

## An Excerpt from the Song Commentary by St Bernard of Clairvaux

### Introduction

Recently I was on the hunt for a particular Latin word in St Bernard's **Commentary on the Song of Songs** and without any planning, hit upon the section at hand. That happened to be Sermo 40, section #3. The two Latin words of concern are *otium* and *negotium*. It so happened that Bernard attributed the former to Mary and the latter to Martha, both of biblical fame and found in the following section. I was going to search for both in the **Commentary** but decided upon the present format. Most likely the search will follow soon.

So why did I spend valuable time making notations on the passage below despite it being short? It reflects a long standing desire to come as close as possible to the original text even to the point of forcing the Latin over into the English. Not a very good idea. Obviously this attempt set me up to create a perfect stumbling block. Still, if I hadn't taken a crack at it, I'd come away dissatisfied. Perhaps some day I'll be able to find a better correspondence between a text in the original language and its English rendition, so in the meanwhile please pardon the awkwardness of what is presented here.

Though not advertized as in the title, this document contains a second part which is partially related. It pertains to a chapter from the **Rule of St Benedict** which deals with the daily manual labor. In it are seven references with regard to the Latin verb *vaco* which in the context at hand can be taken as being at leisure.

An important point! Both parts of this short document are intended as an aide for the practice of *lectio divina*. Other than that they have no value. Such is the purpose of all documents on this homepage.

As for the excerpt at hand (Sermo 40, section #3), it's divided into nine sentences or parts of a sentence so as to better comprehend the text. The English translation is from **On the Song of Songs II** (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo 1976).

The plus sign (+) follows some Latin words. This means they are repeated and because they are as such, there may be no need for translation or explanation.

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**1. Ergo intendere non in Deum, sed in saeculum, saecularis animae est, nec ullam prorsus genarum speciosam habentis.**

Therefore to direct one's mind completely to worldly pursuits rather than toward God is the sign of a worldly person whose cheeks are totally devoid of beauty.

*Intendo*: fundamentally to stretch out, to strain as well as to aim, to seek. Here the issue is one of focus upon worldly affairs instead of God. That is to say, two uses of the preposition *in*: *Deus* and *saeculum*, that latter as age or time. Thus *Deus* and *saeculum* are opposing realities. And so if the focus of *intendo* is as such, the soul or *anima* (air, breath, life) is *saecularis*, this worldly or temporal character is contrary to its nature. Bernard uses the image of the bridegroom's cheeks which lack beauty or anything splendid, *speciosus*. The adverb *prorsus* means in a straightforward manner, a way to emphasize the negativity at hand.

**2. Intendere autem quasi in Deum, sed non propter Deum, hypocritae plane animae est: cujus etsi una facies decora videtur, quod ad Deum qualicunque intentione respiciat;**<sup>1</sup>

TTTTTT o direct one's mind as it were toward God but not for the sake of God, betrays the attitude of the hypocrite, one of whose cheeks may seem attractive because of a vaunted concern for God,

To direct one's mind as it were toward God but not for the sake of God, betrays the attitude of the hypocrite, one of whose cheeks may seem attractive because of a vaunted concern for God.

This is the second use of the verb *intendo* + with regard to *in* God compared with "for the sake of God." Here *in* is surpassed by *propter*. *Quasi* or *as, like* shows that the preposition *in* indeed is inferior to *propter*. This clearly (*plane*) points out the hypocritical view of the soul or *anima* +.

One visage (*facies* rendered as cheek) gives the appearance (*video*, to see) of being beautiful, *decorus* also as becoming or fitting. This is true insofar as anyone looks to God, *respicio*, to be mindful, to consider with the preposition *ad* indication of direction towards-which.

**3. ipsa tamen simulatio omne in ea decorum exterminat, et magis per totum**

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<sup>1</sup>Though this is a complete but lengthy sentence, breaking it up at the semi-colon is a way of making it more manageable.

**ingerit foeditatem.**

but whose presence nullifies every form of attractiveness and contaminates the whole with its ugliness.

However (*tamen*) the act of feigning or insincerity drives out (*simulatio*) all becomingness or *decurus* in itself. The verb *exterminor* is strong, like the English exterminate. This false concern for God heaps up (*ingero*, to carry or our in) every type of filth, *foeditas* also as deformity.

**4. Si autem vel solum, vel maxime, ob vitae praesentis necessaria ad Deum converterit intentionem; non quidem faece hypocrisis putidam, pusillanimitatis tamen vitio dicimus subobscuram, et minus acceptam.**

Again, if one directs one's mind to God solely or chiefly because of the necessities of the present life, I cannot say that it stinks with the dregs of hypocrisy, but it is so befogged by pettiness of spirit that it cannot merit acceptance.

At first glance (*autem*, however) this *converto* or directing one's *intentio* or intention to (*ad*) God sounds innocuous enough but if done either solely or especially (*solum* and *maxime*, to the greatest extent) due to the necessities *necessaria* (that which is indispensable and *praesens*, immediate, at hand) of this present life, Bernard makes the following remark. One won't experience shame with the excrement of hypocrisy (*putidam* and *faex*). Rather, he will experience being befogged (the *sub-* of *subobscurus*) by smallness of spirit that he is incapable of acceptance.

On the other hand (*autem*), if a person directs (*converto*, to direct) oneself to (*ad*) God either solely or especially (*solum* and *maxime*, to the greatest extent) due to the necessities of the present life, *necessaria* (that which is indispensable and *praesens*, immediate, at hand), this won't be considered as shameful due with the excrement of hypocrisy (*putidam* and *faex*). Rather, it suffers being obscured (the *sub-* of *subobscurus*) do to the defect or *vitium* of *pusillanimitas* or timidity (*pusillus* or tiny prefaced to *anima* +) and is incapable (*minus* or less) of acceptance.

**5. Porro e contrario intendere in aliud quam in Deum, tamen propter Deum; non otium Mariae, sed Marthae negotium est.**

On the contrary, to give one's attention to something other than God, although for God's sake, means to embark on Martha's busy life rather than Mary's way of contemplation.

*Intendo* + or to stretch out, to strain with regard to anything other than

literally “in God” even for God’s sake (*propter* +) means not participating in the leisure of Mary but in the busyness of Martha, *otium* vs. *negotium* (*neg-* being the negative of *otium*).

**6. Absit autem ut huiusmodi est, quidquam illam dixerim habere deforme!**

I do not say that this soul is deformed,

*Absit* or far be it of such a kind (*huiusmodi*) which Bernard claims to be (*habeo*, to have) deformed, *deformis* or lacking proper form, expression.

**7. Nec tamen ad perfectum affirmaverim pervenisse decoris: quippe quae adhuc sollicita est et turbatur erga plurima, et non potest terrenorum actuum vel tenui pulvere non respergi.**

but it has not attained to perfect beauty, for it worries and frets about so many things, and is bound to be stained to some degree with the grime of worldly affairs.

Bernard maintains (*affirmo*) that the soul hasn’t of yet achieved the perfection of beauty, *perfectus* also as that which is finished or completed. *Pervenio* literally means to come through and is expressive of thoroughness. It is with the preposition *ad* indicative of direction towards-which or that which is perfect in beauty, *decorus* +.

Such a soul is concerned and disturbed about a multitude of things, *sollicitus* and *turbo*, thoroughly moved and to be in tumult with regard to *plurimus*. Thus such a soul is bound to be stained, *respergo* literally to sprinkle with the dust of earthly things.

**8. Quem tamen cito facileque deterget vel in hora sanctae dormitionis casta intentio, et bonae conscientiae interrogatio in Deum.**

This however is quickly and easily cleansed at the hour of a death made holy by the grace of a pure intention and a good conscience.

Two adverbs, *cito* and *facile* or quickly and easily with regard to the soul being cleansed, *detergeo* as to wipe off in the hour of a sleeping (*dormitio*) made holy or *sanctus* by a question or *interrogatio* of a pure intention, *intentio* and a good conscience, *conscientia*.

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**Rule of St Benedict, Chapter Forty-Eight, On the Daily Manual Labor**

Otiositas inimica est animæ, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in **lectione divina**.

Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brethren should be occupied at certain times in manual labor, and at other fixed hours in holy reading.

Note the difference between *otium* which connotes leisure and *otiositas* as idleness. The verb *occupo* as to occupy as well as to be involved parallels *otium*. Benedict contrasts *labor* and *lectio divina*, both the subject of *occupo*.

Ab hora autem quarta usque hora qua Sextam agent, **lectioni vacent**

From the fourth until about the sixth hour let them apply themselves to reading.

*Vaco* also as to act, to behave with *vaco* fundamentally as to be empty yet as well as a disposition of rest...leisure...similar to *otium*.

A kalendas autem octobres usque caput quadragesimæ usque in hora secunda plena **lectioni vacent**;

From the fourteenth of September till the beginning of Lent they are to devote themselves to reading till the end of the second hour.

*Vaco* + with regard to *lectio*, the time here being chiefly winter.

Post refectioem autem **vacent lectionibus suis aut psalmis**

After the meal let them apply themselves to their reading or to the psalms.

The original meaning of *refectio* is to restore, something that in the context at hand continues with *vaco* and the reading of psalms.

In quadragesimæ vero diebus, a mane usque tertia plena **vacent lectionibus suis**, et usque decima hora plena operentur quod eis iniungitur.

During Lent, from the morning till the end of the third hour, let them devote themselves to reading; then until the end of the tenth hour let them labor at what is appointed them.

An alteration between *vaco* + when it comes to *lectio divina* and *operor* or to labor, often in the sense of being devoted to something.

Ante omnia sane seputentur unus aut duo seniores qui circumeant monasterium horis quibus **vacant fratres lectioni**, et videant ne forte inveniatur frater acediosus qui **vacat otio** aut fabulis et non est intentus lectioni, et non solum sibi inutilis est, sed etiam alios distollit

Moreover, let one or two seniors be appointed to go around the monastery during the hours when the brethren are engaged in reading, to see that no brother be found who is slothful or who is giving himself to idleness or gossip instead of applying himself to his reading, so that he is not only doing harm to himself but is also a source of distraction to others.

Here *vaco* + is used twice. With regard to the first, seniors are to see no monk is slothful, fond of being idle or gossip: *acediosus* is the adjectival form of *acedia*, a type of melancholy resulting from boredom, being empty or *vaco* with regard to *otium* + taken here in a negative way and *fabula* often as story or discourse. All three can taken the place (*intentus*) of *lectio*.

As for the seniors, most likely they've had experience in this regard and know what to look for. As for the seeing at hand (*video* +), more often than not it takes the form of offering encouragement.

Dominico item **die lectioni vacent omnes**, excepto his qui variis officiis deputati sunt.

On Sunday they are to devote themselves to reading, with the exception of those who are assigned to various duties.

A contrast between *vaco* + and those who are assigned various duties, *deputato* or to delegate. Note that this pertains to the day of Sabbath, Sunday.

Si quis vero ita negligens et desidiosus fuerit, ut non velit aut non possit meditare aut legere, iniungatur ei opus quod faciat, **ut non vacet**.

But if there is one who is so negligent and slothful as to be unwilling or unable to meditate or read, let some work be given him to do, so that he may not be idle.

Neglegens and *desidiosus*: negligent and indigent, lazy. Both make a monk unable to meditate or read, *meditor* to think or reflect upon. Benedict prescribes work so as not to be *vaco* +.

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