Chapter 1

Bernard of Clairvaux in the Twelfth-Century World

Spiritual direction involves two willing participants: a director and a person or persons being directed. It happens more in the reality of life than in esoteric statements in books worth quoting from generation to generation. To understand Bernard of Clairvaux as a spiritual director, a basic understanding of the real Bernard set in time and culture is necessary. Modern readers have very little in common with medieval Europeans; their language, worldview, culture, politics, and economics are foreign to us. Other than an understanding of God, we share with medievals only our human identity. To set in context the spiritual direction Bernard offers in his letters, we must first explore Bernard in the twelfth-century European world.

BERNARD AS A CHILD OF THE CHURCH

Some individuals are born before their time. These unique people find themselves in a culture unprepared for their ideas, technological or scientific insights, or philosophical theories. Peter Abelard, the twelfth-century philosopher and theologian, was one of these people. Peter's contemporary, Bernard of Clairvaux, was not. Bernard de Fontaines (1090–1153) entered a Europe and an ecclesiastical system perfectly suited for him.[1] The Roman church was flourishing, medieval European culture was entering the high point in its history, and scholasticism had begun to have its own place in

1. Storrs, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 72.

theological debates. This medieval renaissance did not arrive without tension, however, but was full of controversy and occasional violence.

Under the Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century, monasticism was ripe for renewal. The establishment by Pope Gregory VII of an overarching papal control structure for the church was based, in part, on a supposed rediscovery of the *Donation of Constantine*, a document purported to demonstrate that a centralized papal authority was an ancient tradition. This centralized power transformed the role of the pope from that of a delegating authority to a ruler involved in the many details of governing a multinational society. While the Gregorian popes enjoyed this new dominance in worldly affairs, it did not come without a price. They now had to endure the daily traffic and long speeches of litigants who each believed their issue was of the utmost importance. As R. W. Southern states, the popes became prisoners of their own machine.[2] Gregory wanted more centralized control, and he received it, along with the detailed and miniscule litigation that came with it. Nevertheless, the benefits of papal control outweighed the administrative frustrations. For example, the threat of excommunication was, in these early years of reform, a powerful political tool in a highly superstitious society, as in the excommunication of King Henry IV of Germany.[3] Nearly everyone, from the religious to the peasantry, feared the wrath of God in the world to come. Since the clerics wielded control over laity by claiming to be God's representatives on earth, church leaders wielded considerable power, forcing both king and layperson alike into submission in order to garnish God's good favor. This supposed freedom from the secular authorities gave the church the enviable position of becoming the dominant force in society as a whole.

European medieval culture lagged behind Byzantium in orderliness, sophistication, and administrative structure. In the East, a unified currency, salaried administrative rulers, and centralized justice provided a greater stability than the Western culture of military allegiances and power, fluctuating church support, and multi-nationalism. Visitors to Constantinople often commented on the dazzling decorative displays of the courts and dress of the rulers. In Europe, the strength of one's army or number of serfs, not one's opulence, demonstrated power and authority. Not until

2. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 110.

3. Henry, apparently testing Pope Gregory's resolve, appointed bishops to three sees in Italy, which Gregory claimed as his own. At the Diet of Worms in 1076, Henry withdrew himself from the obedience of Rome and was excommunicated. The results were disastrous for the German king.

European exploration of Byzantium, particularly during the Crusading period, did the nobility of Europe focus their efforts on ornate décor in dress and architecture.

The tenth and eleventh centuries were periods of political maneuvering throughout Europe. In France, the great fiefs of Normandy, Brittany, Flanders, and Burgundy began to take shape, joining Aquitaine as independent nations with their own distinct cultures and customs. These feudal states, ruled by powerful families, became larger and more powerful through strategic political alliances, marriages, and military conquests. In 1066, Normandy became the most powerful state when Duke William added England to his land possessions. In the Holy Roman Empire kings found it difficult to keep order and peace within the kingdom and to keep the pagan nations to the north and east at bay.

This period in the history of the West was an age of experimentation, tolerance, monastic expansion, and enterprise. It has also been called one of the most significant periods both socially and theologically in the history of Christianity.[4] Monastic expansion in spirituality, politics, and finance fueled an already expanding economy. This monastic growth was supported by secular society, as benefactors gave their lands for the development of new monasteries. These donors desired the cultivation, safekeeping, and management of their lands that monastic foundations offered, and the prayers of the monks on behalf of their patrons offered a sense of eternal security.

Western Europe was experiencing for the first time a significant growth of cities, commerce, and the development of the burghers. Cistercian monastic establishments on the frontiers of Europe expanded useable lands and territories, opening new areas for civilization. The acceptance of profit-making ushered a new understanding of trade to the medieval world. Monasticism, too, was experiencing the benefits of the accumulation of wealth. The issues of capital, expansion, and commerce became a focus in all strata of society. Western Europe in the early twelfth century was in many ways the pinnacle of the medieval West. Some have even referred to this prosperity and interest in new ideas the so-called "twelfth-century renaissance."[5]

4. Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 5.

5. Recent interest in identifying a twelfth-century Renaissance began with Charles Haskins' 1927 work *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*.

Not since the days of Charlemagne had Europe been as politically or financially stable as in the early twelfth century. Great conquesting campaigns were over, and the nobility, peasants, and ecclesiastical leaders desired to take advantage of the expanding economic growth of the period. Despite the positive aspects of this growth and expansion of Europe, however, both the church and temporal society needed restraint and spiritual grounding. They found these qualities in Bernard of Clairvaux.

Most scholars place his birth in 1090 at his father's estate in Burgundy, a beautiful chateau on a hill overlooking the city of Dijon. He was the middle child in a family of seven children. From all accounts, his parents lived a pious life, faithful to the church. According to the *Vita Prima*, his father, Tescelin, came from a long established military family. Although Tescelin was a respected member of the lower nobility throughout Burgundy, most of Bernard's later political connections seemed to come from the family of his mother, Aleth. Although his brothers seemed to delight in training for a knightly occupation like their father, Bernard was more comfortable with books and clearly had a deep affection for his mother. From all accounts, her death, when Bernard was a teenager, had a profound influence on his life.

The story of Bernard, along with thirty members of his family and extended relatives, bypassing the respectable and comfortable Cluny for the struggling and austere Citeaux is well known. How Bernard was able to inspire the others to join him at Citeaux is an example of this man's will and charisma. Overlooking the city of Dijon, the family's hilltop home provided security and twelfth-century comfort for young Bernard and his family. That his brothers and he were expected to assume their places in society was no obstacle to the young nobleman. By his pure will and passion, and through his recruiting of others to join him at Citeaux, Bernard demonstrated his ability to inspire others to abandon their personal desires for his agenda. Already at an early age, Bernard was well aware of this personal charism, and he knew how to use it.[6]

Some have described Bernard as a tall, skeletal person with light golden hair and a reddish beard. He had a peaceful intensity about him that caused others, even those who opposed him, to pause in awe when he entered a room. He also suffered from severe physical maladies from his

6. Leclercq, "Towards a Sociological Interpretation," 21.

youth, including headaches and digestive disorders, which regressed to a point at which he could scarcely eat anything at all.[7]

THE ZEAL FOR REFORM

Whether or not Citeaux would have closed had not Bernard and his companions arrived is an open question. We know that before the Burgundians arrived Abbot Stephen Harding and the others had questioned their future. The fledgling Cistercian Order began in 1098 as an attempt to regain strict interpretation of both the order and discipline of Benedict's monastic *Rule*. Their harsh lifestyle and lack of sophisticated accommodations caused several of these reforming monks to succumb to illness and starvation. Some evidence exists that the arrival of Bernard with his band of men to Citeaux did not save the monastery from extinction but provided the means for the Cistercians to expand to new foundations.[8] Regardless of the situation, the revitalization of Citeaux with the admission of the new converts provided Stephen with a healthy opportunity to expand the small order in 1113.

Stephen, impressed by both the determination of the young Bernard to live a life in complete submission to the rule and with his natural leadership abilities, asked Bernard to found a monastery in a region to the north of Citeaux in 1115. Bernard's choice for a location was in the remote Absinthe Valley. Clairvaux would serve as the only monastery Bernard would ever oversee and become the mother of dozens of daughter houses. At the time of Bernard's death, the community at Clairvaux numbered more than seven hundred. Some have argued that the sole reason of the success of Clairvaux was the activity of Bernard himself.[9] Certainly Bernard's very presence and nature had a significant effect on the growth of Clairvaux and the entire order. Yet, Bernard believed that his charisma only served as the means to motivate people to seek a significance for their lives that was far deeper than even the movement of Cistercian monasticism.

7. *Ep* 310; *SBOp* 8:230.
8. Mahn, *L'Ordre cistercien*, 60–61.
9. McCaffrey "The Basics of Monastic Living in St. Bernard," 157–62.

THE CISTERCIAN IDEAL

The Cistercians were not the only new orders in twelfth-century Europe. They were part of a broader movement of reform that included the Carthusians, Savigniacs, Grandmontines, and Premonstrantensians. The rise of wandering preachers, hermits, and recluses also gained popularity during this era. Any successful reform movement needs a leader who has both a charismatic personality and a disciplinarian spirit. Bernard seems to have possessed both.[10] What set the Cistercians apart from other reforming monastic movements were their high ideals, strong administrative control (a particular gift of Cistercian founder Stephen Harding), and the person of Bernard himself.

For Bernard, the mystical union between Christ and the church exists to the extent that the two cannot exist without one another. Because Christians are united to Christ through the church, this mystical marriage is not for their own good but for the good of others. As Jean Leclercq states, Bernard understood Christians as "united to all, called on to watch over all, and consequently responsible for all."[11] Although people lived in communities—whether abbeys, cities, or rural villages—their true citizenship was in heaven, and people in all areas of life should strive to live in such a manner as to reflect this citizenship, as the church is the divine norm of national identity.[12]

The early Order of Citeaux desired to live as a faithful spouse by carefully following St. Benedict's *Rule*. The Cistercians' emphasis on poverty, asceticism, simplicity in art and architecture, and ordinary lifestyle was a mere function of their devotion to Christ. Breaking from traditional monastic customs, the Cistercians set themselves apart from other orders (even the new orders). They were obsessed with the *puritas Regulae* and desired none other than to follow Christ through a judicious following of its text. Bernard seems to have focused on particular aspects of the Rule that he believed provided the means for real union with Christ and differentiated these aspects of the Rule from what he deemed as secondary elements, which he rarely mentioned in his writings.[13]

10. Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 112.

11. Leclercq, "Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and the Contemplative Community," 97–112.

12. Williams, "The Political Philosophy of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux," 466–69.

13. Leclercq, "St. Bernard in Our Times," 16.

Of course, this focus on the means for following Christ made an implicit commentary on other monastic orders that had a more open understanding of Benedict. For the early Cistercians, the monastery, more than a school of learning, was a school of charity.[14] This understanding caused many to view the Cistercians as pious, prideful monks who only knew humility in the context of comparing themselves to others.

ECCLESIASTICAL ACTIVITY

For an individual who had fled the world, Bernard spent a considerable amount of time in it. Yet, for all of his activities outside of Clairvaux, Bernard's complex personality made him a polarizing figure. Emotions controlled his actions and he was known to be compulsive. By using the right terms and choice of words others could easily draw him into situations that had nothing to do with him or the Cistercian Order. William of St. Thierry, for example, knew he could draw Bernard into the Abelard affair by eloquently portraying the scholar in a letter to the saint as a perverter of the "belief in the Trinity, of the person of the Mediator, and of the mystery of our Redemption."[15] After reading William's pamphlet on Abelard (and seemingly not checking the facts himself), Bernard thrust himself into the controversy, calling for Abelard's condemnation. It should be noted, however, that in his response letter to William, Bernard acknowledges, "I am not in the habit of trusting my judgments, especially in such grave matters as these."[16] Nevertheless, this admission did not prevent Bernard from pursuing the condemnation of Abelard's writings at the Council of Sens in 1139.

While Bernard's use of letters as means for involving himself in the affairs of the world was extensive, some have questioned the effectiveness of Bernard's ecclesiastical activity. Many of his letters have a spontaneously sour flavor about them, causing the reader to have pity on the poor scribe that took Bernard's dictation. Yet, the success of these letter-writing campaigns was not always clear. For example, during the papal schism of the 1130s, Bernard wrote vociferously in support of Innocent II. Following the condemnation of Anacletus, Bernard used his apparent political favor with Innocent to write more than fifty letters to the pontiff. Conversely, Innocent

14. Bamberger, "The Monastic Vision of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux," 46–58.

15. *Disp. adv. Petrum Abelardum*, PL 180.249–282..

16. *Ep* 327; *SBOp* 8:263.

apparently wrote only five letters to Bernard, three of which were co-addressed to both Bernard and a bishop. In this instance, the letter-writing activity seems only to have been unidirectional. A more accurate interpretation of Bernard's effectiveness, however, is not whether or not the pontiff replied to the saint, but whether or not Innocent acted on Bernard's desires.

Early Ecclesiastical Interventions

In its early years, as the foundation of Clairvaux continued to gain converts and financial support, Bernard experienced his first two activities outside of the Cistercian world. Coincidentally, both of these activities regarded Cluny, the formidable and prosperous Benedictine Abbey and Burgundian neighbor of Clairvaux to the south. The first major exchange between Bernard and Cluny regarded the situation in the autumn of 1116 with Bernard's nephew Robert, a Cistercian monk, and coincided with the period in which the young, sickly abbot was secluded from his monks.

During Bernard's confinement Robert, seemingly growing weary of the Cistercian ideal—and taking advantage of the situation of Bernard's isolation from the community—arranged to be taken to Cluny and subsequently was given nearly royal treatment by the Cluniacs. The young abbot of Clairvaux handled the situation very differently than an older and more confident Bernard might have handled it. He understood his lowly political position compared to powerful Cluny. More importantly, he knew that Robert's parents had promised him to Cluny in the child's youth. In a later reflection Bernard recorded that Robert left "*me invito.*"[17] Other than Bernard's revealing and emotional letter to Robert, written a few years after his departure, and a second mention of the situation in the letter cited above to Jorannus, Abbot of St. Nicasius of Rheims, Bernard remained overtly silent on this matter, at least publicly.

The second early incident, also with Cluny, occurred at the instigation of Bernard's new friend, William of St. Thierry, who asked Bernard to compose a document on the excesses and laxities within the current state of monasticism. It resulted in the publication of the *Apologia* in the 1120s. Whether satirical or not, the emergence of this document established Bernard as a vocal young reformer who was not timid about promoting reform outside his own Order. The strained relationship between the Cistercians

17. *Ep* 32; *SBOp* 7:87.

and the Cluniacs was exaggerated, to say the least, by the publication of this manuscript.

The *Apologia* has been misunderstood since its first appearance. Rather than a scathing attack on the practices of Cluny, Bernard begins by criticizing his own Cistercian monks for spiritual pride. Bernard's use of sarcasm and irony is masterful. One must remember, however, that Bernard did not criticize Cluny for Cluny's sake. The famous abbey is mentioned only rarely in the corpus of the text. Bernard had respect for them and their place in the monastic community. For Bernard, both Cluny and Clairvaux could co-exist peacefully and faithfully in the same church, stating, "It is not our Order alone, nor yours alone that makes up this unity, but ours and yours together."[18] Bernard understood the various orders in the church as the many different jeweled adornments worn by the spouse of Christ. For him, each had its own place and special significance to Christ, the church's bridegroom.

The Papal Schism of 1130

These small skirmishes with the Cluniacs were of minor consequence compared to Bernard's first major ecclesiastical engagement that placed him at the center of the European political world. Before 1130 Bernard's involvement in the affairs of others had been limited to settling disputes between individuals, arguments over land between nobles and the Crown, and in other small matters. His involvement seems to have been behind the scenes, away from public attention. This was about to change, as Bernard's involvement in the papal schism would cause his reputation and fame to move from Burgundy to all of Europe.

As Pope Honorarius II lay near death, a member of the Curia, Haimeric, Chancellor of the Holy See, was aware of the papal ambitions of Peter Leonis. Leonis, a cardinal, had once been a monk at Cluny. Apparently, Leonis was not known for his virtuous life, and very few individuals had positive remarks about his character. Born into a wealthy family, he spent most of his career focusing on the accumulation of riches as he progressed politically through the ecclesiastical ranks. Both Peter the Venerable of Cluny and Suger of St. Denis questioned the character of Leonis, even though they mutually had an affiliation with him and understood his great political power.

18. *Apo* 4.7; *SBOp* 3:87.

In order to spare the church from the ascension of Leonis to the Holy See, Haimeric and others moved the ailing Honorarius to a remote location to hide his impending death. Upon his death, but before the public announcement and post-burial hiatus, Haimeric, four cardinal bishops, five cardinal priests, and four cardinal deacons met and elected Gregory of San Angelo as Pope Innocent II.

Rumors of the death of Honorarius spread to Peter Leonis and his cardinal supporters, who outnumbered the cardinals who supported Gregory. They unanimously elected Leonis as Pope Anacletus II. Clearly, these cardinals followed the regulations more exactly, as they waited the prescribed number of days to hold the election. The supporters of Innocent II, however, felt they needed to act boldly to spare the church the scandal of Peter Leonis. Anacletus had a majority support of the Roman people and the political operatives within the church. Innocent had the support of the church's reformers. Something had to be done, and King Louis "*le gros*" of France took the initiative. Although he was a friend of Anacletus, he nonetheless summoned a council in Etampes of the chief ecclesiastical leaders in his realm to decide the matter, and he personally invited Bernard to attend. Bernard clearly supported Innocent II as Bernard believed his character was much more becoming of a pope than the ambitious, wealthy Anacletus.

As Bernard left Clairvaux for Etampes, he was leaving behind a life of relative seclusion, embarking upon a new epoch in his life. In fact, this may be the second, major turning point in Bernard's life (the first is when he left a secular career for Citeaux).[19] At this council, Bernard's influence in Europe began to be felt. According to the hagiographical account of Bernard's life, the *Vita Prima*, the members of the council waited for Bernard's arrival before conducting any business and unanimously appointed Bernard to be their spokesperson. In fact, the *Vita Prima* states that when Bernard made his public decision to support Innocent, all in attendance at the council agreed with him unanimously and with enthusiasm.

Bernard was now the spokesperson of France in the papal schism, and he spent a considerable amount of time and energy supporting the claim of Innocent II. The task was considerable, taking into account the fact that Anacletus had more political clout than Innocent and had connections and support across the continent, including France and England, but particularly in Italy. Whether intentional or not, Bernard's activities during this papal division had the effect of establishing Bernard as the moral authority of

19. James, *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, 105.

Europe. He accomplished this not by skirting the powers of the church but by using the very political and bureaucratic structures within the church for his own reforming purposes.

Bernard's persistence continued, and after eight years of schism, the supporters of Anacletus submitted to Innocent at the death of the antipope, who died, according to the *Vita Prima*, "losing heart," as he knew that his supporters were defecting to Innocent. Interestingly, Bernard disagreed with the victorious Innocent II in how to deal with these detractors. The pope desired a public and formal submission by them. Bernard, conversely, believed their capitulation should be handled in private, and with grace.[20]

Bernard's frequent travels and correspondence with much of the European church during these tumultuous eight years gave him a considerable reputation—and respect—even among those who did not support Innocent's papal claim. He returned to Clairvaux exhausted, but found himself being called periodically by Innocent II to intervene in political skirmishes, particularly in France. It seemed the entire world knew of this abbot. For the remainder of his life, Bernard would use this popularity to his advantage, sometimes more successfully than others.

Abelard

The controversy regarding Peter Abelard may be Bernard's most embarrassing ecclesiastical involvement. It began with William of St. Thierry, Bernard's trusted friend, who in a letter to the saint, warned of the doctrine of Peter Abelard. Apparently, Bernard knew little of Abelard's erroneous teaching yet seemingly without hesitation began a campaign to have the teachings of Abelard condemned.[21] In 1139 the Council of Sens ensued, and like the Apostle Paul before Festus in Caesarea, Abelard utilized his political rights and appealed to Rome. As Abelard raced to Rome to defend himself, he was told at Cluny that his books had already been burned. His academic career over and his reputation tarnished, Abelard retired as a monk at Cluny.

Possibly the greatest academic mind of his time, Peter Abelard gained a reputation for challenging established teachings and doctrines, based on a modified form of nominalism in which he cast doubt on traditional Christian formulations. He gained fame as an eloquent and persuasive teacher

20. Dumesnil, *Saint Bernard*, 82.

21. *Ep* 327; *SBOp* 8:263.

and debater, and from many accounts he was well aware of his talents. His affair with the young Heloise is well known, as is the violent retribution taken by his young lover's uncle. Perhaps Abelard's most controversial teaching regarded the atonement. Rather than understanding the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity, Abelard's exemplarist view of the atonement saw the cross as an image of love, as Jesus demonstrated for humanity the moral lesson of the suffering servant. The death of Jesus was a manifestation of God's love, not a sacrificial, atoning act. His unique view of the Trinity also became contentious when he defined the Father as Power, the Son as Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit as Goodness.[22]

For many modern readers, Abelard's doctrine may not seem as controversial as it must have appeared in the twelfth century. His attempt to combine philosophy and reason with theological introspection has been the method for critical thinkers since the renaissance. His insistence upon independent thinking was not accepted in the twelfth century in which he lived, as free enquiry was viewed as unfavorable to church discipline. However, one cannot assume that Abelard's doctrine alone caused so much concern for Bernard. One also cannot assume that Bernard desired the condemnation of Abelard because of the teacher's moral lapses, for in his condemnation of Abelard through a number of letters, Bernard does not mention Abelard's scandalous relationship with Heloise. Obviously, he was aware of the relationship. Either it was not the central issue of Bernard's problems with the scholar or else he believed it had nothing to do with the issue at hand. Clearly, this issue would have been an easy target for the Cistercian abbot. By not addressing this questionable behavior in Abelard's past, Bernard showed wise discretion. Evidence does exist, though, that before the events of 1139, Bernard and Abelard, other than being at odds professionally, felt no antagonism towards each other.[23]

The Abbot of Clairvaux was not opposed to scholasticism. The abbey itself had an extensive library, initiated by Bernard, which included the writings of many church Fathers and those of the Carolingian renaissance. For Bernard, the aspect of obtaining knowledge should always be grounded in love. One's study of theology should always lead one to union with God, having an effect on one's life. Seeking knowledge for its own sake, however, is an aspect of pride.[24] The use of reason for Bernard was a spiritual exercise

22. Peter Abelard, *Theologica Christiana*, 1.3.

23. Little, "Relations between St. Bernard and Abelard before 1139," 155–68.

24. *Hum* 13.41; *SBOp* 3:47.

that brings a person to humility. In his Sermons on the Song of Songs, Bernard teaches that any seeking of knowledge divorced from the goal of improving oneself or others is pride, vanity, and profiteering.

Another issue for Bernard in assessing an individual was determining one's motives. A person could be justified in a wrong decision if the individual had the proper objectives. The validity of one's intentions is a common theme for Bernard and may have been at the heart of his criticism of Abelard. Bernard writes that Abelard "is a man who does not know his limitations."[25] Abelard's intentions were selfish and ambitious, not the paradigm for a monk. This attitude amounted to a hypocritical presentation of himself and, subsequently, his ideas.

Bernard understood Abelard as one who sought knowledge for its own sake and for his own reputation. For the saintly abbot, this volatile combination needed to be quenched. In Bernard and Abelard were two opposing worlds: the old world of the church Fathers versus the emerging world of the scholastics. Had Abelard lived in a different age, his generation world have been more willing to accept his ideas. However, contending with the politically powerful Abbot of Clairvaux was his undoing, despite his scholastic popularity and personal pomp.

The Second Crusade

When Bernard Paganelli, abbot of Saints Vincent and Anastasius and former monk of Clairvaux, was elected to the papacy as Eugenius III, the Cistercian arrival in the ecclesiastical world was ratified. Having a spiritual son as Pope gave Bernard considerable power, allowing him to influence the affairs of the world from a safe vantage behind the scenes, separated from public accountability. Bernard himself attests to this power in a letter to Eugenius, in which he relates the opinion of others who said, "it is not you but I who am the Pope."[26]

Bernard's health was declining and he was aging, yet he obeyed when asked by the new Pope engage in recruitment preaching throughout France for a crusade to free Edessa from Islamic occupation. To simplify political aspects, Eugenius desired a French crusade, and no one in the land was more capable than the esteemed Bernard to encourage the nobility and peasants to participate. Bernard was at the height of his reputation. Not

25. *Ep* 193; *SBOp* 8:44–45.

26. *Ep* 239; *SBOp* 8:120.

only had he resolved the papal schism a decade earlier, his former pupil now sat in Rome. In helping to resolve the schism, Bernard's intent was the preservation and reform of the church, for he saw in the person of Innocent II the means of keeping an evil presence out of the church.[27] Presented with the task of preaching a Crusade in France, Bernard once again saw an opportunity for ecclesiastical reform.

Bernard was known for his eloquent and persuasive preaching, and as he traversed France, Bernard's proclaimed words evoked images of a heavenly glory awaiting the crusaders in the Holy Land as they removed the Muslims from the holy places.[28] On 31 March 1146, below the hill town of Vézelay, Bernard preached to hundreds of people who came to see and be close to the holy monk. Following a moving message in support of the crusade, individuals began calling for crosses to stitch to their clothes to show their assent to make the journey to Jerusalem. Bernard himself offered his robe to be cut up and sewn into crosses for the masses. Even the proud and fashionable Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of France, seems to have been moved to action after hearing Bernard preach that day, and agreed to join her husband, King Louis VII, on the quest.

Encouraged by the hundreds of individuals who accepted his spiritual challenge to free the holy places from the heathen, Bernard wrote to Eugenius, "You ordered; I obeyed . . . I opened my mouth, I spoke; and at once the Crusaders have multiplied to infinity."[29] Bernard grew to believe that the spiritual importance of this crusade meant that more than just the French should be involved. Without consulting the Pope, he decided to take the message of the Crusade beyond the French borders and into Germany. Emperor Conrad had no intention of crusading with the young French King to Jerusalem, yet Bernard did not relinquish his attempts to stir Conrad to action. After several sermons in which the abbot failed to move the king, Bernard's eloquent preaching finally pierced the heart of Conrad two days after Christmas 1146 at Speier. Conrad pledged his support.

However, Pope Eugenius' plans for Conrad had nothing to do with his French crusade. Eugenius, facing difficulties with the Romans, was forced to leave Rome in 1145. He needed Conrad's help to suppress the Italians.

27. *Ep* 126; *SBOp* 7:309–19.

28. Although Bernard believed it was better to kill the Muslims than to let them kill holy Christians, his desire was their conversion to Christ. For a summary of the Cistercian view of the Crusades, see Kienzle, "Tending the Lord's Vineyard."

29. *Ep* 247; *SBOp* 8:141.

As he began to inquire about the state of the preparations of the crusade, he heard of Bernard's venture into Germany. Bernard, expanding the crusade beyond the sphere of the pope's desires, doused any help Conrad might have given Eugenius with the Italians. By sending an all-French crusading force, Eugenius wanted to avoid the divided command that led to the near defeat of the First Crusade.[30] Although he was asked simply to recruit for the effort, Bernard single-handedly changed the dynamic and politic of the crusade.

The crusade proved disastrous. The deplorable behavior of the German troops, the inept leadership of a young French king, the distrust between the two heads of state, and several distractions (including the presence of the French queen and her entourage), led to an embarrassing defeat at Damascus and the decimation of the European troops. Understandably, the blame was placed on Bernard.[31] People needed a scapegoat, and Bernard had recruited people with the promise of a heavenly rapture for everyone involved. Once the most powerful and influential figure in Europe, the tragic nature of the crusade resulted in Bernard losing much of his credibility, if not respect for his spirituality.

BERNARD'S SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Towards the end of his life, Bernard began to decline ecclesiastical invitations. In addition to frequent stomach ailments and physical frailties that plagued him for most of his life, he was growing weary of the many demands placed upon him, a situation he himself created that grew beyond his capacity to deal with it. In some ways, Bernard may have understood himself to be a caretaker of the entire church.[32] His love for the church, combined with his impulsive demeanor, resulted in his many activities away from his cloister at Clairvaux. Based on Bernard's understanding of the role and tasks of a monk, this existence was acceptable to him.[33] Because of his nature and understanding of love, he simply could not resist becoming involved in matters outside of Clairvaux.[34] In many ways, the

30. Runcimann, *A History of the Crusades,* 2:257.
31. *Csi* 2.4; *SBOp* 3:413.
32. Fracheboud, "Je Suis La Chimèra De Mon Siècle," 132.
33. *Hum* 10.29; *SBOp* 3:39.
34. Sommerfeldt, *On the Spirituality of Relationship*, 113.

idea of Clairvaux as a remote haven for contemplation became a misnomer. Bernard's popularity was too strong a presence to keep people away.

In Bernard's later life, one can see some regret in his letters, as he questioned his own calling and even his very existence, as in the famous letter to a Carthusian prior in which he called himself a Chimæra and referred to his life as monstrous.[35] In writing to this Carthusian, who undoubtedly had many fewer involvements in the world than Bernard, the saint may have felt some embarrassment for not abandoning the world completely as his habit and tonsure indicated he had. Another instance of regret occurred during the papal schism, which kept the saint from joining the other Cistercian abbots in Chapter at Cîteaux around 1137. Bernard, ensnared in the political fallout of this scandal, realized his engagement with the church had become nothing but a burden to him. In the letter to his colleagues, he wrote that "life itself often becomes a burden to me."[36] The brutality of church politics was an aspect of ecclesiastical life had become a weight he could scarcely bear.

As one with a keen understanding of his own times and the people in it, Bernard could influence society with subtlety. After all, it was Bernard who was the focus of myth and hagiography and not Peter the Venerable, Suger, or other leaders. Bernard had no structural authority over anyone outside of his order, yet his influence permeated the whole of the European church. His personal sanctity and reforming vision moved many of those around him to respect him. They may not have liked him at times, but they nonetheless had deference towards him. As Jean Leclercq writes, Bernard never intended to be an eloquent diplomat of the church, renowned for his expertise in political or military matters. In his mind, he was a representative of Jesus Christ, crucified.[37] This vocational calling is all he knew to be, and in that regard, he became a polarizing figure in his own generation, even as Christ was in his.

35. *Ep* 250; *SBOp* 8:147.

36. *Ep* 145; *SBOp* 7:347.

37. Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, 70.