

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 24: Bernard of Clairvaux, Medieval Reformer and Mystic

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## From the Editor: Sweeter Than Honey

It is fitting for us to wrap up our work here in Pennsylvania on Christian History by doing this issue on Bernard of Clairvaux. We have wanted to overcome the common imbalance—which many of you have pointed out to us—that would seem to suggest that worthwhile history, with a few exceptions, began with the Reformation. Bernard, a man Luther and Calvin greatly admired, defies such a notion, and he represents a long and deep tradition that has contributed a great deal to the Church. Though Bernard stands out as an exemplar of Catholic monasticism, his pronounced loving devotion to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and to the divine authority of Scripture transcends easy categories and gets to the heart of what the Christian faith is all about.

Bernard, the man of humility, is one of the great figures in Church history. He is nevertheless a figure who represents the “contradictions” of his age, and tensions that are still highly relevant today. He was a man of contemplative quiet, peace, and seclusion, a writer of the loftiest words on loving God who also vigorously promoted a Christian “holy war,” the Second Crusade, and who worked for political goals and the legal condemnation of heretics. It has been a key motif of our intention in publishing Christian History to encourage us all to realize that our collective heritage contains much to be thankful for, and much to be sorry for. We are all the body of Christ—or as Bernard might prefer to say, the Bride of Christ—and we all share in the glories and faults of our family. An important lesson to be learned here is that although we may regret many of Bernard’s actions, we should not judge him or any person, by the standards, values, and “enlightened insights,” of any age but his own; and the medieval world is a very difficult one for us to fathom (to say the least). And before we jump to criticize him with Bible verses, we must grapple with the fact that he had a profound and intimate mastery of the Bible. Indeed, his life was a religious experience saturated with Holy Scripture.

Bernard should cause us to consider the concessions we have made as Christians to the pattern of this world. Though many of us may not have considered the monastic life of contemplation as a viable vocation, we desperately need to reconsider how much of a still, quiet place we have uncompromisingly reserved in our lives for communion with our Lord. Do we not more likely simply try to fit God into the rat-race scheme of our lives—lives devoted to personal achievement? For all our flurry of “service” and religious activities, are we a generation to which God, though he might not say “I never knew you” (Matt 7:23), could say “I *hardly* knew you.” Would we dare to say that our communion with God and the priority we give it is the *true indicator* of our love for him? When it comes to the school of spiritual devotion, Bernard’s example casts most of us as distracted kindergarten children, and it has nothing to do with “works righteousness,” but everything to do with the command to love God with all our hearts, souls, and strength.

From across the centuries, from a distant, even alien medieval world, Bernard of Clairvaux comes to us and can help us. Thank God for Bernard’s wisdom, more valuable than gold, sweeter than honey. Thinking ourselves rich and full, we are poor and starving for it.

“Go out into  
the field of your Lord and  
consider how even today it abounds  
in thorns and thistles  
in fulfillment of the ancient curse.

Go out, I say, into the world,  
for the field is the world and it is  
entrusted to you.

Go out into it not as a lord,  
but as a steward, to oversee and to  
manage that for which you must  
render an account.

Go out, I should have said, with  
careful responsibility and  
responsible care.”

Bernard of Clairvaux

***From Book 2 of On Consideration***

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 24: Bernard of Clairvaux, Medieval Reformer and Mystic

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## A 12th Century Man for All Seasons

The Life and Thought of Bernard of Clairvaux

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**Bernard of Clairvaux is worthy of the title "a man for all seasons." His life was dogged by controversy and he fought for some issues that few today would wish to defend. Yet despite this he has in every generation had his admirers. As Jean Leclercq put it, "today, as in his own time, he enchants more readers than he exasperates."**

In the 16th century he was a widely quoted figure, and both Catholics and Protestants were keen to claim his support. John Calvin saw him as the major witness to the truth in the Medieval Church between Gregory the Great (died 604) and the 16th century. Calvin was not alone in his admiration of Bernard. In the early years of the Reformation dozens of anthologies of writings of early Church fathers and medieval masters were published, by Catholics and Protestants alike. In these works the two most popular medieval authors, who appear in almost all of them, are Gregory the Great and Bernard of Clairvaux. The great monk of the 12th century, the theologian of love, the "honey-tongued doctor," has been admired by all manner of Christians now for almost 800 years.

Bernard was born in 1090 at the chateau of Fontaines, on the outskirts of Dijon in Burgundy (today, France). The chateau survives today and part of it has been converted into a chapel commemorating Bernard. His family belonged to the lesser nobility and Bernard would have received the upbringing proper to a young nobleman, training him for a life in the world. But this was not to be.

In 1112\* [\* Some recent scholarship has redated Bernards entry to Citeaux to the year 1113.] he entered the recently founded Abbey of Citeaux, the first abbey of the new Cistercian order. This was not one of the well-established and prestigious monasteries, but was a strict reforming monastery which had been founded in 1098 by one Robert of Molesme. By 1112 the abbot was an Englishman by the name of Stephen Harding, whose beautifully illustrated Bible is today in the municipal library at Dijon. Bernard did not arrive empty-handed but managed to bring with him a party of 30 recruits, including his two uncles and most of his brothers. In time, more of his family were to join the order.

### Citeaux, Clairvaux, and Controversy

Three years later, Bernard was appointed abbot of a new monastery, the third offshoot from Citeaux. He set out with 12 monks to a remote valley where they founded the Monastery of Clairvaux. (The abbey at Clairvaux still survives, but was converted into a prison after the French Revolution. The cells once inhabited by monks are now inhabited by prisoners.)

Citeaux had been founded in opposition to what was felt to be the laxity of the Benedictine order, and Clairvaux was founded in the same spirit. The aim was to return to a strict observance of the **Rule of Benedict**, including poverty and hard work. There was to be a stricter form of asceticism than that being practiced by the Benedictines.

At Clairvaux Bernard carried his reforming ideas to extremes, and in his early years this had

unfortunate consequences. His high standards proved to be too severe for the frail humanity of his monks. After a time they were unable to cope and Bernard had to slacken the reins. Furthermore, Bernard was stricter with himself than with others, with the result that his health was permanently damaged. In particular, he suffered from severe gastric problems and had ongoing problems with digestion. A place had to be provided for him to be sick during monastery services. Despite his poor health, however, Bernard achieved more in his lifetime than has been achieved by most other great men.

Citeaux was founded in protest to Benedictine compromise, and this brought controversy. Into this controversy Bernard entered wholeheartedly. One of his first works, written around 1124–1125, was his **Apology**, addressed to Abbot William of St. Thierry, concerning the dispute between the Cistercians and the monks of Cluny. (The great monastery at Cluny was the center of the Benedictine community in that day.)

The Cistercians were accusing the Cluniacs of infringing the **Rule**; the Cluniacs responded by accusing the Cistercians of unfair criticism. Bernard addressed the second charge first, admitting that there is the danger of spiritual pride. "There are people who go clad in tunics and have nothing to do with furs, who nevertheless are lacking in humility. Surely humility in furs is better than pride in tunics" (Apology 6:12). He then launches into a brilliant satirical attack on Cluniac luxury. In a famous passage he caricatures the lavish meals served at certain monasteries:

Meanwhile course after course is brought in. Only meat is lacking and to compensate for this two huge servings of fish are given. You might have thought that the first was sufficient, but even the recollection of it vanishes once you have set to on the second. The cooks prepare everything with such skill and cunning that the four or five dishes already consumed are no hindrance to what is to follow and the appetite is not checked by satiety... The selection of dishes is so exciting that the stomach does not realize that it is being over-taxed. (9:20)

This was not his last writing concerning the Benedictines and the **Rule of Benedict**. Some years later (1141–1144) he wrote another work, **On Precept and Dispensation**, concerning the nature of obedience to the **Rule**. This began as a response to some queries from two Benedictine monks and is, therefore, less polemical in tone. It concerns the status of the **Rule of Benedict** and the question of whether it may ever be broken.

In particular, what should the monk do if there arises a conflict between the Rule and the obedience which he has promised to his abbot? Bernard stresses that the authority of the abbot is derived from and dependent upon the **Rule** and also that the monk should obey his abbot. Bernard, despite his polemical attacks on the Benedictines, came to have an influence upon the order. Suger, abbot of the prestigious monastery of St. Denis in Paris, was touched by Bernard's words about luxury and adopted a more austere lifestyle for both himself and his monks.

## **Knights and Other Orders**

Bernard also enjoyed a close and warm relationship with other religious orders, such as the Carthusians and the Premonstratensians. In particular he created the Rule for the new order of Knights Templar, and also, at some time between 1128 and 1136, wrote for them a devotional work **In Praise of the New Knighthood**. The Templars were a religious order of knights sworn to defend the Holy Land, and to Christian devotion and morality—unlike that of most plundering crusaders.

After Bernard discusses this new order of knights in **In Praise of the New Knighthood**, he considers the allegorical significance of various sites in the Holy Land that the Templars would be defending, such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth. Most of the discussion is devoted to one site—the holy

sepulchre where Christ was buried. Bernard asks:

“How do we know that Christ has really overcome death? Precisely in that he, who did not deserve it, underwent it. How could we be expected to pay a debt which he has already satisfied in our stead? He who has assumed the guilt of our sins while bestowing his justice upon us had himself paid our debt of death and restored us to life... But what kind of justice is this, you may say, that the innocent should die for the guilty? It is not justice, but mercy.” (11.22ff)

## **Cistercian Growth**

Under Bernard the monastery of Clairvaux grew rapidly and before long began to found its own daughter houses. The first of these, in 1118, was at Trois Fontaines. The second, in 1119, was at Fontenay. (Only the ruins of the chapel and a few other buildings survive at Trois Fontaines, but at Fontenay the buildings have fared better. They have now been lovingly restored, and Fontenay is the best preserved monastery of that period in the world today.)

In due course Bernard himself founded some 70 Cistercian monasteries. If one adds the further offshoots from these monasteries, there were by the time of Bernard’s death almost 170 daughter, grand-daughter and great-grand-daughter abbeys of Clairvaux. It was thanks in large measure to Bernard that the order grew rapidly during the 12th century.

This rapid growth shows the success of the Cistercian order in its first century; however, this was also the cause of its decline. Citeaux had been founded as a rigorist protest against the laxity of contemporary Benedictine monasticism. But the outcome of such rapid growth was a new large and powerful order, and it proved impossible to maintain strict standards for long. In due course, the Cistercians became as lax as the Benedictines. Already in the year of Bernard’s death decisions were made which weakened the commitment to poverty.

## **The Affairs of the World**

Bernard went to Citeaux to flee the world, but here we encounter one of the profound contradictions in his life. He believed that the monk had left the world and turned his back on it, and also that the monk should stay put in his monastery. But in time Bernard became one of the most traveled and active leaders of the 12th-century Church. In 1130 Pope Honorius II died and was succeeded by two rival popes: Innocent II and Anacletus II. Europe divided over the issue.

Bernard came to the conclusion that the former was the better candidate and more committed to reform. He therefore threw his weight behind Innocent and fought hard for him, both by writing letters and by appearing in person to win over Anacletus’s supporters.

Innocent’s eventual victory was due in no small part to Bernard’s support. This served to increase Bernard’s influence at Rome and must have also helped to increase his appetite for this sort of involvement in the affairs of Europe.

Throughout his life Bernard protested his desire to turn his back on the world and his reluctance to be involved in worldly affairs. However, the frequency with which he intervened in such affairs, even when not invited to do so, shows that at least a part of him felt no such reluctance. The extent of his involvement can be seen from the recent critical edition of his *Letters*, which contains no less than 547 letters addressed to many different people all over Europe.

## **Monasticism Versus Scholasticism**

Another ambivalent aspect of Bernard's character can be seen in his relation to scholastic theology. In the so-called "dark ages" (c 500–1000), when western Europe was overrun by successive waves of barbarian invasions, theology was confined almost entirely to the monasteries, which offered an environment of relative stability. This **monastic theology** was produced in an atmosphere of commitment and devotion, within the framework of a life lived according to the monastic rule. It was a theology that fit the needs of everyday life. The goal was not the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, but wisdom—personal growth in spirituality.

The approach taken by the monastics was one of contemplation and adoration. This was especially a theology by and for monks. But with the growing stability of western Europe from the 11th century, scholarship in general and theology in particular spread beyond the confines of the monastery to the cathedral school, and then to the university. This placed theology in a different context and endowed it with a different set of priorities. What emerged, the **scholastic theology**, was based in the schools and took place, therefore, in a more "secular" environment, with a commitment to scholarship rather than to devotion. The goal was objective intellectual knowledge. The approach was one of questioning, disputation, and logical analysis, rather than prayer and meditation.

When did the scholastic approach begin? The first steps can be seen in Anselm of Canterbury, who died in 1109. He was a monk and in many ways remained in the monastic tradition, but he pioneered a more philosophical approach to theology. These beginnings were further developed by others, especially by Peter Abelard (1079–1142), the influential and controversial teacher of theology who lived in Paris in Bernard's day.

Abelard was possibly the most brilliant thinker of the 12th century, and was responsible for introducing a new approach to theology. Augustine, and Anselm after him, operated on the principle that the purpose of knowledge was to strengthen faith, not to question it; the pursuit of knowledge was "faith seeking understanding." Belief came first: "I believe **in order to** understand." Abelard turned this on its head, proposing instead the method of doubt. "It is by doubting that we come to enquire and by enquiring that we reach truth."

This was a dramatic reversal of the traditional approach, added to which Abelard also showed a fundamental lack of respect towards established authorities. This led him at least to question the traditional explanations of the death of Christ in terms of a ransom paid to either God or the devil. (Christ's death as a ransom to the devil was a popular medieval concept.) Instead, Abelard suggested that Christ died not to pay a penalty, but in order to show us God's love, and to win our affection.

### **Bernard Versus Abelard**

How did Bernard react to scholastic theology? He has not inaptly been described as the last great representative of the earlier tradition of monastic theology. He is also well known as the opponent of Abelard who secured his condemnation. This is true, but it is not the whole story. One of Bernard's first works, **On Grace and Free Will**, written about 1128, is a tightly argued discussion of the relationship between grace and free will, which could hold its own in the debates of the schools, and was indeed often quoted by 13th-century scholastic theologians, especially Franciscans. It exhibits a spirit somewhat different from Bernard's other works, and Luther was not totally wide of the mark when he drew a sharp contrast between the Bernard of this treatise and the Bernard of the sermons.

However, when it came to Abelard's teaching Bernard's position was clear. He saw it as a serious threat to the integrity of the gospel. In 1139 he wrote a lengthy letter to the pope (sometimes reckoned as one of his treatises) refuting Abelard. In it he combats much of Abelard's teaching, including his apparent reduction of the atonement to a mere demonstration of God's love.

I was made a sinner by deriving my being from Adam; I am made just by being washed in the blood of Christ. Shall generation by a sinner be sufficient to condemn me and shall not the blood of Christ be sufficient to justify me? ... Such is the justice which man has obtained through the blood of the Redeemer. But this 'son of perdition' [Abelard] disdains and scoffs at it... [Abelard believes that Christ lived and died] for no other purpose than that he might teach men how to live by his words and example and point them by his passion and death to what limits their love should go. (6:16–7:17)

Bernard arranged for Abelard to be summoned to appear at a council at Sens in 1140, where his teaching was condemned. Abelard appealed to Rome, but the pope was Innocent II, who owed his very position in part to Bernard! The sentence was confirmed, and Abelard retired to the monastery of Cluny, where he died the following year.

Bernard's opposition to Abelard and to scholastic theology was not, however, his last word on the subject. Peter Lombard (died 1160), a disciple of Abelard, wrote *Four Books of Sentences* which became a standard theological textbook for the rest of the middle ages and beyond. In this he used methods similar to Abelard's, but with a reverence for traditional authorities which had always eluded Abelard. As a result Lombard even managed to win the support of Bernard.

Bernard's opposition was primarily directed against the abuses of scholastic theology. He felt that it was not an activity suitable for monks, but he did not deny that others might have a vocation in this area. However, Bernard was on occasions capable of giving the impression that the monastic life was the only safe way to heaven. One example of this is to be found in his passionate sermon to clerics, *On Conversion*, preached in Paris in 1139–40, in which he urged them to forsake the world and be converted to the monastic life.

Bernard's opposition to heresy did not stop with Abelard. He also opposed another, but much more wily, scholastic theologian in the person of Gilbert, bishop of Poitiers. Gilbert was summoned to appear before a council at Reims in 1148, but, unlike Abelard, escaped with only a warning. Many felt that Bernard had shown an immoderate zeal against heresy and that he had attempted to exploit his close relationship with the pope in order to have Gilbert condemned.

Bernard also opposed two popular preachers, Peter de Bruys and Henry of Lausanne, who rejected the Catholic Church and formed their own "spiritual" church in the south of France. Another heretic opposed by Bernard was Arnald of Brescia, who taught that the clergy should be stripped of material wealth and that the pope had no jurisdiction outside of ecclesiastical matters.

### **Father to the Pope**

In 1145 Bernard's authority was further enhanced when a former monk of Clairvaux, Bernardo Pignatelli, became pope Eugenius III. With his former pupil as the Roman Pontiff it was natural that Bernard's influence should increase. There is probably an element of self-satisfaction in Bernard's lament to Eugenius that "they say that it is not you but I who am pope" (Letter 239).

Bernard had long been concerned about corruption in the church. Sometime during 1127–28 he had written a work *On the Duties and Conduct of Bishops* in which he protested against abuses. He also, in 1150–1152, portrayed the ideal bishop in his hagiographical *Life of St. Malachy*, the Bishop of Armagh in Ireland who died while visiting Clairvaux.

With his former pupil as pope he had the perfect excuse to turn his attention to the papacy. In the very year of Eugenius's appointment Bernard began his work *On Consideration*. Addressed to Eugenius, it was not completed until 1153, the year in which they both died. In it he urges the pope to

find time for reflection or meditation in the midst of his busy life. He should consider himself (his person and his office), those placed under him, those around him at Rome, and those above him in the heavenly world. Bernard had a high view of the papacy. The pope is "the unique vicar of Christ who presides over not a single people but over all" (2:8:16), and he has fullness of power. However, Bernard is equally emphatic in his opposition to papal tyranny:

We will understand ourselves better if we realize that a ministry has been imposed upon us rather than a dominion bestowed... It seems to me that you have been entrusted with stewardship over the world, not given possession of it... There is no poison more dangerous for you, no sword more deadly, than the passion to rule. Certainly you may attribute much to yourself, but unless you are greatly deceived you will not think that you have received anything more than stewardship from the great apostles. (2:6:9; 3:1:1–2)

### **A Great Leader of a Tragic Cause**

The following year the new pope called for the Second Crusade to be launched to protect the Holy Land from Arab invasion. He appointed Bernard to promote the cause. Bernard's father had taken part in the First Crusade (1096–1099), which had succeeded in taking Jerusalem, and Bernard was happy to accept.

He traveled around Europe calling upon rulers and ruled alike to enlist in "the cause of Christ." Among other things he put an end to the activities of one misguided monk who was urging the crusaders to practice their military skills by massacring the Jews in Germany.

Bernard was successful in launching the Crusade, which began in 1148, but it was a dismal failure. This was a severe blow for Bernard, whose popularity took a nosedive. He consoled himself that it was better for people to be angry with him than with God. However, Bernard's reputation was great enough to survive such a setback. He died in 1153 and was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1174.

### **Master of the Spiritual Life**

Bernard is remembered above all as a master of the spiritual life. In one sense all of his writings are on this theme, but three in particular may be singled out. One of his first two treatises was ***The Steps of Humility and Pride***, written before 1125, in which Bernard expounds the 12 steps of humility described by Benedict in his ***Rule***. This work contains some perceptive insights into human nature:

Humility is a virtue by which a man has a low opinion of himself because he knows himself well... Just as pure truth is seen only by the pure of heart, so also a brother's miseries are truly experienced only by one who has misery in his own heart. You will never have real mercy for the failings of another until you know and realize that you have the same failings in your soul. When a man has been bragging that he is better than others he would feel ashamed of himself if he did not live up to his boast and show how much better than others he is... He does not so much want to be better as to be seen to be better. He is not so much concerned about leading a better life as appearing to others to do so... When a man thinks he is better than others will he not put himself before others? He must have the first place in gatherings, be the first to speak in council. He comes without being called. He interferes without being asked. He must rearrange everything, redo whatever has been done. What he himself did not do or arrange is not rightly done or properly arranged. (1:2, 3:6,14:42)

At a later stage, sometime between 1126 and 1141, Bernard wrote one of his best known works, ***On Loving God***. Probably his most renowned work, however, is his ***Sermons on the Song of***



**Songs.** These 86 sermons were written between 1135 and his death. Although they have the outward appearance of sermons, they are in fact a literary work designed to be read rather than preached. Again, although they follow the text of the Song of Solomon (reaching only the beginning of chapter three), these are really a series of sermons on themes relating to the spiritual life, with only a tangential connection with the text. In these sermons we see Bernard's approach to theology:

There are some who long to know for the sole purpose of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity; others who long to know in order to become known, and that is shameful vanity... There are others still who long for knowledge in order to sell its fruits for money or honors, and this is shameful profiteering; others again who long to know in order to be of service, and this is charity. Finally there are those who long to know in order to benefit themselves, and this is prudence. (36:3)

In these sermons Bernard also speaks of his own mystical experience:

I want to tell you of my own experience, as I promised. Not that it is of any importance... I admit that the Word has also come to me—I speak as a fool—and has come many times. But although he has come to me, I have never been conscious of the moment of his coming. I perceived his presence, I remembered afterwards that he had been with me; sometimes I had a presentiment that he would come, but I was never conscious of his coming or his going. (74:5)

Some of the sermons which Bernard actually preached are preserved. There is also a further series of 'literary' sermons for the various Sundays and festivals of the church year. Bernard's exegesis of the Bible is predominantly allegorical, in line with the approach of the time. His use of this technique earned him the title "mellifluous" (sweetly flowing, as with honey) meaning that he was able to draw the honey of the spiritual meaning out of the letter of Scripture.

The allegorical approach is out of favor today. And though Bernard's exegetical approach may be considered inadequate, this does not mean that his writings are necessarily unbiblical. The teaching which Bernard might extract from or illustrate by an unlikely text is as likely as not taught explicitly elsewhere. Furthermore, the text of Bernard's writings is soaked in Scripture in that there are biblical allusions every few lines.

Bernard of Clairvaux is a great and fascinating figure in the history of the Church. In some ways he is remote from and alien to our age. In other ways his life is an expression of an unchanging Christian spirituality—one that transcends all the barriers of time and culture.

### ***Acknowledgements--***

Parts of this article have appeared previously in Tony Lane, ***The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought*** (Lion, 1984). Extracts from the writings of Bernard are mostly taken from volumes in the Cistercian Fathers Series published by Cistercian Publications.

## A Brief Chronology of the Life and Works of Bernard of Clairvaux

1090 **Birth of Bernard**

1095 The First Crusade

1098 Founding of monastery at Citeaux by Robert of Molesme

1109 Anselm of Canterbury dies

1113 Bernard enters Citeaux

1115 Bernard founds monastery at Clairvaux

1118 Founding of monastery at Trois-Fontaines

1119 Founding of monastery at Fontenay

1121 Abelard's teachings on the Trinity condemned (Abelard born 1079)

1121 Founding of monastery at Foigny

1124 *The Steps of Humility and Pride*

1126–1141 *On Loving God*\* [*\* The exact dates of some of Bernard's works are not known; completed sometime between the years given.*]

1126–1135 *On Grace and Free Choice*\* [*\* The exact dates of some of Bernard's works are not known; completed sometime between the years given.*]

1127–1128 *Duties and Conduct of Bishops*

1128 Order of Knights Templar established

1128–1136 *In Praise of the New Knighthood*\* [*\* The exact dates of some of Bernard's works are not known; completed sometime between the years given.*]

1130 Pope Honorius II dies controversy between rival successor popes begins eight-year schism

1130–1138 Bernard works (successfully) to secure papacy for Innocent II

1132 Founding of monastery at Rievaulx

1135 Bernard sent on political mission as papal envoy to Bamberg, Germany

1135–1153 ***Sermons on the Song of Songs (in progress at Bernard's death)***

1138 Second Lateran Council confirms Innocent II; annuls all acts of rival antipope Anacletus II

1139–1140 ***Sermons of Conversion***

1139 Bernard's controversy with Abelard

1140–1141 Abelard condemned at Sens

1143 Death of Pope Innocent II

1145 Election of Pope Eugenius III (Bernard's former pupil)

1146–1147 Bernard preaches the Second Crusade

1148 Bernard attempts to have Gilbert of Poitiers condemned at Council of Rheims

1148 Defeat of the Second Crusade at Damascus

1150s ***Five Books on Consideration*** (completed 1153)

1150 University of Paris Founded

1150–1152 ***Life of St Malachy***

1153 **Death of Bernard**

1153 Pope Eugenius III dies

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## The Spirituality of St. Bernard of Clairvaux

From Love of Self To Love of God To Love of Self for God

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The legacy of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux to 20th-century Christians, as multifaceted as it is, lies most significantly in his profound human psychology of self-esteem and self-awareness grounded in the mercy and love of God.

**Bernard would be amused to find us talking about the characteristics of *his* spirituality, for his whole effort was directed at faithfulness to the traditional spirituality he had learned in school and at the monastery. This traditional medieval theology taught that men and women were created in the image and likeness of God, but that this image has been corrupted, tarnished, and distorted—but not destroyed—by sin. Because God shared our human nature in Jesus Christ, we can begin the journey from the “land of unlikeness” toward the “land of likeness,” toward the complete integration and reformation of the divine image from which we have fallen.**

The journey will be complete only in heaven, but those who devote themselves to it with special intensity can, by the sheer grace and mercy of God, experience a fleeting foretaste of its heavenly destination on earth.

Monks and nuns give themselves to this reformation under the guidance of the monastic rule and the leadership of experienced spiritual directors. Precisely because they recognize their own limits and weaknesses, monks and nuns place the direction of their lives in the hands of others, who draw on the wealth of collective experience—tradition—to act as guides on the journey from the land of unlikeness.

Bernard belongs to this tradition. He was nourished and shaped by the language of the Bible. Monks understood their lives as a tasting of the sweetness of God’s Word as it came to them through “chewing on,” “rechewing” (ruminating), and “digesting” the honey of the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the past commentators on Scripture, the Church Fathers.

Guido II, head of the Carthusian monastic order (c 1176–1180) describes the process of **reading** (placing the grape of scripture in one’s mouth), **meditating**, or **studying** it in a variety of ways (crushing and chewing it), being drawn by the hint of its sweetness to beg God in **prayer** for an experiential encounter with the text, and finally, knowing Scripture’s Author in the loving embrace called **contemplation**. Contemplation, later called “mystical union,” is simply the experience of the love of God: the experience of God loving us, which in turn is what our love of God consists of.

Bernard is but one of the remarkable group of monastic authors from Benedictine, Cistercian, Carthusian, and other traditions, whose collective legacy places the 12th century alongside the fourth and 16th centuries as a truly outstanding epoch in Church history. Among Bernard’s Cistercian contemporaries, we should acknowledge Aelred of Rievaulx (1109–1167), whose writings, such as ***The Mirror of Charity***, and ***On Spiritual Friendship***, breathe a warm, humane, wise spirit that unflinchingly moves the reader to a love of God and to human friendship.

We should also mention William of St. Thierry (c1085–1148), whose ***Golden Epistle***, and ***The***

***Nature and Dignity of Love***, are only two of the profound explorations of the human soul and spirit from the 12th century. The insights into human psychology, and into the life of the spirit hidden in the mystery of Christ that are found in these writings can be studied and digested with profit by 20th-century Christians, if they are willing to slow down to thoughtfully read, ponder, chew, and savor these books until their wisdom melts in the mouth.

Though Bernard was very capable of writing "speculative," or rational theology, such as his ***On Grace and Free Will***, his favorite and more typical style of writing is running commentary on and explication of Scripture, rich with allusions, and with rhetorical, poetic imagery. This is perhaps best seen in his ***Sermons on the Song of Songs***. However, even his meditative explications of themes from the spiritual life, as in ***On Loving God***, and ***The Steps to Humility and Pride***, are full of scriptural allusions and quotations. We shall look briefly at his outline of spiritual growth in ***On Loving God***, and the first portion of his ***Sermons on the Song of Songs***.

## The Progress of Love

In ***On Loving God*** Bernard outlines a journey from self-love to self-love that meets us where we are and takes us where God wants us to go. [***See the following article for an excerpt from On Loving God.***] He begins with self-love because that is where we find ourselves as human beings, indeed, self-hatred is unnatural. From love of self for selfish reasons, we can, by God's grace, begin to love God for the sake of God's goodness to us in the wonderful world of nature, in the daily blessings God's providence provides for us, and in the salvation God has given us in Christ.

Loving God for the sake of what he has done for us is, however, less than perfect. The next step is to love God for God's sake alone. Simply because God is, we love him. Most of us would stop here; if we ever reached the point where we loved God for God's sake alone, we would consider ourselves to have arrived at love of God. But Bernard does not stop here.

The final step is ***love of ourselves for God's sake***. While this is not the main point of the treatise, it is profoundly significant. One of the characteristics of Bernard's spirituality is the movement from fear to confidence, from false self-esteem to healthy self-esteem. In harmony with the entire Christian tradition, Bernard insists that we find confidence in ourselves because of what God has done for us, first, by creating us in his image, and second, by redeeming us from our failure. Even natural self-love is by the grace of our creation in God's image, and we are able, again by grace, to move from selfish self-love to self-love for the sake of God our creator and redeemer.

In this process we move from 1) a cringing fear of God, such as that of slaves who obey the master out of fear of punishment, to 2) hopeful obedience to God out of expectation of a reward, such as that of a hired servant, to 3) the disciplined obedience of a student to a teacher, to 4) the respectful obedience of a son who knows he is an heir, and finally to 5) the full loving devotion of a bride to her bridegroom (***Sermons on the Song of Songs***, sermon 7). The bride asks for a kiss from the bridegroom out of confidence, no longer out of fear. She has kissed his feet in repentance, kissed his hand in spiritual growth as the bridegroom guides her toward maturity, and now in confidence, she kisses his mouth and joins him in the sweet embrace of love (sermons 1–8).

## A Holy Fragrance

In sermons 10 to 12 Bernard outlines another threefold process of spiritual growth, using the three perfumes that emanate from the breath of the bride and the bridegroom (Song of Solomon 1:1–2). The first perfume, or ointment, is that of repentance, or sorrow for sins. The second is that of devotion, of confident praise and worship of God. The third is that of compassion and mercy. The first one, signifying contrition and brokenness over our sins, is pungent and painful. The second adds the healing and soothing process of growth. Significantly, this second phase, in many ways the one

that occupies most of our lives as wayfarers on earth, is essentially that of worship and praise of God. Healing comes through worship. For monks and nuns this took place in the disciplined daily round of liturgical prayer and praise-filled contemplative reading, as outlined above [*see also Van Engen's article: The Bread of God's Book*]. Bernard's spirituality is grounded in the worship life of the church and is fed by the Eucharist.

The third perfumed anointing is the overflowing of mercy and compassion that comes from maturity in the spiritual life. It flows out of one's own experience of pain and sorrow, and out of God's healing goodness and mercy. It yields mercy toward and love of one's neighbors—both friends and enemies. The closer we draw to God, the more we know of the loving embrace of God, fleeting as it may be here on earth. The more we know this embrace, the more we live in mercy and compassion. Our sinful wills are healed by God's seeking of us, and in being sought and loved, we love God, our neighbor, and ourselves.

We cannot take ourselves too seriously, since we took our first steps in this process by a candid, honest, genuine self-awareness and sorrow for our sins. Yet neither can we denigrate ourselves because the process of repentance and self-discovery is made possible by, and makes possible, the healing of the sin-ravaged image and likeness of God as it is bathed in the compassion and mercy of God. It is out of this mercy, love, and compassion of God that we can confidently know who we are, and offer back to God the love he has shown us. It overflows in love and service to those around us, who, like ourselves, carry that image of God indelibly imprinted on their innermost spirit.

All of this occurs in the Church. No matter how far we progress in spiritual maturity, we remain aware of our shortcomings and failures. Are any of us worthy of the praise given to the bride? Individually, we are not.

"Yet there is one who truthfully and unhesitatingly can glory in this praise. She is the Church, whose fulness is a never-ceasing fount of intoxicating joy, perpetually fragrant. For what she lacks in one member, she possesses in another according to the measure of Christ's gift (**Eph 4:7**) and the plan of the Spirit who distributes to each one just as he chooses (**1 Cor 12:11**)... although none of us will dare arrogate for his own soul the title of bride of the Lord, nevertheless we are members of the Church which rightly boasts of this title and of the reality which it signifies, and hence may justifiably assume a share in her honor. For what all of us simultaneously possess in a full and perfect manner, that each one of us undoubtedly possesses by participation. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your kindness in uniting us to the Church you so dearly love, not merely that we may be endowed with the gift of faith, but that like brides we may be one with you in an embrace that is sweet, chaste, and eternal, beholding with unveiled faces that glory which is yours in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen." (Conclusion of Sermon 12, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*)

Like all God's servants, Bernard was human and failed his God and his Church at times. He would be the first to insist that he not take himself too seriously. His legacy to 20th century Christians, as multifaceted as it is, lies most significantly in the profound human spiritual psychology of self-esteem and self-awareness grounded in the mercy and love of God.

Bernard's ideas and writings are accessible almost 900 years later because they are universal in style, humaneness, and natural imagery, and are simple and biblical in content. In such an essay as this we can merely introduce a corner of Bernard's richness, yet from any corner of his thought we are led back always to the center, to the love of God.

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 24: Bernard of Clairvaux, Medieval Reformer and Mystic

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## On Loving God

To the most illustrious Lord Haimeric, Cardinal-Deacon and Chancellor of the See of Rome, from Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, wishing that he may live for the Lord and die in him. Up to now it has been your custom to ask me for prayers and not for answers to questions. Let me confess I am not very apt at either, although my profession implies prayer even if my conduct falls short of my obligations.... I do not promise to answer all of your questions, but only that which you ask, about loving God; even then my answer will be what he deigns to bestow upon me. This subject tastes sweeter to the mind, is treated with more certainty, and is listened to with greater profit. Keep the other questions for more brilliant intellects.

**You wish me to tell you why and how God should be loved. My answer is that God himself is the reason why he is to be loved. As for how he is to be loved, there is to be no limit to that love. Is this sufficient answer? Perhaps, but only for a wise man. As I am indebted, however, to the unwise also (Romans 1:14), it is customary to add something for them after saying enough for the wise.\* [\* Apparently "A word to the wise is sufficient" is a very old saying.] Therefore for the sake of those who are slow to grasp ideas I do not find it burdensome to treat of the same ideas more extensively if not more profoundly. Hence I insist that there are two reasons why God should be loved for his own sake: no one can be loved more righteously and no one can be loved with greater benefit. Indeed, when it is asked why God should be loved, there are two meanings possible in the question. For it can be questioned which is rather the question: whether for what merit of his or for what advantage to us is God to be loved. My answer to both questions is assuredly the same, for I can see no other reason for loving him than himself. So let us see first how he deserves our love.**

### How God Is to Be Loved for His Own Sake

God certainly deserves a lot from us since he gave himself to us when we deserved it least (Galatians 1:4). Besides, what could he have given us better than himself? Hence when seeking why God should be loved, if one asks what right he has to be loved, the answer is that the main reason for loving him is "He loved us first" (1 John 4:9–10). Surely he is worthy of being loved in return when one thinks of who loves, whom he loves, how much he loves. Is it not he whom every spirit acknowledges (1 John 4:2)[?] ... This divine love is sincere, for it is the love of one who does not seek his own advantage (1 Cor 13:5).

To whom is such love shown? It is written: "While we were still his enemies, he reconciled us to himself" (Rom 5:10). Thus God loved freely, and even his enemies. How much did he love? St. John answers that: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" (John 3:16). St Paul adds: "He did not spare his only Son, but delivered him up for us" (Rom 8:32). The Son also said of himself: "No one has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Thus the righteous one deserved to be loved by the wicked, the highest and omnipotent by the weak. Now someone says: "This is true for man, but it does not hold for the angels." That is true because it was not necessary for the angels, for he who came to man's help in time of need, kept the angels from such a need, and he who did not leave man in such a state because he loved him, out of an equal love gave the angels the grace not to fall into that state.

I think that they to whom this is clear see why God ought to be loved, that is, why he merits to be loved. If the infidels conceal these facts, God is always able to confound their ingratitude by his innumerable gifts which he manifestly places at man's disposal. For, who else gives food to all who eat, sight to all who see,

and air to all who breathe? It would be foolish to want to enumerate; what I have just said cannot be counted. It suffices to point out the chief ones: bread, sun, and air. I call them the chief gifts, not because they are better but because the body cannot live without them. Man's nobler gifts—dignity, knowledge, and virtue—are found in the higher parts of his being, in his soul. Man's dignity is his free will by which he is superior to the beasts and even dominates them. His knowledge is that by which he acknowledges that this dignity is in him, but that it is not of his own making. Virtue is that by which man seeks continuously and eagerly for his Maker and when he finds him, adheres to him with all his might.

Each of these three gifts has two aspects. Dignity is not only a natural privilege, it is also a power of domination, for the fear of man hangs over all the animals on earth (Genesis 9:2). Knowledge is also twofold, since we understand this dignity and other natural qualities are in us, yet we do not create them ourselves. Finally, virtue is seen to be twofold, for by it we seek our Maker and once we find him, we adhere to him so closely we become inseparable from him.

As a result, dignity without knowledge is unprofitable, without virtue it can be an obstacle. The following reasoning explains both these facts. What glory is there in having something you do not know you have? Then, to know what you have but to be ignorant of the fact that you do not have it of yourself .... The Apostle says to him who glorifies himself: "What have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, how can you boast of it as if you had not received it" (1 Cor 4:7)? ....

... [I]s there an infidel who does not know that he has received the necessities for bodily life, by which he exists, sees, and breathes, from him who gives food to all flesh (Psalm 136:25), who makes his sun rise on the good and the bad, and his rain fall on the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45)? Who, again, can be wicked enough to think the author of his human dignity, which shines in his soul, is any other than he who says in the book of Genesis: "Let us make man to our own image and likeness" (Gen 1:26)? Who can think that the giver of knowledge is somebody different from him who teaches man knowledge (Psalm 94:10)? Or again, who believes he has received or hopes to receive the gift of virtue from any other source than the hand of the Lord of virtue? Hence God deserves to be loved for his own sake even by the infidel who, although he is ignorant of Christ yet knows himself.

Everyone therefore, even the infidel, is inexcusable if he fails to love the Lord his God with all his heart, all his soul, all his might (Mark 12:30). For an innate justice, not unknown to reason, cries interiorly to him that he ought to love with his whole being the one to whom he owes all that he is. Yet it is difficult, impossible for a man, by his own power of free will, once he has received all things from God, to turn wholly to the will of God and not rather to his own will and keep these gifts for himself as his own, as it is written: "All seek what is their own" (Phil 2:21), and further: "... man's feelings and thoughts are inclined to evil" (Genesis 8:21).

The faithful, on the contrary, know how totally they need Jesus and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). While they admire and embrace in him that charity which surpasses all knowledge (Eph 3:9), they are ashamed at failing to give what little they have in return for so great a love and honor. Easily they love more who realize they are loved more: "He loves less to whom less is given" (Luke 7:43, 47).

### **The First Degree of Love: Man Loves Himself for His Own Sake**

Since nature has become more fragile and weak, necessity obliges man to serve it first. This is carnal love by which a man loves himself above all for his own sake. He is only aware of himself; as St. Paul says: "What was animal came first, then what was spiritual" (1 Cor 15:46). Love is not imposed by a precept; it is implanted in nature. Who is there who hates his own flesh (Eph 5:29)? Yet should love, as it happens, grow immoderate, and, like a savage current, burst the banks of necessity, flooding the fields of delight, the overflow is immediately stopped by the commandment which says: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39). It is just indeed that he who shares the same nature should not be deprived of the same benefits, especially that benefit which is grafted in that nature.



Should a man feel overburdened at satisfying not only his brethren's just needs but also their pleasures, let him restrain his own if he does not want to be a transgressor. He can be as indulgent as he likes for himself providing he remembers his neighbor has the same rights. O man, the law of life and order imposes on you the restraint of temperance, lest you follow after your wanton desires and perish, lest you use nature's gifts to serve through wantonness the enemy of the soul. Would it not be more just and honorable to share them with your neighbor, your fellow man, than with your enemy? ...

Nevertheless, in order to love one's neighbor with perfect justice, one must have regard to God. In other words, how can one love one's neighbor with purity, if one does not love him in God? But it is impossible to love in God unless one loves God. It is necessary, therefore, to love God first; then one can love one's neighbor in God (Mark 12:30).

... [T]he same creator wills that man be disciplined by tribulations so that when man fails and God comes to his help, man, saved by God, will render God the honor due him. It is written: "Call to me in the day of sorrow; I will deliver you, and you will honor me" (Psalm 49:15). In this way, man, who is animal and carnal (1 Cor 2:14), and knows how to love only himself, yet starts loving God for his own benefit, because he learns from frequent experience that he can do everything that is good for him in God, and that without God he can do nothing good (John 15:5).

### **The Second Degree of Love: Man Loves God for His Own Benefits**

Man, therefore, loves God, but for his own advantage and not yet for God's sake. Nevertheless, it is a matter of prudence to know what you can do by yourself and what you can do with God's help to keep from offending him who keeps you free from sin. If man's tribulations, however, grow in frequency and as a result he frequently turns to God and is frequently freed by God, must he not end, even though he has a heart of stone (Ezek 11:19) in a breast of iron, by realizing that it is God's grace which frees him and come to love God not for his own advantage, but for the sake of God?

### **The Third Degree of Love: Man Loves God for God's Sake**

Man's frequent needs oblige him to invoke God more often and approach him more frequently. This intimacy moves man to taste and discover how sweet the Lord is. Tasting God's sweetness entices us more to pure love than does the urgency of our own needs. Hence the example of the Samaritans who said to the woman who had told them the Lord was present: "We believe now not on account of what you said; for we have heard him and we know he is truly the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). We walk in their footsteps when we say to our flesh, "Now we love God, not because of your needs; for we have tasted and know how sweet the Lord is."

... A man who feels this way will not have trouble in fulfilling the commandment to love his neighbor (Mark 12:31). He loves God truthfully and so loves what is God's. He loves purely and he does not find it hard to obey a pure commandment, purifying his heart, as it is written, in the obedience of love (1 Peter 1:22).... This is the third degree of love: in it God is already loved for his own sake.

### **The Fourth Degree of Love: Man Loves Himself for the Sake of God**

Happy is the man who has attained the fourth degree of love, he no longer even loves himself except for God. "O God, your justice is like the mountains of God" (Psalm 35:7). This love is a mountain, God's towering peak.... I would say that man is blessed and holy to whom it is given to experience something of this sort, so rare in life, even if it be but once and for the space of a moment. To lose yourself, as if you no longer existed, to cease completely to experience yourself, to reduce yourself to nothing is not a human sentiment but a divine experience (Phil 2:7).\* ...

As a drop of water seems to disappear completely in a big quantity of wine ... just as red molten iron becomes so much like fire it seems to lose its primary state; just as the air on a sunny day seems transformed into sunshine instead of being lit up; so it is necessary for the saints that all human feelings melt in a mysterious way and flow into the will of God. Otherwise, how will God be all in all (1 Cor 15:28) if something human survives in man?

I do not think that can take place for sure until the word is fulfilled: "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength," until the heart does not have to think of the body and the soul no longer has to give it life and feeling in this life .... Hence it is in a spiritual and immortal body, calm and pleasant, subject to the spirit in everything, that the soul hopes to attain the fourth degree of love, or rather to be possessed by it; for it is in God's hand to give it to whom he wishes, it is not obtained by human efforts.

All the same, do we not think the holy martyrs received this grace, at least partially, while they were still in their victorious bodies? The strength of their love seized their souls so entirely that, despising the pain, they were able to expose their bodies to exterior torments. No doubt, the feeling of intense pain could only upset their calm; it could not overcome them.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 24: Bernard of Clairvaux, Medieval Reformer and Mystic

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## The Bread of God's Book

Saint Bernard and Holy Scripture

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**Everything Bernard of Clairvaux was involved in—promoting the monastic life, preaching crusades, condemning heretics, advising popes, intervening with kings—sounds so fully “medieval” that it seems strange that Protestant pastors of the Reformation era would respond favorably to this zealous 12th century Catholic monk. The reason lies mostly in Bernard’s emphasis on the Bible. From the time of his entrance into the monastic life around 1113 until his death 40 years later, Bernard spent more than half of each waking day reading, singing, and meditating on Holy Scripture.**

### Life Around the Word

Holy Scripture was the focal point of Bernard’s life. This was not unique to him; he shared this practice with thousands of other devout monks. Bernard belonged to the Cistercians, an order of reformed Benedictine monks dedicated to the restoration of the ancient discipline in complete solitude and isolation. Their lives were devoted to prayer, and they assembled in choir eight times each day. Their days began long before sunrise.

For Benedictines prayer meant, and still means, the saying or chanting of Scripture, especially the Psalms. Some biblical verses and stanzas were chanted every day of their lives. But at the very least all 150 Psalms were recited aloud once a week, in a recurring pattern that shaped their whole inner life.

The Psalms, though the heart of Benedictine prayer, only marked the beginning. All medieval churchmen learned to read (which means, learned to read *Latin*) by way of the Bible. The language of Scripture was therefore imprinted upon their earliest memories, and they could hardly express themselves apart from the language of Scripture. Everything they wrote, from treatises and sermons to letters and poems, echoed the Bible at every turn, much as the language of the King James Bible influenced subsequent English literature.

Beyond the cycle of prayers and psalms, Cistercian monks said or attended mass each morning. This meant that the readings assigned to each day of the year by the church, one from the Old Testament, one from the Gospels, and one from the Epistles, would likewise become second nature to them.

Monks assembled in the refectory for their main meal around noon. They sat in silence while one monk read to them, often from a devotional book or a saint’s life. Sometimes Scripture was read here too, but in any case Scripture was quoted, paraphrased, and echoed all through the chosen devotional texts. What time remained to monks between mass, meals, and the cycle of prayer, they were expected to spend in work and meditation.

Work also proceeded in silence, whether in fields, gardens, or workshops. In an age when books were generally rare, expensive, and cumbersome, these people developed a keen and large capacity for memorization. What monks heard and sang continuously in public worship, they pondered all through the day in their hearts. Scriptural phrases and images sank into the innermost recesses of their lives, and accompanied them in their everyday thoughts.

Cistercian monks were encouraged to spend part of each day in private reading and meditation. This inevitably involved reflection on Scripture. They might read a book of the Bible on their own—Bernard was specially noted for reading the whole Book through from beginning to end repeatedly—or they might make their way slowly through some Bible commentary or devotional work by a Father of the Church.

Finally, before retiring in the evening, the monks followed a course of nighttime readings. Here whole books of the Bible were read in sequence, Isaiah at Advent, Jeremiah at Lent, and so forth. Again, there was almost no part of the day when a conscientious Cistercian monk was not reading, singing, or reflecting on Holy Scripture.

### **Preacher and Teacher**

But what contemporaries found most astounding and attractive about Bernard was his facility to preach and teach Scripture. His Latin prose echoed Scripture in every line. His style was as elegant, playful, and moving as any medieval Latin ever written. The sheer beauty of it was part of the attraction for later readers, including such self-conscious stylists as John Calvin.

In nearly all of his extant writings, including some 500 letters, Bernard employed Scriptural phrases and images. But in certain works his task was clearly and specifically to interpret Scripture. He preached regularly to his monks and sometimes to the people. Some one hundred of his sermons have come down to us, most of them on the Gospel or Epistle texts prescribed for feast days in the church. A few were delivered on special occasions, such as a series preached in Paris in 1140 to convert students to the monastic life, and a related Lenten series on Psalm 91. Bernard's most famous interpretation of Scripture, however, is found in his 86 sermons on the opening chapters of the Song of Songs, preached between 1135 and 1153.

Bernard had an exceedingly high view of Scripture. The Bible contained the very words of Christ or, as he put it more often, of the Holy Spirit, who spoke directly to him and to all the faithful. While God spoke through his apostles and therefore his later ministers as well, it was one of the peculiar joys of the monastic life, as Bernard understood it, that dedicated monks could hear Christ speaking directly to them in the words of Holy Scripture. It was indeed the Spirit himself who spoke; yet only the "spiritual" could truly hear and take it in. Bernard often quoted to his monks his version of a Pauline text (I Corinthians 2:13): These were not human words but the Spirit teaching spiritual things to spiritual persons.

Bernard's Bible was the Latin translation of Jerome known as the Vulgate. He knew neither Greek nor Hebrew and never troubled himself over that. He was confident that the words, as he read and learned them, were shaped by the Holy Spirit in a particular way and for a particular purpose.

Cistercian monks were concerned about the text of the Bible, and undertook to prepare beautiful handwritten copies, free of textual errors and confusions. Some of these huge folio volumes in two columns still exist. (Handy printed versions, fitting into one hand were unknown as yet, and would probably have been considered somehow vulgar, or worse.) These were weighty and precious tomes, resting on a lectern or bookshelf and possibly chained to it, another sign of the great wealth represented by just one of these handwritten books. If monks were to carry Holy Scripture around—and Bernard certainly expected that they would—it was to be in their memories; he would also have said, in their hearts.

Bernard accepted the authoritative text of Scripture, and was convinced that every word bore a special meaning. But he assumed rather than argued the doctrine of inspiration, in the strict Protestant sense. The form of inspiration that concerned him was that by which the Holy Spirit, the author of the text, moved mysteriously in the heart of a believer to make that text plain. By this "in-breathing," God spoke directly to those who meditated upon His Word. In this way too, Christ came, not just once in the flesh, but daily in the Spirit to save souls.

For this experience of spiritual inspiration through Scripture, Bernard had numerous choice expressions, mostly borrowed from Scripture itself. This was to exult in the Lord, to overflow in the spirit; Scripture was the font of life pouring forth its streams of water. More daringly, this experience was to bear Christ in your very womb, in your soul. A Spiritual man would know in this way the ardor which the bride feels toward her bridegroom.

The work of interpreting Scripture, it should be evident, was at the very heart of the religious life in Bernard's view. But this assumes that Scripture is susceptible to this kind of interpretation, that it has the power of the Spirit moving within its text. To understand how that might work, we must put into context Bernard's views on exegesis.

### **Interpreting God's Word**

Bernard learned to understand Scripture, first of all, by reading the *Fathers of the Church*. Though he wished for each of his monks a personal experience of "inspiration" through Scripture, he insisted equally—against Peter Abelard, for instance—that monks should follow in the footsteps of the Fathers. Their interpretation was to remain authoritative, their insights the well-springs of the spiritual life.

Bernard read widely in the Church Fathers, but two figures in particular, as scholars have reconstructed it, largely shaped his reading of the Bible: Origen and Gregory the Great. Origen, who was a Greek father of the mid-third century, is known to moderns as the father of "allegory," and to medievals as the ingenious interpreter of difficult Old Testament books. His writings taught Bernard always to look for the spirit hidden within the letter of the text. Gregory the Great was the great monk-pope from about 600. He taught Bernard to find in that spirit especially the *moralia*, a Latin term which in this context meant not so much "the moral" as "the inner spiritual life"—that which pertains to the truly contemplative.

Bernard found great delight in exploring the mysteries of Scripture, but his fascination was not primarily intellectual in character. Indeed he repudiated, for both himself and his monks, all approaches of that kind to Scripture. To penetrate the mysteries of Scripture was to be an experiential matter. By way of the Spirit, the spirit within the letter recalled the deepest mysteries of God, and touched inexpressibly the innermost parts of spiritual men.

This is what counted as true understanding: not an *intellectual* experience of the text's meaning, but a *spiritual* experience of God himself by means of the text. This was for Bernard the highest delight, the ultimate goal, of the monastic life, and it was to this end that Bernard preached Scripture to his monks each day.

### **The Kiss of the Bridegroom**

Perhaps the best way to pull all this together is in Bernard's own words. He set out his views plainly in the famous opening sermons on the Song of Songs, especially the third and fourth. In his second sermon he explained the "kiss" of verse one, the union of bride and bridegroom, which he referred first to Christ's union with human flesh and then to the subsequent union between the Incarnate and His faithful people, His bride and body.

In the next sermon Bernard turned, in his own words, to the "book of human experience." What can it possibly mean, especially for monks, he says, to open a book of the Bible beginning with the words: "May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" This cannot be truly understood, he says, except by those who have experienced it, who have been kissed by the mouth of Christ. For the sake of his charges, Bernard undertakes to explain it.

Kisses come in three forms, he noted, drawing on common scenes from his own day, the kiss of the feet,

the kiss of the hand, and the kiss of the mouth. Initially, none of us should presume anything more than to kiss the feet, a form of supplication. The Word is a two-edged sword penetrating to the marrow of the heart, and conscientious souls, on hearing it, can only do penance, pleading for mercy and hoping for forgiveness. This is to kiss the Bridegroom's feet.

Second, we may kiss the hand. This is to be raised up and supported, following penance, so that we may gain confidence and assurance through fitting works of mercy and piety. Without these we will fall back into the mire, and soon be pleading again for mercy at his feet. But with works of mercy we will grow in grace and confidence, our love will become more ardent, and we can enjoy the kiss of the hand.

After the kiss of the hand we may begin to long for the kiss of the mouth. God is spirit, and the Spirit of God dwells before His face. To enjoy the kiss of the mouth is to experience what it means become one in spirit with God himself, to have His spirit enter into the depths of our being. This, Bernard notes, is a rare experience and a fleeting one in this life, but it is the goal of the pure in spirit who hope to see God.

To understand the full meaning for Bernard of the kiss of the mouth we must recall earlier remarks. The essential way in which God communes with the pure in spirit is through His Word. Patient meditation on the Word in silence, reflection on that which the monks carried around with them in their heads and hearts, was the means by which their spirits and the Spirit moving the text of the Word could be joined. This, for Bernard and his followers, was the ultimate experience of the religious life.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 24: Bernard of Clairvaux, Medieval Reformer and Mystic

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## Other Sources and the True Source

An emphasis in modern research is placed on attempting to identify the sources behind ancient writings—to prove how much of what an author says he or she borrowed from somebody else, and to add a footnote to each identified quote giving the reference. Supposedly, the more footnotes, the more learned were the author and the person being quoted by the author. A quotation from the Lord's Prayer must have a reference to this or that Gospel, with chapter and verse—as if it could not have come out of the memory of the Christian writer; out of the Gospel through the reader of the Gospel. This approach, however, does not apply very well to the great genius of the 12th century, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

Though it has been possible to recognize the ideas of previous writers in his writings, it is, however, rare that Bernard quotes somebody else's formulations, that he says that he has read this or that somewhere else. Certainly it happened that as he was writing a particular book he was at the same time reading a work of St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, or someone else. It is obvious that he has surely read in Latin the biblical commentaries of Origen. But in his writings he simply depends on the whole tradition of the Church Fathers, especially on the readings he has heard during divine services.

The most recent discovery concerning this is that he was well acquainted with the philosophical and theological works of the fifth-century thinker, Boethius, although he does not mention him by name. He certainly also read the treatise of Cicero, *On Friendship*, before writing his own book, *On the Love of God*, and he drew some ideas from it, though he interpreted them in a new way. He quotes some classical Latin writers, especially poets; but they are rather a source for his literary art and skill than for his own thoughts.

Some indications of his dependence on previous writings is the way he quotes the Scriptures according to the Latin translation given by the *Rule of St. Benedict* or by some other author. However, Bernard is not a professor; he scarcely gives quotations, with the exception of those from the Bible. He seems to have been a rapid reader, except when it came to reading one book: the Bible.

### The Bible and The Book of Experience

If Bernard can be said to have any "sources," they are two: the Bible and his own experience. On one occasion he begins a work by saying "Today we are reading in the book of experience." Actually he did so every day, and this *experience* (a word he uses frequently) is twofold: the biblical experience and his own experience interpreted in the light of the biblical one.

What did this biblical experience mean to him? First of all, it meant the experience of Jesus Christ himself. Then it meant the experience of all those who prepared the way for Christ, and of all those who after him thought about him: patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. Also, the experience of these forerunners and followers should provoke in the readers a Christian experience—a sharing in the experience of Christ.

Let us look at the first pages of the first treatise Bernard wrote. It was supposed to be *On Humility*. But from the very beginning, in the first lines, he quotes the Lord saying, "I am the way, the truth and

the life." When he comments upon this line he does not write on humility, but on truth; the Truth that Jesus is in himself. Immediately, he comes across the experience of Christ: how did he, Truth as he was, become the Truth for us? He had to learn out of experience what it is to live as a human being. Bernard quotes the Epistle to the Hebrews asserting that Christ "learned," and then says what he learned: "Our Saviour has given us the example. He willed to suffer so that he might know compassion; to learn mercy he shared our misery. It is written 'He learned obedience from the things he suffered (Hebrews 5:8), and he learned mercy in the same way; ... what in his divine nature he knows from all eternity he learned in time.'" (*On the Steps of Humility*, no. 1).

Page after page Bernard lingers on these key words: learning, misery, mercy, and chiefly *experience*, to which he returns a dozen times. He forces objections in favour of a less literal interpretation, but he insists on the fact that in Christ a real encounter took place between the misery of our human condition and his mercy. Bernard's conclusion: Let us experience a "spirit of gentleness" in relation to Christ, according to Galatians 6:1, in regard to the weaknesses and shortcomings of our neighbours and of ourselves.

This is just one example among many of how Bernard looks at Christ's experience as related in the Bible and draws personal application from it, but the whole of Bernard is like this. Even when he deals with topics which disconcert us today, as when he is calling upon knights to "carry the cross of Christ," to "follow after him" (Luke 9:23) in a religious crusade, he sees this as an act of personal love, as did his contemporaries.

Reading the Bible, we must seize the opportunity to experience what it says, to re-enact it in our life, to live accordingly, to commit ourselves to Christ. Then we have to confront this first source of information with the second one—our own experience as human beings and Christians. Bernard analyzes this experience and discovers how deep our misery is, yet nevertheless, how much of hope, confidence, and joy we get in experiencing the mercy of God. Hence it follows that there is an enthusiastic, musical, poetic, and constant tune in everything that Bernard writes; it is all a "song in the Spirit," a song of the Spirit of Christ in us.

### **The Book of Life**

For Bernard, Jesus is really the only book we have to read in order to know the Truth, His Truth about Himself, about ourselves, and about the salvation of the world: "The book of life is Jesus opened to all who are called. Blessed is the one who comes to read this book. He should keep this book, which is Jesus, always before him, always in his hands: I mean, of course, in his heart and in his works. May Christ become his model as he is indeed the model for the clergy and for all the people."

And if we read other books, let it be in order to find an answer to the greatest question: "Read in your heart. Become aware of your need of God, whose love never ceases to meet your need, to answer your expectations." (from *On the Song of Songs*, 65.2)



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## The Search for a Holy Life

A Brief Overview of Medieval Monasticism

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**Bernard of Clairvaux was first and last a monk. Whatever else he did or contributed to Christendom must be relegated to a secondary role. The call to monasticism was for over a thousand years preeminent in Christendom, and Bernard faithfully answered the call. For yet a longer time many people considered the call to seclusion, prayer, contemplation, and a life of rigor and service as the choice will of God—though this vocation was for a select group. Bernard was a leader in this select group. He desired above all to draw near to the heart of God, and to lead others in that way.**

During the European Middle Ages (about 500–1500) monasticism was a dominant feature of the church and religious life in general. To be a monk was to respond to the call of God to the life of special devotion and withdrawal from secular concerns. It was to work out one's own religious quest, to live close to God, and to emulate as closely as possible the instructions of Scripture for living the Holy Life.

Such a life was not possible, it was believed, when there were other concerns and temptations ever present: family, secular responsibilities, lust, the desire for power. Whether it be Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus, or Paul, the record of Holy Writ provided examples for those who would undertake to follow a stricter and more limited interpretation of God's will for living.

### The Benedictine Way

Benedict of Nursia (480–543) left an indelible mark on Western monasticism through the influence of the rule that he drew up for those also affiliated with him in his monastic vocation at Monte Casino, Italy, in 528. Although he began as a hermit and lived alone for several years, he soon attracted a number of other people who wanted to adopt his lifestyle and gain the spiritual well-being that was Benedict's. Lest this get out of hand Benedict put down a pattern for monastic living that eventually came to be the basic pattern for all Western monasticism.

While Benedict drew from a long tradition of monastic and ascetic experience, and his was but one of many, he gave distinctive emphasis to his **Rule**. Monks were to engage in manual labor, recite the canonical hours (Psalms and prayers)—the work of God, profess obedience to the abbot, the father of the family of monks, adopt a life of poverty and chastity, and remain with and serve with his adopted family for the rest of his life. Benedict called it a "school for the service of God."

The **Rule of Benedict** did not receive universal acceptance, nor was it intended to. There was no papal decree that made it a requirement. The **Rule** however did have widespread acceptance in many monasteries. It was to be nearly three centuries before there was an approximation of uniform monastic observance in the Western church.

In the meantime, the Benedictine observance was only one of the several traditions found in Italy, Gaul, and most notably Ireland. In Ireland since the fourth century the rule of abbot-bishop, which was very closely linked to the socio-political structure of the people, had developed. The vows, tonsure (hair cut), dress, and practices were also different from those in Rome. It was in Ireland that the penitential and private confessional were initiated. Later they became integral to continental ecclesiastical practices in

and out of the monastery. The mingling of Celtic and Benedictine monasticism in sixth and seventh-century Gaul was the dynamic of a renewed Gallic monasticism. This began most significantly at Luxeuil (originally a Gallic foundation) from whence the fervor spread to a number of the major monasteries of France.

### **A Shift in Priorities**

The center of Western Christendom shifted to Gaul during the Carolingian era. The pinnacle of this period was the reign of Charlemagne (768–814). Included in the concerns of the Carolingian rulers was the extension and reform of monasteries. (Reform at this time meant increased uniformity of practice.) The most influential person in the area of monastic reform was another Benedict, Benedict of Aniane (750–821).

Although the monastic life was a life of separation for laypersons, and was to be a life set apart for repeated celebration of the Eucharist as well as the traditional prayers, the use of private masses increasingly confirmed a tendency towards monastic ordination. Monastic life ceased to be that of a lay person's and became the higher calling of ordained priests.

The shifts that this illustrates are reflected by the changes in ecclesiastical architecture. The monastic church emphasized the altars, extended the number of choir stalls, and placed the laity in a relatively remote position. Abbeys became very wealthy in lands and movable wealth as they were richly endowed by royal and noble benefactors. It became common, for political reasons, to appoint abbots to monasteries because of their prominence and wealth, instead of because of spiritual qualifications. While this did not necessarily always interfere with the spiritual matters—for the man might be pious—it did denote a shift in priorities.

### **Monastic Fall and Rise**

Although in one sense the Carolingian Age was a high point of monasticism, it was also a time for concern. Challenges to old ideals arose due to mistaken priorities, encumbrances of administration, and lay demands. Most significantly, however, these concerns were exacerbated by the general turmoil of the later ninth century, which saw the collapse of political leadership in Western Europe and the onslaught of Vikings, Saracens, and Magyars.

The Vikings were most severe upon the monasteries, pillaging, looting, burning, and murdering on numerous occasions. Many monasteries ceased to exist, others were not used for decades, and all suffered from the disruption of order during these times. The monastic reforms—spiritual, fiscal, and political—availed little to stem the tide of the disintegration that marked the late ninth and early tenth centuries.

But a spark smoldered in the ashes of despair and destruction. Like the phoenix, monasticism arose again in a new wave of reform. Duke William of Aquitaine desired to endow a new monastic foundation that would be dedicated solely to things spiritual. He sought out an exemplary monk, Berno of Baume, to provide the spiritual leadership. This new foundation would be subject only to the papacy, would have no interference from lay princes or local bishops and would be richly endowed so as to reduce the problems that economic necessity might bring.

Through outstanding and long-lived leadership, widespread support, and active recruitment the monastery at Cluny became a source of inspiration for monastic life for nearly 200 years. The best of the Carolingian tradition in the reforms of Benedict of Aniane continued, and to this was added a new spirit of separation from lay authority and the local hierarchy. New monastic houses were springing, and older establishments were undergoing reform.

Many of these new foundations were priories and accountable to the mother house at Cluny. This was an innovation in monastic organizations, and the extension of the family ideal of Benedict of Nursia. The heightened spirituality, the frugal and careful management, the discipline, and the elevated sense of liturgy of the Cluniac houses attracted new members and rich endowments. Along with the new Liturgy, massive buildings, richly ornamented with sculpture and decoration, gave display to the wealth of Cluny's benefactors. In many respects the age of Cluny was both a concluding chapter of Carolingian opulence and a prologue to the new age of reform to come.

## Reform from Cluny

It was the spirit of the men of Cluny and her daughter houses that strongly influenced the new papacy and the new hierarchy of the 11th century. The thrust for a hierarchy independent of lay influences, a centralized papal authority, a celibate clergy, and a growing monastic influence throughout society were themes of renewal and reform that reached their pinnacle in the papacy of Gregory VII (1073–1085) and his successors. Gregory VII was himself a cleric and a former monk of Cluny.

Although reform was not an easy task and was not finished by Gregory, his power and vision set the goals for the next 200 years of the medieval church. The character of these reformers was clearly seen in the zeal and enthusiasm of Pope Urban II (1088–1099), who first called for a crusade as an expression of a vital, militant, and aggressive church. This attitude carries along to Bernard, who preached the second crusade (1147) and supported a reformed and militant Christian expression.

It was the Cluniac monk, Robert of Molesme, a man critical of the excesses that riches had brought to Cluniac monasticism, and desirous of a more stringent lifestyle in the pattern of the original Benedict, who sought fulfillment at the remote monastery of Molesme in 1075. In 1098 he was not completely satisfied with his attempts, and was still under the sway of Cluny. He felt called, therefore, to move with a few monks to found his own monastery in a remote and desolate location of swamps and hills: Citeaux.

Although Robert returned to Molesme, his settlement of Citeaux was continued by Alberic, one of his original companions, and Stephen Harding, his secretary from England who had been strongly influenced by monastic reform in his own land.

Robert, Stephen, and their followers called for a return to Benedict of Nursia, and beyond Benedict to the fathers of the desert. Although Benedict was the approved hallmark for the monastic life, how his rules were interpreted was the key. Had not Benedict, in Chapter 73 of his **Rule**, pointed his followers to yet other standards? The **Rule of Benedict** was not the ultimate monastic attainment. It was only minimal. Higher standards were possible and must be sought.

The founders of Citeaux were not alone in this regard. The last half of the 11th century had seen a renewal of the appeal for the solitary life, especially in Italy where there were self-appointed evangelists calling people to the lifestyle of the apostolic models. There were others, such as Bruno of Cologne, who already had created a new model of solitary monasticism by founding the Carthusian order at Grenoble.

As Cluny had inspired the Gregorian reforms, their outworking now gave rise to a call for the reformation of Cluny itself, and a return to a life of self-denial, simple community, work, poverty, and prayer. This is what the new Cistercian rule provided. They were to be entirely self-supporting in simple agricultural activity. There were stricter dietary regulations. A simplified liturgy and chant were identified for use in plain, austere, undecorated churches. A simple undyed wool garment sufficed for clothing. Contact with others was limited. Theirs was a vocation of silence, of contemplation, and of prayer. The Cistercians might be regarded as the Puritans of their era.

## From Citeaux to Clairvaux

In 1112\* [\* Or in 1113, according to some recent scholarship.] young Bernard came to join the monastery of Citeaux. In 1115 he was sent, along with several companions, including members of his own family, to begin a new monastery at Clairvaux, the third of four daughter houses of Citeaux. Bernard became its first abbot and so remained throughout his life.

As a recruiter for the Cistercians he was exceptional. In the face of its sharper demands, the Cistercians became the most popular. The Order grew until it had over 10,000 adherents. With over 350 houses spread throughout all of Europe by the mid-12th century, the Age of Cluny, the first true international order, had been supplanted by the Age of Citeaux.

Monasticism reigned supreme in European society at both the elite and popular levels. Ironically, but inevitably, with the success of the Cistercians came problems similar to those that Bernard had criticized in the practices of Cluny. Yet Citeaux and Clairvaux were to provide the High Middle Ages with dynamic, spiritually motivated leadership for two centuries in popes, bishops, scholars, preachers, crusades, and kings.

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## The Needle of Sin

Excerpts on man's original simplicity from St. Bernard's Sermons on the Song of Songs

*"Him who thou once didst love thou now fearest, and the form of a slave has superseded that of a free-born child."*

### From Sermon 81

LET THE SOUL ... realize that by virtue of her resemblance to God, there is present within her a natural simplicity in her very substance. This simplicity consists in the fact that for the soul it is the same thing to **be** as to **live**, but it is not, however, the same to **live** as to **live well**, or to **live happily**. For the soul is only like God, not equal to him. This is a degree of nearness to him, but it is only a degree...

To make all this somewhat clearer, let us say that only for God is it the same to be as to be happy: and this is the highest and most pure simplicity. But the second is like unto this, namely that being and life should be identical. And this dignity belongs to the soul. And even though the soul belongs to this inferior degree, it can nevertheless ascend to the perfection of living well, or indeed of living in perfect happiness: not in the sense that being and happiness will ever become identical for her, even after she has completed the ascent.

Thus the rational soul may ever glory in her resemblance to the Divinity, but still there will also ever remain between them a gulf of disparity whence all her bones may cry out, "Lord, who is like unto Thee?" Still, that perfection which the soul possesses is great indeed: from it, and from it alone can the ascent to the blessed life be made.

### From Sermon 82

The fact that Scripture speaks of our present unlikeness to God does not mean that Holy Writ maintains the likeness has been destroyed, but that something different has been drawn over it, concealing it. Obviously, the soul has not been cast off her original form, but has put on a new one foreign to her. The latter has been added, but the former is not lost, and although that which has been superinduced has managed to obscure the natural form, it has not been able to destroy it. "Their foolish heart was darkened," said St. Paul, and the Prophet cried: "How is the gold become obscured and the finest color changed?" He laments that the gold has lost its brightness, and that the finest color has been obscured: but the gold is still gold, and the original base of color has not been wiped out. And so the simplicity of the soul remains truly impaired in its essence, but that is no longer able to be seen now that it is covered over by the duplicity of man's deceit, simulation, and hypocrisy.

What a contradiction it is, this combination of simplicity and duplicity! How unworthy of the foundation is the structure we have erected upon it! This was the kind of duplicity the serpent put on when he pretended to be counsellor and a friend in order to deceive. And his victims, the two dwellers in paradise, put on the same duplicity when they tried to conceal their now shameful nakedness in the shadows and foliage with garments of fig-leaves and words of excuse. From that day forth how terrible has been the spread of that infection of hereditary hypocrisy throughout the whole race. Is it possible to find a single son of Adam who, I do not say willing, but can even endure to be known

for what he really is?

Yet nevertheless in every soul there still remains the natural simplicity of man together with the duplicity that came with original sin, ***in order that these two contradictories might persistently confront one another within us, to our own greater confusion...***

Add to this the fact that the desire for earthly things (all of which are destined to perish) increases the darkness of the soul, so that in the soul that lives in such desires nothing can be seen any more on any side, save the pallid face and the image, as it were, of death. Why does not this soul, since it is immortal, love the undying and eternal things which are like itself that thus she might appear as she truly is and live as she was made to live? But no, she takes her delight in knowing and seeking what is contrary to her nature and, by living in this manner that is so far beneath her, placing herself on the level of perishing things and becoming like them, she blackens the whiteness (candor) of her immortality with the pitch of this familiarity with death. For it is not to be wondered at that the desire of material things makes an immortal soul like unto mortal things, and unlike to the immortal. "He that toucheth pitch," says the wise man, "shall be defiled with it." The soul that seeks its fill of delight in mortal things puts on mortality like a garment, and yet the garment of immortality is not put off, but discolored by the arrival of this likeness of death.

Consider Eve, and how her immortal soul overlaid the glory of her own immortality with the shadow of death, by giving her love to perishing things. For since she was immortal why did she not despise mortal and transitory things and remain satisfied with the things on her own level, immortal and eternal. "The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold." O Woman! That sweetness, that beauty, that delight do not belong to thee! Or if they do pertain to thee, according to the portion of clay that is thine, they are not thine alone, but are common to thee and to all the animals on the earth.

That which is thine, and really thine, is not to be found here: it is something totally different from these: for it is eternal, and of eternity. Why do you force your soul to take on the impress of an alien form, or rather an alien deformity? Yea, indeed, that which she loves to possess, she fears to lose. Now fear is a kind of color. It stains our liberty and, discoloring it, conceals it, and, at the same time, makes it unlike to itself. How much more worthy of her origin would it have been if only this soul had desired nothing, feared nothing, and thereby have defended its own liberty, remaining in her native strength and beauty!

Alas, she did not do so! The finest color is dimmed. Thou fliest away, Eve, and hearing the voice of the Lord thy God, thou hidest thyself! Why so, if not that him who thou once didst love thou now fearest and the form of a slave has superseded that of a free-born child.

... Therefore, because man neglected to defend the nobility of his nature by leading an upright life, it has come about that by the just judgment of his Maker he has not been stripped of his liberty but has been "clothed over with his confusion as with a double cloak." And the expression "as with a double cloak" is very apt, for now in the soul of man are found both the liberty which remains because it is essential to his will, and his servile manner of life which is proof of his servitude. The same thing is to be observed in the case of the soul's simplicity and immortality. In fact, if you consider our present state well, you will see that ***there is nothing in the soul that is not in the same way reduplicated—likeness of God being covered over with unlikeness.*** Is it not indeed "doubled," this cloak in which guile, which is no part of our original nature, has been sewed onto our simplicity, death stitched upon our immortality, necessity upon our liberty, and all by the needle of sin?

## The Reformer Saint and the Sainly Reformer Calvin and the Legacy of Bernard of Clairvaux

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The French genius of Geneva, who greatly shaped modern Protestantism, may well have written his greatest works feeling the presence of the French genius of Clairvaux peering over his shoulder.

**Because of Bernard's theological and ecclesiastical point of view, one need hardly be surprised that both Luther and Calvin regarded him as a forerunner of their own movement. Luther expressed his appreciation of Bernard by calling him one of "the greatest doctors of the church," but did not seem to make much use of his thinking and guidance in his own writings. Calvin, on the other hand, more than once expressed the view that Bernard spoke the very truth itself, and quoted him frequently in the *Institutes* and at least three times in the commentaries. In fact Calvin seems to refer to him favorably more frequently than he does to any other medieval author. Apparently, he recognized Bernard as being of the same mind with himself on the fundamentals of the faith.**

When one turns to examine the evidence for Calvin's agreement with and use of Bernard's writings, one must immediately recognize that there were certain elements in the presuppositions of the two men which inevitably brought them together. The first of these was Bernard's and Calvin's acceptance of the Bible as the word of God and the final authority for the Christian. Bernard could quote Virgil and Ovid from among the pagans, and Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, and others from among the church fathers, but the final authority in his preaching, in his theological and mystical writings and in his arguments with such people as Abelard, was the text of Scripture. He insisted that reason was always subordinate to the Bible, although reason had the responsibility of unfolding and rationally defending biblical doctrines. Such a principle Calvin could well accept, and although he rejected Bernard's allegorizing, he was not too surprised by it, for he found much the same type of exegesis in the reading of Augustine.

Another common assumption of the two men was their view of the person and work of Christ. Bernard never tired of preaching and writing about Christ, both the divine and the human, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. He constantly stressed that man's only hope lay in Christ, and although on saints' days or on special feast days relating to the Virgin Mary, he makes reference to them, praising them highly, one cannot but feel that they were really extraneous to his structure of thought. Indeed, in 1140 when the Canons of Lyons proposed a festival in honour of The Immaculate Conception, he wrote them declaring that it was contrary to scripture and the fathers.

Another common denominator of the two men was their stress on the work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin is often regarded by Protestant theologians as the man who really freed the doctrine of the Holy Spirit from all subordinationism, but Bernard had already stressed the place and the work of the Holy Spirit three hundred years before. Nor did he think merely in terms of the Holy Spirit as given to the Christian through the sacraments of the church, but insisted that the Spirit of God came directly upon his people to give them new life in Him.

Calvin never read anyone, least of all Bernard, uncritically; he was always prepared to show where he differed. He rejects some of Bernard's doctrines, such as that of purgatory and his method of proving it.

Nevertheless, in certain central areas of thought, Calvin felt that he and Bernard were definitely in agreement.

On the sinful and lost state of man Bernard was very clear, very explicit, and somewhat repetitive. He emphasized the fact that man by virtue of his descent from Adam, was a sinner bound under sin and under God's condemnation, so that all men are responsible for the crucifixion of Christ and thus guilty of disobedience to God. One can only be surprised that Calvin did not use more of Bernard on this subject... Calvin [in the *Institutes*] tells us that the admonition of Bernard is worthy of remembrance when he says, "Since we read that a fall so dreadful took place in paradise, what shall we do on the dunghill?"

One's view of original sin and man's resulting depravity, has wide implications for one's whole theology, and this was true in the case of Bernard as well as for others of his contemporaries. ...Bernard saw the Image of God in men as consisting in man's freedom of will, which in essence is neutral. What determines the will is man's reason which decides what is good and what is evil. When at the fall, man lost the virtues created in him, he deprived himself of the ability to will according to true reason. His reason failed. ...Consequently, although man can still will, he cannot will that which is good. Only when man receives grace is he able to will that which is good, i.e., he receives back his freedom.

This all forms the backbone to Bernard's and Calvin's views of the central doctrine of Christianity: the atonement. Concerning this, Bernard was loath to be too explicit since he felt that it was a mystery beyond man's comprehension. Nevertheless, he continued to hold to Augustine's view that by sin, man had come under the domination and rule of Satan and that it was to free man from that rule that Christ had come to redeem... In all of this, Bernard stressed the fact that man could not save himself, but was solely and totally dependent upon Christ as his redeemer.

One could continue to mention other areas of thought in which Calvin followed closely the steps of Bernard. For instance, the Genevan reformer's insistence that the greatest Christian virtue is humility was something which Bernard had said very frequently in his own day. Furthermore, Bernard's stress upon the love of God was also central to his thought, and this Calvin constantly reiterated. Calvin, again, did not accept everything that Bernard said, either concerning certain doctrinal points, or in regard to larger considerations. He could not agree with Bernard's views on monasticism and monastic asceticism, nor did he entirely approve of his mysticism...

Even here, however, one cannot but ask if Calvin did not experience some influence by Bernard when it came down to his views on man's knowledge. In the opening words of the *Institutes*, Calvin discusses the question of man knowing himself and God, insisting that without one the other is impossible. The knowledge of God, according to Calvin, comes only by revelation understood through the grace of God. This is exactly the position of Bernard in his mystical writings. True, Augustine had said somewhat the same six hundred years before, but it is an interesting speculation as to whether Calvin may not have received some early influences in this direction, through reading the abbot's writings.

Whether he did or not, the fact still remains that as one reads the *Institutes*, one cannot but gain the strong impression that, as Calvin put his pen to paper in writing and revising his *Institutes*, the cowed figure of the Abbot of Clairvaux seems to have been looking over his shoulder. Bernard might well have been surprised and shocked at some of the things that Calvin had to say, but it would seem that, on basic principles of theology and on the criticism of the church, the two men stood very close together.

Perhaps one can most easily sum up the relationship of Calvin and Bernard by saying that Calvin in his endeavor to bring the church back to what he considered to be the New Testament pattern of faith and of organization, continued the line of the Augustinian tradition, of which Bernard of Clairvaux was the greatest medieval exponent. Calvin may well have felt that he was, in his own day, bringing to completion the work Bernard had begun.





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## A Chimaera of His Age

A Man of Peace and the Church Militant

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*I am a kind of chimaera of my age, neither cleric nor layman. I have long since stripped off the way of life, but not the habit, of a monk. I do not wish to write about myself what I suppose you have heard from others: what I am doing, what I am up to, the crises in the world I am involved in, indeed the precipices down which I am being cast.*" From a letter by Bernard

Like many a devout Christian saint from Augustine in the fifth century on throughout the entire Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux longed above all else to live a quiet life of monastic prayer and contemplation, free from the entanglement of the surrounding world. And yet, like Augustine six centuries before him, Bernard found himself drawn into most of the major events of his time.

Was there an inconsistency in this, that the outstanding representative of the Cistercian Order (noted for austerity of life and the remoteness of wilderness settlements), combined the life of contemplation with one of the most visible public careers in the 12th century? Bernard, though he was aware of the apparent paradox, would not have thought so.

In one of his famous meditations on the *Song of Solomon* Bernard gives us the key to his natural movement between action and contemplation: "The nature of true contemplation is such that, while kindling the heart with divine love, it sometimes fills it with great zeal to win other souls for God. The heart gladly gives up the quiet of contemplation for the work of preaching."

The apparent tension between the active and the contemplative life was for him just another example of the many Paradoxes we find in God's universe, comparable, for instance, to the problem of reconciling free-will and predestination. Here, as well, the proper balance must be struck.

Throughout the ages, Bernard has rightfully been remembered as one of the most admirable exemplars of the monastic life. Canonized by Catholics, commended by Protestants such as Luther and Calvin, few would deny his greatness as a Christian leader. However, the other public side of his life must also be recounted, for it embodies the characteristics of the Church Militant and raises important questions about Christian life in other generations as well.

## A Violent Age

Bernard lived in a remarkable age. The 12th century was at the heart of the period traditionally identified as the High Middle Ages (roughly 1000–1300 A.D.). By the end of the tenth century, Europe had settled down after several centuries of invasion and instability, the so-called Dark Ages. Now there was expansion (often dramatic) at every level of society. Population growth, towns and trade, new geographic frontiers, intellectual and cultural revival, the "new piety"—all these give witness to the dynamism that marked the world in which Bernard lived.

Unfortunately, it was also a militant world with a penchant for violence. At the top of the social

hierarchy was an aristocracy trained for warfare and all too ready to prove its skills. The Church sought to mitigate fighting within Europe itself by issuing the Peace of God and the Truce of God, each embodying moral limitations placed upon the use of force. However, violence was directed outward, against outsiders and minorities usually perceived as external enemies of the Faith.

Foremost among the victims were Muslims (infidels), heretics, and Jews. Bernard himself came from a minor French noble family (his father lost his life on a crusade) and so the metaphors of warfare came easily to his mind, even though he often exercised commendable restraint for that age. For examples, when a fellow monk named Radulf stirred up anti-Judaism in the Rhineland, Bernard exhorted Christians to use persuasion rather than force [*Fides suasenda non imponenda*—faith by persuasion, not by force]. He recommended a similar approach in dealing with heretics as well.

Bernard is sometimes judged harshly in our pluralistic, more tolerant (or indifferent) modern age, and although he could be ruthless in defense of the Faith, he was no bigot or vindictive persecutor. What characterized him above all was an uncompromising zeal on behalf of the cause of Christ and his Church.

A recent historian has called him “the self-appointed conscience of Europe,” but that is unfair. Over and over again he was pressed into action by contemporary leaders, secular and religious, who regarded him as little less than a “divine oracle.” What makes his achievement the more remarkable is that he had no “official” authority except within his own monastery. His was rather the authority of the prophetic voice. The most revealing comment on this was made by his old pupil, now Pope Eugenius III, who complained mildly, “... They say that it is you who are pope and not I.”

### **Monastic Reformer**

Bernard’s public career is too extensive to cover in its entirety, given his stature among contemporaries; however, a number of representative examples can be given to illustrate the range of his involvement.

To begin with, he was from early on concerned about the spiritual laxness that he saw about him, especially in the Church itself. Not surprisingly, one of his first series of confrontations was with the rival Cluniac monastic system, once a spearhead of reform, but now itself, according to Bernard, worldly and lax in following the normative *Rule of St. Benedict*.

When one of his own cousins fled to Cluny from the harshness of Clairvaux, Bernard wrote an *Apology* on behalf of Cistercian simplicity and initiated a correspondence with various protagonists. Most important was that with the great Cluniac abbot, Peter the Venerable. Although defensive at first and charging the Cistercians with hypocrisy and pharisaism, Peter remained Bernard’s close friend, and in the end came around to admitting most of the charges by initiating an extensive series of reforms.

A similar encounter took place with the powerful Suger, Abbot of St. Denis and minister to the French crown. Bernard attacked him both for the ornate style he was introducing into church architecture (the shift from Romanesque to Gothic) and also for his personal lifestyle: one of the “detestable improprieties” in the Church, Bernard informs him, is “the arrogance of your way of life.” Surprisingly, they too remained friends. Suger likewise took the pointed advice to heart, both personally and on behalf of his monastery as well.

### **Defender of the Faith**

The most dramatic involvement in public life was clearly Bernard’s activity as Defender of the Faith: first, against the threat of heresy and schism within Christendom and second, against the Muslims in the Holy Land.

Heresy, relatively insignificant in the Early Middle Ages, came to be a serious problem during Bernard's time. It was in large measure a by-product of the tremendous expansion of European society, including the spread of ideas reflecting dissatisfaction with the existing Church.

While there was often an affinity between heretical teaching and the criticisms made by Bernard, especially in the advocacy of Apostolic poverty and simplicity, he was essentially a conservative who remained faithful to the official leadership and teaching of the Church. Those deemed heretical, on the other hand, were regarded as dangerous radicals who, if left unchecked, would destroy the established Church.

Accordingly, on numerous occasions Bernard devoted his energies to combatting ideas thought to be heretical or potentially subversive of true doctrine. In 1143, he was informed about the troublesome presence of heretics in Cologne and the Rhineland. They claimed to be the only true Church; some denied the efficacy of the priesthood and the sacraments.

Even more unsettling, they showed great faith and courage in the face of death by burning. Bernard responded by preaching a series of sermons based upon the *Song of Solomon* in which he discussed the phrase "the little foxes," which he identified as "heretics." True Christians, he tried to show, would be able to recognize the false teaching for what it is. Two years later (1145) he traveled through Languedoc in southern France, preaching against the influential heretic, Henry of Lausanne.

### **Rational Opponents**

More controversial was Bernard's participation in the trials of two prominent intellectuals, Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers, both part of the exciting new academic world centering on Paris and its nascent university. Again, he has been accused of anti-intellectualism in our time, but that is to judge him unfairly. By the standards of his own age, he was well educated and contemporaries looked to him for leadership in numerous theological disputes.

Bernard belonged to an older theological tradition, however, one characterized by reverential meditation upon Scripture with the aid of the Church Fathers. Above all, he objected to the excessive rationalism of Abelard and his ilk, the assumption that the mysteries of faith should be subjected to reason and logic rather than accepted as settled Truth. This sort of intellectual curiosity leads to private opinion, destroys certitude and unsettles the minds of ordinary Christians.

Abelard and Gilbert were indeed accused of holding erroneous views of the Trinity, among other charges, and Bernard played a leading role in the Councils of Sens (1140—Abelard) and Rheims (1148—Gilbert), where condemnations were meted out. In reality, these encounters did not represent a genuine engagement of the issues.

Bernard was clever rather than penetrating and it is generally thought that he misunderstood what these scholars were really attempting, although he was perceptive in recognizing the potential dangers implicit in the new method.

### **Holy Warriors and Crusade**

Nowhere is Bernard more representative of the Church Militant than in his energetic participation in the great crusading movement of his age. Early in his career he helped in the establishment of the Knights Templar, a military order founded by a cousin of his to assist in the Holy War against the Muslims. Bernard wrote a handbook, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, defining the new vocation of those who were both monks and knights at the same time.

Then in 1146 he was called upon by the pope to preach a crusade in order to recover Edessa, the first part of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem to be taken by the Muslims. He began at Eastertide with a dramatic sermon delivered to a massive throng including the French king, Louis VII, and his court, who gathered at Vezelay—then one of medieval Europe’s most important pilgrimage sites. He then moved on through other parts of France, Germany and Switzerland, as well as sending a persuasive letter to the English.

Among the thousands who responded, his greatest success was in enlisting the participation of the German Emperor, Conrad III. This Second Crusade, as it turned out, was a colossal disaster. Since he was certain that God had called him to the task, Bernard blamed its failure on the sinfulness of the crusaders. Those who put the blame on him, he argued, were really attacking God Himself.

### **Defender of the Papacy**

One final aspect of Bernard’s public career needs to be considered: his staunch defense of the papacy. Although he respected the papal office, he was concerned that it had become secularized and needed to recover its spiritual essence. His great opportunity came when a fellow Cistercian became pope Eugenius III in 1145. Bernard wrote an important treatise, *On Consideration*, in order to admonish his former pupil about the need for balance in his life as pope. The pressures of routine (and often trivial) business should not crowd out regular prayer and meditation. Above all, the pope should lead by moral example rather than by the exercise of temporal power.

A decade or so earlier, Bernard had played a decisive role in a papal schism that lasted from 1130 to 1138. Divisions within the College of Cardinals based upon age and family alliance led to the election of two claimants: Anacletus II and Innocent II. Although Anacletus had the majority vote, Bernard believed Innocent to be morally superior and therefore, given the ambiguities of the election process, the legitimate pope. Gradually most of Europe aligned with Bernard’s choice. and when Anacletus died in 1138 the schism was officially over. Here again, it is quite evident that the saintly monk had exercised the prophetic role for which he was to become so widely known: his assertion of Innocent’s moral superiority decided the issue.

### **An Open Book**

In assessing Bernard’s public career, we need to remember that he was probably the most visible person in 12th century society, and as such his life was an open book. Interestingly, for all his ruthless single-mindedness in attacking perceived enemies of the Faith, it is remarkable that he more often than not retained the close friendship of those who had felt the sting of his criticisms. Indeed, at least one contemporary described him as a moderate, one who habitually took the “middle way” between opposing parties.

We also must admire him for counseling against the use of force in dealing with Jews and heretics, again in an age prone to violence. He even wrote contemptuously of secular knights who (unlike the Templars) lived undisciplined lives of violence directed mostly against one another.

The biggest question, no doubt, concerns Bernard’s association with the notorious Crusades. Here, his metaphorical understanding of spiritual warfare (after all, a prominent New Testament theme) gave way to an embrace of the dangerous contemporary concept of the holy war, with its justification of the use of force against the infidel enemies of God. In this he was, of course, a man of his times, and it is unfair to judge him outside of his historical context. (However, there were contemporaries of Bernard, such as Abbot Suger, who resisted the “holy war” interpretation.)

In this Bernard stands as a reminder that even the greatest of saints can sanction actions, often in

the name of God, that do harm to the cause of Christ, creating what one historian has recently called the "unacceptable face of the Church."

Bernard was indeed a great man, and great men often have flaws to match their statures. There are lesser figures in Church history, even in our time, who represent the Church at its worst. Bernard still stands above his flaws and mistakes as a great man. In his finer moments, the Abbot of Clairvaux would have agreed with all his heart with St. Paul: "The weapons of our warfare are not those of the flesh."

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 24: Bernard of Clairvaux, Medieval Reformer and Mystic

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## Bernard Lives Today

Cistercians around the world continue to live the monastic life of which Bernard of Clairvaux was the propagator and theologian.

M. Basil Pennington, ocsa, is a Benedictine monk, and a leading contemporary exponent of the monastic way of life. Among his various scholarly and popular writings, he has edited and contributed to the books *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Commemorating the Eighth Centenary of His Canonization* and *The Cistercian Spirit* (Cistercian Publications). He lives at Assumption Abbey in Ava, Missouri.

***Robert of Molesme was 70 years old in 1098 when he left his place in the prosperous Abbey of Molesme at the head of 20 beloved sons to seek a new life in the wilderness of Citeaux. Some contemporaries accused Robert of instability—this was his fourth or fifth move. But later ages in canonizing him have honored his undying zeal, which brought forth a monastic order that flourishes today, over 800 years later. Robert's sanctity shines forth in the way he obeyed the pope's order and returned to Molesme only a year after he launched what was to be the fulfillment of his life's dream and labor.***

Robert's work was carried forth by his disciples—first Alberic, and then the Englishman, Stephen Harding, who one day welcomed into the monastery Bernard of Fontaines and 30 companions. It was Stephen who imparted to Bernard the spirit of Saint Robert and Robert's master, Benedict of Nursia. The permanence of Robert's undertaking was assured once it was commanded by the gifts for leadership, writing, and sanctity with which God had endowed Bernard.

Cistercians today, in the last years of this 20th century, in nearly 150 monasteries scattered throughout the world, still seek to live Robert's "stricter observance of Benedict's ***Rule for Monasteries***. In this time of ongoing renewal the monks and nuns continuously seek to discern between what are the adaptations to these times and to various cultures that are necessary to live authentically the evangelical way laid out in the ***Rule***, and what might be simply compromises of its life-giving practice.

Benedict, a monk of the West venerated equally by Orthodox and Catholics, has, through his ***Rule***, exercised the most powerful of prevailing influences. Most monks and nuns of the West still follow it, at least to the extent of drawing their main inspiration for evangelical living from it, and observing some of its basic practices. In chapter 58 of his ***Rule***, Benedict calls upon the wise old monk who is to shepherd the newcomers to discern among them which ones are truly called to the monastic way. And what is the norm Benedict gives him to use in this discernment?: "Do they truly seek God?"

## Common Elements of the Monastic Way

Monastic life could perhaps be defined or described as a life that is centered upon the search for communion with God—a way that is organized to facilitate this search for the experience of the living God, and a life lived in complete harmony with his will.

Benedict sees this monastic search, or way, characterized by three deep concerns: zeal for ***humility***, zeal for ***obedience***, and zeal for the ***Opus Dei*** (the "work of God")—the spiritual practice that is meant to place the monk or nun immediately in the presence of the Divine.

Humility, true self-knowledge, is the realization that there is in fact something, or ***Someone*** more: Someone to be sought as the fulfillment and meaning of one's life. Humility is an openness to reality, to

what is, a freedom from the false self, the world of illusions, the constructs of our own mind. Humility expresses itself in obedience—obedience to reality. In the monastic way it takes on the form of obedience to a master who sees more and can guide one in the way that leads to the total, open, free embrace of reality. It is obedience to a tradition which speaks to us of the beyond, and of traditional ways through which one can come into communion with that beyond, into the experience of God.

At the heart of spiritual practice for Benedict were gatherings to chant the Scriptures and listen to them being read. Seven times in the day and once in the night the monks would chant their religious poetry from the inspired book of Psalms until they not only knew it by heart but the sacred words shaped their hearts. The words became a very part of the being of the monk.

Outside these hours of chanting, the monastics' prayer was to be very pure, a thing of the spirit, moved by the Spirit, and prolonged according to the movement of the Spirit. Benedict allowed many hours for what is traditionally called **Lectio Divina**. A literal translation ("divine reading") is misleading; in the monastic tradition the phrase implies not simply the reading of Holy Scripture, but a spiritual process: **Lectio-Meditatio-Oratio-Contemplatio** (Reading-Meditation-Prayer-Contemplation).

While many of the monastic fathers urged that all their disciples learn to read, this would not always be the case, so often they urged committing the Scriptures to memory. **Lectio** could well be reading the Scriptures in one's own heart. **Meditatio** would not be merely some rational exercise (as meditation became so commonly in later Western practice), but rather an allowing of the received word to rest in the mind until it descends to shape the heart. Like a mold that embraces and shapes soft clay, the word forms the heart and the heart responds.

**Oratio** refers to a stage when the pure movement of the heart is in harmony with the received word. And when the whole of the person is absorbed into the activity of the divine, into the divine harmony, the goal, **contemplatio** is achieved.

In contemplation we pass beyond. We leave the rational mind in its gropings; images fail us. We go beyond them to the deeper reality. It is here where we are all one. Those who have experienced this, know this oneness. When we return, we have to grope again for words and concepts if we would think or speak at all of the traces of the divine that have remained with us, if we would speak to one another about this. We must fall back on the words and concepts, the images and poetry our tradition gives us, knowing how completely they fall short.

## **A Continuing Influence**

Monasticism and the experience it lives and seeks to share is present within the Church to remind us all that we must not let our poor words and concepts and images, no matter how sacrosanct, stand as barriers to our spiritual experience. Today, thousands of men and women continue to follow this way of Benedict, which was brought to such transcendent and powerful fulfillment in the life and writings of Bernard.

Each year, one or two new Cistercian monasteries are founded in different parts of the world to make this way of life more widely available. The Second Vatican Council has declared that no local Catholic church or diocese should consider itself complete until it has at its heart a monastic community devoted to a life of contemplation.

Cistercians have seen in the powerful healing and uplifting role that Bernard exercised in Christendom in the first years of the Order a sign of what the Cistercian life represents within the people of God. As the monk of today goes quietly about the daily monastic program, he may not think of it in the lyrical terms of Bernard's commentaries on the **Song of Songs**, but his enduring fidelity is not untouched by the powerful faith he has found in the writings and spirit of his well-loved father, Bernard of Clairvaux.



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## Bernard of Clairvaux: Recommended Resources

The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux

**THE WORKS OF BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX** English translations, Cistercian Publications Inc, Kalamazoo, Michigan

**Treatises I: Apologia to Abbot William & On Precept**

**Treatises II: The Steps of Humility & On Loving God**

**Treatises III: On Grace and Free Choice & In Praise of the New Knighthood**

**On the Song of Songs (4 volumes)**

**The Life and Death of St Malachy the Irishman**

**Magnificat: Homilies in Praise of the virgin Mary**

**Sermons on Conversion**

**Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope**

**Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit**, Jean LeClercq, Cistercian Publications.

**Merton on St Bernard**, Cistercian Publications. Essays by the leading 20th-century spokesman for monasticism.

*Cistercian Publications has several other titles on Bernard as well as many others on related subjects. They offer a free catalog.*

**Bernard of Clairvaux, Selected Works.** In the series: *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, Paulist Press, NY, 1987. This volume contains a very helpful introduction to Bernard (by Jean LeClercq)-possibly the best available. The new translations and the forward are by Gillian Evans; she is an Oxford-trained medieval scholar and has several scholarly books on medieval subjects, including:

**The Mind of St Bernard of Clairvaux.** In the series: *Classics of Faith and Devotion*, Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon, 1983. A book designed for devotional reading and introduced by James M. Houston, a former lecturer at Oxford and Chancellor of Regent College. Also includes selections by Bernard's friend William of St Thierry.

**Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.** Bruno S James, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1957. A penetrating short biography.

**The Love of Learning and the Desire for God.** Jean LeClercq, Fordham University Press, 1961. An essential book about the history, purpose, and meaning of monastic life.

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