹ "All our practice, our work and leisure, our speech and silence," he continues, "must be brought to this."⁶⁰⁰ Isaac is unequivocal concerning the goal of monastic life: "And so, brothers, if all of our training is to be true, let us see to it that their purpose is always to bring us the delight of contemplation and true love of our neighbor, to gracious leisure with God and ordered relations with our neighbors."⁶⁰¹

The monastic life, while valuable, is limited nonetheless. "Once the active life has achieved its purpose," Isaac reports, "what is left for the soul except the contemplative life, the consummation of which is the vision of and delight in God?"

⁵⁹⁶ *Sermon 5.9. Duae sunt partes oeconomiae, operari et custodire. Unde de primo homine dictum est: Ut operaretur, et custodiret illum.* SC 130: 148; PL 194: 1705C.

⁵⁹⁷ *Sermon 15.14. (M)ortificatio nostra Christi Domini mortem, passionem passio, patientiam quoque patientia in exemplum sibi et auxilium vocat.* SC 130: 292; PL 194: 1740C-D.

⁵⁹⁸ *Sermon 15.15.* SC 130: 292; PL 194: 1740D.

⁵⁹⁹ *Sermon 25.7. Gaudium est, amor est, delectation et suavitas, visio, lux, claritas, quod exigit a nobis Deus, ad quod fecit nos Deus.* SC 207: 120; PL 194: 1773B.

⁶⁰⁰ *Sermon 25.7. Omne exercitium nostrum tam laboris quam quietis, tam sermonis quam silentii, huc referamus.* SC 207: 120; PL 194: 1773B.

⁶⁰¹ *Sermon 25.10. Itaque, fratres, omnis nostra, si vera est, disciplina, contemplationi et delectationi semper insudet, aut solius Dei libero otio, aut proximi ordinato negotio.* SC 207: 122; PL 194: 1773D.

During this pitiable wandering of ours, where everything is imperfect, nothing is found perfect.”⁶⁰² The monastic life—its practices, disciplines, etc.—are means to an end, something that in the end gives way to the greater.

And yet there is something that surpasses even the contemplative life. In *Sermon* 1, Isaac suggests that to live the monastic life is to follow Christ up the mountain where the crowd cannot follow. “Therefore, brother, escape far away,” he counsels, “do not return to the crowd, but rather remain in solitude, to follow Jesus, climb the mountain, tell the crowd: ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’”⁶⁰³ And yet even the closest disciples who ascend the mountain with Christ are left behind at a certain point, namely, the final ascent whereby Christ becomes “the equal to the equal, the Son to the Father.”⁶⁰⁴

Isaac goes on to explain how, despite his own intellectual formation and abilities, the monastic approach is not an intellectual one. “Sensual understanding or life is darkness,” he reports, “but spiritual understanding and life are daylight.”⁶⁰⁵ Knowing God, Isaac offers, is synonymous with loving God. This, again, is not intellectual but rather spiritual. “Since knowing the true God is eternal life, to love with the entire heart is the true way. Therefore, love is the way; love is the likeness, the true image; love is the prize, truth is the reward; by love we travel, in truth we stand.”⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰² *Sermon* 17.19. *Quid enim post activam vitam, nisi speculativa restat, quae visione Dei, et delectatione consummatur? Verum quoniam in hac aerumnosa peregrinatione, ubi omnia ex parte sunt, et nihil invenitur perfectum.* SC 130: 324; PL 194: 1748B.

⁶⁰³ *Sermon* 1.4. *Ideo, frater, longa fugiens, ne recurras ad turbam, sed mane in solitudine, sequere Iesum, subi in montem, dic turbae: Quo ego vado, non potes venire.* SC 130: 86; PL 194: 1690A.

⁶⁰⁴ *Sermon* 1.7. *(Tertio ubi nemo eum sequi potest, universitatem creaturae transiliens, solus salit aequalis ad aequalem, Filius ad Patrem.* SC 130: 88; PL 194: 1691B.

⁶⁰⁵ *Sermon* 16.9. *Carnalis sensus sive vita tenebrae; spiritualis autem sensus et vita dies.* SC 130: 300; PL 194: 1742D.

⁶⁰⁶ *Sermon* 16.16. *Ut cognoscat verum Deum, aeterna est vita, sed ut toto corde diligit, vera est via. Caritas ergo via, veritas vita; caritas similitudo, veritas imago; caritas meritum, veritas praemium; caritate itur, veritate statur.* SC 130: 306; PL 194: 1744B.

This devotion and abandonment to truth requires the abandonment of the world and its wisdom. “We have fled worldliness entirely and this present world almost as completely,” Isaac tells his monks, “so that nothing would hinder our searching for you.”⁶⁰⁷ Indeed, Isaac implores the brothers that they always cling to and never leave God.⁶⁰⁸

The embrace of the monastic life, according to Isaac, requires attention to praxis, in particular attention to prayer and meditation. “A heart that would contemplate should be as bright as a mirror and shine just as a still pool of the clearest water,” he states in *Sermon 25*, “so that in it and through it the mind may see itself, as in a mirror and through a mirror, an image in the image of God.”⁶⁰⁹ One’s life, in other words, must be spiritual before one’s understanding can be spiritual.

This, as we have seen, is a commonplace in monastic literature, from the Desert Fathers and Cassian in particular. In *Sermon 12*, Isaac implores: “This is what order requires, reason demands, why I am hardly silent to you, that if one wants to be truly spiritual in meditation, understanding and doctrine, then one’s life, habits and virtues must be spiritual first; affection is foremost, more than reason.”⁶¹⁰

Isaac’s insistence is no doubt due to his understanding of the monastic life as one of striving and struggle, as well as an exile or seeking. “For God’s purpose in showing or uncovering to us something about himself is not to satisfy us, but rather to excite our

⁶⁰⁷ *Sermon 21.7. (Q)ui mente totum et corpore fere totum mundum fugimus, ut expediti quaereremus te.* SC 207: 52-4; PL 194: 1759B.

⁶⁰⁸ *Sermon 21.14-5.* SC 207: 58-60; PL 194: 1760B-C.

⁶⁰⁹ *Sermon 25.14-5. Cor vero contemplantis perlucere oportet tamquam speculum aut aquam limpiddissimam et quietam, ut in ipso per ipsum, sicut in speculo per speculum, videat mens suam ad imaginem Dei imaginem.* SC 207: 124; PL 194: 1774B-C.

⁶¹⁰ *Sermon 12.1. Hoc enim ordo exigit, ratio exposcit, nos fere nusquam tacemus, ut qui vult esse vere spiritualis, prius sit vita, moribus, virtutibus, ut esse possit aliquando meditatione, sensu, doctrina; prius sit affectione, quam ratione.* SC 130: 250; PL 194: 1730A.

searching,” he says. “We are not meant to settle down satisfied, but rather have our thirst grow greater.”⁶¹¹

This squares well with Isaac’s correlation of physical toil and asceticism with the spiritual life. “So, my brothers,” he tells his monks in *Sermon 5*, “let your exhausting work, the roughness of your solitude, the strain of your vigil, whether bodily training or spiritual studies, have no other purpose than to rid you of faults and by arranging your manner cover you in virtue.”⁶¹² If one becomes the virtue for which one strives, then training and the active life is the necessary perquisite for the contemplative life.⁶¹³

All the while Christ remains the model and norm of the monastic life and the monks’ “toilsome journey” through this life.⁶¹⁴ In *Sermon 18* Isaac elaborates on the parable of the sower to demonstrate how Christ is an example to monks. The seed is the word of God and the sower the Son of Man, both of which are identical. The sower, as Isaac interprets, sows himself by the example of his deeds as well as his teaching. “The seed is, therefore, the word of God, the sower is the Son of man,” Isaac tells his monks, “not only the very Word of God but also the very Son of man, whence seed and sower are the same.”⁶¹⁵

The sower, Isaac continues, sows himself by the example of his deeds as well as his teaching. The seed can also enter the heart by grace. “There are indeed many sowings of the word,” Isaac offers. “One interior, another exterior; one to the ear of the

⁶¹¹ *Sermon 23.3. Nihil enim hic ostendit aut revelat de se Deus, ut visum sufficiat, sed ut ad inquirendum accendat; nihil, ut hic satiet, sed ut ad sitiendum excitet.* SC 207: 82; PL 194: 1765C.

⁶¹² *Sermon 5.24. Itaque ad nihil aliud, quaeso, fratres mei, sudet labor vester, squaleat solitudo, vigilet intentio, sive corporalis exercitii, sive studii spiritualis, quam, ut vitiis expulses, compositisque moribus, inductis virtutibus.* SC 130: 160; PL 194: 1708C-D.

⁶¹³ *Sermon 17.17-9.* SC 130: 322-4; PL 194: 1748A-C.

⁶¹⁴ *Sermon 12.6. (In hac aerummosa peregrinatione nullum caritatis officium recusare pro Christo.* SC 130: 254; PL 194: 1731A-B.

⁶¹⁵ *Sermon 18.4. Semen est ergo verbum Dei, sator Filius hominis; sed ipsum Dei Verbum ipse Filius hominis, unde et semen et sator idem.* SC 207: 10; PL 194: 1750B.

heart, another to the ear of the body; furthermore, one by the word of teaching to the ear, another by example of life to the eye, another by inspiration of grace enters the heart.”⁶¹⁶

Although the scribes and Pharisees could speak to the ear, their actions were unable to convince the eyes. Christ’s disciples, following Christ as the pattern, are able to sow as Christ did, offering themselves as examples as well as by the assistance of grace.

“Indeed, Christ the one true master sows without by example and word, and helps within by the gift of grace.”⁶¹⁷

Word and example thus converge, along with grace itself. Just as Christ spoke externally and internally, thereby proving by his own life his obedience to the Father, Isaac is unequivocal that the lives of his monks ought also to be indivisible. It is silly, Isaac argues in *Sermon 30*, to cheer others on in battle if one lacks the courage to stand in the line of battle for oneself.⁶¹⁸ It was necessary for Christ himself to give to the world not his teaching but also the example of his life. It is no different for the monks, to offer transformed and truly Christ-like lives in word and deed.

It is my argument that Isaac’s point in his sermons is to convey teaching on the monastic life. In *Sermon 48* he does not appear to be describing an *apologia* for his speculative preaching or the change in his style of preaching as a result of his support of Becket. Rather, he is defending traditional monastic practice—consistent practice, i.e., consistency between word and deed—in the face of scholasticism of one form or other as

⁶¹⁶ *Sermon 18.8. Sunt enim plures sationes verbi: alia interior, alia exterior; alia ad aures carnis, alia ad aures cordis; alia denique foris ad aures verbo doctrinae, alia ad oculos exemplo vitae, alia ad cor intus inspiratione gratiae.* SC 207: 14; PL 194: 1750D-1751A.

⁶¹⁷ *Sermon 18.9. Unus vero verus magister Christus foris seminat vita et voce, intus iuvat dono gratiae.* SC 207: 14; PL 194: 1751A.

⁶¹⁸ *Sermon 30.7.* SC 207: 184; PL 194: 1788D.

well as at least one military order.⁶¹⁹ In other words, Isaac is writing as a monk more than anything else.

D. Summary

In the light of Isaac's predecessors in monastic literature, both in the East and the West, I have argued that Isaac's focus or intent is on the spiritual formation and direction of his monks, not political matters. This is especially clear in Isaac's sermons where he demonstrates little interest in the events of his day, even those in which he was directly involved. When we consider the way in which monastic literature treats circumstantial and historical details, as well as geographical and spatial references, Isaac is not unique in minimizing the former and dealing less than literally with the latter. And owing to Isaac's admitted preference for allegory, it follows that his references to "exile" should not be taken literally.

Raciti's argument concerning Isaac's sermons and their revelation of biographical clues, however, concludes otherwise. Isaac's references to "exile" refer to an actual period of forced stay on Ré as a result of his support of Becket. The foundation of the monastery on Ré as well as Isaac's exile occurred relatively late, both of which Raciti took as proof of his description of Isaac as the victim in the course of twelfth-century power politics. And yet Isaac was not alone in supporting Becket's cause against Henry.

⁶¹⁹ McGinn has written that "(a) scholastic vein among these early Cistercians found its most significant voice in Isaac, the controversial abbot of Stella, who seems to have ended his days in exile on the Isle of Ré off La Rochelle." McGinn, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (World Spirituality 16; New York: Crossroad, 1985), 215. McGinn's remark needs to be reconsidered, however, not least because while Isaac was certainly exposed to what can reasonably be considered to be among the very best of the scholastics of his day (most notably Abélard), *Sermon 48* demonstrates his rethinking of this approach in the light of his experience as a monk. This is why in many sermons Isaac emphasizes the monastic life, poverty, etc.

What is more, supporters of Becket who were involved more significantly than Isaac—chiefly Bellesmains and Geoffrey—suffered no loss of political fortunes. As there is no indication that Isaac’s approach would have been less nuanced or differed significantly from that of Bellesmains or Geoffrey, it is difficult to believe that a Cistercian abbot on the fringe of Becket’s supporters would have suffered the loss of his abbey and been forced to flee his community.

I have argued, on the one hand, that the style of Isaac’s preaching is consistent with his monastic forebears and, therefore, not a reliable source for either biographical or contemporary information. I have also argued that the episode on Ré appears to have been for Isaac an early and brief parenthesis in an otherwise uncontroversial career at Stella. Isaac was neither a significant supporter of Becket nor an unfortunate victim because of it. He was, rather, a monk who preached to monks and his sermons demonstrate that despite his considerable learning and rhetorical skills, his was concerned above all else with conveying to his flock the purpose, tools and goal of the monastic life.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

A. Summary

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate on the basis of the historical and documentary evidence, as well as the political and ecclesiastical context of Becket's struggle with Henry, that Isaac's role was a marginal one. I demonstrated further that whatever support Isaac may have given to Becket and his cause, such was not the reason for either official sanction or retribution. I argued that Isaac's support of Becket was minimal and did not lead either to his exile on Ré or consequences affecting his abbacy. Furthermore, I argued that while Raciti and others have claimed that Isaac provides clues in his sermons concerning his support of Becket and its consequences, they actually provide proof of Isaac's continuity with the Christian monastic tradition.

I began this study with a statement of the problem and described its relevance, as well as the thesis that I have defended. I also established my guiding questions for the dissertation, namely, whether evidence exists for Isaac's direct role in the Becket controversy as well as his support of Becket and whether Raciti's theory concerning Isaac's forced exile as a consequence of his support of Becket is sound.

In addition to this, I established two points that formed the foundation of my argument concerning Isaac. First, that Raciti's theory concerning Isaac, Becket and Isaac's "exile" is an insufficient one, built upon evidence that fails to consider the historical as well as other contexts. Second, that Raciti's theory overemphasizes Isaac's role, giving him a status or importance he did not have, while overlooking Isaac's roles as monk and abbot and the implications of both.

Interest in Isaac's life and works has grown over the past several decades, as demonstrated by the number of scholarly articles as well as the use made of Isaac's works by the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council. Isaac's involvement in Becket's controversy with Henry has been the stimulus for much of the attention of scholars and served as the basis for this study. Raciti's thesis that Isaac suffered for his support of Becket—the loss of his abbacy and forced exile on the island of Ré—continues to be a commonplace in the scholarly literature. Isaac is understood in the end as a victim who died in disgrace in his place of exile.

There is no shortage of information concerning the Becket controversy; the correspondence from Becket alone amounts to a goldmine of information. Becket's role and that of Henry are well known; Isaac's role, however, is less than clear. While Isaac offered to support Becket via intercessory prayer, neither Becket's correspondence nor other relevant materials describe Isaac as a significant supporter.

What we can cobble together concerning Isaac's biography is in keeping with his times. Isaac arrived on the Continent at some point to study and subsequently became a monk in the Cistercian Order. There is enough evidence to suggest that Isaac came to France but to cite specific schools and masters remains difficult. When and where Isaac became a monk is also unclear. He rose eventually to become the abbot of Stella, where he wrote the 55 sermons and two treatises attributed to him.

Given the relative paucity of scholarship on Isaac, many scholars concur with Bouyer's comment that he is "a great mystery among the Cistercians."⁶²⁰ Isaac is, however, no longer a great mystery. There is much about him that remains elusive, if not mysterious, but in the past century a number of scholars have contributed to a body of

⁶²⁰ Bouyer, *Cistercian Heritage*, 161.

scholarly literature on Isaac that, while modest compared to the greater lights of the twelfth century, continues to grow. In the Chapter I, I described and elaborated upon this literature, beginning with the early researches of Bliemetzrieder and Debray-Mulatier and continuing up to the present. I surveyed the scholars who have produced a growing body of work concerning Isaac's thought and works. The study of Isaac's life and works—his sermons in particular—has been greatly improved by the publication of the critical edition of his sermons in the *Sources chrétiennes* series and English translations of a good number of Isaac's sermons have been published over the years.

The issue of Isaac's involvement in the Becket controversy is a topic that has occupied the attention of scholars over the years. Bliemetzrieder's early article identified the island of Ré as the location to which Isaac refers in his sermons. Debray-Mulatier demonstrated that while Isaac petitioned for the monks of Cîteaux and Pontigny to intervene on Becket's behalf, Isaac apparently did not suffer for it; she also argued for a relatively early date for the founding of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré.

Raciti produced his seminal study of Isaac's sermons with the intention of collecting biographical information from them. The influence of this study was considerable and continues even today. Raciti argued that Isaac's political fortunes were lost due to his support of Becket's cause against Henry. Following the Cistercian Order's withdrawal of hospitality and Becket's departure from Pontigny, Geoffrey of Auxerre moved against Isaac who was forced into exile and subsequently died on Ré. Raciti later amended his theory by eliminating Geoffrey's role but his theory would remain practically unchanged: Isaac's time on Ré, which coincided with the foundation of the monastery,

occurred toward the end of his life and amounted to a forced exile following the loss of his abbacy in the wake of the Becket controversy.

Salet's and McGinn's subsequent studies basically accepted Raciti's outline and chronology. For both, a forced exile on Ré as a result of Isaac's support of Becket was assumed. It was not until Garda's study that Raciti's theory was seriously challenged. Garda discovered a cache of archival material that seemed to indicate that Isaac actually died as the abbot of Stella, while other material suggested an early date for the foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers. Garda became the first scholar to undermine seriously Raciti's argument and offer a view of Isaac not as the victim of persecution due to his support of Becket, but rather as a medieval abbot who ended his days in peace.

Gastaldelli and Dietz followed Garda in further questioning Raciti, the former arguing against Geoffrey's involvement as well as Raciti's forced exile theory and the latter arguing against Raciti's method of using Isaac's sermons as sources of biographical and historical information. I reported in this chapter that I have followed Garda, Gastaldelli and Dietz in their criticism of Raciti's theory. Like them I took issue with Raciti's attempt to use Isaac's sermons as source of historical and biographical information.

Likewise I took issue with Raciti's theory that Isaac's time on Ré amounted to a forced exile due to his diminishing political fortunes. Unlike Garda, Gastaldelli or Dietz, however, I discussed Isaac's sermons in the monastic context whence they came. This described the significance of Isaac's sermons, namely, as the product of a monk for monks, reflecting as they inevitably do the world in which they lived and worked.

In Chapter II, I focused mainly on Becket and Isaac's role in the controversy between the former and Henry. I then provided background concerning the Investiture Controversy as well as the origins of the Cistercian Order. Finally, I elaborated on my collection and analytical strategies and explained how these formed the basis of my argument and criticisms.

Becket's life and death especially have been the subject of and, indeed, immortalized in verse as well as on stage and screen. From his humble beginnings in twelfth-century London to becoming the archbishop of Canterbury, Becket's life during his time up to ours continues to fascinate. Becket's associations were as important as his enemies, and this practically ensured (in addition to Becket's passionate and obstinate personality) the clash between Henry and himself.

Even though the Investiture Controversy in England did not exactly parallel the situation on the Continent, the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical power was the focus of much interest and intensity. Henry was bent on reasserting his control over the English church, which he declared unambiguously in the Constitution of Clarendon of 1164. When Becket rejected these, his path toward the clash that led to his dramatic murder in Canterbury Cathedral on the Feast of the Holy Innocents in 1170 was set.

Becket's close relations with the Cistercian Order are expected, given the latter's dedication to the papacy and in particular the reforms of Gregory VII. Becket's correspondence reveals how much he relied upon the order—spiritually as well as practically—during his clash with Henry. It was to the Cistercian monastery at Pontigny that Becket would flee in 1164, and while the order would rescind its earlier offer of

hospitality in 1166, Becket and the order shared a great deal concerning the church's authority and rights.

Isaac's decision to become a Cistercian is in keeping with his times, given the order's growth and expansion during his lifetime. While Bellesmains, in a letter to Becket, refers to Isaac as their "common friend," were it not for this reference there would be nothing to indicate Isaac's active support of Becket. Indeed, there would be no mention of Isaac whatsoever in Becket's voluminous correspondence if not for this remark. There is also nothing to indicate any consequences that Isaac may have suffered as a result of any support of Becket's cause against Henry.

Following the historical information, I described my collection and analytical strategies. My focus was on the historical and documentary evidence concerning the foundation of the Notre Dame des Châteliers in addition to Isaac's sermons. Earlier scholarship on Isaac and his sermons failed to consider Isaac's predecessors in monastic literature as well as to understand them as an example of the genre of the monastic sermon. On the basis of both earlier examples from monastic sermons and the methodology of sermon studies, I discussed Isaac's sermons not only against their immediate historical background but also in their monastic and theological context. In so doing, I explained how Isaac's support of Becket was nothing for which he would have suffered exile.

Finally, I argued in Chapter III that Isaac's focus or intent is on the spiritual formation and direction of his monks, not political matters, and that analyzing his sermons for historical or biographical information is problematic. I explained how monastic literature treats circumstantial and historical details, as well as geographical and

spatial references. Isaac is not unique in relativizing the importance of the former and dealing less than literally with the latter. In addition, given Isaac's admitted penchant for allegory, it follows that his references to "exile" ought not to be taken literally.

Raciti's theory concerning Isaac's sermons and inherent biographical clues concludes otherwise. Isaac's references to "exile" refer to an actual period of forced stay on Ré as a consequence of his support of Becket. The foundation of the monastery on Ré as well as Isaac's exile occurred relatively late, both of which Raciti took as proof of Isaac's loss of political fortunes following the Becket controversy. Isaac, however, was not alone in supporting Becket. Indeed, supporters of Becket who were involved more significantly than Isaac—chiefly Bellesmains and Geoffrey—suffered no losses, political or otherwise.

Furthermore, I argued that the style of Isaac's preaching is consistent with the monastic tradition and, therefore, not a reliable source for either biographical or contemporary information. I also argued that the episode on Ré appears to have been little more than an early and brief parenthesis in an otherwise uncontroversial career at Stella. Isaac was neither a significant supporter of Becket nor an unfortunate victim as a result. He was a monk who preached to monks and his sermons demonstrate that despite his erudition and skill, Isaac was concerned ultimately with conveying to his monks the purpose and goal of the monastic life.

B. Interpretation

Several years ago, when reading Isaac's sermons for the first time, I realized that Leclercq's remark concerning sermons as "written rhetoric" was not helping me to understand fully the monastic context and content of Isaac's preaching.⁶²¹ As time went on, especially as I became engaged with the research of Raciti and others, I understood less and less how Isaac's sermons—indeed, how Isaac's rhetoric, written or otherwise—functioned as rhetorical objects.

A break came while reading Garda and especially Isaac himself with a view to those who came before him, namely, Isaac's predecessors in the Christian monastic tradition. This helped me to realize that what Isaac was interested in primarily was not conveying historical or autobiographical information in his sermons but rather the process of transformation. Although Isaac does refer to the personal or quotidian, his goal in his sermons is the transformation of his audience rather than the presentation of any specific historical or circumstantial information. Isaac's sermons are less a catalogue or résumé of historical detail and much more a primer of personal transformation.

This led me to realize that my initial dissatisfaction with Leclercq was on the right track and that neither Leclercq nor Raciti could account for the way Isaac's sermons functioned. As a result of this study, I now see at least four areas concerning Isaac's sermons that need to be reconsidered. First and likely most obvious, this study pays particular attention to Isaac's teaching on the goal of the monastic life, specifically the transformation of the monk. While previous scholarship has focused on a range of topics such as Isaac's Christology and ecclesiology, and while Raciti in particular has argued

⁶²¹ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 154.

that Isaac's sermons provide clues to his involvement in the Becket controversy as well as his fall from grace, I have suggested an alternative strategy for reading Isaac. My strategy is to read Isaac's sermons backward, as it were, focusing on their monastic content and context.

Such a strategy requires, in particular, refocusing attention on Isaac's teaching concerning the Bible and prayer. Isaac's clear preference for allegory is part and parcel of his teaching on the goal of the monastic life, for he means to move his monks beyond the letter of the text as well as the physical or practical imitation of the earthly life of Christ to real participation and ultimately transformation in Christ.⁶²² Within this study I have suggested just such an alternative and refocusing by taking seriously Isaac's predecessors in the Christian monastic tradition and reading his sermons as continuations of the same.

A second area I have developed and to which I have paid attention is closely related to the above, namely, the purpose of monastic preaching. If Isaac was not interested primarily in providing historical or circumstantial information in his sermons, or his own commentary on the issues of the day, then in what was he interested? As I have demonstrated on the basis of recent scholarship in the area of sermon studies, a monastic preacher like Isaac was far more interested in providing spiritual and theological direction than a presentation of daily affairs.

Kienzle, Muessig and others have provided much in their scholarship that has been previously unrecognized in studies of Isaac's sermons. Once the goal of the monastic life is brought to the forefront as a way of understanding Isaac's sermons,

⁶²² Isaac's penchant for allegorical interpretation is clear, as we have seen, in *Sermon* 1.4 and *Sermon* 11.16. For the theme of transformation, see for example *Sermon* 16.15.

understanding the purpose of his sermons follows naturally. As a result, theology comes to the fore. “The twelfth-century monastic sermon reveals the theology and spirituality of its world,” Kienzle describes, “providing also some glances at daily life in the cloister.”⁶²³ But it is the former that is paramount. Given such an understanding, I have presented Isaac’s sermons as less as a catalogue of historical data and more in terms of how he meant them to be heard and, ultimately, realized.

A third implication of this study concerns the perennial question of whether sermons such as Isaac’s as we have them were preached as such or written in the genre of the sermon. “The written text is an inexact reflection of a preaching event,” Kienzle writes. “Hence, the historian must grapple with the numerous ways in which inexactitude may occur.”

For medieval sermon studies, one of the primary problems for research, perhaps the primary problem, lies in determining whether there is any relationship between the text and an actual oral discourse, and if so, in identifying the nature of that relationship... There are many ways in which the written text may not correspond to the sermon as delivered. The language of the written text may not be the language in which the sermon was preached, because sermons preached in the vernacular were generally taken down in Latin.⁶²⁴

This is especially important for *Sermon 48*, Raciti’s “basis of his interpretation of the life of Isaac.”⁶²⁵ While Leclercq’s understanding of the monastic sermon as “written rhetoric” has proven helpful in some respects, I can only conclude that Isaac actually preached *Sermon 48* (or at least some form of it, since the version actually preached may

⁶²³ Kienzle, “Conclusion,” *The Sermon*, 979.

⁶²⁴ Kienzle, “Introduction,” *The Sermon*, 169-70.

⁶²⁵ McGinn, *Golden Chain*, 5.

not correspond exactly with the text as we have it). Leclercq did not believe that monastic sermons were always or necessarily preached, but were rather written along conventional lines, in keeping with a genre on monastic literature (i.e., the sermon).⁶²⁶

Leclercq believed that Bernard's references to interruptions and other incidents were literary conventions rather than what Bernard actually preached. Kienzle, following Leclercq, declares that Bernard's masterful sermons on the Song of Songs "on the whole constitute polished works of considerable literary merit, probably written for reading and not preaching."⁶²⁷ Christopher Holdsworth challenges this, however, in his essay "Were the Sermons of St Bernard on the Song of Songs Ever Preached?" as does M. B. Pranger in "Killing Time: An Essay on the Monastic Notion of Speed."⁶²⁸

The question of whether Isaac's sermons as we have them were actually preached is an important and, admittedly, difficult one. There is the matter of the text as we have it and whether it reflects something that was preached or is, rather, a purely literary work written following the conventions of the sermon. Isaac's sermons, as Salet describes in his Introduction to the critical edition of Isaac's sermons in *Sources chrétiennes*, are

⁶²⁶ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 167-76.

⁶²⁷ Kienzle, "Twelfth-Century Monastic Sermon," *The Sermon*, 291. Leclercq argues that they were not delivered in "Les Sermons sur le Cantiques ont-ils été prononcés?," *Revue bénédictine* 65 (1955): 71-89; ET: "Introduction," in *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh (CF 7; Kalamazoo, Mich., and London and Oxford: Cistercian and Mowbray, 1976), vii-xxx.

⁶²⁸ In *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Studies in Intellectual History 90; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998), 295-318 and 319-35, respectively. Note Pranger's recent *The Artificiality of Christianity: Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism* (Figurae; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Holdsworth notes: "Very quickly Leclercq's view gained and held scholarly support. In 1980, for example, Emero Stiegman asserted on the basis of what Leclercq had written that the sermons were not delivered: that they were 'the literary work of the scriptorium rather than the pulpit,' in which 'the text mimics and oral presentation.' All references in them to the time of day, or to the relation of his audience and so on were a 'pure contrivance—all histrionic.'" Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, 297. Holdsworth is referring to Stiegman's article, "The Literary Genre of Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum*," in *Simplicity and Ordinariness*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (CS 61; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1980), 68-93, at 71, 73 and 75, respectively.

literary works bearing evidence of careful composition.⁶²⁹ “When a genre that is supposed to be oral can only be recorded for posterity in a textual form,” Muessig notes, “the relationship between the written record and the preaching event becomes clouded.”

The textual witness may introduce a misunderstanding, an assumption that such “texts” were never preached. Furthermore, the form and style of sermons could come in various packages, sometimes appearing to be treatises, letters, biblical commentaries, and saints’ lives, adding further confusion to what constitutes the content of preaching.⁶³⁰

Modern scholars, therefore, face a dilemma: no matter how we decide the matter (i.e., whether a sermon was actually preached or not), we can only have access to the text as a text. We can never again recreate the moment in which any sermon was preached.⁶³¹

Raciti assumes Isaac preached the sermons as we have them; he makes much, after all, of *Sermon* 48 as Isaac’s “apology.” Raciti also argues that Isaac preached the sermon in the vernacular.⁶³² The question, then, is whether Isaac delivered his sermons in the form we now have them? I believe he did.

Finally, this study contributes to a similar and no less vexing question, namely, in which language did Isaac preach? Hoste, for example, mentions that both Bernard and Isaac undoubtedly preached in the vernacular.⁶³³ Bruun argues that for Isaac in particular, “the homiletic style also may have been shaped according to the comprehensive nature of the audience (as well as) Isaac of Stella’s consideration for the rhetorical accessibility of the sermon.”

⁶²⁹ SC 130: 26-35.

⁶³⁰ Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, 5.

⁶³¹ “Although the sermon is essentially an oral discourse,” Kienzle writes, “written sermons often served either for preaching or for reading. Moreover, modern readers deal with the medieval sermon only as a written text.” Kienzle, “Introduction,” *The Sermon*, 159.

⁶³² Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 285.

⁶³³ SC 130: 34

Isaac's third sermon for the Nativity of John the Baptist [*Sermon* 48] is concerned with homiletic style; he regrets that his community has become so accustomed to subtleties and elegant renewals of the old, that if "we say something that we have already said—or that may be found in writing somewhere—it makes you either sick or angry." But Isaac goes on to state that on feast days such as that of the nativity of John the Baptist, "when a crowd of lay people gathers from all directions," the sermons are "simple and for the simple, and communicated in pedestrian words for the sake of those who have not yet assumed wings but follow the ambulating Jesus on foot."⁶³⁴

This is a knotty issue but one that could bear fruit. Kienzle suggests that this may prove promising when it comes to research concerning Bernard's sermons. "In the absence of extratextual manuscript evidence such as Bernard's letter to 'G,'" she writes, "we must look to intertextual factors in order to try to determine how closely the written monastic sermon reflects and oral form. It is possible to reach the conclusion that a sermon was not preached, but impossible, I think, to conclude that it was."⁶³⁵

Kienzle's insights and instincts could apply equally well in the case of Isaac. Her work and the recent scholarship of others represent a complement to my own on the purpose and actual audience of monastic sermons.

C. Limitations

As with any lengthy study, there are certain limitations to this one, most of which are due to the relative obscurity of Isaac and the data I used to develop. For the former, while much has been written on Isaac compared to the initial research of Bliemetzrieder over a century ago, much about Isaac's life remains unknown. What can be pieced

⁶³⁴ Mette Birkedal Bruun, "Mapping the Monastery: Hélinand of Froidmont's Second Sermon for Palm Sunday," in *Prédication et liturgie au Moyen Âge*, ed. Nicole Bériou and Franco Morenzoni (Bibliothèque d'histoire culturelle du moyen âge 5; Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 187-8.

⁶³⁵ Kienzle, "Typology of the Medieval Sermon," *De l'homélie au sermon*, 98.

together concerning his background and education is only partial and not wholly satisfying. Specific biographical details remain elusive and Isaac himself is reticent to divulge much about himself in his sermons. Had I studied a twelfth-century writer about whom more was known, perhaps I would have been able to analyze data more completely or precisely. In any case, what can be determined about Isaac's life and times provides grist for the mill nevertheless as this study and earlier scholarship demonstrates.

For Isaac's sermons themselves, the existence of a critical edition—fundamental to any serious approach to sermons studies—is a boon to scholars. Considering the number of unedited sermons awaiting an editor's attention, we are fortunate to have Isaac's entire *oeuvre*. The number of Isaac's sermons extant, however, is only 55 and while hardly a small number my research might have been affected had I compared and contrasted Isaac's sermons with those of Bernard or other Cistercians, or monastic preachers outside the order. Given that my primary objective was to lay out the general framework of Isaac's theology, quite specifically his approach to the monastic life, I focused on Isaac's sermons alone and in particular those in which he articulates this approach most directly.

My approach in this study is an historical and theological one. I am, therefore, reading Isaac's sermons as an historical theologian and not as a linguist or philologist. While I have done my best to read Isaac in the original Latin I am neither a classicist nor Latinist in particular by training. My goal has been to render Isaac into workable, if not elegant, English and I have relied on a variety of dictionaries and other lexical aids as well as available English translations to check my own work. This creates another limitation since my interest lay more with Isaac's thoughts and concepts, rather than the

words themselves. While Hoste, Salet and Raciti have done a superlative job in editing Isaac's sermons in the *Sources chrétiennes* series, I have been frankly incapable of engaging in similar scrutiny which may or may not have affected some of my findings.

Another limitation has to do with the breadth of sermon studies itself. The diversity of approaches and methodologies of sermons studies, to say nothing of the backgrounds of the scholars who are rapidly adding to the field, ensures that a diversity of opinions and findings will continue. This is at the same time a weakness or at least for this writer a limitation. James W. O'Malley avers that a scholar "must draw upon the findings and methodology of exegesis, liturgy, theology, social history, cultural history, literary criticism, textual criticism, and many other disciplines."⁶³⁶

While I am an expert in neither social nor cultural history, and unlike Katherine Jansen I cannot treat at length any clues in Isaac's sermons concerning popular devotion,⁶³⁷ I can add my voice and research to the continuing efforts. In particular I have used my knowledge of the history of Christian monasticism and monastic theology and how this affected Isaac's sermons. Sermons studies has helped me in understanding Isaac's sermons as well as articulating my response to Raciti.

Perhaps more than any other scholar, Louis-Jacques Bataillon established the methodological basis for sermon studies.⁶³⁸ Beyond matters of authorship, date and provenance, Bataillon demonstrated that prior to using a sermon as an historical source,

⁶³⁶ James W. O'Malley, "Introduction: Medieval Preaching," in *De oro domini: Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas L. Amos et al. (Studies in Medieval Culture 27; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), 2.

⁶³⁷ While Jansen's research has not focused heretofore on either Isaac or the Cistercians, it has discovered how mendicant preaching on Mary Magdalene in particular affected popular devotion. See her recent study, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶³⁸ See especially Bataillon's *La predication au XIII^e siècle en France et Italie: Études et documents*, ed. David d'Avray and Nicole Bériou (Variorum Collected Studies Series 402; Aldershot, Hampshire, and Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1993).

one has to understand, *inter alia*, the collection in which the sermon is found, the sermon's function in the particular collection, and the sermon's liturgical role. Bataillon also emphasized the particularly knotty issue of the relationship between the sermon as it has been preserved in its written form and its original oral presentation.

This admittedly narrow slice of scholarship adds to a steadily growing body of scholarship from many areas. Indeed, scholars from a variety of disciplines have collaborated in order to understand better and more completely medieval sermons and the history of preaching. The International Medieval Sermon Studies Society and its journal, *Medieval Sermon Studies*, is one tangible piece of evidence of such collaboration. Hans-Jochen Schiewer and Volker Mertens established an international cadre of scholars called SERMO in 1996, the purpose of which is to produce a list of vernacular sermons similar to Johannes-Baptist Schneyer's magisterial *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150-1350*.⁶³⁹

A final limitation of this study, one that is related to the above, has to do with the equally diverse field of literacy studies. While I have read studies by Brian Stock,⁶⁴⁰ Walter J. Ong,⁶⁴¹ M. T. Clanchy,⁶⁴² Harvey J. Graff,⁶⁴³ Mary Carruthers,⁶⁴⁴ and others, I

⁶³⁹ Johannes-Baptist Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150-1350* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters; Münster: Aschendorff, 1969-90. 11 vols.). The *Repertorium* is a catalogue of over 100,000 medieval Latin sermons, arranged according to *incipits* and *explicitis*. Schneyer also provides lists of ms. and printed editions of sermons, as well as sermons preached by particular authors or on specific feast days. Schneyer also lists sermons preached for reasons such as following plague or some other calamity. Muessig surely does not exaggerate when she divides sermon studies into the periods before and after Schneyer's *magnum opus*. "This extensive list of sermons caused an explosion of research which took off in the 1970s," she relates. "Schneyer's *Repertorium* enabled, and still enables, scholars to enter into the widely untapped world of sermon literature by providing them with a detailed road map." Muessig, "Sermon, Preacher and Society," 75.

⁶⁴⁰ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁶⁴¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

⁶⁴² M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (2d ed. Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993).

am too much of a non-specialist to use their concepts and theories as fully as I would have liked in analyzing Isaac's sermons, nor could I engage them as directly as other scholars on which I have focused in this study. While my lack of a background in literacy studies is a limitation for this study it is, however, an advantage since I have obtained great benefit from these scholars and have discovered areas for my own scholarship on Isaac's sermons.

The plethora of scholarship and other resources concerning sermon studies indicate the vastness of the field as well as opportunities for scholars from diverse backgrounds. "Largely untapped," Kienzle writes, "many of these resources remain to be identified, edited, read, and studied with care."⁶⁴⁵ Those of us who are willing to engage in oft-times laborious and unglamorous work will contribute nevertheless to the slow but sure expansion of knowledge of medieval sermons and turn up ground for subsequent scholarship.

D. Directions for Future Research

This study suggests a previously unrecognized aspect of Isaac's theology, namely, that of the monastic life and in particular its purpose and goal. I have focused specifically on Isaac's sermons and demonstrated that Isaac stands squarely within the continuum of the Christian monastic tradition. This has helped to elucidate the question of whether the standard view, beginning with Raciti's important and influential work in

⁶⁴³ Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁶⁴⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁴⁵ Kienzle, "Conclusion," *The Sermon*, 982.

the early 1960s, concerning Isaac's forced into exile on Ré as a result of his support of Becket is correct.

I have argued and demonstrated that it is not, primarily on the basis of monastic charters that prove a relatively early foundation of Notre Dame des Châteliers on Ré as well as, and more important, Isaac's sermons. Raciti's misreading of Isaac's sermons—reading them in order to ferret out historical and biographical information, but neglecting altogether Isaac's use of allegory—raises the following questions with which to direct future research.

First, Cistercian preaching in the vernacular in the twelfth century. Are there parallels to popular twelfth-century literature, e.g., troubadours, *chansons de geste*? To what extent was there vernacular preaching in Cistercian monasteries? Giles Constable's "The Language of Preaching in the Twelfth Century" deals with the questions of how sermons were prepared and transmitted in the Middle Ages (the twelfth century in particular), how and to whom they were preached, and in what language they were delivered.⁶⁴⁶ Constable discusses the conception, delivery, transcription, and preservation of sermons, which often survive in a form quite different from the way they were preached.

Concerning the audiences of sermons, Constable studies the type and degree of linguistic divergences and the extent of bilingualism. Some preachers did not understand Latin and some laypeople knew Latin, and both groups seem to have preferred some Latin in sermons. Constable concludes that sermons were preached not only in Latin to the clergy and in the vernacular to the laity but also (contrary to the view of many

⁶⁴⁶ Giles Constable, "The Language of Preaching in the Twelfth Century," *Viator* 25 (1994): 131-52.

scholars) in a mixed or macaronic language to mixed audiences, which very well may have been the case for Isaac.

The stories of miraculous understanding of sermons in the vernacular, in other words, demonstrate that the listeners did not always know the language in which the sermon was preached. Whether there is internal or intertextual evidence to indicate preaching in the vernacular is also something on which future research should focus.⁶⁴⁷

Second but related to the above, Raciti argues that when Isaac says in *Sermon* 48.15 that he has spent “quite some time at that *apologia* of mine” and so little on the text and the Feast of St. John the Baptist, the Latin text as we have it is merely a summary of a longer sermon originally delivered in the vernacular.⁶⁴⁸ This is important in future research on the question of whether there is a vernacular original underneath *Sermon* 48 (and other sermons of Isaac) and how this could be determined.

This is important as well concerning the related question of whether Isaac delivered his sermons orally or whether they were written to be read and, therefore, not delivered. Is there any manuscript evidence that a *vernacular* sermon served as the basis for a Latin summary or précis? Is there any evidence that any of Isaac’s sermons were given in the vernacular first and subsequently disseminated in Latin? Were his sermons delivered in the vernacular but transcribed in Latin? What would some clues be, clues within the text, if that were the case?

⁶⁴⁷ Note again Kienzle’s remark from Ch. III, supra: “Audiences for medieval sermons, sometimes known and sometimes not, may be ascertained from extratextual indicators such as manuscript rubrics, or from intratextual, deictic references, that is references to the sermon’s actual situation—person, time, and place—which indicate the presence of a real or imaginary audience and at times give clues to the audience’s identity.” Kienzle, “Introduction,” *The Sermon*, 154.

⁶⁴⁸ Raciti, “Isaac de l’Étoile,” 285.

Third, in *Sermon 48.2*, Isaac seemingly criticizes the incorporation of the Order of Calatrava by Pope Alexander III on 26 September 1164.⁶⁴⁹ He goes so far as to call it “a new and monstrous breed of military.”⁶⁵⁰ Does Isaac’s remark indicate the unpopularity of either the order or, in the wake of the Second Crusade (1147-9), the crusading movement itself? Can we demonstrate whether Isaac’s remark represents his personal view or, rather, a larger body of public opinion? Does Isaac’s criticism dovetail with the criticisms of Minnesänger, troubadours, *trouvères*, etc.? What does the vernacular literature in Isaac’s area at that time reveal? To what extent did other Cistercians offer their own criticisms of either military orders of the crusading movement? Isaac’s preaching belongs to a time when there was extensive preaching concerning the Crusades among the Cistercians.

We know about Helinand of Froidmont, a former *trouvère* who became a Cistercian ca. 1190, but were there other Cistercians? How did the order handle dissent when it came to the Crusades, either support of or opposition to? Given Bernard’s stature in the order, this research would seem to demonstrate a variety of opinions when it came to the Crusades. Elizabeth Siberry notes that “(t)he most serious reaction [i.e., reaction to the Crusades] occurred after the major reversal of Christian fortunes at Damascus on the Second Crusade.” Siberry continues: “Several chroniclers lamented that the expedition, which had aroused such expectations, had achieved nothing; and there seems to have been a general atmosphere of bewilderment and despondency.”⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁹ See, for example, Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord’s Vineyard* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom, and Rochester, N.Y.: York Medieval Press and The Boydell Press, 2001) and Elizabeth Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading: 1095-1274* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon and Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁶⁵⁰ See Chapter I, *supra*.

⁶⁵¹ Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, 190. Siberry continues: “This was manifested in various ways. First, because of his advocacy of the crusade, St. Bernard received much personal criticism, and one

Fourth and finally, while I agree with Raciti that Isaac's *Sermon* 48 was delivered orally, this nevertheless raises the question of the genre of the monastic sermon and whether monastic sermons were delivered orally or were, rather, literary works, i.e., "written rhetoric." More to the point, the important question for future research is if Isaac initially delivered his sermons orally, did he or an amanuensis with his knowledge subsequently record them?

We know this was the practice with Bernard and others. "Some collections [of sermons] were compiled by the author," Kienzle asserts. "During the last years of his life, Bernard of Clairvaux grouped and revised many of his works, including series of his sermons."

Guerric of Igny gathered his sermons into a collection. An abbot might request that one of his monks put together chapter talks. Julien of Vezelay dedicated his sermons to his abbot who had asked him to gather them. The monks too might ask the abbot to pursue in written form a topic discussed in chapter; such is the case for Aelred of Rievaulx's homilies on the burdens of Isaiah. Finally, sermons were also collected after the preacher's death; Odo of Morimond's disciples put together his sermons after he died.⁶⁵²

chronicler went so far as to question the divine inspiration of his preaching. Secondly, there was a poor response to Abbot Suger's efforts to launch a new crusade. In May 1150, Louis VII summoned French nobles and ecclesiastics to an assembly at Chartres in order to discuss plans for another expedition to the East. But according to St. Bernard, the barons were reluctant to take the cross; the proposed meeting at Compiègne in July never took place. It is interesting that two chroniclers attributed the lack of enthusiasm for the new crusade to opposition from the Cistercians, who appear to have suffered as a result of their involvement in the previous expedition; and when Suger died in 1151, no one took up his initiative...Pope Eugenius III called the Second Crusade 'the most severe injury of the Christian name which the church of God has suffered in our time,' and fears of a similar catastrophe seem to have made the papacy cautious about supporting future expeditions." Ibid., 191-2.

⁶⁵² Kienzle, "Typology of the Medieval Sermon," *De l'homelie au sermon*, 92-3. Old writes: "The important collections of sermons of Saint Bernard that have (come down to us) are literary sermons written to be read. They are not stenographic records of actual sermons, although real sermons surely lie behind them, but sermons that have been taken down in outline form by notaries and edited, corrected, and perhaps expanded by the preacher. As Dom Leclercq explains it, the sermon had become a literary form in the time of Bernard. Some of the published sermons have a strong—others a weak—relation to the preached sermon." Old, *Reading and Preaching*, 257-8. Old cites Leclercq with whom he clearly agrees in whether Bernard's sermons were preached or not.

That being the case, we must consider internal evidence in order to determine how closely the text reflects what was delivered orally, whether in Latin or the vernacular. This research would surely expand our understanding of Isaac's sermons, since McGinn's remark about how "a thinker of such originality and power has been accorded such cursory treatment in the past" still rings true when it comes to unraveling the manuscript collections.⁶⁵³

Isaac was a monk who wrote for monks. What little can be known of Isaac's education reveals that he was a man of considerable learning. His sermons and other works reveal the careful crafting of thought and precision of vocabulary. And yet, in the midst of an elaborate explanation of God's substance (*substantia*), Isaac declares in *Sermon 22* that it is necessary either to be silent or to use "changing words."⁶⁵⁴ For Isaac, God strikes dumb as much as he dwarfs.

Despite Isaac's learning and erudition, he was not loquacious but was rather of a piece with what Leclercq describes as "the literature of silence." "In the schools," he writes, "there is much talking, much 'disputation.'" This was Isaac's world during his youth but on becoming a monk, he entered a new world. "In the monastery," Leclercq continues, "they write because they do not talk, they write to avoid speaking."⁶⁵⁵

Isaac gave himself neither to "much 'disputation'" nor display of his learning. He gave himself, rather, to the tradition of which he was a part, a tradition of reading, understanding and applying Scripture to the monks in his care as well as to himself. As an heir of Cassian and Benedict, Isaac claimed their mantle in his service to Christ and the monks entrusted to his care. In the end Isaac meant to give only what he had been

⁶⁵³ McGinn, *The Golden Chain*, 33.

⁶⁵⁴ *Sermon 22.10. Tacere, aut mutuatis uti verbis, necesse est.* SC 207: 70; PL 194: 1762D.

⁶⁵⁵ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 154.

given. It is only fitting, then, that Isaac should have ended his days on earth not as a disgraced exile far from his monastery but rather as the very abbot and spiritual father of the community at Stella, his true “exile” from Eden.

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