

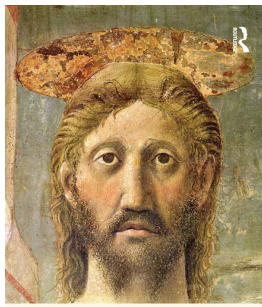
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### Bernard of Clairvaux

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### BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

Brian Patrick McGuire

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was not a philosopher in the strict sense of the word. His writings, however, have an epistemological foundation and belong to a perennial discussion within Christian thought about the relationship between faith and reason. Thus the great historian of medieval philosophy, Etienne Gilson, had no qualms about including Bernard in his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. In a chapter called “Speculative Mysticism”, Gilson showed how Bernard described a process by which the human soul seeks the love that God offers: “Ecstasy is nothing else than the extreme point of this union of wills and this coinciding of a human love with the divine” (Gilson 1955: 167).

Bernard was born into a family of the lower nobility at a castle just outside of Dijon, Fontaines-lès-Dijon, in Burgundy. He was educated by canons in the town of Châtillon-sur-Seine. They seem to have encouraged the great love of Latin letters that is reflected in his writings. He apparently intended to continue his education in the manner of the wandering scholars of his era. According to a story included in his hagiography, Bernard was on his way to study in Germany, but the recollection of his mother, who had recently died, made him turn back and become a monk (William of Saint-Thierry, *Sancti Bernardi vita prima* [The first life of Saint Bernard; hereafter *Vita prima*] 1.3.9, in *Patrologia Latina* [hereafter *PL*] 185:231–2).

At the age of twenty-two or twenty-three Bernard entered what was then called the New Monastery, which later came to be known as Cîteaux. It had been founded in 1098 by breakaway monks from Molesme. Its monks were seeking a stricter way of life in accord with the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Bernard was attracted to what we can call heroic monasticism, emphasizing strict asceticism but also fostering the enjoyment of close bonds among the monks. According to his legend, he arrived at the gate of Cîteaux with more than thirty friends and relatives, who also wanted entrance into the monastic life (*Vita prima* 1.4.19, in *PL* 185:327).

We know very little about Bernard’s first years as a monk, but by 1115 the Abbot of Cîteaux, Stephen Harding, was ready to send him to Champagne to found a

daughter house. According to his first hagiographer, William of Saint-Thierry, Bernard said that what he learned about the Scriptures came from meditation on them while he was “in forests and fields” and that “he had had no masters except the oaks and the beeches”. They were, he said “in a gracious joke”, his friends (*Vita prima* 1.4.23, in *PL* 185:240). This idea of learning from nature reappears in a letter of Bernard to the monk Aelred of Rievaulx. Bernard had asked Aelred to write a work about charity in monastic life, and Aelred had replied that he was not sufficiently learned to compose the required exposition. Bernard replied that Aelred’s learning came from hard physical work in the outdoors. According to Bernard, Aelred had gone to the school of the Holy Spirit, a far superior teacher than “some grammarian” (Aelred of Rievaulx, *Opera omnia I*, 1971: 3).

Bernard was not just playing with words here. Regardless of his aristocratic background, which would have looked down on manual labour, Bernard as a monk came to terms with the physical environment that every new Cistercian foundation had to transform in order to make it a suitable place for a monastic community. For Bernard the trees and streams of Clairvaux were part of a learning process in which he combined his deepening knowledge of biblical and patristic texts with the challenges and inspiration of the world around him.

Bernard’s philosophical foundation was thus based on what might be called the school of nature. Besides participating in the hard manual labour required by the Cistercian life, he also made extreme demands on his body in terms of ascetic deprivation. When his health collapsed, Bernard had to cut back on such observances (*Vita prima* 1.7.32, in *PL* 185:246). But the intensity of his penetration of biblical language is connected to an ability to concentrate his attention on the spiritual or interior dimension.

#### BERNARD’S PRE-SCHOLASTICISM

Bernard’s ascetic regime in no way prevented him from involving himself in intellectual questions. A good indication of his activity is a letter dated around 1125 in reply to a request from Hugh of Saint-Victor, a distinguished house of canons in Paris. Hugh (*d.* 1141), one of the leading scholars of his day, turned to Bernard for advice. The fact that he wrote to the still young Bernard shows that the abbot of Clairvaux already had a reputation that had reached the schools of Paris.

Bernard’s reply is listed as his Letter 77, but is sometimes given the title of a treatise, *On Baptism*. As the Benedictine scholar Hugh Feiss has shown, Hugh was asking Bernard to respond to three propositions that were associated with the school of Peter Abelard (Feiss 1992: 358). Much of what Bernard argues in his response is based not on scriptural authority but on reason. In many passages he was expressing himself not as a theologian but as a philosopher. He claimed, for example, that it would be wrong to condemn the non-baptized who lived prior to the command of Jesus that everyone must be baptized in order to be saved: “Is it

congruent for the author of life, who had come to root out death, to make use of death at the very beginning of his ways, to the disadvantage of a world which was still ignorant of the latest heavenly decree?" (*ibid.*: 361; *Sancti Bernardi opera* [The works of Saint Bernard; hereafter *SBO*], 1957–77: vol. 7, 185). Bernard concluded that prior to Christ's promulgation of the command to be baptized, there would have been other ways by which people could have been saved.

But what about people who lived after Christ? Bernard formulated what later would be called the doctrine of baptism of desire. He referred to authorities from the writings of Church Fathers such as Ambrose and Augustine. But he also continued his argument on the basis of reason. First of all, the martyrs were saved by their faith and blood. Secondly, children are saved by faith: not their own but that of those who love them (Feiss 1992: 366–8; *SBO* vol. 7, 190–92).

In the course of this brief but concentrated exposition, Bernard argues on the basis of thesis and counter-thesis. His basic assumption is that it befits a God of love to save as many as possible. Just as many Christians today, he points out, know little about the future life but still believe in it, so too believers before Christ had hope in salvation but did not know how it would take place. They were saved on the basis of their faith, even though they were not baptized.

Hugh of Saint-Victor made good use of Bernard's arguments and included them in his landmark theological work, *De sacramentis* (On the sacraments) (Feiss 1992: 355). Hugh turned to Bernard because the Abbot of Clairvaux did not just list authorities to back his point of view. As Feiss has shown, Bernard "uses reason to solve apparent contradictions among authorities, to create dilemmas, to drive home arguments, and to rebut objections" (*ibid.*: 359).

Bernard here can be seen as following the theology of the twelfth-century schools, where logic was used in order to solve intellectual questions. In this sense he went beyond the practice of monastic theology attributed to him by Jean Leclercq (1982: 222–5). According to Leclercq, this approach to learning meant close meditation on the language of Scripture and the Fathers. The contemplative and experiential element is contrasted with the logical and speculative approach of scholastic theology.

In this letter-treatise, however, Bernard immersed himself in the argumentative procedure that characterized the schools. He was thus able in his mid-thirties to deal with the theological questions of his day in a manner that matched the intellectual argumentation then current in Paris. Bernard was clearly influenced by William of Champeaux, who had been Abelard's teacher. William and Bernard became friends and in 1115 William ordained Bernard. It is possible that William endowed Bernard with his enthusiasm for the writings of St Augustine.

Besides Bernard's letter on baptism, another product of the 1120s that indicates his singular ability to reason in the manner of the schools is his treatise *On Grace and Free Choice*, usually dated to 1128. Although Bernard here was very much aware of the ideas of St Paul, especially in the Epistle to the Romans, the Abbot of Clairvaux provided his own agenda for reconciling God's grace with human free

will. His purpose was to show free choice as cooperating with grace. He defined voluntary consent as “a self-determining habit of the soul” (*On Grace and Free Choice* II.3, in *SBO* vol. 3, 167; 1977a: 55). Consent is a necessary point of departure for human responsibility. Bernard argues carefully for a threefold freedom: of nature, of grace and of life in glory (III.7). He asks about the freedom that belongs to the saved and considers what is special for God and what is found in all rational creatures (IV). Freedom of choice belongs to all who have the use of reason (V.15). At the same time, however, grace is a necessity so that the person can will that which is good: “Created, then to a certain extent, as our own in freedom of will, we become God’s as it were by good will” (VI.18, in *SBO* vol. 3, 179; 1977a: 73).

The references in these pages are to Paul, especially to the Corinthians and to Romans, but the form of argumentation is Bernard’s own. He insists that free choice remains even after the person has sinned (VIII). The existence of free choice in the creature reflects the image of the creator (IX). Grace does not take away free choice (XI). In sin we still have free choice and are responsible for our acts (XII). Bernard thus argues for human responsibility, but he also considers human merits to be gifts of God (XIII).

Bernard concludes that our consent and our actions derive from God but are our own (XIV). He claims that he has remained close to St Paul and has returned “to almost his very words” (XIV.48, in *SBO* vol. 3, 200; 1977a: 107). But the Abbot of Clairvaux has gone beyond Paul: he has made a systematic presentation of human free will in its relation to God’s grace. He has done so in a rigorous and discursive manner different from what we find in the Epistles of Paul.

Approaching one of the central questions of Christian theology, Bernard defines human choice in terms of grace. His key concept is the good will that the individual must manifest in order to receive the grace offered by God (XIV.46–7). Bernard balances his concepts on a knife-edge in order to include both grace and free will: “Grace does the whole work, and so does free choice – with this one qualification: that whereas the whole is done *in* free choice, so is the whole done *of* grace” (*totum quidem hoc, et totum illa, sed ut totum in illo, sic totum ex illa*; XIV.47, in *SBO* vol. 3, 200; 1977a: 106).

#### BERNARD’S EXPERIENTIAL REFLECTIONS

Bernard’s reputation as a solid theological thinker meant that the masters of the Paris schools turned to him for advice. Far more important for his reputation in monastic circles, however, was his ability to combine meditation on the language of Scripture with personal insight. Here Bernard followed the practice of Anselm of Canterbury (*d.* 1109) in linking his theological reflections to his own interior life (Southern 1966: 34–47). Anselm did so in his prayers and meditations, while Bernard chose the vehicle of the eighty-six *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (*Sermones in Cantica*; hereafter SC) that he preached for the monks of

Clairvaux. These sermons are masterpieces of twelfth-century Latin prose and reveal Bernard's talent for linking language with thought (Casey 1988).

Here is Bernard addressing the monks about how it was for him to receive spiritual insight:

I want to tell you of my own experience, as I promised. Not that it is of any importance. But I make this disclosure only to help you, and if you derive any profit from it I shall be consoled for my foolishness; if not, my foolishness will be revealed. I admit that the Word has also come to me – I speak as a fool – and has come many times.

(SC 74.5, in *SBO* vol. 2, 242; 1980: 89)

Bernard could allow himself to speak about his inner life in order to help his monks. Paul had done the same thing, and Bernard was thus able to draw on a Christian practice of revealing the movements of the heart and soul in order to provide consolation, encouragement and help to others.

The passage here is a long exposition about how the coming of the Word cannot be described in any physical terms. The Word is full of paradoxes. Bernard says that he has no way of knowing how and when the Word entered into him, and yet he knew the Word was there. In his own innermost being, Bernard could rejoice in the coming of the Word: “Only by the movement of my heart, as I have told you, did I perceive his presence and I knew the power of his might” (SC 74.6, in *SBO* vol. 2, 243; 1980: 91).

The meditation continues, making up the better part of this sermon. One can wonder whether Bernard actually preached it to the brethren at Clairvaux. What matters, however, is that he considered it appropriate for all who read him to hear about some of the most profound experiences of his life. In this sense he was much more than a conventional master of the schools of his age. He offered his own interior life as food for thought and spiritual sustenance for his audience.

In a much earlier sermon Bernard shared himself with his monks not in terms of mystical experience but in relation to his trials and doubts (SC 14.6, in *SBO* vol. 1, 79; 1977b: 102). He spoke of the “coldness and hardness of heart” that he had felt. In seeking the love of God, he had found only a sense of numbness. At the same time he missed having a friend to help him out. Bernard felt there was no consolation to be had. Then suddenly he became aware of the presence of a good man or the memory of a dead or absent friend, and this experience would open up the gates of emotion and bring tears.

Bernard described how the happiness caused by such an event could leave him feeling depressed. This reaction he could also experience in his present life: “even now, if a similar experience should happen to me, I eagerly grasp at the proffered gift, I am grateful for it, even though I feel sad beyond words that I have not won it by my own merits” (SC 14.6, in *SBO* vol. 1, 80; 1977b: 103). Bernard interpreted such a reaction as indicative of the human longing for the vision of God. He took

it for granted that many of his monks had similar experiences, and he saw these as fostering love among the brethren. Such moments could be medicine that helps cure the sick and strengthens the convalescent.

The language here is Bernard's way of conveying his own interior life to his monastic community and of telling its members that he assumed his experiences were theirs. Bernard legitimized self-doubt and hesitation, while at the same time encouraging the brothers to share their deepest feelings with each other. He allowed them to emphasize their need for each other in friendship and consolation. In such sharing, he accepted tears as a way of manifesting the inner life.

What do such descriptions have to do with philosophy? Bernard told his monks that he sought a "more refined and interior philosophy, to know Jesus and to know him crucified" (SC 43.4, in *SBO* vol. 2, 43; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:2). Bernard was looking for ways of reconciling his inner life with that of his fellow monks in relating their existence to the crucified Christ. This was his philosophy, one that was not taken "from the school of rhetoricians and philosophers" (SC 36.1, in *SBO* vol. 2, 4). Bernard warned against their pride, but he also considered the arrogance of his own heart. This awareness brought about in him the *acedia* or dryness of soul that was the fear of every monk: "The psalms are stale, reading is disagreeable, prayer is devoid of joy, the accustomed meditations irretrievable" (SC 54.8, in *SBO* vol. 2, 107; 1979: 76–7).

Again, Bernard made use of his own interior life in order to describe what he assumed his fellow monks were experiencing. He spoke of inability to work, fits of anger and lack of restraint in speaking. Instead of talking down to the monks, his method was to speak of his own dilemmas in order to describe theirs. Such experiences, according to Bernard, are the way by which God manifests himself for our good (SC 36.6, in *SBO* vol. 2, 8). It is then that a person will cry out to God who will hear him.

A further dimension of this inner life is the link between Bernard the authority figure and Bernard the friend. Many of Bernard's letters are expressions of friendship, and it would be right to say that Bernard could not imagine monastic life without the bonds of friendship. This fact cannot be taken for granted. The Desert Fathers had in general warned against friendship as a distraction from or even a danger to monastic discipline (McGuire 1988: 25–34). Bernard, in contrast, was so confident about the benefits of friendship in the monastery that he did not even feel called on to defend its practice.

The claims of friendship and love in the monastery are apparent in Bernard's remarkable lament on the death of his brother. He interrupted one of his sermons to describe his sense of shock and loss on the news of the death of Gerard. Here he defended his right to shed tears of sorrow: "Our weeping is not a sign of a lack of faith, it indicates the human condition" (SC 26.13, in *SBO* vol. 1, 180; 1976: 72).

It can be argued that such a passage is a complex literary construction and by no means reflects spontaneous feeling. Without dealing with the question of the



relation between written and spoken text in these sermons, I think it still possible to claim that Bernard wanted his audience to know how much he loved his brother and suffered from his death. In expressing his own lament, he legitimized close bonds among the brothers. In speaking of his tears, he allowed the brothers to weep for their own losses.

Bernard thus offered his audience what we can call a philosophy of personal experience. He was not an individualist in the modern sense, for his sense of self and identity was tied to his belonging to the collective of a monastery and a monastic order. But for Bernard the monastic life was made deeper and richer through an awareness and sharing of the inner lives of his monks. Close bonds grew up in the admission of faults, the pursuit of contemplative experience and the love of the language of the liturgy. Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* reflect these dimensions in his life and manifest his desire to share himself with others. In this way Bernard is *magister spiritualis*, a spiritual teacher, who through his writings made himself available not only to other monks but also to anyone able and willing to read his magnificent Latin prose.

#### THE POSSIBILITIES AND DANGERS OF LEARNING

Bernard of Clairvaux does not always come across in medieval studies as a master of enlightenment. He has in fact often been described more as the enemy of learning than its friend (Grane 1970: 121–2). This interpretation can stem from an opposition made between Bernard and Abelard: the first is seen as the advocate of authority and blind faith, while the second is interpreted as manifesting a new emphasis on reason that is the harbinger of modern times. Bernard is thus the dark Middle Ages, while Abelard brings the light of reason.

Such an opposition, however convenient, is not only deceptive but also wrong. Bernard did not oppose learning, whether in the cloister or outside, and the way he responded to his opponents shows how much time and effort he invested in study and thought. We do him a disservice to suggest that his primary recourse was to issue decrees against his opponents in the faith.

At the same time, however, it is right to see Bernard as having been sceptical about the benefits of learning for its own sake. This scepticism was based on a concern that highly educated people become infatuated with themselves. In one of his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* he defended himself from the charge “that I have cast aspersions on the learned and proscribed the study of letters” (SC 36.2, in *SBO* vol. 2, 4; 1976: 174). He insisted that he was aware of how scholars benefit the Church, “both by refuting her opponents and instructing the simple”. The problem, however, is that knowledge inflates (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:1).

Bernard here begins a long reflection on the limitations and possibilities of learning. So far as he was concerned, “all knowledge is good in itself, provided



it be founded on the truth” (SC 36.2, in *SBO* vol. 2, 5; 1976: 175). Knowledge, however, is like food. It has to be consumed in the right order. All the foods that God made are good, but health is harmed if due order is not observed.

Here, as elsewhere in his writings, Bernard is close to St Paul, whom he quotes: “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:2). The benefit and usefulness of knowledge depend on the manner in which one knows. There must be order, application and purposefulness in approaching the object of study. Bernard warns against the misuse of knowledge for shameful curiosity, vanity or material gain. Thankfully there are people who want knowledge in order to be of service. They perform an act of charity: *Sed sunt quoque qui scire volunt, ut aedificent, et caritas est* (SC 36.3, in *SBO* vol. 2, 6).

From here Bernard continues in emphasizing the importance of self-knowledge. We must be aware of our own sinfulness and seek the vision of God: “if I look up and fix my eyes on the aid of the divine mercy, this happy vision of God soon tempers the bitter vision of myself” (SC 36.6, in *SBO* vol. 2, 7; 1976: 179). In this manner self-knowledge provides a point of departure for coming to the knowledge of God. Bernard was concerned with the experience that the individual acquires in facing himself and at the same time seeking God.

Sermon 36 provides insight into Bernard’s scheme for the good use of knowledge, in which the individual makes use of his own self-understanding in advancing to a meeting with God. Knowledge (*scientia*) is in itself neutral. It can be used for good or evil. Bernard is by no means afraid of it: he sees the knowledge that comes from experience and learning as a possible path to God.

At the same time, however, he warned against the “windy chatter” of philosophers (*ventosa loquacitas*; SC 58.8, in *SBO* vol. 2, 131). Bernard spoke of their utterances as a bad kind of rain that caused sterility in the earth instead of fruitfulness. Even worse were the rains brought by heretics, who produced thorns and thistles rather than good fruits.

Bernard was here speaking in general of philosophers and heretics. He does not go into detail. But it is interesting that he places the two categories of people so close together. The same is the case in another sermon, where he again points to the wordiness of philosophers, and then places them next to heretics in their wranglings: *nec verbositate philosophorum nec cavillationibus haereticorum* (SC 79.4, in *SBO* vol. 2, 274).

Such a juxtaposition indicates a great deal of reserve on Bernard’s part towards the learning of philosophers. In the one place in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* where he mentions a specific heresy, however, he was careful to make it apparent that he believed in the value of persuasion and learning. Describing dualist heretics and asking what to do with them, Bernard asserted that faith is a question of persuasion and not of force: *quia fides suadenda est, non imponenda* (SC 66.12, in *SBO* vol. 2, 186–7). Heretics, however, were often beyond such persuasion. They could not be convinced by logical reasoning, which they did not understand. Nor

could they be won over by references to authorities they did not accept. Also, persuasive arguments were useless (SC 66.12, in SBO vol. 2, 286).

Bernard here laid bare his own argumentative method: *ratio*, *auctoritas* and *suasio*. For him it was right and necessary to do more than quote authorities. As a philosopher of Christ, he had use of reason and persuasion.

In reviewing Bernard's correspondence in trying to get Abelard condemned as a heretic at the Council of Sens in 1141, it is clear that he also made use of *ad hominem* arguments and did whatever he could to blacken the man's reputation. Bernard's behaviour is an indication of a holy zeal that can forget charity. In the end, however, Bernard apparently did accept the settlement arranged for Abelard by the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable (Clanchy 1999: 319–24). However much Bernard considered Abelard to be a heretic, he was willing to believe in the latter's good will.

#### A PHILOSOPHY OF MONASTIC LIFE

Bernard's vitriol against Abelard was due to his conviction that his opponent misused philosophy and theology. The Abbot of Clairvaux, however, spent much more energy in trying to establish the rightful boundaries of the monastic life. His monument to this vocation, *On Precept and Dispensation*, was probably written in the early 1140s, and was the fruit of Bernard's own life as a monk over several decades. He took as his point of departure the *Rule of Saint Benedict* and asked whether its precepts are commands or counsels. This question led him to consider the types of necessity: stable, firm or fixed (II.4). The first covers rules that were established by human beings and can be changed. The second refers to God's own laws: these cannot be changed, except by God. The third type of necessity has to do with what has been established by God from all eternity and cannot be changed, even by God himself (III.7).

With this distinction in mind, Bernard can return to the specific case of the rules observed by monks. They belong to the first category. They cannot be changed arbitrarily, however, and his first point is that the abbot himself is subject to the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (IV.9). The monk promises obedience not according to the will of his superior but according to the Rule. At the same time obedience must be kept within the limits of monastic profession (V.11): "Let not the commands or prohibitions of the superior over-step these bounds. They cannot be stretched farther nor cut shorter. Let no superior forbid me to fulfill my promises, nor demand more" (SBO 3, 261; 1970: 113).

Point by point Bernard goes through the categories of obedience and considers its limitations. He makes it clear that there are different degrees of disobedience, just as there are different authorities and precepts (VII.13). Similarly there are degrees of obedience. Some actions are allowed when there is no specific prohibition against them, as in the case with conversation and laughter (VIII.17).

Sometimes it is necessary to refuse obedience, in the case when an order is given that is opposed to the law of God (IX.19). Normally, however, what superiors order is to be looked on as what God has commanded (IX.21).

Bernard then considered the punishment for disobedience: it was to be in proportion to the fault. Sometimes even breaking silence in the monastery can be a serious sin. Bernard asked whether what he required was asking too much of the individual monk. He replied on the basis of what he had seen in monastic life. As so often, experience was his teacher (XIII.32). Bernard allowed for different customs according to different monastic professions (XVI.48). He visualized monastic life as a second baptism. He asked whether a monk should remain in his own monastery in a state of anger or seek peace elsewhere (XVIII.56). In an age when men and women were seeking new forms of monastic life, this was a burning issue.

Bernard made clear in this treatise how much faith he had in the possibility of reflecting on human experience and logical distinctions in order to find meaning and order. The monastic life that he described was based on self-sacrifice but also on self-preservation. There was no place for excessive devotions that killed the body. As Bernard wrote towards the end of *On Precept and Dispensation*: “we are partly bound to our bodies and partly to the Lord: bound to our bodies by bonds of life and feeling, and bound to the Lord by faith and love” (XX.60, in *SBO* vol. 3, 292; 1970: 149). The love that the monk expresses towards God brings him to God in direct relation to that love: *Præsens igitur Deo est qui Deum amat in quantum amat* (XX.60, in *SBO* vol. 3, 293). The epigram is typical for Bernard: a linguistic *tour de force* that expresses a deep theological truth.

#### THE AFTERMATH

The abbot and monastic writer who had involved himself so intimately with the teachings coming from the twelfth-century schools of Paris did not become a central figure at the scholastic university that was established there after about 1200. In the thirteenth century Bernard's works more or less drop out of sight, except for his *On Grace and Free Choice* (Elm 1994: 53). His way of expressing himself was perhaps not sufficiently rigorous for the generations that built up theology according to *summae*.

In the later Middle Ages, however, Bernard's theology made a comeback to the schools of Paris. His presence can especially be seen in the writings of the theologian Jean Gerson (1363–1429), who dealt with the question of vows by turning to Bernard's *On Precept and Dispensation* (McGuire 2005: 156). Bernard is one of Gerson's favorite authors, and Gerson even gave a sermon on Bernard on the saint's feast day, 20 August, at the College of Saint-Bernard, the Cistercian house of studies in Paris (1998: 128–48). This had been established in the 1240s in order to make it possible for the Cistercians to participate in the scholastic theology of

their age (Lekai 1977: 81). In naming the college after Bernard, the Cistercians indicated their belief in learning in relation to the life and writings of Bernard.

Gerson saw in Bernard a man who combined learning with affectivity. The term *affectus* is a key concept in describing what it is that characterizes Bernard's teaching. The saint believed that by investigating the interior life of the human person, he would find the trace of God. Human emotion and attachments were not threats for Bernard, as they had been for the Desert Fathers. Emotional bonds provided a point of departure for reaching out for God. Bernard was convinced that the monastic life was the best way to make this journey. His successors, such as Bonaventure, would point elsewhere. But both Bonaventure in the thirteenth century and Gerson in the fifteenth bear witness to the durability of what we can call Bernard's Christian philosophy. Through a union of thought and feeling the human person can return to the foundation of their being. In love and friendship with other persons the human person makes their way to the font of love.

Bernard was confident that Christ as the Word of God makes his visitations in the human soul. As Bernard described his own experience: "I perceived his presence, I remembered afterwards that he had been with me; sometimes I had a presentiment that he would come ..." (SC 74.5, in SBO vol. 2, 242). Thought and feeling unify in the unity of God's son.

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On FREE WILL see also Chs 2, 7, 19; Vol. 1, Ch. 18; Vol. 3, Chs 9, 15; Vol. 5, Ch. 22. On THE WORD see also Ch. 3.

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