HENRY HEGEL'S LECTURES ON AESTHETICS described the art of the sublime he defined its forms according to the different kind of relationship of “substance as significance to the world of phenomena” (p. 484). Hegel distinguishes between pantheistic poetry, whose historical manifestations he sees connected through the experience of the “substantial existence of God in things” (p. 493), so that it knows only symbols indistinct in content, and the “artistic form of actual sublimity”, which is characterised by a clearly understood significance. Here the work of art is the “effusion of pure essence as the interpretation of all things”; “God’s meaning which transcends everything temporal in the temporal” here turns the art of the sublime into a sacred art. Its content is the “relationship of God to the world created by him”, since the formless Creator is neither present in what is created nor can be given artistic representation by means of what is created. Man can encounter the sublimity of God through elevation above the trivial, as in the “sacred poetry” of the Psalms (pp. 495–6). By explaining the sublime from Jewish monotheism, Hegel touches the root of the sublimity of Christian art, on which he does not focus further. The basis of the sacred art of the sublime is located not in Classical antiquity – which Hegel also leaves out of consideration – but in the Bible as the revealed word of the relationship between God and the world. The task of making the meaning of the word intelligible, which Revelation presents to art and exegesis, remains in the realm of the Hegelian sublime, although in the following exposition we do not see the “significance transcending everything temporal in the temporal” in the “pure essence”, “Substance”, or the “Absolute” of Hegelian philosophy, but understand it rather...
in a Christian sense as God’s revelation of the sense of the created world in the veil of the word.

The question of the spiritual sense of the word is not only common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam as revealed religions, but is also, in the Christian Middle Ages with which we are concerned here, peculiar to all languages, not merely German. The problem is a general hermeneutic one, which concerns the universal languages of the Church, the vernacular languages, and even the “languages” of the arts not bound to the word. Its unfolding will, for the Middle Ages, present us with the inner connection of all scholarly disciplines – including those of natural science – in a common function aimed at the understanding of the world and its meaning as represented in the word, an inner connection we risk losing sight of today.

If we enquire about the spiritual sense of the word we have to begin with the Bible, for the understanding of which the Middle Ages struggled, in liturgy and instruction, in countless commentaries and with all artistic means, including creative poetry. The urge to understand Holy Scripture presented Christendom with its greatest interpretative challenge, not merely in the narrow historical and philological sense, but quite simply in every sense which at the time had been faced by humanity. And we literary and linguistic scholars are generally not aware – as was Dilthey in his “Development of Hermeneutics” – of the extent to which our own interpretative art of Bible exegesis is indebted to the patristic and medieval periods.

The concern to understand the word of revelation implies a high endeavour transcending any preoccupation with a text of extrabiblical literature. Since the time of the Church Fathers, every interpretation of the Bible is predicated on the conviction of the unique quality of Holy Scripture, which distinguishes it fundamentally from all secular literature, meaning from this perspective the whole literature of Classical antiquity. This amounts to a tenet repeated again and again: whereas all profane literature includes only a historical or literal sense of the word, the word of Holy Scripture contains, besides the historical or literal sense which it has in common with pagan literature, a higher, spiritual sense, a sensus spiritualis. Founded in the New Testament, the doctrine of the sensus spiritualis of the biblical word dominated the Middle Ages. It received its basic formulation in Origen’s Peri archon and Augustine’s De doctrina christiana, was sanctioned in the exegetical tradition founded by the Church Fathers, and remained valid until Luther broke with the spiritual interpretation of the Bible and consequently had to reject the tradition. It set medieval philology – if one may use the term to include the concerns of theology with the word of Scripture – two fundamentally different tasks. One consisted in the correct understanding of the literal sense of the Bible which it shared with all profane literature, by means of textual criticism and the other methods of text analysis practised in the Trivium, developed since the Hellenistic era, and transmitted to the Middle Ages from the Classical period. That is of course the task which modern philology has inherited and continues to pursue with methods
which have undergone further development and enrichment. In the Middle Ages, certain schools and periods appropriated this task as a matter of particular concern, such as the Antiochene school very early, and certain adherents of the school of St Victor in Paris in the twelfth century. And even in these cases we find an insistence on the requirements which have become self-evident for our own literary and linguistic study: that the context, the place and date of origin, the genre, the character and detailed circumstances of the author, are important for the express aim of understanding the sense intended by the author: *sententiam litteralem scripturae ab auctore principaliter intentam* [the literal sense of Scripture chiefly intended by the author].

Since Dilthey’s school of interpretation, these matters have become familiar again and need not concern us further. The second— and, for the Christian philological study of the Middle Ages, more substantial—task lay in the discovery of the spiritual sense of the word hidden in the letter, which for Bernard of Clairvaux was revealed with the crucifixion of the Word for the Old Testament also, when the “veil of the letter that kills was rent”.

The doctrine of this spiritual sense is founded on the principle of the difference of the meaning of the word in profane literature and in Holy Scripture. I shall quote it in a twelfth-century formulation, as here and in what follows I am not concerned with historical derivations, but with an account of conditions in the twelfth century in particular, in order to draw conclusions of importance for medieval studies beyond the narrow interest of theology. Specialists will not fail to note where I am indebted to the scholar of English philology H. H. Glunz, theologians such as J. Daniélou, H. de Lubac, M.-D. Chenu, C. Spicq, and the historian Beryl Smalley— to restrict myself to these few names. Richard of St Victor formulates this principle as follows: “The word of God is far superior to worldly wisdom inasmuch as not only the sounds of words but also the things (sc. meant by the word) contain meaning”: *non solum voces, sed et res significative sunt* [not only the sounds of words but also things carry meaning]. The significance of this statement cannot be overestimated. Without it there is for the Middle Ages no spiritual sense of the word. It means that the profane word has only an immediate, superficial meaning, one in Hugh of St Victor’s words “written over its face”, the historical or literal sense which consists in the sound of the word (the *vox*) having a thing (the *res*) as its content. Hence the meaning of the sound of the word “stone” is according to its literal sense exhausted in the thing which is known to us from nature. But it is inherent in the nature of Holy Scripture that it is precisely this thing, in which the literal sense is exhausted, which is the real carrier of meaning. Every individual thing evoked in language by the sound of a word, every creature created by God which is named by a word, points towards a higher meaning, is the sign of something spiritual, has a *significatio*, a *be-tokening* (in Middle High German *be-zeichenunge*), a *significance* (in German *Be-deutung*). Hence we distinguish a twofold meaning, one relating the sound of the word to the thing, the *vox* to the *res*, and a higher meaning connected to the thing, which points from the thing to something higher. Whereas Jewish and
Classical antiquity was concerned only with the meanings of words, the medieval Christian linguistic and literary discipline goes above and beyond this by including also the meanings of all the things given in creation. Alan of Lille formulates it concisely as _omnis creatura significans_ [every creature carries meaning], or in Hugh of St Victor: _Omnis natura Deum loquitur. Omnis natura hominem docet. Omnis natura rationem parit, et nihil in universitate insecundum est_ [The whole of nature speaks of God. The whole of nature teaches man. The whole of nature gives birth to reason, and nothing in the universe is sterile]. But the thing in its turn has not merely one meaning like the word (as long as it does not carry more than one through homonymy), but several kinds of meaning. Every individual thing denoted by the word has in its turn a range of meanings, the number of which is identical with the sum of the properties of a thing. For this is the second principle, which again I shall not trace historically: things have as many meanings as they have properties. As summarised by Peter of Poitiers: _Quaelibet enim res, quot habet proprietates tot habet linguas aliquid spirituale nobis et invisible insinuantes, pro quarum diversitate et ipsius nominis acceptio variatur_ [For as many properties as each thing has, so many languages does it have implanting something of a spiritual and invisible nature in us, and on account of the diversity of which even the acceptance of its own name is varied]. The properties of a thing bearing meaning are given in the form of its outward appearance (_visibilis forma_) and in its inner nature (_invisibilis natura_). Snow signifies something from its outward form to the extent that it is white; from its inner nature to the extent that it is cold. It is the fundamental concern of medieval philology to discover and identify the nature of both the _voces_ and the _res_. Both investigations fall within the Seven Liberal Arts. In the Trivium (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric) the _voces_ are dealt with. The Quadrivium on the other hand has the task of defining things according to their form and nature, that is with regard to their properties as bearers of meaning. Hence, for example, mathematics considers the _forma exterior_, physics the _interior natura_ of things. Or, using as a basis the division, current in the Middle Ages since Origen, into logic, ethics and theory: _Logica de vocibus, ethica de moribus, theorica de rebus tractat. Item theorica subdividitur in mathematicam, physicam, theologiam_ [Logic deals with the sounds of words, ethics with rules of behaviour, theory with things. Theory is again subdivided into mathematics, physics, theology]. Hence not the linguistic and literary subjects in the narrow sense of the Trivium, but mathematics and physics are affiliated to theology. The Trivium is invoked to serve the science of the significance of words (_Wortbedeutungskunde_), the Quadrivium the science of the significance of things (_Dingbedeutungskunde_) which builds on it. All the subjects of medieval science and scholarship are of service in the elucidation of the spiritual sense of the word: _Omnes itaque artes subserviunt divinae sapientiae et inferior scientia recte ordinata ad superiorem conducit_ [And so all the arts are subject to divine wisdom and the lower science, properly regulated, leads to the higher]. Or: _In hoc enim quod in divina pagina tam rerum quam vocum necessaria est significatio, artes et subserviunt, dum trivium vocum, quadrivium phisicarum rerum_
And for the reason that in the sacred text the meaning of things is necessary as well as of the sounds of words, the arts are subject to it; while the Trivium manages the knowledge of the sounds of words, the Quadrivium manages that of physical things. The specifically philological disciplines dealing with the word are preliminary to the subjects of the Quadrivium dealing with the thing, in order to pave the way to the spiritual significance of things. Hence the disciplines dealing with the form and nature of things have no self-sufficient sense of being “pure” sciences, but prepare the way for the meaning of Scripture. This is the one and only function of the Physiologus, the bestiaries, the lapidaries, the herbals, indeed the whole medieval encyclopaedic tradition beginning with the monumental De universo of Hrabanus Maurus, who himself titles it De sermonum proprietate et mystica rerum significatone [On the property of words and the mystical meaning of things]. The description of things is the aim of all science and scholarship directed at what is created, in order to prepare the ground for the spiritual understanding of things by determining the properties of every creature. But these res primae res secundas significantes [primary things signifying secondary things] include not merely all visible objects, but also people, numbers, places and times, as well as the facts of history. And the events of the whole of history since the Creation are carriers of meaning, which has far-reaching consequences for the typological aspect of the medieval consciousness of history. Ea, quae in veritate gesta sunt, alterius sacramenti formam praefigurasse dicuntur [Those things which happened in reality are said to have prefigured the form of another sacrament].

In what follows we shall not attempt to distinguish between the disciplines of the meaning of words (Wortbedeutung) and the meaning of things (Dingbedeutung) on the one hand, and on the other the meaning of events (Ereignisbedeutung), which is related fundamentally to the latter, and on which the typological dimension of medieval art is largely founded. Here we shall keep within the framework of what, as regards the science of meaning (Bedeutungskunde), for the Middle Ages can be presented lexicographically.

Since things have as many meanings as properties, while properties however can be both good and evil, the same thing can have good as well as evil meanings, those, as the Church Fathers already express it, in bonam partem [in a good sense], as well as those in malam partem [in an evil sense], or, as is often said, there are words which can be written with golden ink or with black ink. The same thing denoted by one word can signify God and the devil as well as spanning the whole range of values lying between them with its different meanings. The lion can signify Christ, because according to its nature it sleeps with its eyes open, just as Christ, though He died as a man, still lived as God (III, 54). Because of its blood-lust it can, according to its nature, signify the devil, who, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8; III, 54). It signifies the virtuous man, who is “bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1; III, 53). It signifies heretics because of the stench of its teeth, which proceeds from its mouth like the word of blasphemy from the mouth of the heretic (III, 55), etc. The
meaning acquired by the thing on any given occasion depends on the characteristic of the thing which is selected for comment, and on the context in which the word in question appears. The significance of the word is confined to its relation to the one thing. But the thing has a world of meanings, which extends from God to the devil and is potentially present in every single thing denoted by a word.\textsuperscript{18} It is activated in any given instance only in the specific direction determined by the context and by the quality associated with the thing. Hence in a concrete textual instance the lion cannot signify “God or the devil”, but only one of them, and in another context the other. Where the meanings of things are concerned, it is also necessary to have an interpretation of the sense from the context, in order to determine the right meaning from among the theoretically arbitrary number of possible meanings. It is the task of the Middle Ages to elucidate the world of meanings (\textit{Bedeutungswelt}) invested in things since Creation as the sum of possible spiritual meanings, in order to be able to apply it in the concrete instance through the discovery of the appropriate meaning. To this end the Middle Ages produced mnemonic verses intended to list the properties of a thing concisely, as for example for the thing “sea” in the Anonymus of Clairvaux (II, 156):

\begin{quote}
\textit{Est mare diffusum, fervens, salsum atque profundum,}
\textit{Absorbens, fluidum, lucidum, foetens et amarum}
\textit{Atque procellosum, rugit, gignitque periculum.}
\end{quote}

[The sea is extensive, seething, salty and deep, devouring, flowing, bright, stinking and bitter, and stormy, roaring, and bringing forth peril.]

Or, in the \textit{Distinctiones monasticae} (II, 381), for the thing “oil”:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Oleum multa significat in sacra scriptura, quia multae sunt eius proprietates, quae notantur his versibus:}
\textit{Est oleum pingue, calidum, nitidumque, suave;}
\textit{Mitigat et reficit, lucet, superenatat, ungit.}
\end{quote}

[Oil signifies many things in Holy Scripture, because many are its properties which are recorded in these verses:

Oil is fat, warm, and sleek, agreeable; it soothes and revives, shines, floats on the surface, anoints.]

Thereafter these properties are interpreted in the same order.\textsuperscript{19} If these are properties which can be used for interpretation, then, to give an example of this also, a mnemonic of the \textit{Distinctiones monasticae} for the meanings of things has twelve different meanings of the thing “stone”, which has a world of meanings ranging from Christ above down to the gentile (II, 330):

\begin{quote}
\textit{Christus, et angelica virtus, Christi quoque sponsa,}
\textit{Iustus, iustitia, carnalis sensus, et usus}
\textit{Praeux, peccatum grave, daemon, falsus hebraeus,}
\textit{Verus gentilis dicitus esse lapis.}
\end{quote}
The descriptions of things which in the Middle Ages commonly serve as the basis of the determination of sense can show a carefully nurtured poetic reverence for the nature of things, especially when such descriptions remain in prose, as with the Anonymus of Clairvaux on the thing “dew”, the descriptions of which are particularly beautiful: *Ros invisibiliter descendit, refrigerat, fecundat; clarus, suavis; modico calore siccatur; terram mollescit, semini placet; nocte fluid et silentio, minutatim ac sparsim* (II, 90) [The dew descends invisibly, cools, fructifies; clear, agreeable; dries up in moderate warmth; softens the earth, is agreeable to the seed; flows down in the night and in silence, gradually, here and there]. The earthly thing, summoned as creature from the hand of God to manifest His praise, is not extinguished by its spiritualisation but instead receives the consecration of the Creator’s word established in the thing, and is for that reason described with pious reverence. It is the obligation of the Middle Ages to unlock the sense of the essence of things comprehended in this way. For – and in this lies the reason for all this effort – the significance of words is determined by man and serves the expression of human will. But the significance of things is established by God. Through words man speaks to man, through things God speaks to man, and it is necessary to understand the word of God in things: *Voces ex humana, res ex divina institutione significat. Sicut enim homo per voces alteri, sic Deus per creaturas voluntatem suam indicat* [The sounds of words have their meaning by human, things by divine, ordinance. For as man indicates his will by words to another, so God does so through created things].

But what is the nature of the spiritual sense hidden in things, the *sensus mysticus* to the extent that it is closed away, or *sensus spiritualis* to the extent that it is laid bare? Here the mention of a word hitherto deliberately omitted becomes unavoidable, and we have to consider the nature of allegory. No concept has seemed more beguiling from Classical antiquity to Romanticism and on into modern scholarly terminology and given rise to more misunderstandings. Here it is sufficient for us to establish one clear distinction. What literary history above all of the later Middle Ages defines as allegorical poetry, such as the French *Roman de la Rose* and the allegories of love (*Minneallegorien*), has nothing to do with what we understand by allegory in our present context. The two are mutually exclusive. In one case we are dealing with allegories in the manner of personifications: the sense is what is given, and the thing appropriate for its embodiment is sought and found by literary creativity. Since C. S. Lewis’ book *The Allegory of Love*, literary history has paid special attention to this kind of poetry, which is also “allegorical”, and the danger of terminological confusion, clearly avoided by Lewis himself, is nowadays apparent. Personification allegory is a literary technique employed since Classical antiquity and at home in poetics, where its name still has currency in the Middle Ages.
What the Middle Ages understands as allegory in the exposition of Holy Scripture is of a different origin and a different nature. While the poetic technique of allegoresis involves arbitrary poetic illustration of an idea through personification or the use of a concrete image, within the Christian interpretation of words the opposite is the case: the revelation, _revelatio_, of the sense of the language of God sealed in the creature at Creation, a _spiritualis notificatio_ [communication of spiritual knowledge], as Hugh of St Victor calls it (PL 175, 20D), which understands the language of divine proclamation from the silent world of things.

The Middle Ages as a general rule understands three stages of the spiritual sense of the word and generally denotes the first of these three steps as allegory. Above the foundation of the historical or literal sense of the word rises a superstructure – so called by the Middle Ages themselves[^24] – of the three levels of spiritual sense of Scripture: the allegorical, the tropological and the anagogical senses. Corresponding to whichever aspect of the sense of the word is sought, the word is disclosed to the exegete according to the historical, the allegorical, the tropological, or the anagogical dimension of its sense. If the text is questioned as to the historical past, it responds with the historical literal sense. If the question is couched in terms of the significance of the text for Christian spiritual history (_Heilsgeschichte_), the response is at the level of the allegorical sense. In this case allegory means the same as the modern concept of typology, that is the relationship of meaning between prefiguration and fulfilment, as between the Old and the New Testament. This form of typological thought, rooted in the idea of Christian spiritual history (_Heilsgeschichte_), exerted a strong formative influence on the historical consciousness of the Middle Ages; among other things it succeeded in being transferred to the relationship between the Classical (as prefiguration) and the Christian (as fulfilment) and thereby to some extent heightened the conscious sense of elation at living in a period superior to that of Classical antiquity, a consciousness which drove a great impetus in the Middle Ages to surpass Classical antiquity artistically, as established by Schwietering, further developed and systematically argued by Auerbach and Glunz.[^25] In its tropological or moral sense, the word reveals its relation not to salvation history (_Heilsgeschichte_), but to the life of the individual soul in the world. This sense gives instruction for the conduct of one’s life, by indicating the soul’s destiny and way to salvation. And finally, according to what it has to say about the promises fulfilled in the future life, the word discloses its anagogical, eschatological sense, that which relates to heaven. A standard example repeatedly cited in the Middle Ages is the word _Jerusalem_: historically a city on earth, allegorically the Church, tropologically the soul of the believer, anagogically the heavenly city of God.

According to an image common in the Middle Ages from Jerome on, the walls of allegory are erected on the foundation of the understanding of the letter, beyond which the Jews and gentiles did not proceed. Above it the vault of the roof of anagogical understanding soars aloft into the heavenly realm, while the colours of Moralitas serve to decorate the walls
of the building of the meaning of the word (Wortbedeutungsgebäude) within and without. If earlier we had occasion to introduce the concept of the world of meanings (Bedeutungswelt), now we encounter the new concept of the space of meanings of the word (Wortbedeutungsraum), the spiritual structure of sense, which is built as the superstructure above the foundation of the historical sense. The stages and dimensions of the medieval science of meaning (Bedeutungskunde) give spiritual perspective to the world of created things, which is manifested as language in the use of words. The Middle Ages, supposedly devoid of perspective, have their own, appropriate kind of perspective in the spiritual transparency of whatever exists. It is revealed in the gaze which detaches itself from the earthly and is directed up and beyond to the reality of spiritual meaning of the sign present in that which is created. It is per-spective in the truest sense, for it looks through the visible to the invisible, through the significans [signifier] to the significatum [signified]. It leads from the foundation to the vault, from the earthly to the heavenly. Its nature is not abbreviation, but extension into the sublime. It does not relativise with reference to an earthly focus, but aligns itself with the absolute, making what is created intelligible with regard to its relation to eternity. Its nature is not visual in the physiological sense, but theological and spiritual, and as such it determines the art of the sublime. Without a knowledge of the spiritual perspectives of the world and the space of meanings which delimit the relations between God and man, we should not expect to understand literature which presupposes such knowledge. Hugh of St Victor says that whoever misses the correct modus and ordo legendi [method and order of reading] is like someone who, having lost his way wandering in a dense forest, makes every effort in vain.

German literature – to take but one vernacular example – was for centuries, from about 770 to about 1150, apart from the very limited relics of pagan forms, almost exclusively biblical poetry, and after 1150 this still continued to play a major role. There are limits to the value of modern, secularising semantics (Wortbedeutungskunde) for the interpretation of this literature because of its restriction to the literal meanings of words. Modern lexicography, which addresses the word in terms of its literal meaning alone, cannot elucidate the spiritual sense of the word for us. Similarly, modern etymology largely leads us astray, if we make its methods our approach to the spiritual significance of the word in the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages pursue a speculative etymology which is part of theology, serving to illuminate the sense encoded in the word. Even where the etymology has a historical basis, speculative knowledge is projected into the historical detail, and the chief task consists in establishing meaning through the type of etymology which flourished from Isidore of Seville onwards and deep into the Middle Ages. Its interest is only apparently concerned with historical development, namely to the limited extent that it serves the science of meaning (Bedeutungskunde). When the word mors [death] was derived in the Middle Ages from amarus, “bitter”, or from Mars the god of war as the bringer of death, this interpretation of the sense was also possible for pagans,
whereas the third etymology of this word has a Christian conditioning when it derives the word from the bite of the apple at the Fall: *a morsu primi homini, qui vetitae arboris pomum mordens mortem incurrit* (*PL* 177, 134C) [from the bite of the first man who incurred death by biting the fruit of the forbidden tree]. It would be foolish to deride such etymology as unscientific when it assisted its own age in the discovery of a profound interpretation of the meaning of words, as indeed contemporary etymology served to clarify the spiritual sense of words.27 Our modern etymology would have been questionable to the Middle Ages on the grounds that it remains rooted in the literal sense and gives no information about the meaning of the world and of life. The spiritual sense of the word with its world and space of meanings contains a Christocentric interpretation of meaning and accordingly a direction for life, as the often quoted mnemonic verse indicates as it pithily summarises for the beginner the four stages of the sense of Scripture:

\[ \text{Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, } \\
\text{Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.} \]

[The letter teaches the facts, the allegorical sense what you should believe, the moral how you should act, the analogical whither you are going.]

The task of writing a history of medieval Christian etymology still lies in the future. The etymological foundation of the meaning of words diminishes in the Middle Ages, if my view is correct, in proportion to the rise in importance of the vernacular languages, as our example *mors* indicates, being untranslatable from Latin into the vernacular languages, or only in exceptional cases, as in a passage of the *Wiener Genesis* (ll. 603–4; ed. K. Smits, l. 302) where the text dealing with the creation of Eve says: *maget sol si haben namen, want si fone manne ist genomyn* [she shall have the name *maget* (maid) because she is taken from *manne* (man)].28 If, therefore, medieval etymology is very largely held within the confines of a single language, it is on the contrary essential to the meanings of things that the spiritual sense of the word is the same in all languages, since it does not proceed from the sound of the word in the various individual languages, but from the language of things which all humanity alike encounters in creation, as Alan of Lille writes in a verse about the rose (*PL* 210, 579A):

\[ \text{Omnis mundi creatura} \\
\text{Quasi liber et pictura} \\
\text{Nobilis est et speculum;} \\
\text{Nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,} \\
\text{Nostris status, nostrae sortis} \\
\text{Fidele signaculum.} \\
\text{Nostrum statum pingit rosa,} \\
\text{Nostris status decens glosa,} \\
\text{Nostrae vitae lectio –} \]

[Every creature of the world is a mirror for us, like a book and picture: a faithful sign of our life, our death, our condition, our fate. The rose depicts our condition, a fitting commentary on our state, a reading aloud of our life . . .]
If we consider the matter theologically, it emerges that the Tower of Babel only continues in the literal sense of languages, but has been eliminated by the spiritual sense of the word which is common to all languages and draws its essence from things. Through it all languages partake of the mystery of Pentecost. Through it historical periods are, like languages, annulled in the eternal truth proclaimed by the whole of history.\textsuperscript{29}

It is necessary for all branches of research concerned with the Middle Ages, from literary and linguistic scholarship by way of history and art history to the natural sciences, not to leave to theology alone the complex of problems relating to the spiritual sense of the created world, which is manifested as language in the use of words, but to appropriate it and make it fruitful for their own purposes, as initiated in the case of art history, and in research into symbolism by historians (P. E. Schramm).

The Middle Ages produced not only a Christian etymology, but also a Christian grammar which, as Smaragdus explains in his commentary on Donatus written at the Emperor Charlemagne’s bidding, aims to overcome what was dimly prefigured in Classical antiquity through fulfilment in the spirit of truth, and in the same field to transform the \textit{paganorum ritus} [rite of pagans] into a \textit{sacrificium domini} [sacrifice of the Lord].\textsuperscript{30} But here I am not concerned with outlining a historical evaluation of medieval Christian etymology and grammar appropriate for the spirit of their own age – not one springing from nineteenth-century evolutionary thought – and which also served the discipline of semantics (\textit{Bedeutungskunde}),\textsuperscript{31} but rather to draw attention to another field of endeavour, in my view of greater significance.

Anyone accustomed to question the spiritual sense of things might find that it becomes a daily devotional exercise to meditate on the allegorisation of the visible things of the world, as is reported of Gregory of Nazianzus.\textsuperscript{32} And when Bernard of Clairvaux ranks the preaching of trees and stones more highly than that of books, this is intended to be seen on the same level.\textsuperscript{33} It is necessary to read the book of creation, and by meditation to interpret its letters. Here too the saying is valid: \textit{Principium ergo doctrinae est in lectione, consummatio in meditacione} [For the beginning of instruction is in reading, its completion in meditation].\textsuperscript{34} The essence of pious education lies in the devotional exaltation of the space of meanings (\textit{Bedeutungsraum}).\textsuperscript{35} Bible exegesis and sermon educate not only the clerically trained, but anyone moved by this proclamation of the methods of disclosure of the spiritual sense hidden in things. That it was attained, in the centuries from St Paul to the Church Fathers, that the universe of the created world, as far as it is manifest in the vocabulary of the Bible, was raised into the light of its spiritual significance, is the huge achievement of a creative, meditative reflection, inspired by the spirit of the Bible, on the essence and ways of salvation. In a tension, sometimes latent, sometimes evident, between tradition and freedom which lasted over a thousand years and incorporates the problem, profound from the point of view of the history of ideas, of the shift in meaning of the spiritual sense of the word – as is apparent in the transition from Romanesque to Gothic with its
dehistoricisation and internalisation of religion in mysticism — the continuity of interpretation indebted to the tradition is so great that a lexicographical codification of the spiritual senses of words was possible, and the history of this lexicographical activity is no less living than that of medieval exegesis.

In both the monastic and the scholastic spheres the Middle Ages produced many dozens of allegorical dictionaries, which systematically interpret the vocabulary of the Bible — naturally consisting almost exclusively of common and proper nouns and numerals — by establishing the space of meanings and assessing the world of meanings (Bedeutungswelt) with a view to determining its spiritual sense and making its spiritual power transparent. These dictionaries begin in the fifth century with the Formulae spiritualis intelligentiae of Eucherius of Lyons, undergo a notable expansion before 820 with the Clavis of Pseudo-Melito, become more frequent from the mid-twelfth century on and maintain their position as widely disseminated aids for sermon and exegesis in an unbroken chain down to the eighteenth century. Still largely unedited for the Middle Ages (Migne’s Patrologia Latina contains little of relevance), hitherto noticed almost entirely by theologians and then only occasionally, we would know little of the genre were it not for the fact that a century ago Cardinal Pitra happened to apply his stupendous erudition to an edition of the Clavis and partly filled the gap in our knowledge of this material, an isolated effort at the time and largely still unrivalled today. Besides the artes praedicandi and the instructions for reading Holy Scripture, from Hrabanus Maurus’ De institutione clericorum (following Augustine’s De doctrina christiana) and Hugh of St Victor’s Eruditio didascalica (PL 176, 739–838) down to Flacius Illyricus’ Clavis in the sixteenth century, what has been said above about the spiritual sense of Scripture can be substantially found in the preambles to these dictionaries.

We distinguish three principal types of lexicographical arrangement of the spiritual sense of the word according to its literary form. These dictionaries sometimes follow the order in which the words appear in a particular text, above all the Psalter, as in the Distinctiones collections known from the early scholastic period on, which are closely related to the continuous exegesis of the Bible commentaries. A second type appears in the twelfth century, for example with Alan of Lille, Petrus Cantor and the Pseudo-Hrabanus, treating the chosen vocabulary in alphabetical order. This type thus meets the needs of the preacher and comes to dominate later on. The third form of allegorical dictionary is older and is idealistic rather than practical in its conception; it arranges its vocabulary according to groups of things in a kind of systematic summa. These summæ are older than those of the early scholastic and scholastic periods, and of a different nature, being more akin to works such as Hrabanus Maurus’ De universo which aim at an organised description and interpretation of the world, and, like the Clavis, are closer to these in time. The twelve books of the Clavis treat their vocabulary as a series of classified groups: first the words for God, then those for the Son. There follow the things between heaven and earth, from the angels to dew, next the earth with everything
which concerns it, and then man with his limbs and activities. The following
books, which deal with the metals and the implements fashioned from them,
the world of flora, birds and beasts, indicate that the Physiologus and the
medieval herbals, bird books and lapidaries are to be understood in their
conception as specialised allegorical dictionaries, which tend to become ele-
ments of such universal dictionaries or else are derived as parts of them. The
following book deals with man as a social being in family and church, the
next is headed De civitate [On the City], meaning the city as an architectural
and social structure, important for art history because of its architectural
allegories. The twelfth book concerns number symbolism, like the many
specialised tracts de significatione numerorum [on the meaning of numbers].
The appended thirteenth book, finally, treats geographical and historical
names after the example of Jerome.

Among the alphabetically arranged dictionaries also there is a mixed
type which again lists the vocabulary of the individual letters of the alphabet
as such a summa, that is, collects under A first of all the words closest to
God, and then descends through the cosmos of things beginning with A down
to those signifying the devil, as in Peter of Capua’s Rosa alphabeticæ (c. 1200),
where for example the words beginning with the initial I start with iustitia
[justice] and end with infernus [hell]. In the arrangement of the individual
dictionary articles, the idea of the summa is embodied anew, since according
to the descriptions of things – which in themselves may be not merely beauti-
ful, but also of historical and cultural interest42 – the world of meanings
of the individual thing is again traversed from God down to the devil, as we
saw in condensed form in the mnemonic verse about the meanings of lapis [stone].

Here I must confine myself to a general indication of the significance of
such kinds of allegorical dictionary for all branches of medieval studies. The
grandiose spiritual scale and amazing uniformity of the Christian science of
the interpretation of words, together with the etymology adduced in the
dictionaries and the Christian grammar pertaining to it, are an impressive
historical witness to a science which permeates the world with a spiritual
dimension. It will not deflect the modern language scholar from his path,
prescribed by historical conditions, but it will impress and perhaps give cause
for reflection, for instance with regard to the validity of the application to the
Middle Ages of modern semantic field theory, if the medieval principles of
arranging vocabulary in the summa are compared with modern principles,
for example in the scheme of lexicographical organisation of Hallig and von
Wartburg.43 As desiderata of medieval scholarship we envisage (i) an inventory of
the allegorical dictionaries in the form of a catalogue; (ii) the editing of at least
the most important of them, and (iii) their analysis by all disciplines for their
specific relevance in each case.44

Medieval theology, as in the case of Aquinas,45 adhered to the principle that
the spiritual sense of the word distinguishes the Bible from all profane literature
and is not applicable to it. In practice, however, the principle could not be upheld,
since in the Middle Ages – as already in Classical antiquity – the allegorical method of textual interpretation was applied also to extrabiblical and pagan texts such as Homer, Virgil and Ovid, and even at the level of the vernacular languages as in the *Ovide moralisé*. The allegorisation of the lovers’ cave in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* is the first explicit application by a German poet of the method of spiritual interpretation of the text to his own profane text. Dante described and applied the same method in the *Convivio* and in his dedicatory letter to Cangrande indicated it was applicable to the *Divina commedia*, giving examples for the *Paradiso*. When Chrétien de Troyes draws a distinction between matter and sense in his Arthurian romance, we should consider whether he was not looking more consciously beyond the distinction between matter and idea appropriate for his work than we have hitherto noticed, and considering the possibility of the interpretation of the sense of individual motifs of his subject matter. For example, only the allegorical dictionaries led me to the recognition that the lion which conquers the dragon and accompanies Iwein after he has taken its part signifies justice (*das Recht*), in whose name and with whose help Iwein engages in his knightly adventures. Gottfried von Strassburg may well have been hinting at such an interpretation in his praise of Hartmann von Aue (*Tristan*, 4621ff.):

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Hartmann der Ouwære
ahi, wie der diu wære
beid ëzen unde ínne
mit worten und mit sinnen
durchverwet und durchziert!
wie er mit rede figieret
der aventiure meine!
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[Ah, how Hartmann of Aue dyes and adorns his tales through and through with words and sense, both outside and within! How eloquently he establishes his story’s meaning! (trans. A. T. Hatto [Harmondsworth, 1960], p. 105)]

If knowledge of the method of the spiritual illumination of words is indispensable for biblical poetry in the Middle Ages, it can, with due caution and the necessary sense for the inherent nature of creative literature (*Dichterisches*), also be made fruitful for secular literature. With a type of biblical poetry which is consciously restricted to the literal sense and hagiographical literature (*Legendendichtung*) devoid of allegorisation subsumed within it, we have to contrast allegorising biblical poetry as literature with higher pretensions. Where a work goes over from pure narrative to allegorisation, like the *Wiener Genesis* in the biblical and *Tristan* in the secular sphere, we need to question poetic function and aesthetic value. Medieval poets could, without concern for their poetic reputation, adopt foreign subject matter, as, among many other instances, the German poets take over French romances and interpret them and illuminate their meaning still further. This has to be seen in association with the fact that the Middle Ages are much less concerned with
the invention of new subject matter than with its reinterpretation – a substantial difference from what the modern period expects of a writer. Just as theology indefatigably seeks to reinterpret the same texts in a creative manner, so likewise does literature, as far as concerns the few large-scale fictional narratives, once they have been invented in the first place. The illumination of the meaning of the extant themes and subject matter was accomplished, as in theology, by the execution of their historical shift in meaning, in this case in literary terms. This, for the Middle Ages, is of scarcely less literary value than the invention of the few really great figures like Chrétien, whose romance received its last creative interpretation at the hands of Cervantes, when, in the melancholic state of a man who had become isolated in his enthusiasm, he showed that his time had been passed in a world incapable of viewing the knight as anything more than a mere lovable fool.

Since the Jews and pagans remained obdurate at the level of the letter, whereas, according to Augustine, spiritual understanding imparts salvation to the believer, a new medieval Christian aesthetic saw, in allegory, the arrival of a new beauty in the world which transcended Classical antiquity. Otfrid von Weissenburg, the first poet of the sensus spiritualis [spiritual sense] in the German language, spoke of it in his exegesis of the Marriage Feast at Cana. He interprets the transformation of the water into wine as the transition from the literal sense of the word to knowledge of its spiritual sense. The refreshing spring water of the word is transformed into glorious wine when it is made intelligible with a view to the salvation concealed within it. Otfrid saw his poetic vocation in such a clarification of the word, followed by its transformation. With the awakening of the letter to the spirit, the revelation of what was concealed, the dissolution of shadows in the light of knowledge, the transformation of the water into wine, Otfrid sees a new Christ-given beauty (II, 10, 11–12):

\[ \text{Deta et iz scónara al so zám, joh zjarara ouh so filu fram,} \]
\[ \text{(vir góum es némen wollen), so win ist widar brúnnen.} \]

[He did this, as was fitting, so fairly and so beautifully – we mean to take good note of it – to the extent that wine is compared to water.]

In accordance with his teacher Hrabanus Maurus’ requirement in verbis verum amare, non verba [to love not words, but the truth in words], Otfrid reveals the beauty of the word not so much in its sound as in its spiritual sense. But the sound should not be unworthy of the spiritual sense. The formal beauty of his work, cultivated in humility, will only be visible to the one who follows Otfrid in understanding with him the deeper meaning of the form revealed by the allegorisation of the terminology of Classical poetics. Through Otfrid we know what allegorical poetry means: the realisation of a new beauty through the awakening of the letter to the spirit in intelligent form.

Luther said of himself that the period he spent as a monk was the time when he allegorised everything. Later it was his care tradere scripturam simplici sensu
[to communicate Scripture in its pure sense].\textsuperscript{52} That seems to mark the end of the Middle Ages. But even if the emblem books of the Renaissance, which in one bound leapt back over the Middle Ages to draw directly from Classical antiquity, appeared beside the allegorical dictionaries and seemed to displace their Christian interpretation of meaning, the baroque period also once again permeated emblematics, which survived as late as Winckelmann, with the medieval spirit of allegory, as in the case of the seventeenth-century \textit{Mundus symbolicus} of Filippo Piccinelli.\textsuperscript{53} But Leibniz was already writing: “Toute la nature est pleine de miracles, mais de miracles de raison.”\textsuperscript{54}

It was not until autonomous observation of nature called into question the biblical world-picture and a secularised view of history challenged medieval salvation history (\textit{Heilsgeschichte}), not until revelation was found in discoveries, sense and meaning were entrusted to the senses and the religious experience of God (\textit{experientia Dei}) in the world became displaced by experiment as far as \textit{experimentum suae mediatis}it,\textsuperscript{55} that the Seven Liberal Arts vanished, taking with them their sense of serving man by opening up the world to creative interpretation from the spirit. The liberal arts became the exact sciences. New knowledge, in its unease, knowledge of truths no longer eternal but historical, disrupted the devout seriousness of an aesthetic game which had re-created the Hexameron through the illumination of its meaning in meditation, and shook to its foundations the radiant edifice of the spirituality of things. Wherever the common interest of peoples in the pentecostal language of allegory was shattered, the bell tolled for the Middle Ages.

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Pitra, III, lxxixff., identifies 150 allegorical dictionaries from Eucherius in the fifth to the *Mundus symbolicus* of Filippo Piccinelli in the seventeenth century, of which 140 fall into the period 1000–1635. In addition Pitra records 45 authors on the names of God and Christ, 13 on heavenly things, more than 20 authors on *De natura rerum* (III, xxviii), some 50 authors who collected allegories from the works of Gregory the Great (III, xxiii), a whole sequence of authors on number mysticism (III, 307ff.); and, by Christian authors, 20 bird books (II, 520), 22 herbals (II, 468ff.) and 25 lapidaries (II, 345ff.). In addition there is the *Physiologus* literature, medieval lexicography drawing on Classical tradition in the manner of Ansileubus, Papias, Huguccio, etc.: see G. Goetz, *De glossariorum latinorum origine et fatis* (Leipzig & Berlin, 1923). An additional subject is the broad field of Bible exegesis (e.g. the Apocalypse commentaries on the symbolism of precious stones), emblematics and iconology until into the eighteenth century. Only the united forces of medievalists of different countries and disciplines will be able to gather in the harvest waiting here in a rational and meaningful way.

The text which to my knowledge presents the science of meaning (*Bedeutungskunde*) discussed here clearly and exhaustively and in the most concise fashion is Hugh of St Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*, chapter 14, *PL* 175, 20f.: *Diligens scrutator sacri eloquii rerum significationes nequaquam negligere debet, quia sicut per voces primarum rerum notitia acquiritur, ita per significationem rerum earundem intelligintia, quae spirituali notificatione percipiuntur, et manifestatio perficitur. Philosophus in aliiis scripturis solam vocum notitiam significationem; sed in sacra pagina excellentior valore est rerum significatio quam vocum: quia hanc usus constituit,*
illam natura dictavit. Haec hominum vox est, illa Dei ad homines. Significatio vocum est ex placito hominum; significatio rerum naturalis est et ex operatione creatoris volentis quasdam res per alias significari. Est etiam longe multiplicior significatio rerum quam vocum. Nam paucae voce plus quam duas aut tres significationes habent. Res autem quaelibet tam multiplex potest esse in significione aliarum rerum, quot in se proprietates visibles aut invisibles habet communes aliis rebus. Haec autem res primae per voces significatae et res secundas significantes sex circumstantiis discretae considerantur, quae sunt hae, videlicet res, persona, numerus, locus, tempus, gestum. In his enim significatio rerum primarum ad secundas consideratur. Res autem in hoc loco intelligimus in materia quacunque vel substantia inanimata coelestium sive terrestrium constitutas: ut sunt lapides, ligna, herbae et caetera hiuis modi, quae in elementis vel ex elementis sunt. Omnis autem res, quae ad significandum proponitur in scriptura sacra, aut secundum exteriori formam aut secundum interiori naturam significat. Rem autem large hic accipimus supradicta sexta rem continua, quae in animae vestae et elemento est, quae in elementis vel ex elementis sunt. Omnis autem res, quae ad significandum proponitur in scriptura sacra, aut secundum exteriori formam aut secundum interiori naturam significat. Sub exteriori forma figure rerum et colores continentur, quae visu percipimus. Ad interiori naturam pertinet aliae rerum proprietates, quas caeteris sensibus comprehendimus... [A diligent researcher ought by no means to neglect the meanings of the things of holy eloquence, because as knowledge of primary things is acquired through the sounds of the words, so is the understanding through the meanings of the same things which are perceived by spiritual acquaintance, and its manifestation is perfected. The philosopher in other writings knows only meanings of the sounds of words; but in the sacred text the meaning of things is much more excellent than the meaning of the sounds of words, because custom determined the latter, but nature determined the former. The latter is the voice of men, the former the voice of God to men. The meaning of the sounds of words is from the pleasure of men; the natural meaning of things is from the work of the Creator in willing certain things to be signified by others. Moreover the meaning of things is far more various and manifold than the meaning of the sounds of words. For few words have more than two or three meanings. But anything whatever can be as manifold in its meaning of other things, as it contains visible or invisible properties in common with other things. Moreover these primary things which signify secondary things are considered separately according to six conditions, which are: thing, person, number, place, time, deed. In these the meaning of primary things is considered in relation to the secondary. Moreover, in this place we understand things in whatever matter or inanimate substance of heavenly or earthly things they are formed: such as are precious stones, woods, plants, and all others of this kind which are in elements or derived from elements. And every individual thing which is set forth in Holy Scripture as yielding meaning bears meaning either according to its external form or according to its internal nature. And here we accept the thing as containing in abundance the aforementioned six conditions, under which the thing itself is contained, that is the matter which we proposed as the
first attribute. For every individual thing bears meaning either according to its internal nature or according to its external form. In the external form are contained the figures and colours of things, which we perceive with sight. To the internal nature belong other properties of things, which we comprehend with the remaining senses . . .], – which are then elaborated in detail. Finally Hugh refers to, albeit in part merely hinting at, the significance of persons, numbers, places, times and events. In chapter 3 (PL 175, 13ff.) Hugh attaches the greatest importance to demonstrating that the spiritual sense does not devalue the letter, but confers its most sacred recognition upon it. It is the Holy Spirit who depicted the letters to frail human senses: quasi quaedam simulacra mysticorum intellectuum depinxit [painted like certain images of mystic significations] (PL 175, 14C). – Noli itaque de intelligentia scripturarum gloriari, quandiu litteram ignoras. Litteram autem ignorare est ignorare quid littera significet et quid significetur a littera [And so do not boast in the knowledge of the Scriptures as long as you are ignorant of the letter. For to be ignorant of the letter is to be ignorant of what the letter means and of what is meant by the letter] (PL 175, 13D).

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NOTES
* Slightly revised University of Kiel Inaugural Lecture of July 1958
3 There is a clear and detailed treatment of the hermeneutic principles of medieval exegesis in an anonymous introduction, of the fourteenth century at the latest, to the twelfth-century Allegoriae of Pseudo-Hrabanus, edited by J. B. Pitra, Spicilegium solesmense, Vol. III (Paris, 1855), pp. 436–45. In the following, references to Pitra’s volumes II and III follow the pattern: III, 439.
4 Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermones in cantica 14, 4, PL 183, 841B; Peter of Poitiers in his Allegoriae (see notes 9 and 11 below) also says that on the day of the Passion the velum [veil] which until then spread over the world was rent asunder: revelata sunt fundamenta arbis terrarum [the foundations of the circle of the world were laid bare]. Compare in the Distinctiones monasticae: Quod leo de Juda libri signacula solvit;/Hoc est quod Christus, surgens a morte revolvit/Velum scripturae: vero cessere figurae (III, 54) [That the Lion of Judah loosened the seals of the book,/that means that Christ, rising from death, rolled back/the veil of Scripture; truly types and figures ceased].
5 For references, see the concluding bibliography.
6 Richard of St Victor, Exceptiones II, 3: De scripturae divinae trivici modo tractandi; PL 177, 205B; compare Speculum ecclesiae (in the appendix to Hugh of St Victor), PL 177, 375B: In libris autem ethicorum voces tantum mediantibus intellectibus res significant. In divina pagina non solum intellectus et res significant, sed ipsae res alias res significant. Unde claret scientiam arium ad cognitionem divinarum scripturarum valde esse utilem [For in the books of the gentiles the sounds of words signify things only through the mediation of minds. In the sacred text minds do not merely signify things, but the things themselves signify other things. From which it is clear that the science of
the arts is very useful for knowledge of the Holy Scriptures]. Hugh of St Victor, De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris, chapter 3, PL 175, 12A: Habet enim sacrum eloquium proprietatem quemdam ab aliis scripturis differentem, quod in eo primum per verba quae recitantur de rebus quibusdam agitur, quae rursum res vise verborum ad significationem aliarum rerum proponuntur [For the sacred word has a particular property different from other writings, that through the words which are cited in it there is a primary concern with particular things, which are again put forward in place of words to indicate the meaning of other things].

7 PL 210, 53A. Petrus Cantor cites the Pauline statement Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta consciencitun [Romans 1:20, Vulgate text] [For since the creation of the world his invisible properties have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made] in the form: Invisibilia Dei a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt visibilia consciencitun [II, 17] [since the creation of the world the invisible properties of God have been there to see as visible things in the things he has made]. On this, Hugh of St Victor, De arca Noe morali II, 12: PL 176, 643D. Creation is the opus Dei, quod numquam desinit esse, in quo apere visibili invisibili sapientia creatoris visibiliter scripta est [work of God which never ceases to be, in which the work the invisible wisdom of the Creator is written in visible form for the visible] (compare ibid., II, 16, PL 176, 645).

8 Erudition didascalica VI, 5: PL 176, 805C.

9 Petri Pictaviensis allegoriae super tabernaculam Mosysi, ed. P. S. Moore & J. A. Corbett (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1938), p. 4; compare Speculum ecclesiae, PL 177, 375D: Res [. . .] tot figuras quo naturae et quo habent proprietates tot significationum habent diversitates [Things [. . .] have as many figures as natural qualities and they have as many different kinds of meanings as they have properties]. Richard of St Victor, Excerptiones II, 5: De significatione vocum et rerum, PL 177, 205D: Voci non plus quam duas aut tres habent significationes. Res autem tot possunt habere significationes, quo habent proprietates [The sounds of words do not have more than two or three meanings. But things can have as many meanings as they have properties]; compare Guibert of Nogent, PL 156, 29B.

10 Richard of St Victor, Excerptiones II, 5, PL 177, 205D: Res duobus modis significat, natura et forma. Natura, ut nix, qua frigida est, extinctiunem designat libidinis. Forma, qua candida est, munditiam designat boni operis [A thing conveys its meaning in two ways, in nature and in form. In nature, as snow, because it is cold, signifies the extinction of appetite. In form, because it is white, signifies the purity of a good work]. A further example from the Distinctiones monasticae (II, 482): Naturas aqulae cognoscere non puto vile,/Cuius naturas sacras reor esse figurae [I do not hold it worthless to know the natural properties of the eagle, whose natural properties I judge to be figures of sacred things].

11 Speculum ecclesiae, PL 177, 375D. The text continues (376A): Mathematica de visibilibus formis rerum visibilium agit, physica de visibilibus naturis rerum visibilium, theologia de invisibilibus essentiae et earundem naturis. Sic ergo per artes iuvamur in divina pagina, ubi vocum significationem attendimus propter literalem sensum et rerum significationem consideramus, ut capiamus mysticum intellectum per formam visibilem, ubi iucat mathematica, aut secundum naturam invisibilum, ubi physica et theologae servient [Mathematics deals with the visible forms of things, physics with the invisible natures of visible things, theology with the invisible essences and the natures of the same. Thus therefore, in the divine text, we are assisted, through the arts, where we direct attention to the meanings of the sounds of words according to the literal sense and consider the significance of things, in grasping the mystical meaning through the visible form, where mathematics helps, or according to the invisible nature, where physics and theology are of service].

12 Richard of St Victor, Excerptiones II, 4: Quod scriptura mundana subserviat divinam [That profane writing is subordinate to Holy Scripture], PL 177, 205C. The text continues: Sub eo iugur sensu, qui inter voces et res versatur, continetur historia, et ei subserviunt tres scientiae, dialectica, rhetorica, grammatica. Et sub eo sensa, qui inter res et facta mystica versatur, continetur allegoria. Et sub illo, qui est inter res et facienda mystica, continetur tropologia. Et his duobus subserviunt arithmetica, musica, geometria et physica [History therefore is contained under that sense which is situated between the sounds of words and things, and it is served by three sciences, dialectic, rhetoric and grammar. And allegory is contained under that sense which is situated between tangible things and mystic things which are done. And tropology is contained under that which is between tangible things and mystic things which are to be done. And these two are served by arithmetic, music, geometry and physics].

13 Speculum ecclesiae, chapter 8, De occultis scripturarum Veteris et Novi Testamenti [On Hidden Things in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments], PL 177, 375C; compare Hugh of St Victor, De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris, chapter 13, PL 175, 20C: Septem liberales artes haec scientiae subserviunt. Trivium ad significationem vocum, quadrivium ad rerum significationem respicit [The Seven Liberal Arts are
subject to this science. The Trivium is responsible for the meanings of the sounds of words, the Quadrivium for the meanings of things.

In the preface to King Lewis, PL 111, 9B: Nuper quoque quia vos, quando in præsentia vestra fui, compertum vos habere dixistis aliquod opusculum me noviter conrice de sermonum proprietate et mystica rerum significatione... Sunt enim in eo plura exposita de rerum naturis et verborum proprietatibus nec non etiam de mystica rerum significacione [And also because recently, when I was in your presence, you said you wished me newly to prepare some little work explaining the nature of words and the mystic meanings of things... For there are in it many explanations about the natural qualities of things and the properties of words, and also about mystic meanings of things in addition].

Richard of St Victor, Exceptiones II, 5, PL 177, 205D: Hae autem res primae res secundas significantes sex circumstantiis discrete considerantur, quae sunt hae: res, persona, numerus, locus, tempus, gestum [Moreover these primary things which signify secondary things are considered separately according to six conditions, which are: thing, person, number, place, time, deed].

Hrabanus Maurus, PL 112, 331A, on Galatians 4:24, quae sunt per allegoriam dicta [which things are said as an allegory]. Since allegoria occurs in the Bible only here, a history of the exegesis of Galatians 4:24 promises to be richly informative about the theological understanding of allegory. [Translator’s note: see now Hartmut Freytag, “Quae sunt per allegoriam dicta. Das theologische Verständnis der Allegorie in der frühchristlichen und mittelalterlichen Exegese von Gal. 4,21–31”, in: Verbum et Signum: Beiträge zur mediävistischen Bedeutungsforschung: Studien zur Semantik und Sinntradition im Mittelalter; Friedrich Ohly zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. H. Fromm, W. Harms & U. Ruberg, 2 vols (Munich, 1975), Vol. I, pp. 27–43] Dentes et tetis et aureis litteris scribuntur in hac pagina (II, 212; compare II, 251, 499, 504, etc.) [Slanders are written with foul and with golden letters in this text]. Pseudo-Hrabanus, Allegoriae, PL 112, 850B: una eademque res non solum diversam, sed et adversam aliquando in scriptura sacra significationem habere potest [One and the same thing can have not only diverse meanings in Holy Scripture, but can sometimes have opposite meanings].

When F. Scheidweiler, “Die Wortfeldtheorie”, Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur 79 (1942), 249–72 (p. 264), observed that in the Middle Ages we find “in a manner no longer tolerable for us similar words with not merely varying, but totally different meanings side by side in the same author”, these “enigmas of meaning” (p. 265) correspond to the nature of the poetic word (on which J. Schwietering is quoted, ibid., p. 265, n. 1) and to the types of resistance offered to the formation of a written language. One might be justified in asking whether the plurality of meaning of the word is in effect fostered by the plurality characterized in the spiritual sense.

Thomas Cantipratanus, in De naturis rerum XVI, 3 and 7, appears to have composed the verses De proprietatibus lunae (or solis) [On the properties of the sun (or moon)] himself. In chapter 7, on the sun:

De eius proprietatibus septem versus sunt;
Fulgidus, effundit radios, fons ipse caloris;
Attrahit hic nubes, specimen vel forma caloris;
Illustrat lunam; noctemque diemque ministrat;
Fructus maturat; ac humida cuncta resiccat;
Intrat, si reseras; glacies et dura relidit;
Laetificat sanos oculos; tenebras de nocte relidit;

[Seven verses about its properties:It shines, pours forth rays, its own source of heat; it attracts clouds, is the emblem and image of heat; it gives light to the moon; it serves by day and by night; it ripens fruit; and dries up all wet places again; if you open it, it enters; it strikes back at ice and hard places; it gladdens healthy eyes, and closes the inflamed; it sets, and rises; it descends, and climbs from thence.]

In chapter 3, on the moon:

Sunt ergo isti versus et lunae proprietates;
Humorum mater, solisque refrigerat aestum;
Eclipsim patitur, Phoebó faciente recessum;
Huic sol dat lumen; tenebras de nocte relidit;
[And these are verses on the properties of the moon: /The mother of the humours, it cools the heat of the sun; /it suffers eclipse, a retreat caused by Phoebus; /to it the sun gives light; it drives the darkness from night; /it gives light to the world, is early when the sun revisits; /among the planets it more approaches the earth; /it waxes, wanes, glows, mediates time.]

Each of the properties mentioned in the verses about the moon and the sun is then interpreted as signifying the Virgin Mary and the Sun respectively, and their spiritual meanings are explored.

20 PL 177, 375C; compare Hugh of St Victor, Eruditio didascalica V, 3: *sed excellenter valde est rerum significatio quam vocum, quia hanc asse instituit, illam natura dictavit. Hanc hominum vox est, illa vox Dei ad homines. Hae prolatae perit, illa creature subsistit* [But the meaning of things is much more excellent than the meaning of the sounds of words, because custom determined the latter, but nature determined the former. The latter is the voice of men, the former the voice of God to men. The latter dies when uttered, the former, once created, endures].

21 It is the type of “conscious symbolism” of Hegel (loc. cit., pp. 528ff), “in which appears chiefly the dominance of abstract meaning over outward form” (p. 526).

22 Hence the “meaning of things” (Dingbedeutung) here too, but a concretisation of the abstract or internal which is not determined at the Creation but *ex humana institutio* [by human agency] in poetical creativity. It lives not *phusei* (by nature), but *theosei* (by determination).


24 Rupert of Deutz, *PL* 168, 393f.: *Non ignoro, quantum vel quale susceptor negotium, scilicet historiae siue rei gestae aliquod ponere fundamentum et super illud magnum, quod sub istis vocibus continetur, supereducit mysterium. Lurum enim exposito mystica firmius stat neque fluitare permittitur, si super historiam certi temporis vel rei demonstrabilis rationabiliter superaedificata continetur* [I am not ignorant of how much or to what extent I should undertake the business, namely to establish some foundation of history or deeds and erect above it the great mystery which is maintained under the sounds of these words. For then the mystic explanation stands more firmly and is not allowed to stagger if above the history of a certain time or event the superstructure is kept together in a manner which is demonstrably rational].


26 *Eruditio didascalica* V, 5: *PL* 176, 793D.

27 The twelfth-century Anonymous of Clairvaux comments on his alphabetical dictionary: *In hoc libello continentur etymologiae nominum, rerum proprietates, et vanumdem distinctiones scripturarum testimonii confirmatae* (III, 488) [In this little book are contained the etymologies of names, the properties of things, and its distinctions established by the evidences of the Scriptures].

28 Behind which a biblical etymology is certainly hidden: *haec vocatio virgo, quasiam de viro sumpta est* [Genesis 2:22] [This shall be called woman, because she is taken from man]. In Luther’s Bible: “she shall be called woman (Mannin) because she is taken from man (von Mannen)”.

29 On the dissolution of time, Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, 21, *PL* 76, 135C: *Scriptura [ . . . ] scientias tamen omnes atque doctrinas ipso etiam locationis suae more transcendit, quia, uno eodemque sermone dum narrat
textum, prodit mysterium; et sic scit praeterita dicere, ut eo ipso noverit futura praedicare; et non immutato discendi ordine, eisdem ipsis sermonibus novit et ante acta describere et agenda nuntiare [Scripture [...] however transcends all the sciences and teachings even by its own manner of speech, because, while it narrates the text in one and the same word, it brings forth a mystery; and thus it understands how to tell of past events in such a way that by virtue of this it knows how to proclaim future events; and without changing the order of narration in the same words it knows both how to describe acts before they are performed and how to announce things to be done]. Hugh of St Victor, De scripturis, chapter 3, PL 175, 12A: *Est autem allegoria, cum per id, quod ex littera significatum proponitur, aliud aliud sive in praeterito, sive in praesenti sive in futuro factum significatur* [It is also an allegory, when through the thing represented in the literal meaning something else is signified as done either in the past or in the present or in the future].


Dulcia depromit, promittit et aurea regna,
Lactea cum solido pocula pane dabit.
Muneribus sacris plenus est iste libellus,
Scripturam retinet, grammatica redolat.
Nunc scriptura doct domini perquirere regnum,
Lacquer terrena, scandere regna poli.
Promittit cunctis caelestia dona beatis,
Vicere cum domino semper et esse suo.
Grandia retribuit caro sedulique legentibus.
Praemia grammatica ars miserante Deo. (ll. 33-42)

[It brings forth sweet things and promises golden kingdoms, will give cups of milk with solid bread. This little book is full of holy gifts, holds Scripture fast, has the odor of grammar. Now Scripture teaches the eager search for the Lord’s kingdom, the abandonment of earthly things, the ascent to the kingdoms of the heavens. It promises heavenly gifts to all the blessed, to live with and belong to the Lord for ever. The art of grammar, by the mercy of God, repays the dear and diligent reader with great rewards.]


32 Guibert of Nogent, *Quo ordine sermo fieri debeat*, PL 156, 29D: Gregorius Nazianzenus, vir mirabiliter eruditus, in quodam suo libro testatur se id habuisse consuetudinis, ut quisquid videret ad instructionem animi allegorizare studeret. Quod acumine rationes satis idoneas in exemplum et significantias utiles illarum quas ex usu assiduo nihil pendimus rerum uberrime invenit, quae tanto utilius cogitantur, quo benevolentia illis ampliore dicuntur, tantoque sunt gratiosiora quanto minus auditorisibus asilata [Gregory of Nazianzus, a man of astonishing erudition, in one of his books asserts that he had made it his custom that he would take pains to allegorise whatever he saw for the instruction of his soul. If anyone were accustomed to do so by sharpness of mind, not only in sacred books but in almost everything which is in the visible world, he finds plenty of appropriate enough comparisons to serve as moral examples and profitable meanings for those things which, because they are in everyday use, we regard as worthless; such things being deemed all the more profitable the greater their serviceability is said to be, and all the more pleasing the less familiar they are to listeners].

33 Epistola 106, 2 to Henricus Murdach, PL 182, 242B: *Expeto crede: aliud amplius invenies in silvis quam in libris. Ligna et lapides docebunt te, quod a magistris audire non possis. An ne putas posse te sugere mel de petra oleumque de saxo durissimo? An non montes stillant dulcedinem et colles fluent lac et mel et valles abundant frumento?* [Believe what is tested: you will find something more excellent in woods than in books. Wood and stones will teach you what you cannot hear from the masters. Surely you do not think you can suck honey from a stone and oil from the hardest rock? That the mountains drip sweetness and the hills flow with milk and honey and the valleys abound with corn?]

34 Hugh of St Victor, *Eraditio didascalica* II, 11: PL 176, 772C.

35 Pseudo-Hrabanus [twelfth century], *Allegoriae*, PL 112, 849-51, writes in depth about this *spirituale edificium* [spiritual building]. The passage begins: *In nostrae ergo animae domo historia fundamentum ponit, allegoriae parietes erigit, anagogia tectum superponit, tropologia vero tam interius per affectum quam exterius per effectum boni operis variis ornatibus depingit* (849C) [For in the house of our
Therefore that first meaning, by which the sounds of words signify things, belongs to the first sense, that is the literal sense. That meaning by which the things signified by the sounds of words may themselves signify something, is the literal sense. That meaning by which the things signified by the sounds of words signify things, belongs to the first sense, that is the literal sense.

In connection with this shift of meaning, the question of the development of style beyond mere parataxis deserves at least a brief mention here. Parataxis was bound up with the immediate relevance of the interpretation of words, things and events in relation to a higher sphere, with only loose connections in the horizontal context.


Ed. C. Wotke, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 31 (Vienna, 1894).

Ed. J. B. Pitra, Spicilegium silesiense, Vols II and III (Paris, 1855). The allegorical dictionaries are less old than might have appeared when Cardinal Pitra discovered the lost clavis of Bishop Melito of Sardes in the Latin glossary Caput Domini and thus thought he had proof of a Bible dictionary from as early as the second century. Pitra, the most distinguished scholar where these questions are concerned, unearthed a wealth of valuable sources, but out of an understandable elation at their discovery erred in his historical judgement of them. Criticism has demonstrated that the supposed clavis of Melito is a dictionary compiled from Augustine, Gregory the Great and other Latin fathers: O. Rottmanner, "Ein letztes Wort über die Clavis Melitonis", Theologische Quaestionschrift 78 (1896), 614–29; É. Amann, in: Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Vol. X (1928), col. 546. The terminus ante quem is the year 821, since the work formed a preface to the Bible of Theodulphus of Orleans (died 821). For transmission, editions and literature on the clavis, see F. Stégmüller, Repertorium biblicum mediæ ævi, nos. 5574–8; on the Theodulphus Bibles, ibid., nos. 8005–6.


See for example the praefatio to Hrabanus Maurus' De universo, PL 111, 9–12; the preface Quisquis ad sacrae scripturae notitiam desiderat percerere [Whoever desires to obtain knowledge of Holy Scripture] to the Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam of Pseudo-Hrabanus (considered to be Adamus Scotus or Garnerius of Rochefort), PL 112, 849–51; Guilbert of Nogent, Quo ordine sermo fieri debet [The Order of Composition of a Sermon], PL 156, 21–32; the Prologue to the Allegoriae of Peter of Poitiers, loc. cit., pp. 1–2; Hugh of St Victor's Prologue to De sacramentis, PL 176, 183–6; Alan of Lille, Prologue to Distinctiones dictionum theologicaum, PL 210, 607–8; Sicardus of Cremona, Mitrale I, 15, PL 213, 47–8.


E.g. on scutum (II, 300) [shield], or on the bishop's staff [baculus] (II, 387).

R. Hallig & W. von Wartburg, Begriffssystem als Grundlage für die Lexikographie: Versuch eines Ordnungsschemas, Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin 1952/54 (Berlin, 1952). Here, for example, faith and religion appear at the end of Section IV, "Social Organisation" (pp. 79ff). As examples of the medieval study of synonyms might be mentioned the discussions of words for ecclesiastical spaces in Sicardus of Cremona, Mitrale I, 5, PL 213, 26–7, and in Beleth's Rationale, PL 202, 15D, 108D. The synonyms make the same object appear under different aspects.

Pitra himself had aimed to produce [II, ii] a Bibliotheca nova veterum de re symbolica scriptorum [New library of ancient writings about symbolic matters].

Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, q. 1, a. 10: Cum in omnibus scientiis voces significant, hoc habet proprium ista scientia (theologia) quod ipsae res significatiae per voces etiam significat aliquid. Ilia erga prima significatio, quae voces significant res, pertinent ad primum sensum, qui est sensus litteralis. Illa vero significatio qua res significatiae per voces etiam aliares significat, dictat sensus spiritualis; qui super litteralem fundatur et eum supponit. While the sounds of words have meaning in all the sciences, this science (theology) has the characteristic that those things signified by the sounds of words may themselves signify something. Therefore that first meaning, by which the sounds of words signify things, belongs to the first sense, that is the literal sense. That meaning by which the things signified by the sounds of words signify things, belongs to the first sense, that is the literal sense.
42 THE SPIRITUAL SENSE OF WORDS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

words in their turn signify other things is called the spiritual sense, which is founded on the literal sense and presupposes it; cited from M.-D. Chenu, “Histoire et allégorie au douzième siècle”, in: Glaube und Geschichte: Festgabe J. Lortz, ed. E. Iserloh & J. Manns, Vol. II (Baden-Baden, 1958), pp. 59–71 (p. 71).

46 J. Schwietering, Die deutsche Dichtung des Mittelalters, 2nd edn (Darmstadt, 1957), pp. 59, 149, mentioned, in the context of the poem “Die Hochzeit” and the Arthurian romance, the possibility of “interpreting secular literature also in a spiritually symbolic sense”: “Chrétiens distinguishes explicitly between matièr et san – subject-matter and meaning – and the poet’s audience is so steeped in the concept of spiritual symbolism that in the sphere of secular narrative also it enquires after the exemplary meaning beyond the verbal content.”

47 Compare for example Gregory the Great’s interpretation of the lion as viri insti securitatis [safety of the just man]; according to Proverbs 28,1, iustus autem quae leon confidens absque terrors erit [the virtuous man is bold and free from fear as a lion] (Pitra III, 52). On the lion as a symbol of justice, A. Erler, Das Straßburger Münster im Rechtsleben des Mittelalters (Frankfurt a.M., 1954). It is for consideration whether the Iwein motif was already blind to meaning when from the thirteenth century on it was transferred to Henry the Lion: see K. Hoppe, Die Sage von Heinrich dem Löwen (Bremen, 1952), compare the review of L. Wolff, Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 80 (Tübingen, 1958), 165–9.

48 What exegetes identify as the task of historia applies fundamentally to hagiographical narrative, e.g. the twelfth-century Pseudo-Hrabanus, PL 112, 849B: Historia nuncup per perfectionem exempla quae narrat legentem ad imitationem sanctitatis excitat [For history, through the examples of perfect men which it relates, incites the reader to the imitation of holiness].

49 Hervaeus of Bourg-Dieu (died 1150) comments on the Book of Tobit, in F. Stegmueller, Repertorium biblicum medii aevi, Vol. III (Madrid, 1951), no. 3256: Liber Tobiae in superficie litterae est salubris. Maxime enim vitae moralis et exemplis abundat et monitit. Sed quantum poma foliis, tantum allegoria historiaris praecellit [The Book of Tobit is wholesome in the outer surface of the letter. For it abounds with both examples and advice regarding a moral life. But by as much as the fruit surpasses the leaves, by so much does the allegorical meaning surpass the facts of history]. The same passage appears in Hugh of St Victor, Allegoriae in Vetus Testamentum IX, 2 (De mysteriis quae continentur in libro Tobiae) [On the mysteries contained in the Book of Tobit], with the addition: Maxima enim ecclesiae sacramenta continet. Ipsa enim Tobias populam Israel significat, qui caeteris idolatriae deditis fide recta et operibus Deo serviebat (PL 175, 737D) [For it contains the greatest sacraments of the Church. For Tobit himself signifies the people of Israel, who while all others were given to idolatry served God with true faith and works].

50 One example from the Distinctiones monasticae may stand for many; Plato, licet esse acutissimus, verba Moysis, quae potuit legere, non potuit multis in locis intelligere, quia carui gratia adiutrice (II, 225) [Plato, although of the greatest intelligence, in many places could not understand the words of Moses, which he could read, because he lacked the assistance of grace].

51 Hence the unknown author of the Moralitates still defines the task as uti salubriter creaturis (II, xxix) [to employ created things to advantage].


55 W. Rehm, Experimentum mediætatis (Munich, 1947).