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In a profound sense Carolingian society was oriented around and shaped by the study and interpretation of the Bible. Biblical interpretation occupied the energies of the most prominent intellectuals within the Carolingian world, suggesting models for social and political, as well as theological, practice and ensuring divine favor for the Carolingian dynasty. Early-medieval exegetes regarded themselves as guardians not only of the biblical text but also of the entire patristic tradition, which they used to decipher it. Like scripture, however, the patristic tradition was anything but systematic; moreover, it was not comprehensive, and it was further complicated by the vagaries of manuscript survival and the availability of texts. Even when early-medieval exegetes sincerely attempted to be faithful to the works of the Fathers, they often brought a degree of organization to bear in the interpretation of scripture that had not previously existed, and, of course, they were also entirely capable of shaping and reframing the presentation of patristic authorities for their own purposes. Like a collection of spolia reconfigured in a new setting, the complex process of selection and abridgment of the patristic tradition, therefore, can reveal the concerns of Carolingian exegetes as they sought...

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1 Biblical interpretation was, in fact, the “core intellectual discipline of much of the Middle Ages”: Thomas E. Burman, “Introduction,” in Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 123 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2. Modern scholars have increasing respect for the ability of Carolingian exegetes not only as transmitters and shapers of the patristic tradition but also for their role within Carolingian society as a whole. See the essays in The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era, ed. Celia Chazelle and Burton Van Name Edwards, Medieval Church Studies 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages, ed. Claudio Leonardi and Giovanni Orlandi, Millennio Medievale 52 (Florence: SISMEL, 2005); and The Multiple Meaning of Scripture: The Role of Exegesis in Early-Christian and Medieval Culture, ed. Ineke van ‘t Spijker, Commentaria 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).


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to mold Frankish society according to biblical principles. In this process of systematization, the allegorical or figural interpretation of scripture could sometimes act as a tool, linking different chains of images to one another within scripture itself or to particular doctrines or practices within early-medieval society. In one particular instance, which I will explore here, the early-medieval commentary tradition on the Song of Songs was able to bring together the rich imagery of the Song with traditional conceptions of the church as mother and Gregorian ideals of pastoral care. The challenge of puzzling out the erotic poetry of the Song of Songs enabled many early-medieval exegetes, including Bede, Alcuin, Haimo of Auxerre, and Angelomus of Luxeuil, to speculate about the nature of the church and to emphasize their own position and the range of their authority within it, including their attitudes and duties toward the laity.

One of the central achievements of Bede, I will argue, was the systematization of a particular reading of the Song, adopted and further simplified by the Carolingian exegetes, which depicted the church and the clergy in maternal terms. One of the consequences was the early-medieval exegetes’ articulation of a vocabulary to express clerical authority through the female body, specifically the maternal female body. I suggest that the Carolingian commentary tradition on the Song can be placed in parallel with other texts within the Carolingian world: Carolingian writers, to an extent perhaps not sufficiently recognized, invoked the church’s authority by describing it as a mother and, at the same time, discussed relations between members of the clergy and between an abbot and his monks in maternal terms. This maternal language had a complex range of significations. At times welcoming, maternal, and sincerely tender, in polemical contexts this language could also be employed as a tactic, as Carolingian authors resorted to a vocabulary of “soft power” to encourage, or compel, obedience. These various types of maternal language occasionally gave added force to similar language in the commentary tradition on the Song and culminated with powerful effect in the works of the immensely creative Paschasius Radbertus, who seemed particularly to relish the vivid imagery of the Song of Songs read in this way.

In Jesus as Mother Caroline Walker Bynum explored the use of maternal language as applied to Christ and the figure of the abbot in light of developments in twelfth-century spirituality, particularly among the Cistercians. For Bynum, Cistercian authors invoked such language in connection with Christ and the office of the

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2 The works I will discuss are listed in Friedrich Stegmüller, Repertorium biblicum medii aevi, 11 vols. (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Francisco Suárez, 1940–80), under the following numbers: the commentary of Bede, no. 1610; that of Alcuin, no. 1092; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 2822, known as the Vox ecclesie, and the fragment, London, British Library, MS Harley 213, nos. 9621 and 10365, respectively; the commentary of Angelomus of Luxeuil, no. 1339; and Paschasius Radbertus’ Lamentations commentary, no. 6262.

3 I have borrowed the term from Joseph Nye, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x.
the abbot in part to express their “intense concern and anxiety over authority,”
their mixed feelings about shouldering pastoral responsibility, and “the need of
Cistercian abbots for a new image of authority” to meet the challenges of the day. More recently, although she acknowledges the existing “tension between the ideal of withdrawal and the monks’ social involvement,” Martha Newman has pointed to a more positive, proactive Cistercian conception of pastoral care and service within the church. Cistercian monastic culture, in which the use of interpretation of the Song played a distinctive role, fostered connections between the monastery and the wider community. While I would not disagree that Bernard and other Cistercian writers represent a shift toward a more affective tone, which is reflected in their writings about the Song of Songs, I would suggest that the early-medieval interpretation of the Song already contained within itself the model of the maternal doctor of the church, a model embracing both the ambivalence toward and the responsibilities of pastoral care, which Bernard transformed in turn to fit his own particular purposes. Though it was not the main focus of her work, Bynum herself recognized that the use of maternal language and imagery by the Cistercians to describe the nature of their authority and their role within the church had considerable patristic and early-medieval precedent. Because early-medieval exegesis of the Song of Songs has received little recent critical attention, however, its impact on the later tradition has not been broadly understood, or it has been understood only in light of later, twelfth-century developments and not within its early-medieval historical context.

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9 Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 126–28. Bynum primarily juxtaposes the patristic tradition of maternal imagery with the Cistercian transformation, which “seems less an aspect of that looking back to the early church that is such a prominent motive in twelfth-century spirituality than an aspect of certain broad trends that are, so far as we can tell, new” (129). While she alludes to several early-medieval examples of such language, such as Paschasius Radbertus’s *Life of Adalhard*, she does not explore them in detail. For suggestions that some of Bynum’s claims should be reassessed see David Appleby, “Beautiful on the Cross, Beautiful in His Torments: The Place of the Body in the Thought of Paschasius Radbertus,” *Traditio* 60 (2005): 1–46, at 8; Arthur Holder, “Introduction,” in *The Venerable Bede: On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Arthur Holder (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 17; Conrad Leyser, “From Maternal Kin to Jesus as Mother: Royal Genealogy and Marian Devotion in the Ninth-Century West,” in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400–1400: Essays Presented to Henrietta Leyser*, ed. Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 21–39, at 38.

10 For a survey of the early-medieval interpretation of the Song of Songs, the critical works remain Friedrich Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien: Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hoheliedauslegung des Speculum* 89/2 (April 2014).
The challenges posed by expanding missionary endeavors, the conquests and forced conversions of Charlemagne, and the far-reaching reforms of the church itself in the ninth century led early-medieval exegetes to emphasize a different set of elements within the patristic tradition of interpreting the Song from those that attracted the Cistercians. When Bede, for example, wrote his commentary on the Song of Songs, he did not mean its readership to be limited to monastic circles—rather, a monastery in the Northumbrian church was often the center of clerical, as well as monastic, life and maintained intimate connections to surrounding lay society. As a consequence, the importance of pastoral care, broadly defined, looms very large in Bede’s work and in that of the Carolingians who followed him. Likewise, the very prominence of biblical interpretation within Carolingian society, its connection to the court and to Carolingian imperial ideology, and the general adherence to the Rule of Saint Benedict imposed by Charlemagne and his successors meant that these early-medieval Song commentaries were not “house scholarship” in the way that later works became for the Cistercian writers. Instead, biblical scholarship, like doctrinal controversy, was worked out in an environment of consensus politics presided over and directed by the king; the works of Carolingian biblical scholars implicated, at least in theory, everyone in a position of spiritual responsibility, from the king filtering outward from the court through the bishops to the local clergy. For all that early-medieval exegetes still frequently described the Song of Songs as an epithalamium and still referred to the Song’s main characters as the Sponsus and Sponsa, they were interested in the Bride of the Song, not as a depiction of the mystical longing of the individual soul, but as a collective depiction of the forms of life within the church in which they were engaged.

Except for one striking instance in Bede’s Song commentary, as I will show, the texts I will discuss do not explicitly describe Jesus or God as mother in the way discussed by Bynum and previously outlined by André Cabassut. What is


distinctive about the early-medieval reading of the Song of Songs, I will argue, is the consistency with which the beautiful and sensual figure of the Bride is portrayed as a maternal figure and the extent to which, in turn, within the Carolingian church maternal imagery bled over into descriptions of the duties of a single class of senior ecclesiastics, the doctores or teachers. While the Carolingian reform has often been portrayed as either hostile to women’s spirituality or, at least, as ominously silent on the subject, the decision by Carolingian authors to take up maternal imagery to convey spiritual authority is worth noting. The ideals of the reform imposed on senior ecclesiastical figures the expectation that they would exert moral authority, more or less gently, on a dizzying variety of fronts. The full complexity of the bishops’ role defies easy generalization; as Anna Trumbore Jones has noted for the later Carolingian world, the bishops’ “fluid and multi-faceted” power and the sheer range of their responsibilities created tensions and anxieties for the bishops themselves, in an interesting parallel to the twelfth-century situation described by Bynum and Newman. On the whole, that the Carolingian doctores could employ a vocabulary of soft power to describe themselves, as well as the church they governed, is suggestive of the breadth and complexity of their ideals, the reach of their ambitions, and their perennial need to reinforce consensus within a common clerical class. The use of maternal imagery likely also reflects a social reality in which a large proportion of monks and clerics had been child oblates, used to finding maternal surrogates in their superiors as well as in the wider institution in which they served.

To envision the church as a maternal figure was hardly new even in the early-medieval period. In the Latin West, the image of the church as mother can be found in the writings of the apostle Paul and is scattered throughout patristic authorities such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, with Augustine in particular frequently describing the church as a mother. At

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the same time, scripture itself had established a precedent for describing new believers as infants not ready for solid food, only for the milk of the essentials of the faith. In part as a tactic against Pelagianism, Augustine had argued throughout his polemical works in defense of the needs of still-immature believers, the *paruuli*. In a specifically exegetical sense, the *paruuli* were those Christians still not capable of understanding the “spiritual,” or allegorical, interpretation of scripture; ironically, such a limitation had once been Augustine’s criticism of the Manichaeans in particular. More generally, *paruuli* was also a word for the entire class of catechumens, and Roland Teske has suggested that, for Augustine, *paruuli* as a term came to signify the majority of the Christian community, with their continued need for direction and divine grace. By extension, in the patristic period and beyond, to provide milk for the *paruuli* was understood to be one of the duties of the scriptural exegete. Gregory the Great envisioned contemplation and pastoral care as integral parts of a dual spiritual ideal; conventionally compared to Rachel and Leah, the two wives of the patriarch Jacob, if contemplation was inherently more desirable, pastoral care was ultimately more productive. Understood in opposition to “barren” contemplation, therefore, pastoral care for early-medieval theologians was often depicted through the language of fertility, fecundity, and nursing, and this maternal language could sometimes be applied to those charged with its execution.

A distinctive early-medieval reading of the Song of Songs would grow out of this Gregorian conception of pastoral care, encouraged by the lack of one complete, authoritative patristic commentary on the Song of Songs and the concerns of the exegetes themselves. For its early-medieval commentators, the Song was not yet the exhaustively glossed text it would become in the twelfth century and later. In the third century, Origen had pioneered the technique of reading the Song of Songs allegorically, understanding the Bridegroom as Christ and the Bride, alternately, as the Church or the individual soul. Origen’s commentary in Jerome’s and Rufinus’s translations, however, was both fragmentary and a paraphrase of the original Greek; complete Latin commentaries on the Song of Songs, such as those of Ambrose and Apponius, and even the small collection of homilies of Gregory the

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18 1 Cor. 3.2, Heb. 5.12–13, 1 Pet. 2.2.


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Great, were not widely circulated in the early Middle Ages. The first complete and systematic commentary on the Song of Songs of any length in the early-medieval West was that of the Venerable Bede. Bede, typically, while acknowledging that he was “following in the footsteps of the Fathers,” was nevertheless quite capable of making tracks of his own for a good pedagogical cause. While Bede appears to have possessed a rare complete copy of Apponius’s commentary on the Song of Songs, his use of it was subtle; Apponius seems to have influenced Bede’s overall scheme for the commentary rather than his interpretation of particular passages. Of far more direct impact on Bede was Gregory the Great’s piecemeal treatment of individual images from the Song over the course of his writings, particularly in the *Moralia in Iob* and the *Homilies on Ezekiel*. These would be so important to Bede, who did not, in fact, possess Gregory’s homilies on the Song of Songs, that he would devote the entirety of the last book of his commentary to compiling a small florilegium of Song-related extracts, most of which are drawn from these two works.

Written probably around 716, Bede’s Song commentary displays many of the obsessions that would come to dominate his later “reforming” exegesis: a church encompassing and incorporating a variety of peoples, staffed by a highly trained class of preaching *doctores* learned in scriptural interpretation and modeled after the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. Among other things, Bede’s commentary pushed to the forefront the ecclesiological reading of the Song as the normative, traditional reading of the text. Bede’s commentary included a summary of his interpretation in the form of a list of *capitula* and another list specifying which character in the Song was speaking at any particular time; throughout the commentary Bede employed a formidable barrage of scriptural

21 For Bede’s importance see Riedlinger, *Die Makellosigkeit*, 71–88.
25 Bede, *In Cantica*, pp. 181–89. Much of this is a condensed version of Bede’s particular interpretation of the Song. As Mary Dove has noted, “it must be admitted that if the ‘chapters’ are read by themselves, in isolation from the commentary, their relationship to the text of the Song of Songs is unknown.”
cross-references to bolster his interpretation. Bede’s focus throughout is on the ever-advancing work of the church, maturing from the Old Testament figure of Synagoga into the full-fledged Bride of Christ and encompassing the work of the apostles down to the work of present-day doctores and praedicatores. Uniting disparate passages in one complete and systematic reading, Bede’s Song commentary ensured that there would be a consistent ecclesiological interpretation of the vivid images and metaphors of the Song. If anything, Bede demystified the text: through his interpretation, followed by the numerous exegetes in the next century who tackled the Song, this voluptuous collection of poetry was transmuted into a fund of images to describe an institution and a textual community within which the increasingly vocal, self-conscious elite of the Carolingian reform could reflect on their own place. Early-medieval exegetes of the Song of Songs are especially noteworthy, I would argue, in their specific application of maternal language and imagery, including images of the female body, to a group of the male spiritual elite in particular. The commentary tradition on the Song refers to this spiritual elite as the doctores of the church, and sometimes her praedicatores, and they are not defined with much greater specificity than that. In the Ecclesiastical History Bede applies the term doctores to monks and bishops indiscriminately, and it may well be that it was intended as a broad category to include all those responsible for some level of instruction and pastoral care.

In the early-medieval commentary tradition on the Song, the central, basic distinction made by the exegetes is between the doctores and the paruuli. This is projected, as it were, onto the female body of the Bride, with the exegetes visualizing the life of the church in terms of the Bride’s individual features, likened in the biblical text to a variety of fruit, flowers, or animals. For example, in the Song, the Bride’s eyes are compared alternately to doves and to the fish pools of Heshbon. For Bede, the Bride’s eyes represent her spiritual perception (sensus spiritualium); alternately, he suggests, “the preachers of the holy church can also be understood in the eyes of the Bride, through which she gazes on the mysteries of heavenly secrets, which the general crowd of believers does not know.”26 Like the fish pools of Heshbon, however, which are productive sources of food, Bede notes that the doctores have a responsibility to communicate what they know, “so that what they learn in secret,” Bede the teacher admonishes, “they might be able to proclaim in the open, and the things that they perceive in private meditation they might supply through teaching as the plain nourishment of the holy church.”27 Similarly, for Alcuin, Haimo, and Angelomus, the eyes of the Bride represent the spiritual sense in general and, in particular, the class of people who possess it,

26 “Possunt autem in oculis sponsae etiam praedicatores intellegi sanctae ecclesiae per quos celestium archana secretorum quae generalis credentium turba nequit aspicit”: Bede, In Cantica 2.4, lines 45–47.
27 “Idem sancti praedicatores qui ab alimento uerbi calla erant sponsae comparati designantur etiam in oculis ab inspectione archanorum quae in occulto discunt ipsi ut possint in aperto proloqui et per ea quae secreta meditatione perceperunt manifestum sanctae ecclesiae nutrimentum docendo ministrent”: Bede, In Cantica 4.7, lines 246–50.
who, *propter simplicitatem*, have a clearer understanding of heavenly realities.\(^{28}\) The anonymous author of the Carolingian commentary known as the *Vox ecclesie* notes: “The eyes, the preachers of the holy church, are so called on account of their humility and innocence.”\(^{29}\)

Similarly, the neck of the Bride, adorned with ornaments of gold and silver and compared to a tower hung with battlements, also represented the *doctores*. Gregory the Great had simply compared the neck of the Bride to the activity of preaching, with the gold and silver of her jewelry representing spiritual knowledge and holy eloquence, respectively. Bede, Alcuin, Haimo, and Angelomus are faithful to this interpretation, but they are also more institutionally precise that it should be the “preachers” who embody the voice of the church.\(^{30}\) The tower-and-shields metaphor suggested the unified, even fortified structure of the church generally but also the role of the preachers in speaking the *uerbum aedificationis* to the *rudes*.\(^{31}\)

For Alcuin, the effect was to make the church “everywhere impregnable,” and both he and Haimo of Auxerre seem to have been particularly sensitive to the threat of heresy. Within the church, however, the neck of the Bride also signified the mediative role of the *doctores*, linking the head, Christ, with the remaining members of his—and her—body in a very literal and tangible sense. Bede notes that the ministry of the *doctores* is the conduit by which the *alimenta uitae* enter the body; similarly, for Haimo, the voice of the preacher to its hearers is like the throat, which, “having taken in the sustenance of the word, conveys it to nourish the body.”\(^{32}\)

If the *doctores* were the tower-like neck of the Bride, the church, in that they defended her against heresy, they were also her nose, able to sniff out and to detect bad doctrine. According to Bede, following Gregory the Great, “now, on account of their most wholesome discretion, which was proved by the Fathers to be the mother of the virtues, they [the *doctores*] are also signified in her nose, because, as if, evidently, by the faculty of smell, they are qualified to discern more fully than the rest those who give off the lethal stench of depravity from those actions or
words from which the good odor of Christ emanates.”  

Alcuin and Haimo both repeat the comparison of the doctores to the Bride’s nose; however, for Alcuin, following Bede, it is clearly the discretion of the doctores that matters, while for Haimo and Angelomus, quoting Gregory, the particular sort of depravity the doctores should detect is, specifically, “the lethal stench of the heretical corpse.”

When, one might well ask, does one find the general populace figured within the body of the Bride? In truth, not often, perhaps because the Song of Songs was so carefully protected as a text not intended for general consumption. One exception to this tunnel vision, however, is the closely juxtaposed comparison of the Bride’s hair, like a flock of goats, with her teeth, white as sheep newly come from the washing, which further suggested to early-medieval exegetes the distinction between the multitude of believers and the class of perfectiores, the doctores. Because of Christ’s parable of the sheep and the goats, goats’ hair in the Song had a rather ambivalent quality to most exegetes, which they explained by saying that most believers, like an unruly head of hair, were more fragile and less disciplined, particularly when compared with the purity, hardness, and impeccable order of the doctores. As with the throat of the Bride, her teeth were also responsible for the patient breaking down of difficult doctrines into—essentially—baby food, “because,” according to Bede, “they prepare the bread of the word of God for her little ones, who are not able to chew it.”

The anonymous author of the Vox ecclesie notes: “It calls the teeth of the church his preachers, who pass along those things which they take up by breaking them down into the body of Christ.” It is worth pondering, in an era before processed baby food, how powerful and maternal the image of chewing a small child’s food for him or her would have been, what a chord it would have struck—and have been meant to strike—in its readers, and how intimate and embodied this language would have seemed in speaking about a mandarin caste of male clergy, monks, and scriptural exegetes. Similarly, the scarlet lips of the Bride, dripping with honey and milk, represent, respectively, the eloquence of the doctores and their abilities to nourish the paruuli with simple doctrine.

33 “Nunc autem etiam causa saluberrimae discretionis quae a patribus mater esse uirtutum probatur designantur in naso quia nimirum quasi per olfaciendi officium ceteris amplius dinoscere sufficiunt in quibus actibus siue sermonibus bonus odor Christi flagret qui uero letiferum prauitatis exhalent fetorem”: Bede, In Cantica 4.7, lines 296–300.

34 Gregory the Great, Moralia in Iob 31.4, lines 6–12; Haimo, Commentarium, 344B–C; Angelomus, Enarrationes, 621C–D.

35 Augustine famously found the image delightful, outlining for it an ecclesiologial interpretation (perhaps not original to him) that Gregory and others would adopt: De doctrina Christiana, ed. J. Martin, CCSL 32 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1962), 2.6, lines 15–29.

36 Cf. Haimo, Commentarium, 315C–D.

37 “Dentes sunt ecclesiae quia panem uerbi Dei paruulis illius ad quem manducandum ipsi non sufficiunt parant”: Bede, In Cantica 2.4, lines 97–99.

38 “Dentes ecclesiae predicatoros eius dicit, qui ea que suspicerunt salubriter comminuendo in corpus Christi traicium; hii ascenderunt de lavacro regeneracionis omnes repleti gemino caritatis precepto”: Vox ecclesie, 222.

39 For example, see Haimo, Commentarium, 321B–C.
This dichotomy between the needs of the *paruuli* and the skills of the *doctores* underlies one of the most complex networks of imagery in early-medieval Song interpretation: the comparison of the *doctores* to the breasts of the Bride, an image that recurs with some frequency in the Song, and the equally ubiquitous mention of milk and honey.\(^40\) Because of a notorious (mis)translation of the Septuagint preserved in the Vulgate, the first set of breasts to be admired in the Song of Songs were not, in fact, those of the Bride but those of Christ the Bridegroom: *ubera tua meliora vino* (Song of Sol. 1.1).\(^41\) What was an early-medieval exegete to make of the image of a Christ with breasts, in a sense a female Christ? Bede, never daunted, had compiled every example he could find in which Christ used feminine language to talk about himself, such as the lament over Jerusalem, in which Christ likened himself to a mother hen longing to gather her chicks under her wings, or Paul’s comparison of himself to a woman in labor. “But the Spouse himself, our Lord, that is, did not hesitate to apply to himself the figure of the female sex,” Bede remarks, moving swiftly on. The milk of Christ is sweeter than the old wine of the Old Testament, Bede notes, citing both the passages from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians and 1 Peter. Taking up Gregory the Great’s comparison from the *Moralia in lob* of the breasts of the Bride to the *doctores* of the church, Bede had a concise formulation to open his commentary by which the *doctores*, the breasts of the Bride, were shown to imitate in function the breasts of Christ, nurturing immature believers.\(^42\) As Arthur Holder has noted, Carolingian exegetes who worked with the Song lacked Bede’s quiet bravado in presenting an image of a female Christ, or at least a Christ with feminine attributes; it is one of the most striking instances, in fact, where they do not faithfully follow the lead of *magister Beda*.\(^43\) With the image of the *doctores* as the breasts of the church, however, the Carolingian exegetes readily concurred, and they repeated this particular interpretation of the breasts of the Bride in their commentaries whenever the figure appears.

So, what did it mean for a Carolingian priest or monk to imagine himself as a breast of the church? More than a passing comparison, the image recurs several times throughout the Song, inextricably tied by these exegetes not only to the *doctores* but to the person of Christ from the very opening of the text. In general, these were images meant to be pored over, meditated upon, repeatedly “chewed”

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\(^{41}\) For a modern rendering of the passage see Paul J. Griffiths, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011), 6–7, 10.

\(^{42}\) “Sed nec ipse sponsus, id est dominus noster, sexus feminei figuram in se transferre refugit cum per Esaiam dicit: Numquid ego qui alios parere facio ipse non pariam, dicit dominus, si ego qui generationem ceteris tribuo sterilis ero? et iterum: Quo modo si cui mater blanditur ita ego consolabor uos; et in euangelio ad ciuitatem incredulam: Quoties uolui congregare filios tuos quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas, et noluisti”: Bede, *In Cantica* 1.1, lines 47–133, at lines 75–82.


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by the doctores. Like the image of the Bride’s teeth, it is strikingly intimate. For Alcuin, the doctores are compared to a breast “for the sake of the consolation of the weak and the sustenance of the childish”; the doctores are to be the paedagogi parvulorum meorum.\textsuperscript{44} Milk he elsewhere compares to the eruditio parvulorum, while honey signifies the fortior doctrina perfectorum.\textsuperscript{45} Similarly, for Haimo the milk of the doctores is simplex doctrina for the simplices fideles and the infirmi auditores, while the honey stands for the arcana et intima of scripture.\textsuperscript{46} Angelomus of Luxeuil, quoting Apponius, mentions the need for believers to be nourished on the lac triforme of the Trinity. Angelomus’s Enarrationes in Cantica canticorum was an ambitious effort to provide exalted, meditative reflections on particular aspects of the Song for Louis the Pious’s son Lothar and was, as a consequence, perhaps less concerned with pastoral care per se than Bede or Alcuin had been. Although Angelomus includes the traditional interpretation of the breasts of the church as the doctores, for him the dichotomy between the inner spiritual life and active charity was equally important, and so the breasts of the church are, more broadly, those holy men who draw their teaching ex intimis to nourish exterius.\textsuperscript{47} But the same oppositions still apply: inner, deeper meaning and outward rudimenta; mature and immature Christians; contemplation and active charity; the few and the many.

In all of these images, the eroticism inherent in the Song’s descriptions of the Bride’s neck, lips, and breasts has been ignored or cut away. But there is more than censorship at work here: not simply suppression, but substitution, an alteration of the meaning of these figures. Denuded of all sexual overtones, the power of the images lies instead in their tenderness, the promise of safety and nourishment, and the juxtaposition of the maturity of the Bride (and that of the doctores) with the dependence of the little ones, the daughters of Jerusalem or the paruuli, who surround her and are in some sense under her care. So safe, benign, and intimate do these images feel, in fact, that it is easy to forget how ambitious they actually are. To aspire to be the eyes, the nose, the lips, the teeth, the neck, and the breasts of the church is a fairly formidable program of clerical activity with an almost endless scope. Moreover, not only does it exclude the laity from the church’s body from the chest up, as it were, but the easy equation of the doctores with these parts of the church’s body in effect claims that the doctores are the only eyes, nose, teeth, and breasts that the church possesses. According to this network of images, the doctores become the exclusive conduit by which nourishment can both enter and exit the body, in the form of milk. In other images in the Song, the doctores’ supervisory, monitory role is even more directly expressed: they are the

\textsuperscript{44} “Item in mammæ nomine sancti doctores propter consolationem infirmorum et parvulorum sustentationem, quæ lacte exprimitur”: Alcuin, Compendium, 140.
\textsuperscript{45} “In lacte eruditio parvulorum, in meli fortior doctrina perfectorum signatur”: Alcuin, Compendium, 141.
\textsuperscript{46} “Lac parvulis convenit, ideoque per lac designatur simplex doctrina, quæ initium credentium imbuítur; mel vero, quod de rore coeli confici creditur, coelestem et spiritualem doctrinam significat, quæ perfectis et instructis convenit. Sub lingua ergo Ecclesiæ mel et lac est, quia aliquando coelestia mysteria perfectis, aliquando rudibus plana et simplicia annuntiât”: Haimo, Commentarium, 321C.
\textsuperscript{47} Angelomus, Enarrations, 566D, 567C, 571A–B.
gatekeepers, the uigiles who, in the text of the Song, guide and, on one occasion, even beat the hapless and wandering Bride; likewise, they are the armed ranks of mighty men standing, swords drawn, about the lectulus—the litter or palanquin of King Solomon—and are also the keepers of the Bride's vineyard and the redolent cedar beams supporting the house of the Bride and Bridegroom. The maternal imagery of the Song of Songs emphasizes the nutritive aspects of the ministry of the doctores, but it should not be separated from the broader historical context of the Carolingian reform and the claims of an expansive, even aggressive clerical class.

Alongside the reading of the Song of Songs systematized by the early-medieval exegetes, maternal language could also be used on occasion to describe power relations within the ranks of the doctores themselves. Moreover, maternal language could be used as a tactic by Carolingian authors to accompany reform, disarming potential protest and reinforcing consensus. Martin Claussen has drawn attention to Chrodegang of Metz's very deliberate description of the church as a mother in the Regula canonicorum: “Thus, the appellation mother church—mater ecclesia—is so striking here. It is used to unite the various alienated and marginalized groups Chrodegang has enlisted into a new family. . . . The choice of words and themes is purposeful, and relates to his attempts at community creation.”

While clerical categories remained nebulous to a certain extent in this period, the Carolingian reform saw the formation for the first time of metropolitan archbishoprics and, more broadly, the elaboration and crystallization of the church's institutional structure. Eric Palazzo has drawn attention to the mid-ninth century as a “turning point” in which bishops “progressively found their place in the ecclesiastical system established by the temporal power,” while Steffen Patzold has noted the particular importance of the 829 Synod of Paris in helping to form a new, increasingly aggressive “Paris model” of Carolingian episcopal activity. In a recent study, Megan McLaughlin has argued that, beginning in the ninth century, metropolitan bishops both clarified and strengthened their control over their suffragans and that, at the same time, these claims were expressed using maternal imagery, such that “metropolitan authority had come to be seen as related to

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maternal authority," with cathedral churches, likewise, increasingly known as the "mother church" of their diocese.51

In this vein, a bishop could express his outrage over heretical teaching in terms of the heretic’s rejection of the wholesome nourishment provided by the doctores, or conversely, he could encourage a wayward son to return to the church’s welcoming maternal embrace. In Beatus of Liébana’s anti-Adoptionist work, Adversus Elipandum, written around 785, Beatus explains that, in her infancy, the early church was the paruula, or “little sister,” of the Song, whose breasts had not yet grown: “She could not offer the breasts of preaching to her weak hearers. . . . But in this age, the Lord says, ‘The maidens have loved you’ (Song of Sol. 1.2). Indeed, all the church, which were made one and catholic, are called maidens . . . in age of suitable mind for spiritual fecundity.”52 Also writing to Elipandus after the Council of Frankfurt in 794, Charlemagne (or those doctores writing on his behalf) took up ecclesiological imagery circulated in the exegesis of the Song of Songs, proffering both carrot and stick, underscoring the church’s authority in maternal terms, exhorting Elipandus to return to the fold, and reminding him of the terrifyingly unified and fortified appearance of the church to her enemies:

The Christian faith rejoices to extend its twofold wings, namely, of divine and fraternal charity, throughout the broad expanses of the lands, so that she might nourish with maternal devotion those whom she had borne in holy baptism. And the greatest joy of holy mother church is the uniting of her sons, so that they might be joined together as one who were redeemed by one, since that same redeemer, our lord Jesus Christ, says, “Holy Father, those you have given to me, preserve them in your name, so that they all may be one, just as we are one” (John 17.22). Wherefore, in the Song of Songs, it is said concerning the holy church: “Terrible as the well-ordered battle line of an army” (Song of Sol. 6.3). The collected placement of an army and the united strength of warriors usually strike fear into their enemies: thus the peaceful union of the sons of holy mother church within the walls of the catholic faith, indeed, is quite terrifying to the powers of the air and stands thoroughly impenetrable to the fiery arrows of wicked treachery, just as he who was both the truest preacher to the nations and the boldest warrior on behalf

51 Megan McLaughlin, Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform, 1000–1122 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139–141. McLaughlin argues that this widespread use of maternal imagery would continue to be traditional for the rest of the Middle Ages but would, from 1050 onwards, be gradually displaced by “the language of paternity.” For recent studies of masculinity in the Carolingian world see Lynda Coon, Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); and Rachel Stone, Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 81 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

52 “Hinc enim de illa dicitur: Soror nostra paruula est et ubera non habet, quia nimium sancta ecclesia priusquam proficeret per incrementa uirtutis, infirmis quibusque audituribus praebere non potuit ubera praedicationis. Adulta uero eclesia dicitur, quando Dei Verbo copulata, repleta sancto Spiritu per praedicationis misterium in filiorum conceptione fetatur, quia quos exortando concipit convertendo parit. De hanc eius aetate Domino dicitur: Adulescentulae dilexerunt te. Vniuersae quippe ecclesiae, quae unam catholicam faciunt, adulescentulae vocantur; non iam uetustae per culpam, sed nobellae per gratiam; non senio steriles, sed aetate mentis ad spiritualem congruae fecunditatem. Tunc ergo cum in diebus illis ecclesia quasi quodam senio deuilitata per praedicatione filios parere non ualent, reminiscitur fecunditatis antiquae, dicens illud Iob uersiculum: Sicut fui in diebus adulescentiae meae, quando secreto Deus erat in tabernaculo meo”: Beatus of Liébana, Adversus Elipandum libri duo, ed. Bengt Löfstedt, CCCM 59 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), 1.131, lines 3892–3907.
of the church taught, saying, “Taking up in all things the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one” (Eph. 6.16) and to escape this wicked world in unencumbered flight to heavenly things.53

Likewise writing against Elipandus, Paulinus of Aquileia details how the good pastor leads back the erring sheep “until, having been taken up into the lap of our mother, the church, in the embrace of love, resting sweetly in the tranquil peace of faith, they might suck the lavish breasts of the goodness of God.”54 Similarly, in the *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, also called the *Libri Carolini*, Theodulf of Orléans excoriates the Byzantine Greeks for their supposed failure to understand scripture concerning images. Theodulf begins his masterpiece with an ornate preface juxtaposing the church as mother against the incursions of heretics and schismatics:

Our mother the church, redeemed by the most precious blood of her spouse, Christ, and washed by the regeneration of the life-giving flood [of baptism], satisfied by the saving food of his body and the draft of his blood, and anointed by the oil of nectar-like chrism, and spread throughout the entire earth in peace, undergoes wars, sometimes foreign and sometimes domestic, at times is shaken by the incursions of outsiders, at times is struck by the rebellions of citizens. Sometimes, indeed, she is assaulted by the molestation of unbelievers or heretics; or, in fact, at other times she is disturbed by the rivalries of schismatics or the proud.55

In writing to Hincmar of Laon, Hincmar of Reims enjoins his rebel nephew “to come back humbly and diligently and obediently to Reims, as to a mother,

53 “Gaudet pietas Christiana divinae scilicet atque fraternae per lata terrarum spatio duplices caritatis alas extendere, ut materno fovent affectu quos sacro genuerat baptismate. Et maxima est sanctae matris ecclesiae exultatio suorum adunatio filiorum, ut sint consummati in unum qui redestri sunt ab uno, dicente eodem redemptore domino nostro Iesu Christo: Pater sancte, serva eos in nomine tuo, quos dedisti mihi, ut omnes unum sint, sicut et nos unum sumus. Unde et in cantico canticorum de sancta dicitur ecclesia: Terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata. Constipata exercitus ordinatio et unanimis bellatorum fortitudo magno solet hostibus esse terrori: sic filiorum sanctae matris ecclesiae intra murum catholicae aedis pacifica adunatio aeris potestatibus nimium constat terribilis et ignitis malignae perfidiae spiculis omnino inpenetrabilis extat, sicut et verissimus gentium praedicator et fortissimus ecclesiae proeliator praecipit dicens: In omnibus adsumentes scutum fidaei, in quo possitis omnia telae nequissimae ignea extingueret et hoc saeculum nequam ad caelestia volatu evadere”:


54 “Optamus tamen et omni annisu mentis, immensa pietatis boni pastoris, qui animam suam posuit pro ovisibus suis, et neminem vult perire, Clementiam imprecamur, ut perfidiae relictio errore, ad viam veritatis quaec Christus est, et ipso redente perducente, quatenus in sinum matris Ecclesiae dilectionis suscepi amplexu, tranquilla suaviter fidei pace quiescentes, largissima sugant ubera, et ignitas omniumque nequissimae ignea extingueret et hoc saeculum nequam ad caelestia volatu evadere”:

Paulinus of Aquileia, *Libellus sacrosyllabus contra Elipandum*, PL 99:164C-D.

55 “Ecclesia mater nostra, pretiosissimo sponsi Christi sanguine redempta et regeneratione salutaris gurgitis lota et salutiferor edulio corporis et haustu sanguinis satiata et nectaris liquoris unguine delibeta et per universum orbem terrarum in pace diffusa, aliquando externa, aliquando interna perpetuitur bella, aliquando exteriorum concutitur incurvus, aliquando civium pulsatur tumultibus. Nonnumquam videlicet incredulorum vel heresorum impellitur infestationibus, nonnumquam vero scismaticorum vel arrogantium turbatur simulatibus”:

to suck salubrious doctrine from her catholic breasts.” 56 Hincmar of Laon can hardly have thanked his uncle for depicting him, effectively, as a *paruulus*. Indeed, while the use of maternal language by the *doctores* was, no doubt, somewhat more conciliating than the language of grim disciplinarians, it is, nonetheless, a fairly manipulative tactic to infantilize potential opposition.

The sort of maternal imagery I have described also appears, as one might expect, in connection with the authority and role of the abbot, and it surely would have had powerful added resonance in an era of child oblation. The commentary on the Benedictine rule by Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel notes that an abbot should be “in one and the same person” both father and mother to his monks, having both the “affectionate innards (*pia viscera*) of a mother and also the strict discipline of a father. . . . And those to whom he offers the breasts of a mother to suck, he holds under the discipline of a father.” 57 In the Rule of Saint Basil a chapter on the third grade of humility, repeated twice in Benedict of Aniane’s *Concordia regularum*, enjoins the *paruulus* to be “ submissive to the invitation to the breasts of the fosterer (*nutrici*) .” 58 In the context of Carolingian monasticism, where a significant number of monks would have been child oblates, this language of parenting and the maternal imagery found in the commentaries on the Song of Songs would surely have struck a very deep chord, particularly if, as Mayke de Jong has suggested, an even higher proportion of the educated *scholastici* would have entered monasteries as young children. 59 Alcuin, writing to his deeply loved and much-missed community at York, describes in near-elegiac terms their role in his spiritual and intellectual formation: “You sustained the fragile years of my childhood with maternal devotion, you supported me in the lustful time of my boyhood with dutiful patience, and reared me with the discipline of fatherly chastening to the age of full-grown manhood, and strengthened me with the learning of holy studies.” 60

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56 “Cui etiam licet, inspirante divina gratia, abundans adsit doctrina, tamen pro nostri officii debito, ex scrinio sanctae metropolis Rhemorum documentum dare studebimus qualiter se, coope rante Domino, morum probitate et doctrinae studio debeat gerere. Ipsum vero non nescium quod totius provinciae cura per sacros canones metropolitano commissa, ad eamdem metropolim suam, sicuti ad matrem, ut ex ejus catholicis uberibus salubrem sugat doctrinam, humiliter, ac sedulo, atque obediente monemus recurrere”: Hincmar of Reims, *Epistola* 52, PL 126:275D–276A.


60 “Vos fragiles infantiae meae annos materno favistis affectu; et lasciuum puerciae tempus pia sistinuistis patientia et paternae castigationis disciplinis ad perfectam viri edociuistis aetatem et
Speaking very much from within this tradition, in language very similar to that of Alcuin and Smaragdus, Paschasius Radbertus’s *Life of Saint Adalhard of Corbie* fuses the color and emotional power of Song imagery into his narration of the life of a man who had been both a spiritual father and mother to him. Paschasius was a foundling who was raised by the aristocratic nuns of Soissons, most notably, the abbess Theodrada, who would be succeeded by her daughter Emma. Further patronized at Corbie throughout his life by Theodrada’s brothers, Adalhard and Wala, Paschasius remained fiercely loyal to the family even in politically difficult circumstances. While not as divisive a character as his formidable brother Wala, Adalhard may nevertheless have posed something of a technical challenge for his would-be hagiographer.\(^{61}\) Without miracles to describe, Paschasius chose instead to emphasize Adalhard’s considerable abilities as a model monk and abbot: his physical beauty, his abilities to preach to and counsel his monks, his learning, his devotion to the Divine Office, and, in his life, Adalhard’s imitation of the sufferings of Christ.\(^ {62}\) Paschasius concludes the *Vita Adalardi* with the brief “Eclogue of Two Nuns,” a “plaint of praise” between Adalhard and two churches, personified—surely Corbie and its daughter house, Corvey. Galathea, the elder nun, whom Adalhard, “in Christ’s stead, nurtured in marriage,” is described as a mother, while the younger, Philis, is her daughter. While there are no explicit references to the Song of Songs, the pairing of a mature woman and her much younger daughter, both of whom had been dependent on and were now deprived of the nurture of their male counterpart, is deeply reminiscent of the female characters from the Song of Songs.

Throughout the *Life of Adalhard*, Paschasius creates extremely dramatic and rhetorical fusions of images and phrases lifted from the Song of Songs, alternately depicting the saint as the Bride with regard to his own relationship with Christ and as the Bridegroom with regard to his monks, who are in turn frequently described as the “daughters of Jerusalem.” Particularly striking in both respects is the prominence of maternal language and imagery used to evoke the special distinction of Adalhard’s ministry, and it can be no coincidence that Paschasius returns again and again to the image of the nutritive breasts of Adalhard, who is depicted both as Corbie’s spouse and as her dearest son. According to Paschasius, he was both their father and their mother, even their more-than-mother; like Elisha when Elijah was lifted to heaven, his monks are left bereft with the prophet’s departure. “For we are mindful,” Paschasius writes, “of the breasts with which _lactabas_”; indeed, how great was the divine word of God we enjoyed.

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in you, ... and we were nourished by the innards (vissceribus) of [your] charity.”

Corbie without Adalhard is Rachel weeping for her children, Paschasius continues, with a love even greater than that of an earthly mother:

I believe, O dearest and most beloved, that maternal love could perish before we could cease loving you. Even if she forgets her own, we will never forget you. But while the ages remain and night divides its lot with day, the fame of your most holy life will be proclaimed. We will never be without your praise. But draw us after you, we beg, and we will run in the odor of your perfumes. For better are your breasts than wine; your fragrances, than the best perfumes. The upright ones love you. So we ask to arrive where you are grazing, where you are lying. We know that it is at midday.

At the emotional climax of this peroration, with his own words seeming to fail him, Paschasius reaches for a pastiche of verses from the Song in which Adalhard is transformed into the Bridegroom from the Song of Songs, pursued by the Bride, Corbie, and her maids, the monks. Strikingly, in the Vita Adalhardi, while the saint leaves his household—and indeed, all who come in contact with him—in the same state of longing uncertainty as the Bride for her vanishing Bridegroom, for Paschasius it is Adalhard’s capacity to nourish and to teach, his breasts that were “better than wine,” that is what is most missed at Corbie.

Once systematized through the commentary tradition, the body of maternal imagery developed within Song exegesis could be transferred to other female personifications within scripture and, as with the Song of Songs, associated with the duties of the church’s doctores. Paschasius Radbertus, not himself the author of a commentary on the Song of Songs that has survived, was, however, one of two Carolingian exegetes to write on the Old Testament book of Lamentations, the other being Hrabanus Maurus. As Ann Matter has argued, their decision to tackle this hitherto-untouched and rather challenging piece of scripture may have been inspired by changes in liturgical observance; she notes, too, however, that Lamentations possessed certain attributes that may have recommended it to Paschasius in particular.

Differing from Hrabanus’s rather encyclopedic approach to exegesis, Paschasius appears to have chosen the book as part of a deliberate and complicated agenda of self-fashioning in which he modeled himself on the prophet Jeremiah, the traditional author of Lamentations, in part to defend his controversial hero, Adalhard’s brother Wala. Throughout the book, the prophet envisions...
the besieged city of Jerusalem personified as a grieving woman, “Rachel weeping for her children.” For Paschasius, Lamentations and the Song of Songs were both superlative scriptural songs, just as these two female figures, the Jerusalem of Lamentations and the resplendent Bride of the Song of Songs, were parallel visions of the church, one hemmed in by her temporal sufferings, the other transcendent in eternal glory.

As Matter noted, exegesis of the Song of Songs is pervasive throughout the commentary on Lamentations, with Paschasius noting as many verbal correspondences between the two works as possible. Prominent among these points of contact is the degree to which both Jerusalem and the Bride, for Paschasius, are fundamentally maternal, nurturing figures, each trying every means within her power to exhort her reluctant children down the path to salvation:

When the church observes those advancing on the royal way to the fatherland, pregnant because she nurtures and begets her sons, sorrowing and weeping with many cares over the shackles of her little ones, she cries out, “Oh, all of you!” not so that she may hold them back from the road but so that she might invite them to the gifts of charity. “Attend with your mind,” she says, “and consider with the vision of compassion if there is a sorrow like my sorrow” (Lam. 1.12), because, according to the law of our redeemer from the Gospels, a woman has sorrow when she gives birth. And this virgin spouse of Christ—the mother of all of us, because she bears and produces, nourishes and gives milk—is discouraged in sadness, and mourns in abasement, since she sees that nearly all go to destruction and the extinguishing of life; in some people, indeed, she is tried to the point of death; but giving birth, she is followed by others; other immature ones she nourishes; other hardened ones she calls back, reluctantly, to the ways of life; others, hesitant and slow to go, she awaits; others, reckless, she chastens so that they might go with her own, so that the enemy might not perhaps discover such people outside of camp: no surprise, because all of these passing through along the way bear arms with the Bride of Christ in her camps. Concerning whom, of course, in the Song of Songs [we read], “Who is it?” he asks, “who ascends through the desert, rising like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, choice as the sun, terrible as a battle line” (Song of Sol. 3.6, 6.9)?

66 Matter, “Lamentations Commentaries,” 150–51. In fact, I would argue that the Lamentations commentary and Paschasius’s two lives of Adalhard and Wala should be considered as a trio of thematically related works: the Song of Songs is to Adalhard what Lamentations and the language of weeping and proclamation are to the Epitaphium Arsenii, with both men representing differing, but ultimately related and equally important, models of spiritual authority within the church.

In the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs, we encounter a passage very similar in its emphasis on the maternal work of the church, expressed in terms of flexible, adaptable, affective sympathy and encouragement:

And you may see her unhesitatingly nourishing her little ones with the milk of these full breasts, from one the milk of consolation, from the other that of encouragement, according to the need of each. For example, if she should notice that one of those whom she begot by preaching the Good News is assailed by temptation, that he becomes emotionally disturbed, is reduced to sadness and pusillanimity and therefore no longer capable of enduring the force of temptation, will she not console with him, caress him, weep with him, comfort him, and bring forward every possible evidence of God’s love in order to raise him from his desolate state? If, on the contrary, she discovers that he is eager, active, progressive, her joy abounds, she plies him with encouraging advice, fans the fire of his zeal, imparts the ways of perseverance, and inspires him to ever higher ideals. She becomes all things to all, mirrors in herself the emotions of all and so shows herself to be a mother to those who fail no less than to those who succeed.

Of the extant copies of Paschasius’s Lamentations commentary, the provenance of one is Citeaux and of two others is Clairvaux, and it seems likely that Bernard was aware of, and may even have been directly inspired by, such passages in the works of Paschasius.

In the course of developing his image of the church as mother—by interpreting Jerusalem in Lamentations as the other side of the coin, as it were, of his...

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70 All three are twelfth-century manuscripts: Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 68; and Troyes, Médiathèque du Grand-Troyes (olim Bibliothèque municipale), MSS 448 and 558.

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interpretation of the Bride in the Song of Songs—Paschasius could also invert the positive injunctions to maternal care outlined in the Song commentaries and depict the doctores, effectively, as unnatural, dysfunctional mothers. At Lamentations 4.3, the biblical text itself creates an ideal opportunity: “Even sea monsters offer the breast to suckle their young, but the daughter of my people is as cruel as an ostrich in the desert. The tongue of the suckling child sticks to the roof of his mouth; the children (paruuli) seek bread, and there is no one to break it for them.” In the *Moralia in Job* Gregory the Great had interpreted this passage to apply to the deceptive lure of heretical teaching, an interpretation that would be deployed against the Adoptionist Elipandus by both Beatus of Liébana and Paulinus of Aquileia. Paschasius begins with the extract from the *Moralia*, but then, strikingly, he turns the image back against the Carolingian doctores themselves, using the image as a platform for a scathing critique of self-interested pastoral care. Although the passage is long, it is worth quoting in full: "Furthermore, according to the allegorical senses the tongue of the suckling child sticks to the roof of his mouth in thirst without the milk of doctrine, when the care of the doctores, cruel as an ostrich without concern for their flocks, loving something else, has grown cold and the pastor has not, with the apostle, nourished the sucking children with the milk of the teachings of God. For this reason also the apostle tells his children: “I gave you milk and not solid food because you were not yet able to consume it” (1 Cor. 3.2). For there are in the church of Christ nursing children suckling the breasts of the precepts of God, and there are more mature ones who already are able to receive solid food, namely, to understand the more profound depths of the mysteries of God, if there were one who would break bread for them, namely, the more obscure holy matters of the scriptures. But when the care and concern of the pastors has been lacking, there is no one to break the breast of teachings to the immature ones and no one to break bread for the more mature ones. Carefully considering these, the prophet laments the degenerate life of the former and bewails the death through cruelty of the latter, because many doctores, seduced by their impiety, could justly be accounted more cruel than sea

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71 “GHIMEL. Sed et lamiae nudaverunt mammam, lactaverunt catulos suos: filia populi mei crudelis quasi struthio in deserto. DALETH. Adhaesit lingua lactentis ad palatum ejus in siti; parvuli petierunt panem, et non erat qui frangeret eis”: Lam. 4.3-4.


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monsters and more negligent than ostriches, since, even if sea monsters may seem more cruel to their young, nevertheless they do offer them a breast and nourish their whelps in some way. Surely in comparison to them, the pastors who pursue their own interests and seek worldly goods rightly are lamented as more barbaric on account of their negligence as often as the tongue of suckling children, consumed with putrid matter, clings to the roof of the mouth in thirst. And the ostrich as well: even if it seems to lay its eggs without care and without the instinct of any maternal concern, nevertheless scholars say that it places them in the sand where the great heat of the sun burns daily, where the eggs are tended gently by the heat of the sun and the embrace of the sand until the development of the chicks. Rightly are these [doctores] lamented as more negligent than those [ostriches], without pastoral care and concern, with minds elsewhere, who refuse to break even bread for the children when they have begged.73

It is difficult not to think that Paschasius, himself a foundling dependent on the charity of Theodrada and Adalhard, was speaking with his own personal history lending added vim to his righteous pastoral indignation. This concern to provide nutritive pastoral care would, in fact, be as much a vital part of Paschasius’s theological oeuvre as it would be of Bernard’s. In practice, in his capacity as abbot of Corbie, Paschasius Radbertus was deeply implicated in the slow conversion of the Saxons through Corbie’s daughter house, Corvey. Paschasius’s famous eucharistic treatise, De corpore et sanguine Domini, was intended for Corvey’s abbot Warin as part of this effort, as well as the treatise De fide, spe, et caritate.74

Paschasius describes the gradual process by which the immature believer acquires an understanding of spiritual realities, returning again to Gregorian language of suckling the paruuli:

... God the Trinity, desiring to make [himself] plain more fully through the light to those untutored in the faith, who do not yet know how to understand with their intellect anything but corporeal things, has shone forth in a triply distinct number for the one to be made known in a number of appearances. [He did this] for the purpose that, by sight,

73 “Porro secundum allegoricos sensus lingua lactantis ad palatum adhaeret in siti sine lacte doctrinae quando cura doctorum crudelis quasi struto sine sollicitudine pro gregibus aliud diligens torquerit nec cum apostolo lacte doctrinaram Dei paruulos lactantes pastor aluerit. Hinc quoque apostolus suis ait paruulis: Lac uobis potum dedi non escam quia necdum poteratis sed neque adhuc potestis. Sunt enim in ecclesia Christi lactantes paruuli sugentes ubera praeeceptorum Dei sunt et maiores qui iam quent solidum capere cibum scilicet profundiora mysteriorum Dei intelligere si esset qui eis frangeret panem secretiora uidelicet sacramenta Scripturarum. Sed cum cura pastorum ac sollicitudo defuerit non est qui minoribus mammam denudet doctrinarum neque qui maioribus fragant panem. Quos bene intuens prophetas iure eorum deplorat reprobam uitam et istorum plangit crudelitatis mortem eo quod multi doctores impietate sua perlectori crudeliiores iure lamiis censeantur et neglegentiores strutionibus. Quoniam et si lamiae crudeliiores suis foetibus uideantur nudant tamen mammam et quodammodo lactant catulos. In quarum profecto comparatione pastos qui sua sectantur et terrena quaerunt atrociores merito planguntur ex quod neglegentia quae spem lingua lactantium ad palatum tabo consumpta adhaeret in siti. Nec non et strutto et si ulla pietatis affectu ponere uidetur tamen phisici dicunt quod ea in sabulo ubi nimius solis feruo coddieti candescit poni ubi calore solis et confortu sabuli usque ad concretionem pullorum temperanter confouentur. Quibus isti sine cura ac sollicitudine pastorali aliud meditantes recte neglegentiores deplorantur qui etiam paruulis cum petierint panem saltem frangere fugiunt”: Paschasius Radbertus, Expositio in Lamentationes, book 4, lines 491–520.

hearing, and touch, those still nursing (lactantes) in the faith by means of these three senses might draw inwardly into themselves the first rudiments of the faith, so that with the cooperation of that which is felt externally, perfect faith might be nourished more fully in turn by the breasts of the scriptures. For those who were still bestial would not have been able entirely to grasp spiritual things first. And for this reason it was necessary that through the outward senses the tender infancy of believers might perceive the faith externally and that the entire human being, returning inwardly from fleshly sensation, might become spiritual and strive to be turned upwards toward spiritual things.  

Characteristically, Paschasius adopts a position of divine accommodation modeled after the thought of Augustine and Gregory but includes his own distinctive emphasis on the evidence of the external senses as conduits, albeit rudimentary ones, of divine grace. As with the Life of Adalhard and his Lamentations commentary, Paschasius expresses the relation between scripture, the doctores, and those they taught in the language of nursing, lactation, and maternal care. Paschasius clearly envisioned himself as both a recipient and a provider of the milk of scripture from the breasts of the doctores; and given the circulation of his exegesis among the Carolingian ecclesiastical elite, it is suggestive of how standard or even commonplace this maternal language would have been.

As scholars are beginning to recognize, Carolingian aristocratic lay piety mirrored and was marked by much of the earnestness of the doctores in responsibly discharging their God-given ministerium by word and moral example. In parallel with the rise of the advice manual and the Fürstenspiegel genre, if Carolingian clergy were setting themselves up in exegesis of the Song of Songs as the breasts of the church and encouraging one another to have a maternal tenderness toward the paruuli under their care, this in turn may well have given one woman and mother—and a very well educated woman at that—certain particular ideas. At the beginning of Dhuoda’s Liber manualis, she tells her son that she wishes to be his hortatrix. He had doctores, she concedes, that were useful enough, “but not of an equal condition, with a heart burning in her chest, to me, your genetrix, my firstborn son.” Dhuoda was not a monk or a priest, nor could she be, but in the Liber manualis it is as if she is claiming that she could feel as passionately as one with regard to her spiritual charge. If, in the Song commentaries, maternal Song

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75 “... volens Deus Trinitas adhuc rudibus in fide luce clarius aperire qui necdum aliud sensu quam corporea scint cogitare trino distincte ad cognoscendum unum refulsit specialitatis numero. Quatenus uisu auditu et tactu adhuc lactantes in fide tribus istis sensibus intus in se traicerent prima fidei rudimenta. Vnde cooperante ipso qui exterius sentiebatur fides perfecta deinceps uberibus Scripturarum plenius nutrituret. Non enim prius adhuc animales spiritalia potuissent ad plenum capere. Et ideo necesse fuit ut per sensum exterius tenera credentium infantia fidei periperet et de sensu carnis introrsus rediens totus homo conuersus ad Deum inuisibilia uidendo per fidem fieret spiritalis et tenderet sublimius per fidem doctrinarum lacte nutritus ad spiritalem converti”: Paschasius Radbertus, De fide, spe, et caritate, ed. Beda Paulus, CCCM 97 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), book 1, lines 1084–97.


imagery was meant to describe the kind of attitude the doctores should have and the kind of advice they were to provide, here maternal feeling has been made the central, justifying reason why Dhuoda could and should air her own particular, unique views, even if expressed in different terms from those of Paschasius.

Bede and the Carolingian exegetes established the Song of Songs as a narrative in which the doctores envisioned themselves as parts of the body of the Bride, and they substituted for the eroticism of the Song a vocabulary of Gregorian pastoral care described in maternal terms. The use of maternal language forms one component of a shared episcopal vision in the ninth century, worked out not only in capitularies and conciliar acta but also in the more open and speculative realm of biblical exegesis and implemented in a multitude of individual cases and circumstances. Scholars have only begun to understand the sheer complexity of the Carolingian conception of the doctores as a social and religious class. The one aspect of it that I have examined here, the use of maternal language to describe the doctores, was systematized in the commentary tradition on the Song by Bede and the Carolingians but was hardly limited to it. Moreover, Carolingian authors deployed this maternal language of clerical authority for a variety of purposes: it could be alternately or even simultaneously passionate, manipulative, aggressive, and tender; it could be used to heckle theological opposition or to move one's fellow monks to tears. Beyond the ninth century these texts continued to circulate and to exert their influence into the high Middle Ages: through the segments of Bede's Song commentary incorporated in the Glossa ordinaria, for example, or in the immensely popular Song commentary of Haimo of Auxerre, whose name was often forgotten, or through the works of Paschasius Radbertus. The Song of Songs itself would always contain the power to form textual communities and to inspire reformers and exegetes to think about the church and their role within it. To a certain extent, in their use of the Song, the Cistercians were doing what church reformers have always done, taking up traditional ideas to strike an old chord within a new historical context. Their needs were different, as well as the nature of their response to the unique challenges they faced, but the early-medieval exegetes had done much to provide the Cistercians with some of the tools they would employ.