

CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES: NUMBER SEVENTY-SIX

THE FIRST LIFE OF
BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES: NUMBER SEVENTY-SIX

The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux

by

William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and
Geoffrey of Auxerre

Translated by

Hilary Costello, OCSO



Cistercian Publications
www.cistercianpublications.org

LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota
www.litpress.org

A Cistercian Publications title published by Liturgical Press

Cistercian Publications
Editorial Offices
161 Grosvenor Street
Athens, Ohio 45701
www.cistercianpublications.org

In the absence of a critical edition of Recension B of the *Vita Prima Sancti Bernardi*, this translation is based on Mount Saint Bernard MS 1, with section numbers inserted from the critical edition of Recension A (*Vita Prima Sancti Bernardi Claraevallis Abbatis, Liber Primus*, ed. Paul Verdeyen, CCCM 89B [Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011]).

Scripture texts in this work are translated by the translator of the text.

The image of Saint Bernard on the cover is a miniature from Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, fol. 1, reprinted with permission from Mount Saint Bernard Abbey.

© 2015 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Vita prima Sancti Bernardi. English

The first life of Bernard of Clairvaux / by William of Saint-Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre ; translated by Hilary Costello, OCSO.
pages cm. — (Cistercian Fathers series ; Number seventy-six)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-87907-176-9 — ISBN 978-0-87907-692-4 (ebook)

1. Bernard, of Clairvaux, Saint, 1090 or 1091–1153. 2. Christian saints—France—Biography. I. William, of Saint-Thierry, Abbot of Saint-Thierry, approximately 1085–1148? II. Arnaldus, Abbot of Bonneval, –approximately 1156. III. Geoffrey, of Auxerre, active 12th century. IV. Title.

BX4700.B5V563 2015

271'.1203—dc23

[B]

2015024945

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
List of Abbreviations	xxxix
Editor's Note	xlii
The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux	1
Book 1, by William of Saint-Thierry	1
Book 2, by Arnold of Bonneval	79
Book 3, by Geoffrey of Auxerre	143
Book 4, by Geoffrey of Auxerre	181
Book 5, by Geoffrey of Auxerre	233
Bibliography	259
Scriptural Index	265
Index of Names	273

Acknowledgments

Dr. James France has helped me and encouraged me in this translation. Most of the footnotes, apart from the scriptural quotations, are due to him. He has also helped me considerably with the Latin text, which it was necessary for me to establish before I could undertake the English translation.

If any scholars or any readers desire to see the Latin text, I have a bound copy of it at Mount Saint Bernard Abbey; the manuscript itself is of course kept safely in the archives but could be consulted with permission from the abbot. Br. Martin Horwath took the photographs of the manuscript; these too are available to anyone who wishes to see them.

Fr. Hilary Costello
Mount Saint Bernard Abbey

Introduction

When Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, died on August 20, 1153, his former secretary, Geoffrey of Auxerre, had already begun to create a *vita* to make the case for Bernard's canonization. Having compiled notes about Bernard's early life and monastic beginnings, Geoffrey arranged for William of Saint-Thierry to incorporate them into a narrative of Bernard's early life and monastic beginnings. After William died in 1148, Arnold, abbot of Bonneval Abbey, took the story further, focusing on Bernard's advocacy for Pope Innocent II in the papal contest with Peter Leonis, Anacletus II. Geoffrey himself then completed the *vita*, writing three books about Bernard's extensive miracles, activities as a peacemaker in Italy and France, and death and burial at Clairvaux.

But the final five-part *vita*—the *Vita prima Sancti Bernardi*, or the *First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*—did not lead at once to Bernard's canonization. Geoffrey had pinned his hopes on Pope Eugenius III, a former monk of Clairvaux and then a Cistercian abbot before becoming pope in 1145. In part because Eugenius died a month before Bernard, on July 8, 1153, another decade, another pope, and a significant revision of the *vita* intervened before Bernard's canonization. But in 1174, after Geoffrey submitted his revised version of the *Vita prima*, Pope Alexander III named Bernard a saint.

The work that follows here is the first English translation of Geoffrey's revised *Vita prima* (Recension B), the one on which Alexander relied in his canonization decision. The first, longer version (Recension A) received two English translations before Paul Verdeyen prepared his 2011 critical edition.¹ But Geoffrey's shorter Recension

¹ William of St. Thierry, et al., *St. Bernard of Clairvaux: The Story of His Life as Recorded in the Vita Prima Bernardi by Certain of His Contemporaries*, William of St. Thierry,

B has until now been available only in manuscript witnesses, one of which—the exemplar of this translation—is a treasured possession of the English Cistercian abbey of Mount Saint Bernard.

THE MANUSCRIPT

All those who have held an ancient manuscript in their hands know the feeling of awe that comes over them when they realize that this book written with such care and love by a monk eight hundred years ago is now in their own hands. That was the feeling I had when first I held our manuscript.

The manuscript contains two works: the *Vita prima Sancti Bernardi* and Bernard's *Vita Sancti Malachiae*. It was acquired by Mount Saint Bernard Abbey in 1950 from a bookseller, Bernard Quaritch, who had bought it for £120. Fr. John Morson, who was librarian of the monastery at the time, has given the background of its coming to Mount Saint Bernard:

Bertram, fourth Earl of Ashburnham (ob. 1878), collected the famous Ashburnham library which was dispersed in the eighteenth-nineties. *Appendix 232*, having as its chief content the Life of St. Bernard, was labelled fifteenth century, and was sold at Sotheby's on 1 May 1899 for £3 12s. 6d. It was soon recognized that the writing should be dated about 1200, and that the miniature portrait of the saint, heading the work, had been produced in the life-time of those who had known him. The manuscript passed through the hands of several booksellers, was acquired by the late Mr. James Lyell, then at the dispersal

Arnold of Bonnevaux, Geoffrey and Philip of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1960); William of St. Thierry, et al., *Bernard of Clairvaux: Early Biographies, Volume 1 by William of St. Thierry*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Guadalupe Translations (Lafayette, OR: Abbey of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 2000); William of Saint-Thierry, et al., *Vita prima Sancti Bernardi Claravallis Abbatis*, ed. Paul Verdeyen, CCCM 89B (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), cited below as VP.

of his collection in 1951 returned to its probable origin, the Order of Cîteaux.²

Fr. Morson continues with a description of the portrait of Saint Bernard that begins the work:

The portrait makes this unique among manuscripts of the Life.³ Crude and rubbed as it is, it may seem at first glance to tell us nothing, but when it is compared with others it appears as one of a family, indeed as an ancestor. It can hardly be doubted that the artist had reflected upon the description of St. Bernard's outward appearance given by Geoffrey.⁴ There are the frail body, moderate stature, slightly flushed cheeks, auburn beard. Over the undecorated alb, or possibly monastic cowl, is a bell-shaped chasuble, blue as was often used by the Cistercians. . . . Stole, orphrey and footwear, are of gold. Such decorations were forbidden under St. Bernard's influence and in his life-time.⁵ The artist is making the best use of the colours at his disposal, putting on to the vestments the gold which St. Bernard would have shunned, just as he places a golden aureole behind the head. What at first seems to be a low mitre is in fact an exaggeration of the monastic tonsure. Cistercian abbots did not have mitre or ring in the twelfth century, and St. Bernard himself reproved all abbots who sought such privileges.⁶ There

² John Morson, "Some Manuscripts of the Life of St. Bernard," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 37 (1955): 476–502, here 485.

³ My fuller discussion of the manuscript and portrait is in *The Life of the Spirit* (November 1953), and in *Collectanea Ord. Cist.* (1954), 30–4, 214–21 . . . [Morson note, abbreviated].

⁴ Book 3, n1: Migne, P. L. 185, 303 [Morson note].

⁵ First statutes of the General Chapter, st. 10. The date (formerly given as 1134) and origin of these statutes are discussed at length by J. A. Lefèvre in *Collectanea Ord. Cist.* (1954), 157–82, 241–66 [Morson note]. For the statute itself, see Chrysogonus Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux*, *Studia et Documenta*, vol. 9 (Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses, 1999), 320, under the heading "Quid liceat uel non liceat nobis habere de auro, argento, gemmis et serico. X."

⁶ *De Officio Episcoporum*, n36. Migne, P. L. 182, 832 [Morson note].

are no insignia but the crozier held in the left hand, the right being raised to teach, as so often in the early portraits.⁷

He then goes on to describe the manuscript itself and the inferences that can be made about its date, provenance, and textual value:

The book contains 163 vellum sheets, edges slightly planed, measuring 10 by 7 inches, each ruled with twenty-nine or thirty lines, rebound between the original boards with their clasp. The unskilled and hasty writing, coming probably from a newly founded scriptorium, indicates about 1200 as a likely date and provenance rather Flemish than French. The errors of the illiterate scribe are many, but behind them one can recognize an accurate dictation, resulting in an early and useful sample of recension B. These characteristics, possibly also the marking of accents and frequent punctuation, suggest a Cistercian origin.⁸

Although Fr. Morson considered the manuscript to be of Flemish provenance, others argue that it is French. Adriaan H. Bredero, for example, lists it in his register of manuscripts of Recension B as “prov[enance]. Abbaye cistercienne en France (?)”⁹ As far as I can tell, it is the only manuscript of the *Vita prima sancti Bernardi* in a library of the Cistercian Order. For that reason it is a valuable manuscript for Mount Saint Bernard Abbey and for the Order. The

⁷ Morson, “Some Manuscripts,” 485–86. Morson reproduces the portrait in black and white on p. 480.

⁸ Morson, “Some Manuscripts,” 486–87. Adriaan H. Bredero, who has studied the manuscript history of the *Vita Prima*, suggests that the MSB manuscript (hereafter MSB 1) could be earlier than was previously thought; he groups it with eleven other manuscripts of Recension B from the twelfth or thirteenth century; see his “Études sur la ‘Vita Prima’ de Saint Bernard,” *Analecta* 17, nos. 1, 2 (1961): 3–72, 215–60, and 18, no. 3 (1962): 3–59, here 17:23–24. Jean Leclercq identifies it as a manuscript of the twelfth century (“Études sur Saint Bernard et le texte de ses écrits,” *Analecta* 9 [1953]: 3–245, here 43). The image is reproduced on the cover of this book and in James France, *The Cistercians in Medieval Art* (Thrupp, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 40; and in James France, *Medieval Images of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, CS 210 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007), 73.

⁹ Bredero, “Études,” 17:24.

scribe who wrote it is unknown, but he or she writes with a strong, clear, firm hand, despite mistakes here and there, showing some lack of familiarity with Latin. In a sense those mistakes make the text even more personal. It is clear that behind them lies an accurate text, one containing an early witness to Recension B of the *Vita prima*.¹⁰

But there it was, lying in our archives for sixty years, and no one had much interest in it. That is why I decided to translate the Latin into English. Fr. Morson ended his article with the hope that some scholar would make a critical edition of Recension B. To do that one would have to collate at least the eighteen twelfth- and thirteenth-century surviving manuscripts that Bredero has identified. This translation is much less adventurous than a critical edition would be, but it does introduce the only manuscript of the *Vita prima* that belongs to a Cistercian monastery.

In 1163, when Geoffrey submitted the original, longer, version of Bernard's *vita*, Alexander III was in the process of redefining the traditional canonization process, with canonization requests now not to be submitted during a synod or council but at a different time, so that those evaluating the request would have the time to verify the facts—and specifically the miracles—reported in the *vita* accompanying the request. Bredero explains the implications for the *vita* as Geoffrey perceived them:

This requirement implied that the stories in a *vita* about virtuous deeds and miracles were to fit the more or less stereotypical scheme that corresponded with the position of the candidate-saint in the world of church and society during his life.

As a result of these changes in procedure, a *vita* now had to satisfy paradoxical requirements. On the one hand, a stereotypical *Life* of a saint, characterized by piety, was required;

¹⁰ This title refers to the fact that the five books of the *Vita* (or, in some manuscripts, six) constitute the first of three hagiographical lives of Bernard. Bredero describes it as “the oldest, the most important, and the most extensive description of Bernard’s life that has been preserved in many manuscripts. Both other lives are significantly less comprehensive and, to a large extent, depend for their content on this *vita prima*” (*Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996], 25).

on the other hand, information was to be provided with regard to authentic facts. This paradox forced the hagiographer to select and disguise his facts in such a way that verification would be difficult, if not impossible. Such selectivity was of special importance when the candidate-saint had been a well-known figure during his lifetime, or, at least, while it was still possible to hear people tell about the reported miracles. If Geoffrey of Auxerre was aware of these changes in procedure, this may have prompted him, as the only author who was still able to do so, to change the text of the *vita prima* accordingly.¹¹

As a result, Bredero continues, “Geoffrey’s revision of this *vita* . . . concerns mainly abridgments or elimination of passages, as well as some stylistic and factual improvements.”¹²

THE AUTHORS OF THE *VITA PRIMA*

William of Saint-Thierry, the first of the three authors, was a learned theologian (probably more learned than Bernard himself) and spiritual writer. But in this book he appears more simply and humbly as a friend of Saint Bernard, whom he probably met in 1128 in a hut on the grounds of Clairvaux Abbey, when both men were seriously ill. He was five years older than Bernard, having been born at Liège in 1085. After beginning his monastic life at Saint Nicaise in Reims, in 1119 or 1120 he was elected abbot at the nearby Abbey of Saint-Thierry. But in 1135, after seven years of wishing to become a

¹¹ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 33–52, here 45–46; see also Adriaan H. Bredero, “The Canonization of Saint Bernard and the Rewriting of His Life,” in *Cistercian Ideals and Reality*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt, CS 60 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1978), 80–105.

¹² Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 46. For more on changes from the first to the second version, see Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 46–52. To facilitate comparison of the two versions of the *Vita*, I have inserted the critical edition’s section numbers, bracketed, into my translation and used them for references in the two indices. At the beginning of each book of the translation I also note the extended passages that Geoffrey deleted from Recension A.

Cistercian, he resigned his abbacy and entered the Cistercian monastery of Signy, in the Ardennes, where he died in about 1148, five years before Bernard.¹³

The second author, Arnold of Bonneval, became a monk of the Benedictine monastery of Marmoutier in 1138 and was elected abbot of Bonneval, in the diocese of Chartres, in about 1141. He resigned the abbatial office before 1156 and probably died at Marmoutier soon afterward. He was friendly with the Cistercians but probably did not know Bernard well personally. Unable to come to Clairvaux while Bernard was dying, he reportedly sent him a gift of delicacies. Geoffrey of Auxerre reports that Bernard made a final effort to write a short letter of thanks to Arnold, mentioning his inability to eat or sleep and signing it in his own hand; that final letter appears as part of Geoffrey's narrative of Bernard's death in the last book of the *vita* (bk. 5.9–10).¹⁴

Scholars have questioned the authenticity of this final letter, but to me their arguments seem inadequate.¹⁵ Even if Arnold was not very close to Bernard, he was certainly friendly with many of the friends of Clairvaux. If the letter is authentic, it must have been written in August 1153, within the fortnight before Bernard died, for Geoffrey says Bernard dictated it “a very few days before his sacred passing from us” (bk. 5.9).

Since Arnold was well known to the monks of Clairvaux, Geoffrey asked him to complete the work that William had not been able to finish. Although Arnold initially declined, he later undertook the

¹³ For a recent study of the relationship of William and Bernard, see E. Rozanne Elder, “Bernard and William of Saint Thierry,” in *A Companion to Bernard*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011), 108–32, here 116. Elder points to the joint efforts of the two men in encouraging monastic reform and to William's initiative in drawing Bernard into the pursuit of Abelard for heresy (119–22).

¹⁴ Bernard, Ep 310 (SBOp 8:230; *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James [London: Burns and Oates, 1953], #469, p. 521).

¹⁵ For challenges to the letter, see, e.g., Richard Upsher Smith, “Arnold of Bonneval, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bernard's Epistle 310,” *Analecta* 49 (1993): 273–318; and Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 104–8.

work, tracing Bernard's life from the time of the papal schism, which began in 1130, until about 1148.

Geoffrey of Auxerre, the author of the last three books of the *Vita prima*, probably also initiated the entire work. He must have entered Clairvaux soon after 1140, but before that he had been a student in Paris under Peter Abelard, studying theology. He could have had a brilliant career in the church, but when Bernard preached to the clerics of Paris in what became his *On Conversion to Clerics*, Geoffrey was so overcome by Bernard's words that he changed his whole way of life and became a monk of Clairvaux.¹⁶ Bernard soon made the young monk his traveling companion and secretary; in that role, Geoffrey began in 1145–1147 to record his observations of Bernard's activities, especially his miracles, with the aim of writing a life of Bernard.

When Geoffrey revised the finished five-book work to meet the new papal requirements for canonization, his alterations apparently offended some members of the Order who had helped to shape the first version in its final form. Although in 1162 the monks of Clairvaux elected him abbot, the fourth successor to Saint Bernard, in 1165 he was forced to resign, partly because of his editorial work on the *Vita prima*.¹⁷

THE ROLE OF THE *FRAGMENTA GAUFRIDI* IN THE *FIRST LIFE OF SAINT BERNARD*

The *Fragmenta Gaufridi* are the most ancient biographical witness to Saint Bernard. Two editions appeared in 2011, both based on the manuscript at the Cistercian monastery of Tamié. Christine Vande Veire first prepared a critical edition of the text, collating the Tamié manuscript with two other manuscripts copied from it and with

¹⁶ *Ad Clericos ad Conversione* (SBOp 4:69–116); on Geoffrey's conversion, see Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 94–95.

¹⁷ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 49–50.

various printed editions. A little later Fr. Raffaele Fassetta, OCSO, a monk of Tamié, again edited the work.¹⁸

The Tamié manuscript of the *Fragmenta* was originally at Clairvaux. After being lost for some time during the French Revolution, it came to the monastery of Orval and then eventually to Tamié. The manuscript has two parts. The first part, which the editors title *Fragmenta* II, contains five short passages relating to the childhood of Bernard, to his father, Tescelin, and to his mother, Aleth, here incorrectly called Elizabeth. The second, much longer, part (known as *Fragmenta* I) consists of sixty passages, again relating the childhood of Bernard from his birth in 1090 up to his encounter with the heretics of Toulouse and his healing of a hysterical woman in 1145.

Geoffrey of Auxerre has for many years been recognized as the author of the second part of the *Fragmenta*.¹⁹ He wrote his longer portion of the *Fragmenta* during his years as Bernard's secretary, taking notes on the events he witnessed with the purpose of later writing a full account of Bernard's life. The author of the shorter part is more difficult to determine. Both Vande Veire and Fassetta follow Ferruccio Gastaldelli, who in 1989 persuasively conjectured that the author was Raynaud, another monk of Clairvaux.²⁰ After entering Clairvaux in 1117, in 1121 Raynaud was sent by Bernard to become abbot of Foigny. In 1131, however, he left Foigny and returned to

¹⁸ *Fragmenta Gavfridi*, ed. Christine Vande Veire, in *Vita Prima Sancti Bernardi Claraevallis Abbatis*, ed. Paul Verdeyen (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), 235–307; see also Geoffroy d'Auxerre, *Notes sur la vie et les miracles de saint Bernard; Fragmenta I, [Précédé de] Fragmenta II* by Raynaud de Foigny, ed. and trans. Raffaele Fassetta, SCh 548 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2011). Vande Veire places the longer portion before the shorter to reflect the chronological order of the two portions and so labels them *Fragmenta* I and II (see *Fragmenta* 254–55 and 254n41). Fassetta agrees with Vande Veire in numbering the longer portion as *Fragmenta* I and the shorter as *Fragmenta* II, but he begins his edition with *Fragmenta* II.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the origins, purpose, and dating of the *Fragmenta*, see Vande Veire, *Fragm.*, 254–61; and Ferruccio Gastaldelli, “La più antiche testimonianze biografiche su San Bernardo. Studio storico-critico sui *Fragmenta* Gaufridi,” *Analecta* 45 (1989): 3–80; reprinted in Ferruccio Gastaldelli, *Studi su San Bernardo e Goffredo di Auxerre*, Millennio Medievale, 30; Reprint, 3 (Florence: Sismel. Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001), 43–127. See also Bredero, “Études,” 218–19.

²⁰ Ferruccio Gastaldelli, “La più antiche testimonianze.”

Clairvaux, serving Bernard as secretary until replaced by Geoffrey. It seems likely that Geoffrey then sent both parts of the *Fragmenta* to William of Saint-Thierry as a basis for the life of Bernard.

William certainly relied extensively on the *Fragmenta* in book 1 of the *Vita prima*, using in his narrative all the earlier part by Raynaud and just over half of the second part—sections 1–39. But as a highly skilled author, he wove these materials on Bernard’s life into an original narrative, combining the sources he had at hand with his own reminiscences of close friendship with Bernard, gathered during the time the two of them had lived together in the little hut on the grounds of Clairvaux, where Bernard had been sent to recover from a severe illness. William thus rewrote the narrative in his own words, making hardly any explicit reference to the words in the *Fragmenta*. In writing book 4, Geoffrey also used the *Fragmenta* extensively, but, unlike William, he often repeated the words verbatim, expanding the story while incorporating his own earlier notes from the *Fragmenta*.

Unlike William and Geoffrey, Arnold of Bonneval appears to have worked almost entirely without reference to the *Fragmenta*, including only two episodes found there, Bernard’s encounter with Peter of Pisa and the death of Peter Leonis—and perhaps he takes even those from another source.²¹ In fact I can find only one sentence taken in part from *Fragm* I.39 about the death of Peter Leonis: “For *this foolish pontiff*, the heir to Peter Leonis, came to the man of God in secret, and he, Bernard, *brought him to the feet of the lord Innocent* after he had rid himself of *the insignia that he had usurped*” (*et ipse ridiculus pontifex . . . usurpatis insignibus . . . ad domini Innocentii pedes adduxit*) (VP 2.47).²² The absence from this book of other quotations from the *Fragmenta* points to Arnold’s use of other sources.

²¹ Bredero suggests that Arnold relied on Raynaud de Foigny for his discussion of Bernard’s 1136 visit to Milan and used information about the papal schism received from Arnulf of Séez, who had been the archdeacon of Bishop Geoffrey de Lèves of Chartres, and probably additional material from a source at Clairvaux, perhaps Geoffrey d’Auxerre himself (see Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 114–15).

²² In the translation, phrases taken directly from the *Fragmenta* are italicized (*Fragm* I.39: *ipse ridiculus pontifex temerariae usurpata insignia ponens, cum omnibus fautoribus suis procidens* [sic] *ad pedes domini Innocentii papae*).

THE WORK

The *Vita prima* contains the story of Saint Bernard's life from his mother's dream about him before he was born in 1090 until his death at Clairvaux at the age of 63 in 1153; it also includes a few events from just after his death. To that extent it can be understood as what Thomas Heffernan calls a sacred biography.²³ The events it relates appear chosen and presented to advance Bernard's canonization. Michael Casey, discussing the importance of the biographer's recognizing the work as hagiography, comments on what that genre means for its portrayal of Bernard:

The fundamental assertion of the *Vita prima* is that Bernard of Clairvaux was a holy man. The single most important fact which this work mediates is that some of his contemporaries thought sufficiently highly of him to present his career from this perspective. . . . What is certain is that the *Vita prima* is not principally concerned with conserving objective data for the use of future historians. Facts it certainly contains, but they are elaborated selectively. There is a case to present; if suitable facts are available they are exploited. If not they can be expanded or glossed; incidents can be leaned on to yield a favorable interpretation. Where cooperative events are lacking, legends may be used.²⁴

The writers were men of their time, accepting the religious traditions of the period and the teaching of the church while it was undergoing profound changes such as the rise of scholasticism, which became dominant in the following century. Their pens were tipped

²³ Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); see also Bredero, "The Canonization of Saint Bernard," 80–83.

²⁴ Michael Casey, "Towards a Methodology for the *Vita prima*: Translating the First Life into Biography," in Bernardus Magister: *Papers Presented at the Nonacentenary Celebration of the Birth of Bernard of Clairvaux, Kalamazoo, Michigan*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt, CS 135 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, and Cîteaux, 1992), 55–70, here 57.

with fine Latin, with rhetoric playing a prominent part under the influence of classical writers such as Virgil, Cicero, and Seneca. To this tradition was added Bernard's own genius for poetic phrases and ability to invest almost every sentence with an apt scriptural quotation. Bernard was also gifted with great charm, combined with a deep sense of humility that captivated everyone he met. This charm, this charisma, manifested itself especially when as a young man he decided to exercise his zeal for the religious life within his own family and then reached out toward a widening group of social peers and church prelates and even, after the schism of 1130, the highest dignitaries in the church, including archbishops, cardinals, and the supreme pontiff.

All these traits are apparent in Bernard's better-known books, such as *On Loving God* or his most influential work, the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. But for an understanding of how they began and developed, it is necessary to read the *Vita prima* and to read it with discretion. It is not a totally objective narrative, not history as we know it today. The three writers tend, for example, to underplay the weaknesses of their hero. Undoubtedly Bernard had weaknesses, yet this compelling *Life* conveys not only his force of character and spiritual power but the deep admiration and affection of those who knew him well.

BOOK 1

William of Saint-Thierry's book, which begins the *Vita prima*, introduces Bernard as a man of extraordinary charisma who gradually impressed and stimulated everyone with whom he came into contact. William also shows Bernard as the fulfillment of prophecy, becoming as an adult the gifted preacher foreseen in his mother's dream of him as a barking dog. During his life, indeed, the numbers of those he influenced rapidly multiplied, many of them becoming some of the most powerful figures of their age.

William portrays the young Bernard as precocious, exceeding all his siblings in his natural genius, progress in studies, and prodigious memory, as seen in his ability to memorize the Scriptures. William reports that as a young man Bernard spoke to the members of his

family with words of fire, predicting their future and drawing them with him into Cîteaux, the home of the most severe monastic life of the time. There was apparently no resisting his impassioned, powerful overtures. Every member of the family fell under his spell, even though at first they opposed him. So, for example, William tells of Bernard's brother Gerard, who mocked him for his behavior. But when one of Bernard's prophecies came true, Gerard dared not oppose Bernard any longer; willingly though unwillingly he joined the group, eventually becoming one of Bernard's most fervent disciples.

This first book thus shows Bernard as a man of forceful enthusiasm who drew his friends and family into a circle of monks. In 1113, Bernard entered Cîteaux; such was his compelling energy that two years later his abbot, Stephen Harding, sent him and his family members who had joined him at Cîteaux to found its third daughter house, Clairvaux.²⁵ There, by his own example, Bernard taught the young community to live in austerity and poverty, blazing a trail that drew noblemen and peasants alike to become disciples, living the most austere life of any age.

Stories of Bernard's healing both members of his own family and strangers he met on his travels became so well known that Bernard's reputation as a miracle worker quickly spread, as William conveys in lyrical prose. Bernard's preaching was also so powerful and his faith so firmly rooted that William described his work, in the language of 1 Corinthians 13:2, as equivalent to "moving mountains," with such a powerful effect that "what this little-known and ailing man, at death's door and strong only in speech, did in this life was a greater miracle than all his other miracles" (bk. 1.61). Gradually men came to Clairvaux to partake of its spiritual riches, and within a short space of time it became a large community with many members. As a result, after a while it became necessary for Clairvaux to found other monasteries, so that Bernard's influence began to spread to many places in France and beyond.²⁶

²⁵ For a discussion of the relationship between Stephen and Bernard, see Joël Regnard, "Saint Bernard and the New Monastery," *CSQ* 49, no. 4 (2014): 431–53.

²⁶ Louis Lekai credits the quick Cistercian expansion in the twelfth century to Bernard's "dynamic character and energy"; he counts 331 Cistercian houses

William shows that influence as not limited to monks and monasteries, however. When in 1115, as the new abbot of the small unknown monastery of Clairvaux, Bernard needed to be ordained to the priesthood, he approached the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, William of Champeaux. Almost immediately Bishop William saw the young abbot as holding the key to the future of the church and became closely knit with him in a deep spiritual friendship. Soon afterward, William of Saint-Thierry himself met Bernard; so great became their friendship that Bernard told William the details of his early life and many other things that William included in the *Vita prima*.

William's book thus contains a number of significant stories about Bernard's life, including the deathbed repentance of Lord Josbert, Bernard's famous letter to his cousin Robert, written in pouring rain but undampened, the onslaught of the legendary flies of Foigny, Bernard's determination to guard his chastity against repeated onslaught, and his recurring health problems.²⁷ These stories witness to Bernard's growing influence on his contemporaries, the growth of his authority, and the magnetism of his person and his words.

This book also includes stories of some of William's own encounters with Bernard, giving more personal insight into William himself than does any other surviving work. He tells, for example, of his first visit to the ailing Bernard, his shock at the circumstances in which Bernard was housed, and his own longing to remain there with Bernard. He also writes of his later extended stay at Clairvaux as an invited guest of Bernard when both were sick and isolated from the community. On this occasion, William relates, Bernard supervised William's own slow recovery to health, even attempting to govern William's dietary decisions.

existing across Europe in 1151 and estimates a total population of over 11,600 monks. See *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977), 34, 44.

²⁷ On the flies of Foigny, see Anselme Dimier, "Le miracle des mouches de Foigny," *Cîteaux* 8 (1957): 57–62. On Bernard's poor health, see E. Rozanne Elder, "Making Virtues of Vexing Habits," in *Studiosorum Speculum: Studies in Honor of Louis J. Lekai, O. Cist.*, ed. Francis Swietek and John R. Sommerfeldt, CS 141 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1993), 75–94.

The book William wrote looks deeply into the heart of Bernard, describing in simple yet elegant words the humility, charity, and gentleness of this great man and superb orator. This book is thus imbued with William's enthusiasm for his friend and spiritual guide. It is no wonder that this first portion of the *Vita prima*, ablaze with William's admiration for Bernard, is the most personal portion of the work. It focuses much more on Bernard the man, the monk, and the abbot than on Bernard the public figure; it contains some miracles but mostly tells the human stories that are still best known and loved about the young Bernard, who so shaped William's own life and thought.

BOOK 2

After William died, leaving his work unfinished, Arnold of Bonneval wrote a second book. While the Benedictine Arnold was apparently also a friend of Bernard's, at least according to Bernard's Epistle 310, he was older and less concerned with the force of Bernard's individual personality than William had been. Instead, he focused on Bernard's role in resolving the papal schism, which divided the church in the West between two popes, both claiming supreme power and authority and both supported by a powerful clique. Innocent II was the wiser but more diffident, while Peter Leonis—Anacletus II—was much more powerful, much more overbearing; it was up to the bishops of Europe to choose which to accept as the supreme pontiff. Because Anacletus was dangerously powerful in Rome, Innocent sailed north to Pisa, calling a council of bishops to meet in Étampes to discuss the crisis.

When the king of France, Louis VI (r. 1108–1137), summoned Bernard to the council, the bishops agreed that the matter should be put to him to resolve—that the business of God should be decided by the servant of God. Bernard reluctantly undertook the task and, after some inquiries, named Innocent pope. This decision placed Bernard at the center of church politics, quickly establishing him as the most influential person of the twelfth century. It was, I suppose, unprecedented in the checkered history of the papacy that

an abbot, not even a prelate in the church, should choose the pope, yet as Arnold tells it, such was the charisma of Bernard that he did it and did it very well.

Arnold's deep interest in the events of the papal conflict sometimes caused him to digress from his overview of Bernard's life and public role. So although Arnold describes the disruption caused by an apparently mentally disturbed monk during Innocent's visit to Clairvaux and Bernard's healing of the man, he at once turns to Innocent's long journey back to Rome and his forcing his way into the Lateran Palace, where he was greeted by many of the Roman nobility and people. He goes on to explain that because of the still too-powerful forces of Anacletus, Innocent then once again left Rome and set up court at Pisa. From there he called on Bernard to go to Milan to quell the schism started by Archbishop Anselm, a follower of Anacletus.

At this point, though, Arnold remembers his purpose, turning once again to Bernard, who, accompanied by two cardinals, Guy and Matthew, crossed the Apennines and entered Milan. The enthusiasm among the Milanese for his coming was so great that as he approached, still seven miles away, they went out in large numbers to greet him: "Those going before the abbot and those following cheered him with mighty acclamations of joy, and . . . he was for a long time delayed by the dense crowd" (bk. 2.9). The story concludes with peace restored to the city through Bernard's sanctity.

At this point, instead of continuing with the theme of Bernard's social and political authority, Arnold for a while considers Bernard's spiritual power, inserting three miracles of healing that show both Bernard's authority over those possessed by the devil and his popularity among ordinary people, popularity that preceded him as far as Milan and was soon recognized throughout France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and England. But Arnold also notes Bernard's anxiety about the effect of his charisma and the popular confidence in his power to heal:

The people's faith would not allow the least hesitation in the man of God, and, because of his impressive humility, he did not presume to put to the test these unaccustomed requests or

to be embarrassed when the people made them. If he obstinately resisted the loving-charity of those asking, . . . he would seem to offend God, and if his own faith might dissent from the faith of the people, he would be seen by his diffidence to cast a shadow over God's omnipotence. He burned within himself over this, and although he thought it necessary to do these signs not so much for the faithful as for the unbelievers, he committed his bold efforts to the Holy Spirit and, relying on prayer, putting his trust in the power coming from heaven, with the spirit of fortitude he rebuked Satan, who fled from him. (bk. 2.9)

Arnold even suggests Bernard to be a close equivalent to Jesus, saying that the people's veneration "went beyond what was due to a mortal man" (bk. 2.14) and that "everywhere people were saying that *a great prophet has arisen who is mighty in deed and in word*" (bk. 2.15; Luke 7:16; 24:19). Arnold's enthusiasm for Bernard's popularity knows no bounds: "From the castles nearby, from the villages and cities, the multitudes flocked to Milan to follow the holy man, both strangers and citizens. They sought his blessings, they listened to his words, they watched his wonderful works, and they delighted beyond belief in his teaching and miracles" (bk. 2.15).

Arnold's narrative here again turns back from this public acclaim, for a time showing Bernard as an abbot and a man of simplicity and personal restraint. For as soon as Bernard returned to Clairvaux from this journey, he found that his monks were waiting to confront him with a problem that he had not foreseen, one a direct result of his public role: the original monastery had already become too small to house the ever-growing number of recruits gained by his preaching and charisma. At first he was reluctant to do anything to replace the original buildings, because the community had so recently spent a considerable amount of money and effort on the first enterprise; he voiced his fear that "the men of the world" would judge the community of being either "fickle and changeable" or wealthy if they so soon undertook to build a larger monastery (bk. 2.29). But he was quickly forced to change his mind at the urgent request of the seniors, who pointed out the desperate need of a more extensive place. Thus a new building project got underway; it was

soon achieved with the generous support of many noble lords and the vigorous work of the young monks and lay brothers. Clairvaux rapidly arose to completion in the place where it now stands.

After this episode, however, Arnold shows Bernard as once again turning away from his monastic obligations to resume his role as a public figure. In 1137, Roger, the king of Sicily, a follower of Anacletus, called a council and instructed Cardinal Peter of Pisa, a man of remarkable eloquence and learned in canon law, to defend the cause of the antipope. Roger was convinced that Cardinal Peter would easily obliterate all opposition by his forceful rhetoric. Indeed, he nearly did so before Bernard's spirited refutation: "But the man of God, understanding the matter to be not one of words but of the power of the kingdom of God, spoke"—and at length proclaimed the disaster that would befall the church and the world if the schism did not quickly come to an end (bk. 2.45). Bernard's reply to the cardinal went down in history as one of the most remarkable of his glorious career.

After the end of the papal schism, the death of Anacletus in 1138, and the restoration of peace, Arnold enlarges his lens to subsequent events, sketching briefly the rapid spread of the Cistercian Order and the European bishops who emerged from the Order, including the election of Eugenius III in 1145, a former monk of Clairvaux and the first Cistercian pope. After briefly writing of Bernard as "a man with a pure heart and mind" (bk. 2.51), he introduces another outbreak of hostility, now between Count Theobald of Blois and the king of France, now Louis VII, with Bernard resolving it through his intervention, "as a solicitous mediator, the holy abbot." So Arnold concludes his book, insisting that the efficacy of Bernard as a public figure throughout those long years had resulted from his holiness as a monk and abbot. His book thus ends with the resumption of "tranquility and the desired serenity of peace," achieved by Bernard (bk. 2.55).

BOOK 3

Now Geoffrey, Bernard's secretary, takes up the story in a book considerably shorter than the two previous ones. It turns somewhat sharply from Bernard's public role to a focus on "the way of life

and the teaching of this blessed father” (bk. 3.Prol). After praising Bernard’s spiritual stature, Geoffrey describes his physical appearance, his clothing, and his bearing at table, marked by austere discipline at meals. This book contains so much detail that one can visualize Bernard at home in his monastery with his monks. Even when away from Clairvaux, Geoffrey shows, Bernard was above all a monk and a man of devotion. To emphasize his intensity of interior meditation even while traveling, Geoffrey inserts Bernard’s visit to Hugh of Grenoble and the Carthusians. He draws a picture of the man he admires, a holy man, kind and gentle, a man of deep recollection, one not given to the frivolities of ordinary men and women, one who loved his monastery and his monks and who, therefore, despite his greatness in the eyes of the world, declined every effort to make him accept the dignities of ecclesiastical preferment.²⁸

When Geoffrey does turn in this book to Bernard’s public life, he concentrates not on Bernard’s role in the papal schism and his work to settle regional and ecclesiastical crises, but on the Second Crusade, Bernard’s opposition to Peter Abelard, and his encounter with Gilbert de la Porrée. Geoffrey presents Bernard’s involvement in the Second Crusade as resulting directly from papal pressure, including Pope Eugenius’s calling on Bernard to preach the crusade. At first reluctant to do so but eventually moved, says Geoffrey, by “a general edict from the supreme pontiff” (bk. 3.9), Bernard forfeited his own opinion and obeyed the pope, with enormous success. As Henri Daniel-Rops writes, “His burning words spoken at Vézelay on Easter Sunday, 1146, kindled a flame that seemed at first to outshine the fervour of Clermont fifty years before.”²⁹ Geoffrey praises Bernard’s involvement and quotes his powerful words of encouragement, but it is clear that Bernard was unwise to get involved in something he

²⁸ Casey writes, “The Bernard we learn about from the *First Life* is one who conforms to Geoffrey’s vision. Bernard’s sanctity is presented according to the way in which Geoffrey perceived holiness. . . . Geoffrey’s Bernard is a serious man without much in the way of lightheartedness or spontaneity” (Casey, “Towards a Methodology,” 61).

²⁹ Henri Daniel-Rops, *Cathedral and Crusade*, trans. John Warrington (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1957), 453.

was powerless to influence, as Geoffrey underlines by his effort to explain Bernard's participation. The intrigues and deceits among the leaders of the crusade ended in disaster not only for the church but also for Bernard's reputation.

Geoffrey also somewhat briefly surveys Bernard's opposition to Peter Abelard, which resulted in Abelard's condemnation at the Council of Sens in 1141.³⁰ Geoffrey refers to Abelard, his own former master, as "a famous and celebrated teacher" but one whose teaching was "full of serious blasphemies" (bk. 3.13). Abelard was an astute thinker, a champion of reason, a man who, as he wrote in his *Historia Calamitatum*, "preferred the weapons of dialectic to all the other teaching of philosophy" and who based his teaching on question, argument, and conclusion.³¹ In this he was easily the greatest master of his time, preparing the way for Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas in the following century.

Geoffrey's judgment of Abelard's teaching as blasphemous reflects his adherence to Bernard's views, prompted by William of Saint-Thierry's warnings of dangerous teachings in Abelard's writings. William was particularly disturbed by the fact that Abelard's lectures were sowing widespread skepticism among the students of Europe.³² As Geoffrey reports, the matter came to a head at the Council of Sens, where Bernard argued against Abelard's theological errors, despite an original reluctance to attend."³³ As a result, the council condemned Abelard. Though Geoffrey commends Bernard for his

³⁰ Although the council has traditionally been dated to 1140, Constant J. Mews has established the correct date as 1141, in "The Council of Sens (1141): Abelard, Bernard, and the Fear of Social Upheaval," *Speculum* 77, no. 2 (2002): 342–82.

³¹ Abelard, "Historia Calamitatum," in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice, rev. Michael Clanchy (1974; rev., London: Penguin Books, 2003), 1–43, here 3.

³² Sister Edmée [Kingsmill], "Bernard and Abelard," in *The Influence of Saint Bernard*, ed. Benedicta Ward, Fairacres Publication 60 (Oxford: SLG Press, 1976), 89–134.

³³ Mews suggests that the unknown figures who persuaded Bernard to attend and speak against Abelard may have been advisers to King Louis VII, such as Suger of Saint Denis and Joscelin of Soissons, as well perhaps as Samson, archbishop of Reims ("Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Abelard," in *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire [Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2011], 133–68, here 167).

role in bringing about the condemnation, Sr. Edmée Kingsmill rightly notes the cost to Bernard's reputation: "In most modern studies Bernard is presented (if more implicitly than explicitly) as the villain of the piece whose reactionary zeal cut down a veritable Socrates."³⁴

Constant J. Mews argues, however, that the issue went beyond both theology and philosophy, that while William and Bernard responded explicitly to what they saw as theological error in Abelard's teaching, the operative cause of their response was fear that Abelard's increasing influence among former supporters of the schismatic Pope Anacletus II might lead to a new schism within the church: "If sympathizers of Anacletus II were sympathizing with Abelard in questioning the full omnipotence of the Trinity, then the authority of the Church and message of Christ himself could be challenged."³⁵

Geoffrey also quickly summarizes a similar situation, Bernard's encounter with Gilbert de la Porrée in 1148 at the Council of Reims. Gilbert was one of the most erudite (and apparently frequently incomprehensible) men of his day. According to Otto of Freising, "what he meant was never clear to childlike minds, scarcely even to men of education and learning."³⁶ He was brought before the council after two of his archdeacons accused his teaching on the Trinity to Pope Eugenius III as heretical. After a drawn-out discussion that wearied even the pope, Gilbert submitted to the will of the council, but only, he said, because his position might cause scandal to the less-learned faithful, who could hardly be expected to understand the subtleties of his arguments. He thereafter maintained that his own orthodoxy should be sufficiently irreproachable in the eyes of men who knew how to reason philosophically.³⁷

³⁴ [Kingsmill], "Bernard and Abelard," 90.

³⁵ Mews, "Bernard of Clairvaux," 160–62, here 161.

³⁶ Otto of Freising, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa* 1.lii (l), trans. Charles C. Mierow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 88.

³⁷ For recent studies of Gilbert, see Karen Bollermann and Cary J. Nederman, "Standing in Abelard's Shadow: Gilbert of Poitiers, the 1148 Council of Rheims, and the Politics of Ideas," in *Religion, Power, and Resistance from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Centuries: Playing the Heresy Card*, ed. Karen Bollermann, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Cary J. Nederman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 13–36;

Toward the end of this book, Geoffrey returns to Bernard's private life, mourning with Bernard over the loss of his brother Gerard in 1138 and telling how Bernard overflowed with grief and sadness, bared his heart before his brethren, and, overcome with tears and anguish, lamented over Gerard, letting all the world grieve with him in his poignant Sermon 26 on the Song of Songs.³⁸ Geoffrey goes on to speak of his own experience as companion and amanuensis, at Bernard's side as he traveled throughout Europe. For those wishing to know Bernard more deeply, Geoffrey appends a list of Bernard's writings to emphasize his thought and spiritual gifts (bk. 3.29). Finally, Geoffrey ends the book with a heartfelt paean of praise for the man of God, whom he calls "a beautiful olive, a fruitful vine, . . . a solid vessel" (bk. 3.32).

BOOK 4

In Book 4 the mood changes. Here, Geoffrey relates the miraculous events he and others have witnessed, now clearly preparing for Bernard to be recognized as a miracle worker and saint. In fact, Christopher Holdsworth calls attention to one case in which Geoffrey's agenda is particularly clear. When mentioning Pope Eugenius's presence at the 1147 Cistercian general chapter, Geoffrey neither lingers on Eugenius's extraordinary presence—he was the first pope ever to attend a chapter—nor mentions the business transacted there, despite the fact that at that momentous chapter the abbots incorporated the Savigniac and Obazine Orders into the Cistercian Order, in the filiation of Clairvaux. As Holdsworth points out, Geoffrey's goal here was distinct from the abbots' activities at that chapter,

Clare Monagle, "The Trial of Ideas: Two Tellings of the Trial of Gilbert of Poitiers," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 35 (2004): 113–29.

³⁸ Bernard, *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum* 26.2–27.1 (SBOp 2:311–13; *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh, CF 7 [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976], 60–74).

his concern being rather to report something that happened on the evening of the day that the Chapter ended: Bernard's healing of a deaf child. This silence about something that seems to us so important may seem strange, until we recall two things: that Geoffrey's overarching intention was to show Bernard as a man of God, not to give a consecutive account of his life, and that if Geoffrey had said something about the affiliation of Savigny, it could have led him on to mention the problems that immediately followed it, . . . events that might not have redounded to Bernard's reputation.³⁹

Indeed, Geoffrey devotes this book to Bernard's role as a man of spiritual gifts, a healer. In it he records nearly two hundred fifty such events, though some of them may also appear elsewhere in the *vita*. Geoffrey expected Bernard's miracles to be attributed to God, effected through the agency of Saint Bernard. His contemporaries would for the most part have taken them in the same sense, though toward the end of Bernard's life there was probably a growing tendency to belittle his holiness and dismiss some of the miracles.

Geoffrey usually groups Bernard's miraculous events under various headings rather than presenting them in chronological order. These groups alternate between gifts that Bernard exercised in proximity to the recipients and those done from a distance, echoing the movement of the *vita* as a whole between Bernard's life at home, as a monk and abbot, and his public journeys and engagement in public crises.

The first and most important group of these events recounts Bernard's spiritual gifts, especially his gift of spiritual predictions. Twelve predictions include several in which Bernard declares that people he has just met—among them Henry, the brother of the king of France, and Andrew, a member of Henry's entourage—will soon become monks of Clairvaux. Coming almost immediately true in Geoffrey's telling, these predictions demonstrate Bernard's prophetic powers and link him with the biblical prophets. Geoffrey narrates these predictions near the

³⁹ Christopher Holdsworth, "The Affiliation of Savigny," in *Truth as Gift: Studies in Medieval Cistercian History in Honor of John R. Sommerfeldt*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, et al., CS 204 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004), 43–88, here 49.

beginning of the book, with no explicit time sequence. Here, Bernard appears as a thaumaturge, a man always acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This inspiration underlies all the other events that Geoffrey narrates.⁴⁰

A second spiritual gift is bilocation, which Geoffrey shows six times at the beginning of book 4, when Bernard, though physically absent, does a marvelous work as if he were present. So, for example, Gerard, the abbot of Mores, sees him circulating among the monks during Vigils while he was actually sick in his room: “At the night hour,” Bernard tells Gerard, “I was afflicted with serious physical problems, but even though I was not present in my body, I was there in spirit” (bk. 4.4).

One case in this book demonstrates Bernard’s power over the devil, seen in his healing of a deranged person.⁴¹ A man whom Geoffrey describes as troubled by a demon is healed when Abbot Pons comes into the man’s cell with a stole previously worn by Bernard; the demon departs, shouting, “I can remain here no longer!” (bk 4.7). Geoffrey calls particular attention to Bernard’s humility in hearing of this event, laughing at those who expressed astonishment at the event.

These stories precede a group of seven or more events involving substances blessed by Bernard and working their power at some distance from him. Geoffrey introduces this group with a story about a woman in the territory of Auxerre who experiences such a lengthy labor that she becomes too weak to deliver the child. When Bernard hears of her agony he sends her a gift of blessed water; as soon as she tastes it, she gives birth to a son (bk. 4.23). Numerous stories of blessed bread follow: (1) a great number of people asked for blessed bread from the man of God; (2) a knight in the region of Meaux is healed by swallowing a piece of bread blessed by Bernard; (3) a desperately wounded young man is healed when bread blessed by

⁴⁰ See André Picard and Pierre Boglioni, “Miracle et Thaumaturgie dans la vie de Saint Bernard,” in *Vie et légendes de Saint Bernard de Clairvaux. Création, diffusion, réception (XII–XX^e Siècles)*, *Actes des Rencontres de Dijon, 7–8 juin 1991*, ed. Patrick Arabeyre, et al. (Brecht and Cîteaux: *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses*, 1993), 36–59.

⁴¹ A large number of such events also appear in the earlier books.

Bernard is put in his mouth; (4) several loaves remain incorrupt for seven years or more; (5) Gerard and Henry, two Cistercian abbots in Sweden, witness to bread's being incorrupt eleven years after being blessed; (6) others similarly witness to such incorruption; (7) Bernard gently rebukes his great admirer, Archbishop Eskil of Denmark, for double-cooking blessed bread, and Eskil later finds that new bread Bernard blesses and gives him is preserved for three or more years (bk. 4.23–24).

Then Geoffrey turns to physical healings, usually associated with the towns or cities that Bernard visited for church matters from 1145 to 1147. Six kinds of healings are included: (a) forty-nine healings of blindness, (b) twenty-seven healings of deaf or deaf and mute persons, (c) sixty healings of crippled or lame persons, (d) eight healings of paralysis, (e) more than fifty instances of “many other healings,” and (f) fifteen special cases. Thus with the other cases already mentioned, in this book Geoffrey reports roughly two hundred thirty-six miracles performed by Bernard, with notable detail included in some cases, suggesting that Geoffrey himself witnessed them or heard about them from reliable witnesses.

BOOK 5

As Book 4 resonates with Geoffrey's admiration for Bernard's miraculous power, Book 5 is permeated with the sadness of Bernard's death. In this book Geoffrey loses his friend, Clairvaux and its monks lose their abbot, and the church loses its greatest son of the twelfth century. Geoffrey here shows the monks of Clairvaux grieving with an intensity found in no other context in the *Vita prima*: all understand Bernard, so dominant in the history of the time, to be irreplaceable.

In 1153, after being abbot of the monastery for thirty-eight years, Bernard was dying. It seems that his community had been prepared for his death since the beginning of the year, when he, recognizing its approach, began increasingly to withdraw from life. In a letter to his Uncle Andrew during this period, he expressed his awareness that little time remained to him. But as he lingered, on the verge of death, the metropolitan of Metz, Archbishop Hillin of Trier, asked

him to intervene in violent events taking place near the city. Amazingly, in response to this request Bernard recovered sufficiently to travel to Metz, over a hundred miles away.

Bernard's behavior here must be recognized as not only remarkable but even somewhat inappropriate. After being away from Clairvaux so often and so long on the business of the church, when he at last returned to Clairvaux, with death approaching, his primary duty was surely to remain with his monks as their abbot. It seems strange that at that point he undertook still another mission, because of the needs of a local church, placing that call above his duty to his own community. But his immediate response to the crisis at Metz reveals a great deal about his character and self-understanding as a servant of the church and a seeker of peace.

The conflict at Metz was between the bishop, Stephen, and Duke Matthew of Lorraine, but the people of the city were caught up in it, with the men of the city having been recently ambushed in a narrow defile of the River Mosel, beneath the height of Froidmont in the direction of Pont-à-Mousson. In this battle on February 28, 1153, more than two thousand men of Metz had perished, some killed by the sword, some by drowning; the city was now preparing to take revenge. In this crisis, Archbishop Hillin begged Bernard to intervene. When Bernard arrived, he found the opposing forces on the banks of the Mosel, with both sides intent on war. After some negotiations, in spite of the aggression on both sides, Bernard predicted that peace would prevail, saying, "It was shown to me in a dream" (bk. 5.4). Eventually, as Geoffrey tells it, through a conference of the leaders on a small island in the Mosel, peace was restored.

By late April or early May, after performing a few miracles at Metz, Bernard was back at Clairvaux. Growing ever more frail, he said to his community, "*These are the words that I spoke* [John 14:10] to you before I fell ill in this winter just past. What you feared has not yet come to us. Summer is near at hand and, believe me, the dissolution of this body" (bk. 5.8). Soon afterward he seems to have become increasingly unaware of what was going on around him. As Geoffrey puts it, "He withdrew his affections and the bonds of his sacred desires, which he had previously showed with such careful attention" (bk. 5.8). So when Bishop Geoffrey of Langres showed up to deal

with him and questioned his lack of interest in the urgent matters he raised, Bernard sent him away, saying in the words of Saint John's sacerdotal prayer, "I am not of this world" (John 17:16; bk. 5.8).

On August 20, at almost the third hour of the day—about 9:00 a.m.—Bernard died. In the passage about his death, Geoffrey links him to three groups of people, the visiting prelates who had heard that death was near, the monks chanting the office of Tierce, and the brothers keeping vigil at his side. With this movement Geoffrey moves closer and closer to Bernard's final moment, from the gathering of those from outside the monastery, to the monastic choir singing Tierce, and finally to "those of his sons standing by close to him lamenting with grief and copious tears" (bk. 5.13). So he slowly narrows the lens from those in the outer world who learned the news of Bernard's death and mourned his departure, to the members of the community gathered in prayer, and finally to those few who experienced his last moments with him, weeping at its piercing reality.

Geoffrey concludes his story of Bernard's death with a song of praise for the life of the holy man:

Happy that soul, so uplifted by the high privileges of his merits,
Where the desires of his lowly sons follow him,
Where the sacred desires of the heavenly beings drew him.

Happy and truly serene is that day for him
On which the resplendent midday, Christ, blazed out—
A day long awaited by him all the days of his life
With such longing, sought with sighs,
Frequented in his meditations,
Foreshadowed in his prayers.

Happy the transition from labor to rest,
From waiting till gaining the prize,
from agony to victory, from death to life,
From this world to the Father. (bk. 5.13)

Geoffrey goes on to describe what happened after Bernard died, as the community carried his body, clothed in priestly vestments, to the church, where many came to mourn over him. Among them were many women, but, barred from entering the church by Cistercian

practice, they remained outside. Bernard lay in state for two days while the vast concourse of people brought a variety of objects to touch to his body as souvenirs and sacred relics. So great was the crush of people and anxiety about its becoming even greater at the time of the burial that the monks buried Bernard somewhat earlier than they had planned, early in the morning two days later, on August 22, before the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Geoffrey concludes his account with stories he has heard about Bernard's appearances after his death, so emphasizing his rebirth into eternal life. One of those stories, concerning William of Montpellier, appears only in Recension B. In it Bernard appears to William and takes him to a high mountain. There, William composes a eulogy, quoting many verses of Scripture in praise of Bernard's departure from this world (bk. 5.22).

CONCLUSION

As the work of three authors who knew Bernard in different ways and focused on different aspects of his life, the *Vita prima* lacks both a coherent narrative and a single perspective. At the same time, it has a generally chronological structure, beginning before his birth and ending with his death and burial. Nonetheless, Geoffrey's initiation of the project, his provision of the *Fragmenta* to undergird the text, and especially his revisions to Recension B, all aimed at achieving Bernard's canonization, culminated in a powerful book that finally was not only concerned with that canonization but also has introduced Bernard's life and its meaning to generations of readers and hearers.

Bernard was in his own eyes a simple and humble servant of God, but his influence in his own time had no bounds, extending not only to popes, bishops, and secular aristocrats, both men and women, but also to the common people, who everywhere acclaimed him. Yet in the final analysis, Bernard's influence in the centuries since his death has been even more powerful because of his writings. Although they are hardly mentioned in the *Vita prima*, Geoffrey of Auxerre acknowledges them on the final page of Book 4, where he

lists Bernard's main treatises and letters, though excluding many of his sermons, such as those on the liturgical year. So he anticipates the enormous impression that these writings have had on the spiritual lives of so many in the eight and a half centuries since Bernard lived.⁴²

⁴² Bernard's letters, published in SBOp 7–8, reveal his widespread interaction with men and women across Europe, personal connections that are almost invisible in the *Vita prima*.

Abbreviations

- Analecta* *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis* (1945–1965).
- Beginning* *The Great Beginning of Cîteaux: A Narrative of the Beginning of Cîteaux: The Exordium Magnum of Conrad of Eberbach*. Translated by Benedicta Ward and Paul Savage. Edited by E. Rozanne Elder. CF 72. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2011.
- CCCM Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers).
- CF Cistercian Fathers series (Cistercian Publications).
- Cîteaux* *Cîteaux in der Nederlanden* (1950–1958); *Cîteaux: Commentarii Cistercienses* (1959–present).
- CS Cistercian Studies series (Cistercian Publications).
- CSQ *Cistercian Studies* (1966–1990); *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* (1991–present).
- Exordium* *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense sive Narratio de Initio Cisterciensis Ordinis*, ed. Bruno Griesser, CCCM 138 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1994).
- Fragm* *Fragmenta Gaufridi*. Edited by Christine Vande Veire, in *Vita prima Sancti Bernardi Claraevallis Abbatis*, ed. Paul Verdeyen. CCCM 89B. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011. 235–70.
- James *The Letters of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*. Translated by Bruno Scott James. London: Burns Oates, 1953.
- Notes* Geoffrey D’Auxerre. *Notes sur la vie et les miracles de saint Bernard: Fragmenta I. (Précédé de) Fragmenta II*, by Raynaud de Foigny. Edited and translated by Raffaele Fassetta. SCH 548. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2011.
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina. Ed. J.-P. Migne. 221 volumes. Paris, 1844–1864.
- RB The Rule of Saint Benedict.
- SBOp Sancti Bernardi Opera. Edited by Jean Leclercq and H. M. Rochais. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957–1963.

- SCh Sources Chrétiennes. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.
 SSOC Scriptorum S. Ordinis Cisterciensis. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses.
 VP *Vita prima Sancti Bernardi Claraevallis Abbatis*. Edited by Paul Verdeyen. CCCM 89B. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011. 1–233.

WORKS OF SAINT BERNARD

- Apo *Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem*. SBOp 3:61–108; “St Bernard’s Apologia to Abbot William.” Translated by Michael Casey. In *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, 1, Treatises 1*. CF 1. Spencer, MA, and Shannon, Ireland: Cistercian Publications, 1970. 1–69.
- Conv *Ad clericos ad conversione*. SBOp 4:69–116; “On Conversion, a Sermon to Clerics.” Translated by Marie-Bernard Saïd. In Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on Conversion*. CF 25. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981. 1–79.
- Csi *De consideratione*. SBOp 3:379–493; *Five Books on Consideration: Advice to a Pope*. Translated by John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan. Bernard of Clairvaux, vol. 13. CF 37. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976.
- Dil *De diligendo Deo*. SBOp 3:109–54; *On Loving God*. Translated by Robert Walton. CF 13B. 1973; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995.
- Ep(p) Epistola(e). SBOp 7–8; *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*. Translated by Bruno Scott James. Introduction by Beverly Mayne Kienzle. Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1953; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998.
- Gra *De gratia et libero arbitrio*. SBOp 3:155–203; *On Grace and Free Choice*. Translated by Daniel O’Donovan. In Bernard of Clairvaux, *Treatises 3*. CF 19. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977. 3–111.
- Hum *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*. SBOp 3:1–59; *The Steps of Humility and Pride*. Translated by M. Ambrose Conway. In Bernard of Clairvaux, *Treatises 1*. CF 13. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1973. 1–82.
- Laud *De laude novae militiae*. SBOp 3:205–39; *In Praise of the New*

- Knighthood*. Translated by M. Conrad Greenia. In Bernard of Clairvaux, *Treatises 3*. CF 19. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977. 113–67.
- Miss *Homiliae super “Missus est” in Laudibus Virginis Matris*. SBOp 4:3–58; *Magnificat: Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Translated by Marie–Bernard Saïd. CF 18. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979. 1–58.
- Mor *Ep de moribus et officiis episcoporum*. SBOp 7:100–31; *On Baptism and the Office of Bishops*. Translated by Pauline Matarasso. CF 67. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004.
- Par *Parabola*. SBOp 6/2:257–303. *The Parables*. Translated by Michael Casey. In Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Parables and the Sentences*. CF 55. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000. 11–102.
- Pre *De praecepto et dispensatione*. SBOp 3:241–94; “St Bernard’s Book on Precept and Dispensation.” Translated by Conrad Greenia. In *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, 1, Treatises I*. CF 1. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1970. 71–150.
- SC *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*. SBOp 1–2; *Sermons on the Song of Songs 1–4*. Translated by Kilian Walsh and Irene Edmonds. CF 4, 7, 31, 40. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1971–1980.
- Sent *Sententia*. SBOp 6/2:1–256. *The Sentences*. Translated by Francis R. Swietek. In Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Parables & the Sentences*. CF 55. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000. 103–458.
- VMal *Vita Sancti Malachiae*. SBOp 3:295–378; *The Life and Death of Saint Malachy the Irishman*. Trans. Robert T. Meyer. CF 10. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1978.

Editor's Note

I am grateful to Neil Bernstein, Sr. Joanna Dunham, OCSO, Beverly Kienzle, Constant J. Mews, Gregory Proctor, Dom Mark Scott, OCSO, Tyler Sergent, and Lorraine Wochna for assisting me with editorial questions concerning this important text, and to Elana Harnish, Megan Milano, and Nick Riley for assisting with the preparation of the two indices. MD.

THE FIRST LIFE OF BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

BOOK 1

BY WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY

*Here begins the Preface of the Lord William,
the Venerable Abbot of Saint-Thierry,
to the Life of Saint Bernard,
Abbot of Clairvaux.*

I am going to write the life of your servant, which will give honor to your name. This is your gift, O Lord God, his God, just as you willed that through him the renewal of the church in our time has blossomed anew. It now has the former splendor of grace and power that it had in apostolic times. I call on your love now to be my helper; that love I have still to urge me on.

Surely there is no one who has within himself *that breath of life** from your love, however small it may be, and who sees your glory and your honor so clearly and faithfully shining out over this world who would not take up the work as far as he was able. He could make the light inflamed by you but lying hidden to be written down by his pen and made manifest and put up on high *to shine on all those in your house.**

*Gen 2:7

*Matt 5:5

I myself have wanted for a long time to be of service to him in my position, but I was held back by awe and timidity, and because the importance of the material should be reserved to more accomplished

*Ps 30:21

writers, it would be better to wait until after his death, for fear that he might be put under pressure by my praise and be safer *from the wiles of men and their abusive words*.^{*} But he is still flourishing, still competent; the weaker his body, the stronger and more powerful his actions, which do not prevent him from doing things worthy to be remembered, and always he accumulates more and more noble deeds. Yet he remains silent, and they need to be written down. *But I have not long to live.*^{*}

*2 Tim 4:6

*Rom 7:24

*2 Tim 4:6

While my infirmities are leading me to *the body of death*^{*} and all my members are beginning to respond to the close embrace of death, I feel that *I am on the point of departure*,^{*} and I fear that what I have put off may be too late, namely, the task that I longed to complete before the last journey.

But some of my brothers out of their kindness and respect urge me on and exhort me. They know all about him because they have always been with the man of God and have made careful inquiries about him. They have been with him, have seen and heard many things about him, and have suggested many wonderful things that God has done through his servant while they were present. As they are religious men and in the school of their master, I feel that they are free from every taint of deceit. More than that, they have brought forward as witnesses the authority of proven persons, such as bishops, clerics, and monks. I cannot possibly question the faith in the faithful. It goes without saying that everybody knows these things, that the whole church tells Saint Bernard's virtues. For this reason I have taken upon myself this task as far as I can without vanity on my part but out of the trust I have in a kind friend. I have taken account of the marvelous material the brothers have all offered me in praise of God.

I do not, however, write these things as if I were putting them accurately in order, but rather I have

undertaken to bring them together and rewrite them into unity of style, not intending to publish them while he was alive or writing them up while he knew about it. Still, I *have confidence in the Lord** that they will take it up again after me and after his death, do better and more worthily what I myself have attempted, invest the worthy material with another style, and powerfully present *his death, which was precious in the sight of the Lord*.* So by writing his life they will commend his death and throw light on his death from his life. Now then, with the Lord's help let us take up the task we have proposed.

*Rom 14:14

*Ps 115:6

Here ends the Preface.

The life of the holy abbot Bernard begins.

BERNARD'S BIRTHPLACE AND FAMILY¹

[1] Bernard was born in Fontaine, the town of his father, in Burgundy. His parents were upper-class people according to secular standards, but even more noble in dignity according to their devout Christian values. His father, Tescelin,² was a military man of long standing, a religious and just man. He acted like John the Baptist, the precursor of the Lord, following the army of the gospel in that he struck no one, was not given to fraud, was content with his wages,* and used them well to do good. So he served his earthly rulers with his counsel and his weapons, and yet he did not neglect to render to the Lord his God what was due

*Luke 3:14

¹The section titles are not present in the manuscript or critical edition but are added in this translation. Section 48 from Recension A is absent from this text.

² Called Ginger or Redhead because of the color of his hair, which Bernard inherited (*Notes II.1*).

*1 Tim 5:4

*Eph 5:22

*Eph 6:4

to him.³ Bernard's mother, Aleth,⁴ was from a castle called Montbard. She followed in her own way the rule of the apostle and maintained her household* in the fear of the Lord under her husband,* intent on works of mercy and guiding her children with sound discipline.* She had seven children, six boys and one girl, whom she bore not so much to her husband as to God.⁵ All her boys eventually became monks, and her girl became a nun. She did not bring them up in a secular fashion, but as soon as they were born she offered each of them to God with her own hands. For this reason she shunned the habit of giving her children to be breastfed by another, but with her own mother's milk she gave them a mother's goodness in a natural way. As they grew up she kept them under her guiding hands, bringing them up in a kind of monastic fashion rather than that of the court. She did not allow them sweet delicate foods but rather common and nourishing food, and so she prepared them, under the Lord's guidance, as if teaching them the way of life of a hermit.

HIS MOTHER'S DREAM

[2] Bernard was Aleth's third child. While he was still in her womb she had a dream that presaged

³ Geoffroy d'Auxerre, *Notes sur la vie et les miracles de saint Bernard: Fragmenta I. (Précédé de) Fragmenta II*, by Raynaud de Foigny, ed. and trans. Raffaele Fassetta, SCh 548 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2011), 72–75 (hereafter *Notes*); *Fragmenta Gaufridi* (hereafter *Fragm*) I.1, II.1, ed. Christine Vande Veire, in *Vita prima Sancti Bernardi Claraevallis Abbatis* (hereafter VP), ed. Paul Verdeyen, CCCM 89B (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), 235–70 (here 273, 305).

⁴ In *Fragm* I.1, she is wrongly called Elizabeth because of an error by a copyist.

⁵ Guy (b. 1087), Gerard (b. 1088), Bernard (b. 1090), Humbe-line (b. 1092), Andrew, Bartholomew, and Nivard.

the future. She saw within her a dog totally white with some red hair on its back, and it was barking. At this she was alarmed; when she consulted a religious man, he immediately foretold with a prophetic insight what David had said about holy preachers: *The tongues of your dogs lick the blood of their enemies.** So he replied to her anxiety and unease, “*Do not be afraid;** all is well. You will be the mother of the best breed of dog. He will be the guardian of God’s house, and like a guard dog he will bark against the great enemies of the faith. He will be a famous preacher, and like a good dog gifted with a healing tongue, he will heal souls suffering from many ills.”

*Ps 67:24

*Luke 1:30

When the good woman heard this response, she accepted it as a reply from God and was happy about it, and from then on she completely regained her love for her unborn child.⁶ She began to think that he should be brought up to be schooled in holy matters according to the manner of the vision and its interpretation, which had been promised to him in such a sublime way. And this is what happened. As soon as he had been happily born, not only did she offer him to God, as was the custom with the others, but she went on to do what holy Anna had done. The mother of Samuel, who had asked for a son from God and had received one, had placed him in the temple for the abiding service of God;* likewise Aleth offered Bernard as an acceptable gift to God in the church.⁷

*see 1 Sam
1:22-28

[3] As soon as she possibly could, she placed him to be taught by the renowned teachers in the church of Châtillon so that he might progress in the things he was best at. Afterward it was recognized that, influenced by Bernard himself, the church of Châtillon

⁶ *Fragm I.1, II.2* (VP 273, 305–6; *Notes* 82–83, 74–77).

⁷ *Fragm I.3* (VP 274; *Notes* 76–77).

changed from its secular way of life and joined the Regular Canons. The boy, filled with grace and gifted with natural genius, quickly fulfilled his mother's desires for him. For he progressed in his studies above his age and beyond his peers. In secular studies, however, he already began to mortify himself and, as it were in a natural way, looked toward the perfection he would achieve. He was simple with regard to worldly matters, loving to be on his own, avoiding the limelight, deeply thoughtful. *He was obedient to his parents and subject to them.** Kind and gracious to everyone, at home he tended to be simple and quiet, rarely going out, unbelievably shy. He was never one for speaking much, though he was devout, so his childhood was childlike. He gave himself up to his studies, and in this way he discerned and came to know God in the Scriptures. In all this he progressed a great deal in a short time and was highly perceptive in his mental aptitude, as can be seen from what we are going to recount.

*Luke 2:51

[4] When he was still a boy, he was troubled with a severe pain in his head and took himself to bed. A young woman was brought to him with the purpose of mitigating the pain with her singing. When he became aware that she was coming in with her musical instruments, with which she used to play the fool with people, he made an exclamation of annoyance and rejected her and sent her away. God's loving mercy was not lacking to the good zeal of the holy boy; he was continually aware of its strength. Being moved by the Holy Spirit, he noticed at once that he had been freed from all the pain in his head.

BERNARD'S DREAM OF JESUS' BIRTH

From then on he progressed considerably in his faith, and the Lord appeared to him just as *he had*

once appeared to Samuel in Shiloh and revealed his glory to him.* On the solemnity of the Lord's Nativity, when at night they were all getting ready, as was the custom, for solemn Vigils, the Lord came to him. Since the hour for celebrating the Night Office was put off a little, Bernard was sitting there waiting with everyone else, and his head drooped in sleep. Then it happened that the child Jesus revealed himself in his Holy Nativity to the little boy, awakening in him the beginnings of divine contemplation and increasing his tender faith. Jesus appeared to him *like the spouse coming forth from his chamber*.* He appeared to him before his very eyes as the wordless Word was being born from his mother's womb, *more beautiful in form than all the children of men*.*

*1 Sam 3:21

*Ps 18:6

*Ps 44:3

Bernard was taken out of himself so that his child-like love was transformed by the holy boy. So persuasive to his mind was this moment that from then on, as he confesses, he believed he was at the very moment of the Lord's birth. From those who often listened to him it is obvious that the Lord showered him with blessings at that time, since he has spoken about this mystery more frequently and delved into its meaning more profoundly.

Afterward he wrote a little book in praise of the Mother of God and her Son and his Holy Nativity among his works or treatises, taking his material from the gospel of Saint Luke, where we read, *The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city in Galilee** and the following.⁸

*Luke 1:26

We should not be silent about the fact that from his earliest years when he had any money he used to give it in alms secretly. He did this in a shy way. He

⁸ *Fragm II.5* (VP 307; Notes 78–81); *In laudibus Virginis Matris* (SBOp 4:13–58).

*Luke 2:52

performed his acts of piety in accordance to his age, or rather beyond his age. [5] As time went on he progressed *in age and grace with God and men.** Boyhood soon gave way to adolescence. His mother, Aleth, had brought up her children in the faith and had done all that she could to educate them for their future in this world. She died and went happily to be with the Lord. We must not pass over the fact that for a long time she had lived a happy life with her husband. She was a good and honorable wife in the good and honest ways of this world and in the catholic faith. For many years before her death, she brought up her children, insofar as a woman could who is obedient to her husband's authority and does not have rights over her own body.*

*see RB 58.25

In her home, in her married life, in her dealings with the world around her, she was for the most part living an eremitic or monastic life, using simple food and putting aside elaborate dresses and worldly vanities; as far as she was able, she kept herself away from secular cares and pursuits. She applied herself to fasting, vigils, and prayers. There were some things she could not do without monastic profession, but she replaced those by almsgiving and various works of mercy. She persisted in these things daily until her last days, when, in coming to the end, she migrated from this world to be perfected in the world to come by him to whom she went.

When she was dying, the clergy and those who had gathered round her were singing the psalms for the dying, and she joined in, so that when it came to her last moment and her voice could not be heard, she could still be seen to move her lips and with her tongue to praise the Lord. Finally, when it came to that part of the litany *by your passion and cross free her, O Lord,** raising her hand she made the sign of the cross and *gave up her spirit,*[†] so that her hand that was raised could not lower itself.[‡]

*the Office of the Dead

†Matt 27:50

‡d. Sept. 1, 1103

[6] From now on Bernard began to live his life in his own way. He was spoken of as a young man with high hopes, one elegant in bearing, gracious and pleasing to look at, of charming manners and a keen intellect, and polished in speech. As he began to make his debut into society, many paths were opened to him, so that he was assured of success in whatever he undertook. A future of great promise smiled on him everywhere. Yet he was under pressure from friends whose way of life was very different and whose boisterous friendships aimed at making his way of life like theirs. If this life had gone on and become attractive to him, how bitter would have become the thing dearest to him: the chastity that he loved and held dear in his heart. The *crooked serpent** spread out its nets of temptation and in various ways *lay in wait for his heel*.*

*Isa 27:1

*Gen 3:15

It once happened that when Bernard was looking around, his gaze fell on a woman, but he at once corrected himself, blushed within himself, and blazed with annoyance at himself. A pool of freezing water lay near; he jumped into it and remained there until he was nearly frozen and, by the power of grace, his lust had been cooled. He was then clothed with the love of chastity in the same way as Job, who said, *I made a pact with my eyes that I should not think upon a virgin*.*

*Job 31:1

A NAKED GIRL COMES TO HIS BED

[7] Round about this time the devil tried to play a trick on him. While he was sleeping, a naked girl snuck into bed with him. When he became aware of this, he peacefully and silently ceded to her that part of the bed that she had occupied and moved over to the other side and went to sleep. She was miserable

about this and waited expectantly; then she started stroking him and tried to stimulate him. Finally, since he took no notice of her, the impudent girl blushed and, filled with dismay and amazement at his persistence, got up and hurried away.

It also happened that Bernard and some companions were guests at the house of a certain matron. This woman started to think about him, about what a pleasant young man he was, and she allowed her eyes to be ensnared so that she burned with desire. She then made up a special bed for him to honor him above the others. That night she got up and brazenly approached him. When Bernard realized what was afoot, he, never short of ideas, shouted out, "Thieves, thieves!" Hearing this, she fled. The whole family got up, lit their lamps, and looked for the thief, but of course he was not to be found. They all returned to their beds, and silence reigned and darkness once more returned. Everyone else reposed as before, but not this wretched woman. She got up again and sought Bernard's bed, but again he shouted, "Thieves, thieves!" Again they looked for the thief in vain, and as Bernard was the only one who knew what was happening, he kept it to himself. A third time the stupid woman tried and was rejected; she was hardly able to desist, because of either fear of being found out or desperation at his unwillingness. On the following day Bernard's companions took him to task and queried him concerning his dreaming all night about thieves. He answered, "To tell the truth, there was a thief. The hostess was trying to snatch away from me a priceless treasure, my chastity, which no one could restore."

[8] Meanwhile he was thinking to himself and pondering that saying, "It is not safe to sleep close to a serpent or to live long with a snake," so he began to think about flight from the world. He looked around him and saw that the world and the prince of

the world offered him many openings and promised him great opportunities, yet all was false *and vanity of vanities, and all was vanity*.^{*} He listened to the voice of the Truth speaking inwardly, calling out to him and saying, *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you*.^{*} Deciding that the most perfect way was to leave the world, he made inquiries and sought out where he could more certainly and more purely find *rest for his soul*^{*} under the yoke of Christ.

*Eccl 1:1

*Matt 11:28–29

*Matt 11:27

BERNARD FINDS CÎTEAUX

Making a search for such a place, he came upon the newly founded Cistercian plantation,⁹ a new way of monastic life, a great harvest but needing workers, for hardly anyone had gone there seeking the grace of conversion because the way of life there was too austere and poor. For a person *truly seeking God*,^{*} however, it held no terrors, so he set aside all fear and hesitation and turned his mind to Cîteaux in order to melt away and be hidden in *the hiding place of God's face from the disturbance of men and from the contentious tongues*.^{*} It would be for him a flight from vain pride, from his noble lineage, from his own gift of a keen intellect, perhaps even from his growing reputation for holiness.¹⁰

*RB 58.7

*Ps 30:21

[9] When Bernard's brothers, who loved him in too human a fashion, realized that he was seriously considering entering religious life, they tried their utmost to deflect his mind to literary studies and enmesh him more seriously in secular pursuits through a love for secular learning. As he himself would readily admit,

⁹ Louis Lekai, "From Molesme to Cîteaux" and "The Fundamentals of Cistercian Reform," chaps. 2–3 in *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977), 11–32.

¹⁰ See *Fragm* I.4 (VP 275; Notes 86–89).

their delaying tactics might well have succeeded had it not been for the persistent memory of his holy mother. Again and again he fancied he saw her hurrying toward him, complaining reproachfully that he had not been softly nurtured for this sort of trifling, nor was it with this end in view that she had educated him.

*in 1111

There came a day, as he was riding to join his brothers, who were with the duke of Burgundy engaged in besieging Grancey Castle,* when his anxiety preyed on him more intensely. Passing a church midway on his route, he turned aside and entered. There he prayed with a flood of tears and hands stretched out, pouring out his heart like water before the face of the Lord his God. That was the day that saw his purpose firmly fixed in his heart.

HE BEGINS TO PERSUADE HIS BROTHERS

*Rev 22:17

*Ps 82:15

*Aleth's brother

[10] Nor did he turn a deaf ear to the voice that says, “*Let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’*”^{*} From that day on, *as fire consumes the forest or the flame sets the mountains ablaze,*^{*} running hither and thither and pouncing first on what lies to hand before ranging farther afield, so too the fire that the Lord had purposely kindled in his servant’s heart first attacked his brothers, leaving only the last, too young as yet for the religious life, to be a comfort to their aging father, before moving on to kinsmen, comrades, friends—wherever there was the slightest hope of conversion. His uncle Gaudry,^{*} the castellan of Touillon, a man of rank and reputation and renown, was the first to vote with his feet, as the saying goes, and to opt with his nephew for the monastic state.¹¹ Swift on his heels came Bartholomew,

¹¹ *Fragm* I.4, I.7 (VP 275, 277; *Notes* 86–89, 94–95).

youngest but one of the brothers and not yet knighted, who gave his easy assent to Bernard's words of wisdom. But Andrew, the next in age to Bernard and himself a new-made knight, found it hard to accept his brother's counsel, until suddenly he exclaimed, "I see my mother!" And indeed she appeared to him distinctly, smiling serenely, and approving her son's intention; thereupon, surrendering on the spot, another recruit left the ranks of the world for the army of Christ. Andrew was not alone in seeing his mother rejoicing over her sons: Bernard too confessed to a similar vision.¹²

Guy, the oldest of the brothers, was a man of substance, already married and more firmly established in the world than the rest. Doubtful at first, he reflected long and deeply and then agreed to enter the religious life provided his wife gave her consent, a most unlikely step for a young noblewoman with infant daughters to bring up. Bernard, however, inspired with an unshakeable hope in God's mercy, promptly assured Guy that his wife would either come to share his feelings or die fairly soon.¹³

After a while, as there was no moving her, her magnanimous husband, helped even then by that strength of faith of which he was later to offer so shining an example, conceived at God's prompting the bold plan of abandoning all outward trappings and living a peasant's life, working with his hands to keep himself and his wife, whom he could not put away against her will. Bernard, meanwhile, who was running about, rounding up this man and that, arrived on the scene, and almost at once Guy's wife fell gravely ill. Realizing how it would hurt her *to kick against the goad*,* she begged forgiveness of Bernard, who had been sent

*Acts 26:14

¹² *Fragm* I.8 (VP 278; *Notes* 94–97).

¹³ *Fragm* I.3, I.9 (VP 274, 278; *Notes* 86–87; 96–99).

for, and sought assent for her own entry into religion. When she and her husband had been finally parted according to ecclesiastical practice, each taking a vow of chastity, she joined a congregation of women religious, where she serves God devoutly to this day.¹⁴

GERARD AND THE LANCE

[11] The next in age after Guy was Gerard, a knight active in combat, prudent in counsel, and loved by all for his remarkable courtesy and kindness.¹⁵ Worldly wisdom had him dismissing his brother's quick compliance as mere frivolity, and he was resolute in rejecting Bernard's sound advice and admonishments. Finally Bernard, afire with faith and zeal for his brother's welfare, exclaimed in a fit of exasperation, "I know, I know, that it takes affliction to make a man receptive." Then, putting a finger to Gerard's side, he added, "The day will come, and soon, when a lance will strike you here in your side and will open a road into your heart for the words of salvation you treat with such contempt, and you will fear for your life but not lose it." And as he had said, so it came about.

A little later, outnumbered by enemies and wounded as his brother had predicted, Gerard was taken prisoner in a skirmish and hauled off with a

¹⁴ At Larrey, near Dijon; see *Fragm* I.3 (VP 274; *Notes* 86–87).

¹⁵ Conrad of Eberbach, *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense sive Narratio de Initio Cisterciensis Ordinis* 3.1, ed. Bruno Griesser, CCCM 138 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1994), 138–43 (hereafter *Exordium*); *The Great Beginning of Cîteaux: A Narrative of the Beginning of Cîteaux: The Exordium Magnum of Conrad of Eberbach*, trans. Benedicta Ward and Paul Savage, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, CF 72 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2011), 209–11 (hereafter *Beginning*).

lance head fixed in the very spot to which Bernard had pressed his finger. Fearing death, which seemed imminent, he shouted out loud, "I am a monk, I am a monk of Cîteaux!" This did not, however, prevent his being taken prisoner and shut away. A messenger was sent hotfoot to Bernard, but he did not come: "I knew," he said, "that it would be hard for him *to kick against the goad*.* His wound is not mortal, though, but life-giving.** And so it proved. For Gerard, although he recovered from his wound faster than could have been hoped, did not change his resolve, or rather the vow he had made. Now that the love of the world no longer fettered him and only the chains of his enemies prevented him from entering the religious life, God's mercy came swiftly to his aid. His brother arrived and tried to get him freed, but without success. Forbidden even to speak with him, he stood close by the prison wall and shouted, "Brother Gerard! We shall be leaving soon to enter the monastery. As for you, be a monk here since they will not let you out, and rest assured that what you want to do but cannot will be deemed done."

[12] A few days later, while Gerard was fretting more and more, he heard in his sleep a voice saying to him, "Today you will be freed." It was the holy season of Lent. Early that evening, as he was pondering what he had heard, he bent to touch his shackles, and one of the leg irons fell off with a clatter in his hand, so that he was less restricted and could hobble along. But what was he to do? The door was bolted, and there was a crowd of poor people at the gates. He stood up, however, and less out of hope than of the tedium of lying there, and excited too by the idea of trying, he moved across to the door of the undercroft in which he was held in fetters. No sooner had he touched the bolt than the bar came away in his hand and the door opened. With the shuffling gait of a

*Acts 26:14

**2 Pet 1:3

man in irons he made his way to the church, where they were singing Vespers.

When the beggars waiting outside saw what was happening, providentially frightened out of their wits, they ran off without raising the alarm. As he was hobbling churchward, a member of the household, cousin to the man whose prisoner he was, chanced to come out, and seeing him make what haste he could toward the church, called out, "You are late, Gerard!" And as the other turned pale, "Hurry up," he added, "there's still some left for you to hear." The man's gaze was held fixed, and he was quite unaware of what was happening. Not until he had given the still-shackled Gerard a helping hand up to the steps of the church and the latter was passing inside did he realize what was going on and make an unsuccessful effort to detain Gerard.

So it was that Gerard, freed in spirit and body alike from the world's grip, faithfully fulfilled the vow he had taken. At the same time the Lord made most powerfully plain the grace that his servant Bernard had derived through the holy life he led so perfectly, for in the spirit of him who made what is to be, Bernard was enabled to see what was to come as though it had already taken place. When he placed his finger on the spot on his brother's side where the wound was soon to gape, the lance appeared to him in its very actuality, as he himself later confessed when questioned by those from whom he could not keep it secret.¹⁶

BERNARD GATHERS HIS GROUP OF RELATIVES

[13] The others had gathered together in the Spirit with Bernard. On the morning of the first day when

¹⁶ *Fragm* I.2 (VP 273–74; *Notes* 82–85).

they entered the church, they heard the words of the apostle Paul being read out: *God is faithful because the good work he has done in you he will bring to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** The devout young man had hardly had time to hear these words when they came to him *as a clap of thunder from heaven.** He began to rejoice in the Spirit, for he was now the spiritual father of all those reborn in Christ, his own brothers, and he saw clearly that the hand of the Lord was working with him. From this moment he set himself to assemble whomever he could by the force of words and began *to put on the new man.** With those with whom he used to discuss worldly matters he now talked earnestly about conversion, pointing out to them the joys of flight from the world, the way the miseries of this life would come to a speedy death while life after death was to be forever either in bliss or in wretchedness.

*Phil 1:6

*Acts 2:2

*Eph 4:24

Could he do more? *As many as were ordained to eternal life** one after another came to believe him and consent to his counsel since the grace of God was working in them. Some at first hesitated but *were cut to the heart,** because God's servant, by his prayers and insistence, the truth in his words, brought them round.

*Acts 13:48

*Acts 2:37

Lord Hugh of Macon¹⁷ was also among those who joined him. Today he has been snatched away from the community at Pontigny that he had built and is now the bishop of the diocese of Auxerre, which he rules in an admirable and dignified way. When he heard that his dear friend and companion had converted, he lamented the loss, as though Bernard were dead to the world. Where before they used to agree together in their talks, now they lamented with one another for different reasons, different griefs. They

¹⁷ Hugh of Macon, who entered Cîteaux with Bernard, was the founding abbot of Pontigny in 1114 and bishop of Auxerre from 1136 to 1151.

spoke with words of disagreement, different points of view. In the course of their friendly words with one another, the Spirit of Truth was gradually infused into Hugh, and they began to face one another with words of mutual understanding. They shook hands in friendly agreement about the new way of life that was more worthy of them, more truly spiritual, so that they had *one heart and one soul in Christ** and became friends once more as of old.

*Acts 4:32

[14] After a few days, however, Bernard learned that Hugh had reneged on his proposal, influenced by his companions. An opportunity arose for Bernard when there was a meeting of the bishops in that area; he hurriedly took it and went to call Hugh back from his straying or, as Saint Paul put it, *to bring him to birth** in Christ. Those who had led Hugh astray noticed that Bernard was there and, keeping an eye on Hugh, stopped Bernard from approaching him, so that he *could not cry out to the Lord* for him.*

*Gal 4:19

*Jdt 9:1

Bernard betook himself to prayer and weeping, and pretty soon there was an immense downpour of rain. They had gathered in a field where the weather was serene and no such change was expected. So they all ran for cover from the storm to the local village. There, Bernard got hold of Hugh. "Stay with me," he said, "out of this shower of rain." They remained together alone, but the Lord was with them. Very soon it became calm, and serenity of soul returned. The pact they had made was renewed and their proposal confirmed, which from then onward would not again be violated. [15] *The wicked saw and were angry, they gnashed their teeth and melted away,**¹⁸ but the *just man put his confidence in the Lord** and triumphed *gloriously** over the world.

*Ps 111:10

*Prov 28:1

*see Exod 15:1

¹⁸ *Fragm I.6 (VP 275–77; Notes 90–95).*

From now on, when Bernard spoke either publicly or privately, mothers hid their sons from him, wives kept their husbands away from him, and friends fended off their friends from contact with him, because the Holy Spirit put so much power into his speech that hardly any other love could withstand its force. When the number of those who joined themselves to him and took on this way of life increased, it became like the early church, where we read that *the company of believers had one heart and one soul** in the Lord. *They all dwelt together and none of the rest dared to join them.** They had their own house in Châtillon, where they lived together, and nobody dared join them who was not one of their number. But if someone did enter and saw and heard what they were doing and singing, it was just as the apostle Paul says of the Christians in Corinth: *If all prophesy, anyone entering will be convinced by all and will be called to account by all, and falling down he will adore the Lord and declare that God is truly among them,** and he himself will adhere to them in unity, or if he goes away he will repent with tears because they are so blessed.*

*Acts 4:32
*Acts 5:12-13

*see 1 Cor
14:24-25
*Job 29:11

In those days and in that district it was unheard of for anyone who was still remaining in the world not to have his conversion known to everyone. They kept together for six months in secular dress after their first project so that they could all have time to wind up their business affairs.

THE LISTLESS PAIR

[16] When some of them began to suspect that the tempter might try to draw one of them away, God revealed what was going to happen concerning this matter. One of them *gazed into the vision of the night,** and he saw them all sitting in one house

*Dan 7:14

in an orderly fashion eating some food, amazingly fresh, gorgeous, and tasty. While most of them were taking their food with hearty appetites, two of them, he noted, remained listless, hardly partaking any of this salutary food. One of them took nothing; the other seemed to take some but scattered it about carelessly. This is how it turned out later. One of them returned to the world before the project had started; the other *began the good work* like the rest but did not *bring it to completion*.*

*Phil 1:6

I saw him later in the world, like Cain, *tramping about aimlessly from the presence of the Lord*.* As far as I could judge he was a miserable sight, down and out and, to look at, pathetic. In the end, however, he returned to Clairvaux as an invalid and forced by need, even though he was from a good family and well-liked by all his family and friends. When he got there he renounced his properties but not really his own will, and he died among them, not as a brother or one of them, but as *a poor man and beggar*,* apart and asking for mercy.

*Gen 4:14

*Ps 39:18

[17] When the time came for Bernard to fulfill his vow and achieve his plans, with his brothers and spiritual children he took leave of his father's dwelling. He was like a father among his brothers, for he had brought them to birth in Christ, *the Word of life*.* Guy, the oldest, saw his brother Nivard, the youngest, playing with other boys in the road and said to him, "Hello, Nivard, this whole place of ours is now yours alone." He replied, not like a child, "What? You've got heaven, and leave me earth! That's not a fair deal." Still, when the others had departed he remained at home with his father, but as soon as he could he followed his brothers, and no one could stop him, neither his father nor his acquaintances nor his friends. So it was that all the brothers followed God's will, and there were left in their home their

*Eph 5:26;
1 Cor 4:15

father with his daughter, about both of whom we will talk later.¹⁹

CÎTEAUX

[18] At that time Cîteaux was still a novelty and just a *little flock** living under venerable Stephen, their abbot.²⁰ They were beginning to grow dejected because of the lack of vocations, and their hopes for future numbers were fading.²¹ It appeared that they could not pass on their inheritance, which was holy poverty, to anyone, because although the holiness of their life was admired by all who saw it, they kept away from that severe austerity. But now, all of a sudden, God visited them* and made them joyful again. It was so unexpected, so sudden. It was as if their house had received this reply from the Holy Spirit: *Shout for joy, you barren woman who bore no children! Break into cries of joy and gladness, you who were never in labor! For the sons of the forsaken one are more in number than the sons of the wedded one, ** and afterward *you will see your children's children unto many generations.**

*Luke 12:32

*i.e., the
community
at Cîteaux

*Isa 54:1;
Gal 4:27

*Tob 9:11

BERNARD ENTERS CÎTEAUX WITH HIS COMPANIONS

[19] In the year 1113 from the Lord's Incarnation, and thirteen years from the founding of Cîteaux,²² Bernard, the servant of God, who was about

¹⁹ *Fragm* I.11 (VP 279; *Notes* 98–101).

²⁰ Stephen Harding, third abbot of Cîteaux, 1109–1133; d. 1134.

²¹ See *Exordium* 1.21 (CCCM 138:79; *Beginning*, 98–99).

²² David N. Bell, "From Molesme to Cîteaux: The Earliest 'Cistercian' Spirituality," CSQ 34 (1999): 469–82.

twenty-two years old, entered Cîteaux with more than thirty companions and submitted himself to the sweet yoke of Christ under Abbot Stephen. From then on *the Lord blessed him, and the vine of the Lord of hosts started to give fruit,* extending its branches as far as the sea and its boughs well beyond.** This was the beginning, the holy principles on which the man of God based his life. I consider that no one could adequately tell his manner of life, how his life on this earth somehow reflected the life of heavenly beings. No one could possibly write about the life he lived without living it himself. Only a person who had been given such graces and lived by them would be able to tell how from the very moment of his conversion the Lord filled him with his chosen grace, *how he feasted on the plenty of his house.** He entered the house of the Lord, which was *poor in spirit,** at that time still hidden away and of no importance. He had the intention of dying from the hearts and memory of mankind, with the hope of disappearing *like a lost vase.**²³

But God had other ideas and was making him ready *as a chosen vessel,** not only to strengthen and expand the monastic order but *to carry his name before kings and Gentiles** to the ends of the earth. Of course he did not apply this teaching to himself or even think about it; rather he had in his heart the need to be constant in following his vocation, so that he constantly said in his heart and even often on his lips, “Bernard, Bernard, *what have you come for?**”²⁴ In the same way as we read about Our Lord—*Jesus began to do and to teach—**from the moment he entered his cell in the novitiate he himself began to do what he would later teach other people.

*Josh 18:16

*Ps 79:12

*Ps 35:9

*Matt 5:3

*Ps 30:13

*Acts 9:15

*Acts 9:15

*Matt 26:50

*Acts 1:1

²³ See *Fragm I.4* (VP 275; Notes 86–89).

²⁴ Thus Bernard places himself in the role of Judas in Gethsemane, betraying the Lord through his sins.

[20] Afterward, when he became abbot of Clairvaux, he used to tell the novices who had come and were keen to enter, “If you are keen to learn what goes on inside, leave your bodies outside, since you have brought them with you from the world. Only your spirits enter here; *the flesh does not profit at all.*”^{*} But when the novices feared the novelty of these words, he showed sympathy for their frailty and added more kindly that only *the desires of the flesh*^{*} should be left outside. But he himself while he was a novice in no way spared himself; rather he constantly mortified himself, not only concerning *the desires of the flesh*,^{*} which pertain to the body, but even the body itself by which they are done. But when he began very frequently to experience the sweetness of God’s love bestowed on him, because he was being enlightened interiorly with love, he also feared those bodily expressions and hardly allowed them any scope in his life, except for what was needed in his dealings with other people. Since he put this continual mortification into practice as was his custom, it became habitual and second nature for him.

*John 6:64

*1 John 2:16

*1 John 2:16

He was totally absorbed in the spirit; his thoughts were often completely directed toward God, as were his spiritual meditations, and his mind was totally occupied with God, so *that what he saw he did not see, what he heard he did not hear,*^{*} nor did he taste what he ate; he felt hardly anything with his bodily senses. For instance, he spent a whole year in the novitiate, yet when he left it he still did not know whether it was a carved roof, which we usually call vaulted, or not. However frequently he went in and out of the church, he thought there was only one window in the east end, whereas there were three.

*Isa 6:9

BERNARD'S PERSONAL ASCETICISM

He had dampened down all sense of curiosity about such things, so that if perhaps he did happen to see them he did not advert to them because his mind was elsewhere, as they say. Indeed, without memory mere sense perceptions count for nothing. [21] In him there was no contradiction between nature and grace, so much so that what was written in Wisdom was fully implemented in him: *I was a boy of happy disposition, and I had received a good soul; or rather, being good, I had entered an undefiled body.** He had been endowed with a keen intelligence by nature, and grace enabled him to contemplate spiritual or divine things, for he *had received a good soul*, since by reason of a natural spiritual grace he was strongly able to overcome himself by his innate quality of virtue without a tendency to carnal sensuality or haughty disdain, enjoying his spiritual studies and those things that are of God,* spontaneously leaning toward God in his service and subduing himself to the Spirit. His body was in no way sullied by consent to shameful acts, yet he necessarily took care of it in such a way that he made himself serve the spirit and be a suitable tool in his service of God. But from the gift of prevenient grace and by the help of a natural tendency, and also by the use of a good spiritual discipline, the body in him is such that he could hardly desire anything that worked against the spirit, at least to harm the spirit. The spirit in him overcame the forces of flesh and blood so powerfully, as he yearned to oppose the flesh of the weak animal nature that fell under its burden, that to this day it has not been able to rise again.

*Wis 8:19-20

*Heb 5:1

What am I to say about the sleep that in other people is accustomed to give rest from work and the senses or recreation for their minds? From then till today he keeps vigil beyond normal human strength.

He used to complain that he wasted no time more than when he was asleep. For him the comparison between death and sleep is apt, for those who are asleep seem to be dead as far as humans can see, though to God death is no more than sleep. If he heard a religious snoring out loud while asleep, or if he saw someone lying around in a careless way, he could hardly put up with it but complained that he was sleeping in an unbecoming or worldly way. To his own meager time of sleep he joined his meager ration of food. In neither case did he allow his body its full measure but took just what he considered absolutely necessary. As for vigils, since staying awake was usual for him, it was his custom not to spend the whole night sleepless.

[22] Even today he hardly takes any pleasure in eating but only eats for fear of breaking down. Before he eats anything, just thinking of what he is going to eat seems to be enough for him. So he takes his food as if it were an agony for him. From the first days of his religious life, that is, from the time he left the novitiate, since his physical makeup was extremely frail and delicate, because of his continuous fasting and vigils, because of the cold, and because his stomach was dragged down by hard and continuous labor, it has rejected whatever he takes, and he vomits it raw and undigested. Of course, by the process of nature food passes to the bowels, and that part of his body was so obsessed with distressing sickness that it discharged only with great pain. Whatever is left over to nourish his body is not so much to sustain his life as to defer his death. After a meal he always reckons up how much he has eaten. If he ever catches himself going slightly beyond the usual measure he does not allow it to go unpunished. Even though he would sometimes like to regale himself in a little extra, he finds he can hardly do so.

So from the beginning he was a novice among novices, a monk among monks, strong spiritually but frail in body, without allowing himself any relaxation concerning his rest or his food, or any withdrawal from the common work or the duties placed on him. He reckoned everyone else to be holy and perfect but himself to be still no more than a beginner, a learner, in no way needing the indulgences or relaxations of those who had become more meritorious and more perfect. He needed to be a fervent novice under the strict rule of the order, under strict discipline.

[23] As a result, when the brothers were engaged in manual work that he was not used to, he had an ardent desire to emulate them in the common monastic way of life, but he lacked the competence required for digging, cutting down trees, carrying things on his shoulders, or taking his turn in any hard manual work that was equally demanding. When his strength failed him, he used to turn to more menial tasks, relying on humility as a compensation.

Now it is remarkable that he who had received great graces in the contemplation of spiritual things by God's gift should not only put up with being occupied with such chores but even take great delight in them. Other people often give themselves over to manual labor to such an extent because of human weakness that their minds wander away and become distracted from the interior unity of the spirit. But as we have said, Bernard mortified this sensual type of distraction and was privileged to have a greater grace *by the power of the Holy Spirit*,* so that he could completely give himself outwardly to his work and at the same time rest totally with God inwardly. His conscience was thus satisfied, and so too his devotion.

*Rom 15:19

While he was working he used to pray and meditate without their interfering with his work. His ex-

terior work did not form a barrier to the sweetness of his interior contemplation. To this day he confesses that whatever he gains from the Scriptures, whatever he finds spiritually in them, comes chiefly from the woods and fields, and he has no teachers besides the oaks and beeches; he was accustomed to make a good-humored joke of this among his friends.²⁵

[24] At harvest time the brothers were occupied in reaping with vigor and joy in the Holy Spirit, but as he was quite unable to do the work, not knowing how, he was ordered to sit on his own and take some rest; he was so upset at this order that he found refuge in prayer. He was so close to tears that he asked God to give him the grace for harvesting. His simple faith won him his religious desire. God gave him at once what he had hoped for. From then on he became so skilled in the work that he used to relish it, realizing that he had obtained this gift from God alone, so that he devoted himself to it more willingly. Whenever he was free from this work or other jobs, he used either to pray or read or meditate. If he had the chance for solitude, he used it for prayer, but wherever he was, either by himself or with the others, he made solitude of heart his own, and so he was everywhere alone with God.

LECTIO DIVINA

He gave himself to frequently reading the Scriptures in order, simply yet with joy. He said that he understood them better than his own words and that whatever was there enlightened him with truth and power;

²⁵ See Bernard, Ep 106 (SBOp 7:266); #107 in *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James (London: Burns Oates, 1953), 155–56 (hereafter James).

he affirmed that they impressed on him the original fount* more than he gained from the current commentaries. He read the commentaries of the holy and orthodox teachers and in no way felt that his own interpretation was equal to theirs, but while he adhered faithfully to them and followed them, he himself drew from the same source that they had drunk from. Full of the Spirit who had divinely inspired the whole Holy Scripture, he himself used them with confidence and assurance, as the apostle says, *for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.** When he preaches the Word of God, he makes every text he expounds plain and enjoyable, and he does this in such a way that even his reproofs are successful. Everyone who listens to him, seculars as well as religious, are struck with astonishment at his teaching and the gracious words *that proceed out of his mouth.**

*of wisdom

*2 Tim 3:16

*Sir 41:19;
Luke 4:22

CLAIRVAUX FOUNDED: BERNARD BECOMES ABBOT

*Gal 1:15

*John 11:52

[25] *When he who had set him apart from** the world and called him to reveal in him his glory with a still greater grace, God brought together *into one* a great number of sons *who had been scattered abroad.** God put it into the heart of Abbot Stephen to send these brothers to build a house at Clairvaux. As they were going, Stephen appointed Bernard as abbot over those he sent,²⁶ surprising those men who were mature in age and had worked hard both in the world and in the religious life. They feared for Bernard because he was a youth of tender age and subject to sickness and also was not used to vigorous manual work.

²⁶ *Exordium* 2.1 (CCCM 138:72–73; *Beginning*, 129).

Clairvaux was in the district of Langres, not far from the river Aube. It was an ancient denizen of thieves and in antiquity was called the Valley of Wormwood, either because of the abundance of bitter wormwood or because of the bitter grief of those who fell into the hands of robbers. In that *place of horror and vast solitude** these meek and virtuous men settled down, making *a den of thieves* into the temple of God and *a house of prayer*.* There they served God in simplicity for a time in poverty of spirit, *in hunger and thirst, in cold and exposure, in constant vigils*.* Often they had to satisfy their hunger with a gruel made out of beech leaves. Their bread was made out of *barley, millet, and vetches*,* as the prophet Ezekiel says. When this bread was put before a religious man who came to the guesthouse, he wept over it, took some of it away secretly, and showed it to everyone, thinking it miraculous that any man could live like this, especially such men as these!

*Deut 32:10

*Matt 21:13

*2 Cor 11:27

*Ezek 4:9

[26] But the man of God was not interested in this matter. His greatest care was for the salvation of many souls. From the first day of his conversion right up to the present time, he was known to have only one thing in his thoughts, namely, to have a mother's love for every soul.²⁷ Indeed, there was a sort of conflict in his heart between his holy desires and his holy humility. At one moment he confesses that he is dejected that his efforts cannot show any results, but afterward his burning ardor makes him forget himself, and he admits that he finds no other consolation than the salvation of many souls. In the end, charity gives birth to confidence, yet humility keeps it in place.

And so it happened that on one occasion he rose early for Vigils. Then after Vigils there was a long inter-

²⁷ SC 23.1–2 (SBOp 1:139–40; CF 7:26–27).

val before Lauds in the morning, and he went outside. He walked around close by and was praying to God that his prayers and those of his brothers might be acceptable, for he was, as I have said, filled with the desire for spiritual fruitfulness. All of a sudden, while he was standing there, he closed his eyes in prayer and saw on all sides a great multitude of men in diverse clothing and different walks of life coming down from the hills close by into the valley below; so many were they that the valley could not contain them. What this meant is clear to everyone.²⁸ The man of God was so encouraged by this wonderful vision that he exhorted his brothers *never to despair of God's mercy*.*

*RB 4.74

GERARD: THE CELLARER'S COMPLAINT

[27] Before winter started, his brother Gerard,²⁹ who was the cellarer of the house, complained strongly to Bernard about the supplies for the house and said that the brothers did not have enough to buy them. Their needs were so pressing that he could not accept mere verbal encouragement. There was just not enough to give out.

The man of God inquired from him how much would be needed for the present shortage. He replied twelve pounds.³⁰ Bernard then sent him off and resorted to prayer. A little while later Gerard came back and told him that a woman from Châtillon was outside and wanted to speak to him. He went out to see her, and she fell at his feet, offering him twelve loaves to obtain his blessing. She implored him to pray earnestly

²⁸ See *Fragm* I.13 (VP 280; *Notes* 102–3).

²⁹ D. 1138 (*Exordium* 3.1 [CCCM 138:148–51; *Beginning*, 209–14]).

³⁰ The critical edition has *undecim libras* “eleven pounds.”

for her husband, who was seriously ill. Bernard talked with her briefly and sent her off, saying to her, “Go now, and you will find that your husband is healed.” She went back home and found it just as he had said. The abbot then comforted his cellarer for his timidity and told him to have *greater trust in the Lord** in the future. To tell you the truth, this did not occur just this once, but whenever a necessity of this sort came up he received help from the Lord from an unexpected source. Because of this event, men who were insightful understood that *the hand of the Lord was with him*,* and they were cautious about burdening him with unimportant matters because they knew his mind was tender and still fresh from the delights of heavenly secrets; they only consulted him about interior matters of conscience and the needs of their souls.³¹

*Ps 26:14

*Luke 1:66

[28] For them the situation was similar to what we read about when the Israelites came to Moses after he had conversed with the Lord on Mount Sinai and, coming out of the dark cloud, he went down to the people. His *face was beaming with horns of light and was so awesome that the people fled away from him*.* Just so, the holy man Bernard came from the face of the Lord, where in the solitude of the Cistercian life and the sublime height of contemplation he remained in silence, enjoying those blissful moments. He brought with him something miraculous that he had acquired, something of divine purity rather than human. These men who were under his authority and with whom he lived were all almost estranged from him.

*Exod 34:35

Often enough, when he had to preach to them on spiritual subjects and the development of their spiritual lives, *he spoke to them with the tongues of angels*,* so that they could hardly grasp the meaning. Above

*1 Cor 13:1

³¹ *Fragm I.15 (VP 282; Notes 106–9).*

all, in matters of human behavior, he led them *out of the abundance of his heart** to set them standards so sublime and to demand such perfection of them that *his words seemed hard*,* so little did they understand what was being said to them. Again, when he heard them singly in confession, accusing themselves of the various fantasies to which human thought is prone and which no one can avoid in this life, here, above all, no *fellowship* could be found between *his light and their darkness*,* for he discovered that those he had taken for angels were in this respect ordinary men. Possessed himself of an almost angelic purity and conscious that God had bestowed on him from his youth his singular grace, he jumped naïvely to the conclusion that monks were proof against the temptations to which the frailty of human nature exposes all humankind and could not fall into the mire of such imaginings—or if they did so, they were not monks.

[29] But those who were truly devout and combined piety with prudence revered his teaching even if they did not understand. If they were at times dumbfounded by the novelty of what they heard when confessing their faults (since he seemed to be sowing seeds of despair in men already weak), they still felt that, by admitting their wickedness to him instead of seeking excuses, at least, as Job said, they were not perversely *denying the words of the Holy One*,* inasmuch as *no man living is justified in the sight of God*.* So it came about that holy humility became the mistress of both teacher and those being taught. For when the accused humbled themselves before the accuser, he himself began to suspect the zeal of his indignation in the face of their self-abasement. It came to such a point that he felt that his own ignorance was more to blame and regretted having to speak at all since he did not know what to say. He feared, lest by speaking to men not so much of things

*Matt 12:34

*Job 6:60

*2 Cor 6:14-15

*Job 6:10

*Ps 142:2

beyond as of those unworthy of them, he might harm the conscience of his hearers.

And again he realized that he was demanding of simple monks a degree of perfection that he himself had not yet attained. He began to think that they might well think in the silence of their souls *upon better things and more germane to their salvation** than they would hear from him, that they might *work out their salvation* more devoutly and efficaciously on their own than through any example of his, that indeed his preaching might prove more of a stumbling block to them than a way of building up their interior lives. He was disturbed and saddened over this thought, and *questions arose in his heart*,* so he decided to withdraw from all activities into himself and *wait*, in solitude of heart and *in silence, on the Lord** until the Lord should, according to his mercy, reveal his will to him in this matter.

*Heb 6:9

*Luke 24:38

*Lam 3:26

God's mercy was not slow in coming to his aid.* It was only a few days later that Bernard saw in a dream at night a boy standing by him and looking at him with the brilliant light of God, who bade him with great authority to speak confidently whatever words should be put into his mouth, *for it was not he who spoke but the Spirit who spoke within him*.³² From that time on the Spirit indeed spoke more openly in and through him, giving *greater power to his words** and depth to his *understanding of the Scriptures*,* also increasing the appreciation and respect of his hearers and endowing him with a new *understanding of the poor and needy*,* *the repentant sinner*,* and the seeker for pardon.

*Dan 7:12

*Matt 10:20

*Eph 6:19

*Luke 24:45

*Ps 40:12

*Luke 15:7

[30] Now that he had learned to some degree to take part in ordinary conversation and act in a more humane fashion, he began to enjoy the fruits of their common conversation and living among them on

³² *Fragm* I.13 (VP 280–81; *Notes* 102–3).

their own level. His father also, who had remained alone at home, came to live with his sons and become one of them. After he had lived with them for some time, he died at a good old age.³³

HUMBELINE MEETS HER MATCH AND WINS

Their sister, who was married and given to a worldly life, became aware of the dangers inherent in riches and the pleasures of worldly living, so in due time God inspired her to visit her brothers. When she came along, intending to see her venerable brother, as she approached the monastery with her retinue, dressed in fine clothes, Bernard utterly refused to go to see her, saying that he despised her appearance and calling her vile, like a snare of the devil trying to capture souls. She heard about these words and was extremely confused and full of regret that none of her brothers would deign to meet her. She found her brother Andrew, who was at the door of the monastery, and when he saw her decked out in fine clothes, he called her “wrapped-up crap,”³⁴ so she dissolved into tears. “I may be a sinner,” she retorted, “but *Christ died for them*.* Because I am a sinner, all the more do I need counseling and guidance. If my brother despises my flesh, a true servant of God would not despise my soul. Let him come out here, let him command. Whatever he commands I will do.” Holding her to this commitment, Bernard came out to meet her with his brothers.* He could not, however, separate her from her marriage to her husband, so he first of all forbade her all worldly grandeur

*Rom 5:6;
1 Cor 8:11

*probably in
1122

³³Tescelin joined Clairvaux in 1120 and died shortly afterward.

³⁴*Ob uestium apparatur stercus inuolutum*

in fashionable dress and every form of ostentation, and he urged her to live in that style of life that her mother had followed for a long time with her husband. He then sent her off. She went back home and, obedient to his demands, immediately changed her ways *according to the power of the Most High*.*

*Ps 76:11

Everyone was astonished in the change in this dainty young noblewoman. She changed her way of life in regard to costume and diet and began to live a hermit's life while still in the world. She applied herself to vigils, undertook a regime of fasting, gave herself to continual prayers, and alienated herself from every worldly pursuit. She lived with her husband for two years like this. Then he, especially in the second year, wishing to honor God, did not presume any more to approach *this temple of the Holy Spirit*.* Finally, because of the strength of her perseverance, he was prevailed upon to free her from her bonds to him and conceded to her the chance of serving God, to whom she had engaged herself, in accordance with the rites of the church. She took advantage of the freedom she had desired and went to the monastery of Jully, where she lived with the nuns who were there and made her vows to God for the rest of her life.* The Lord bestowed on her the grace of holiness, so that she showed herself equal to those men of God both in mind and in body.

*1 Cor 3:16-17

*d. in 1141
at Jully

BERNARD: ORDAINED TO THE PRIESTHOOD

[31] Shortly after Bernard had been sent to Clairvaux, he needed to be ordained into the ministry that he had assumed. But the see of Langres, which had the right to ordain him, was vacant at the time, so the brothers looked for a place where he could be ordained. They soon discovered that the bishop of

Châlons-sur-Marne, the venerable William of Champeaux, was a man of good reputation.³⁵ They decided to send him there. And so it came about. He went to Châlons, accompanied by Elbodo, a monk of Cîteaux. The younger man entered the house of the bishop, looking emaciated and deathly pale and clothed in rags, while the senior monk was well built, physically strong, and elegant. Some of those there smirked and some mocked, but others, recognizing the reality, showed him due respect. When they wanted to know which of the two was the abbot, the bishop was the first *to have his eyes opened** and perceived the servant of God, and so received him as such.

*Num 24:16;
Neh 1:6

As soon as they were in private conversation and by Bernard's words the bishop discovered the prudence of the young man, he was more and more impressed by his humble manner of speaking; so this wise man understood his guest's arrival as a divine visitation. His welcome was so warm that they became familiar friends at once, and their conversation soon became free and confidential. Their understanding of one another deepened beyond mere words. What more can I say? From that moment they became *one heart and one soul in the Lord*.* This fact was so apparent that they quite often became guests of one another, so that the bishop made Clairvaux his own home. Indeed, not only was Clairvaux the home of the bishop, but also the whole of the city of Châlons became a home to the monks of Clairvaux. Indeed, through the bishop's influence, the province of Reims and the whole of Gaul was moved toward a devout reverence for the man of God. Such was the prestige of the bishop that many others learned to accept Bernard

*Acts 4:32

³⁵ William of Champeaux taught Abelard at Paris. He founded the house of Regular Canons at Saint Victor, Paris, and was bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne from 1113 to 1122.

and revere him *as an angel of God*.^{*} It would appear that this bishop, a man of such great authority, had such a leaning toward this unknown monk—to be sure a monk of such humility—that he must have had some presentiment of the grace that was to blossom in him later on.³⁶

*Acts 27:23;
Gal 4:14

[32] A little later, when the abbot's illness became so severe that nothing could be expected except his death or a life more serious than death, the bishop paid him a visit.^{*} On seeing Bernard, the bishop asserted that there was still hope not only for his life but even for his return to health, provided he listened to his advice and agreed that care should be given to his body as was required for this type of illness. But Bernard would not easily be turned away from his accustomed rigor and usage, so the bishop betook himself to the Cistercian chapter, where a few of the abbots had assembled.³⁷ *He prostrated himself fully on the ground*,^{*} and with humility worthy of a bishop and the love expected of a priest he asked for and obtained his request that for a whole year Bernard should submit himself to him in obedience.

*Sept. 1119

*RB 53.7

How could they refuse such a humble request from such an influential person? He returned to Clairvaux and ordered a small house to be built outside the cloister and the boundary of the monastery. He then directed that none of the restrictions of the Order in the matter of food and drink or anything of that sort should be laid on Bernard, so that he should not have any solicitude for the concerns of the house, but that he should live there in the manner he himself had laid down for him.

³⁶ *Fragm* I.20 (VP 284–85; *Notes* 114–17).

³⁷ The abbots of Cîteaux and her daughters La Ferté, Pontigny, and Morimond.

WILLIAM OF SAINT-THIERRY FINDS BERNARD

[33] It was at that time that I began to be a regular visitor at Clairvaux and to see him. While I was there with another abbot³⁸ visiting him, I found him in a little hut such as lepers often have near public cross-roads. I found him there under obedience to the bishop and the abbots, as I have said, resting from all interior and exterior concern concerning the monastery, free to be with God by himself and as it were rejoicing *in the delights of paradise*.^{*} I was *admitted into that royal bedchamber*,^{*} and when I pondered over that dwelling and him who dwelt there, I swear to God, the house filled me with such reverence that it seemed as if I were *approaching the altar of God*.^{*} I overflowed with such affection for that man, with such a desire to be with him in his poverty and his simplicity, that if I had been given the option that day, I would have desired nothing more than to remain with him forever and be at his disposal.

*Ezek 28:13

*Song 1:3-4

*Ps 42:3

Since he received us with such great joy, we asked what he was doing, how he was getting on; he smiled at us in his generous fashion and replied, “Wonderfully! Up to now rational men have obeyed me, but now *by God’s just judgment*”^{*} I have been ordered to be obedient to someone, more like an irrational beast.” He told us that a rustic, vain man, who knew nothing about the illness that he was suffering, was boasting that he would cure him. He had been handed over to him by the bishop, the abbots, and his brothers under obedience.

*Wis 16:18

When we sat down to eat with him, we realized that he was so ill and needed to be entrusted to such

³⁸ Joran, abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Nicaise in Reims.

care and providence as was necessary. But we saw him, under this doctor, being offered food that even a healthy person could hardly touch unless he was famished. *We saw and we pined away*,* hardly able to contain ourselves even by the silence of the Rule; we were stirred up with anger and outrage at that sacrilegious man, a murderer. But he who put up with these things with indifference ate it all with equal approval, just like one whose senses were so spoilt and virtually dead that he could hardly taste anything. Indeed he was known to have eaten raw grease^{*39} given to him for a long time in error instead of butter, to have drunk oil instead of water, and many other like things that were given to him.* He used to say that he liked only water because, when he took it, it cooled his mouth and his throat.

*Ps 118:158

*MSB MS.
1: *sagenam*
(dripping or
grease)

*see also bk. 3.2

[34] This, then, was how I found him. This was how that man of God lived in his solitude. Yet he *was not alone, for God was with him*,* and he was in the care of the holy angels, and they were his guardians. That truth is demonstrated with very clear indications. One night he was alone attentively pouring out his soul in prayer when he drowsily heard voices that were thin and dream-like coming from a great crowd who were passing by. Getting up, he heard these voices more clearly. He rose up from the cell he was lying in and followed them on their way. Not far away the place was thick with thorns and brambles, though now it is quite changed. On this spot there were choirs standing, spread here and there, singing from side to side, and the holy man heard them

*John 16:32

³⁹ Horstius has *sanguinem* (“blood”) here, perhaps deriving from *sagumen*, which the critical edition reports as witnessed by MS. D of Recension A (Bruges Bibl. de la Ville MS. 32). All printed editions of the *Vita prima* through the PL follow Horstius in printing *sanguinem*; the critical edition, however, reads *sartaginem*.

and was deeply moved.⁴⁰ At that time he did not at first recognize the hidden meaning of the vision, but after some years when the monastery was moved and the oratory was placed there on that very spot he discerned the meaning of the voices he had heard.

I remained there with him for a few days, still annoyed, and wherever I looked around me I was bewitched as if *I saw a new heaven and a new earth*,* tracing the ancient ways of our fathers the Egyptian monks and in them the blossoming footprints of men of our time. [35] Ah, that was the time to perceive the golden age of Clairvaux, when those men of virtue who had once been rich in worldly affairs and honored as such were now planted in the poverty of Christ and in his blood, giving glory to the church *in toil and hardship, in hunger and thirst, in cold and exposure,* in persecutions and calamities, in many hardships*.* These were the men who made Clairvaux ready to be the place of plenty and peace that it is today. They did not think of living in this way for themselves, but only for Christ and the brothers who would later serve God there. They gave no thought to what they themselves lacked, provided that they could leave after them what was sufficient and necessary for future arrivals to gain experience of voluntary poverty for the sake of Christ.

The first thing those who came down from the hills surrounding Clairvaux would see *was God in these houses*.* This silent valley spoke to them of the simplicity and humility in the buildings, mirroring the simplicity and humility of those living there. Then, in that valley full of men, where none was at rest, where all were toiling at their work and each one had a job assigned to him, at midday and at

*Rev 21:1

*2 Cor 11:27

*2 Cor 12:10

*Ps 47:4

⁴⁰ *Fragm I.20* (VP 284–85; *Notes* 114–17). See also *Fragm I.32* (VP 290–91; *Notes* 134–35).

midnight they found silence all round them, save for the sound of work, save for the brothers occupied in the praise of God. Indeed their practice of silence enjoys such renown and has instilled such reverence for their way of life that even among the seculars who come there speech is so respectful that, I aver, they do not chatter idly or talk about trivial matters, but only what is worthy of the place.

CLAIRVAUX: IN SHADY WOODLANDS

The solitude of this place, among the shady woodlands and enclosed by the nearby impassable mountains in which the servants of God lie hidden, represented in a fashion that cave where our holy father Saint Benedict lived.* It was there that he was *found by the shepherds*,* and these men, who marveled at his life in the cave, seemed also to have imitated his way of living in solitude.⁴¹ Their *love was well ordered** and made that vale full of men into a solitary place for each of them, because their life was so well ordered—for just as if one person is in disorder, even when alone, so that person is inwardly disturbed, so where unity of spirit and a rule of silence govern a multitude, solitude of heart and an orderly life defends each one.

[36] To live in simple dwellings and simple ways of life was like nourishment to those dwelling there. Their bread seemed to them more like clay than bran. It was produced from the hard labor of the brothers, pressed out of the sterile earth of the desert, and whatever provisions there were had hardly any taste except for their hunger for God, or rather what the love

*Subiaco

*Luke 2:15–16

*Song 2:4

⁴¹ *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great: Translation and Commentary*, ed. and trans. Terrence G. Kardong (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), chap. 8, pp. 8–9.

of God could instill into them. And yet the simplicity of these young novices was such that they would have denied themselves even that taste. They thought that anything at all that gave them pleasure in eating was like poison, so much so that they rejected God's gifts on account of the grace they experienced within themselves. Anything that had seemed impossible beforehand to people living ordinary lives, they now undertook not only all the time without grumbling but even with huge pleasure with the help of God's grace, since their spiritual father's zeal instilled this pleasure into them. But this pleasure brought with it another sort of complaint that was all the more dangerous, because they thought that what they were doing was spiritual, far distant from mere bodily fitness.

*Matt 2:12

They had persuaded themselves that any pleasure in the flesh was harmful to the soul; moreover, their conscience bore witness to this understanding, as did their memory, faithful to the gospel. It was as if *they departed to their own country by another way*,* so they thought, since because of the delight from the love within them, they seemed to themselves to be living enchantingly as hermits and took just as much delight in nauseating things as the more pleasant. [37] In this matter they held suspect the daily admonitions of their spiritual father, in that he seemed to be complying with mundane things rather than with the spirit.

*Acts 7:22

When the bishop of Châlons happened to be passing that way, this matter was brought to him for his opinion. He was a man *mighty in speech*,* and he embarked on a sermon to them, saying that any man who rejected the gifts of God on account of the goodness of God was putting himself at enmity to God's grace and resisting the Holy Spirit. He then quoted the story of Elisha the prophet and the followers of the prophets who were leading an eremitical life with him in the desert. One day when it came to mealtime they found *some*

*bitter deathly herbs in the pot used for their meal.** Through God's power and the ministry of the prophet, the food was sweetened by the flour dropped into it. "So also for you," he said, "the flour of God's grace working in you changes bitterness into sweetness. Take it, then, with thanksgiving; you will be safe in doing so, for though by nature it is not quite fit for human use, through God's grace it has become fit for you to use, so you should use it and eat it. On the other hand, if you still remain disobedient and incredulous, *you will be resisting the Holy Spirit** and so be ungrateful for his grace."

*2 Kgs 4:40-41

*Acts 7:51

[38] This took place at that period under Bernard, the abbot, and through his teaching. It was a valley aglow with light and love, a school of contemplation and spirituality. Here was fervor for the discipline of the Rule, and everything was done and ordered *according to the pattern shown to him on the mountain** when he dwelt with God *in the cloud** at Cîteaux, that school of solitude. If only he had kept to those basic principles of his early way of life and afterward grown accustomed to live as a man among men and, having learned how to *understand the needy and the poor*,* to have compassion on the weaknesses of men; if only he had shown these same qualities toward himself as he had toward others: kindness, discretion, concern!

*Exod 25:40,
Heb 8:5

*Exod 16:10

*Ps 40:2

BERNARD'S SELF-IMPOSED RIGOR, NONE TOO WISE

But as soon as he had become free from the chain of his novice's year of obedience and had performed its duties, he returned to his accustomed former ways, like a bow under tension, and again took up his original rigorous life, like a cascade of water that has been held back and suddenly released. He imposed on himself a punishment for that long period of quiet and a penalty

for the task that had been interrupted. You would have seen this debilitated and frail man trying to carry out whatever he could without considering whether he could do so, solicitous for everyone else while heedless of himself, a model of obedience to everyone yet hardly ever listening to anyone who was speaking out of love or with authority about his own welfare. He was always striving to make greater efforts, thinking nothing of what he had already done. He would not spare his own body but had to add vigor to his spiritual gains. His body was undermined by various sicknesses, brought on by his fasting and constant vigils, and was thus in a weakened state.

*Ps 108:24

[39] During the day and at night he prayed standing upright until at last *his knees weakened by fasting** and his feet swollen by his labors could no longer bear the weight of his body. For a long time and as far as possible he kept secret the hair shirt next to his skin, but when it became known, he immediately relinquished it and went back to the common usage. His food was bread dipped in milk or water, cooked vegetables, or the soft mash made for babies. His sickness would not allow him anything else, or he refused other things for the sake of frugality. He drank wine only infrequently and then only a little, since he asserted that water suited his sickness and also his appetite. In spite of being so weak and exhausted, he would by no means allow himself to be excused during the day or at night from the common work of the brothers or from the duties and tasks of his ministry. Doctors saw him and his way of life, and they were amazed. They surmised that nature had endowed him with such drive that he was like a lamb linked to the plow and impelled to till the fields.⁴²

⁴² *Agnus ad aratum alligatus arare*; this alliteration is impossible to render into English. I have tried to emulate it with the letter *l*.

Now when his stomach was so decayed that he vomited up his food undigested, this behavior began to be more and more unacceptable to the brothers, especially when *they were singing in choir*,* yet he would not leave the assembly of the brothers but had a receptacle dug into the earth by the place where he was standing, and for quite a while he put up with this painful inconvenience as far as he could. In the end, things became so intolerable that he was forced to leave the common life and live by himself alone, except for the times when he had to take part in meetings of the brothers for the sake of conferences or consoling them or the need for monastic discipline.

*RB 43.11

[40] This became a sad necessity, for that holy brotherhood was now deprived for the first time of his constant paternal companionship. In this we are saddened, and we weep over this sorry outcome of his sickness, but at least we admire the love he shows in his holy desires and spiritual warmth. The outcome of his sickness, however, should not be a cause for indefinite weeping and sorrowing.

Perhaps God in his wisdom willed this illness *to shame the many strong and great of this world by the weakness of this man*.* Nothing, then, has been left undone because of Bernard's sickness that should have been done, for the grace he had received blossomed later. Who else in our time has done anything as great as he? Even though close to death and failing in health, he has done wonders for the honor of God and the profit of the holy church, far more than others with strong physique and in fine fettle. Look at the number of men he has drawn from the world by his words and his example, not only to conversion of life but even to perfection. Just think of the many houses he has set up throughout the whole of Christendom, without a doubt *cities of refuge*,* so that whoever has

*1 Cor 1:27

*Josh 21:37

committed sins worthy of death and eternal punishment may repent and be converted to God and flee to them for salvation. How many schisms he has ended, how many heresies he has put to shame, how many times he has brought peace to discordant churches and people! All these things were for the good of the general public. Who could enumerate all the good things he has given individually to countless people, for special reasons, for personal needs, in a particular place, in a time of want?

[41] Moreover, even if his holy zeal is blamed for being excessive, he certainly holds a place of reverence even for that excess among those with devout mentality, for *all who are led by the spirit of God** have great esteem for the servant of God and would be slow to criticize him for it. Among such people he is easily excused, since *no one would dare to condemn a person whom God justifies** and has performed through him and by him so many things, such sublime works. Happy is he who is reckoned to be at fault over the things that other men usually presume to glory in. As a youth he harbored doubts about his own goodness, since *blessed is he who always fears the Lord,** for he was keen to acquire that full tally of virtue that he had through grace and to increase the relevance of his labor.

*Rom 8:14

*Rom 8:33

*Prov 28:14

POWER PERFECTED IN WEAKNESS

If his life was to be a model for everyone to imitate, it should not be lacking in the example of frugal continence. In this respect, even if the servant of God sometimes overdid it, he left an ideal of fervor for other ardent minds to follow rather than excessive zeal. Why should we try to excuse him in this? After all, he himself is still quite diffident about all his

works, and right up to the present he is not ashamed to accuse himself, treating it as sacrilegious that his body should withhold something from the service of God and his brothers because he has rendered it useless and idiotic by his own indiscreet fervor. But now he has recovered from his sickness, and this sickness has made him stronger and more effective. *For power is made more perfect in weakness,** shining out from that time until the present with more dignity among men and women, bringing with it reverence, and reverence eliciting authority, and authority eliciting obedience.

*2 Cor 12:9

[42] Now his preaching is endowed with divine energy, since, as we said above, it was once foretold of him *from his mother's womb,** attested by divine revelation. Not only was this the case, but he was appointed to it by an appropriate heavenly plan, which equipped him to follow it at every moment of his life either while he was a subject* or as a superior. He was made ready to do this work by ignoring what he wanted to do, not only in things pertaining to the monastic life but also in those pertaining to the whole business of the church. Indeed, first of all he dedicated his youthful enthusiasms to reviving the fervor of the ancient religion in the monastic order. To this end he devoted all his effort, by his example and his words, among the brothers in the community within the boundaries of the monastery. Afterward, when he was forced to adopt another way of life because of his physical sickness, as has already been said, the demands of his sickness and its necessities forced him to live sequestered from the common life of the community in a more solitary manner.

*Luke 1:15

*e.g., a novice

This necessity provided the initial occasion when he began to make himself available to people; many of them flocked to him while *he preached the word of life,** and he made himself known to them more

*2 Tim 4:2

*2 Cor 2:11;
Matt 16:23

*Gal 5:22

*1 Cor 12:7
*Rom 11:33

*1 Cor 11:28

freely and more copiously than before. Later, obedience drew him for a long time from the monastery to deal with general concerns of the church, so that wherever he went he used to speak of God and could not keep silent about him, and he could not stop doing *the things of God*.^{*} Thus in a short time he became well known, so that the church of God, finding such an effective member within the Body of Christ, could not but use him for whatever needed to be done. However, although from the first flowering of his childhood he was always replete *with the fruits of the spirit*,^{*} from this time onward these fruits were added to him so copiously that, as the apostle says, *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good*.^{*} This means that he abounded in more fruitful words of *wisdom and knowledge*,^{*} performing works of power through the grace of prophecy and various *deeds of healing*.^{*}

I have learned about these things from the faithful men who have told me of them with confidence, and I now leave them to my readers.

JOSBERT IS HEALED

*John 2:11

This was the first of his signs^{*} that Christ did by the hand of his servant, making him known to the world. [43] When Bernard had been at Clairvaux for some years, it happened that a nobleman called Josbert,⁴³ who was closely related to him, fell seriously ill in La Ferté, a town near the monastery. Suddenly this sickness took possession of him, and he lost both his mind and his speech. His son, Josbert Junior, and all his friends were so overcome with grief that such a

⁴³ Josbert le Roux, viscount of la Ferté-sur-Aube.

highborn man and one of such eminence should die without confession or viaticum. A messenger hurried off to the abbot, who was not in the monastery then. When the abbot returned, he found that Josbert had been lying sick for three days. He had compassion on the man and was moved by the tears of his son and the others who were likewise lamenting.

Placing his trust in God's mercy, Bernard pronounced this extraordinary statement, saying to them, "It is well known to you all that this man has harmed the church in many ways by oppressing the poor and offending God. If you give credit to me and restore to the churches and put back the practices he has usurped to the detriment of the poor, he will then be able to speak and make confession of his sins and also devoutly receive the divine sacraments." They were all amazed; his son cheered up, and all the family rejoiced. Whatever the man of God had ordered they resolutely promised they would do, and they carried it out. Bernard's brother Gerard and his uncle Gaudry, however, were much disturbed and fearful about this promise; they got together in private and criticized him vehemently and strongly upbraided him. But he curtly and with simplicity replied, "It is easy for God to do what you can only believe with difficulty." Then, after a prayer in private, he went and offered the immortal sacrifice of the Mass.⁴⁴

While he was still offering the sacrifice a messenger came in. This messenger said that Josbert was now speaking freely and had abjectly requested that the man of God should come quickly to him. As soon as the sacrifice was finished, Bernard came along, and Josbert confessed his sins with tears and sorrow. He then received the sacraments, and after two or three

⁴⁴ *Fragm* I.17 (VP 283; *Notes* 108–11).

days, still living and speaking, he ordered all those things that the holy abbot had specifically demanded to be put into place without renegeing on his word. He dealt with the affairs of his household, gave alms, and so finally breathed forth his soul in a Christian fashion, with a sound trust in the mercy of God.⁴⁵

HEALING OF A BOY WITH A WITHERED HAND

[44] Once when the holy father had returned from the meadows, he met a woman carrying in her arms her little son, whom she had brought from a distance. While still in his mother's womb, he had had *a withered hand** and a totally distorted arm. Moved by the mother's tears and prayers, Bernard ordered the child to be set down, and then he prayed for a long time, making the sign of the cross over the arm and the hand. Then he told the woman to call her son. She called the infant, and he ran to his mother and embraced her with both arms, and *he was instantly made well*.^{*46}

*Mark 3:1

*Matt 9:22

[45] The brothers and spiritual sons of this blessed man were always marveling at what they heard and saw about him. They were not uplifted in a merely human fashion, however, nor did they give him glory; rather they were fearful on account of his youth and solicitous because of the novelty in his spiritual methods. His uncle Gaudry and his eldest brother, Guy, forestalled the other brothers in their zeal. They were like a pair of *thorns in the flesh* to him to *keep him from becoming too elated** by the greatness of the graces that he seemed to have received in a divine

*2 Cor 12:7

⁴⁵ Josbert d. 1125; see *Fragm* I.14 (VP 281–82; *Notes* 104–7).

⁴⁶ *Fragm* I.16 (VP 282–83; *Notes* 108–9).

way. They did not spare him, even abusing him with harsh words to shake up his tender diffidence, and even making nothing of all these well-attested signs. They opposed this *most gentle man*,* who never answered back, and they frequently brought him to tears with their hasty and reproachful speech.

*Num 12:3;
Vulg *mitissimus*

Geoffrey, the venerable bishop of Langres,⁴⁷ a man who was a relative of the holy man and close to him in conversion of life and an inseparable companion in everything, often tells this story. The first miracle he saw Bernard doing was when his brother Guy, mentioned above, was present. He was passing through the town of Nanton⁴⁸ in the territory of Sens, and a young man who had a fistula in his foot begged the holy father to touch him and give him a blessing. He made the sign of the cross and healed him at once. After a few days, they went back through the town and found the man healed and healthy. The blessed man's brothers, however, could not restrain themselves even by this miracle but still rebuked him, accusing him of presumption in agreeing to touch the boy, though he did watch over him with bountiful love.

[46] It was at about this time that his uncle Gaudry, who with a like zeal used to upbraid him with harsh reproaches for his meekness, as we have mentioned, suffered from a serious fever. When the sickness grew severe and he was overwhelmed with frightful pain, he was forced to turn to the abbot, humbly entreating him to bear with him, as he had often done with other people. Bernard, who possessed a spirit *sweeter than honey*,* first of all recounted gently in a few words how often Gaudry had rebuked him with

*Sir 24:27

⁴⁷ Geoffrey de la Roche-Vanneau, a distant cousin of Bernard and nephew of Josbert le Roux.

⁴⁸ Château-Landon, between Fontainebleau and Sens.

*Matt 8:3;
Mark 5:23

reproaches and then hinted that he might now just be testing him, but when Gaudry insisted, *he laid his hand on him and ordered the fever to depart.** At once the fever left Gaudry at this command, and he felt within himself the healing he had complained about in other people.⁴⁹

*Dan 7:7

This same Gaudry departed from this light after living at Clairvaux for many years, fervent in spirit and avid for every good thing. He had been a little while disturbed, for almost an hour before his death, and his whole body was trembling terribly, but just before he died he regained his former serenity, and his countenance was calm and peaceful. The Lord did not deprive the abbot's caring soul of knowledge of the meaning of this thing. Indeed, after a few days Gaudry appeared to him *at night in a vision.** When Bernard asked him how he was, he replied that he was prospering very well, and he thanked God that he was in a place of great happiness. Then he was asked why the dire distress came upon him so unexpectedly just before his death. He replied that at that moment two evil spirits had been preparing to shove him into a pit horribly deep and dark, so that he was all quaking with terror, but then blessed Peter came to snatch him up, and at once he felt not the slightest hurt.

THE HARSH BROTHER SAVED BY PRAYERS

[47] For a long time Bernard spoke of all the things that happened to those who departed from this life, their happiness or their needs, and what heavenly grace had revealed to him from the moment of their entry into bliss. There is one thing I

⁴⁹ *Fragm* I.17 (VP 283; *Notes* 108–11).

should say, however, namely, a warning he repeated several times. There was a brother who was well-intentioned but quite harsh about the way that other brothers acted and less compassionate than he should have been. He died in the monastery. After a few days he appeared to the man of God looking wretched and miserable, indicating that all was not going for him as he desired. When asked why this was happening to him, he complained that he had been handed over to four savage beasts. As he was saying this, he was suddenly struck and, as it were, kicked out of the presence of the man of God.

Bernard cried out with acute distress after him. “I order you,” he said, “in the name of the Lord, that whatever happened to you concerning those who oppose you, you should make known to me.” He gave himself to prayer for him and offered the Host of Salvation. He admonished some of the brothers whom he knew to be sincere and holy men to entreat the Lord in the same way for the brother. He persisted in prayer until after a few days he was consoled to learn, since it was made known to him by another revelation, that on account of his command the man had been freed.⁵⁰

[49] It was about this time that famine spread in the kingdom of France and regions close by, but the Lord heaped blessing on the barns of the brothers. Indeed, until that year, the annual produce of their labor had never been sufficient. That year as well, after they had sedulously gathered the harvest and reckoned up everything, they calculated that it would be hardly sufficient to keep them going till Easter. When they wanted to purchase anything, they could not pay, because what was sold was far more costly than usual. But from the time

⁵⁰ See *Exordium* 2.2 (CCCM 138:99–100; *Beginning*, 130–32).

of Lent a great crowd of poor people came to them. They faithfully gave them what they had from the modest annual produce, since the Lord had blessed them with it, and they also eagerly provided for the poor who crowded around them until harvest time.

There was a poor man living not far from the monastery whose wife, an adulterous woman, tormented him with venomous words. She used to threaten him in her anger and fury and came out with wicked incantations, so that his life was a misery and he became so eaten up that he could neither die nor be allowed to live. Very often he lost his power of speech and even his physical senses, and when he came back to himself he returned not to life but to a cruel drawn-out death. Eventually he was brought to the man of God, who was staying in the monastery, and this wretched tragedy was explained to him. Bernard became terribly angry that the ancient enemy should arrogate to himself a Christian man, so he called two of the brothers, and they carried the man to the holy altar. When they got there, he placed the ciborium containing the Eucharist on the man's head and ordered the demon by the power of the sacrament to put a stop to harming a Christian. So it came about as he commanded, and after so much torment that miserable man was healed, perfect faith restoring him to perfect health.⁵¹

THE LETTER TO ROBERT

[50] Brother Robert,⁵² a monk under the holy man and a close relative of his, was as a young man

⁵¹ *Fragm* I.28 (VP 288–89; *Notes* 128–29).

⁵² Robert of Châtillon, the son of a sister of Bernard's mother, Aleth (see *Exordium* 3.11, 12 [CCCM 138:168–75; *Beginning*, 240–52]).

deceived by the persuasive talk of certain people and betook himself to Cluny. The venerable father, after hiding the fact for some time, stated in a letter to Robert that he should return. He dictated this letter to the venerable William,⁵³ later the first abbot of Rievaulx,⁵⁴ who recorded it, writing the letter on parchment.⁵⁵ They were both sitting outside in the open, having gone out of the confines of the monastery in order to keep the dictation secret. All of a sudden it unexpectedly started to rain. The one who was writing, as we have said above, wanted to put the document away. But the holy father said, “It is the work of God; keep writing, do not fear.” He therefore wrote the letter in the pouring rain, without the rain’s getting it wet. For while the rain was pouring down, the sheet exposed to it was covered with the power of charity, and what charity wrote in the letter, charity likewise preserved. Because of this glorious miracle, this letter was selected by the brothers, not undeservedly, as the first one in the volume of his letters.⁵⁶

[51] Once there was an important solemnity, and a brother who because of a secret sin had been debarred from receiving communion at the holy altar was afraid of being caught and could not stand the embarrassment. So he had the audacity to approach the abbot with the others. Now although Bernard intuitively knew about the hidden secret, he was not willing to rebuff the man, but *in his inmost heart** he prayed to God that he might arrange a better outcome for such

*RB 7.51

⁵³ See Marc Debusson, “La provenance des premiers cisterciens d’après les lettres et les *vitae* de Bernard de Clairvaux,” *Cîteaux* 43 (1992): 5–118, here 84.

⁵⁴ An English monk of Clairvaux and Bernard’s secretary; d. Aug. 2, 1145; Rievaulx was founded in 1132.

⁵⁵ See *Exordium* 3.11 (CCCM 138:168–74; *Beginning*, 240–50).

⁵⁶ *Fragm* I.21 (VP 285; *Notes* 116–19).

presumption. Now when the man had received the Eucharist he could not swallow it. However much he tried, he just could not do so and became anxious and frightened, and he kept his mouth tightly closed. After Sext, the midday office, he drew the holy man to one side, threw himself at his feet and with profuse tears told him what was disturbing him. He opened up his mouth and showed him the Eucharist. Bernard reproved him and absolved him from the sin he had confessed, after which he received the Lord in the sacrament without any difficulty.⁵⁷

THE FLIES OF FOIGNY

[52] We have known him to have done great things even over very small creatures. Once he came to Foigny.⁵⁸ They were getting ready for the dedication of the new oratory, but there was such an incredibly large number of flies in the place that their noise and exasperating buzzing to and fro gave rise to a severe disturbance to everyone who entered. As nothing could be done about it, the saint exclaimed, “I excommunicate them.” Next morning they were all found dead, and they covered the whole surface of the place. The workmen got shovels and scooped them up so that the basilica was finally cleaned up. This event soon became so popular and celebrated that the great number of people who had come to the dedication from the vicinity changed it into a slogan: “Those infernal flies of Foigny.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Fragm* I.26 (VP 288; *Notes* 126–27).

⁵⁸ Clairvaux’s third daughter, founded July 1121, whose first abbot was Clairvaux monk Raynaud; Foigny was one of the first abbeys he built, situated in the region of Laon.

⁵⁹ *Fragm* I.19 (VP 284; *Notes* 112–13).

[53] In another monastery called Cherlieu⁶⁰ a young boy was incessantly weeping and wailing, and the holy man healed him with a kiss. As he had been weeping for a long time without any letup and could not be calmed, and the doctors were ignorant of that type of sickness, he was gradually declining into misery. The holy father took him aside and urged him to make a confession of his sins. Once he had made his confession, all of a sudden his face became serene, and he asked the blessed father to give him a kiss. After that kiss of peace from the holy man's lips, he immediately quieted down and was at peace. The source of his tears dried up, and he returned home safe and sound.⁶¹

[54] Once again, when the abbot went out after the other brothers to work, a father brought to him his son, who was lame. He begged the abbot to consent to lay his hand on the boy. But the man of God excused himself, claiming that he himself did not have the gift by which he could perform the favors asked for, since to give the gift of walking to a lame person was for the power of an apostle, not for him. The boy's father stood his ground and won him over, so Bernard made the sign of the cross over the boy and sent him off. From that moment the boy began to recover, and within a few days the father brought him back with immense gratitude, offering him to Bernard fully healed.⁶²

THE GROUP OF NOBLE KNIGHTS

[55] Once a group of noble knights turned aside to Clairvaux to see the place and its very reverend abbot.

⁶⁰ Caruslocus, affiliated to Clairvaux in 1131.

⁶¹ *Fragm I.23* (VP 286; *Notes* 120–23).

⁶² *Fragm I.37* (VP 293; *Notes* 140–41).

The season of Lent was close at hand, and almost all of them were young, committed to military service in the world. They were on the lookout for one of those detestable jousting fairs, commonly called tournaments. There were a few days before Lent, and Bernard began to ask the men not to use their weapons during that period. They refused, being obstinate, and would not listen to him, so he said, “*I trust in the Lord** that he will give me the truce that you refuse.” He then called a brother and ordered him to bring some ale, and he blessed it, saying that they should drink to the good health of their souls. They therefore drank with him, but some of them were unwilling to do so, afraid of it because of their love for worldly things, for afterward they experienced the effects of God’s power in that draught.

*Ps 10:2

As soon as they were outside the monastery they began to get heated in their conversation with one another, because *their hearts were burning within them.** God was inspiring them, and *his word was moving them swiftly,** so that they turned and were converted from their normal ways and enlisted themselves in the spiritual struggle. Some of them are still *fighting in God’s service;** some of them, released from the shackles of the flesh, are now reigning with him in heaven.

*Luke 24:32

*Ps 147:15

*2 Tim 2:4

[56] Is it not a thing of wonder that older people should honor this man with such great devotion? After all, the power of God stirred him up in infancy with devotion while he was not yet at the age of reason or devout.⁶³ Many people knew William Alcherum of Montmirail,⁶⁴ an illustrious youth. (His

⁶³ *Fragm* I.36 (VP 292–93; *Notes* 140–41).

⁶⁴ MSB MS. 1 has William Alcherum (*Guillelmus Alcherum*), but the critical edition has *Waltherum de Montemirabili* for the youth and *Waltherus* for his uncle.

father's brother, William, was one of those knights we have mentioned and was professed in the sacred knighthood at Clairvaux.) This was William Alcherum, Junior;⁶⁵ when he was still an infant a year old and knew only his mother's breasts, his mother had offered him to the man of God with gratitude and rejoicing to be blessed. She had been privileged to have the holy man as a guest in her house. And when the man of God, as he was always accustomed to do wherever he went, spoke to those around him about spiritual health and growth, the mother sat near his feet holding her child in her lap. While they were talking, he sometimes stretched out his hand, and the baby tried to grasp it. Eventually he noticed these efforts because the little one kept reaching; everybody was quite taken by the fact that the infant had the knack of being able to grasp the hand just as he wished. Then in a lovely and generous way Bernard held out his other hand and brought it up to the mouth of the child, who kissed it. This did not happen only once, but time and again the little one was allowed to hold Bernard's sacred hand.

BERNARD'S SICKNESS AND SATAN'S DEFEAT

[57] There came a time when the man of God was sick, and there flowed from his mouth something like a stream of phlegm. His body became so exhausted that he began to fail, so that after a little while he was drawing close to death.⁶⁶ His sons and friends gathered round for the last rites of their dear father, and I myself was present among them, for he considered

⁶⁵ VP *Waltherum iuniorem*; MSB MS. 1 (*Guillemus alcherum iuniorem*).

⁶⁶ See *Fragm* I.29 (VP 289; *Notes* 128–31).

me worthy of being numbered among his friends. When he seemed to be almost on the point of drawing his last breath, *he fell into an ecstasy of mind** and saw himself before the tribunal of the Lord. *Satan also was present** as an enemy smiting him with fraudulent accusations. But when Satan had attacked him with all these things and then allowed the man of God to speak for himself, Bernard, being neither terrified nor even disturbed, replied, "I confess that I am not worthy, nor can I by my own merits obtain *the kingdom of heaven.*"* Nevertheless, I have a lawful right to claim it for two reasons, for the Lord my God has obtained it for me by the bequest of the Father and the reward of his passion, for on the one hand he has gained it himself and on the other he gives it to me. I am not ashamed, then, rightly to claim it for myself by his gift." The enemy was confounded by these words, the matter was resolved, and the man of *God came back to himself.**

*Acts 10:10;
Ps 30:23

*Job 1:6

*Matt 7:21

*Acts 12:11

*RB 42.3

[58] Because of this vision Bernard expected that the dissolution of his body was imminent, but a quite different one followed. He was placed on a certain seashore, and it seemed to him that he was waiting for a ship to carry him across. When the ship pulled in to the shore, he quickly made to board it, but withdrawing from him, it moved off into the water. This happened three times, and then the ship sailed off, leaving him there, and did not return. From this he understood that his departure from this life was not yet to be. The pain still increased, however, and it became so grievous that the hope of imminent death did not now comfort him. It came about that as the day drew to a close, when the rest of the brothers went as was customary to their reading of the *Conferences*,* their abbot was left alone with two brothers assisting him in the lodging place where he lay. He was so afflicted with intense pain, which increased

beyond his strength, that he called one of the two brothers and ordered him to go quickly and pray for him. The brother excused himself and said, "I am not prayerful enough," but he enforced him by the authority of obedience.

The brother went to pray at the altars, three of them in the same basilica. The first of these was in honor of the blessed Mother of God, and the second two, placed on either side, honored the martyr Blessed Laurence and the abbot Blessed Benedict. At that moment the Blessed Virgin was present to the man of God accompanied by the two others, namely, Blessed Laurence and Blessed Benedict. They were present in that serenity and calmness that is proper to them, and they were so clearly visible to him that from their very entrance into the cell he distinguished each of them personally. *Laying their hands on him*,* they soothed the painful place by their gentle touch, and from that moment they removed all his sickness. Then the river of phlegm *dried up*,* and all his pain disappeared.⁶⁷

*Acts 13:3

*Mark 5:29

WILLIAM'S SICKNESS AND THE REMEDY

[59] Once I myself was sick in our own house* and completely drained. The sickness was prolonged and went on and on for a very long time. Hearing about it, Bernard sent to me his brother Gerard,⁶⁸ a man of happy memory. He pressed me to come to Clairvaux, and he promised me that I would either be soon cured or die. I set out at once for the place, as if the opportunity was divinely given and accepted.

*the Abbey of Saint-Thierry

⁶⁷ *Fragm I.29 (VP 289; Notes 128–31).*

⁶⁸ Debuissou, "La provenance," 75.

I do not know which I preferred, either dying close to him or being with him for some time. I made that journey, even though the task was very burdensome and I was in great pain.

Once I got there, it was as he had promised me and, I confess, what I had wanted. My health returned to me from that very alarming sickness, but my physical strength came back only gradually. O good God, how good was that sickness for me, that time of rest, that time of prayer, which was mainly just what I wanted. For during the time he himself was confined by his sickness, he helped me with my needs in my sickness for the whole time that I was with him. Both of us, sick though we were, discussed for the whole day the soul's spiritual well-being, that is, the remedies of the virtues against the flagging of vices. He then commented on the Song of Songs to me, explaining the moral meaning to me during the time of my infirmity, leaving on one side the deeper mysteries of that part of Scripture, since that is what I wanted and what I asked of him.

Each day whatever I heard on this subject I used to put it down in writing so that it might help me to remember what God had given me through him. He used to expound it to me kindly and without any envy, to communicate his understanding of the text and his own meaning drawn from experience. He brought light to his teaching in many ways, which could usually be discerned only through experience. And even though I could not as yet comprehend what he put before me, he made me understand what I had failed to grasp.

But let that be enough about these things I have talked about.

[60] When the Sunday named Septuagesima came round, at Vespers of the Saturday before the Sunday, I was now regaining my health and was strong

enough to get up from my bed and move around on my own, so I began to get ready for my return to our own brothers. When he heard of this he simply would not hear of it and put a stop to it, giving me no hope of a return until Quinquagesima Sunday. I easily agreed with what he commanded, because I went along with his desire, and my weakness seemed to require it. But when after Septuagesima Sunday I wanted to abstain from meat, which I had eaten till that day out of necessity and because he had demanded it, he forbade that too. I would not agree to this injunction, however, and would not listen to him when he made this request, nor obey what he demanded, so we disagreed with one another until the Saturday evening. He went off tight-lipped to Compline, I to bed. Now see what happened: my sickness revived and grew much worse, resuming all its former strength.

This attack came upon me with such ferocity and violence that I was tortured all night and devastated with such malice that I believed I would be overcome by it, despairing of life itself since it was beyond my strength and beyond the limit of my endurance that I might not still have a final word with the man of God. But after I had spent the whole night in pain, late in the morning he came at my bidding, offering me not so much the expression of his sympathy that I was used to, but rather a rebuke. Nevertheless he said with a chuckle, "What do you want to eat today?" Now I quickly interpreted the real cause of my affliction to be his silence at yesterday's disobedience, so I said, "Whatever you order." "Be at rest," he said; "you are not going to die yet." Then he went off. What can I say? All the pain went away at once, except that I felt drained after the pain I had had during the night. So for the whole day I hardly had enough energy left to get up from the bed. What about the pain or

*John 5:14 its severity? I do not remember ever having suffered the like. The next day I felt *healed once more*,* and my strength returned. After a few days, with the blessing and kindness of my good host, I returned home.

BERNARD'S WIDENING MISSION;
CLAIRVAUX, THE VALLEY OF LIGHT

*Sir 45:1 [61] Bernard was *beloved by God and mankind*.* In that valley of his and in the local towns and regions that he was often obliged to visit for the requirements of the house, he blossomed with his virtuous deeds and miracles. Then he began to be drawn farther afield into distant places either because of the common needs of the church or the love of the brothers, or by obedience to superiors, or else to bring back peace so desperately needed and restore it between churches and secular princes in discord with one another. Also, he was needed to put an end peacefully with God's help to the never-ending disputes defying human reason and counsel and by the power of faith to make possible many things that seemed impossible *to the spirit of the world*;* as it were *by moving mountains*,* he appeared more and more in everybody's eyes to be highly esteemed and even venerated.

*1 Cor 2:12

*1 Cor 13:2;

Mark 11:23

*Isa 55:11
(*revertetur ad me vacuum*, Vulg)

*John 21:6

His powerful preaching began especially to shine out to such an extent that he even softened the hard-hearted among his hearers, so that he hardly ever *returned empty handed*.* After a while he became so remarkably proficient in his sermons and in his exemplary way of life that he was like a net for the word of God in the hand of a fisherman, so great was the *quantity of rational fish** that he began to catch.

From each of these captures the boat of the house of God seemed to be filled.* Briefly, then, it came about that what this little-known and ailing man, at death's door and strong only in speech, did in this life was a greater miracle than all his other miracles.

*Luke 5:6

At that time Clairvaux (in name and in reality a Clear Valley), that valley whose light radiated with divine brilliance as if from the peaks, was spreading its vigor down into the sloping plains of the world. Formerly called a valley of absinth and bitterness, from then on in that valley *the mountains began to distill their sweetness*.^{*} This was a void, a sterile place totally lacking in goodness, but now it began to abound in spiritual fruit, *from the dew of heaven and the blessing of God^{*} the pastures of the wilderness overflow with richness;^{*} the nation has been multiplied and increased in joy.*^{*} Then there was fulfilled in that valley what the prophet once said to the city of Jerusalem: *The children who were barren will say in your hearing, the place is too narrow, make room for me to settle, and you will say in your heart, Who has borne me these? I was sterile and barren, who has reared these?**

*Joel 3:18;

Amos 9:13

*Gen 27:29

*Ps 64:13

*Isa 9:3

*Isa 49:20-21

[62] From a valley within narrow limits it has grown exceedingly wide and spacious into a cloistered dwelling, moved now into *an open and spacious plain*,^{*} with those dwelling there having revelations of divine things, growing rapidly and increasing in numbers, so that now this place is too cramped for the great number of those abiding there.⁶⁹ Now the houses of the Order, daughters of Bernard's own house, have filled many deserted places, on this side and beyond the Alps and the seas, and still they are coming and still they flow in, those for whom a place must be found. From all sides the brothers are sought after and sent, since the kings of the

*Num 33:49

⁶⁹ Clairvaux moved to a more spacious site in 1135. *Fragm* I.30 (VP 289; *Notes* 130–31). See book 2.29–31 below.

nations and princes of the church reckon themselves blessed, as do the cities and regions everywhere, if they can merit to increase in renown by having a company from that house and regime of the man of God. What shall I say? Further still, this form of religious life has reached people as far off as the barbarous nations, in which the natural ferocity has shed its human attributes, where through it those fiends of the woodlands have become human again and have grown used to living with men and *sing a new song to the Lord*.*

*Ps 95:1;
Isa 42:10;
Ps 32:3

*Luke 5:4

God's fisherman, then, did not fail *to let down his net for capturing fish** at the Lord's command, and while some turned away and others followed their own path, the full tally of that holy congregation never lessened. To this very day, those catches of his have come and amazingly are still coming from Châlons, from Paris, from Mainz, from Liège, and from many other cities. From other regions too: Flanders, Germany, Italy, Aquitaine. Wherever he goes, for whatever reason, or wherever he is needed, or where still to this day the man of God is required to visit, wherever he goes he comes back full, totally supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit. This fullness accompanies him everywhere.

[63] Nor does he forget those he has sent elsewhere, but wherever they are he himself always preserves fatherly concern over them. Just as rivers *return to the place from which they arise*,* so either his sons' glad news or their sorrowful news comes back to him daily. Often what is happening among them is made known to him from his fatherly concern for them, by divine intuition without *any human contact*,* though they are far away from him. If anything is provided, if anything is to be corrected among them, their temptations or their extravagances, sicknesses or death, or any intrusion of worldly troubles, he knows. So he often enjoins on those at home prayers for cer-

*Sir 1:7

*Gal 1:16 (Vulg
carnis et sanguinis)

tain needs of absent brothers. Sometimes even those dying in far-off places make known to him through a vision that he should come to them, asking him for his blessing and indeed for permission to die. This is done out of obedience in those being sent and love in the one who sends them.⁷⁰

BERNARD'S PREDICTIONS

Once when I had come to him and while I was speaking to him, I saw and I heard what I cannot be silent about. There was a certain monk from Foigny who was about to go back home. As he had received a favorable reply about the matters he had come for, he was about to go off, but the prophet of God called him back *in the spirit and power of Elijah** and in my hearing mentioned the name of a brother from that house, ordering him to correct those things that he was doing in secret. If not, he said, he might expect the judgment of God to come upon him. Taken aback, the monk asked him who had told him about these things. Bernard replied, "Whoever it is has told me, go off and tell him what I say to you and do not hide anything, lest you also should be involved in a similar penalty for the sin."

*Luke 1:17

I marvel over this thing, but while I am marveling, much greater marvels about him have been told me in a similar case. [64] Guy, the most senior among Bernard's brothers, was a serious and truthful man, as everyone who knows him is aware. When we were here in some place talking together, I was inquiring from him about this matter in a jovial way as friends are accustomed to do. "These things," he said, "that

⁷⁰ *Fragm* I.55 (VP 301–2; *Notes* 168–69).

*2 Tim 4:4 you have heard are *just fables*.”* When he in his usual careful way devalued his brother’s powers but was unwilling to disturb me, he said, “What I do not know I cannot tell you, but *one thing I do know*,* and I have experienced it: many things have been revealed to him in prayer.”

*John 9:25

of Champeaux Then he recounted to me how, when they began at first to build new houses of the Order and the honey-filled hives of spiritual bees were being asked for everywhere, the Lord Bishop William asked for and received his request, and they constructed in his Diocese of Châlons-sur-Marne one house called Trois Fontaines. They sent out to that place the abbot with his monks—Dom Roger,⁷¹ a nobleman in the world’s opinion but more noble in sanctity, and other men of a similar quality. Bernard, their spiritual father, did not forget those sons whom he had sent but was there with them in his fatherly concern and his devout affection. So it came about that when they were alone together, the abbot and he who was telling me this story, while they were speaking to one another about these brothers, suddenly Bernard the abbot gave a great sigh, and grieving within himself from his heart concerning them, he called out: “Go,” he said to his brother, “Pray for them, and whatever God shows you about them relate to me.” He replied, “Good heavens! I am not a person who knows how to pray like that and merits to gain my plea!”

*Ps 41:5 When Bernard insisted on his bidding, however, Guy went off and prayed. He prayed with all his strength, *pouring out his soul** to God for each one of the new community. While he was praying, he was filled with such a loving gentleness in his heart for

⁷¹ Roger of Trois Fontaines, one of the converts of Châlons in 1116.

each one of them and an overwhelming grace of spiritual consolation that he rejoiced in spirit. And he had certain trust that he had been heard for them all, except for two of them for whom his prayer faltered, his devout feelings hesitated, and his trust failed. When he related this fact to Bernard who had sent him, Bernard straightaway delivered his verdict about those two, which in the event proved true.

BERNARD VISITS CHÂLONS

[65] Abbot Roger and the others who were with him were those whom the man of God used to visit whenever he drew near to the city of Châlons. A similar thing also happened then to them and among them. For when at the request of the bishop Bernard had visited Châlons, he returned bringing with him a great number of noblemen, educated men, clerics, and laymen. While he was still in the guesthouse *refreshing these new plants** with his heavenly discourse, a monk, the porter, came in and announced that Stephen de Vitry,⁷² their master, was present. He too had come to renounce the world and desired to live with them. Who other than Bernard would not rejoice in the arrival of such a man, especially since that *valley had not yet thrived much in the fruit** of such corn as he?

*Ps 143:12

*Ps 64:14

But the Holy Spirit revealed to Bernard *the snares of spiritual wickedness;** he groaned for a while silently and then cried out in the hearing of everyone there, “An evil spirit has brought him here.* He comes alone, he shall return alone.” As he was still unwilling, however, *to scandalize the little ones,** his sons, he

*Eph 6:11-12

*Luke 8:2

*Matt 18:6

⁷² Master of a group of scholars from Châlons who joined Clairvaux.

received the man and carefully warned him about perseverance and the need to give himself to the other virtues. He admitted him *into the novitiate** for a trial period, where those truly seeking God and going to persevere proved themselves. Yet he knowingly and shrewdly discerned that he would promise to do everything and do nothing. But concerning everything he had *predicted, none fell to the ground*.*

*RB 58.5

*1 Sam 3:19

*Mark 12:15

This man Stephen, as he himself confessed, saw while he was still in the novitiate a little Moorish fellow dragging him out of the oratory. After Stephen had remained there for almost nine months he left, and the prediction came true: he came alone and went away alone. In this way the *wiles of the enemy** were frustrated, and what the devil had instigated for the wreckage of the novitiate was fulfilled instead in his own defeat.⁷³

[66] Before we leave Châlons aside, when on one occasion the holy father returned there, he and those who were with him were laboring under harsh conditions because of the cold and the winds. Many of those who were then in his company went on ahead and did not wait for him on account of the cold, so that he was left almost alone. It so happened that the horse of one of the two with him, who had dismounted, evaded him and galloped off across the open plain. They could not capture it, and the intemperate weather did not allow them to remain there any longer. “Let us pray,” he said, and knelt down in prayer with the brother who was with him. Hardly had he finished the Lord’s Prayer when behold, the horse returned as meek as could be, came to a halt before him, and went back to its rider.⁷⁴

⁷³ *Fragm* I.25 (VP 287; *Notes* 124–25).

⁷⁴ *Fragm* I.35 (VP 292; *Notes* 138–39).

BERNARD AT REIMS

[67] We now move on from Châlons to the city of Reims. There was an occasion when the man of God was present, trying to reconcile the differences between the archbishop and the people of Reims.* While he was there in the palace of that city staying with Josselin of Soissons, the bishop,⁷⁵ a great assembly of clerics and citizens filled the house to sue for peace. A sorrowful woman brought along her son, offering him in front of everyone with a plea for mercy, for the boy was reckoned to be possessed by a demon. Indeed on that very day he had attacked his mother and almost killed her. He had become mute and blind and deaf, and he was not able to see when he opened his eyes. All his faculties were seriously impaired, and he remained without any understanding. Bernard felt deep sympathy for this distraught mother who was so tortured by the agony of her boy. He caressed the pitiful youth, and laying his gentle hands on his head and face he began to speak to him with soothing words; he inquired of him how he could presume to attack his mother. The boy then came back to himself and at once recalled his sin; from then on he promised to reform himself and was restored unharmed to his mother.

*1139

In the monastery that is called Aulps,⁷⁶ among other sick persons who needed healing there came to him a woman sick with epilepsy. At that very moment, while she was standing in front of him, she fell down struck with her illness. The man of God immediately *took her*

⁷⁵ Six of Bernard's collected letters were addressed to Josselin (also Jocelin) de Vierzy, bishop of Soissons 1126–1152: Epp 222, 223, 225, 227, 263, 342 (SBOp 8:86–90, 94, 97, 172, 284–85; James ##298, 299, 301, 303, 336, 387).

⁷⁶ In Savoy, founded by Molesmes in 1090 and affiliated to Cîteaux in the Clairvaux filiation in 1136.

*Mark 16:9

by the hand and lifted her up,* so that she was henceforth perfectly cured from her infirmity, not just for a time.⁷⁷

[68] The duchess of Lorraine⁷⁸ was a noblewoman, though no longer living in such a noble way, when she saw in a dream the man of God extracting seven terrible serpents from her womb with his own hands. Afterward, because of his admonition, she converted her life and became a religious,* and to this day she takes delight that *he cast out* of her *seven demons*.^{*79}

*at Tart

*Mark 16:9

I know one cleric, called Nicholas,⁸⁰ almost desperately given to worldly matters but freed from this attachment by Bernard. After he had entered Clairvaux and received the habit and the observance of monastic life, he saw those who had fled there from the shipwreck of the world and were redeeming the plight of their shipwreck with the continuous gift of tears; he desired to do the same but was unable to do so because of *the hardness of his heart*.* He asked Bernard with great sorrow in his heart to pray for him to God for the gift of tears. Bernard prayed, and he obtained for him such a great and such continuous *compunction of heart** that from then on the expression on his face was completely changed. Even when he was eating his eyes were filled with tears, and this too happened wherever he went or whatever he said.

*Mark 10:5

*RB 20.3, 49.4

THE INFLUENCE OF BERNARD ON HIS CONTEMPORARIES

[69] So many and so great are the powerful deeds we have heard about Bernard concerning the various

⁷⁷ *Fragm* I.33 (VP 291; *Notes* 136–37).

⁷⁸ Duchess Adelaide, d. 1158, sister of the Emperor Lothair.

⁷⁹ *Fragm* I.34 (VP 291–92; *Notes* 136–39).

⁸⁰ See Debusson, “La provenance,” 96–97.

needs of people and the different ways he has helped others that if anyone wanted to make a statement or write about them, that person would arouse either disbelief in those who are disdainful or disdain in those who are incredulous. In all his works his intentions were so pure and enlightened that they pointed clearly *to a body full of light** in whatever he did. He did not arrogantly reject all those high ecclesiastical honors that were always being pressed on him,⁸¹ and indeed he was worthy of them but declined them for religious reasons, and sensibly so. But he made it clear that in everything he did he was always seeking how he might bear himself. He was so worthy that he could have been forced into them (I know not by what judgment of God), for he had gained reverence for his remarkable sanctity among everyone, so that sometimes he may have been forced into something against his will.

*Matt 6:22

Yet while he escaped from the honors of this world, he did not escape the authority that comes with these honors. In the conviction of all who fear and love God he is revered and loved, since wherever he is present, he does not dream of saying or doing anything against righteous living. Whenever he says or does anything to promote good living, he is obeyed. [70] Strengthened by this same authority, whenever the needs of obedience or *charity* in the church of God *impels him on*,* he accepts every inconvenience found in the work. Is there anyone among powerful men, either seculars or church dignitaries, who submits himself with such

*2 Cor 5:14

⁸¹ The people of Milan wanted to elect him as their archbishop in 1135; in 1139 he was elected archbishop of Reims but refused. See Ep 449 (SBOp 8:426–27; James #210). Bernard also refused the sees of Châlons in 1131 and Langres in 1138. See *Fragm* 1.27 (VP 288; *Notes* 126–27). See also bk. 2.26–27 below.

willingness to God's will, to whose counsel he humiliates himself?

Proud kings, princes and tyrants, knights, and extortioners fear him and reverence him so that he seems to fulfill what we read in the gospels that the Lord says to his disciples: *Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you.** Indeed, where spiritual things are looked at in a spiritual way and when spiritual persons are being dealt with, quite another authority is given to him, just as it is said by the prophet about holy creatures: *For there came a voice from the firmament that hung over their heads, and they stood and lowered their wings.** So in these days, whenever spiritual persons are speaking to him or dealing with him, they are steadfast in yielding precedence to him and in submitting their thoughts and understanding to his thoughts and understanding.

*Luke 10:19

*Ezek 1:25

HIS HUMILITY, HIS CHARITY, HIS PATIENCE

So great is the badge of holiness that commends this man of virtue in the sight of God and of men to this very day, so evident the witness of sanctity surrounding him and the charisms of the Holy Spirit shining forth in him, and—what is greater than all these and more difficult in human matters—all these things are evident in him without inspiring the slightest envy. What drives envy from him is that he is above any envy. The evil in the human heart often ceases to envy in a person what it cannot aspire to. [71] He himself crushes every trace of envy by the example of his humility or changes it for the better *by provoking charity*,* or if it is too depraved or too hardened he overpowers it by the weight of his authority. Who is found these days so efficacious or so loving

*Ps 108:24

at fostering charity wherever it is, or at promoting it where it is not? Who is so beneficial to those whom he can help, so benevolent to everyone, so gracious to his friends, so patient with his enemies? Indeed, he could not have any enemies, he who never wishes to be inimical to anyone.

Just as friendship exists between two persons, so it cannot exist except between two friends, and in the same way enmity is perhaps between two enemies. The person who hates or does not love the one who loves him is not so much an enemy as simply a wicked person. But the one who loves everyone never has an enemy because of his virtue. It does happen, however, that a person may suffer enmity against himself by another's uncalled-for wickedness. Charity, when it possesses him completely, *is patient, is kind,** defeating malice by wisdom, impatience by patience, pride by humility.

*1 Cor 13:4

The following is an appendix to the preceding work, which, because the author had died, Burchard, the abbot of Balerne, added.

The particular reason for writing the previous work was friendship for that faithful man, Bernard. It was written by the venerable William, once abbot of Saint-Thierry, on the life of Saint Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux. At that time, William was a monk of the community of Signy, where he went because of his desire for solitude and quiet, and he remained there until the time of the schism against Pope Innocent by Peter Leonis. This work was considered to be an orderly account of the *Fragmenta*. Such was the grace found in it that hardly anything found therein more intimately reveals the hidden secrets of mutual love disclosed in those friendly talks about spiritual

mysteries. The gracious familiarity that emanates from this work is still now clearly seen in the letters Bernard wrote to William⁸² and makes clear to those who read them what he felt about him. Bernard also wrote to him his *Apologia*⁸³ and his other work, *On Grace and Free Will*.⁸⁴ William, however, had a far stronger and more general reason for writing, namely, the good of the whole church of God, so that this vase filled with such desirable treasures should not be hidden, and likewise that this treasure, the man himself, might not be hidden. It is not then inappropriate that he who desired to write about this should lament and say, *An unseen treasure and hidden wisdom, what profit is there in them both?** He himself sets forth the riches of salvation, the desirable treasure, so that it may not be buried like a dirty clod of soil that is by no means a clod, but rather a most precious jewel.

*Sir 41:17

Nevertheless it happened to him, contrary to his desire, that he was overcome by death, as he had himself feared and had intimated in his preface, and did not complete what he had conceived in his mind and wished to commit to writing. So then anyone who begins to read this work can quite easily understand that this devout and religious boy, Bernard, like another Benedict, was predestined from the first moment of his conversion, since he was seen to have been sanctified *even in the womb of his mother*.^{*} From her the future holiness of his life and teaching was realized and accounted for in the former work. What that young man, Bernard, began to do until he arrived at perfect manhood and from then on is

*Luke 1:15

⁸² Epp 84 *bis*, 85, 86, and 327 (SBOp 7:219–24, 8:263; James ##87, 88, 89, and 236).

⁸³ *Apologia ad Guillelmum* (SBOp 3:81–108).

⁸⁴ *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (SBOp 3:155–203).

portrayed diligently, as has already been said, in the previously narrated work. This was written by that first-rate artist, William, but he was prevented from completing it.

*This is the end of the first book of the life of
Saint Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux.*