

***The vita contemplativa:***

**Bernard of Clairvaux's ideas on the ideal way of life**

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# Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Bernard of Clairvaux's preferred way of life	3
1.2.1 The <i>chimaera</i>	4
1.2.2 The old and the new learning	6
1.2.3 Field of research	8
1.3 The life of Bernard of Clairvaux	11
1.4.1 Sources	12
1.4.2 <i>De Consideratione</i>	13
1.4.3 <i>De Diligendo Deo</i>	15
1.4.4 <i>De Conversione</i>	16
1.4.5 <i>Apologia</i>	18
1.5 Methodology	19
<b>2 The <i>vita contemplativa</i></b>	<b>23</b>
2.1.1 Bernard of Clairvaux on consideration and contemplation	24
2.1.2 <i>De Consideratione</i>	24
2.1.3 <i>De Conversione</i>	27
2.2.1 The <i>Vita Contemplativa</i> in a larger framework	29
2.2.2 Evangelical and apostolic ideals	30
2.2.3 Personal experience	32
2.2.4 The humanity of Christ	33
2.3 Evaluation	34
<b>3The <i>vita contemplativa</i> and the Cistercian order</b>	<b>36</b>
3.1.1 The many-coloured robe of Joseph	36
3.1.2 <i>Apologia</i>	38
3.1.3 The world outside	41
3.2.1 Monks and lay brothers	42
3.2.2 Economic developments	44
3.2.3 Defending manual labour	45
3.2.4 Cistercian nuns	47
3.2.5 The Knights Templar	48

3.3 Preaching	49
3.4 Evaluation	50
<b>4The objectives of the <i>vita contemplativa</i></b>	<b>51</b>
4.1.1 Antropology	51
4.1.2 Free will	53
4.2.1 The voice of God	55
4.2.2 Mystical experience	57
4.3 Know thyself	58
4.4 Evaluation	60
<b>5 Conclusion</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>66</b>

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Bernard of Clairvaux's preferred way of life

Bernard of Clairvaux is one of those historical persons whose name is mentioned in almost every handbook or survey of the twelfth century. Because Bernard got himself involved in almost all important matters concerning the Church in the twelfth century, this comes as no surprise. From the crusades to the rise of the authority of the Pope, liturgical renewal, the new schools; Bernard was involved. Indeed, Bernard was deeply concerned with the society<sup>1</sup> he lived in, and he made himself heard when he did not agree with matters he took an interest in.

Various scholars have compared Bernard of Clairvaux to his contemporaries, or associated him with the intellectual and educational changes that took place in the twelfth century. First, they looked at the specifics of the twelfth century, and then at Bernard's work and life as an example of these specifics. Indeed, we will see in chapter two and three that various aspects of the twelfth century appear in Bernard's work.

It is important to keep in mind that unlike us, who can look at the twelfth century from a distance, Bernard was in the middle of all the changes that took place. Looking back at the twelfth century, we have made models to come to grips with the past. We try to place Bernard into one of them, but he does not seem to fit. He was a person whose opinions changed during the course of his life, based on the people he met, and the situations he encountered. Bernard got involved in business of the Church, although often not by his own endeavour. Abbots, bishops and even popes came to Bernard for advice, and persuaded him to participate in public affairs. If his contemporaries valued Bernard's opinion so much, I think it is just that modern scholars do the same. Like his contemporaries, I will first ask what Bernard's opinion was on various matters was. Only then will I compare his ideas to a more general outline of the twelfth century.

Bernard left us many written sources. Although they are difficult to interpret, they should enable modern scholars to discover partially what Bernard thought about the life he lived and the business he got himself involved in. Was this 'active life' -full of business outside his own monastery- the life that Bernard had in mind for himself? Or did he prefer another way of life? What was, according to Bernard of Clairvaux, the best possible way of life for humankind to live on earth?

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<sup>1</sup> Society in its widest meaning. It can cover the entire populace of a certain period, but also the elitist, intellectual upper layer.

The most obvious answer to this question would be that Bernard preferred a quiet life, with sufficient time for meditation on the bible; the *vita contemplativa*, over a life with many responsibilities outside his monastery; the *vita activa*. The *vita contemplativa* was the lifestyle of a monastery, a place of contemplation and inner solitude. In a monastery, monks could not be bothered with the pursuits and temptations of the world.

I would like to find out how Bernard himself envisaged the *vita contemplativa*, what the objectives of this lifestyle were, how one came to live the *vita contemplativa*, and if Bernard was able to live up to his own ideal.

At first sight, the question what, according to Bernard of Clairvaux, the best possible way of life for humankind to live on earth is, might not seem to be innovative, but it is probably the best way to discover how Bernard valued the society he lived in. He was a fervent preacher of his own ideal, but he had to work hard to make the *vita contemplativa* possible for his monks in the new Cistercian order.

In answering this question, I hope to avoid judging Bernard on the basis of intellectual and educational renewal. Instead, I want to point out that Bernard was a man of his time concerning monastic renewal and respect for various orders, personal religious experience, and mystical theology. His ideals about the *vita contemplativa* determined his choices in life.

What the *vita contemplativa* entailed, and how the *vita contemplativa* that Bernard envisaged was a tendency of the twelfth century will be explained in the second chapter. In the third chapter, various aspects of the Cistercian order, such as lay brothers, economic inventions, education and the dispute between the Benedictine and the Cistercian order in relation to the *vita contemplativa* will be discussed. The objectives of Bernard's *vita contemplativa* are the topic of the fourth chapter. Finally, I will conclude on my findings and decide whether Bernard has lived up to his own ideal way of life.

### **1.2.1 The *chimaera***

As stated above, Bernard was a very busy man, venturing out for his Order, travelling through Western Europe to deal with affairs he was confronted with, preaching to the nobility to convert, and writing letters to his superiors when he did not agree with their decisions. He got himself mixed up with problems way over his head, like the settling of the papal schism in

1120.<sup>2</sup> That modern scholars connected Bernard's name to the twelfth century is therefore not a coincidence.

Sommerfeldt rightly pointed out that his contemporaries "must have thought of him as Bernard *from* Clairvaux, rather than *of* Clairvaux", because he spent so much time travelling.<sup>3</sup> He also stated that Bernard acted out of love for his superiors and his monks when he preached the *vita contemplativa* but lived a *vita activa*.<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Köpf suggested that it was not so much out of love for his monks when Bernard lived the *vita activa*, but that he simply felt the need to share his religious experiences with the rest of Western Christendom. Bernard appealed to the personal responsibility of his audience to choose a life of contemplation, as we will see in chapter two. Also, being an abbot brought responsibilities with it, Bernard could not escape from.<sup>5</sup> Thus, everywhere he came, Bernard preached a life of contemplation, while he was too busy to live the life he preached. Bernard was aware of this dichotomy, since he wrote about it in a letter to Bernard, Carthusian Prior of Portes.

May my monstrous life, my bitter conscience, move you to pity. I am, so to speak, the chimaera of my age, neither cleric nor layman. I have abandoned the life of a monk, but I still wear the habit.<sup>6</sup>

Bernard wrote that he felt like a 'chimaera'. This monstrous creature from ancient mythology had a body that was partly lion, partly goat, partly snake.<sup>7</sup> Bernard must have felt like one person living two lives at the same time. In response to requests from his superiors and friends, he sometimes dealt with church affairs that were normally the responsibility of bishops and archbishops. Nonetheless, Bernard decidedly turned down every chance of becoming a bishop himself.

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<sup>2</sup> John Sommerfeldt, 'The Chimaera revisited', *Cîteau: Commentarii Cistercienses. Revue d'histoire cistercienne / A Journal of Historical Studies*, 38:1-2 (1987), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Sommerfeldt, 'The Chimaera revisited', p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Sommerfeldt, 'The Chimaera revisited', pp. 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Köpf, 'Bernhard von Clairvaux: Mystiker und Politiker', *Aufbruch, Wandel, Erneuerung: Beiträge zur "Renaissance" des 12. Jahrhunderts: 9. Blaubeurer Symposium vom 9. bis 11. Oktober 1992*, ed. Georg Wieland (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), pp. 257-259.

<sup>6</sup> Trans. Sommerfeldt, 'The Chimaera revisited', p. 13. Bernard de Clairvaux, *Epistolae, I. corpus epistolarum 181-310*, Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 8, Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais and Charles H. Talbot, Editiones Cistercienses (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1957-1998), Ep. 250, 4, p. 147, 1-3. "Clamat ad vos mea monstruosa vita, mea aerumosa conscientia. Ego enim quaedam Chimaera mei saeculi, nec clericum gero nec laicum. Nam monachi iamdum exui conversationem, non habitum."

<sup>7</sup> Peter Dinzelsbacher, 'Ego non legi...' Bernhard von Clairvaux zwischen modernem Individualismus und traditioneller Autoritätsgebundenheit', *Individuum und Individualität im Mittelalter*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 24 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), p. 336.

Dinzelbacher has another theory. He suggested that the ‘chimaera’ in Bernard’s life was the dichotomy between monastic theology and Scholastic theology. Bernard realised that he could not bring these school-systems together.<sup>8</sup> If this awareness made Bernard indeed feel like a ‘chimaera’, I wonder why he cried out that he neither was a cleric nor a layman. This suggests that Bernard was confused about his role as abbot, but it does not imply that he felt like a schoolmaster.

Of course, the ‘chimaera’ could be nothing more than a rhetorical tool. In this case Bernard would be showing off his humility and defending his own ways. But judging from all the letters he wrote, Bernard had a meddlesome temper and he must have realised that even though he could not escape from his responsibilities as an abbot, he should have left other worldly affairs behind. I therefore agree with both Sommerfeldt and Köpf that the ‘chimaera’ in Bernard’s life was caused by his drive to share his love, knowledge and religious experiences with others. He could not sit away quietly in a monastery; he wanted the rest of the world to enjoy the same life of contemplation. Furthermore, if he was asked for his opinion, he wanted to make sure it was heard. Bernard found it difficult to let go of his control on Church matters. Since Bernard believed he was not able to live up to his own ideal and set an example himself, he must have been worried that the monks who were entrusted to his care and the people he met during his travels would take over the bad example he had set.

### **1.2.2 The old and the new learning**

That Bernard preached the *Vita Contemplativa* so ardently, indicates that it was a lifestyle that not many people lived up to. As we will see, the *lectio divina* was part of this lifestyle. This was a slow-reading of, and meditation on the bible. In the Scholastic milieu of the universities, beginning in the twelfth century, this custom had fallen into disgrace. Reasoning about God had taken the place of experiencing God. The bible had become a starting-point to rationalise about the qualities of God, a method fully developed in Scholastic theology. Amid the theologians who had recently been trained in logic, and who were exploring this method to the fullest, there was Bernard who taught that the bible was a means to come to practical knowledge about oneself, and about God. He believed that the bible was not meant to reason about God’s character. This would only lead to idle speculation. Reading the bible was meant to experience the presence of God.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, ‘*Ego non legi...*’, pp. 336-337.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 37-41, 46-48.

At least, that is how Gillian Evans would like to portray Bernard of Clairvaux. He was well-educated at the Canon school of St Vorles, but he choose to give up his secular learning and career as a master to become a monk.<sup>10</sup> Even though he got involved in intellectual disputes and won a trail against one of the greatest theologians of his time, Peter Abelard, Bernard was unable to stop the tide. What Bernard taught, was monastic theology. What Peter Abelard and others taught, was Scholastic theology. Looking with hindsight, the Scholastic training at the universities had the future.

This description of Bernard is understandable and even defensible. I do not disagree with Evans that Bernard's theology was very different from twelfth-century university training. Nonetheless, it is a very limited view. It reduces Bernard's life to the dichotomy between monastic and university theology.

Evans' knowledge of twelfth-century theologians is enormous. She is able to outline the most complicated theological problems of the twelfth century and explain the differences that existed between theologians. Her knowledge of Bernard's theology and her insight in the trails against Gilbert of Poitiers and Peter Abelard is invaluable. Her comprehension of medieval theology is not easily shared by other scholars. Evans' specialisation in medieval theology lead her to evaluate Bernard of Clairvaux on the basis of his theology as well. In some respects, she has found Bernard's theology inferior to that of his contemporaries.

Her conclusion caught my interest, because if the universities and the Scholastic method were such important factors of the twelfth century, and if Bernard was not much of a theologian, why did his name appear in such a variety of twelfth-century surveys? Why did his contemporaries value him so much? Why did his friends ask him to write treatises on theological topics if they could easily have found someone with a better education? Why was Bernard involved in the trails against Gilbert of Poitiers and Peter Abelard?<sup>11</sup>

Bernard must have been more than just a theologian, because his contemporaries cared for his thoughts on various topics. What message did he preach, and in what way did he preach it that he became so influential? Even Evans acknowledged that Bernard's talent lay in preaching. His sermons persuaded his listeners. Scholastic theology was not of Bernard's concern. He did not disapprove of it, but he realised that logical reasoning was not meant for everyone. Students and monks could easily be led astray by their own speculation. He had but to look around at the heresies of his time, to worry where false speculations could lead.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 37, 39, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 39-41.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 83-84, 96-98.



Bernard was much more concerned with the well-being of the Church and its members, than Scholastic theology and theologians. William of Saint Thierry must have proven that Abelard posed a real threat, or else Bernard would not have participated in the trial against him. Theologians were allowed to occupy themselves with reasoning, as long as they did not bother other believers with their thoughts. For them, Bernard had laid out a different life, where thinking about the bible and God took the form of meditation and contemplation, and which took place far away from the distractions of the world.

### **1.2.3 Field of research**

Many great scholars have done research into Bernard's work, and have gained more insight in his life. It is impossible to read all literature for this present research, or comment upon every scholar. Four scholars cannot be overlooked, because they have roused my curiosity, or have been in aid of my own research. First, Gillian Evans' knowledge of medieval theology is invaluable, when analysing Bernard's writings. Secondly, Jean Leclercq has developed a psychological method to discover what Bernard's character was like. Finally, Giles Constable and Peter Dinzelbacher both look at Bernard's work from the point of view of history of mentalities. History of mentalities tries to reconstruct the framework of a certain society, consisting of ideas, ideals, dreams and fears, which highly determined the thoughts of every person. Bernard lived in a society that was completely different from ours. His ideal way of life took shape in response to the society he lived in. It was firmly grounded in the framework of the early twelfth century. Bernard's *vita contemplativa* is uniquely Bernard's, but some of its aspects can be found in the ideals of his contemporaries as well. History of mentalities is therefore, in my opinion, the best way of analysing history, because it avoids making a division between the 'old' and the 'new' and evaluating medieval persons on this basis. Instead, it tries to discover general tendencies in the mental framework of a group of persons, or a society as a whole, and relate how the ideas of individuals relate to this framework without judging them as 'old' or 'new'.

Gillian Evans is the first scholar who has been in aid of my research. Her theological knowledge of the twelfth century allowed me to analyse *De Diligendo Deo* in chapter four. Jean Leclercq is the second scholar whose work has been of use to my own research. He was an expert of Bernard's work and can never be overlooked when analysing Bernard's opus. He has made an edition of all of Bernard's work together with Henri Rochais and Charles Talbot, and has studied Bernard's work and the biographies about his life in great depth. He came to the conclusion that the way Bernard was presented in his biographies, did not represent the

real Bernard. They were meant to prove that Bernard was a saint, living a virtues life, guided by wisdom. In real life, however, Bernard struggled with many problems and made wrong decisions. Therefore, Leclercq suggested to look at Bernard's letters from a psychological point of view, to discover what his inner motives were and what Bernard's character was like. Leclercq also emphasised that as a writer, Bernard was skilled in rhetoric and that his arguments can be misleading.<sup>13</sup> Some examples of Bernard's rhetorical skill can be found in chapter three. Leclercq discovered that Bernard preferred to have control over situations. Moreover, he had a temper that could play up if he did not get his way.<sup>14</sup> This fascinating approach gives some insight in Bernard's character and makes it possible to determine in what respect Bernard was able to live up to his own standards. He must have struggled with his temperament, for monks were supposed to be tranquil. But he also knew from experience that a life of contemplation brought fulfilment, and his enthusiasm encouraged others to live the harsh Cistercian life.

Another great scholar who has done research on Bernard of Clairvaux and monastic life is Giles Constable. He has looked into the monastic milieu of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the changes that came with the new orders. To Constable, a small group of men, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Geoffrey of Auxerre and William of Saint Thierry, represented the ideals of the new Cistercian order. Although William was a Benedictine monk for most of his life, he was a close friend of Bernard and joined the Cistercians near the end of his life. Geoffrey of Auxerre was a Cistercian monk, who wrote much about Bernard's life because he highly admired Bernard.<sup>15</sup> Constable pointed out that these three men -who presented the ideals of the Cistercian way of life- were not the only men to value these ideals. One of the most important aspects of the *vita contemplativa*, inner peace, was not solely preached by these three men, nor by the Cistercians in general, but it was a notion that Benedictine monks found important as well. More so, it was a peculiarity of the early-twelfth century.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to Leclercq, who has done research into characteristic features of Bernard's writing, theology and character, Constable has looked for Bernard's social and cultural framework. The ideas and ideals that were important in the twelfth century were important to

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Nouveau visage de Bernard de Clairvaux, Approches psycho-historiques* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1976), pp. 8-9, 37-39.

<sup>14</sup> Leclercq, *Nouveau visage de Bernard de Clairvaux*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>15</sup> Giles Constable, 'The ideal of inner solitude in the twelfth century', *Horizons marins. Itinéraires spirituels (Mélanges Michel Mollat, I: Mentalités et Sociétés)*, ed. Henri Dubois, Jean-Claude Hocquet and André Vauchez (Paris, 1987), pp. 27-34. Reprinted in: Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Collected Studies Series (Variorum/Ashgate: Aldershot/Brookfield, 1996), pp. 29-31.

<sup>16</sup> Constable, 'The idea of inner solitude', pp.28-32.

Bernard too, because he was part of that society. A modern historian can determine with hindsight what was important in the past. However, Constable acknowledged that the opinions of various contemporaries could exist next to each other. Their ideas could somehow be related and therefore represent a single feature of society. An example is the division of medieval society in various orders. The triple division<sup>17</sup> is best known to modern scholars, but Constable argued that there were many examples of eleventh- and twelfth-century writers who knew of other divisions. Looking back at the Middle Ages, modern scholars like to divide medieval society in orderly structures. But the fact that medieval writers did so as well, does not mean that medieval society knew a strict division. There are so many medieval divisions of society known to us, that any division seems an invention. By making divisions, medieval writers were trying very hard to find order and meaning in the society they lived in. Bernard was no exception when he tried to divide medieval society in three groups based on the biblical examples of Noah, Daniel and Job.<sup>18</sup> His choice of biblical persons might be original; the principle behind it was not.

Peter Dinzelbacher is the last scholar in this list. Like the other scholars, Dinzelbacher has done extensive research on Bernard of Clairvaux and his opus. He has written a detailed and orderly biography about Bernard's life. Like Constable, the world that Bernard lived in and the corresponding worldview have been of interest to Dinzelbacher. Not only has he published on Bernard of Clairvaux; History of mentalities of the Middle Ages in general has been the subject of various of Dinzelbacher's publications.

It is impossible to include the work of all scholars on Bernard of Clairvaux in this research, because that would result in too much literature to read. Moreover, some of the literature is not relevant for my research. Adriaan Bredero, an excellent Dutch historian, has done extensive research on the biographies about Bernard's life. Concern about the reliability of the anecdotes about Bernard's life has been his main priority, but has little value for this present research. Stephen Jaeger and Brian Stock both have analysed the intellectual differences of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Their conclusions made me realise that Bernard was a well-educated man with a great talent for preaching. Jaeger and Stock show once again how great a change the medieval learning system underwent in the twelfth century. However, in their conclusions, Bernard is either an example of the old or the new learning system, and as I said earlier, this is a judgment I would like to avoid. Instead, I would like to

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<sup>17</sup> Those who work, those who fight, and those who pray. See: Giles Constable, 'The orders of society in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance Hoffman Berman (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 68-69.

<sup>18</sup> Constable, 'The orders of society', pp. 68-73, 80-82, 84-85. Also see § 3.1.3.

focus on what Bernard found important in life and indicate that his ideas were part of an early twelve-century mentality where ‘old’ and ‘new’ were not relevant, because changes were still taking place.

### 1.3 The life of Bernard of Clairvaux

As I have said before, Bernard was a very busy man. He was actively involved in various matters of the Church and the business of his order. Next to preaching, he also found the time to correspond with abbots, popes and friends and write a large number of theological tracts. In this short overview, I will only mention the events that are of importance to my own research.<sup>19</sup>

Bernard was born in the castle of Fontaine-lès-Dijon in 1090 as the third child of Tescelin, a vassal of the Duke of Burgundy, and Aleth, daughter of Bernard de Montbard. He was sent to the canon school of St Vorles in Châtillon-sur-Seine at 1097. His mother Aleth died when Bernard was still very young, on August 31, 1107 or 1108. In 1113, he joined the Cistercian order at Cîteaux with a companion of thirty family members and friends. On June 25 of 1115, Bernard and a group of monks were sent to Clairvaux. Clairvaux was the fourth daughter-house of Cîteaux. In the same year, Bernard was ordained by William of Champeaux as abbot of Clairvaux.

Bernard fell ill in 1119, and again in 1122. These periods of illness consolidated his friendship with William of Saint Thierry, who came to visit and comfort Bernard both times. Together, they read the biblical book Song of Songs, and somewhere in 1116-1117 or 1124-1125 Bernard wrote letter 11, which later was added to *De Diligendo Deo* (1126-1141). *Apologia* was written around the same time (1124-1125). His father retired to Clairvaux and died in 1120 as a monk.

Bernard was present at the council of Troyes in 1128 to defend the Knights Templar. In the years 1130-1138 he got himself mixed up in the papal schism, and in 1140 Bernard participated at the council of Sens to get some of Abelard’s ideas condemned. The sermon on conversion was held in 1139, but the written version was composed much later. In 1146, Bernard began preaching the Second Crusade. He was involved in the trial against Gilbert de la Porrée in the years 1147-1148. Near the end of his life, Bernard finished *De Consideratione* (1148-1153) that was addressed to the Cistercian Pope Eugenius III. This Pope died in 1153,

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<sup>19</sup> Dinzelbacher has written an excellent biography. See: Peter Dinzelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux, Leben und Werk des berühmten Zisterziensers* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1998). Aerden has made a clear list of events in Bernard’s life. See: Bernardus van Clairvaux, *Ommeker, De omvormende kracht van Gods woord*, trans. Krijn Pansters en Guerris Aerden osco (Budel: Damon, 2009), pp. 40-47.

the same year that Bernard died. Eugenius' death was on July 8<sup>th</sup> and Bernard's death was on August 20<sup>th</sup>. Bernard of Clairvaux was canonised in 1174 by Pope Alexander III.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.4.1 Sources

Bernard of Clairvaux has composed about 330 sermons, some 500 known letters, and 13 treatises. It is not possible to include all of these texts in my research. Nor are they all relevant. To understand how Bernard envisaged the *vita contemplativa*, a few works will suffice. In *De Consideratione*, Pope Eugenius III is strongly urged to seek solitude and quiet, and spent time in contemplation. This tract will be discussed in chapter two. What Bernard wants Pope Eugenius III and his monks to contemplate who and what God is. Bernard explains the steps of contemplation in *De Diligendo Deo*, the subject of chapter four. The reasons why contemplation should take place in a monastery and not in ordinary life are found in *De Conversione*. From this tract we can learn how Bernard thought about the human soul, and how contemplation took place in the human soul. This tract will be analysed in chapter two and four. Furthermore, why the Cistercian order provided a better chance of contemplation than the Benedictine order of Cluny, can be found in *Apologia*, which will be discussed in chapter three.

These four tracts should bring forth enough information to explain what the *vita contemplativa* looked like according to Bernard, how it could best be lived in a Cistercian monastery, and what objectives could be reached with such a life.

The transmission of these tracts is complicated, because Bernard has reworked some of his letters into theological tracts. It is important to understand how Bernard's work came into being. He kept finalising his work until he was completely satisfied. Sometimes, copies were made of texts that Bernard was still working on, which resulted in variant readings of the same text. Morimond was a monastery where such copying was done and where various manuscript transmissions originated in respect to the work of Bernard of Clairvaux. The monks of Clairvaux continued the process of reworking and finalising Bernard's sermons and tracts after his death, adding more variations to the manuscript transmission. Their efforts usually were meant to make the texts easier to read.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bernardus van Clairvaux, *Ommeker*, pp. 40-47.

<sup>21</sup> Or, in the case of *De Diligendo Deo*, the monks altered the citations from the bible. Bernard habitually referred to the *Vetus Latina*, but in one manuscript transmission of *De Diligendo Deo*, there are only references to the *Vulgate*. The monks must have replaced them. See: Bernard de Clairvaux, *De Diligendo Deo*, Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 3, Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais and Charles H. Talbot, Editiones Cistercienses (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1957-1998), pp. 115-117.

The variations and various stages of writing make it difficult to determine how Bernard envisaged what the final wording of his work was. We do not possess an official version of any text that Bernard had in mind. We have to determine which manuscripts are most reliable to provide us with the wordings closest to Bernard's intentions. Every manuscript transmission has to be studied on its own to come to the most reliable representation of the text.

The most urgent problem in the manuscript transmission is the difference between the short and long versions. Did both versions already exist during Bernard's life, or were parts omitted, or added later? *De Consideratione*, for example, has been transmitted in a long and a short version. Fortunately, a letter proves that the short version of the text had been sent to Morimond to be copied, long before Bernard had a chance to finish it. In this case we know that the short version was not the text that Bernard had in mind.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, apart from the long and short reading of the texts, most variant readings do not pose a genuine problem to determine what the wordings of the text closest to Bernard's intention were. Often we are dealing with misreadings, misspellings, and scribal improvements.

The translations of the four tracts I have analysed in this research are from the hand of Gillian Evans, Michael Casey and occasionally, my own. Evans has published a book of translations of selected works of Bernard of Clairvaux. I have cited her translations on *De Diligendo Deo*, *De Conversione*, and book five of *De Consideratione*, unless stated differently. I have cited the translation of Casey on *Apologia*. I have consulted Dutch translations of *De Consideratione* and *De Conversione* only for my own understanding of the Latin text.

For biblical translations, I have used the King James Version of 1769.

#### **1.4.2 *De Consideratione***

Bernard of Clairvaux wrote five letters to Pope Eugenius III between 1145 and 1153. Pope Eugenius had been a monk at Clairvaux, and even though he was higher in rank when he became Pope in 1145, Bernard was still anxious for the Pope's spiritual well-being and offered him letters of advice to cope with his busy life. Bernard wrote this tract at the end of his life, so he put his wisdom and lifelong experience in it. Three themes can be distinguished in these letters. First, the struggle for power in Rome among the most important families. The

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard de Clairvaux, *De Consideratione*, Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 3, Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais and Charles H. Talbot, Editiones Cistercienses (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1957-1998), pp. 381-382.

Pope needed their support. Coping with the failure of the Second Crusade is the second theme. Finally, in the fifth letter, consideration and self-knowledge come to the forefront. Consideration was the original reason why Bernard wrote these letters.<sup>23</sup>

*De Consideratione* probably has the most complicated textual transmission of Bernard's opus to come to grips with, because of the large amount of manuscripts and the existence of both a short and a long version of the tract. Even though Bernard wrote five letters, they were supposed to be presented as a single tract. Single letters have not been found. There is a possibility that letters were copied from different manuscripts and were presented together in a new manuscript, so that variant readings were intermingled. The tract was named *De Consideratione ad Eugenium papam*, after the first line of book V; *Libri superiores, etsi De consideratione inscribantur* [...], and medieval copyists took over this title without question.<sup>24</sup>

Dating the tract causes some problems. Eugenius became pope in 1145, thus Bernard must have begun writing the first letter after this date. Much of the second letter consists of an explanation why the Second Crusade was a failure, so this letter cannot have been written before 1148. Nicholas of Clairvaux, a monk at Clairvaux, sent an example of the second letter to Peter the Venerable in Cluny in 1149 because he was convinced that this letter was completed. But Bernard had not finished his work at all, and continued writing on the letter. Peter the Venerable wrote a response, but it was not included in the manuscript transmission. The fifth letter must have been written somewhere in 1152, or 1153. It took Bernard five to six years to finish the tract, and all this time he never stopped revising the text until his death in 1153. The monks in Clairvaux continued his work, revising the text into a more difficult reading.<sup>25</sup>

In 1153, a manuscript was sent to Eberhard of Reifenberg, bishop of Bamberg. *De Consideratione* was more or less complete by the time, but Bernard was still rewriting some of its parts. Eberhard of Reifenberg made a copy and sent the manuscript to Morimond, where various copies were made and spread to other monasteries. This manuscript was the beginning of a separate transmission, called *Recensio Morimundensis (M)*.<sup>26</sup>

Variations in the textual transmission of *De Consideratione* are primarily based on regions. Remarkably, there is no special Italian transmission based on the letters sent to Pope

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<sup>23</sup> Bernard van Clairvaux, *Bezinning*, trans. M.C. Slotemaker de Bruïne (Amsterdam, Uitgeversmaatschappij Holland, 1951), pp. 5-14.

<sup>24</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol.3, ed. Leclercq, p. 381.

<sup>25</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol.3, ed. Leclercq, pp. 381-382.

<sup>26</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol.3, ed. Leclercq, p. 385-386.

Eugenius III. The first transmission (M) can be subdivided in other groups as well, based on faulty readings. A younger group of manuscripts (S) existed primarily in England. The copyists inserted famous expressions of Bernard of Clairvaux into the text and divided it in chapters. The third group, C, seems to be a second revision made in Clairvaux, even though it was done by someone else than Bernard. The short and long version of *De Consideratione* came into being during this process. The copyists, who thought they were finishing the work of Bernard, added more difficult readings.<sup>27</sup>

The edition of Lerclercq and Talbot is based on the manuscripts from this transmission M, because it is the oldest and most reliable transmission, and on a mixture of S and C, because they are the result of partial corrections and improvements that Bernard himself had agreed upon, or that he was still working on.

### 1.4.3 *De Diligendo Deo*

One of Bernard's main themes was the love between God and man. He found his inspiration in the biblical book the Song of songs. *De Diligendo Deo*, a tract originally called *De Dilectione Dei* by Bernard, expressed Bernard's ideas about the believer's required love for God, and how this love could bring the soul of the believer closer to God. The prologue of this tract opened with '*De diligendo Deo quaeritis*'. This familiar phrase was used more often by Bernard in the *Sermones Super Cantica*, and that is probably why it became the title of his tract.<sup>28</sup>

Aimeric, chancellor of the Roman See, made the request for this book. He fulfilled this position from 1126 until his death in 1141. *De Diligendo Deo* must have been written sometimes between these dates. Dinzelbacher suggested that it must have been in the year 1136 that Bernard wrote this tract, because that was a relatively quiet year for Bernard, with only short travels, and enough time to write.<sup>29</sup>

Although *De Diligendo Deo* was meant to be of practical use to Aimeric, Bernard did not share his own religious experiences. Instead, he explained that the love of God brings the human soul closer to a union with God. It was a process with the ultimate goal of a deification of the soul, where will and love are in perfect agreement with God's will and love. It was not possible to experience this union on earth. But the believer can make a start and experience

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<sup>27</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol.3, ed. Leclercq, pp. 387-391.

<sup>28</sup> *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, ed. Leclercq, pp. 109-111.

<sup>29</sup> Dinzelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux*, p. 186.



some measure of union. The outcome was very practical, but the way described by Bernard to reach this union remained very theoretical.<sup>30</sup>

The oldest manuscripts of this tract number over sixty and were probably widely read. Two textual transmissions can be distinguished, even though the manuscript transmission of *De Diligendo Deo* is much more homogenous than other transmissions. The text of the edition of Leclercq and Talbot is therefore based on both transmissions. A revision of the text has been made in Clairvaux (C), consisting of multiple manuscripts. A group of manuscripts within this transmission holds a shorter version. The second transmission contains less manuscripts, but these were remarkably consistent. They are called the German transmission. Within this German transmission there was a group of texts where citations from the *Vetus Latina* have been replaced by citations from the *Vulgate*. Another group of texts seemed to be based on a short version of *De Diligendo Deo* with added glosses. Other texts in this transmission have *capitula*, which have been printed in the edition.<sup>31</sup>

#### **1.4.4 De Conversione**

In the autumn of 1139, Bernard held a sermon to the students in Paris. Geoffrey of Auxerre later wrote about this sermon in the *Vita vel miracula Bernardi abbatis*, because he was one of the students present who converted and entered the monastery at Clairvaux.<sup>32</sup> Conversion meant to Bernard entering a monastery, where one had the chance to fight against one's own sinfulness, and next to this, experience God in daily contemplation. The 'Beatitudes' from the Gospel of Matthew do duty here as steps from the old life to the new life with God.

Guerric Aerdon suspects that Bernard must have preached this sermon on the first of November in Paris. A sermon on the 'Beatitudes' was usually delivered on November first, All saints day. Moreover, in 1140, Bernard participated in the council in Sens, against Peter Abelard. This took place at Pentecost. Because there are no obvious references in this tract to Abelard, a schoolmaster that the Parisian students must have heard of, he dated this sermon before the council of Sens. Bernard had not felt the urge to warn the students against his teachings, or the Scholastic method. The first of November 1139 would be a plausible date,

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<sup>30</sup> Dinzelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux*, pp. 186-189.

<sup>31</sup> *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, ed. Leclercq, pp. 115-117.

<sup>32</sup> *Ommeker*, trans. Pansters and Aerden, pp. 11, 48-50, and *De Conversione*, vol. 4, ed. Leclercq, pp. 61-62. Problematic though, is the fact that Geoffrey of Auxerre retold this story in the fourth book of the *Vita Prima*, but he altered the story and left a few details out, including that he was present during Bernard's preaching. In 1145 he had become a sectarian in the *scriptorium* of Clairvaux, and one of his main objectives was to prove Bernard's sanctity. However well-intended, Geoffrey's accounts are not always reliable. See: Adriaan Bredero, *Bernardus van Clairvaux, (1091-1153): tussen cultus en historie: de ontoegankelijkheid van een hagiografisch levensverhaal* (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1993), pp. 90-98.

because it is quite a few months before Pentecost.<sup>33</sup> These sermons were not like any of the liturgical sermons Bernard ever composed, because his objective was to persuade the Parisian clergy to join a monastic order.<sup>34</sup>

The name of the theological tract, a revision of the sermon, was called *Ad Clericos de Conversione*. The textual transmission of *De Conversione* is complicated, because there are two versions of the text. There is a short version of the text (B), which was found among a collection of other sermons, and a long version of the text (L). Bernard was working on both versions of the text at the same time. While he was editing and finalising the short version, he also rewrote it into a longer version.<sup>35</sup>

Scribes made notes of the sermons that Bernard preached, so that he could later rewrite the sermons into a readable text. This must have happened with *De Conversione* as well. Nonetheless, the short version of *De Conversione* does not contain the actual wording of the sermon that Bernard preached in Paris, but it might have contained something of it. The short version is older than the long version. There are two known manuscript transmissions, because two redactions of the short version have been made, and one of these has many similarities with the longer version of *De Conversione*. The manuscripts beginning with the words ‘*Non immerito*’ originated in Morimond.<sup>36</sup>

The longer version often appears in combination with other sermons of Bernard, *De colloquio Simonis et Iesu*. Again, there are two manuscript transmissions, based on different *exemplaria* that appear in the text. One of the transmissions originated in Clairvaux, the other transmission circulated in the North of France and Belgium. The long version of the text is considered by Leclercq to be the most important one of the two, and is therefore printed in the edition. It has been reconstructed from the oldest extant manuscripts from Clairvaux. There is even a possibility that these manuscripts have been composed during Bernard’s life. The long version of *De Conversione* has been the latest version that Bernard approved of. Thus, even though the short version must have been close to the wording that Bernard used when he held the sermon, the long version has to be preferred, since it was the last version of the text that Bernard looked upon. The main tenor of the sermon did not change however, and both

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<sup>33</sup> *Ommeker*, trans. Pansters and Aerden, pp. 52-53, 55-56.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard de Clairvaux, *Ad clericos de Conversione*, Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 4, Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais and Charles H. Talbot, Editiones Cistercienses (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1957-1998), p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> *Ommeker*, trans. Pansters and Aerden, pp. 52-56, and *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 62-64.

versions of the text make it possible to discern what Bernard found most important in his sermon.<sup>37</sup>

#### **1.4.5 *Apologia***

*Apologia* came forth from the controversy between the Cistercian and Benedictine monks. The Benedictine, or ‘Black Monks’, had since long lived by the Rule of St Benedict, but over the years, the Rule had been moderated and various other ecclesiastical, liturgical and practical rules and customs had been added.<sup>38</sup> The Cistercians, or ‘Grey Monks’, after their undyed habits, like other new orders that appeared about this time, wished to establish a new form of monastic life that was closer to the Rule. By establishing new orders, instead of reforming the old Benedictine order, the Cistercians basically dismissed the old order. The Black Monks felt slighted and defended their own way of life. Both sides wrote letters and tracts to prove their point. *Apologia* is one of the eleven tracts that were written during the first period of this conflict.<sup>39</sup>

*Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem*, the official title of the tract, was written in 1125, when Bernard was 35 years old. He had been abbot of Clairvaux for ten years by this time. It was not his own choice to write this tract, but instead a product of circumstances. During Lent 1125, extending from February 11 to March 28, Bernard wrote a letter to his cousin Robert, because Bernard was angry with him that he had left the Cistercian order, to join the Benedictine order at Cluny. He defended the Cistercian way of life, and when the letter became public, it appeared as if Bernard had wanted to defame Cluny. In response, Bernard wrote a letter to Simon, abbot of Saint-Nicholas-aux-Bois, to demonstrate his goodwill to Cluny. He also explained why he had denied a Benedictine monk to enter the monastery of Clairvaux. Around the same time, William, abbot of Saint Thierry in the diocese of Rheims, must have written a letter to Bernard, instructing him to write a tract on the subject to soothe the matter. Unfortunately, the letter is no longer extant.<sup>40</sup>

Reluctantly, Bernard began to write and sent a first draft to Oger, Canon Regular of Mont-Saint-Eloi in the diocese of Arras. Oger made a copy and sent it to William, but no manuscript of this preliminary draft is extant. Our knowledge of the whole process comes

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<sup>37</sup> Bernardus van Clairvaux, *Ommeker*, pp. 53-56. *Apologia Bernard de Clairvaux, Apologia*, Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 3, Jean Leclercq, Henri Rochais and Charles H. Talbot, Editiones Cistercienses (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1957-1998), pp. 64-67.

<sup>38</sup> See: §2.2.4, §3.2.2 and §3.2.3.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *St Bernard's Apologia to Abbot William*, trans. Michael Casey, Cistercians and Cluniacs (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1970), pp.3-4.

<sup>40</sup> *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, pp.4-5.

from various letters that have been found in the register of the monastery of Clairvaux, although they are difficult to understand at some points. Letter 88 and 84bis are examples of letters that indicate how the writing process went along. In letter 84bis, Bernard admitted that he intended to make a *libellus* or an *opusculum*. This letter was written in response to William, and indicates the beginning of his writing. In letter 88, Bernard had sent his first draft to Oger, and made a request for corrections and an introduction. In letter 84bis, Bernard explained why he agreed to the task of writing this tract, and some scholars have argued that this letter was meant as an introduction to *Apologia*. However, there is no proof of this in the manuscript transmission.<sup>41</sup>

Somewhere by the end of 1125, the first version of *Apologia* must have been completed. Around that time, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, published his own defence of the Cluniac interpretation of the Benedictine Rule. Regardless if Bernard read this text or not, it did not influence *Apologia*. Bernard had other plans. He wrote a second version of *Apologia* to improve its formulation.<sup>42</sup>

The first version of *Apologia* (P), was replaced by the second, official version (S). It did not circulate widely. Oger and William had made a copy of this text, and in monasteries where William lived and where he had connections this version can be found. The variant readings in this transmission are based on geography.<sup>43</sup>

The second version and transmission of *Apologia* can be divided among *capitula*. Some of the manuscripts begin with *Apologeticus*, *Liber apologeticus*, *Apologium*, or *De fastu equitandi*. These titles are variant readings, based on geography as well, but do not indicate various stages in the revision of the work. Manuscripts beginning with *De fastu equitandi*, however, are very old. Some of them date back to the time of Bernard. They are the basis for the text in the edition.<sup>44</sup>

## 1.5 Methodology

Although Bernard's Latin is not too difficult and his ideas are not too philosophical, he is not an easy author to read. His line of reasoning is difficult to follow, because it was deeply rooted in biblical language. There cannot be one page in his opus where he does not cite at least a few lines from the bible. These citations are covered with layers of meanings that are often completely lost to modern readers. It seems as if Bernard cites random biblical texts to

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<sup>41</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, ed. Leclercq, pp. 63-67, and *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, pp. 5-8.

<sup>42</sup> *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, pp. 10-12.

<sup>43</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, ed. Leclercq, 67-74, and *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, ed. Leclercq, 74-79, and *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 11.

underline his point, but when he dwells on citations from the bible, it becomes clear that Bernard sees allusions in the text that are hard to grasp for a modern reader.<sup>45</sup> Bernard may have written in biblical language, but he reasoned according to a certain tradition. If we keep a Vulgate or a Vetus Latina next to Bernard's work, it is possible to find out where his citations come from. It is a completely different matter to understand Bernard's exegesis.

Another complication concerning the interpretation of Bernard's work are his rhetorical skills. A modern reader can easily be deceived by Bernard. He may not have been a dialectician like Abelard, but he was a skilled writer who knew the basics of rhetoric.<sup>46</sup> In *Apologia*, Bernard explains that all the monastic orders are of equal value. But at the end of the tract, he numbers a few reasons why the Cistercians are better than the Benedictine monks. Bernard is convinced of the superiority of the Cistercians, but he cannot come forward with this idea. Instead, he hides behind what others have to say about the Benedictine monks.

Leclercq has analysed Bernard's character. According to him, Bernard was a passionate idealist, whose temper could play up every now and then. Although Bernard's tracts can be quite concealing, behind the lines Bernard's character always makes an appearance. Bernard was an idealist. Even if he could not live up to his own ideals, he was a fervent preacher of the things he believed in. Although it can be difficult to look through Bernard's rhetorical tricks, it helps to keep in mind what his temper was like. Bernard emphasised the things he was passionate about. We will see in chapter three how he defended the Cistercian order and some of the tricks he played.

In order to better understand what message Bernard wanted to convey, I suggest a close-reading of the four tracts mentioned above, with a special focus on key words. Unfortunately, a small list of key words is not possible. Bernard has a varied vocabulary. He uses many variations for the same word. This is partially due to biblical and liturgical quotations. The word 'rest' can function as an example. *Quies (secura)* and *quiescere* appear most often in the four tracts. If Bernard uses *otium*, it usually means that he quotes a biblical or liturgical text, for *otium* can mean laziness as well, and that was something that Bernard was weary of. Instead, Bernard sees rest as a state of mind, so that a person can experience the love or hear the voice of God. An experience of God gives fulfilment, and therefore does the verb *satiare* belong in this list as well. Finally, the words *pax* and *requies* are used to indicate peace and rest.

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<sup>45</sup> Leclercq, *Nouveau visage de Bernard de Clairvaux*, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 39-43.

Looking for ‘rest’ in the four tracts seems complicated enough, but Bernard has a corresponding vocabulary for ‘work’ as well, which he usually thinks of as a bad thing, but which can occasionally be good, too. The same is true for Bernard’s vocabulary for ‘world’. In the patristic tradition, the world is usually not the best place to be, but for Bernard, the world can be a neutral area as well, where ordinary men and women live. Because he often quotes the bible, a positive or negative implication of the words *saeculum*, *terra*, or *haec tempora* have to be discovered in its context.

I have called another group of key words ‘workings of the soul’. These key words form the basis of chapter four and are most often found in *De Diligendo Deo* and *De Consideratione*. This group includes all words for the soul (*anima*, *spiritus*), the different aspects of the soul (*ratio*, *memoria*, *conscientia*, *voluntas*) and verbs relating to the aspects of the soul (*consolari*, *considerare*, *convertere*, *contemplari*). There is a group of key words that I have called ‘virtues’ (*dignitas*, *honestas*, *sapientia*, *pietas*), and a group called ‘vices and other bad things’, which are things that Bernard disapproved of. The most important word in this list is *curiositas*, which will be discussed in chapter four. Other words in the list are *superbia*, *ignorantia*, *desiderium carnale*, *arrogantia*, *corpus mortale*, *ambitio*, *temporalia gloria* and *generatio saeculi*.

I have used these lists of keywords when I analysed the tracts. They have helped me to stick to Bernard’s line of reasoning. The words in the group ‘rest’ indicated to me that Bernard was writing about his ideals of the *vita contemplativa*, for rest is the main factor to enable a monk to contemplate.

Next to lists of key words, I have looked for recurring metaphors. One of the most important metaphors in the tracts is a doctor (*medicus*) who brings healing (*remedium*, *cura*). The soul of the common Christian needs healing, but in particular that of the wary and frustrated soul. The bridal metaphor (*sponsa*) is extremely important as well, and can be found in nearly every text written by Bernard. Christ is represented as the bridegroom, and the bride can either be the Church, or the soul of the personal believer. That Bernard sees a believer as a pilgrim on this earth (*peregrinare*), is a metaphor that appears in various tracts as well, although not as often as the other two.

Some biblical persons are exemplary of Bernard’s preferred way of life. Others were the opposite of this way of life. Mary and Martha are examples of living opposite ways of life. But Bernard acknowledged that there was more than one way to live a good life. Noah, Daniel

and Job are striking examples. These three righteous men followed different paths of life to heaven, without one being the best way.<sup>47</sup>

Because Bernard lived in a male community and much of his education was meant for them, I assume that the best way of life that Bernard envisaged was in the first place the life of a monk. Therefore, I have chosen to write 'he', 'him' and 'monk'. When I mention 'monk', 'he', or 'him', I do not necessarily exclude nuns and lay brothers, nor mean to imply that Bernard excluded them from his ideal way of life. However, it does not become clear from the four tracts that I will discuss in my research how Bernard envisaged the best possible way of life for nuns, lay brothers and the Knights Templar. Some aspects of Bernard's ideal way of life were decidedly aspects of the life of a monk, thus nuns and lay brothers cannot always be included when I write about monks.

For all the metaphors and skilled writing, Bernard had one main objective in mind; to persuade his contemporaries to convert to a life of contemplation. But what was this life of contemplation all about?

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<sup>47</sup> Constable, 'The orders of society', p. 82.

## 2 The *vita contemplativa*

A partial answer has already been given to the main question, what was, according to Bernard of Clairvaux, the best possible way of life for human kind to live on earth? I have said that this was the *vita contemplativa*.

We have to deduce from the sources what Bernard thought about the *vita contemplativa*. Bernard wrote *De Consideratione* for Pope Eugenius III. The objective of this tract was to encourage the Pope to spend enough time contemplating, instead of being concerned with worldly affairs.<sup>48</sup> The pope had lived a life of contemplation as a monk in Clairvaux.<sup>49</sup> Bernard was afraid that the Pope would lose sight of the end-goal of his human life, because he was too busy with his affairs.<sup>50</sup> The life of the Pope can be called a *vita activa*, for he was concerned with practical and worldly business.

To Bernard, the *vita contemplativa* was a life to which monks felt a vocation.<sup>51</sup> It was a life of high esteem. Constable put it this way: “A life of withdrawal from secular life and dedication to God was almost universally regarded as the highest ideal of life on earth, and monks and nuns were seen as a distinct order of society, superior to both the clergy and the laity.”<sup>52</sup>

In *De Consideratione* Bernard made a distinction between ‘consideration’ and ‘contemplation’. Contemplation is the highest stage of consideration.<sup>53</sup> Contemplation and consideration are both activities of the mind. Whereas consideration is limited to thinking,

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<sup>48</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol.3, I, V, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 399, 21-22. “*Si quod vivis et sapis, totum das actioni, considerationi nihil, laudo te?*” “If you, what you have of life and wisdom, spent totally on action, and nothing on consideration, shall I praise you?”

<sup>49</sup> *Bezinning*, Slotenmaker de Bruïne, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, I, II, 3, ed. Leclercq, p 396, 2-5. “*Vereor, inquam, ne in mediis occupationibus, quoniam multae sunt, dum finem diffidis, frontem dures, et ita sensim te ipsum quodammodo sensu privas iusti utilisque doloris.*” “I fear, I say, that in the middle of occupations, because they are many, while you despair the end, you harden your expression and how you thus, hardly noticeable to yourself rob yourself from the sense of pain, that is righteous and usefull.” (trans. MdL)

<sup>51</sup> *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, I, 2-II, 3, V, 7, ed. Leclercq, pp. 71-74, 78-79.

<sup>52</sup> Giles Constable, ‘The diversity of religious life and acceptance of social pluralism in the twelfth century’, *History, society and the churches: Essays in honour of Owen Chadwick*, ed. Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 29-47. Reprinted in: Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Collected Studies Series (Variorum/Ashgate: Aldershot/Brookfield, 1996), p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On consideration*, trans. Gillian R. Evans, *The classics of Western spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 150. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, I, 3, ed. Leclercq, pp. 468-469, 25-26, 1-2. “*At omnium maximus, qui, spreto ipso usu rerum et sensuum, quantum quidem humanae fragilitati fas est, non ascensoriis gradibus, sed inopinatis excessibus, avolare interdum contemplando ad illa sublime consuevit.*” But the greatest of all is he who spurns the use of things which the senses can perceive (as far as human frailty can) and goes up not by steps but in great leaps beyond our imagining; he has learned to fly the heights in contemplation at times.



pondering, and meditation, contemplation can also mean viewing or seeing.<sup>54</sup> To illustrate the difference, I will give an example. A monk could consider what God is. He would know that the bible says that God is love<sup>55</sup>, so he could think about what this means. He could draw some practical lessons from this verse, for example, that he should live a life worthy of God's love. A monk contemplating the same verse would at some point realise that he is the object of God's love. He knows that he is loved, he feels that he is loved, and his knowledge has become experience. He has 'seen' it.

Another term that appears in this chapter that needs some explanation is 'meditation'. Monks were supposed to meditate on the bible, an activity involving reading, rereading, analysing, singing, hearing, and memorizing. This was not just an intellectual task; monks had to familiarize themselves with the bible. This was true for the Rule of St Benedict as well. These texts had to become a practical reality in their lives.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.1.1 Bernard of Clairvaux on consideration and contemplation**

The *vita contemplativa* was not a way of life in which monks went from mystical experience to mystical experience. They seem to have been rare and not easy to reach. The Cistercian way of life was harsh, and monks had to give up quite a lot to begin with the *vita contemplativa*. Nevertheless, Bernard had many reasons for choosing this way of life, not least because the whole process of conversion gave a monk the chance to hear the voice of God calling him to monastic life.<sup>57</sup>

### **2.1.2 De Consideratione**

In *De Consideratione*, Bernard urged Pope Eugenius III to take time for consideration. Now that he had become pope, he did not have much time for activity. Bernard recalled that when

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<sup>54</sup> After analysing Bernard's ideas on contemplation, I looked up the definition of contemplation in the Oxford Dictionary of English (2nd revised edition, 2005). I like this definition, because it does not include consideration as a description of contemplation. Moreover, in my opinion it phrases quite clearly what Bernard's ideas on contemplation are. "Contemplation is a form of Christian prayer or meditation in which a person seeks to pass beyond mental images and concepts to a direct experience of the divine."

<sup>55</sup> 1 John 4:8 (KJV) He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

<sup>56</sup> Giles Constable, 'The concern for sincerity and understanding in liturgical prayer, especially in the twelfth century', *Classica et Mediaevalia: Studies in honour of Joseph Szövérfy*, ed. Irene Vaslef and Helmut Buschhausen, Medieval Classics: texts and studies 20 (Washington and Leiden, 1986), p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *On conversion*, trans. Gillian R. Evans, The classics of Western spirituality, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 72. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, V, I, 8, ed. Leclercq, p. 80, 1. "Et ecce iterum vox de nubibus dicens: Peccasti, quiesce." "And behold, a voice from heaven saying, "Be still, you have sinned."

Eugenius was still a monk, he enjoyed the peacefulness of contemplation.<sup>58</sup> The first books of the tract deal with practical and contemporary business. Only in the last book of this tract did he describe consideration. Consideration is for human beings on earth. They cannot behold what is in heaven, and therefore have to ponder and think about the things that are above. Thoughts have to be controlled; they can easily wander to lower things of the earth, things that can already be seen. Consideration aims to glimpse this heavenly realm, where human beings cannot yet go to, because their bodies do not belong to the realm of spirits.<sup>59</sup>

In order to ‘see’ something of this spiritual world, one has to leave the physical behind. In Bernard’s opinion, the senses are not a bad thing, they can even be put to good use, but they hold a monk back to earth. Contemplation is an activity of the mind involving no senses.<sup>60</sup> Basically, Bernard wants his monks to focus on God and become so absorbed in this activity, that they no longer notice their surroundings.

The ability to leave behind the impressions that the senses give is connected to three forms of consideration. The first is *consideratio dispensativa*.<sup>61</sup> The senses are still very prominent, and a monk puts them to good use in serving others. In this manner, he will deserve an experience of God. *Consideratio aestimativa* is the second form of consideration.<sup>62</sup> This is a form of consideration that we have come across before. It is a monk’s task to ponder who and what God is. This is a mental activity. Thirdly, there is *consideratio speculativa*.<sup>63</sup> This is in fact contemplation. For this activity, a monk has to be able to leave all human things behind, and solemnly contemplate upon God. To come to the final stage of *consideratio speculativa* monks have to go through the earlier stages of *dispensativa* and *aestimativa*.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, I, I, 1, ed. Leclercq, p. 493, 11-12. “*Novi quibus deliciis dulcis quietis tuae non longe antehac fruebare.*” “I know, which delights of your sweet peacefulness you used to enjoy not long before.” (trans. MdL)

Notice the word *quietis*. It is on my list of key words. Bernard believes that the life of a monk is peaceful.

<sup>59</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, V, I, ed. Leclercq, 1-2, pp. 467-468.

<sup>60</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 150. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, II, 3, ed. Leclercq, p. 469, 2. “[...] *avolare interdum contemplando ad illa sublima consuevit.*” “He has learned to fly to the heights in contemplation at times.”

<sup>61</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 150. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 469, 12-14. “*Dispensativa est consideratio sensibus sensibilibusque rebus ordinate et socialiter utens ad promerendum Deum.*” “Consideration is practical when it makes use of the senses and the things the sense perceive in an orderly and coordinated way, so as to please God.”

<sup>62</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 150. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 469, 14-15. “*Aestimativa est consideratio prudenter ac diligenter quauque scrutans et ponderans ad vestigandum Deum.*” “It is scientific when it wisely and carefully searches into and weighs the signs of God’s work in the world”.

<sup>63</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 150. *De Consideratione*, ed. Leclercq, V, II, 4, r. 15-17, p. 469. “*Speculativa est consideratio se in se collgens et, quantum divinitus adiuvatur, rebus humanis eximens ad contemplandum Deum.*” “It is speculative when it retires into itself and, as far as God helps it, frees itself from human affairs for the contemplation of God.”

<sup>64</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 150. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 469, 17-19. “*Puto viliganter advertis aliarum hanc esse fructum, ceteras, si non referantur ad istam, quod dicuntur videri posse,*

There are three ways in which it is possible for human kind to learn of things higher than this world. This is through opinion (*opinio*), faith (*fides*) and intellect (*intellectus*).<sup>65</sup> Faith is best for Bernard, because it is certain. “Faith is a voluntary and certain foretaste of a truth which has not yet been made obvious.”<sup>66</sup> “*Intellectus* is a ‘certain and clear knowledge’ of what is invisible.”<sup>67</sup> Finally, opinion is least favoured, because it is uncertain. “Opinion is merely to hold something true which one does not know to be false.”<sup>68</sup>

Evans pointed out that Bernard’s ideas about gaining knowledge through opinion, faith and intellect were influenced by his experience of the trials against Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers that he was involved with. William of Saint Thierry had provided Bernard with a list of errors of Abelard’s work. He claimed that Abelard had defined faith as an *aestimatio*. *Aestimatio* can mean a private judgement; it is what someone thinks personally.<sup>69</sup> Bernard was wary that people might apply their own convictions on matters of faith. Some doctrines, like the Trinity, cannot be understood, but have to be believed. If people would reason freely about the dogmas, they would lose their credibility.

In *De Consideratione*, Bernard did a little exercise of his own. He considered what God is. Based on the bible<sup>70</sup>, he came to the answer of breadth (*longitudo*), length (*latitudo*), height (*sublimitas*), and depth (*profunditas*).<sup>71</sup> The way through which Bernard came to higher knowledge was a bible verse. His source was not opinion or intellect, but a matter of faith. This is how Bernard envisaged consideration to be done. Already, at the beginning of book five of *De Consideratione*, Bernard warned Pope Eugenius III, that his consideration should concentrate on higher things. For if his thoughts wandered off to lower and visible things, he went into exile.<sup>72</sup> Consideration was not easy, but the results were rewarding, because they brought a person back home.<sup>73</sup>

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*sed non esse.*” “I think that you are keenly aware that this last is the fruit of the others. If the others do not lead to this, they are not what they seem to be.”

<sup>65</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, III, 5, ed. Leclercq, p. 470, 16-18. “*Is [...] tribus modis, veluti viis totidem, nostra sunt consideratione vestigandi, opinione, fide, intellectu.*”

<sup>66</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 71. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, III, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 471, 7-8. “[...] *fides est voluntaria quaedam et certa prelibatio necdum propalatae veritatis.*”

<sup>67</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 71. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, III, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 471, 8-9. “[...] *intellectus est rei cuiuscumque invisibilis certa et manifesta notitia.*”

<sup>68</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 71. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, V, III, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 471, 9-10. “[...] *opinio est quasi pro vero habere aliquid, quod falsum esse nescias.*”

<sup>69</sup> Evans, *The mind of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 212-213.

<sup>70</sup> Ef. 3:18-19 (KJV) May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

<sup>71</sup> *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, XIII, 27, ed. Leclercq, p. 489, 21. “*Quid est Deus? Longitudo, latitudo, sublimitas et profundum.*”

<sup>72</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 148. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, I, 1, ed. Leclercq, p. 467, 9-13. “[...] *Eugeni, quia toties peregrinatur consideratio tua, quoties ab illis rebus ad ista deflectitur inferiora et visibilia,*

### 2.1.3 De Conversione

Bernard was convinced that there was no real life except in conversion.<sup>74</sup> Conversion meant to Bernard to enter religious life. But converting to a monastic order was not for everyone. It required a calling of the Lord that a person would hear inside the heart.<sup>75</sup> This meant that to Bernard, God's voice could already be heard even before a person was converted. Conversion was more than entering a monastery. The entire human soul<sup>76</sup> needed conversion, because by nature it was directed to fulfilling a person's own wishes, instead of the will of God.<sup>77</sup>

In the tract *Ad clericos de conversione*, we find some of Bernard's reasons why someone should enter a monastery. In Bernard's eyes a monastery was a place of refuge, to flee away from the world.

“Flee from the midst of Babylon, flee and save your souls. Flee to the cities of refuge where you can do penance for past sins and also obtain grace in the present and confidently await future glory.”<sup>78</sup>

Monks flee from the world to a monastery to do penance. This is the first reason to enter a monastery. Here on earth, in this body, it is still possible to do penance.<sup>79</sup> On the day

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*sive intuenda ad notitiam, sive appetenda ad usum, sive pro officio disponenda vel accitanda. Si tamen ita versatur in his, ut per haec illa requirat, haud procul exsultat. Sic considerare, repatriare est.”* “Eugenius, whenever your consideration wanders from these things to lesser and visible things, whether in search of knowledge or something for practical use, or to do your duty in administration or action, you go into exile. You do not do so if your consideration concentrates on these higher things, so that through them it seeks what is above. To consider in this way is to come home.”

<sup>73</sup> See chapter four for the various rewards and objectives of consideration.

<sup>74</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 66. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, I.1, ed. Leclercq, p. 70, 4-5. “*Ex quibus verbis evidenter agnoscimus, quoniam vera nobis vita non nisi in conversione est [...]*.” “From these words we see clearly that our true life is to be found only through conversion, and there is no other way to enter upon it.”

<sup>75</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 67. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, I, 2, ed. Leclercq, p. 72, 1-3. “*Ad hanc ergo interiorem vocem aures cordis erigi admonemus, ut loquentem Deum intus audire quam foris hominem studeatis.*” “I admonish you, therefore, to lift up the ears of your heart to hear this inner voice, so that you may strive to hear inwardly what is said to the outward man.”

<sup>76</sup> Bernard holds on the traditional Augustinian interpretation of the human soul. In chapter four, the concept of the soul will be explained in more detail.

<sup>77</sup> On the human will and the will of God, see § 4.1.2

<sup>78</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, pp. 95. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, XXI, 37, ed. Leclercq, p. 113, 16-18. “*Fugite de medio Babylonis, fugite et salvate animas vestras. Convolate ad urges refugii, ubi possitis et de praeteritis agere paenitentiam, et in praesenti obtinere gratiam, et futuram gloriam fiducialiter praestolari.*”

<sup>79</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 71. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, IV, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 77, 12-16. “*Verum is quidem perniciosissimus erit reditus, et miseria sempiterna, quando iam paenitentia haberi poterit, agi non poterit. Ubi enim deerit corpus, actus non erit. Sane ubi nulla fuerit actio, nec satisfactio quidem ulla poterit inveniri.*” “Truly, that will be a most dreadful return and eternal wretchedness, when it can no longer repent or do penance. For where there is no body there is no possibility of action. Where there is no action, no satisfaction can be made.”

of resurrection, all of humankind will be judged. Either they will enter eternal life, or eternal punishment.<sup>80</sup>

Doing penance on earth, however, was useless unless a monk ended his sin.<sup>81</sup> A monastery was not only a place to do penance for committed sins, but to prevent future sin altogether. The four virtues of fortitude, justice, prudence and temperance were necessary requirements to fight off temptations.<sup>82</sup>

Thirdly, monasteries were places of peace and healing for Bernard. If a convert did not have a clear conscience, he could find cure (*cura*) for the wounds of his conscience.<sup>83</sup> The convert had to experience that he was in a state of sinfulness, and that he was unable to change this. Only then, the doctor (*medicus*) would be able to cure the memory of the convert.<sup>84</sup> Bernard thought of a convert as a person who needs healing, and he applied the metaphor of a doctor to describe God's role in the process.

Living in the world, obtaining high clerical positions, or, in short, living a *vita activa*, means living surrounded by various temptations, and occasionally falling in sin. It is therefore much better to retreat to a monastery, and complete the process of conversion.

“There is no delay. [...] He speaks of the temptations of the flesh and denounces worldly consolations as vanities, trivial and worthless, short-lived and most dangerous to all who love them.”<sup>85</sup>

Especially the worldly consolations of the flesh are in vain, for they will never satisfy. Giving in to ‘the pleasures of the throat’ (*voluptas gutturis*) will only cause obesity and

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<sup>80</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 71. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, IV, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 77, 22-23. “[...] quod nunc ponit, quandoque recipere corpus, non tamen ad paenitentiam, sed ad poenam.” “Now he lays down his body; now he receives it again, yet not to penance but to punishment.

<sup>81</sup> *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VI, 8, ed. Leclercq, p. 80, 5-6. “Vanum tibi est [...] dum peccare non destiteris, paenitere [...]”

<sup>82</sup> *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol.4, X, ed. Leclercq, pp. 93-94, 21.

<sup>83</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 72. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, V, 7, ed. Leclercq, p. 79, 2-4. “Maximeque inter initia conversionis oleo misericordiae linit ulcera, ut nec morbi quantitas, nec difficultas curationis ultra quam expedit innotescat. [...]” “Especially at the beginning of our conversion, he anoints our ulcers with the oil of mercy, so that we may not be too much aware of the seriousness of our illness or the difficulty of curing it.”

<sup>84</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 76. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VII, 12, ed. Leclercq, p. 86, 11-12. “Utilis prorsus infirmitas, quae medici manum requirit, et salubriter a se deficit, quem perficit Deus.” “The weakness is a benefit which seeks the help of a physician and he who faints does so to his salvation when God perfects him.”

<sup>85</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, pp. 76. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, VIII, 13, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 87, 4, 6-8. “Nec mora [...] Arguit vitae carnalis illecebras, et consolationes saecularis nugacitatis accusat, tamquam exiguas et indignas, sed et brevissimas quoque et perniciosissimas omnibus amatoribus suis.”

diseases.<sup>86</sup> Giving in to lust will only lead to shame and regret.<sup>87</sup> In fact, the pleasures of the body will never satisfy, and will only make a desire for more moments of fulfilment. That is why there is a great famine on earth<sup>88</sup>, according to Bernard. People long for more satisfaction of their earthly desires.

Curiosity<sup>89</sup> and vanity<sup>90</sup> are just as dangerous as the pleasures of the body. They lead to vain pursuits, away from God. These temptations are particularly dangerous for clergymen. Because they have been taught in the ways of the bible, they should know better, but because they live the *vita activa*, they are surrounded by worldly temptations.<sup>91</sup>

Ultimately, Bernard's conviction that a person's actions have everlasting value lies behind this reasoning. They will not be forgotten and will determine one's place in eternity.<sup>92</sup> The *vita activa* is too risky in Bernard's eyes. A person could easily give in to temptations of the world, let alone temptations of the soul, because his eyes are not focused on seeing a glimpse of God but on earthly things. The *vita contemplativa* provides a lifestyle of penance and fighting temptations of the soul, without the fear of worldly temptations. Religious experiences keep monks on the right path to heaven and the salvation of their souls.

### 2.2.1 The *Vita Contemplativa* in a larger framework

As I have indicated in the introduction, I would like to evaluate Bernard's ideas on the basis of History of Mentalities. In doing so, we will find that there is room for older and newer notions in Bernard's worldview that happily coexisted together. Bernard's concept of eternal

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<sup>86</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 77. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VIII, 13, ed. Leclercq, pp. 87-88, 16-17, 1. "*Hinc monstruosius dilatantur renes et humeri, hinc tumentes uteri non tam impinguntur quam impraegnantur a ruina, et dum carnis onus ossa non sustinent, etiam morbi varii generantur.*" "By this the upper and lower parts of the body are enlarged, and the swelling stomach is not so much fattened as made pregnant with destruction; and when the bones cannot bear the weight of the flesh, various diseases follow."

<sup>87</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 77. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VIII, 13, ed. Leclercq, p. 88, 4-7. "[...] *nimis tenaci feriat icta corda morsu, cuius appetitus anxietatis et vecordiae, actus abominationis et ignominiae, exitus peanitudinis et verecundiae plenus esse dignoscitur.*" "This is the man whose heart is torn, whose desires full of anxiety and regret, whose acts of abomination and ignominy, whose fate of remorse and shame, are fully recognized at least for what they are."

<sup>88</sup> *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XIV, 26, ed. Leclercq, p. 100, 14. "*Facta est enim valida fames in terra [...]*."

<sup>89</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 77. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VIII, 14, ed. Leclercq, p. 88, 9-10. "*Nam tertium nihil in homine cui curiositas prosit invenies. Frivola prorsus et inanis ac nugatoria consolatio.*" "For you will find no third part of man which might benefit from curiosity. Frivolous and vain and empty is that consolation."

<sup>90</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 77. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VIII, 14, ed. Leclercq, p. 88, 15. "*Vanus utique labor, qui studio vanitatis assumitur.*" (Psalm 126:1) "Vain indeed is the labor which is carried out from zeal for vanity."

<sup>91</sup> Bernard uses six paragraphs to dwell on the wicked ways of some the clergy. This sermon was originally addressed to the clergy in Paris, so he actively appealed to their conscience. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XIX, 33 – XXI, 38, ed. Leclercq, pp. 110-114.

<sup>92</sup> *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VIII, 17, ed. Leclercq, p. 90, 20-21. "*Nec enim opera nostra transeunt, ut videntur; sed temporalia quaeque velut aeternitatis semina iaciuntur.*"

life is traditional, although the emphasis on personal accountability is an aspect found among various writers of the twelfth century, including Bernard. Retreating from the world to a monastery was a traditional solution, but the way Bernard and other Cistercians envisaged monastic life was innovative, as we will see below and in the next chapter. That a monk was supposed to live a life of contemplation and meditation was not new, either. But Bernard's distinction between consideration and contemplation, and his hopes that every monk would come to the highest state of consideration and have personal mystical experiences, was firmly rooted in twelfth-century ideas that Christ was approachable.<sup>93</sup>

I would therefore like to point out three aspects in Bernard's thinking that originated from the twelfth-century worldview. These are the apostolic way of life, the concept of the individual, and the humanity of Christ. These aspects find their place in Bernard's worldview, leading to his own particular theory about the *vita contemplativa*. Bernard's contemporaries took hold of these aspects as well, but planted them within their own frame of thought and developed their own theory of what the *vita contemplativa* should be like. The debates of the eleventh and twelfth centuries about monastic orders and rules are based on the fact that they were held by persons, who thought differently about the *vita contemplativa*. However, they shared the fact that they were all thinking about the apostolic way of life, individual experiences, and the humanity of Christ.

### **2.2.2 Evangelical and apostolic ideals**

Behind the debate on which order interpreted the Rule best - and which Rule was best, that of St Benedict or St Augustine - was a firm belief that the monastic life was the best possible way of life and the surest way of salvation for human kind on earth.<sup>94</sup> That new orders came into being in the eleventh and twelfth centuries indicates that this belief was still very strong. Monks were still thinking about living a monastic life, interpreting monastic rules, and questioned the current practices of the Benedictine monks.

The desire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to reform the Benedictine order, or to found new orders so as to live the life that monks thought was according to the will of God, can be called an evangelical or an apostolic movement.<sup>95</sup> Bernard and his contemporaries read

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<sup>93</sup> See § 2.2.4

<sup>94</sup> Richard W. Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages* (2nd ed. London: The Cresset Library, 1987), p. 257, and, Constable, 'The diversity of religious life', p. 32.

<sup>95</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 250-251, and Constance Hoffman Berman, 'Were there twelfth-century Cistercian nuns?', *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance Hoffman Berman (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 223.

about the life of Jesus and his apostles and longed to live the same kind of life themselves<sup>96</sup>, but they placed different emphasis on the aspects of this lifestyle. In their eyes, the Rule of St Benedict was no more than an interpretation of the life of Jesus and his apostles, inspired by the first Christian hermits who retreated to the desert. Thus, even the Rule was open for interpretation.

The desire to live the life of Jesus and his apostles has been called the *vita apostolica*. To Constable this term indicates the traditional vision of “a life of withdrawal modelled on the members of the primitive church who had ‘but one heart and one soul’ and had all things in common (Acts 4:32)”.<sup>97</sup> For only in a community it was possible to pray and fast together, and have no personal possessions.<sup>98</sup> But around the turn of the twelfth century a difficulty arose. Clergymen formed communities of their own, accepted the Rule of St Augustine, and were called canons regular. They took up the functions of preaching and pastoral work, which meant reaching out to the world instead of retreating from it. The canons believed that their lifestyle was pleasing to God, but so did the Cistercians.<sup>99</sup> The conflict between the Cistercians and the canons was a complicated matter. They did not live under the same rule, and they did not share the same ideas and ideals concerning their place among the populace.

The Cistercians genuinely believed that they were the true followers of the Rule of St Benedict and that they had restored it to its true simplicity.<sup>100</sup> According to them, the Benedictine order had become slack in its observance. Bernard defended the various orders of his days, by comparing them to the many-coloured coat of Joseph<sup>101</sup>, but he also lashed out to the Benedictine monks when their practices did not correspond with those of the Cistercians.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> See for example: Bernard of Clairvaux, *On loving God*, trans. Gillian R. Evans, The classics of Western spirituality, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 183. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, IV, 11, ed. Leclercq, p. 128, 18-20. “*At vero generatio rectorum benedicetur (Ps 111:2), qui utique cum Apostolo, sive absentes, sive praesentes (2 Cor. 5:9), contendunt placere Deo.*” “But truly, the generation of the righteous will be blessed, those who, whether away from him or in his presence, strive with the Apostle to please God.”

<sup>97</sup> Giles Constable, ‘Religious communities, 1024-1215’, *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick, Edward Powell, Jonathan Shepard, Peter Spufford (Cambridge histories online: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 336-337.

<sup>98</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Kloosterleven in de Middeleeuwen in West-Europa en de Lage Landen*, trans. Ernst Frankemölle (Amsterdam: Pearson Education Benelux, 2004). Original: C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism – Forms of religious life in Western Europe in the middle ages* (3rd ed. Pearson Education Limited, 2001), pp. 154-155.

<sup>99</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 250-251.

<sup>100</sup> Lawrence, *Kloosterleven in de Middeleeuwen*, p. 181.

<sup>101</sup> Gen. 37:3. See § 3.3.1.

<sup>102</sup> Constable, ‘The diversity of religious life’, p. 42.



The Cistercians furthermore believed that the Rule was nothing other than the pure interpretation of the Gospel of Christ<sup>103</sup>, or, at least, that the Cistercian observance of the Rule was the pure interpretation of the Gospel of Christ. Manual labour was reintroduced by the Cistercians in their daily practice. For them, it was like an ascetic practice.<sup>104</sup> Manual labour allowed the Cistercian to live far away from populated areas, because by working the lands, they could provide for themselves. Poverty was, according to Bernard, a necessity of his ideal way of life. The apostles had given up all their possessions to follow Christ and monks were supposed to do the same.<sup>105</sup>

### 2.2.3 Personal experience

The second aspect in Bernard's thinking that we come across is self-awareness, or self-knowledge.<sup>106</sup> Bernard often appealed to personal experiences of sinfulness of men to make his point.<sup>107</sup> His sermon *On conversion* was meant to make the Parisian clergy aware of their own sinfulness and the need to enter religious life to battle against temptations.<sup>108</sup> If his listeners would enter the Cistercian order and live the *vita contemplativa* as Bernard envisaged it, this would result for them in personal experiences of unity and communication with God.<sup>109</sup> Both experiences -that of sinfulness and of mystical union- were extremely personal.

The focus on personal experience is another current of the twelfth century. The concept of the individual was not the same in the twelfth century as it is today. It was not new to the twelfth century either. Peter Dinzelbacher stressed the aspect of individuality in Bernard's work. Bernard's exegesis was proof of this individuality. Bernard could not write anything on his own, without consulting the Church Fathers. Their exegesis and interpretation of the bible were authoritative during the Middle Ages.<sup>110</sup> But Bernard began to break through this pattern. Not many Church Fathers were authoritative to him. Ambrose, Augustine, and

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<sup>103</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 251-252.

<sup>104</sup> This explanation belongs to Leclercq. See: Christopher J. Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work: the Cistercian view', *Studies in Church History* 10, Sanctity and secularity: the church and the world: papers read at the eleventh summer meeting and the twelfth winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), p. 61.

<sup>105</sup> Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work', pp. 61-62. How this caused problems, will be explained in chapter three.

<sup>106</sup> See § 4.3

<sup>107</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 83. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XI, 22, ed. Leclercq, p. 95, 5-7. "*Hinc nimirum illud est quod quotidianis discimus experimentis, eos qui converti deliberant, tentari acrius a concupiscentia carnis[...]*." "That is an only too familiar daily experience to all of us, that those who are giving their minds to conversion are tempted the more strongly by the desires of the flesh."

<sup>108</sup> *Ommeker*, trans. Pansters and Aerden, pp. 52-53, 55-56.

<sup>109</sup> Köpf, 'Bernhard von Clairvaux: Mystiker und Politiker', pp. 250-251, 256.

<sup>110</sup> Dinzelbacher, '*Ego non legi...*', pp. 722-723.

Gregory the Great were cited most often. Theologians after the sixth century, even those who were contemporaries or friends, were never cited as authorities. The Rule of St Benedict, however, had great authority to Bernard, even though he interpreted it freely to his own advantage.<sup>111</sup>

Bernard thought himself very capable of interpreting the bible on his own. He had the greatest respect for tradition, but he also believed that his own intellectual capabilities were sufficient means to interpret the bible.<sup>112</sup> If he came across problems to which he found no answer he was not concerned. There were things a believer could simply not understand. These things were to be accepted by faith.<sup>113</sup> An example is the Trinity in *De Consideratione*. Bernard explained that it was a mystery; something to be revered, not peered into.<sup>114</sup>

Bernard's exegesis of biblical texts was carried out in almost the same way in all of his tracts and sermons. He began his line of reasoning with a personal observance or experience, continued with logical thinking, and finally quoted a bible verse or a sentence from the Fathers to underline his point. When Bernard cited any of the Church Fathers, he usually agreed with them, or tried to make it appear as though he did.<sup>115</sup>

#### 2.2.4 The humanity of Christ

The third aspect of a changing worldview in the twelfth century that we find in the ideas of Bernard of Clairvaux and his contemporaries is an emphasis on the humanity of Christ. This becomes most obvious in the thoughts about the Passion. Monks strove imaginatively to share the pain of Christ. Christ became portrayed as the suffering man, who acted out of love for the believer. This was a portrayal of Christ with which monks could identify. It was a very personal identification, for the idea that Christ had suffered for the believer personally became more prominent.<sup>116</sup>

Even though there was a growing emphasis on the inner quality of devotion, there was no such thing as the imitation of Christ in the twelfth century. That was for later centuries, but

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<sup>111</sup> Dinzelsbacher, 'Ego non legi...', pp. 724-729.

<sup>112</sup> Dinzelsbacher, 'Ego non legi...', pp. 727-728.

<sup>113</sup> Dinzelsbacher, 'Ego non legi...', pp. 732-733.

<sup>114</sup> *On consideration*, trans. Evans, p. 162. *De Consideratione*, vol. 3, VIII, 18, ed. Leclercq, p. 482, 11-14. "Sufficiat et tenere sic esse, atque hoc non rationi perspicuum, nec tamen opinioni ambiguum, sed fidei persuasum. Sacramentum hoc magnum est, et quidem venerandum, non scrutandum." "Let it be enough for him to believe this, not as something which is clear to reason, nor as something which is a matter of uncertain opinion, but as something of which he is convinced by faith. This is a great mystery and to be revered, not peered into."

<sup>115</sup> Dinzelsbacher, 'Ego non legi...', pp. 728-729.

<sup>116</sup> Burcht Pranger, 'God', *Middeleeuwse ideeënwereld 1000-1300*, ed. Manuel Stoffers, *Middeleeuwse Studies en bronnen* 63 (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994), pp. 110-111, Colin Morris, *The discovery of the individual, 1050-1200* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), pp. 140-141.

the identification with Christ's sufferings during the Passion was a step in this direction.<sup>117</sup> Part of the duty of a monk was weeping during the liturgy and commemoration of the Passion. Burcht Pranger argued that this weeping as part of the liturgy was nothing more than performance. It was a monk's obligation to weep, the *officium flendi*. Thus weeping was the result of performing an act, not experiencing an emotion.<sup>118</sup> Dinzelbacher, on the other hand, stated that monks personally were moved by the story of the passion. He further pointed out that Bernard did not just demand a correct saying of the liturgy; he wanted his monks to mean what they said.<sup>119</sup>

Growing emphasis on the inner quality of devotion can be found in the debates that took place over changes of the liturgy. Although there were some voices raised in the twelfth century to alter part of the wording of liturgical texts so that they would correspond better to the melody, the Cistercians were firmly opposed to make changes in favour of the melody. The Cistercians did not oppose to alterations of the liturgy, as long as they would come closer to the 'original' text of the Bible, or the liturgy in the Rule of Saint Benedict. Authority and authenticity were more important ideals of the Cistercian than the practical use of the liturgy. To Bernard, effective liturgy was based on the accuracy of the wording of the text. Melodies merely functioned as a tool to make the letter more meaningful.<sup>120</sup>

The humanity of Christ, and therefore the approachableness of Christ, became most obvious in the new explanation of the metaphor of the Bride and Groom in the Song of Songs. Bernard wrote a comment and a series of sermons on this biblical book. This secular love of a couple that is getting married had always been interpreted spiritually. Traditionally, the Bridegroom represented Christ, and the Bride the Church. But Bernard saw in the Bride the soul of every single believer too, and thus interpreted the Song of Songs as a book of meditation for the individual believer. He broke away from the old tradition and laid the foundation for later mysticism. This spiritual love could not be understood by reason and was therefore a mystery, to be discovered for oneself.<sup>121</sup> At the foundation of this love lay an image of Christ who was human, with human emotions, and who was therefore approachable.

## 2.3 Evaluation

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<sup>117</sup> Constable, 'The concern for sincerity', pp. 25, and Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, p. 252.

<sup>118</sup> Pranger, 'God', pp. 108-110.

<sup>119</sup> Dinzelbacher, '*Ego non legi...*', pp. 744-745.

<sup>120</sup> Constable, 'The concern for sincerity', pp. 21-26.

<sup>121</sup> Dinzelbacher, '*Ego non legi...*', pp. 740-742.

An experience with Christ was very personal, and here we find again the concept of the individual. The aim of knowing Christ is to do his will, and live the best possible life. And so these three particular aspects in the worldview of the twelfth century are deeply interwoven. They have deeply influenced Bernard's theology and that of his contemporaries. To Bernard, the *vita contemplativa* was a voluntarily chosen way of life. He believed that the *vita contemplativa* was the closest representative of the Apostle's way of life and therefore pleasing God. It was also the surest way to gain salvation and experience the presence of God in this world. Bernard could not but convince others of his ideal way of life. How the *vita contemplativa* took shape within the Cistercian order, and how his contemporaries responded to Bernard's ideals, will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 3 The *vita contemplativa* and the Cistercian order

Religious orders underwent some changes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Various monastic orders were established, next to the traditional Benedictine monasteries, and groups of clergy living together accepted the Rule of St. Augustine and were called canons regular. A military order was established in the Holy Land, and others would follow. There were plenty of hermits, and communities of laymen attached themselves to religious houses.<sup>122</sup> In short, religious life in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was thriving. People experimented with new ideals of religious life, although this did not mean that all types of life were regarded as equally valuable.<sup>123</sup> There was discussion about which rule was best to follow if the military order was a proper order, since monks were not allowed to fight, and if it was possible for laymen to accept a rule. The feeling of belonging to a specific order increased, rather than belonging to the monastic order in general.<sup>124</sup> One of the fiercest controversies was between the Benedictine order and the Cistercian order. Both orders accepted the Rule of St Benedict, and both orders believed that their observance of the Rule was best. But their fight was not only about the Rule, it was also about attracting novices.<sup>125</sup>

In Clairvaux, Abbot Bernard had the chance to instruct his monks in the *vita contemplativa* he envisaged. Not only did he belong to the Cistercian order, he stood at the emergence of the order and shaped many of its ideals. Bernard kept correspondence with various men outside his own order, and had to decide what he thought about other orders. In *Apologia*, he discussed the differences between the monks of Cluny and the monks at Clairvaux. As we will see, the Cistercians differed greatly from the old Benedictine monks because of their agricultural program, manual labour and the acceptance of lay brothers. Next to the lay brothers, Bernard had to defend the Knights Templar, a military order, against its adversaries because he was involved with the birth of the Order and he even wrote a Rule for these monks to keep. Finally, at the end of this chapter, I will discuss some problems concerning the education of monks and lay brothers, and the language that Bernard preached in.

#### 3.1.1 The many-coloured robe of Joseph

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<sup>122</sup> Constable, 'The diversity of religious life', pp. 34-35.

<sup>123</sup> Constable, 'The diversity of religious life', pp. 46-47.

<sup>124</sup> Constable, 'The diversity of religious life', p. 36.

<sup>125</sup> Constable, 'The diversity of religious life', p. 37.

“I am not so dull that I cannot recognize Joseph’s robe here. [...] This robe was famous for its many colours; it was marked out by a glorious variety. [...] Therefore, let us all work together to form a single robe, and let this robe include us all.”<sup>126</sup>

Bernard applied the seamless<sup>127</sup> robe of Joseph<sup>128</sup>, dyed with many colours, as a metaphor for the various orders within the church. The colours represent the orders, and the fact that the coat was woven in one piece represents the fact that there was unity in the church even when various orders existed.<sup>129</sup> Bernard looked for an answer in the writings of the Church Fathers to the question of how it was possible that various orders existed while there was only one church and one faith.<sup>130</sup> He found some answers in the *Regula Pastoralis* and *Moralia* on Job, written by Pope Gregory the Great. In these works, Gregory the Great had laid the basis for the theme ‘diversity within unity’.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, he explained that there were biblical grounds for diversity in Jesus’ story about the many mansions in the Father’s house<sup>132</sup>, and the diversity of gifts of the Spirit in the first letter to the Corinthians.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, we find the same bible quotations about the many mansions and the diversity of gifts in *Apologia* as well.<sup>134</sup> But Bernard liked Joseph’s many-coloured robe best, because he could connect it to his favourite metaphor for the church.

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<sup>126</sup> *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. by Casey, pp. 39, 41. *Apologia*, vol. 3, III, 5, IV, 7, ed. by Leclercq, p. 85, 10-13, p. 87, 8-9., “*Non sum tam hebes, ut non agnoscam tunicam, Ioseph [...] Notissima quippe est, quia polymita, id est pulcherrima varietate distincta [...] Omnes ergo pariter occurramus in unam tunicam, et ex omnibus constet una.*”

<sup>127</sup> See note 14

<sup>128</sup> Gen. 37:3 (KJV) Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

<sup>129</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, III, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 86, 11-13, 16-21.

<sup>130</sup> Constable, ‘The diversity of religious life’, pp. 38, 40-41.

<sup>131</sup> See for example: *Apologia*, vol. 3, IV, 8, ed. Leclercq, p. 88, 17-18. “[...] *Ecclesia, quaedam huiusmodi sit pluralis, ut ita dixerim, unitas unigue pluralitas.*” How is it possible that there is plurality within (the church), when, like you said, there is unity within plurality.

<sup>132</sup> John 14:2 (KJV) In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

<sup>133</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (KJV) Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. Constable, ‘The diversity of religious life’, p. 31.

<sup>134</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, IV, 8, ed. Leclercq, p. 88, 20. “*In domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt.*” “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” (John. 14:2, KJV) *St Bernard’s Apologia to Abbot William*, trans. Michael Casey, p. 40. *Apologia*, vol. 3, III, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 86, 16-17. “*Audi quomodo polymitam: Divisiones, ait, gratiarum sunt, idem autem spiritus; et divisiones operationum sunt, idem vero Dominus.*” “Hear how the robe is many-coloured: There are diversities of gifts, he says, but the same spirit; and there are different administrations, but the same Lord.”

“What gifts are these? To his Bride, the Church, he left his own robe as a pledge of her inheritance, a many-colored robe, woven from top to bottom.”<sup>135</sup>

Bernard thought of the Church as the Bride of Christ (*sponsa*), which made it impossible to accept divisions within the Church. The many-coloured robe was to Bernard a useful metaphor to indicate that the various orders only consisted of outward differences. Fundamentally, all the Orders were part of a unity; the Church, the Bride of Christ. “My dove, my fair and perfect one is one only.”<sup>136</sup> Christ’s gift to the Church was the many-coloured robe, which allowed the existence of various orders, like the various colours of the robe. The Bride was not in a position to ignore this present, nor to take advantage of it. Not only was this metaphor a means to come to grips with the present situation of various orders, the metaphor also enabled Bernard to discredit everything and everyone who did not respect this unity, or who did not belong, in his opinion, to this robe. Moreover, if Bernard accepted and respected the other orders, they had to accept and respect the Cistercian order in return.

To Bernard, various orders were possible, because the differences between them appealed to different people. Some monks needed a stricter observance of the Rule to fight for salvation. Others required a milder observance, because they were stronger in faith. “Different remedies are prescribed for different illnesses; the more serious the illness, the more drastic the remedy”.<sup>137</sup> As long as men and women were free to choose the order they entered and chose a milder or stricter observance of the Rule with the right motivation, no harm could be done. Intention, as we will see in chapter four, was of major importance to Bernard. Once novices had taken their vows, they were expected to remain in the Order for the rest of their lives.<sup>138</sup>

### 3.1.2 *Apologia*

William of Saint Thierry asked Bernard to write a treatise on the difficult topic of the diverse orders, and put an end to the accusations that Bernard and other Cistercians had looked down

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<sup>135</sup> *Bernard’s Apologia to abbot Willem*, trans. Casey, p. 40. *Apologia*, vol. 3, III, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 86, 11-13. “*Quae dona? Relinquat videlicet sponsae suae Ecclesia pignus hereditatis, ipsam tunicam suam, tunicam scilicet polymitam, eademque inconsutilem.*”

<sup>136</sup> *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 41. *Apologia*, vol. 3, IV, 7, ed. Leclercq, p. 87, 10. “[...] *una est tamen columba mea, formosa mea, perfecta mea.*”

<sup>137</sup> Constable, ‘The diversity of religious life’, p. 43. *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 42. *Apologia*, vol. 3, IV, 7, ed. Leclercq, p. 88, 1. “*Et diversis morbis diversa conveniunt medicamenta, et fortioribus fortiora.*”

<sup>138</sup> On monks switching between orders, see: *Apologia*, vol. 3, XII, 31 ed. Leclercq, pp. 107-108.

on the Benedictine order, in particular the monastery of Cluny.<sup>139</sup> Peter the Venerable was abbot of Cluny from 1122 till 1156. He and Bernard kept a correspondence during their time as abbots. They both agreed on the theme ‘diversity in unity’, but Peter the Venerable still had a hard time accepting that new monastic orders changed some of the customs that the monks from Cluny had hold onto for centuries.<sup>140</sup> Bernard did his best to explain that he held nothing against the Cluniacs, and thought of their order as any other order.

“What I say now is what I have always said. This way of life is holy and good. [...] Organized by the Fathers and predestined by the Holy Spirit, it is eminently suited for the saving of souls.”<sup>141</sup>

More remarks like this can be found in the beginning of *Apologia*. But in the course of the tract, beginning at paragraph five, the tone changes, and Bernard names various points he has against the observance of the Rule of St Benedict by the monks of Cluny. His accusations are by no means mild. He complains about clothes<sup>142</sup>, food<sup>143</sup>, buildings and decorations<sup>144</sup> at Cluny. All in all, Bernard must conclude that the monks of Cluny have become slack in their observance of the Rule. However, this does not keep him from showing his regard for the Benedictine order at the end of the tract.<sup>145</sup> This was most probably done because he did not want to end the tract on a bad note.

Bernard’s change in tone is in line with the structure of the tract. First, Bernard defends himself against accusations that he has slandered the Cluniacs. Then, he explains his theory that all orders belong to the same church by using the metaphor of the many-coloured, seamless coat of Joseph. Furthermore, he even agrees that some Cistercian monks have made the mistake to criticize Benedictine monks.<sup>146</sup> The monks that have criticised other orders are called citizens of Babylon.<sup>147</sup> Bernard compares them to Pharisees<sup>148</sup>, and accuses them of

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<sup>139</sup> *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, pp.3-5.

<sup>140</sup> Constable, ‘The diversity of religious life’, pp. 41-42. For the correspondence between Peter and Bernard see: Knight, *The correspondence between Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux* (Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>141</sup> *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 37. *Apologia*, vol. 3, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 83, 25-26, p. 84, 1. “*Dixi, et dico: modus quidam vitae est sanctus, honestus [...] a Patribus institutus, a Spiritu Sancto praeordinatus, animabus salvandis non mediocriter idoneus.*”

<sup>142</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, X, 24, ed. Leclercq, p. 101.

<sup>143</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, IX, 19-20, ed. Leclercq, pp. 96-98.

<sup>144</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, XII, 28, ed. Leclercq, pp. 104-106.

<sup>145</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, XII, 31, ed. Leclercq, pp. 107-108.

<sup>146</sup> *Apologia*, vol.3, V, 10, ed. Leclercq, p. 90, 1-2. “*Unde nunc mihi conveniendi sunt quidam de Ordine nostro, qui contra illam sententiam.*” *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 45. “It has come to my notice that there are some members of our Order who are speaking unfavourably of other orders, contrary to what the Apostle says.”

<sup>147</sup> *Apologia*, vol.3, V, 10, ed. Leclercq, p. 90, 8-9. (*cives Babylonis*)



judging others.<sup>149</sup> Finally, Bernard's tone changes, and he begins his specific accusations against Cluny.

Leclercq pointed out that this structure is "modelled on the ancient rhetorical ploy whereby an advocate begins his defence by denigrating his client."<sup>150</sup> But there is more to *Apologia* than a case for defence. Leclercq concluded that this piece was in fact a satire. Toward the end of the tract, it becomes obvious that Bernard did not only want to correct the monks of Cluny in their behaviour. The Cistercians who had become slack in their observance were not spared either.<sup>151</sup> This tract provided Bernard with a chance to criticise the monasteries of his own order as well, while hiding behind his verdict of Cluny.

Leclercq explained that in satire the truth is exaggerated, not denied. A skilful writer knows how far to push the truth, before it can no longer be accepted. An example from *Apologia*, where Bernard pushes the truth about the value of food, will demonstrate this tactic.<sup>152</sup>

"We fill our stomachs with beans and our minds with pride. We condemn rich food as though it were not better to take delicate fare in moderation than to bloat ourselves to belching-point with vegetables. Remember that Esau was censured because of lentils, not meat, Adam was condemned for eating fruit, not meat, and Jonathan was under sentence of death for tasting honey, not meat. On the other hand, Elijah ate meat without coming to grief, Abraham set a delicious meat-dish before the angles, and God himself ordered sacrifices of the flesh of animals."<sup>153</sup>

What Bernard seems to imply here, is that eating meat is of no consequence at all, while in fact the Cistercians ate little meat because they were convinced that this was what the Rule prescribed. It appears that Bernard agreed with the monks from Cluny to eat plenty of

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<sup>148</sup> *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 45. *Apologia*, vol. 3, V, 10, ed. Leclercq, p. 90, 10-12. "Vobis ergo inquam, fratres, qui etiam post auditam illam Domini de Pharisaeo et Publicano parabolam, de vestra iustitia praesumentes, ceteros aspernamini." "To you brothers I am speaking, who scorn others and rely on your own virtues, even after hearing the Lord's parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

<sup>149</sup> *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 45. *Apologia*, vol. 3, V, 10, ed. Leclercq, p. 90, 20-21. "Cur contra evangelium ante tempus, et contra Apostolum alienos servos iudicatis?" "Why do you pass judgment prematurely, contrary to the Gospel, and on the servants of another contrary to the Apostle?"

<sup>150</sup> Leclercq, 'Introduction', *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. by Casey, pp. 12-13.

<sup>151</sup> Leclercq, 'Introduction', *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. by Casey, p. 13.

<sup>152</sup> Leclercq, *Nouveau visage de Bernard de Clairvaux*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>153</sup> *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, pp. 48-49. *Apologia*, vol. 3, VI, 12, ed. Leclercq, p. 92, 7-13. "Repleti deinde ventrem faba, mentem superbia, cibos damnamus saginatos, quasi non melius sit exiguo sagimine ad usum vesci, quam ventoso legumine usque ad ructum exsaturari, praecipue cum et Esau non de carne, sed de lente sit reprehensus, et de ligno Adam, non de carne damnatus, et Ionathas ex gustu mellis, non carnis, morti adiudicatus, econtra vero Elias innoxie carnem comederit, Abraham angelos gratissime carnibus paverit, et de ipsis sua fieri sacrificia Deus praeceperit."

meat, because the bible was not against eating meat, and disagreed with the Cistercians to avoid meat as much as possible. All monks who read or heard this tract must have realised immediately that Bernard was playing a trick. Neither of the orders was handling meat in a proper manner. Bernard never advised to eat plenty of meat, but being proud of not eating meat was something he despised just as much. By pushing the truth, Bernard got his audience to think about their own customs, and their motives behind them. With one example, he reached out to both the monks of Cluny and Clairvaux.

### 3.1.3 The world outside

The Cistercians were at odds with Augustinian canons too, for in contrast to the canons, who were convinced that they had the pastoral task to serve the cities and villages they lived in, the Cistercians fled from the world. The Cistercian ideal was to retreat to the desert and live a life of simplicity, poverty, purity and refinement of spiritual life.<sup>154</sup> In contrast to the canons, who wanted to serve the nearby populace but accepted gifts and benefices, the Cistercians reasoned that they did not want to be a burden to the populace, and did not accept gifts and tithes, but were self-supporting. They moved away from populated areas and cultivated lands in remote areas.<sup>155</sup>

The emergence of various orders must have been confusing for contemporaries, in particular the adaptation of a Rule by the canons. From that moment on, some members of the clergy lived under a rule and others did not. Before the existence of the canons regular, only monks had lived under a rule, but they were not clergy because they were not ordained. Monks had fulfilled their own special purpose within the church, neatly separated from the worldly business of the clergy.<sup>156</sup> Now, there were communities of ordained men who lived under a rule, who did not retreat from the world, but who held onto their worldly occupations. This was a breach of the natural order of things. With so many options, a medieval person must have wondered which way of life was best.

Bernard tried to solve this question by naming three biblical persons that represented variety.

“By the same token, we would have to take it for granted that celibates and married folk are at variance, simply because their lives are moderated by different Church laws, and that monks and regulars are always ad odds due to differences in observance. We would never guess that

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<sup>154</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 250-252.

<sup>155</sup> Holdsworth, ‘The blessings of work’, p. 61-62. Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 253-255.

<sup>156</sup> Constable, ‘Religious communities’, pp. 336-337.

Noah, Daniel, and Job share the same kingdom, since we know they followed very different paths of virtue.”<sup>157</sup>

Gregory the Great’s explanation of this verse dealt with the different orders in the church in the sixth and seventh centuries. Noah represented church authorities, Daniel the religious men and women, and Job the good lay folk.<sup>158</sup> Bernard did not explain whom he thought the three men represented. Constable provided a number of solutions, after analysing other divisions and metaphors of Bernard as well. Noah, Daniel and Job could represent the orders of clerics, monks and laymen or, the clergy, the penitent/continent, and the married/faithful populace or, confessors, continent, and contemplatives.<sup>159</sup> I have already pointed out that medieval society cannot be as neatly structured as modern scholars might like, and I leave open which of the divisions that Constable made is best. In my opinion, Bernard mentioned this particular bible verse because he realised that Gregory’s traditional interpretation no longer applied to the society in which he lived. Things had changed, and Bernard realised it. But in *Apologia*, he wanted to point out that various ways of life were good, even though Bernard himself preferred the Cistercian way of life.

### 3.2.1 Monks and lay brothers

One of the things that distinguished the Cistercians from the other orders was their acceptance of working lay brothers in their monasteries. Richard Southern states that the lay brothers were second-class monks. “They were illiterate and therefore unable to take a full part in the life of the community. Moreover, they were required to remain illiterate and forbidden ever to aspire to a full monastic status. Yet they were monks in the sense that they followed a simplified monastic regime.”<sup>160</sup> However, a clear-cut distinction between the ‘old’ *conversi* who were illiterate when they entered a monastery, but who received an education, and the ‘new’ *conversi* who entered a monastery and remained in this state, cannot be made, according to Constable.<sup>161</sup> There is no way of discovering who received an education in a medieval monastery. What we can tell is that the Cistercians accepted a whole new group of

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<sup>157</sup> *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. Casey, p. 38. *Apologia*, vol. 3, III, 5, ed. Leclercq, pp. 84-85, 22-26, 1. “*Ergo et continentis, et coniuges invicem se damnare putentur, quod suis quique legibus in Ecclesia conversentur. Monachi quoque ac regulares clerici sibi invicem derogare dicantur, quia propriis ab invicem observantiis separantur. Sed et Noe, et Danielem, et Iob in uno se regno pati non posse suspicemur, ad quod utique non uno eos tramite iustitiae pervenisse cognovimus.*” (Ezekiel 14:14)

<sup>158</sup> *Bernard’s Apologia to abbot Willem*, trans. Casey, p. 38, note 23.

<sup>159</sup> Constable, ‘The orders of society’, pp. 80-81.

<sup>160</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>161</sup> Constable, ‘The diversity of religious life’, p. 34.

monks in their midst, namely the lay brothers. They had taken vows, but they did not participate fully in the liturgy because they could not read. Participating in the liturgy was traditionally a monk's task.<sup>162</sup> Monks and nuns were recruited from every layer of society<sup>163</sup>, but since the Cistercians decided to let the lay brothers form a special group within their communities, I suspect that the lay brothers came from the same background, as I will try to explain.

It is important to keep in mind that the Cistercians accepted no novices under the age of sixteen. Novices participated one year in the daily life of the monastery, before they could take their vows.<sup>164</sup> A voluntary choice of religious life, including the harsh circumstances that the Cistercians lived in, was one of their ideals. This meant that novices either had to be educated elsewhere during their childhood, or had to be educated when they entered the monastery. It is therefore not impossible that novices at the age of sixteen, and even older, received a basic training, so they could at least understand something of the liturgy.<sup>165</sup>

But the lay brothers, who also had a year's noviciate before making their vow of life-long obedience and to make a voluntary choice for this lifestyle, did not receive an education.<sup>166</sup> I suspect that this was the case because the background of lay brothers was such that people did not think it necessary to educate them. Lay brothers did most of the hard work. During a few hours every day, Cistercian monks had to perform manual labour as well, because they believed that this was what the Rule of St Benedict required of them. But some monks complained that the work they had to do was the work of slaves.<sup>167</sup> Thus, perhaps the lay brothers had been peasants and servants before they entered religious life. Men with no freedom and no chance to be educated in normal life did not need an education in a monastery as well. I find the statements of Southern that the ceremony around the act of profession was a mixture of feudal and monastic elements, and the life of the lay brothers "a kind of monastic vassalage"<sup>168</sup>, illuminating, although they do not necessarily prove my point.

There are no extant written sources of the lay brothers thus it is hard to determine what they thought of the life they lived, or why they had entered a monastery. The life of a lay brother cannot have been very different from that of a peasant or a servant, for they spent

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<sup>162</sup> Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work', p. 66.

<sup>163</sup> Constable, 'Religious communities', p. 343.

<sup>164</sup> Bredero, *Bernardus van Clairvaux, tussen cultus en cultuur*, p. 21-22. And: Dinzelbacher, 'Ego non legi...', p. 738.

<sup>165</sup> Constable, 'The diversity of religious life', p. 34.

<sup>166</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, p. 258, and Lawrence, *Kloosterleven in de Middeleeuwen*, pp. 184-185.

<sup>167</sup> Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work', p. 68.

<sup>168</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, p. 258.

most of their time doing manual labour. The lay brothers had to be present at some of the services in the monastery, and because they had taken vows of obedience, stability, and chastity, they were not allowed to get married and begin their own family. Just how strictly the lay brothers were placed under the Cistercian rule concerning food, clothes and sleep remains uncertain, but their life cannot have been easy.<sup>169</sup> Why then was this life so attractive at the onset of the Cistercian order?

### 3.2.2 Economic developments

There were several reasons for laymen to enter a monastery in the twelfth century, which are not easily separated. The first reason for laymen to enter the Cistercian order was one of economic reasons.

The ideal of the Cistercians was to retreat from the world to the 'desert'. Since there was no desert in Western Europe, the Cistercian moved to the plainest, and usually uncultivated, land they could find. They 'colonised' new areas of Western Europe. Furthermore, they did not accept rents or tithes, but only moved to a new area if they got full possession of it. They did not accept gifts from benefactors, nor stimulated pilgrimages. The Cistercians wanted to provide for their own needs and not be a burden to their surroundings.<sup>170</sup>

At the beginning of the twelfth century, there was a surplus of labour, because most of the cultivated land had been taken into use. Peasants and farmers were looking for work. The choice of the Cistercians to move away from populated areas and cultivate new land was, economically speaking, the best decision they could ever make. Now that land was scarce, they colonised new areas where others did not. Moreover, because there were not enough (skilled) monks to cultivate the land, the Cistercians had to rely on the manpower and expertise of laymen. Opening up the monastic life to laymen, the Cistercians safeguarded their future, and provided labour for a group of men who needed it most.<sup>171</sup>

Thus, the first reason for laymen to enter the Cistercian order was poverty, resulting from a surplus of labour. They found work, food, clothing and shelter among the Cistercians.<sup>172</sup> But this was not the only reason. There were religious motivations involved too.

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<sup>169</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, p. 258-259. In the early days of the order, the lay brothers highly outnumbered the monks.

<sup>170</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 253-255.

<sup>171</sup> Southern, *The making of the Middle Ages*, pp. 252-257.

<sup>172</sup> Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work', p. 67.

Since the monastic way of life was seen as the surest way to salvation, and since the lay brothers lived a form of monastic life as well, the laymen who entered the Cistercian order received the guarantee that their otherwise ordinary life would now lead to salvation. Conrad of Eberbach, first a monk at Clairvaux and later abbot of Eberbach, recorded anecdotes about the order, including visions of lay brothers in his *Exordium Magnum*. In these visions, Christ appeared doing manual labour himself.<sup>173</sup> These visions thus gave a spiritual meaning to the labour of the lay brothers. The daily work of peasants and servants became sacred. This is what Holdsworth called “a spirituality of work”, and “a life of consecrated labour.”<sup>174</sup>

### 3.2.3 Defending manual labour

To the Cistercians “manual work was a proper activity for a monks” since “a monastery should attempt to live by the fruit of its own labour.”<sup>175</sup> The Benedictine monks did not share this conviction. If the first duty of a monk was to live a life of contemplation which required time for prayers, meditation and consideration, where did a monk find time for manual labour? And how could his mind come in the state of peacefulness required for consideration?

The Cistercians responded that a monk who was working with his hands, could be praying with his mind at the same time. Moreover, the rhythm of a daily structure of work and contemplation could bring the soul even closer to God. Thirdly, Bernard believed that manual labour prevented laziness, a vice he had seen at Cluny.<sup>176</sup> Finally, manual labour was a form of ascetic practice to the Cistercians.<sup>177</sup> Peter the Venerable it did not understand this reasoning. As long as monks were occupied in good works, they were in no danger of laziness.<sup>178</sup>

The bible verse that Bernard offered to authenticate the practice of the Cistercians seems to contradict the practice at first sight, but Bernard found a formidable way to turn the meaning of the verse to his own advantage.

*“Finally, we would have to affirm that either Mary or Martha or both failed to please the Lord, since their efforts to do this were so very unlike.”<sup>179</sup>*

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<sup>173</sup> Holdsworth, ‘The blessings of work’, p. 67.

<sup>174</sup> Holdsworth, ‘The blessings of work’, pp. 71, 74.

<sup>175</sup> Holdsworth, ‘The blessings of work’, p. 60.

<sup>176</sup> Holdsworth, ‘The blessings of work’, pp. 62-63, 69.

<sup>177</sup> Leclercq in: Holdsworth, ‘The blessings of work’, p. 61.

<sup>178</sup> Holdsworth, ‘The blessings of work’, p. 69.

<sup>179</sup> *St Bernard’s Apologia to abbot William*, trans. by Casey, pp. 38-40. *Apologia*, vol. 3, III, 5, ed. by Leclercq, p. 85, 1-3. “*Mariam denique et Martham necesse sit aut utramque, aut alteram Salvatori displicere, cui nimirum tam dissimili studio devotionis contendunt ambae placere.*”

In this little fragment, we find the same rhetorical trick that Bernard applied on eating meat in § 3.1.2. At first sight, Bernard seems to imply something different from what he really wants to say. Martha and Mary traditionally represented the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. In the biblical story, Martha was rebuked by Christ for working too much, and Mary was praised, because she had taken the time to sit with Christ and listen to his words. Monks were traditionally associated with Mary, since they had chosen to live a life of contemplation. They too, wanted to take the time to sit at Christ's feet, and listen to his words. Thus, traditionally, the life of a monk was praised over the life of ordinary men and women, who had to work.

In the context of a discussion between two monastic orders, where one order approved of manual labour and the other order plead for more 'spiritual' occupations, Martha seems to allude to the Cistercian order and Mary to the Benedictines. If so, the Benedictines would rightly question the practice of the Cistercians.

But Bernard argued that neither the life of Mary or Martha was good in itself, for people have different callings. Both working and listening are good activities, as long as the person engaged in them has the right intention.<sup>180</sup>

In *Apologia*, Bernard reproached the Cistercian monks who had criticised the Cluniacs for being lazy, and who were proud of their manual labour. Bernard warned these Cistercian monks that Christ had reproached Martha for not taking time to be still and listen. But the Benedictine monks were accused of being lazy and too proud to work. They were reproached for leaving all the chores to Martha. According to Bernard, manual labour trained monks in the virtue of humility. To him, Mary had been praised for the virtue of humility, and it was a virtue that every monk required to come closer to God.<sup>181</sup>

Problematic about monks who performed manual labour was that many monks came from noble families. Bernard was no exception. They had never learned to work the fields and found it hard to get used to agricultural duties. An anecdote in the *Vita Prima* relates how Bernard grew frustrated when he did not know how to cut corn.<sup>182</sup> Even though the Rule of St Benedict prescribed manual labour, working the fields had become rare in the Benedictine order. Most monks only did domestic chores, and servants were hired to work the fields.

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<sup>180</sup> *Apologia*, vol. 3, IV, ed. Leclercq, pp.87-89, 7-8.

<sup>181</sup> *St Bernard's Apologia to abbot William*, trans. by Casey, pp. 49-50. *Apologia*, vol. 3, VI, 12, VII, 13, ed. by Leclercq, pp. 92-93. Constable, 'The orders of society', p. 81. For Holdsworth's suggestions on Martha and Mary, see: Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work', pp. 64-65.

<sup>182</sup> Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work', p. 63.

Some of the noble men in the Cistercian order were unwilling to do certain types of manual labour, for they thought of it as slave labour (*opus servi*).<sup>183</sup> This must have caused awkward situations. While the Cistercians had to defend their convictions to suspicious Benedictine monks, they had to explain their convictions to some of their own members as well.

### 3.2.4 Cistercian nuns

So far, only monks and lay brothers have been discussed, but the Cistercian order encompassed nuns too. Constance Hoffman Berman has investigated the history of Cistercian nuns, and offered some conclusions that are in direct contrast to the old ideas about early Cistercian nuns. There are no extant sources from the early Cistercian nuns, and monks did not write about them in their narrative texts. The old idea was therefore that there were no Cistercian nuns at the inception of the Cistercian order. But Hoffman Berman has examined charters and other local administrative documents, and came to a completely different conclusion.<sup>184</sup>

Women were present from the first beginnings of the Cistercian order. In documents for the house at Molesme, the founding house of the Cistercian order, he found that there were nuns in Molesme, and women who were donors and patrons of the new monastic movement. In 1130, Bernard of Clairvaux was even involved in composing a rule for the house of nuns at July. It was founded at nearly the same time as Clairvaux, and Bernard kept a friendly relationship with the prior of July. There was also a house of nuns at le Tart, of which the written documents date back to 1120. This was a house of aristocratic women. Both July and le Tart established various new foundations. Other houses came into being because they adopted the Cistercian rule. These could be Benedictine houses of nuns which, by adopting the Cistercian rule, became Cistercian houses. According to Hoffman Berman, often the preaching of Bernard led to such an adaptation of the Cistercian rule.<sup>185</sup>

Hoffman Berman briefly touched upon a debate that has been going on about Bernard's opinion of women and nuns. I will not dwell on this topic, because there is no space. It would, however, be interesting to examine how Bernard envisaged the *vita contemplativa* for nuns, and whether or not they are different from his ideals for monks.

### 3.2.5 The Knights Templar

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<sup>183</sup> Holdsworth, 'The blessings of work', p. 68.

<sup>184</sup> Hoffman Berman, 'Were there twelfth-century Cistercian nuns?', pp. 217-, 221-228.

<sup>185</sup> Hoffman Berman, 'Were there twelfth-century Cistercian nuns?', pp. 218-221, 237-239..



Now that Cistercian monks, lay brothers and nuns have been discussed, the Knights templar cannot be left unnoticed. They did not belong to the Cistercian order, but it was Bernard who set up a Rule for them. The Knights Templar came into being to protect the pilgrims in the Holy Land. The routes to the holy places were never safe, and a small group of knights fought for the protection of pilgrims on these routes. Bernard got involved in the business of the Templars, because somewhere between 1119 and 1126, king Baldwin II of Jerusalem wrote Bernard a letter, in which he asked Bernard's help to request the Pope's approval of the Order. This happened in 1129, at the council of Troyes. By then, Bernard had already drafted a Rule for the Order, and shortly afterwards he wrote a tract in defence of the Order; *De Laude Novae Militiae*.<sup>186</sup>

To Bernard, the Knights templar were a new kind of soldiers, who fought a double war, spiritual and physical. In chapter four, we will see that intention was of utmost importance to Bernard. This held true for the Templars as well. If they were to kill their enemy during battle while they were fighting for a just cause with pure intention, not with a desire to kill, they committed no sin.<sup>187</sup> The Templars had therefore to live a life set apart in every way from common soldiers. They were to live under discipline and be obedient, modest, live together in a small community, and never sit idle to avoid curiosity, another term that will be discussed in the next chapter. Bernard set high standards for these men to live up to.<sup>188</sup>

But the Knights Templar were monks as well; perhaps even more so than soldiers, in the eyes of Bernard. They had to live the life of monks, and hold on to the liturgy, except when they were on a mission. In *De Laude Novae Militiae*, Bernard described a pilgrimage to the holy places, so that the Templars would understand the spiritual meaning of these places. Moreover, Bernard looked upon the Templars as pilgrims on this earth, just like other monks.<sup>189</sup>

Again, Bernard had played a key role in opening up a life of contemplation to a new group in society. A soldier would not be accepted in a monastery unless he laid down his weapons. The compromise that Bernard developed would be interesting to dwell upon. However, there is no room for it now.

### 3.3 Preaching

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<sup>186</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>187</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>188</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 29.

<sup>189</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 25, 29-30.

One final aspect of the Cistercian order that has to be discussed in relation to the *vita contemplativa* is preaching. Bernard was a famous preacher, both inside and outside the monastery. The sermons that we have on paper do not contain the literal wording of Bernard's preaching. Notes were taken of Bernard's sermon that were later edited into the written form we have on paper. Constable concluded that "written sermons bear little resemblance to what Bernard actually preached."<sup>190</sup>

When Bernard preached inside the monastery, his audience consisted of monks and lay brothers. Since lay brothers did not have any schooling, most likely, they did not understand Latin. It is impossible to know for sure whether Bernard solely preached in Latin and had a translator, or whether he preached in the vernacular as well. Constable suspects that Bernard preached in both languages from time to time<sup>191</sup>, although he points out that the language was not the most important aspect of Bernard's sermons. His preaching was like a performance, and Bernard knew how to engage his audience. Even if his audience could not understand him because he was preaching in Latin, it only added to the performance, because Latin was a language of mystery.<sup>192</sup> The topics that Bernard preached about were adjusted to his audience. Evans noted that "Bernard proves himself a judicious and balanced thinker. He never forgets the needs of the simple and the importance of keeping the truths of faith clear for them."<sup>193</sup>

When Bernard preached outside a monastery, for example when he preached the second crusade, or tried to convert the Parisian clergy, he often had to make use of an interpreter. Bernard could speak 'in the Roman tongue' of the area of Clairvaux, but he did not speak other local languages. Constable therefore put forward the theory that the difference between Latin and vernacular was not as substantial as the difference between the various local tongues.<sup>194</sup> Bernard was just as much a performer outside the monastery as when he was surrounded by his monks and lay brothers. Contemporaries of Bernard, such as Geoffrey of

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<sup>190</sup> Giles Constable, 'The language of preaching in the twelfth century', *Viator* 25 (1994), pp. 131-152. Reprinted in: Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Collected Studies Series (Variorum/Ashgate: Aldershot/Brookfield, 1996), pp. 134-135.

<sup>191</sup> Constable, 'The language of preaching', pp. 137, 142-143. In the same article, on p. 138, Constable quotes Leclercq on the language of Bernard's sermons: "The manuscripts of Bernard's sermons show that the Latin of the first redactions, and the short sermons, resembled the vernacular more than that of the revised versions and long sermons. Bernard's spoken Latin 'was sometimes very close to the Romance tongue in its vocabulary and its grammar', Leclercq said."

<sup>192</sup> Constable, 'The language of preaching', pp. 139, 145-146. Brian Stock, *The implications of literacy*, written language and models of interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries (Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 90-91, 405-409.

<sup>193</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 145.

<sup>194</sup> Constable, 'The language of preaching', pp. 141, 147, 149-150.

Auxerre, Otto of Freising and William of Saint Thierry, were all impressed by the impact he had on his audience. Bernard wept during his sermons, and so did his audience.<sup>195</sup>

### 3.4 Evaluation

Even though Bernard had the highest respect for other monastic orders, he envisaged the *vita contemplativa* within the Cistercian order. To him, this was the best possible way of life for human-kind. Monks in the Cistercian order lived a life of ascetic practice and contemplation. Whereas monks in the Benedictine order were wealthy and spent too much time on elaborate liturgies, according to Bernard.

Whether lay brothers lived up to Bernard's ideal of the *vita contemplativa* remains uncertain. Their manual labour was sacred in itself, and possibly contemporaries believed that contemplation was not for these men. On the other hand, Bernard was a fervent preacher of consideration and contemplation. It seems likely that Bernard encouraged the lay brothers to consider what he preached to them, and contemplate upon texts of the bible that were read in the monastery. In what respect nuns lived up to the *vita contemplativa* that Bernard envisaged remains uncertain as well. If the nuns could read, they could contemplate and consider. Their lives could have been similar to that of monks.

The Knights Templar were an entirely different matter altogether. Their way of life was so different from the other monks, that a real comparison cannot be made. Nonetheless, based on Bernard's urging in *De Laude Novae Militiae* to consider the spiritual meaning of the holy places in the Holy Land, I think that Bernard laid out a life of contemplation for these men as well.

Bernard did not preach the *vita contemplativa* as an intellectual concept, but as a lifestyle. His intention was not to inform his audience, but to arouse it. He wanted his audience to accept this lifestyle and experience its outcomes and objectives. If he invented various forms to give shape to his ideal way of life, it corresponds to his theory about diversity within the church. What mattered to Bernard was freedom of choice and intention. As long as these values remained intact he was willing to accept a compromise of his ideal way of life. To understand why Bernard wanted everyone to live the *vita contemplativa*, we will have to discover what its objectives were.

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<sup>195</sup> Constable, 'The language of preaching', pp. 139, 145-146.

## 4 The objectives of the *vita contemplativa*

In this final chapter I will analyse *De Diligendo Deo* and *De Conversione* to discover what the objectives of the *vita contemplativa* were to Bernard. One of these objectives, mystical experience, I have mentioned before. Although Bernard did not write in great detail about these experiences, he did write about at least three different experiences. Hearing the voice of God, knowing the love of God and loving God back in return and finally, a mystical out-of-body experience.

In order to come to understand these mystical experiences, we have to look at Bernard's ideas on the workings of the human soul and the role of the human body. Because the contents of *De Diligendo Deo* and *De Conversione* are a mixture of philosophy, theology and exegesis, I will closely follow some key-words, to stay as close to Bernard's text as possible. The key words include *anima*, *spiritus*, *ratio*, *memoria*, *conscientia*, *voluntas*, *considerare*, *convertere* and *contemplari*. Although every paragraph in this chapter could be discussed in much further detail, this does not serve the purpose of a close-reading. I will explain some things in more detail when required, but I will not give a theological evaluation of Bernard's ideas.

### 4.1.1 Antropology

First, we have to understand how Bernard thought about the human soul. For the soul is the connection between the material and the spiritual, and between the human spirit and the Spirit of God.<sup>196</sup> Bernard's ideas about the soul came primarily from Augustine. Augustine had combined Aristotelic and Platonic ideas about the soul with a Christian worldview. He paralleled the three activities of the soul with the Trinity. The three activities of the soul were reason (*intelligentia*, *intellectus*), memory (*memoria*) and will (*voluntas*), according to Augustine.<sup>197</sup>

We find the same activities of the soul in *De Conversione*. To Bernard “the soul itself is nothing but reason (*ratio*), memory (*memoria*), and will (*voluntas*).”<sup>198</sup> We will see that these three aspects all need conversion. Conversion of the human soul is a process.

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<sup>196</sup> Jos Decorte, ‘Naar zijn beeld en gelijkenis: de ziel’, *Middeleeuwse ideeënwereld 1000-1300*, ed. Manuel Stoffers, *Middeleeuwse Studies en bronnen* 63 (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994), p. 227.

<sup>197</sup> Decorte, ‘Naar zijn beeld en gelijkenis’, p. 229.

<sup>198</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 75. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VI, 11, ed. Leclercq, p. 84, 14-15. “*Denique tota (anima) ipsa nihil est aliud quam ratio, memoria, et voluntas.*”

In *De Consideratione* we already have seen reason at work. Consideration and contemplation are higher activities of reason because they bring the soul closer to God.<sup>199</sup> But there is a process of conversion needed before the soul can engage itself in contemplation. In *De Conversione*, Bernard explains that the role of reason in conversion is to judge memory<sup>200</sup>, and to lead the will to a place of rest; an inner paradise where the will can experience God.<sup>201</sup>

In the process of conversion, memory is the second activity of the soul that is stirred. For memory remembers the pleasant things in life, but also the sins that one has committed.<sup>202</sup> This is why Bernard sometimes uses the word ‘conscience’ (*conscientia*) to indicate memory. One of the first steps in the process of conversion is the awareness of a guilty conscience. The person whose conscience speaks against him, cannot solve this problem himself. God has to heal the conscience.

“For now a manifold consolation eases the torture of the accusing conscience. [...] Especially at the beginning of our conversion, he anoints our ulcers with the oil of mercy, so that we may not be too much aware of the seriousness of our illness or the difficulty of curing it.”<sup>203</sup>

The metaphor of a doctor (*medicus*) is applied to the act of forgiveness. For as Bernard puts it: “Take away condemnation, take away fear, take away confusion, and there is full remission of sins.”<sup>204</sup> Memory is not taken away, but no longer gives a person a guilty conscience.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Decorte, ‘Naar zijn beeld en gelijkenis’, p. 230.

<sup>200</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 75. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VI, 11, ed. Leclercq, p. 84, 7-11. “*Iam vero ratione ipsa vexatio dat intellectum [...] Videt enim memoriam plenam spurcitarum [...]*” “Now the reason understands its vexation. [...] It seems that memory is full of filth.”

<sup>201</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 84. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XII, 24, ed. Leclercq, p. 97, 6-7. “[...] *inveniet paradisum voluptatis plantatum a Domino; inveniet hortum floridum et amoenissimum; inveniet refrigerii sedem [...]*” “He will find a paradise of pleasure planted by the Lord. He finds a garden of sweet flowers. He will find a cool resting-place.”

<sup>202</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 69. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, III, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 75, 1-3. “*Transiit enim velociter totus ille pruritus delectationis iniquae, et voluptatis illecebra tota brevi finita est; sed amara quaedam impressit signa memoriae, sed vestigia foeda reliquit.*” “For however quickly all the prurience of delighting in iniquity passed, and however briefly the enticements of pleasure were attractive, memory is left with a bitter impression, and dirty footprints remain.”

<sup>203</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 72. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, V, 7, ed. Leclercq, pp. 78-79, 16, 1-4. “*Multiplex enim nunc consolatio arguentis conscientiae relevat cruciatum. [...] Maximeque inter initia conversionis oleo misericordiae linit ulcera, ut nec morbi quantitas, nec difficultas curationis ultra quam expedit innotescat [...]*” Also see: *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 76. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VII, 12, ed. Leclercq, p. 86, 11-12. “*Utilis prorsus infirmitas, quae medici manum requirit, et salubriter a se deficit, quem perficit Deus.*” “The weakness is a benefit which seeks the help of a physician and he who faints does so to his salvation when God perfects him.”

<sup>204</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 84. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XV, 28, ed. Leclercq, p. 104, 3-4. “*Tolle damnationem, tolle timorem, tolle confusionem, quae quidem omnia plena remissio tollit [...]*”

<sup>205</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 84. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XV, 28, ed. Leclercq, p. 103, 12-14. “*Huius indulgentia delet peccatum, non quidem ut a memoria excidat, sed ut quod prius inesse pariter et inficere*

The third activity of the soul is the will. Conversion of the will is the final step in the process of conversion. The will is probably the most complicated activity of the soul, and therefore will be discussed in a separate paragraph.

Although matters were more complicated than this, we find in Bernard's work that a human being was nothing without a soul nor a body (*corpus*).<sup>206</sup> Since it was the soul that could communicate with God, the soul was thought to be superior over the body. It was the sinful state of the human body that had caused a distance between God and human beings.

“For while we are in this body we are in exile from the Lord. That is not the body's fault, except in that it is yet mortal; rather it is the flesh which is a sinful body, the flesh in which is no good thing but rather the law of sin reigns.”<sup>207</sup>

Another word for body is members (*membra*). They represent the five senses, that can tempt human beings to sin.<sup>208</sup> After reason has realised that the soul needs God and memory has been healed, only the will is left over to be converted. The senses demand fulfilment of their wishes<sup>209</sup>, and the will is torn apart between giving in to the senses, or listening to reason and convert as well.

#### 4.1.2 Free will

Having a free will in the Middle Ages did not implicate that a person was free to do whatever he wanted. Instead, it meant having the freedom to choose what was good.<sup>210</sup> A person who was undergoing the process of conversion, but whose will was not yet converted, was not free.

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*consuevisset, sic de cetero insit memoriae, ut eam nullatenus decoloret.*” “His pardon wipes out sin, not from memory, but in such a way that what before was both present in memory and rendered it unclean is now, although it is still in memory, no longer a defilement to it.”

<sup>206</sup> Decorte, ‘Naar zijn beeld en gelijkenis’, pp. 206-207.

<sup>207</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, pp. 89-90. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XVII, 30, ed. Leclercq, p. 106, 18-21. “*Quod enim dum in hoc corpore sumus, peregrinamur a Domino, non utique corporis est culpa, sed huius quod adhuc scilicet corpus mortis, magis autem corpus peccati sit caro, in qua bonum non est, sed potius lex peccati.*”

<sup>208</sup> *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VI, 9, ed. Leclercq, pp. 81-82.

<sup>209</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 73. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VI, 9, ed. Leclercq, p. 81, 8-10, 12-13. “*Ac membra quidem ad suam illam infelicissimam dominam incunctanter accedunt, ut adversus dominum crudeliter interpellent et imperia duriora causentur.*” “But the members (senses) come to their unhappy mistress (will) without delay to complain bitterly against their master (reason) and bewail his hard commands.”

<sup>210</sup> Decorte, ‘Naar zijn beeld en gelijkenis’, pp. 212, 218-219.

“You are in bonds. Strive to untie what you can never break. The will is your Eve. You will not prevail against her by using force.”<sup>211</sup>

A person had to give up his own will, and in return accept to do the will of God.

“Yet it is difficult for anyone, once he has received from God the power to will freely, to give up his will wholly to God and not rather to will things for himself. Perhaps it is impossible.”<sup>212</sup>

Once a person let go of his own will, and accepted God’s will, he was able to choose what was good. Bernard wrote of man’s free will as his dignity, which made him superior to animals. A wise man realises that the dignity he possesses does not originate in himself, but is a gift from God. This realisation makes him seek God more eagerly.<sup>213</sup> This is what it all comes down to for Bernard. Seeking God and loving God more. “The cause of loving God is God himself. The way to love him is without measure.”<sup>214</sup>

That everyone should love God was beyond question for Bernard. He had plenty of reasons. First, God had given himself.<sup>215</sup> Second, life on earth was possible, because God provided bread, sun and air. Anyone should be grateful for these gifts.<sup>216</sup> Third, creatures were supposed to love their Creator. “Why should the work of an artist not love its master, if

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<sup>211</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 75. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VII, 12, ed. Leclercq, p. 87, 1-3. “*Ligatus es: solvere studeas quod rumpere omnino non possis. Eva tua est. Vim facere, aut eatenus offendere eam nullo modo praevaleris.*”

<sup>212</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, pp. 178-179. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, II, 6, ed. Leclercq, p. 124, 7-9. “*Verum id difficile, immo impossibile est, suis scilicet quempiam liberive arbitrii viribus semel accepta a Deo, ad Dei ex toto convertere voluntatem [...].*”

<sup>213</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 176. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, II, 2, ed. Leclercq, p. 121, 14-19. “*Quaerat enim homo eminentiora bona sua in e aparte sui, qua praeeminet sibi, hoc est anima, quae sunt dignitas, scientia, virtus: dignitatem in homine liberum dico arbitrium, in quo ei nimirum datum est ceteris non solum praeeminere, sed et praesidere animantibus; scientiam vero, qua eandem in se dignitatem agnoscat, non a se tamen; porro virtutem, qua subinde ipsum a quo est, et inquirat non segniter, et teneat fortiter, cum invenerit.*” “You must look for higher goods in the higher part of yourself, that is, the soul. These higher goods are dignity, knowledge, virtue. Man’s dignity is his free will, which is the gift by which he is superior to the animals and even rules them. Man’s knowledge is that by which he recognizes that he possesses this dignity, but that it does not originate in himself. His virtue is that by which he seeks eagerly for his Creator, and when he finds him, holds to him with all his might.”

<sup>214</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 174. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, I, 1, ed. Leclercq, p. 119, 19. “*Causa diligendi Deum, Deus est; modus, sine modo diligere.*”

<sup>215</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 175. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, I, 1, ed. Leclercq, p. 120, 10. “*Multum quippe meruit de nobis, qui et immeritis dedit seipsum nobis.*” “He who gave himself to us when we did not deserve it certainly deserves a great deal from us.”

<sup>216</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 175. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, II, 2, ed. Leclercq, p. 121, 11-12. “[...] *satis est ad exemplum praecipua protulisse, panem, solem, et aerem.*”

it has the ability to do so?”<sup>217</sup> And finally, loving God was for the own benefit of the believer.<sup>218</sup>

Having a free will to love God, and realising why God should be loved, was not something one could learn in a day. Bernard distinguished between four degrees of love, each becoming less selfish. Like conversion, loving God in the proper way is a process. The first degree of love is a kind of love, “by which a man loves himself for his own sake.”<sup>219</sup> “He can indulge himself as much as he likes as long as he remembers to show an equal tolerance to his neighbour.”<sup>220</sup> The second degree of love means that “man therefore loves God, but as yet, he loves him for his own sake, not God’s.”<sup>221</sup> The third degree means that a person loves God for God’s sake and not for his own.<sup>222</sup> But the ultimate goal is the fourth degree of love. “Happy is he who has been found worthy to attain to the fourth degree, where man loves himself only for God’s sake.”<sup>223</sup> To love in this way is to become like God.<sup>224</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The voice of God

Love is an emotion. Therefore, loving God is not just knowing something with the intellect, but it is a feeling. To Bernard, someone could experience the feeling that God loved him, and that he loved God in return.

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<sup>217</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 186. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, V, 15, ed. Leclercq, p. 131, 22-23. “*Ut quid enim non amaret opus artificem, cum haberet unde id posset?*”

<sup>218</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 174. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, I, 1, ed. Leclercq, p. 120, 1-3. “*Ob duplicem ergo causam Deum dixerim propter seipsum diligendum: sive quia nihil iustius, sive quia nil diligi fructuosius potest.*” “For two reasons, then, I say that God is to be loved for his own sake. No one can be more justly loved, or with greater benefit.”

<sup>219</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 192. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, VIII, 23, ed. Leclercq, p. 138, 13-14. “*Et est amor carnalis, quo ante omnia homo diligit seipsum propter seipsum.*”

<sup>220</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 192. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, VIII, 23, ed. Leclercq, p. 139, 1-2. “*Quantum vult, sibi indulgeat, dum aequae et proximo tantumdem meminerit exhibendum.*”

<sup>221</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 193. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, IX, 26, ed. Leclercq, p. 140, 16-17. “*Amat ergo iam Deum, sed propter se interim, adhuc non propter ipsum.*”

<sup>222</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 194. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, IX, 26, ed. Leclercq, p. 141, 23-24. “*Qui Domino confitetur, non quoniam sibi bonus est, sed quoniam bonus est, hic vere diligit Deum propter Deum, et non propter seipsum.*” The third degree of love: “He who trusts in the Lord not because he is good to him but simply because he is good truly loves God for God’s sake and not for his own.”

<sup>223</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 195. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, X, 27, ed. Leclercq, p. 142, 1-2. “*Felix qui meruit ad quantum usque pertingere, quatenus nec seipsum diligit homo nisi propter Deum.*”

<sup>224</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 196. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, X, 28, ed. Leclercq, p. 143, 15. “*Sic affici, deificari est.*”



True charity is: “an affection, not a contract. It is not given or received by agreement. It is given freely; it makes us spontaneous. True love is content. It has its reward in what it loves.”<sup>225</sup>

Experiencing the love of God was for those who had already been converted. Nonetheless, those who stood at the beginning of conversion, could already hear the voice of God. Bernard called this the divine voice (*divina vox*), or the inner voice (*interior vox, intus auditus*).<sup>226</sup> To him, the voice of God must have been something audible only in his mind. The first word that God speaks to a person is “*convertimini*” (be converted).<sup>227</sup>

“There is no need to make an effort to hear this voice. [...] The voice speaks up; it makes itself heard; it does not cease to knock on everyone’s door.”<sup>228</sup>

The voice of God was heard during other moments in the process of conversion as well. When reason is enlightened and memory is healed, but the will is still rebellious, the voice of God calls the will to an inner paradise.

“When it is in this state, let the soul hear the divine voice; in wonder and amazement let it hear him saying. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. Who is poorer in spirit than he who in the whole of his own spirit finds no rest, nowhere to lay his head?”<sup>229</sup>

“Therefore in this gate of paradise the voice of the divine whisper is heard, a most holy and secret counsel, which is hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to little children.

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<sup>225</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 187. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, VI, 17, ed. Leclercq, pp. 133-134, 22-23, 1-2. “[...] *vera caritas* [...] *Affectus est, non contractus: nec acquiritur pacto, nec acquirit. Sponte afficit, et spontaneum facit. Verus amor seipso contentus est. Habet praemium, sed id quod amat.*”

<sup>226</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 69. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, III, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 74, 8-9. “*Applica intus auditum, reflecte oculos cordis, et proprio disces experimento quid agatur.*” “Listen to the inner voice; use the eyes of your heart, and you will learn by experience.”

<sup>227</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 67. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, I, 2, ed. Leclercq, p. 71, 5-7. “*Dixit: convertimini* (Psalm 148:5), *et conversi sunt filii hominum. Ita plane conversio animarum opus divinae vocis est, non humanae.*” “He said, “Be converted”, and the sons of men have been converted. So the conversion of the soul is clearly the work of the divine voice, not of any human voice.”

<sup>228</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 67. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, II, 3, ed. Leclercq, p. 72, 7-9. “*Nec sane laborandum est, ut ad vocis huius perveniatur auditum; [...] Nimirum vox ipsa se offert, ipsa se ingerit, nec pulsare interim cessat ad ostia singulorum.*”

<sup>229</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 75. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, VII, 12, ed. Leclercq, pp. 85-86, 9-11, 1. “*Audiat ergo anima, quaecumque eiusmodi est, vocem divinam, et audiat cum stupore et admiratione dicentem: Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum. (Mt. 5:3) Quis spiritu pauperior eo, qui in toto spiritu suo non invenit requiem (Lk. 11:24), non invenit ubi caput reclinet? (Mt. 8:20)*”

When it hears this voice, reason not only grasps what it says but communicates it readily to the will.”<sup>230</sup>

Bernard does not explain clearly what and where this inner paradise is. It must be a state of mind of peacefulness, because Bernard implied that the poor in spirit can find peace in this paradise. We have already seen that the will can be tempted by the senses. In this inner paradise, the temptations seem to have ceased. Here, the will can make the choice to convert. It even wants to make the choice to convert<sup>231</sup>, and here we find that the will is finally free. It is free to choose what is good, namely, to convert. In the mind, represented as some sort of inner spiritual paradise, where the reason and memory have found peace and cure and where the believer could hear the whispered voice of God, the will finally surrenders.<sup>232</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Mystical experience

The third experience of God a monk could have, was a mystical one. In contrast to later mystics, Bernard’s theology had nothing to do with visions. Although Bernard used verbs like *videre* and nouns like *visio*, he did not mean seeing with the eye, he meant seeing with the heart.<sup>233</sup> He was not a visionary like his contemporary Hildegard von Bingen, or any of the mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Instead, according to Bernard, mystical experiences took place in the mind. The goal of seeing God was becoming more like God.<sup>234</sup>

The aim of contemplation was experiencing a religious encounter with God.<sup>235</sup> Bernard described that he felt himself lost in these moments.

“To lose yourself as though you did not exist and to have no sense of yourself, to be emptied out of yourself and almost annihilated, belongs to heavenly not to human love.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, pp. 86. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XIV, 26, ed. Leclercq, p. 100, 8-12. “*In huius igitur ostio paradisi divini susurri vox auditur, sacratissimum secretissimumque consilium, quod absconditum est a sapientibus et prudentibus, parvulis revelatur. Cuius sane vocis auditum non sola iam ratio capit, sed gratanter eum communicat etiam voluntati.*”

<sup>231</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 84. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XII, 24, ed. Leclercq, p. 98, 8-9. “*Excitabitur desiderium voluntatis, et non modo videre locum, sed et introire paulatim, et mansionem inibi facere concupiscat.*” “The will’s desire will be moved, and not only to see the place; it will also long to enter it, little by little, and make its dwelling there.”

<sup>232</sup> Köpf, Bernhard von Clairvaux: Mystiker und Politiker, pp. 254. See: *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XI, 24- XII, 26, ed. Leclercq, p. 486-489.

<sup>233</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 89. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XVII, 30, ed. Leclercq, p. 106, 3-4. “*Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt. (Mt. 5:8) Magna promissio, fratres mei, et totis desideriis affectanda.*” “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. This is a great promise, my brothers, and something to be desired with all one’s heart.”

<sup>234</sup> Köpf, ‘Bernhard von Clairvaux: Mystiker und Politiker, pp. 254-256.

<sup>235</sup> Dinzelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux*, p. 343.

Bernard seems to have difficulties to describe what he experienced. “As though” (*tamquam*) indicates that he is trying to explain a mystical experience he has no words for. This seems the moment when Bernard can fully experience the love of God. Evans explains that Bernard experienced “a temporary freedom from the *proprium* which he came to think of as himself, the ‘self’ which separates him from God. When he is stripped of his *proprium* he is joined to God.”<sup>237</sup>

These experiences have a purpose. Eternal life in heaven was the hope of Bernard and his contemporaries. Their whole life was devoted to gain access to eternal life. Religious experiences were encouragements to Bernard to continue on this path.

“There a foretaste of the incomparable delights of love is enjoyed, and the mind anointed with mercy and freed from the sharp thorns and briars by which it was once pricked, rests happily with a clear conscience. These are not among the rewards of eternal life. They should be thought of as wages of the soldiering of this life. They do not belong to what is promised to the Church in the future, but rather to what she is promised now.”<sup>238</sup>

Bernard wrote that these experiences were meant for him and his monks on earth. Because he thought of them as the wages of soldiering, the experience of a clear conscience and a mind anointed with mercy were not meant for heaven, but for this earth. To me, this appears as an optimistic and humanistic perspective on human kind. The monks who converted were worthy to accept gifts from God. But it also points to a humanistic image of God. To Bernard, God was concerned with human life on earth and rewarded monks who eagerly sought his presence with a foretaste of heaven.

### 4.3 Know thyself

Like the humanisation of Christ and personal religious experiences, self-knowledge was a characteristic of the twelfth century that we encounter in Bernard’s work.

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<sup>236</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 195. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, X, 27, ed. Leclercq, p. 142, 16-18. “*Te enim quodammodo perdere, tamquam qui non sis, et omnino non sentire teipsum, et a temetipso exinaniri, et paene annullari, caelestis est conversationis, non humanae affectionis.*”

<sup>237</sup> Evans, *The mind of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 214”.

<sup>238</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 85. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XIII, 25, ed. Leclercq, p. 99, 9-13. “*Ibi avidissime praelibantur incomparabiles deliciae caritatis et, succissis spinis ac vepribus, quibus antea pungebatur, unctione misericordiae perfusus animus in conscientia bona feliciter requiescit. Quae quidem non inter vitae aeternae praemia, sed inter temporalis militiae stipendia deputantur, nec ad futuram pertinent, sed ad eam magis, quae nunc est, Ecclesiae promissionem.*”

“There are two things you should know: first, what you are; second, that you are not what you are by your own power.”<sup>239</sup>

Introspection or self-knowledge was important, because it made a person aware of his sins, and his need to convert. A conversion of the heart brought a monk face to face with himself, and he could see himself for what he was.<sup>240</sup> Awareness of the state of sinfulness made a monk humble. The expression “*Cognosce te ipsum*” and its variants were used by theologians in the twelfth century, including Bernard, to indicate self-knowledge.<sup>241</sup>

Monks who were aware of their own sinfulness and who converted, experienced the force of temptations.

“That is an only too familiar daily experience to all of us, that those who are giving their minds to conversion are tempted the more strongly by the desires of the flesh.”<sup>242</sup>

Apart from temptations of the flesh, monks, and in particular clergy, had to be aware of arrogance (*arrogantia*), ignorance (*ignorantia*) and curiosity (*curiositas*). An arrogant person “dared, in full knowledge and deliberately, to seek his own glory in good things which are not his own, and which he knows perfectly well to be not his by any power of his own.”<sup>243</sup> Ignorance can make “us think less of ourselves than we should”, but it can also make “us think ourselves better than we are.”<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 176. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 122, 8. “*Utrumque ergo scias necesse est, et quid sis, et quod a teipso non sis [...]*”

<sup>240</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 68. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, II, 3, ed. Leclercq, p. 73, 1-2. “[...] *hoc verbum ad omnes qui convertuntur ad cor (Psalm 84:9), praecessisse videtur, et non modo revocans eos, sed et reducens et statuens contra faciem suam.*” “And this word which is addressed to all those who are converted in heart seems to have run on ahead; it is a word which not only calls them back but leads them back, and brings them face to face with themselves.”

<sup>241</sup> Dinzelbacher, ‘*Ego non legi...*’, p. 736. See for example: *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 68. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, II, 3, ed. Leclercq, p. 73, 9. “*Quid enim illo agitur sive radio, sive verbo, nisi ut noverit semetipsam?*” “For what is the purpose of the ray of light or the Word but to bring man to know himself?”

<sup>242</sup> *On conversion*, trans. Evans, p. 83. *Ad clericos de Conversione*, vol. 4, XI, 22, ed. Leclercq, p. 95, 5-7. “*Hinc nimirum illud est quod quotidianis discimus experimentis, eos qui converti deliberant, tentari acrius a concupiscentia carnis [...]*”

<sup>243</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 177. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 122, 26-27. “*In tantum denique ignorantia illa posteriore haec arrogantia gravior ac periculosior apparet [...]*”

<sup>244</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 177. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 122, 17-19. “*Itaque valde cavenda haec ignorantia, qua de nobis minus nobis forte sentimus; sed non minus, immo et plus illa, qua plus nobis tribuimus, quod fit si bonum quodcumque in nobis esse, et a nobis, decepti putemus.*” “And so we should greatly fear that ignorance which makes us think less of ourselves than we should. But no less, indeed rather more, should we fear that ignorance that makes us think ourselves better than we are.”

Perhaps the greatest danger in Bernard's eye was curiosity.<sup>245</sup> It was a man who did not appreciate the gift of reason. Evans explained that Bernard "himself had no intellectual difficulties and he regarded such free-ranging intellectual curiosity as dangerous to the faith of ordinary believers."<sup>246</sup> Abelard, for example, tried to make every religious mystery intelligible, while Bernard believed there were things that were only necessary for the faithful soul to believe.<sup>247</sup> Bernard did not like it when theologians used their mind to try to come to grips with theological problems and mysteries. He was afraid that his monks would be led astray by the speculations of theologians.<sup>248</sup> Bernard wanted everyone to use their mind to contemplate upon God, and experience his presence.

#### 4.4 Evaluation

The objectives of the *vita contemplativa* were varied. The first objective was gaining eternal salvation. Monastic life in general was seen as the safest way to salvation. We have already seen that Bernard preferred the Cistercian order over the Benedictine order. To him, the Cistercian way of life must have been a more reliable way to salvation than the Benedictine way of life. The ascetic practice of manual labour and a close observance of the Rule of St Benedict concerning food, clothes and daily rhythm were means to gain salvation. In the Cistercian order, there was not much room for temptations of the body. To Bernard, the first objective of the *vita contemplativa*, gaining eternal salvation, could best be achieved in the Cistercian order.

Conversion of the soul, to become a free man, was the second objective of the *vita contemplativa*. In *De conversione* Bernard made clear that with conversion he had all the aspects of the human soul in mind. Some characteristics of the twelfth century can be found in the way that Bernard described conversion. The process of conversion was a personal process. A monk had to choose to give up his own will, and accept the will of God. Bernard believed that God was personally interested in the process of conversion, and willing to aid a monk in his next step. A monk underwent the process of conversion to experience the presence of God in his life. This experience was not for a small elitist group, but for any humble monk seeking God.

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<sup>245</sup> *On loving God*, trans. Evans, p. 177. *De Diligendo Deo*, vol. 3, II, 4, ed. Leclercq, p. 122, 16-17. "[...] *sua ipsius curiositate abducitur, efficiturque una de ceteris, quod se prae ceteris nihil accepisse intellegat.*" "When is so carried away by curiosity, that he becomes no different from any other animal, because he does not see that he has received anything more than they have."

<sup>246</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 141.

<sup>247</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 163.

<sup>248</sup> Evans, *The mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 83.

The experience of God was the third objective of the *vita contemplativa*. Whether it was hearing the voice of God, experiencing God's love, or being taken up in a mystical union; all monks who made progress in the process of conversion could strive to experience these things. Like conversion, experiencing God was a process. Monks had to learn to achieve the highest form of consideration, namely, contemplation. This meant that any monk could come to this stage if he practiced long enough. Contemplation eventually led to a mystical union with God. This was the ultimate goal of the *vita contemplativa*.

I think that Bernard must have been such a fervent preacher, because he wanted everyone to experience the presence of God in their lives. Since he was convinced that ascetic practices, a process of conversion and training in consideration and contemplation were required, he urged his audience to enter the Cistercian order. Bernard was an idealist. He genuinely believed that the *vita contemplativa* could be achieved to the fullest in the Cistercian order. He must have had a hard time accepting that some of his contemporaries entered the Benedictine order, believing that this was the best possible way of life for them.

Bernard was a moving preacher according to some of his best friends and biographers. His excellent skills as a preacher and his positive message combined together were excellent means of attracting new converts. The message Bernard preached was appealing to his contemporaries. They heard that they were not only living for eternal life, but that they could see a glimpse of God here on earth too. Even though the Cistercian life was harsh, this made up the difficulties in monastic life. At least Bernard was convinced that this was the case. But was he able to live up to his own ideals?

## 5 Conclusion

In the Introduction I stated that according to Bernard of Clairvaux, the best possible way of life for human kind to live on earth was the *vita contemplativa*. In order to discover what the *vita contemplativa* entailed, I have suggested a close-reading of four of Bernard's tracts, concentrating upon a number of key words and metaphors. These key words helped me to follow Bernard's line of reasoning, and to find an answer to my questions. The metaphors that Bernard used, indicate that he thought of God as a personally interested God with human emotions and feelings. Here we find what I have called 'the humanisation of Christ'. Bernard used the metaphor of a doctor to indicate that the human soul was sick, and that God wanted to cure the human soul. The metaphor of the bride and groom is another example. Christ is the groom and he wants to be with his bride. The bride can either be the Church, or the human soul. This metaphor of earthly love must be interpreted spiritually. Even so, in this metaphor, Christ is personally concerned with the soul of the believer.

I did not want to look at Bernard from the point of view of the changes that took place in the twelfth century, or from the point of view of the 'old' and the 'new' learning. Instead, I have looked at Bernard's texts first, and then looked for similarities in Bernard's work with general aspects of the twelfth century. The three aspects that I have compared Bernard's ideas to, were the ideal of the apostolic life, individual religious experiences and the humanity of Christ. According to the method of history of mentalities, there is room for different ideas and opinions among contemporaries. Indeed, Bernard and his contemporaries did not agree on these three aspects. They had different ideas about the apostolic life and gave shape to their ideas in their own monastic order and observance of the Rule of St Benedict.

I have also mentioned Leclercq's psychological approach in my Introduction. Leclercq pointed out that Bernard had a temper and that he was an idealist. Bernard must have struggled with his temperance, for monks were supposed to be tranquil. Bernard's idealism drove him to preach the *vita contemplativa* to his contemporaries and accept the harsh conditions of the Cistercian way of life.

My main question was: What was, according to Bernard of Clairvaux, the best possible way of life for human-kind to live on earth? I answered with the *vita contemplativa*, because this term pointed me toward the monastic life and included one of the objectives of the *vita contemplativa*; contemplation. My analysis of the four tracts indicated that this held true. Bernard did not simply envisage a conversion to a monastic order, he wanted that all aspects of the human soul would convert to the will of God so that communication between

God and the soul was possible. Bernard did not only envisage a life of penance, obedience and ascetic practices to fight against temptations, he had something much grander in mind. Although fighting temptations was part of monastic life, Bernard wanted his monks to find consolation in hearing the voice of God, and experiencing God's love for them. These aspects seem to be two sides of a coin, that cannot be separated in Bernard's eyes. On one side, there is the sinfulness of man that needs conversion, obedience and fighting temptations. On the other side is consideration and contemplation, leading to moments when a monk can already experience something of God on earth. These moments make it possible for a monk to endure the harshness of this life, because he holds onto his belief that in heaven he will experience the presence of God forever. Thus, the *vita contemplativa* that Bernard envisaged was living a monastic life, with a special emphasis on contemplation.

How does the practice of manual labour of the Cistercian order relate to this way of life? We have seen the arguments of Cistercians in chapter three; working with the hands did not exclude praying with the mind, a rhythm of work and contemplation brought the soul closer to God, manual labour prevented laziness, and manual labour was a form of ascetic practice. Because ascetic practices were a means to fight temptations of the flesh, manual labour belongs to the side of the coin of the sinfulness of man. That the Cistercians put so much emphasis on manual labour, in contrast to the Benedictine order, found its root in the eleventh- and twelfth-century tendency to rethink the life of the apostles. The Rule of St Benedict prescribed manual labour, and the Cistercians believed that they were reintroducing an aspect of true apostolic life in their monastic order.

I therefore think that Bernard envisaged the *vita contemplativa* within the Cistercian order. To him, this was the best possible way of life for human-kind to live on earth. But there were other ways of life that were good –although not best- to live too. As we have seen in chapter three, in *Apologia*, Bernard argued that some monks did not need the Cistercian Rule to fight temptations. Monks and clergy living under any rule could live a life pleasing to God. Like Bernard indicated in his exegesis of the story about Martha and Mary, intention was the key. Someone's intentions defined their motivations. Entering religious life should be a voluntary choice. Once the choice was made, a person should stick to it.

The voluntary decision to enter monastic life brings us to Bernard's objectives of the *vita contemplativa*. A free will was one of them. Bernard wanted his monks to be free to choose what was good. It meant that the will had to be converted to come in line with the will of God. Another objective of the *vita contemplativa* was the experience of the divine. During the process of conversion, monks could hear the voice of God in their minds. Furthermore,



monks learned to love themselves, their neighbours and God, and experienced God's love in return. What Bernard wanted most for his monks was that they learned to contemplate who and what God was so that they would be taken up in a mystical union with God. The final objective of the *vita contemplativa* was gaining eternal life. Since Bernard believed that the *vita contemplativa* was the best possible way for human-kind to live on earth, it was also the surest way to salvation.

Conversion was a key element in *the vita contemplativa*. Only through conversion did a person come to live the *vita contemplativa*. I have written primarily about monks, because most information can be found about them. Whether the lay brothers and nuns lived the *vita contemplativa*, remains uncertain. The lay brothers lived a life of penance and ascetic practice, while they cultivated new areas and worked the fields. But they could not read, nor participate fully in the liturgy. Bernard did preach to the lay brothers, so perhaps they were to consider what he preached to them. But this is speculation. Whether lay brothers lived a life of contemplation remains unknown in this present research. I have done a close-reading of four of Bernard's tracts, so I have not looked deeper into other sources to find an answer to this question.

The same holds true for nuns. Some houses of nuns accepted the Cistercian Rule in a form adapted to the needs of women, but in what respect they lived up to a life of contemplation is to be guessed at. My close-reading of four of Bernard's tracts does not reveal much information about nuns.

The Knights Templar were an entirely different matter altogether. Their life was very different from that of ordinary monks. The objective of this life was to protect pilgrims, and regulate the behaviour of soldiers. That Bernard envisaged some form of contemplation for these men can be deduced from his description of the Holy Land. Whenever the Knights Templar visited one of the holy places, they were to realise and consider the spiritual meaning that Bernard had described in *De Laude Novae Militiae*.

Bernard was an idealist. He wanted for his contemporaries to live up to this ideal, but he realised that it was not always possible. Bernard himself believed he could not live up to his own ideal.

That leads to the last question that needs answering. Was Bernard able to live up to his own ideal way of life? Bernard felt like a 'chimaera'; a person who was torn apart between two lives. Bernard must have thought of himself as an abbot who preached a way of life to his monks that he could not live up to, because he was constantly busy with business of the Church. He usually got involved in these affairs on invitation of his friends. Often he doubted

whether he would agree to accept the invitation. Once his mind was made up that it would be the right thing to let his voice be heard, he accepted and performed his task with vigour. If we judge Bernard on the basis of his own ideals we see that he in fact did what he preached. He freely chose to do what was good in his eyes.

Bernard was an idealist. His intentions were to make himself and others live up to his ideals. He could not but mingle in affairs when he felt that injustice was done. Through all his travelling, preaching and writing, Bernard got the chance to display his method of consideration. Whenever he was affronted with a difficult situation, he looked up what the Church Fathers and the bible had to say about this situation. Then, he considered what his answer would be. Thus, even though Bernard did not spend as much time in his monastery as he liked, he spent much of his time considering the answer and solution to various questions and problems. In doing so, he did live up to some of his ideals. In that respect, he was the living example of the *vita contemplativa*.

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