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## Note to the Reader

Due to space limitations we have been forced to move our historical overview to the appendix. This brief overview of the Middle Ages up until Bernard of Clairvaux's time, might prove very beneficial if you, the reader, is unfamiliar with the era. If needed, it is recommended to be read before chapter 2.

# 1. Introduction

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) stands out as one of the most fascinating characters of the Middle Ages. It is no accident that his immediate contemporaneity has been called 'The Age of Bernard' as he played large roles in e.g., the rapid expansion of the Cistercian Order, the creation of the Knights Templar, the papal schism of 1130-38, and finally the onset of the second crusade – all events which rank among the biggest of the twelfth century. At the apex of his influence, Bernard played a role in most major political struggles in Western Europe (Bredero 1977, 34). Something unheard of at a time when not only the limited means of transportation and communication ought to have severely constrained such all-encompassing involvement, but also at a time when the practical implications of the concept of a homogeneous Europe were yet to truly manifest (McGuire 2009, 10).

Bernard's influence becomes even more puzzling when juxtaposed with his nominal role as the abbot of a reclusive Cistercian monastery, Clairvaux, in what is now France. His extensive political involvement seems at odds with the parental role of an abbot, whose primary concerns were commonly understood to be the spiritual life of his subordinates and contemplative prayer. Evidence that Bernard was a complex character, whose different facets often stand in contradistinction, is however not limited to occupational fuzziness. For, although his mastery of rhetoric and monastic theology proved instrumental to his influence, Bernard was primarily revered among laymen for his compassion and piety: Many miracles were attributed to him, to the extent that he was canonized as a saint in 1174 by Pope Alexander III (McGuire 2009, 255).

Here the contradistinction lies in the fact that contrary to his pious reputation in the Middle Ages, Bernard is today often remembered primarily for his pushy, sometimes dogmatic – and by modern sensibilities unflattering – involvement in the time's most prominent controversies of heresy. In particular, Bernard's conspicuous role in the condemnation of the scholastic Peter Abelard, whose forward-looking exaltation of human

reason in religious matters Bernard opposed, has increasingly caused him to be dismissed as a fanatic. Similarly, Bernard's function as the initiator of the second crusade is often seen as unfortunate. From this 'modern' standpoint, Bernard becomes emblematic of the 'wrongs' of the medieval Church: Intolerant, unenlightened, and megalomaniacal. However, it cannot be dismissed entirely that the ensuing vilification of Bernard is arguably as much a result of modern 'rational' mentalities, as the criticized elements of his life were a result of the mentalities of the Middle Ages (Bredero 1977).

Still, these discrepancies between Bernard's *de facto* and nominal life, and between his initial legacy as a saint and his later legacy as a 'fanatical villain', are intriguing to us. We wish to get behind these legacies and get close to the actual person Bernard as he is recorded in primary sources. The aim is to get an understanding of Bernard as he outwardly saw himself and how he reasoned a consistency between his two roles: Whether that may uncover the St. Bernard whom Dante elected as his final guide in the Paradiso before standing face to face with God in the Divine Comedy, or the Bernard whose remains were thrown on the dung heap in the aftermath of the French Revolution (McGuire 2009, 155). Or perhaps, the Bernard encountered will fit one in particular of the nicknames given to him posthumously by historians; that is, 'the difficult saint' (McGuire 1992).

## 1.1. Problem Definition

Focusing on primary sources, this project will seek to elucidate how Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 - 1153) conveyed himself in an attempt to understand how Bernard conciliated the two contrasting aspects of his life: On one hand is his life as an austere and loving abbot of Clairvaux. On the other is his insistent involvement in Church politics, which often caused him to leave the ostensibly reclusive and introspective life of Clairvaux behind.

### 1.1.1. Cardinal Question

- Taking departure in Bernard's heterogeneous life as both a 'parent' for his monks and an authority on the political scene, who was he, and how did he convey himself?

### 1.1.2. Sub-Questions

- Based on the primary sources, how does Bernard appear as an abbot?
- What is the rationale and motivation Bernard presents for his political involvement, e.g., his interference in the Peter Abelard controversy?
- In extension, how does Bernard conciliate the two differing aspects of his life?

## 1.2. Delimitation

As this project portrays a person living in the Middle Ages, it is evident that detailing the historical context of Bernard's doings is one of the tasks at hand. However, it is outside the scope of this project to write an extensive historical overview of the era or more narrowly of the twelfth century. Instead, we have opted to briefly detail the societal structure of his time.<sup>1</sup> Thusly, focus will not be removed from Bernard himself, as our main concern is his rationale for his actions, not the memorization of the minute details of his interactions with other historical figures.

Furthermore, it must be made clear that this is not a minute biographical account of Bernard's life. While a short biography of Bernard's life is provided, only the aspects of his life mentioned in the problem definition will be thoroughly discussed. As for the sources upon which these discussions are based, they are naturally limited by mere virtue of the fact that Bernard lived nine centuries ago; he cannot be interviewed or observed. As such, our main source is the collection of surviving writings by or about Bernard. In our approach to these, quality has been favored over quantity, as we primarily analyze select writings which we in collaboration with our supervisor have deemed pertinent. Even so, we have had to further delimit which of the letters we zoom in on meticulously to exemplify Bernard's great rhetorical prowess and way of thinking. As such, the majority of our analysis of this character will be found in Chapter 3, about Bernard the abbot.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to space limitations this historical overview has been moved to the appendix.

In addition, out of the many political matters Bernard was involved in, we will only extensively discuss his entanglement with Abelard, drawing upon sources pertaining to other political matters only when they meaningfully expound our portrayal of Bernard within the confines of our problem definition. The incentive behind this is that an evaluation of Bernard's prosecution of Abelard can help cast light on Bernard's negative reputation among some historians. Secondly, Peter Abelard and his scholastic thinking serve as an excellent contemporary counterpoint, by means of which Bernard's – by modern standards almost exotic – way of thinking can be efficaciously introduced.

Furthermore, it is worth to mention that this project shies away from any attempt to apply modern psychological analysis to Bernard, in order to infer the psychological causality behind his thoughts and actions. Such retrofitting of theory pertinent to the modern person onto a member of medieval Western European society is not only essentially unverifiable, but would also have to account for the radical differences between medieval and modern society before it would be of relevance.

Finally, it must be made clear that we are working with English translations of the original Latin texts, as we quite simply cannot read Latin. Accordingly, we recognize that the translations may feature slight inconsistencies in meaning compared with the original texts, but have confidence in the respective translators as each have been recommended by our supervisor. This limitation has another effect, in that several of the longer technical letters or treatises written by, or about, Bernard in relation to his prosecution of Abelard have not been translated to English. This, in conjunction with the chronological complexity of the matter, has meant that secondary literature has more extensively in this section of the report than in the remainder of it.<sup>2</sup> However, the focus is still on Bernard and how he himself represented his cause against Abelard.

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<sup>2</sup> An example is the unpublished article by Constant J. Mews, one of the foremost experts on Abelard, which has been presented to us by our supervisor. We mainly utilize Mews' chronology of events.

### 1.3. Methodology

As the aim with this project is to reach a balanced understanding of a singular person who lived in a historical context far removed from that of our own, one of our major preliminary concerns was the selection of a method that would aid us in bridging the gulf that undoubtedly exists. As with any other endeavor in the field of history, we find ourselves concerned with the objectivity and accuracy of the project. In particular, two connected questions must be raised: Firstly, how do we ensure that the sources are intelligible to us in their own historical context, and are not obfuscated by modern discourse? Secondly, how do we then proceed methodologically to avoid our own preconceptions about the medieval world discolored our portrayal of Bernard? To adequately meet these challenges, we have developed an approach amalgamating two distinct, yet complementary methodological traditions, which will now quickly be detailed.

The primary inspiration for our method is Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002) and his philosophical hermeneutics. At the foundation of Gadamer's position is his teacher Heidegger's belief that a basic term of the human experience of being (*Dasein* – which means 'being there' or 'being here') is its *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*). Metaphorically thrown into the world, there is no Archimedean point the *Dasein* can climb in order to objectively perceive the true nature of things. Instead, it is subjugated to live in a perpetual state of *understanding* on the basis of prior experience. As such, "All understanding that is directed at the grasp of some particular subject matter is thus based in a prior 'ontological' understanding—a prior hermeneutical situatedness" (Malpas 2009). As per Gadamer, hermeneutic practice is then not a capability we slowly develop, but rather an all-encompassing ontological precondition: From the beginning of our lives, we are interpreting and ascribing meaning to what stands before us based on prejudices<sup>3</sup> formed by earlier experiences. In other words, our understanding is contextual.

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<sup>3</sup> Gadamer's use of the word 'prejudice' is neutral, somewhat akin to 'hypotheses', and derived from the judicial *praepudicium*. At times, Gadamer prefers the word 'prejudgment' (Jørgensen, 71).

In conjunction with Gadamer's epistemological denial of an accessible objective state of affairs (Jørgensen, 61), the notion that the particulars of our understanding are contingent on our context – and the inherent historicity of understanding which follows<sup>4</sup> – brings us back to our original questions. For although modern Western society is a direct descendant of the medieval society Bernard inhabited, the differences are many while the similarities are mostly deceptively superficial. If we are to develop an understanding of Bernard on his historical terms, a familiarity with the Western Europe of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is needed. This familiarity does not imply a complete suppression of our own prejudices, but rather an acknowledgement of their existence and the productive role they play in the molding of our understanding of Bernard.

In practice, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics have consequentially foremost meant the development of a reading procedure in accordance with his notion of *the hermeneutic circle*, which stresses that the meaning of a text is to be found within its cultural and societal context. It refers to the idea that one's understanding of a text is developed in a circular interplay between the whole and the part: You understand the part(s) based on the whole, and vice-versa (Jørgensen, 74). As such, we have continually alternated between reading primary and secondary sources, respectively to understand Bernard the individual and the 12<sup>th</sup> century, all the while putting our prejudices up for revision. The eventual goal in any hermeneutical situation is to fuse one's horizon<sup>5</sup> with that embedded in the relevant text: "Just as our prejudices are themselves brought into question in the process of understanding, so, in the encounter with another, is the horizon of our own understanding susceptible to change." (Malpas 2009). To Gadamer, the working out of the hermeneutical situation means the attainment of an appropriate horizon of enquiry.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> As understanding is founded on prior experience, it is always an 'effect of history' (Malpas 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Understanding and interpretation always originate within a particular horizon, which our historically-determined situatedness constitutes (Malpas 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Such a horizon does not replace the preexisting one, but rather mends with it (Jørgensen, 87-92). We recognize this and intend to explicate and discuss our prejudices in the latter chapters.

Overall, Gadamer advocates that the historian displays *historical consciousness*, which can in short be defined as referring to an awareness of historical relativity – the notion that our behavior, language, customs and values are contingent upon unique historical circumstances (Jørgensen, 57-58). In extension of this, the second aspect of our method, which is built on *the principle of charity*<sup>7</sup>, can be introduced. The principle of charity has many forms but can largely be described as a methodological presumption: “[...] made in seeking to understand a point of view whereby we seek to understand that view in its strongest, most persuasive form before subjecting the view to evaluation” (Lander University 2000). The pertinence of the principle of charity stems from Bernard’s controversial character, which can easily be construed as nefarious.

Thus our use of the principle of charity should be seen as an attempt to give the Bernard present in the primary sources a ‘fair shake’. Instead of immediate *ad hominem* and ‘straw man’ dismissals of his arguments, the emphasis is on trying to understand Bernard and actively attempt to resolve any internal contradictions (Lander University 2000). We attempt to draw out from the sources the most cogent rationale for his mixture of the two contrasting roles as respectively an abbot and politician. However, this does not entail that we ignore logical inconsistencies, differences between his written word and his actions, or any similar problem which may arise to endanger a sympathetic image of Bernard. The use of the principle of charity is *only* provisional, intended to enable us to get as close to Bernard as possible without an outright dismissal of him as a power-hungry fanatic; not to make us unconditionally sympathetic towards him.

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<sup>7</sup> The principle of charity is famously used by Donald Davidson in his theory of radical interpretation.

## 1.4. Source Criticism

In order to attempt to understand Bernard, we have examined several sources. This project will deal in depth with Bernard’s own writings, primarily in the form of the collection of his letters and also partly his books to the Pope (*De Consideratione*). It will also make extensive use of the hagiography, *Vita Prima*. Last, we have used secondary literature in order to grasp the context of Bernard and his time.

### 1.4.1. Bernard’s Letters

We have thoroughly analyzed a selection of Bernard’s letters,<sup>8</sup> put together by his secretary Geoffrey of Auxerre. These letters, written to fellow monks, friends, churchmen etc. show Bernard’s reaction to various situations concerning monastic life, friendship, and theology. It is important to keep in mind, that letters in the Middle Ages were not normally private letters. Bernard’s letters were public documents and treatises for everyone to read. Our aim is to attain a sense of Bernard’s use of language and way of thinking, through these letters. The letters analyzed are translations of the original Latin texts, and thus we are aware that this might present a certain loss of meaning. However, having presented this problem to our supervisor, both supervisor and the group are confident that this loss is not significant enough to affect this project.

In short, the letters selected will be used for understanding Bernard and his identity as an abbot. Our analysis will look at the structure, style and logic of how Bernard conveys himself in writing. Thus, we will try to understand Bernard as he expresses himself, and not as his contemporaries did. By first attempting to understand Bernard in this light, one can make an attempt to comprehend his actions, including those on theological or “political” issues.

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<sup>8</sup> As the collection consists of over 500 letters, it would be an enormous task to analyze all of them, especially given the amount of time at our disposal. Accordingly, we have consulted our supervisor to select the letters pertinent to our stated goal.

### 1.4.2. *Vita Prima*

The *Vita Prima* is the rather odd hagiography of Bernard. This oddness will be explained in detail in a later paragraph, after first giving a short introduction to hagiographies as a literary genre. In order to understand Christian hagiographies, one needs to have some insight into the concept of sanctity in the Middle Ages. According to some theologians, a saint was by definition a person who entered heaven. However, in practice, it was implied that the person had been accepted as a saint by an ecclesiastical authority, namely bishops, or by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the papacy (Head 1999).<sup>9</sup> The saint's day of death was commemorated, as it was also the day he was birthed into heaven. The church celebrated this festive occasion by looking back on the saint's life and deeds, often with specific prayers representing the saint's significance and exemplification of the ideals and virtues related to Christian sanctity (McGuire 2009, 31). It is noteworthy that the veneration of saints often occurred several decades after their death (Head 1999).

Hagiographies are written works dealing with the concept of sanctity. Although containing biographical features, hagiographies are not produced nor intended for biographical purposes. They are rather depictions of 'holy' persons, meant to show the actions in their lifetime, which constitute their holiness. These actions are affirmed by tales of miracles performed by the saint. Often, the authors of the hagiographies had had firsthand knowledge of the depicted saint. Nevertheless, they followed more or less standardized templates for the stories involved in their work, regularly emulating the Gospel and even other hagiographies (Head 1999). In short, hagiographies are intended for the canonization of people. They blend the subject's individuality and personality with the values, virtues and morality of Christian sanctity. Therefore, hagiographies tell us perhaps even more about the authors' discourse than about the subject involved.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Head' is a reference to the online encyclopedia article written by Thomas Head at The Orb.

The *Vita Prima* is the hagiography of Bernard. It was written by various contemporary writers including his long time friend and secretary William of St. Thierry. The other writers include his secretary Geoffrey of Auxerre and Arnold of Bonneval. This project will only focus on book 1 of the *Vita Prima* which William wrote, as it deals with Bernard's early life and his identity as a monk, described with personal stories and tales of miracles. The narratives in book 1 range from his early life up until Bernard becoming abbot of Clairvaux. It is notable that William, who died five years before Bernard, had already begun writing about him during his lifetime (Bredero, 33).

It is important to note that the three authors of *Vita Prima* already considered Bernard a saint before the papacy's decree so in 1174. Therefore, the motivation behind *Vita Prima* is arguably deeper than mere Cistercian canonization. William, Geoffrey and Arnold wanted to spread their knowledge and affection of this unique abbot (McGuire 2009, 27). William's depictions will be used partly to understand Bernard's identity as a monk and abbot, as well as to describe his early life. The *Vita Prima* is not overly informative in regards of Bernard's childhood and adolescence. It is nonetheless the only information that we possess from that period of his life. The dearth of information regarding this period is related to the fact that in the genre of hagiography the interest in childhood was limited to the degree that it foreshadowed the accomplishments of the adult life. In short, the child was not allowed to be a child but was looked upon as a little adult. Hence, as *Vita Prima* is the only source describing Bernard's early life, the historian's task becomes filtering out facts, or at least extracting useful information, from the personal narratives and miracles attributed to Bernard. One must remember that *Vita Prima* was written to illustrate Bernard as a saint, therefore the predominant tales of various prophecies and miracles are intended for this purpose (McGuire 2009, 48).

*Vita Prima* is an odd hagiography in the sense that it does not paint an absolute immaculate picture of Bernard. Amongst the saintly praise for Bernard and information

about his early life, there are several descriptions of his eating disorders and inconsiderate conduct in regards to his own health. Arguably, tales about how Bernard fasted to the point where he throws up whatever food he manages to consume, and how his “[...] lower parts of the body too are obsessed with equally distressing illnesses” (William, 22) make for most unusual hagiographic content. The reason for these depictions must be viewed in the light of Bernard’s principles as an abbot. One should leave his body in the secular world, so that only the spirit and true piety remains upon joining the monastery (William, 20). This outlook on seeking God through rather extreme interiority could easily be contrasted to other aspects Bernard’s life. However, this shall not be illustrated in this section, but will be expounded later on in the project.

As relying too heavily on a hagiographic source such as *Vita Prima* in our presentation of Bernard would virtually result in illustrating him as a sacrosanct, we have concurrently and consistently depended on secondary literature, in order to pursue a fair view of the man, his actions and the context. In order to get an overview of Bernard’s life, and his involvement in the Middle Ages, we have depended on Brian McGuire’s book *Den Første Europæer (The First European)* and Jean Leclercq’s *A Second Look At Saint Bernard*. Notably, *Den Første Europæer* is a biography of Bernard authored by our supervisor; therefore it is of absolute importance to note that the cardinal concern for this project is the primary sources, namely Bernard’s own writings.

### **1.4.3. De Consideratione**

This paper uses the Considerations, written near the end of Bernard’s life, as a backdrop upon which one may examine Bernard’s advice to his Cistercian brother and Pope, Eugenius III. It is the intention to shed light on Bernard’s duality by investigating his various expositions on the challenges of the papal office. This will be accomplished by placing the content of the letters in the context of the Bernard that we meet in the primary and secondary sources.

This is done because the Considerations offer valuable insight into the thoughts and motives of Bernard; in examining his advice to the Pope Eugenius III and placing that into the situations which surrounded them, it becomes possible to highlight indications of what Bernard’s intentions were, both in relation to the Pope himself and also in a broader sense.

Overall, the primary sources help us understand Bernard in different lights in order to encapsulate the essence of the project: understanding this most unusual abbot. Hence, one could say that the project aims to comprehend Bernard, but with a certain distance. So aiming neither for a “psychoanalysis” nor a distant power-related view, which would merely make Bernard a pawn in a “Christian game of chess”, the project’s goal is a balance between the two with a hermeneutical method, which will hopefully unveil the true identity of Bernard, or at least come as close as possible.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1. The Benedictine Rule & Carta Caritatis

This section of the paper examines the *Rule Monachorum Sancti Benedicti* (in Latin, literally, "Saint Benedict's Rule For Monks") and the *Carta Caritatis* ("Charter of Love"), with the express purpose of providing a groundwork upon which this paper can examine the behavior of St. Bernard as a monk.

The Rule, written by St. Benedict, a monk who lived from c. 480 to 543, had by the ninth century become the *de facto* work on how a monastery should be run, a position it still occupies today. The Rule provides a comprehensive work on the everyday life as well as the special situations the monks may find themselves in, but it is also at the same time loose enough that it may be applied to virtually any gathering or community equally, and still yield the same result: a fair and straight-forward set of directions that aid in establishing and governing discipline, work and unity amongst the brothers or sisters of a given monastery (Southern, 219).

One of the reasons for the popularity of the Rule is its rather unique nature: on one hand, it manages to cover almost every conceivable situation, but on the other hand, it still remains a relatively short read. To underscore this, keep in mind that in the Middle Ages, every book had to be written in hand, and it was far from everyone who was literate. Thus, a shorter volume had an easier time being circulated, as it were, due to the ease of copying it and the ease of reading it, which may have had a positive impact on its popularity. It also gained popularity with the secular governments of Europe around the eighth century, not because of any particular adherence to religious virtue but because the Rule had a stabilizing effect on the monks who followed it, and by extension, the countryside around them (Southern, 218) - as the Rule itself lays down, its purpose is to return the stray sheep to God "by the labour of obedience" (Southern, 219).

The Rule of St. Benedict concerns itself primarily with the rudiments of daily business in a monastery: when to pray and in what order, what to eat and how much; what tools should be used in labor, and in labor of what; practical things in observance of the Rule's central creed: *Ora Et Labora*, "pray and work". While St. Benedict probably was not the first to call out work and prayer as the two central underpinnings of the monk's life, and while he probably wasn't the first to attempt a codified approach to this, he was the first to attain the degree of success he did: today, some 1500-odd years after they were written, no set of rules concerning the specifics of monastic life can claim as many adherents as do the Rule. It is, as mentioned, very short: the English translation used in this project, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, is exactly 79 pages, each chapter (of which there are 73) being mostly less than a page long. Thus it is easy to see that the Rule was written to cover the widest amount of situations while still readable in a single sitting.

In contrast, the *Carta* was drawn up explicitly for the purpose of organizing the Cistercian Order. It is, like the Rule, short and often to the point. It lays down rules on when the abbots should visit their daughter monasteries, and how often; what arrangements should be made when an abbot is visiting another monastery, and how often a general chapter should be convened, that the Order may review itself and the abbots themselves give moral support to each other as well as maintain discipline - it *does* contain guidelines for reprimands and punishments (Lekai, 461). Written by Stephen Harding in 1119 and ratified by the Pope the same year, it is a much shorter, more detailed set of rules (Lekai, 20). The *Carta* provides the Cistercian Order with an actual constitution, a role that the Rule could not fill – for example, it specifically names some of the monasteries of the Cistercian Order. In many ways, the *Carta* supports and demands obedience to the Rule (Lekai, 462). For example, the *Carta* does not go into detail about matters such as personal ownership of items by the monks, but rather refers to the Rule (which deals with this exact matter, amongst many other things).



The *Carta* was the manifesto of the fledgling Order, meant to both fortify the Order's structure in a psychological and social sense, and to secure it against the stresses of inter-monastery conflict (Lekai, 462). The Order itself was also a part of a larger (and largely unorganized) reaction against the lack of virtue present in the religious society of the eleventh century (Lekai, 5). This can be seen in Robert of Molesme's motivation to found his *Novum Monasterium*, his New Monastery, because he felt that the monastery of Molesme was not suitable for a monk's solitary life of devout prayer as outlined in the Rule. He wanted a more pure approach, and it was to this end that he founded the new monastery, which later became Cîteaux (McGuire 2009, 47), and to which the *Carta* was written.

Furthermore, the *Carta* also deals with the founding of daughter monasteries (a practice which the Cistercians were very fond of, and which they spent vast amounts of time and energy on), and the relations between mother- and daughter-houses amongst the Cistercian Order, and how visits between such were conducted (for example the frequency of such visits). This was quite unusual, because the Rule sets each monastery as an island unto itself, self-supported as much as possible, without contact to other monasteries. In stark contrast, the *Carta* actually contains specific directives on relieving the need of a monastery in particularly dire circumstances, along with instructions about how often the abbots of the monasteries should meet in General Chapter, so that they might discuss the happenings of the Order and keep in touch with each other.

In short, the *Carta* is the founding constitution of the first international organization. Though unlike organizations as they operate today, it still struck a very distinct profile compared to its contemporaries. Organizations of any kind in those times were fraught with difficulties, often beholden to networks of authorities, which themselves were often at odds with each other. In contrast, the Cistercian Order had a single chain of command, with the general chapter meeting as the highest authority from the very beginning. As Middle Age organizations go, the Cistercian Order was a masterstroke (Southern, 255).

### 2.1.1. Consequences of the *Regula* and the *Carta*

Beyond the merely organizational effect of the various rules upon the individual convents, one might imagine that the widespread presence of the Rule had a unifying effect on the monks who led their lives by its edicts. Two monks from different and distant parts of Europe might find that they had some common ground in their lives in that they both obeyed the Rule. Granted, there were likely differences in how the rules were applied from convent to convent – the Rule itself is written in a format that makes for such interpretation of use - but as a whole, it is easy to imagine that these two monks, each from a faraway land, could live, work and pray together based on the Rule, without much difficulty (McCann, 5).<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to examine why the Cistercians felt the need to draw up a set of rules in addition to the Rule. Though it is certainly only a tenth of the size of the Rule - six pages to the Rule's seventy-nine<sup>11</sup> - there is no denying that it had an impact on their lives equal to if not greater than that of the Rule. The influence of this secondary rule set can also be traced in Bernard's behavior in the secular world: the Rule forbids unnecessary travel from the monastery, but the *Carta* specifies many imperatives for traveling amongst the various monasteries of the Order, chiefly in order to maintain discipline and brotherhood between the monasteries. It is plausible that Bernard, emboldened by this, felt that he could set aside the Rule's stance on the matter (due to him living under the *Carta Caritatis*), and allow himself to travel as he did. Of course, he was not unaware of the ban on monks traveling the world - his own letters are evidence of this – but he sidestepped this by mentioning, in letters to his brothers in the monastery, that his separation from them caused him great pain, and that though he was not among them in the flesh, he was with them in spirit, which was what counted at the end of the day (Bernard, Letter

<sup>10</sup> Of course, the Rule itself is quite clear on the matter of monks, travel and the situations in which the two should combine; they obviously should not.

<sup>11</sup> McCann's English translation of the Rule, 1976 edition.

144). Furthermore, it's very possible that Bernard felt compelled to involve himself in the world at large like he did because of the ideas from which the *Carta* was drawn – that it was necessary to maintain close contact with one's family (in sense of the monastic brotherhood, that is). It is certain that he felt he was unable to ignore a plea for help, and that he was aware of the conflict between his vows and his secular life that his travels brought (McGuire 2009, 119). Granted, the *Carta* contains nothing about politics beyond the boundaries of the Cistercian Order, but Bernard could have felt that the horizons presented in the *Carta* were too limited in scope - and he did put forth, as an excuse, that his travels were brought on by the work he was doing for the Church, something he could not ignore (Bernard, Letter 144). In this sense, his travels were a necessary burden caused by his devotion, rather than a deliberate breach of the Rule.

## 2.2. Biography of Bernard of Clairvaux

In order to provide a brief overview of Bernard of Clairvaux, one must look at the first book of *Vita Prima*, written by his friend William of St. Thierry. As mentioned, this source is a hagiography and therefore could be a rather problematic source, however it is nevertheless the only source we have describing Bernard's early life. Furthermore, it does provide some information which becomes helpful in understanding how Bernard came to be the abbot of Clairvaux. In short, due to a lack of other contemporary sources, one has to accept the descriptions and points William makes about Bernard to a certain extent. However, we have also consulted secondary literature in order to get more specific information in regards of dates, as well as historical and social context.

Bernard was born in either 1090 or 1091 at Fontaines-les-Dijon, a castle on the outskirts of Dijon (McGuire 2009, 45). Dijon at the time was the capitol of the duchy Bourgogne. His father, Tecelin of Fontaines, was a devout knight and is rarely mentioned in sources. In *Vita Prima*, his mother, Aleth de Montbard, is described as a faithful wife to her husband, but more so a devout Christian who in the midst of her household tried to live an eremitical life. Tecelin and Aleth had seven children, six boys and one girl, whereof Bernard was the third born. Additionally, the family was well off in terms of material wealth. Bernard's mother insisted on a holy life in the Christian tradition for her children, rather than a worldly life. William of St. Thierry describes how Bernard's mother breastfed her own children, an abnormality for noblewomen at the time as the task was usually passed on to a wet nurse (William, 3-4). This portrays Aleth as a loving and protective mother.

Aleth made sure that Bernard received an education and that he was well-versed in Latin – this happened at Saint Vorles in Châtillon sur Seine, where the family had property and were already acquainted with some of the priests. The priests were renowned for their teaching, and so Bernard would begin his education at the church of Châtillon (McGuire 2009, 49). William tells how Bernard soon “[...] progressed beyond his equals and all out

of proportion to his age” in regards to writing letters and studying Scripture (William, 5). Consequently, his skills in Latin would grow to an exceedingly advanced level, surpassing almost everyone in the 1100s (McGuire 2009, 49). In a final remark on Bernard’s childhood, William describes him as being an obedient boy, whose preference lay in solitude and contemplation in letters and on Scripture, rather than in secular life.

During his teenage years at Châtillon, Bernard’s mother Aleth died. Although William does not provide a date of any kind, it could have happened in 1106 or 1107 (McGuire 2009, 53). Although there is no explicit description of Bernard’s grief, he was undoubtedly deeply affected by this loss. After his mother’s death, Bernard was split between scholastic ambitions and loyalty to his mother, or rather to his mother’s piety. And while Bernard’s sorrow over her death is not expounded on in great detail, it could very well be her passing which gave birth to an idea which he soon came to realize - just as his mother had lived an eremitic life at home, Bernard now contemplated the possibility of leaving his literary studies, in order to embrace God by joining the monastery of Cîteaux.

After hearing of his plans to convert, Bernard’s brothers and friends tried to convince him to go back to his studies. However, as William states in *Vita Prima*, visions and memories of his pious mother would come to Bernard, in which she told that she had not raised him for a secular life (William, 10). Although seemingly another tale intended for canonization, it is clear that Bernard’s devotion, religious virtue and perhaps even his decision to become a monk is attributable to Aleth. Bernard was split between his brothers’ wish for him to lead a life in the secular world, and as what would seem to be his mother’s dying wish: for Bernard to dedicate himself to God. The turning point for Bernard was reached on a journey to his brothers, who were participating in a castle siege.

William of St. Thierry narrates how Bernard at one point stopped at a church by the wayside, entered it and started praying. From that day, Bernard no longer had doubts that seeking God was his purpose in life (William, 10). Having established his dedication to

God, Bernard now turned his attention towards his brothers, male relatives and friends. Just as they had tried to persuade him into living a secular life, he now sought to have them join him in converting to the Cistercian Order. Bernard was successful in convincing all of his brothers to join him but one - his youngest brother was to stay with their aging father. He found additional companions in friends and relatives (William, 10-11).

Having gathered those close to him in heart and spirit, Bernard and his peers settled at the family’s second home in Châtillon (McGuire 2009, 60). Here, they would live for almost six months, as a kind of trial in the monastic life (William, 16). What was odd about this was not only that Bernard and his party had “converted” before even visiting a monastery, but also that Bernard had gathered his friends and family. Instead of abandoning them, defined as belongings to the secular world in this context, Bernard acknowledged that in a monastery they all would become brothers and friends in spirit. By redefining his relations to his brothers and friends in this sense, he seemed to excuse himself of bypassing what Jesus says in the Gospel about leaving friends and family in order to follow him. Hence, in 1113 after having lived several months in each others’ company, a 22 or 23 year old Bernard turned up at Cîteaux accompanied by around 30 people, consisting of friends and family, ready to convert to monastic life (William, 18-19).

In 1115, the abbot of Cîteaux, Stephen Harding, sent Bernard – who had already proven his skills as a leader – out to build a daughter monastery - namely, Clairvaux. Here, to the surprise of the brothers, Bernard was named the abbot (William, 24-25). Bernard would hold this office until his death in 1153. During his rule at Clairvaux, many events would come to shape Bernard’s reputation. Not only did he write influential works such as his sermons, he also involved himself in events concerning various political and theological controversies. For instance, in 1124 where Bernard questioned the faith and loyalty of fellow Cistercian, Arnold of Morimond, who had set out to establish a monastery in Palestine. Another example is his praise of the newly founded Knights Templar in 1128, or

his speech to the army of knights in Vezelay in 1146. Here, he even incited them to go on to The Second Crusade, an expedition which failed horribly.

His involvement in the papal schism in 1130 and his condemnation of Peter Abelard in 1140 or 1141 are also evidence of his vast involvement in the 12<sup>th</sup> century's political and theological scene. There are several other examples of Bernard's efforts to impact contemporary Europe, however the abovementioned is just a brief account of the affairs which Bernard involved himself in. This shortness is due to the fact that the project will elaborate on a selection of these topics at a later point. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1153, Bernard died in Clairvaux. In 1174, he was canonized by Pope Alexander III.

## 2.3. Historiography

As this is far from the first time Bernard of Clairvaux is viewed through the lenses of historical studies, it would be sensible to provide an overview of preceding literature on the subject. This has multiple benefits for readers and authors alike; for one, it depicts an image of a field in which many different methods are applied, and with many different results. With this in mind, a historiography of a few select works<sup>12</sup> can serve as a backdrop to which the findings of this project can be compared and contextualized. We will return more in-depth to a discussion of these historians' interpretations of Bernard vis-à-vis our own understanding of Bernard in the Discussion chapter.

### 2.3.1. Jean Leclercq: A Second Look at Saint Bernard

Jean Leclercq, a Benedictine monk, has in *A Second Look at Saint Bernard*<sup>13</sup> applied the methods of psycho-history to Bernard with the proclaimed goal to give a more nuanced description of Bernard's person than he believed was previously available. In the foreword, Leclercq questions the positive image of Bernard depicted in *L'âme de Bernard. L'homme et le saint*,<sup>14</sup> hoping that an application of psycho-history will yield answers which traditional methods of history had not managed to produce. The findings documented within *A Second Look at Saint Bernard* are mainly based on primary sources, namely the *Vita* and Bernard's letters, the latter being the primary focus.

Throughout the course of this investigation, intended to be "as impartial as possible" (Leclercq 1990, 146), Leclercq touches upon a range of features concerning Bernard; his occasional spontaneous changes in temper, his excellent use of language, rhetoric and irony, as well as the sometimes contradictory relationship between his writings and actions. The goal seems, much like ours, to find the man, not the legend or the saint,

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<sup>12</sup> The 'standard' biography of Bernard was written by the French priest Elphège Vacandard in 1895. It is for many still the best interpretation of him, but has been deselected in favor of newer works.

<sup>13</sup> Originally published in French (1972), we use the translation by Marie-Bernard Saïd.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard de Clairvaux (Paris, 1953) 659-667, quoted in *A Second Look at Saint Bernard*, pp. XIII

behind the name. As such, Leclercq discovers an individual who, while sometimes displaying signs of internal conflict and contradiction, is aware of his own shortcomings and is not afraid to admit them (Leclercq 1990, 146). He concludes that “where he [Bernard] showed himself to be a saint was in the knowledge of his shortcomings, the admission of his failings and in spite of these his faithfulness in following Christ” (Leclercq 1990, 150). However, Leclercq is not entirely positive in his judgment of Bernard; he also portrays him as something of a hothead, occasionally being too sure of the rightness of his own actions, too ruthless in his criticism of others, and not very receptive to other points of view - one way he exemplifies this is through a discussion of Bernard’s way of conducting his criticism towards Abelard.<sup>15</sup> In his book, Leclercq seems more interested in shedding light on Bernard from multiple sides than in judging and commenting on his actions. While this seems like an easy way to avoid academic criticism, another explanation could be that Leclercq is himself a Benedictine monk and thus might treat Bernard as something of a sacrosanct, or at least with respect for his sainthood.

### **2.3.2. Brian Patrick McGuire: Den Første Europæer**

Brian Patrick McGuire, medievalist and supervisor on this project, has recently published a book on Bernard titled *Den Første Europæer*. The title hints at what the preface confirms; McGuire views Bernard as the first European. Throughout the course of the book, McGuire develops this notion, basing his arguments largely on the way in which Bernard conducted himself, locally and internationally, within the higher layers of both politics and theology. He bases his writings almost solely on primary sources, shying away from what he calls “clever ‘theorists’, who dictate how I should read the texts” (McGuire 2009, 11).<sup>16</sup> He does so to understand how Bernard was seen and understood during his own time, and in turn how we can understand him today.

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<sup>15</sup> Many passages highlight these features, for example; *A Second Look at Saint Bernard*, pp. 93-103.

<sup>16</sup> Translated from Danish: “smarte teoretikere, der fortæller mig, hvordan jeg bør læse teksterne.”

*Den Første Europæer* has a wide scope, covering both events which took place during Bernard’s life and after his death. When contrasted with the other works in this chapter, McGuire’s book is extremely clear when it comes to bias, interpretation and personal opinions; these elements are very scarce, and almost solely pertain to McGuire’s argumentation on the subject of Bernard as the first European. On the most part, though, quite the opposite is the case, in the sense that McGuire stays on the descriptive level, recapitulating the life of Bernard – not interpreting it. But this is also the weakness of the book; while McGuire sometimes posits interesting viewpoints on Bernard, its primary focus lies in describing the entire life of Bernard and as such, deeper textual analysis is almost non-existent. While *Den Første Europæer* does provide interesting insight into a most interesting person, derived from sources both spatially and temporally as close to Bernard as possible, it does *not* concern itself very much with getting deep into the letters, which is arguably the best source to use when locating Bernard. This does not mean that McGuire does not use or deal with the letters – he certainly does, just not to the extent one might wish in a book spanning almost 300 pages. As such, McGuire’s book serves as a brilliant foundation for the Bernardine novice, while a seasoned Bernardine scholar might dismiss it as a wide-scoped introduction to Bernard of Clairvaux.

### **2.3.3. Adriaan H. Bredero: St. Bernard and the Historians**

Adrian H. Bredero, Professor emeritus at the Free University in Amsterdam, has produced numerous writings on the topic of St. Bernard. One of these articles, *St. Bernard and the Historians*, details the ways in which Bernard has been studied through history. It takes a point of departure in the different *Vita*, expounding on how their valuation as historical sources has changed parallel with the development of historical methods. In working towards this goal, Bredero recapitulates the shifting attitudes in history towards Bernardine studies, exemplifying with relevant and acclaimed writings stratified over a period of almost 900 years. On the final pages of the article, Bredero concerns himself with the viability of the *Vita* as a valuable historical source; he concludes that while the

Cistercians do not approve of applying psychological theories to Bernard (Bredero, 48), these can nevertheless yield results about Bernard's ambiguity which, when paired with the existing knowledge of Bernard, will provide a more fully fledged image of his person. Bredero supports this claim by giving an example of his own research.

This research led him to the conclusion that Bernard took every opportunity to expand the Cistercian Order. He thus goes on to say that "if your opinions [...] are borne out by further research into the founding of the Cistercian monasteries of those days, they will [...] help as well to explain his historical performance by bringing us to the core of his political activity and of his spiritual, mystical exhaltation [sic.]" (Bredero, 59). Thus Bredero ends his article by expressing a hope that his writings and advancements may benefit other researchers so that they can produce new information on what he calls "the controversy about St Bernard in the opinion of the historians." (Bredero, 62).

### 3. Bernard the Abbot

Bernard was by no means an ordinary abbot. The headline for this section can become a bit misleading, as there is not much to be said about his specific duties as an abbot, nor is that of particular interest in gaining insight into the man. Rather, this section aims to present the Cistercian Order and its spread to get an insight into Bernard's importance for the Cistercians – by both independent reflections as well as those of other historians. When analyzing the person, the abbot and the miracle worker Bernard, *Vita Prima* is an inevitable source. In this section we will make use of this hagiographic source in order to show a more personal side of Bernard, also encompassing his relation to God and his importance to his monks. However, if one wants to know Bernard, one must dive into his own writings, namely his letters. Here, various letters will be analyzed in order to show various sides of Bernard: A caring friend, resolute abbot, passionate advocate of the Cistercian way of life and self-assured man of God. This chapter will present examples of Bernard's brilliant use of language and argumentation, and explore many facets of the self-proclaimed "modern chimera" (Bernard, Letter 326).<sup>17</sup>

#### 3.1. The Growth of The Cistercian Order

The story of the Cistercian expansion is rather complicated and we do not intend to write a thorough exposition of it. Instead a brief exposition will list the most important facts and years and explains Bernard's role in the spread of monasteries. As mentioned previously, the Rule of Saint Benedict denounces the so-called *gyrovagi*, the travelling monk, but does not say anything about founding new monasteries (McGuire 2009, 119). This was probably due to the fact that the Rule was written with an eye to the running of only *one* monastery. *Carta Caritatis*, on the other hand, mentions communication between abbeys and states that if a monastery is prosperous enough it has to expand

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<sup>17</sup> Admittedly, all the letters are worthy of deep textual analysis in terms of style, logic and language, but the analysis of letter 1 will epitomize our understanding of how Bernard conveyed himself in writing.

(Lekai, 463). Bernard was a valuable asset to the Cistercians and some historians claim he was the main cause the expansion of Cistercian monasteries went so swiftly (Leclercq, 52). That he played a vital role in the expansion of Cistercian monasteries cannot be denied but to what extent is debatable.

There already existed three other daughter monasteries close to the first Cistercian abbey, Cîteaux; Pontigny (1114), Morimond (1115), and la Ferté (1113). The fourth monastery was founded in 1115 and was named Clairvaux, with Bernard as its abbot. The Cistercians used a very successful method to found new monasteries in the vicinity of Clairvaux and further away. At the time, young men who sought God and wanted to become monks came from afar to join monasteries they had heard of – and Clairvaux was a popular destination. After having received their monastic training they were often ordered to found new Cistercian monasteries and were sent back to their place of origin. These monks had an advantage because of their local knowledge and contacts.

Another reason why the founding of new Cistercian monasteries was so successful these years undoubtedly had to do with Bernard himself, who throughout his life was admired both within the community of the Church, but also outside. The lay public knew of him either from hearing of the miracles he had performed or had heard of him from the numerous travels he made around Europe in the name of the Church. The fact that he was a well-known figure probably caused many communities to be more favorably inclined towards Cistercian monasteries, despite the fact that the Cistercians was a new monastic order. Furthermore, nobles, bishops etc. often met with Bernard because they had heard of him, and very often the host became fascinated by the charismatic Bernard. On several occasions a meeting with him inspired his hosts to found a Cistercian monastery or introduce the Order to their homeland.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> An example of this is Malachy, the archbishop of Armagh, who on a visit to Clairvaux became close friends with Bernard. He later founded Mellifont Abbey in Ireland in 1142.

In the following years, Cistercian abbeys spread inside the borders of what is now France, but also internationally. In 1128, the Order came to England with the founding of Waverly abbey in Surrey. Later it spread to Wales and Ireland and the countries we now call Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal. In 1144, the Order arrived in Denmark and the cloister of Herrevad in Scania was founded the same year. This was a daughter to Cîteaux, the first Danish daughter monastery to Clairvaux was Esrum, founded around 1150. Before the year 1200, seven other monasteries were founded in the Danish realm. Bredero notes that when Bernard entered Cîteaux in 1113, it only had one other affiliate. At Bernard's death in 1153, the Cistercian Order had 344 monasteries spread throughout Europe: 69 were direct affiliates of Clairvaux, who in turn had 75 affiliates, meaning that Clairvaux had 166 direct descendants (Bredero, 52).

Bredero questions if it is indeed so that Bernard had as massive impact on the Cistercian expansion as claimed by other historians. He mentions other reasons that can explain the matter: First of all, he says that many land-owners speculated in having a Cistercian monastery in their piece of land because they could earn money from the agricultural work that the monks carried out (Bredero, 53). The Cistercians had a strong work ethic and thus must have been able to create large surpluses for the land-owners. Furthermore, the Cistercians tried to keep a distance to the secular world and thus wanted to get their hands on pieces of land far away from larger towns. This of course benefited the land-owners who could sell properties which they had not been able to sell before (Esmark and McGuire, 142). Next, Bredero mentions that the Cistercians on numerous occasions took over existing, but troubled monasteries – or the existing congregation decided to join the Cistercians.

Bredero mentions the Obazine, Savigny and finally Cheminon where he says that there was a possibility that the Cistercians paid the former owners to acquire their monastery. Esmark and McGuire also indicate that the Cistercians were not popular with other mona-

steries due to their success. Some priests felt that the Cistercians took away the most promising young men who otherwise would have become priests. Esmark and McGuire radicalises Bredero's claim and say that the Cistercians sometimes overtook monasteries against the will of the residing monks and, on other instances, were offered entire towns that they accepted, meaning that the original inhabitants had to leave their homes so the Cistercians could have a large piece of land to cultivate (Esmark and McGuire, 142-143).

## 3.2. Bernard of Clairvaux: His life as an abbot

Before one delves into the life of Bernard and his life as an abbot of Clairvaux, one has to make certain reservations regarding the sources. One of the best sources to shed light on Bernard as an abbot of his monastery is *Vita Prima* written by his lifelong friend, William of St. Thierry. The author either witnessed the events described in the book or was told by Bernard himself. The rest of the witnesses used in the work are people who were close to Bernard; monks, clerics or bishops, all in all, people of the church (and because of this, William sees no reason to think that any of these people could be unreliable). Finally, the first book of *Vita Prima* was written in 1147, six years before Bernard's death. *Vita Prima* mostly focuses on all the miracles and unexplainable phenomena that took place around Bernard throughout his life. When trying, as objectively as possible, to account for Bernard's life as an abbot, the extensive depiction of miracles can be distracting to a modern reader. However, since this source is able to show how Bernard lived around the monastery, it is sufficient for our purpose. In *Vita Prima* many miracles are integrated into the story, making them hard to get around at times. But the miracles are important to go into because they show the special bond that lay persons and people of the Church thought there was between Bernard and God. The miracles will be treated separately.

Clairvaux was a 'daughter monastery' to Cîteaux, the first Cistercian monastery. The initial Cistercians thought that other monks in time had removed themselves from the true meaning of the Rule of Saint Benedict and thus they made a splinter group. The author of

*Vita Prima*, William of St. Thierry clearly sees a connection between the monastery of Clairvaux and the early monks who lived in the desert of Egypt. He writes in *Vita Prima*, when describing Clairvaux: "[...] seeing renewed also the ancient pathways of the ancient Egyptian monks, our forefathers, renewed by the freshening footprints of these contemporaries of our own." (William, 34). It seems evident that the monks of Clairvaux lived by stricter rules than others, if one takes a look at a certain passage in *Vita Prima*. When William describes what the monks eat, one can sense that he is genuinely shocked that anyone can live on this diet: "Their bread was more of brick than of bran, barely squeezed from the barren dirt of that desert land by the brethren's enduring toil" (William, 36). William was a Benedictine monk himself, so he would know the diet of other abbeys. William also notes that the monks of Clairvaux, according to him, were in good spirit:

"[...] able to deal with every kind of fleshly endurance [and] that they were now performing many things which had previously seemed impossible to those still in human flesh [...]"  
(William, 36)

### 3.2.1. The Cistercians' Work Ethic

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Cistercians regarded the *Rule of Saint Benedict* as their prime authority. The two most important aspects of the Rule (besides love and self denial) were prayer and work; thus hard manual labour was one of the tasks that Bernard expected his monks to carry out. Compared to other monastic orders at the time the Cistercians emphasised the importance of work. The reason why was because "[...] idleness is the enemy of the soul" (McCann, 53). The purpose of working and praying therefore was to prevent the monks from sinning because lack of work or boredom inspired them to do so. A lot of work had to be done around a monastery to make it function. Often, an abbey was offered a piece of land by either (or by both) the Church or nobles thus making the monks able to cultivate the land so they had something to eat. When they had a surplus they would give it to the needy. The cultivation and harvest of



the land were either done by the monks or illiterate peasants (known as *conversi*) who were taken in by the monastery (Esmark and McGuire, 142). Bernard also participated in the work at Cîteaux and Clairvaux, but his deteriorating health, caused by an eating disorder, forced him to take care of more administrative assignments later on. In addition to the hard manual labour the monks also fasted at times and they had a limited amount of food available each day<sup>19</sup> had to get up early in the morning and thus did not get much sleep. This was obviously in line with the Cistercians' (especially Bernard's) look on all secular things as a source of evil that led people further away from God. The body and its needs, such as hunger and thirst were regarded as something that had to be controlled and denied.

### 3.2.2. Bernard's Eating Disorder

Another aspect of Bernard's life mentioned many times in *Vita Prima* and described in detail is his physical condition. *Vita Prima* often ponders the paradoxical fact that a man so strong in spirit could be of so poor health and physique. The reason was mainly because Bernard suffered some kind of eating disorder, combined with his very strict and negative view of the body and its functions. Another reason is that the difference between the weak physical and the strong spiritual side of a saint in a hagiography is often contrasted. Hunger, for instance, and the need for sleep he regarded as secular needs which had to be controlled. Therefore, he ate and slept very little. William of St. Thierry wonders if this tough asceticism ruined his stomach; the fact of the matter was that if Bernard ate more than the usual small amount of food, he would not be able to keep it down. His condition became such a problem that Bernard could not partake in the practical chores of the monastery and had to take other tasks on his shoulders. In *Vita Prima*, Bernard is described as being very reluctant to reconsider his eating habits, but his friends finally persuade him. When he lies deadly ill, he still manages to joke about it:

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<sup>19</sup> This was specified in the Rule of Saint Benedict (McCann, 45-46).

"How do I live? Very well indeed! In the past I was the one to be obeyed, and this by rational creatures, but now by God's just judgement I have been given over and made to obey a quite irrational beasts" (William, 33)

Again William emphasizes humor and good spirit as being an essential part of Bernard's personality. He also describes that Bernard's asceticism probably ruined his sense of taste, because he is at some point wrongly given oil instead of water and is not able to taste the difference (this also portrays Bernard as being quite uninterested in material things, thus stressing that Bernard did not care for temporal things at all). The closest thing that one gets to a criticism of Bernard, which is quite unusual for a hagiography, is when he has completed the year under administration. William says that he soon began his tough asceticism again and even made stricter rules for himself to live by now that he had eaten more this past year:

"[...] most obedient to all in everything, but in his own case scarcely obedient to either Charity or Authority itself; always setting his earlier feats at naught and planning greater projects against his unspared body, adding robustness to his spiritual effort and wearing the body down in ceaseless fasts and vigils." (William, 38)

William breaks with the traditional portrayal of a saint in a hagiography. He is genuinely concerned for his good friend.

## 3.3. The Miracles

*Vita Prima* deals mostly with the miracles Bernard supposedly carried out throughout his life. Since the miracles are closely intertwined with him and the story of Clairvaux, and because they shed light on the relationship between Bernard and God, three miracles are detailed in the following paragraph. Since we cannot actively look 'behind' the sources and question the purported witnesses of the miracles, but naturally find ourselves skeptical, we have – in accordance with our method – tried to understand the miracles allegorically – as symptomatic for the particular make of Bernard's powerful spirituality.

The first story takes place close to Lent and is about a group of young knights who decide to pay Clairvaux a visit because they have heard of the abbot there. Bernard invites them in, and being the guy he is, instantly realizes that he must convert them. William notes in *Vita Prima* that the knights, as almost every man who were interested in knighthood, occupied themselves with the sinful act of going to tournaments at fairs. Bernard sits down with the knights and starts to talk, and at some point Bernard asks the knights if they would be so kind not to use their weapons before the Fast. The young men strongly refuse to which Bernard says: "I am confident in the Lord that he will grant the truce you deny me" (William, 49). He then blesses some cups of beer and proposes a toast with the knights. Some of them are a bit hesitant, afraid of what will happen to them if they drank the blessed beverage. Afterwards, the knights continue their trip but return to Clairvaux shortly after to convert. This miracle first of all shows the alternative methods Bernard would utilize in order to convert people. Although monks have been brewing beer for a very long time, this has mostly been to support their cloister financially. The monks may have enjoyed a cup of wine from time to time but they never drank beer in the monastery (McGuire 2009, 100), therefore it was rather atypical of Bernard to bless the cups. Disregarding the religious aspect for a moment, Bernard was also wise to 'level' with the young knights who probably were quite surprised and impressed by this approach. Furthermore, this miracle, as all the other miracles described in *Vita Prima*, serves the purpose of showing Bernard's close and special relationship with God: Because Bernard was a strong-willed, pious, humble and devout Christian, God had chosen him to be his instrument. Through him, he performed miracles to help humanity but also to show tangible evidence of His existence which then could inspire people to convert to Christianity.

The next miracle, which is the first mentioned in *Vita Prima*, happened during winter one of the first years after Clairvaux was founded. The cellarer of the monastery, Bernard's older brother Gerard, came to Bernard and angrily stated that the abbey was in lack of a lot of supplies, but that 12 pounds would cover the expenses. Bernard sent Gerard away

and began to pray. Some time after, a woman came to the abbey and offered Bernard 12 pounds for a blessing of her husband who lay deadly ill. Bernard talked with her briefly and sent her home where her husband had recovered in the meantime. Bernard then consoled his brother and said that in the future, he should have more faith in God. Again, Bernard acts as an agent of God, who heals a man but, more importantly, ensures that one of the first Cistercian abbeys survive. The Cistercians must have seen this as a twofold miracle, a clear sign of God's recognition of their order. William adds to the story that this happened on several occasions, further underlining Bernard's close bond with God - he was aided whenever he (and the Order) was in trouble. Though this is the first real miracle described in *Vita Prima*, Gerard's behaviour is rather symptomatic for the rest of the work. Both Gerard and Bernard's maternal uncle, Gaudry, were sceptical regarding Bernard's miracles. Surprisingly, this shows that his closest family did not have as much faith in him as others had.

The last miracle mentioned here deals with Bernard and William of St. Thierry: Bernard was seriously ill and William likewise. When Bernard heard of his friend's condition he commanded William, who was at his own monastery, to travel to Clairvaux. It was explained to William that Bernard had said that he would either die or be cured there. Despite of this eerie statement, William travelled to Clairvaux. While staying at the monastery, Bernard and he had a nice time together; they had long theologian discussions until Bernard recovered. He continued to visit William at his bedside several times a day. Around *Septuagesima*, the ninth Sunday before Easter, William was feeling well enough to return to his own abbey but Bernard would not let him. William complied, but since it was around *Septuagesima* he would abstain from meat which he had been eating during his sickness. Again, Bernard forbade him to do so, but William defied him for once. The following night the illness came back, William had the worst night ever and thought he would die. The next day, Bernard came to William's bedside and asked: "What will you be eating today?" to which William answered: "I shall eat whatever you

order" (William, 54). After this, the illness subsided. This miracle shows a darker side of Bernard and therefore also of God. One is reminiscent of the God portrayed in the Old Testament, harsh and vengeful, who will put His servants through suffering just to make them obey. There is a direct parallel between the way God acts and the way Bernard acts here. Bernard often had such a confidence in God that he would not under any circumstances compromise his own beliefs.

### 3.4. Suger: A Reformed Abbot

Suger, born in 1081 (Bernard, Letter 80), was the abbot of St. Denis, and a very famous person of his time. He was famous before ever dealing with Bernard, as he served King Louis 'le Gros' of France in the capacity of "Chief minister", and it was in this service that Suger earned the title "Father of his Country" (Bernard, 110).

It is evident that Suger mixed his two vocations, that of abbot and statesman, in the service of King Louis. This affair rubbed off on his administration of St. Denis, which by the mid-1120s had certainly become a center of temporal affairs and state management. It served as a place of meeting between the monarchy and the Church, it held the royal tombs and it was from St. Denis that Suger, in his capacity as Chief Minister, oversaw the function of France while the king was away on the Crusade. In short, the administration of St. Denis was a mess, as far as the Cistercian ideal was concerned. This was, in part, what prompted Bernard to write his *Apologia*<sup>20</sup> (which concerned itself with the decoration of monasteries and, by extension, the proper management of the austere monastery), and it was quite likely the *Apologia* which effected the change of heart in Suger c. 1127, at which time Bernard wrote letter 80 (Bernard, Letter 80).

The background of some of the letters between the two comes from Suger's work to reform the abbey of St. Denis, which had at the time become "little more than a centre

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<sup>20</sup> Written in circa 1125.

for the transaction of the great affairs of state" (Bernard, Letter 80). Suger had been inspired by the *Apologia* to work on reforming his abbey. At this point it is important to remember that St. Denis by no means was some backwater hovel in the middle of nowhere, but rather a highlight on the map of France at the time. Reforming it the way Suger did must have taken enormous courage and effort.

Bernard's letters to Suger all indicate a deep and caring friendship between the two: often, the letters contain long sequences of praise and admiration of the abbot of St. Denis and his work there, as well as his excellent qualities as a soldier of God - though they concurrently detail the exact nature of this praise, drawing up the differences between the praise of virtuous men and that of wicked men. This lets Bernard heap praise upon Suger, whose reform work Bernard admired.

Bernard was clearly interested in Suger's work to reform the abbey of St. Denis. Many of his letters to Suger - though they may not deal with the topic directly - contain references to it, and praise Suger for his achievements. It is very likely that the two men shared the ambition of returning the Church to a more pure state, in which a monastery was a secluded place for the humble worship of God rather than a secular waystation for weary people. Bernard certainly had such an ambition, as evidenced by his own letters and by his dedication to the Cistercian ideals, and his letters to Suger are evidence of the latter's own reformation, both of himself, of his abbey of St. Denis and of the monks that dwelt therein. Bernard remarks on this, declaring that if it had been only Suger who had converted from the sinful state that had allowed St. Denis to degenerate into secularity as it had, he would have had silenced his critics; but because he managed to also bring this change of heart upon the monks under his care, he turned his critics to admirers (Bernard, Letter 80). The exact degree of Bernard's influence on Suger's change is perhaps impossible to pin down, but the mere fact that Suger changed the way he did, from a powerful statesman to a humble abbot, certainly speaks volumes.

Bernard also corresponded with Suger in much smaller matters, however. Trusting in his judgment and piety, he would often ask for Suger's help or support in different matters, (Bernard, Letter 406 and 407) as well as offering him advice in various, more mundane cases (Bernard, Letter 401). This goes to show that Bernard did not only involve himself and his network in the grand schemes and politicking of the Church, he also took hand in small cares and troubles of his brothers – frequently, his missives to Suger were for his help in helping a particular gathering of monks, or getting food for a monastery that had experienced a crop failure (Bernard, Letter 406). He also called on Suger to continue the work he began at St. Denis, to instill in others a more virtuous approach to life (Bernard, Letter 401). This was probably what Bernard admired most about his friend. Though, to be perfectly fair, Bernard did also request that Suger move this or that way in matters that were very political (Bernard, Letter 405). At the end of the day, though, Bernard's frequent requests for Suger's help were probably a by-product of Bernard's own fame, coupled with his immense willingness to help in even the slightest matter – he himself acknowledges that he would reply to any letter, no matter how high or humble the sender (Bernard, Letter 235).

Bernard, as an abbot, was thus careful to support those whose work was like his own. Though it is tempting to view their relationship as just another cog in Bernard's machinery, this is hardly the case. Much of Bernard's writing to Suger is advice on how the abbot of a given monastery should act. Bernard, though prone as always to casting about by means of metaphor, always returns to two points: The abbot should be a pillar to his monks, and he should be humble to everyone. His work in this world should be considered nothing, and he should rejoice in every hardship in this life, for that is where he earns his reward in the next. This is consistent with Bernard's own behavior, if it is accepted that he considered his absence from his monastery and his brothers a pain, his work for the Church a necessary chore and his constant traveling a 'necessary evil'.

In conclusion, Bernard carefully supported Suger as an abbot. Although it would be easy to suppose that Bernard would actively try to influence Suger toward a more Cistercian way of life, this is not the case. Bernard expresses joy in Suger's development, but he never directly said, "my monastery is better than your monastery." Instead, he encouraged Suger to continue along his chosen path.

### **3.5. Robert: The reproach of a defector**

The case of Robert is an interesting point of departure for an investigation into the 'real' Bernard. During this period,<sup>21</sup> Bernard wrote a long letter to his nephew, Robert of Châtillon (Bernard, Letter 1). The letter is known as Letter One among Bernardine scholars. In it, Bernard expresses his grief over Robert having left Clairvaux in order to join a 'competing' monastery, Cluny, which was not a part of the Cistercian Order. Through a series of structured arguments, mixed with feelings of guilt, anger, hope and frustration, Bernard does his best to convince Robert to return to Clairvaux. Because of his passion for the cause, this letter shows Bernard in his prime, utilizing all means of persuasion available to him – as such, this analysis will deal both with the case of Robert and Bernard's attempts to resolve it, as well as analyze his rhetorical prowess. Flattering language, biblical quotations and shiny metaphors will be picked apart to see how they, when united, comprise a doctrine which is very hard to resist or argue against.

When setting out to write this letter, Bernard was in a difficult situation; his nephew, Robert, had left the monastery of Clairvaux to join the monks at Cluny. Though he was not formally oblated,<sup>22</sup> his parents did promise Robert to the Cluniac and, as was customary at the time, gave an offering of land as a symbol of their promise. As it were,

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<sup>21</sup> The letter was written in approximately year 1119 (Bernard, Letter 1)

<sup>22</sup> An oblate was a child who was formally offered to a monastery by his parents (Bernard, Letter 1). The rules for oblation are laid down in the 59<sup>th</sup> chapter of The Rule of Saint Benedict. For more information on oblation, see footnote in Bernard, p. 4-5 – for more information on the Rule, see 2.1.

Bernard was not impressed with the Cluniac interpretation of the Rule; according to him, their fine clothes and delicious foods had no place in a monastery, as they took focus away from reaching God: “[...] the soul is not fattened out of frying pans!” (Bernard, Letter 1). As such, having his own nephew abandon the hardships at Clairvaux to live under less ascetic conditions at Cluny was a huge loss for Bernard – not only did Robert abandon his brethren and family, but by abandoning Clairvaux, Bernard felt that he had also stepped off the long and painful path to salvation: he had abandoned God.

### 3.5.1. Analysis

The letter begins with Bernard expressing that he had hoped for “perhaps too long” that Robert would realize his errors and return to Clairvaux. To be precise, Bernard had hoped that the Lord would touch Robert’s soul and by doing that, make him regret his error (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1).<sup>23</sup> Two important things appear; first, that Bernard puts his faith in the Lord instead of Robert – it would seem as if he has already given up hope of Robert himself realizing his error. Instead, Bernard hopes that the Lord will, by his touch, enable Robert to see his error. Secondly, Bernard here gives Robert the blame for having left. Bernard states that he has been disappointed in his hope, and that he can no longer restrain his anxiety (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1). Hence, “against all the laws of justice”, (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1) Bernard has to reach out and contact Robert: “I who have been wounded am forced to recall him who wounded me” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1). By now, Bernard has already occupied the position from which he often delivers his most persuasive arguments – the wounded innocent – not only was he wounded and hurt by Robert, but his hopes for Robert’s deliverance had not been met by God. Facing this, Bernard felt “I must cast myself at the feet of him who should cast himself at mine.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1).

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<sup>23</sup> In this part of the project, we refer to sections as well due to the level of detailed textual analysis and the length of the letter.

Having established his own position in the argument, Bernard proceeds with establishing the position of Robert. Due to the communicative nature of letters, Robert cannot protest against Bernard’s previous statement, nor establish a position for himself. Masterfully, Bernard makes use of this to assume the role of Robert in the letter; “‘But’, you will say, ‘I have hurt no one, spurned no one. Rather have I [...] sought only to fly my oppressor.’” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1). By responding as if he were Robert, Bernard simulates a communicative practice. This allows him to twist the ‘conversation’ in the direction he wants – in this case, he positions Robert as the aggressor and himself as the defender: “Is it not wiser to yield to the persecutor than to resist him? To avoid him who strikes than to strike back?” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1).

Bernard responds to this argument, agreeing, but stating that he is not writing Robert to dispute, but rather to remove the grounds for dispute. He makes it clear that he “shall forget old injuries” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1) and not “ask why or how the present state of affairs came about.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1). He reasons that “to act otherwise were better calculated to open than to heal wounds”, implicitly saying that remembering old injuries, or asking about how the present state of affairs came about would cause bitterness between them – and this is not Bernard’s stated mission. All he wants is Robert’s return: “Only come and there will be peace; return and there will be satisfaction.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 1).

In the beginning of the second section, Bernard assesses his own involvement in Robert’s leaving. This move is somewhat contradictory to the previous sentences, in that Bernard actually accepts part of the blame and thus *is* inquiring into how the present state of affairs came about – “No doubt it may have been my fault that you left. I was too severe with a sensitive youth” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2). In the following lines, Bernard expounds on how the blame can be said to be largely his, due to him being the abbot of Clairvaux and thus overseeing that the ascetic Cistercian way of life is being followed.

However, Bernard does not contend with accepting part of the blame and proceeds with explaining his actions. It is noteworthy that Bernard has once again positioned himself in a manner where it seems not only reasonable but praiseworthy that he defends himself; to begin, he was the spurned one who had to approach his tormentor to fix the past. Now, having chosen to not dwell on the past, having been “too hard on a tender stripling” and accepted the outcome, should he not at least have a chance to explain his actions?

Bernard utilizes this self-created opportunity to its fullest: “I might, perhaps, excuse myself by saying that only in this way could the passions of youth have been curbed [...]” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2). Note how he “might, perhaps” excuse himself, thus retaining a hypothetical pretense in that he is never explicitly asked by anyone to defend himself. This is one of the trademarks of Bernard’s writings: To do something under the pretense of *not* doing it.

Thus, this is not even a real defense, because there is no real attack – Bernard keeps this conflict of blame-placing solely on the hypothetical level. In spite of this, he relates his past actions to the Bible by quoting two different lines of Scripture, each highlighting that correcting one’s loved ones is a virtue. At this point, Bernard has used language to convey a multitude of mixed messages, each one placing him in a somewhat flattering light. He has only been doing what is written in the Scriptures and as a result, his beloved nephew abandoned and wounded him. In spite of the correctness of his actions (cf. the Scriptures), he still accepts part of the blame for Robert leaving and will forgive him if he returns. Seemingly finished with placing the blame, Bernard states that “we will not let arguments about who is to blame delay the correction of what is blameworthy.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2). We are now approaching the turning-point: focus shifts from who must shoulder the blame, to the blameworthy act itself, namely Robert leaving Clairvaux. This sentence is an interesting construction; if someone does something which is blameworthy, it would be expected that the person be held accountable for his actions,

and hence he/she would be to blame for doing that which is blameworthy. Between the lines, Bernard has slowly been preparing, constructing roles for himself and Robert, recapitulating past events and interpreting them to his favor – in the next sentence, he mounts his offense, building upon the preceding elements in the letter. The following quote is the central turning point:

“But it will surely begin to be your fault as well if you do not spare me now that I am sorry, if you do not forgive me now that I acknowledge myself to blame because, although I have been unwise in my treatment of you, I was certainly not malicious.” **(Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2)**

Note the smooth transition; having accepted part of the blame, having said he was sorry and explained his reasons for acting like he did, Bernard now proceeds to place some of the blame on Robert – or, not exactly so, because the blame is not directly placed yet – Robert is not yet to blame. But he will be, should he choose not to forgive Bernard and return to Clairvaux. Two things are interesting here; first, it would seem almost malicious not to spare and forgive Bernard considering all the misery he details in the letter. Second, that all he wants from Robert to relieve him of his guilt, is forgiveness. One might expect this to simply imply ‘hugging and making friends’, but as we shall discover, this is not the case.

In the following lines, Bernard explores Robert’s reason for leaving; he suggests that “you left through my fault, as you believe and I do not deny, [...] or through your own fault, [...] or, as I think more probable, through the fault of both of us.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2). He then proceeds to eliminate the grounds of dispute by writing that he has changed as a person and how, from since they last met, Robert must have changed a lot too. Because of this, their relationship can be different; “You may now embrace me without hesitation as a companion who you used to fear as a master.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2) In any case though, Bernard states that “you alone will be to blame if you do not

return” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2), but that “if you acknowledge your share of the blame, I forgive you.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 2) However, he must also forgive Bernard his share of the blame. As such, the ‘forgiveness’ which Bernard requested in the section above is slowly appearing to us as a concept; it does not mean allowing Bernard to take the blame. Instead, it means returning to Clairvaux and meeting with Bernard in the flesh to discuss the matter with him, acknowledging that Bernard holds some of the blame and that he, Robert, holds the remainder. Currently, it does indeed appear as if Bernard simply wants to remove the grounds for dispute and just return to friendly terms with Robert. However, many pages of the letter still remain and, as we shall discover, Bernard is only getting started.

In the third section, Bernard turns up the charm. He begins the section by explaining how Robert should have no fear of returning; “Forearmed by my assurances, approach without fear. My severity frightened you away; let my tenderness draw you back.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 3) As can be noted, in this first part of the section Bernard makes great use of contrasts (e.g. severity/tenderness, fierce/gentle) to highlight his personal changes – to distance ‘present’ Bernard from ‘past’ Bernard; “you who have been the cause of so much grief to me, I shall lead not with threats but with encouragements, not by menacing but by entreating.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 3).

The quote above resembles some of those which have been examined here already – it is a typical Bernard sentence; it builds upon his previous advancements in the letter, the positions which he has constructed for himself and Robert. As such, this sentence plays on Bernard’s previous statement that he, the wounded one, must cast himself at the feet of the one who wounded him; in the present sentence, he will treat the root of his grief not with threats, but with encouragements. Keeping this in mind, it is time to proceed to the next sentences; “Perhaps anyone else would try another method. And indeed who would not rather insist on your guild and inspire you with fear; face you with your vow

and propose judgement.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 3). From the previous sentence, Bernard takes his use of linguistic devices even further; while previously having used contrasting only as a means of highlighting his personal changes, he now uses it to position himself in relation to other men of his position, perhaps other abbots. At this point, Bernard attacks from a new angle; “But I know your heart. I know that you can be lead more easily by love than by fear.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 3).

Here, a view of the situation as a whole can be beneficial: Bernard has made it clear that he has changed, that he has gone from severity to tenderness. In the above quotes, however, he demonstrates an important understanding of both other abbots<sup>24</sup> and of Robert, perhaps even of people in general; other abbots would probably have scolded Robert for leaving, but since Robert is easier motivated by love than by fear, Bernard is better suited to be his abbot – he knows Robert’s heart. First, one could ask “who likes being scolded?” As such, the part about knowing Robert’s heart could probably be applied to anybody, nephew or not; most people would prefer to be motivated by love rather than by fear. However general the statement appears, though, note that it does serve an important purpose in the text; it allows Bernard to demonstrate an understanding of Robert. This understanding is instantly used as a device for creating a distance between Bernard and other abbots; where they would inspire Robert with fear, Bernard would, because he knows Robert’s heart, inspire him with love – which is what Robert would probably prefer. As such, the understanding of Robert is directly used to demonstrate how Bernard would be the ideal abbot for Robert. Additionally, it also demonstrates that Bernard knows exactly what buttons to push to achieve his goals.

In the remaining parts of section three, Bernard picks up where he left off; having begun

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<sup>24</sup> The word ‘abbots’ is not explicitly used in this section. However, due to the context, it is clear that what is meant is either abbots or other monastic leaders of a similar position. In the forthcoming analysis, ‘abbots’ will be used to describe these people.

a construction of Robert as an individual who is more easily motivated by love than by fear, Bernard continues to develop this construction while, at the same time, flattering Robert; “[...] why make you more fearful who are already timid enough, abase you more who are by nature bashful, [...] and whose natural shyness is a discipline.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 3) Note how this construction makes Robert seem somewhat fragile; this is important, as it will serve as a foundation for the upcoming sections.

In the final lines of section three, Bernard refers to Scripture in order to display how holy figures have been deceived in the past, working from the hypothesis that Robert was deceived into deserting “[...] both his vow and his monastery against the will of his brethren, the authority of his superior, the injunctions of the rule [...]” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 3). This ‘deception’ is an excellent tool on the part of Bernard to lessen the blame that Robert would have to concede should he return.

When section three fades into section four, general speculations about how Robert could have been deceived are turned into concrete accusations directed at the Grand Prior of Cluny. Bernard thus proceeds with a “wolf and sheep”-metaphor in which the Grand Prior is the wolf, while the monks are the sheep. In the latter part of section 4 and the beginning of section 5, Bernard describes Robert’s reception at Cluny; “By such sophistries the too credulous boy<sup>25</sup> was talked round, led astray and led off by his deceiver. [...] He was taken out of his rough, threadbare, and soiled habit, and clothed with a neat and new one.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 5) This is one of Bernard’s main points of criticism of the Cluniac way of life – they lived too comfortably and ate too well, taking too good care of their body and thus forgetting to feed the mind. Bernard dedicates the entirety of section five to describing how the Cluniac receive Robert and how his arrival is celebrated; “a sinner in the desires of his heart, he was praised as if he

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<sup>25</sup> Here Bernard wants Robert to conclude that he is no longer a credulous boy, but a *man* who can, and will, return.

were a conquering hero returned from battle.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 5). Note the tragicomical, ironical twist; because Robert wishes for an easier life at Cluny, he is a ‘sinner in the desires of his heart’. Having left the hardships of Clairvaux and, in Bernard’s eyes, abandoned the path to God, he is being celebrated for being a sinner amongst other sinners. Bernard finishes section five by asking a question which sums up the last two sections; “[...] how could anyone amidst such vanities recognize the truth and achieve humility?” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 5). This question holds two pieces of important information; first, that the vanities remove focus from recognizing the truth and achieving humility – hence they are counterproductive at a monastery – this is Bernard’s critique of the Cluniac. The second part is, in this context, of even greater importance; due to the extreme vanity at Cluny, no one can recognize the truth, not even Robert. If this is true, it gives great credibility to Bernard’s hypothesis that Robert was seduced, tricked.

In the next section, Bernard expounds on whether Robert was ever officially given to Cluny. He concludes that Robert was promised to Cluny, but never officially obliterated. Through a series of arguments, which are interesting but not relevant to the aims of this analysis, Bernard evaluates the consequences of this promise. However, he does not quite finish his evaluation before a new section begins and the topic is changed – but, in section 8, he returns to this affair. Thus we shall proceed to section 7 and only deal with the consequences of promises when we have been presented with all Bernard’s arguments in the matter – when we arrive at section 8<sup>26</sup>.

Section 7 takes a sharp turn where previous sections took off; while the previous sections primarily detailed how Robert was enticed and seduced into joining Cluny, section 7 is about how God will arrive and punish man for his wrongdoings; “He will come who will judge again the misjudgements of men, who will confute what has been unlawfully vowed [...]” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 7). While it might seem like a subtle threat to

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<sup>26</sup> See the following page.



modern readers, it is important to remember that this is no threat – to Bernard and his contemporaries, it was reality. Hence, when Bernard states that “To your judgement seat, Lord Jesu, I appeal; I reserve my defence for your court” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 7), he literally means that those who have broken promises, done wrong, for example by enticing and seducing Robert, will be punished by God. In the remainder of section 7 and the beginning of section 8, Bernard directs his writing at God instead of Robert. This puts an immense amount of weight behind Bernard’s arguments; he is willing to approach God, “who judges justly and searches the reins and the heart”, and have him be the judge. In the final lines of section 7, Bernard resorts to colorful language, elucidating his pain and suffering in the face of God, begging Him to judge in the matter. Bernard then proceeds to section 8, in which he evaluates the value of promises given by one’s parents versus the advice given by one self; “Let them see and judge which has the most force; the vow a father makes on behalf of his son, or the vow a son makes on his own behalf, especially when it is a vow of something better.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 8). Here, an interesting part of Bernard’s idealism appears; the individual knows better than its parents. In the rest of section 8, Bernard reminisces on how Robert was eager to join Clairvaux when he was younger and how happy he was when he entered the order to make Robert reminisce about the good times he had at Clairvaux.

When arriving at section nine, Bernard is at the pinnacle of his rhetorical offensive, his argument having reached critical mass. The first line stands in stark contrast to the previous ones, in that Bernard is almost attacking Robert; “You foolish boy! Who has bewitched you to break the vows which adorned your lips? Will you not be justified or condemned out of your own mouth?” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 9). At this point, the reader might want to take a look at the beginning of the letter and ask some questions; where did the hurt, wounded, humble Bernard go? What happened to forgetting the past and removing the grounds for dispute? Again we must remember the reality of the situation for Bernard. Most likely, he believed himself to be the only thing between

Robert and an eternity in hell, hence his continuous attempts to make Robert return to Clairvaux – in Bernard’s eyes, stepping away from the ascetic ways of the Cistercians, abandoning the vows he himself took, all these are evil things leading to damnation. But it is not too late – depending on the motives of Robert, he might already be on the path to salvation;

“If you left so as to lead a harder, higher and more perfect life, fear not [...] But if it be otherwise, be not high minded but fearful because [...] whatever you permit yourself in food, [...], and curious travel in excess of what you promised when you were with us, is without any doubt to look back, to equivocate, to apostatize.” (Bernard, Letter 1, section 9)

After this, we arrive at section 10. Here, Bernard makes clear his good intentions by warning Robert; “And I have said this, my son, not to put you to shame, but to help you as a loving father because if you have many masters in Christ, yet you have few fathers” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 10). In the rest of the section, Bernard develops the notion of him being a caretaker of Robert, making quite a few parallels to the duties of a mother. Building on this, he constructs another biblical parallel between himself and Solomon; both were bereft of their child. Bernard follows up on this theme in section 11 by conducting an investigation into the motives of those who ‘stole’ Robert. He concludes that if their motives were to cause him pain, they have succeeded. But if it was to spare Robert and ‘rescue’ him from Bernard, then their ‘charitable’ actions have caused Bernard unbearable pain;

“Ah! would that these men might save you apart from me. Would that if I die you, at least, may live! But how can this be? Does salvation rest rather in soft raiment and in high living than in frugal fare and moderate clothing?” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 11)

In this manner, Bernard aptly continues his criticism of the Cluniac and their extravagant lifestyle for the remainder of section 11. In section 12, he once again constructs an artificial position for Robert, ‘letting’ him ask: “But what, you say, is to be done if one

cannot live otherwise?” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 12). Bernard then proceeds with producing explanations and advice on how to endure the Cistercian way of life, making a convincing argument when he points out that “You fear our vigils, fasts, and manual labour, but they seem nothing to anyone who considers the flames of hell” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 12) which Bernard fears Robert will be facing if he stays at Cluny.

Section 13 is the final section of this letter, while also being the longest. In this section, Bernard utilizes metaphors rooted in knight’s discourse; “Arise, soldier of Christ, I say arise!” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 13). In spite of its length, this section is scarce with new information – instead, it serves as the last straw, the final push over the edge. Here, Bernard bombards Robert with convincing arguments<sup>27</sup> mainly concerning Robert’s own responsibility for making things right. It is worthwhile to take a glimpse on the last lines in the letter; “May Christ save you from this, dear son, for at the last judgement you will incur a greater penalty on account of this letter of mine if, when you have read it, you do not take its lesson to heart.” (Bernard, Letter 1, Section 13)

This is an interesting thought to ponder; Bernard knew that Robert was doing wrong, and so did God – so Bernard sent Robert a letter to warn him of the wrongness of his ways. Now, having received and read the letter, Robert faces a greater penalty if he does not comply with the message. Why? Because should he choose not to heed the warning, he would consciously be doing wrong, which is even worse than doing wrong unconsciously. As such, we might ask ourselves if Bernard did Robert a favor by sending the letter. One thing is certain; he did increase the incentive for Robert to return to Clairvaux. Skeptics might inquire whether Bernard wrote this letter for his own good or for Roberts. Should

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<sup>27</sup> While this section does contain interesting information and might yield interesting knowledge when analyzed, a breakdown of this page-long metaphor would require several pages. This is a temptation we are too constrained to indulge, hence the remainder of the analysis will concern itself with the final lines of the letter.

Robert not return to Clairvaux and be condemned on the final judgment, Bernard could be held accountable for Roberts going to Hell. Following this line of thought, one could pose a counterargument; Bernard is more responsible to God than he is to Robert. As such, it is his primary objective to convince Robert of his erroneous ways and make him improve – should this fail, the guilt is not on Bernard’s shoulders, for he simply did what he could and what was expected from him. This explains the length of the letter as well as the extreme amount of work that has gone into producing it and perfecting it; perhaps Bernard felt bad for sending it and putting an impending doom on his nephew, hence he did whatever he could, by any means he had available, to convince him to return.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> According to the *Exordium magnum*, Robert eventually returned to Clairvaux (McGuire 2009, 105).

## 3.6. Drogo: The praise of a defector

In letters 33, 34 and 35 from the year 1120, Bernard is involved in a dispute between Jorannus, abbot of Saint Nicasius, a non-Cistercian monastery, and Hugh, abbot of the Cistercian monastery Pontigny and a good friend of Bernard. At the root of the conflict is the monk Drogo who, by his own choice, has left Jorannus' monastery to join that of Hugh, who held Drogo in very high regard. As a reaction to this, Jorannus writes to Bernard for advice and consolation in the matter – this prompts Bernard to respond in Letter 33. Apparently, Bernard had around the same time written a warning to Hugh of Pontigny concerning the reception of Drogo – upon receiving this warning, Hugh responds to Bernard in what can be assumed to be an offended tone. Apparently, he was not happy with Bernard warning him – this causes Bernard to write letter 34 to Hugh, in order to clarify the warning and mend their friendship. The final letter in the trilogy, letter 35, is written to the monk Drogo. In the letter, Bernard praises Drogo for having sought a higher level of perfection in joining a Cistercian monastery.

As in most cases with Bernard's letters, only the letters written by Bernard are available – not the ones he responds to. As such, we can only analyze one side of the communication; we know the answer, but not the question. Hence an analysis cannot encapsulate the entirety of this conflict, but only shed light on it from Bernard's point of view, and only to the extent of what can be seen in *his* letters. With this in mind, the aim of this analysis will be to examine how Bernard positions himself in the conflict; how he gives advice depending on who he is writing, and how this advice conforms to Bernard's own actions in the Robert incident.

### 3.6.1. Analysis

When writing to Jorannus in letter 33, Bernard gives very little 'practical' advice – instead, he tells Jorannus to put his faith in God and await His will to unfold. Seen through the optics of modern time, this kind of advice would hold no practical value at all; on a very

basic level, it tells Jorannus to do nothing and simply await what will happen. In Bernard's time, it might have involved praying or other religious rituals – one thing it did not involve, though, was Jorannus taking any real kind of action; he has done what he could. As such, Bernard's letter and the advice therein mainly serves as a means of consolation rather than a means of advice, the consolation building upon the idea that God will make things right again; "And overcome you will if you put your hope in God and patiently await the issue." (Bernard, Letter 33, Section 2).

In the final section of the letter, we arrive at a position which is most interesting; Bernard draws a parallel between the Jorannus/Drogo and the Bernard/Robert conflict. Thus he gives his advice further weight in stating that "My advice to you would not be sincere if I did not follow it myself" (Bernard, Letter 33, Section 3), claiming that he, too, 'held his peace and put his faith in God'. This statement is definitely disputable; as has seen in Letter 1<sup>29</sup>, Bernard went out of his way rhetorically to retain Robert, writing one of the longest letters in the collection only to achieve his goal.

On the other hand, one could say that he did not ride out to leash Robert and bring him back, nor did he ever condemn Robert. Instead, he stated that he would reserve his judgment to God.<sup>30</sup> In this light, yes, he does follow his own advice. However, it would be hard to defend a position claiming that Bernard stayed passive during the Robert conflict – he used every means available to him in order to bring back Robert: guilt, fear, persuasion, logic and threatening with divine retribution. As has been discussed in the analysis of letter 1, him writing Robert would, in the eyes of Bernard, actually affect the judgment of God, in that reading the letter would open Robert's eyes to his own wrongdoings and thus increase the divine retribution upon him, should he choose to not heed Bernard's warnings. Keeping this in mind, it can be said that not only did Bernard

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<sup>29</sup> See section 3.5.

<sup>30</sup> This has been shown on page 50.

not stay passive – he actually went the opposite way.

If we go along with Bernard's courtroom metaphor,<sup>31</sup> an interesting theory can be developed. In a sense, Robert is his own jury; should Robert return to Bernard, he is free of guilt – should he choose otherwise, he will be guilty. In other words, Robert decides whether he is guilty or not. At the same time, God holds the position of judge; in any scenario, he will give and carry out the sentence, depending on whether Robert is guilty or not.

However, by sending the letter to Robert and informing him of his wrongdoings, Bernard indirectly makes himself both the judge and jury in the matter; by writing Robert, he informs him of his wrongdoings and gives him a chance to return – this is manipulating the jury. On top of this, by making Robert aware of his wrongdoings he increases the divine punishment, the amount of penalty he will incur if not returning. This is Bernard being the judge, modifying or changing the sentence given by God.

When viewed in this light, Bernard did *not* follow his own advice – instead, he went all the way in his attempts to reclaim Robert. How, then, can it be that he advises Jorannus to do nothing? Is it possible that Bernard wished Jorannus to stay passive, so that the Cistercian Order could 'steal' Drogo from the opposition? To investigate these questions, one must turn to the other letters concerning this conflict, 34 and 35.

In letter 34, Bernard addresses abbot Hugh of Pontigny, a close friend and a fellow Cistercian. The story behind this letter is rather complicated; upon hearing about Drogo joining Hugh's monastery, Bernard writes a letter of warning to Hugh – this warning was prompted by Jorannus' letter and a letter from the Archbishop of Rheims sent to Bernard. Hugh answered the letter of warning by writing a letter himself, addressing the warning from Bernard. Bernard writes a response to this letter, letter 34. While the letter from

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31 See Letter 1, section 7.

Hugh has not been preserved, the defensive, clarifying and almost apologetic tone of Bernard in letter 34 makes it safe to assume that Hugo's tone in the previous letter was not bursting with joy due to the warning from Bernard. Thus, in letter 34, Bernard clarifies his warning, explaining his actions to Hugo and attempts to eliminate any feelings of hostility between the two Cistercian abbots.

It is clear that Bernard was in a difficult position when writing letter 34. For one, his advice to Jorannus and his warning to Hugh might be seen as going against the Order, attempting to aid the 'other team'. As such, Bernard now faces the task of clarifying his warning in his previous letter, explain him giving advice to Jorannus and in general clarify his standpoint in the matter. First, he acknowledges the warning, clarifies its meaning and stands by it (Bernard, Letter 34, Section 1). Then he explains the position he was in when writing the letter; under pressure from both Jorannus and the Archbishop of Rheims. Following this, he proceeds with the classical Bernardine style of flattering argumentation. He points at a specific wording in the warning letter, stating that "I had intended by saying this at the end of the letter to give you a covert hint that I had written what I did under pressure to satisfy [...]" (Bernard, Letter 34, Section 1). Bernard himself states that he would rather have congratulated Drogo than urged his return (Bernard, Letter 34, Section 1), but due to the pressure he was unable to act unconstrained.

In finishing the letter, Bernard deals with some of Hugo's accusations. Once again, he conducts his argumentation in an excellent manner; he dismantles Hugo's accusations and puts Hugo in a position where he is intellectually below Bernard – he who makes ridiculous accusations is himself ridiculous. Nevertheless, they are in agreement that Drogo's joining the Order is a good thing, Bernard has clarified his warning and he has deflected the accusations from Hugh while at the same time flattering and charming him.

Letter 35 is written to the monk Drogo himself. Despite its short length, this letter is almost dripping with sweetness and flattering. It is divided into two sections, the first one

containing praise for Drogo's joining the Cistercians, the second containing instructions and counseling on how to handle those who oppose his actions. The first section revolves around the theme of striving for greater holiness. The principle tenet of Bernard's argumentation is that Drogo, in having left Jorannus' monastery to join a Cistercian one, has stepped onto a path of greater hardships and trials, but also a path of greater perfection; "And now you have left your monastery, as a secular would leave the world, and, although already bent under the burden of Christ, you have not considered it beneath you to submit yourself again to the observances of a new discipline." (Bernard, Letter 35, Section 1) According to Bernard, in submitting to the observances of this discipline, Drogo has reached the end of his reckoning and begun again, striving to reach a new level of perfection; "No one is perfect who does not wish to be still more perfect; the more perfect a man is, the more he reaches out to an even higher perfection." (Bernard, Letter 35, Section 1).

In juxtaposing this response to a defector with the response to Robert, we can distinguish one deciding factor which tips Bernard's scale on whether defecting is a good or a bad thing; while Drogo joined a Cistercian monastery and submitted himself to new and exhaustive hardships, Robert joined the Cluniac who, according to Bernard, live a much easier life than the Cistercians. This highlights the extreme importance of asceticism and distancing oneself from secular things in Bernard's eyes; Robert is reproached for having taken the easy way out, while Drogo is praised for having increased his burden and thus his devotion to Christ. However, Drogo should prepare for criticism from those who envy the Cistercians for having obtained this precious monk. Note how Bernard by using this quotation draws a parallel between those who criticize Drogo and the purest form of evil, namely he 'whose bow is bent in readiness'. Having already weakened the foundation of the skeptics by making them seem affiliated to the devil, Bernard sets his words in stone with references to Scripture. Thus arguing how his position is, in the eyes of the Lord, the right one.

### 3.7. Arnold & Adam: Would-be Missionaries

In letter 6 from 1124, Bernard shows great discontent with a group of monks who set off to Jerusalem on a mission to found new Cistercian monasteries. The letter was written to Arnold, the abbot of Morimond who initiated this journey, and led the monks into war-torn areas. When Arnold died, Adam succeeded him. Adam was a monk of Morimond who had chosen to recommence his former abbot's doings. As a result of this rapid change of abbot, Bernard sent a long and intriguing letter, letter 8, to the new abbot of Morimond. The central theme of letter is obedience towards God's law, and hence adherence to the Rule and Cistercian way of life, namely *Carta Caritatis*. Bernard argues that instead of following protocol, Adam displayed blind obedience towards an abbot who did not adhere to the aforementioned rules. By doing so, Adam himself has disobeyed the word of God. Bernard's point of criticism is based on Arnold and Adam setting off with the approval of the Pope, yet without the approval of their mother monastery, Cîteaux.

Letter 8 is characterized by Bernard's furious anger towards Adam's doings. Even though in principle, this was not a matter concerning Bernard, he could not "[...] turn a deaf ear to God when a man commands what he forbids" (Bernard, Letter 8). Bernard wanted Adam to abort his mission and return to the ascetic life of the Cistercians. Making use of many of the same oratory traits as in the letter to Robert, Bernard did not hold back on explicitly stating exactly what he thought of Adam and the "crime" he had committed. The concluding sentence of the letter underlines the severity of Bernard's wish for Adam to abandon his venture and return home: "Who return shall live, who refuse shall die". (Bernard, Letter 8)

In the midst of warnings, threats and the thunderous disapprobation of Adam's alleged abuse of his office, there are two interesting points to be made regarding letter 8. First, is how Bernard engages himself in a conflict appertaining to the abbey of Morimond, a

daughter monastery to Cîteaux. In accordance with *Carta Caritatis*, if problems arose at a monastery not related to his own, Bernard should report to Stephen Harding, the abbot of Cîteaux. However, as Stephen had not yet returned from a journey to Flanders, Bernard took it upon himself to act as the judicial power of the Cistercians (McGuire 2009, 106).

Second are Bernard's classifications of "wholly good", "wholly evil" and "middling things". The concept of wholly good things encompasses faith, hope, and charity. As they are completely good, it is never wrong to encourage or command to practice these, and in reverse it is always wrong to forbid or abstract from them. Wholly evil things include theft, sacrilege and adultery, which are never right to abide by and therefore are never wrong to forbid. Middling things are indifferent to good and evil, as middling things obtain their qualities of good and evil, by their context. Examples of these are fastings, vigils, reading and holding property. For example, owning property would be a middling thing for a secular person. But for a monk it would be wholly evil (Bernard, Letter 8). Having established these three concepts, Bernard goes on to show how obedience complies with them. Obedience does not bear on neither wholly good nor wholly evil, as Bernard considers these to be given. However, obedience does apply to middling things, depending on their context. In short, and in relation to the abbot Adam whom the letter concerns, the monks who followed him might have done so in the belief that he had the proper authorization. Hence, in this case their actions would be neither wholly good nor evil (Bernard, Letter 8). However, Bernard deems that Adam's own actions are wholly evil:

"But now that, beyond doubt, many have been scandalized, who cannot clearly see how churlish you have been in obeying man rather than God? Who, unless he were mad, would dare to call such an action as yours good or even middling [...] Consequently your journey forth from your monastery because it gave rise to the scandal of so many was, for this reason, against the command of God, and so it was not either wholly good or indifferent, but wholly evil." (Bernard, Letter 8)

Here Bernard remarks on the various monks who have been 'scandalized' by

unsuspectingly following their abbot. Bernard was assured of his definitions of good and evil, even to the point where the Pope's approval of Adam's journey into Jerusalem did not mean much, for such a 'wholly evil mission' could never be in accordance with God's law, regardless of any ecclesiastical approvals. He does not doubt that deep down, Adam knew that he had done wrong. He humorously compares Adam to his namesake from the Bible, trying to cover himself up with fig leaves, thus taking a stab at Adam's conscience. According to Bernard, by seeking the Pope's approval in doing evil on the pretext of doing good, Adam aimed to "[...] sin more impudently and therefore more perilously" (Bernard, Letter 8). Evidently, Bernard's faith in his interpretation of God's law was unwavering, as he apparently could not imagine any ecclesiastical authority such as the Pope endorse Adam's plans: "As if anyone would think it was not evil to consent unto evil! I refuse to believe that the Pope did this unless you got round him by lies or overwhelmed him by importunity." (Bernard, Letter 8). This certainly not only shows Bernard's self-assurance in his faith in God, but also his unyielding insistence on saving the monks accompanying Adam from doom – perhaps even Adam as well.

With the several, vast claims regarding Adam, Bernard knew that he would have to defend himself. In section 18 of the letter, Bernard addresses the inevitable case of putting his own house in order before nagging others. Bernard posits that the accusations against him would concern that he welcomed monks who left their monasteries for Clairvaux. It seems evident that the Cistercians had faced these accusations before, namely in the case of the aforementioned Drogo. At the very least Bernard shows himself to be aware of the duality of his actions. Bernard argues that monks who he assimilated into Clairvaux were not wrong in leaving their monasteries, as they were simply: "[...] coming to where they may be better able to render them to God who is everywhere, repairing the harm they have done by breaking their vow of stability by an exact observance of others." (Bernard, Letter 8). It is notable how this outlook on monastic life works in relation to Bernard's criticism of Robert and Drogo. Robert was reproached for

leaving Clairvaux in favor of a “less ascetic” monastery, while Drogo was praised for joining the ascetic Cistercians.

He goes on to state that, if anyone is disgruntled by him accepting monks from other monasteries, they are jealous, additionally referring to Adam as “envious and calumnious man” (Bernard, Letter 8). Hence, once again Bernard defines his critics as jealous people, predicating them evil, much like in the letter to Drogo. It is notable how in this letter, Bernard does not consider his own travels to be against the regulations of the Cistercians. Evidently, he had showed awareness of the duality and consequences of his travels in other letters. For instance in letter 326 where Bernard suitably puts it:

“I am a sort of modern chimera, neither cleric nor layman. I have kept the habit of a monk, but I have long ago abandoned the life. I do not wish to tell you what I dare say you have heard from others: what I am doing, what are my purposes, through what dangers I pass in the world, or rather down what precipices I am hurled” (Bernard, Letter 326)

### 3.8. Sub-Conclusion

Characterized by their work ethic, asceticism and humility, the Cistercian Order spread vastly all over Europe and thus became a popular branch of Christianity, in a matter of years. By means of the letters analyzed in this section, Bernard shows himself in different lights. For instance, in his letters to Suger he shows how he holds values such friendship as humility in high esteem. Also, what is notable is that Suger and Bernard seem to have discussed how a monastery should be run, including ideals for an abbot. The notion that the abbot should be a pillar to his monks is certainly recognizable in other of Bernard’s letters as well, such as letter 76 to the homesick Rainald, the abbot of Foigny: “You were given to them as abbot not to be comforted, but to comfort [...] The greater your burden, the greater will be your gain; the easier your lot, the less your reward” (Bernard, Letter 76).

Having explored how Bernard extends himself with humility and warmth towards Suger

and to some extent Hugh of Pontigny, one cannot ignore the other side of the chimera: The scolding abbot, who rages with self-imposed authority against divergent religious beliefs such as in the case of Robert and Adam. Bernard makes it perfectly clear what he thinks of blind obedience towards “evil” abbots. Mastered in the art of writing, Bernard uses irony, mockery, persuasion, pleads, Scripture and flattery to win his case. Although not always successful in convincing his addressees,<sup>32</sup> the reader is left amazed by how hard Bernard presses on with his intentions and wishes. Some might hold on to the fact that only the letters from Bernard are available; it is thus impossible to view the whole conflict and hear every side of the story, making it equally impossible to make definite conclusions on the subject. On the other hand, it is still possible to extract features of Bernard's personality which can be taken up for discussion. Considerations and theory-crafting on what we *do* know can yield different theories on what we do not know. Concluding, the big question remains how Bernard himself managed to travel all over Europe in spite of having reproached various abbots for unjustly leaving their monasteries. Being a point which will need further discussion, this is left for later paragraphs. For the time being, one could presume that Bernard thought of his own engagement in Church politics as a ‘necessary evil’.

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<sup>32</sup> It is assumed that Drogo did not stay with the Cistercians, but returned to his former monastery (Bernard, page 65). **Note:** References to pages in Bernard’s letters are to the notes of the translator.

## 4. Bernard the Church Politician

In this chapter we will detail and discuss Bernard's involvement in politics. However, it is important to note that Bernard's multitude of different political actions has inevitably meant that we have had to delimit what we can detail. As such, Bernard's patronage of the Knights Templar and his preaching of the Second Crusade at the behest of Pope Eugenius III will not be detailed, other than briefly mentioned to cast light on Bernard's attitude to war. Likewise, our focus is solely on Bernard the person, not the minutiae of the historical events he played a role in. In other words, we want to learn what motivated Bernard's political involvement, what drove him to leave behind his beloved Clairvaux and his brethren for long periods of time – not his whereabouts and actions at any given time.

One thing is certain: His political involvement had costs, which are also of interest for this project. Not only was he absent from his monks, but with the influence and success followed jealousy and enemies as it is illustrated in Bernard's letter from 1130 to Haimeric, the Chancellor of the Holy See, where Bernard answers accusations that he is an enemy of the Curia (Bernard, Letter 51). It also illustrates how Bernard does not alter or subdue his at times abrasive rhetorical style, which we discussed in the previous chapter, *merely* because he is now addressing the uppermost echelons of society.

We begin with a discussion of Bernard's role in the papal schism, which catapulted him into the highest sphere of Church politics, while discussing his scruples over leaving his brethren behind and his 'efforts' to compensate this. Next, we briefly discuss Bernard's involvement in other ecclesiastical matters such as the struggle over the see of York, as well as his *De Consideratione* to the first Cistercian Pope, both of which are expressions of Bernard's unrelenting desire for Church reform and the compromises this entailed. Finally, we evaluate Bernard's prosecution of Peter Abelard, which more than anything has formed secular historians' opinions about him, and in a sense, cost him his saintly reputation among some of the historians operating outside the confines of the Church.

### 4.1. Bernard's Role in the Schism: 'A Necessary Evil'

While certainly not without influence before, there is little doubt that Bernard's influence within the Church did not reach its apex until after his involvement in the papal schism of 1130 – 1138, which saw him play a decisive role for the victorious party. In 1130, after the death of Pope Honorius II, a divided Rome elected two Popes – Innocent II and Anacletus II – concurrently in accordance with the then diffuse rules for papal elections (Bernard, page 187). With neither able to gain the upper hand, Innocent II left Rome and began to lobby for support outside of Italy. Bernard's involvement began when he was called to a royal council convened on the matter by the French king Louis VI at Étampes.<sup>33</sup> Successful in making the case for Innocent II,<sup>34</sup> Bernard from then on evolved into one of Innocent's key advocates, beginning a period of his life which was filled with long travels in the aid of Innocent, lasting for the duration of the schism.

While accounts of his involvement in the schism, as well as his own letters, show that he advocated Innocent's case with a fervor that would become his trademark, there are indications that his feelings about the matter were at times conflicted. Bernard is in the second book of *Vita Prima* described as having been reluctant to engage himself in the matter before going to Étampes, until he had a vision he interpreted as signaling that his involvement would help bring peace to the Church (McGuire 2009, 124). Naturally, Arnold of Bonneval may have reported this vision not only to underline Bernard's saintly humility, but also to defend Bernard against accusations that he had overstepped his bounds. Nevertheless, it indicates a certain level of unease on the part of Bernard about involvement in ecclesiastical matters outside of the Cistercian Order.<sup>35</sup> Bernard's unease is also evident in the letters which he wrote during the schism to Clairvaux's monks:

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<sup>33</sup> Arnold of Bonneval, the author of *Vita Prima*'s second book claims that it was left entirely in Bernard's hands to select which of the two papal candidates should be supported, but as McGuire notes, this is most likely Arnold retrofitting Bernard's eventual clout in Church matters (McGuire 2009, 124-125).

<sup>34</sup> According to James, Innocent II had the better case both legally and morally (Bernard, page 187).

<sup>35</sup> It also hints at a recurring motif in Bernard's writings: The belief that God is on his side.



“It is not only that I am obliged, for the time being, to live away from you, when even to be king would be but a sorry servitude without you; but also because I am forced to move in affairs that trouble the peace of my soul, and are not perhaps very compatible with my vocation.”

(Bernard, Letter 144)

Letter 144, from which the above quote is taken, is one of these letters. Written during one of his trips to Italy in the 1130's, Bernard seeks to console Clairvaux's monks on the topic of his absence, by in typical medieval fashion writing a letter of consolation in which the sender seeks to console the recipient(s) with the claim that his misfortune is greater than the recipient's: “You are suffering from the absence of one person, but I am suffering from the absence of each and all of you” (Bernard, letter 144). One might then question whether Bernard is not exaggerating his own grievances about his absence from Clairvaux in order to console his subordinates. Yet, even if this is conceded, the fact that Bernard several times undertook the tedious and costly task of sending a letter to the monks of Clairvaux, underlines that this was not done solely out of obligation (McGuire 2009, 121).<sup>36</sup> Likewise, the admission that his current task was not very compatible with his vocation is from this point of view unnecessary, and must at least be partly heartfelt.<sup>37</sup>

If Bernard's stated unease is thought genuine – in accordance with our methodology – what then compelled his involvement in the schism? Bernard himself provides an answer in letters 144 and 146: “We must reckon as gain the loss we suffer, for it is all in the cause of God” (Bernard, letter 144) and “It is for God's sake that I am suffering all this grief and misfortune” (Bernard, letter 146). Of the opinion that “[schism] should be avoided by every possible means” (Bernard, letter 293), and in a position to do something, his absence from Clairvaux was imperative despite the anguish it caused<sup>38</sup> (Bernard, Letter 144):

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<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in a letter written to Clairvaux's prior at the end of the schism – all supporters of Anacletus II in Rome had taken a vow of fealty to Innocent – Bernard is concerned equally with rejoicing over the new found peace and changing “[...] ‘I will come’ for ‘I am coming’” (Bernard, Letter 148).

<sup>37</sup> His previously – in the report – mentioned comparison of himself to a Chimera substantiates this.

<sup>38</sup> e.g., “I am obliged to leave my own to undertake the cares of others” (Bernard, Letter 146).

“I should like to tell you, for your consolation, how necessary my presence here is or was at this juncture, were it not that it would savour of boasting. It is better that you should learn this from others.” (Bernard, Letter 146)

Furthermore, in the letters written to his brethren, Bernard develops the extenuating notion that it is spiritual, not physical, closeness, which is of importance: “So we must be of good cheer for God is with us and, no matter how great the distance which seems to separate us, we can always be united to each other in him” (Bernard, letter 144). As Bernard further states in letter 144, those of the monks who serve God well will always be close to him, while those who do not, will never be close to him despite physical proximity. In letter 146,<sup>39</sup> Bernard additionally clarifies that he finds consolation in the knowledge that if he served God unwillingly, he would be a “wicked servant”, while by doing so willingly “I shall have glory.” Both he and his monks should make the sacrifice his absence represented willingly, or it would be void in the eyes of God.

Indeed, based on the sources at our disposal, it would seem that the monks of Clairvaux accepted both that Church politics deprived them of Bernard for long periods of time and the primacy of spiritual closeness.<sup>40</sup> In a story from *Exordium magnum cisterciense*,<sup>41</sup> it is told how a monk from Clairvaux at a time where Bernard was away on one of his many trips, had a vision of Bernard late one night. In the vision, Bernard was walking to and from all of the monks' beds to ensure that everything was as it ought to be (McGuire 2009, 122). Furthermore, Arnold of Bonneval figuratively describes how all had been well at Clairvaux during Bernard's absence: “Absent in body, the Servant of God [Bernard] had been present in spirit, and his insistent prayers had so shored up and fortified his work that not one chink or crack showed up in all its masonry” (Arnold, 78).

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<sup>39</sup> At the time of the letter's writing, Bernard was in Italy. Emperor Lothair, who Bernard had helped bring to Innocent's support, was preparing to return home from an expedition to Italy without having finally defeated Roger of Sicily, Anacletus' most important supporter (Bernard, page 215).

<sup>40</sup> Albeit, it is clear from Bernard's letters that he was desired back home at Clairvaux, e.g., letter 148.

<sup>41</sup> A Chronicle of events related to the Cistercian order written around the year 1200.

Naturally, both can be construed to be nothing more than apologetic Cistercian propaganda, which more than anything else emphasizes the existence of unease with Bernard's political involvement and his resulting absence from Clairvaux, both during and after his life. Nevertheless, if there had been any significant upheaval at Clairvaux as a result of Bernard's absence, it would most likely have been used as ammunition by his enemies and subsequently recorded in contemporary sources. Nevertheless, despite his stated grievances, Bernard's political involvement did not wane in the aftermath of the schism (only his traveling did, albeit its scope still extensive). Thanks to his pious reputation and political clout, Bernard was continually called upon to help settle affairs, which were primarily, but not always purely, ecclesiastical.

## 4.2. The See of York

In the controversy of the election of the new archbishop in York, Bernard appears as a mediator between the parts in the controversy and it shows Bernard's political influence and his response to the election of William Fitzherbert, then bishop of Winchester and the nephew of King Stephen of Blois. William Fitzherbert was elected as Archbishop of York at the expense of the Cistercian monk Waldef of Kirkham. Waldef's candidacy was rejected by Stephen, but his authority was questionable as he was embroiled in a civil war. William's election was thus questioned and later accused of simony (Bernard 1953, 260). But it was difficult to prove the election invalid. Henry took interest in keeping William as the new archbishop in York, because he saw the possibility that Winchester could get the position as a metropolitan and thus carry out Stephen's ambition (McGuire 2009, 186). The two Cistercian monks who tried to prove the simony of the election, the abbots in Rievaulx and Fountain, had a hard time proving the simony because of the circumstances – hence they consulted Bernard in the matters. Bernard decided to take action in the affair, probably due to his characteristic need to care for and support his Cistercian affiliates, but also influenced by the rumors about William that they passed on. Rumors he himself handed on to Pope Innocent II in several letters (McGuire 2009, 187).

Letter 187 illustrates how Bernard presents William to the Pope with unctuous rhetoric; William does not act in the service of God, but for the purpose of secular power:

“He is a man who puts not his trust in God his helper, but hopes in the abundance of his riches. His case is weak and feeble one, and I have it on the authority of truthful men that he is rotten from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.” (Bernard 1953, 261)

Bernard's involvement in the York affair was not without risk for the Cistercian Order. His accusations toward William Fitzherbert were vague and did not have as much impact as he had hoped for. The Cistercian monasteries were in danger of confiscation and the Order faced expulsion – a following raid on the abbey of Fountain proved that the danger was real (Bernard 1953, 260). However, Bernard did not capitulate – instead he wrote letters to his powerful connections in Rome, and in March 1142 the case was heard there. Although the Cistercians had persuasive evidence against Fitzherbert and the election, the case broke down because the Curia did not approve of second-hand evidence and in September 1143, William Fitzherbert entered the office as archbishop of York (McGuire 2009, 193). The York affair is quite unique because Bernard did not get his will.

## 4.3. *De Consideratione*: Advice to a Cistercian Pope

After the election of Eugenius III, Bernard wrote *De Consideratione ad Eugenium Papam Tertiam Libri Quinque* (“Five Books on Consideration, to the Pope Eugenius III”). It was written by Bernard for a variety of reasons which will be explored in this section, with the explicit aim of trying to uncover his motivation for advising Eugenius, which is in line with this paper's sub-question of examining Bernard as a politician.

### 4.3.1. The Considerations

The five books that comprise the Considerations each deal with a specific topic, which Bernard covers in his own pace. The first book is about the problem of being swamped with the duties of the papal office, and offers reasons as to how Eugenius can clear his schedule. The second book considers the importance of Eugenius knowing both himself,

his motives and the subjects under his command, explaining that the papacy is not a secular dominion but rather a stewardship. It is thus an absolute charge to which, while it does not grant secular power, the Pope has total power to execute his duties under God as the “Vicar of Christ” (Anderson and Kennan, 56). The third book examines the Church as a subject to the Pope, and the challenges that he faces in managing that household. The fourth deals with the city of Rome, itself, and her citizens. Bernard warns Eugenius of becoming mired in their intrigues and conspiracies. The fifth and longest book concerns the problem of knowing God (Anderson and Kennan, 174), and Bernard also speculates upon the celestial hierarchy, using it as a model upon which to base the papal offices.

#### **4.3.2. Bernard and Eugenius**

The relationship between Bernard and Eugenius is interesting in the light of Bernard's actions on the political scene. It is important, first and foremost, to remember that Eugenius was in fact a Cistercian monk before becoming Pope. Bernard was quite irate with the choice of Eugenius as Pope, saying that they had taken a man who was at peace and brought him back to tumultuous life again; that is to say, they had taken him from his abbey and put him square into the thick of secular matters again. This is probably a large part of the reason why Bernard chose to write the Considerations, but as always, his exact reasons for writing the books are difficult to pin down.

True to his chimeric nature, the purpose of the books is twofold: as a practical guide for the embattled Pope, the books are a set of suggestions on how to conduct himself in the face of the paradox consisting partly of secular papal business, which the Pope would invariably become entangled with, and partly of the Cistercian doctrine of strict, unyielding faith in the simplest manner possible. At the same time, the Considerations is also a moral and spiritual support for the monk underneath the fancy hat; Bernard was well aware that any who had lived the life of a dedicated monk of the Cistercian way was ill-prepared for the constant rigors of the papal office, which in that time was a demanding one (Anderson and Kennan, 43).

#### **4.3.3. Bernard the Father**

Even a quick study of the books reveal that Bernard still considered Eugenius to be his son due to their shared past in Clairvaux. Bernard, however, is by no means unaware of Eugenius' position. He comments that his heart is split: on one hand, wanting to comfort his son in the face of the grief that Bernard imagines that they share, now that Eugenius has been “recalled to life” from his solitude, and on the other, to bow down to the majesty of the papal office (Anderson and Kennan, 25). Bernard is aware of Eugenius' power, and he is aware that things may have changed between them due to this, but he is resolved to treat Eugenius as though they were still in the abbey. Bernard probably acted with the best of intentions, not to mention at the behest of the Pope himself, who (as Bernard writes) had not commanded, but rather requested Bernard's help. It does seem a little strange, though, that Bernard notes his own hesitance to begin writing (Anderson and Kennan, 23) - and then writes unceasingly. Though, as Bernard writes, he who was once in Bernard's embrace is always so embraced (Anderson and Kennan, 24).

#### **4.3.4. Bernard the Politician**

It is also evident in the Considerations that Bernard still has a political side to him. Bernard includes advice in the Considerations that, though they're dressed in metaphor, are political in nature. The first book advises Eugenius to maintain stern control of his affairs, by being very judicious of what cases requires his own attention. Specifically, Bernard calls out the advocates - "lawyers", in modern parlance - as one of the greater time sinks in Eugenius' schedule, and he counsels him to cut down on their numbers (Anderson and Kennan, 45). He also advises Eugenius to demand that all courtly matters be short and specific, in order that they may be served with haste (Anderson and Kennan, 44). It shows that Bernard was concerned about useless cases being argued before court, thus wasting Eugenius' time. In the second, he insists that the papal office is not a throne, but rather a watchtower; Eugenius is not allowed to become complacent, but must rather remain vigilant in his charge (Anderson and Kennan, 57).

In conclusion to this section, it can be seen that Bernard mixes political advice with spiritual support, apparently without taking note of any possible discrepancies that may exist between the two spheres; though it must be remembered that he was, at the time, already extremely active on the political scene of 12th century Europe, and that Eugenius himself asked Bernard to write the advice. This, coupled with Bernard's unyielding love for all his sons of Clairvaux, must have motivated Bernard deeply to help Eugenius.

#### 4.3.5. The Chimera's Advice

As a study of Bernard's dual facets, the Second Crusade (1147–1149) is a fruitful study. The Second Crusade, which Bernard preached in favor of, both to the Pope Eugenius and to the German king Conrad and many of his vassals, was an enormous failure. The armies that set out to fortify Jerusalem and take Edessa were destroyed by war and hunger. This marked, in a sense, a turning point for Bernard; he had been graced by success in every endeavor so far (McGuire 2009, 208).

Bernard writes in his letter to Eugenius that he should use all of his powers, both the secular and the ecclesiastical, in defense of the Church. Seemingly, Bernard was of the belief that the defeat required another crusade to repair what had been broken (Bernard, Letter 399), though it is also necessary to note that Bernard had no interest in marching at the head of any such army - indeed, he wrote letters to some monks who did want to, reprimanding them for abandoning their vows and threatening any who left to join the crusade with excommunication. Bernard felt that the failure of the crusade had nothing to do with any error on part of God but rather on part of the Church, that lack of faith and shortsighted planning were, ultimately, the culprits (Anderson and Kennan, 47-48). If nothing else, this shows that Bernard is perfectly capable of placing the blame on both religious and secular reasons.

## 4.4. A Notorious Example: Bernard & Peter Abelard

There can be little doubt that few 12<sup>th</sup> century antagonisms have been as contentious in the eyes of historians as that of Bernard and Peter Abelard (Mews, UNPUB., 1).<sup>42</sup> Given the correlation between Abelard's teachings and subsequent eras' emphasis on rational thinking, Bernard's pivotal role in Abelard's excommunication in the aftermath of the Council of Sens (25<sup>th</sup> May - 1141<sup>43</sup>) has subsequently seen him portrayed as being emblematic of religion's suppression of the cause of reason (Mews, UNPUB., 1). On the surface, those of Bernard's letters written about – or rather against – Abelard, does to an extent align with a portrayal of Bernard as an enemy of Reason. Yet, a more exhaustive look enables a far more nuanced version of the affair to be uncovered. First of all, it is necessary to introduce Bernard's opponent, their different outlooks and relationship before Sens.

### 4.4.1 Peter Abelard: A Short Introduction

Most of the details of Abelard's life are known due to a long autobiographical letter he wrote in 1132 to provide consolation to an unnamed friend in misfortune. The letter, known as *The Story of My Misfortunes*, recounts Abelard's trials and tribulations up until the letter's writing.<sup>44</sup> Born in Brittany in 1079, and of similar standing to Bernard, Abelard turned his back on a military career and opted for the academic life<sup>45</sup> that Bernard had relinquished when he heeded his mother's wishes and cloistered himself at Cîteaux. Due to a combination of great skill, novel ideas, and an incessant self-confidence (evident throughout *Misfortunes*), the student Abelard developed a following of other students while concomitantly often antagonizing his teachers and their supporters (Abelard, 3-9).

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<sup>42</sup> An as of yet unpublished article for Brill's Companion to Bernard titled "Bernard and Abelard".

Constant J. Mews is professor in Australia and one of the foremost Abelard scholars alive today.

<sup>43</sup> While traditionally dated to 1140 (2nd June), cogent evidence that the council was in fact conducted a year later has been uncovered (Mews 2010, 23-24). As shown later, this is of some importance.

<sup>44</sup> As such, it belongs to the same sub-genre of letter writing as Bernard's letters to Clairvaux's monks.

<sup>45</sup> With the concept of universities still in its infancy in Western Europe during Bernard's life, those educated were educated in monasteries, cathedral schools, by travelling teachers, or in independent schools founded by these teachers when they had gained enough clout.

This hostility meant that Abelard's attempts to establish a school of his own generally failed, despite initial success, as his enemies had luck in turning the respective locales against him. In 1114, after two such failed attempts, Abelard became master (teacher) of the cathedral school of Notre-Dame. It was here, between 1115 and 1118, that he had his forbidden liaison with one of his brightest students, Heloise, who was the niece of the canon Fulbert. This tragic love affair is as much the cause of Abelard's perennial fame as his teachings; it portrays Abelard as not only a persecuted harbinger of modern philosophy, but also of modern love. To make a long story short, when the affair was discovered, they secretly married to allow both Fulbert and Abelard to save face. Nevertheless, the eventual outcome was that Abelard was violently castrated at Fulbert's initiative.

As a result, the couple sought refuge, cloistered in Benedictine monasteries – Abelard at Saint Denis (under the abbot preceding Suger). Abelard, however, did not stop teaching, but rather began to turn his attention towards theological matters. The nature of his teachings and the very fact that he had resumed teaching while cloistered, lead to criticism (Abelard, 18-20), a criticism which culminated at the Council of Soissons (1121) where Abelard's treatise on the Trinity was condemned for heresy and burned. Even so, the punishment was of a character which allowed Abelard to return to St. Denis. Due to the tensions between Abelard and the remainder of St. Denis, he negotiated a permission to leave St. Denis and establish a hermitage, named after the Paraclete, near Troyes.

Yet, once more, Abelard felt hounded by his opponents – this time he counted among them Bernard – and at a point between 1125 and 1127 donated the Paraclete to a convent of nuns who formed an abbey with Heloise as abbess. Instead, he became the Abbot of St. Gilda's on the coast of Brittany in one more failed attempt to get peace – this time unruly monks and temporal lords caused the failure. At around 1133, he once again became a master in Paris, having since Sens worked on revising and expanding his theology. It is this position he occupies during the prelude to the Council of Sens.

#### 4.4.2. Their Different Outlooks

As stated in the delimitation, it is not the task at hand to expound the minutiae of the disputed theological statements, nor is it to find the 'correct' of the two positions. However, it is necessary to detail the difference between their philosophical outlooks as it is here the impetus for Bernard's objections about Abelard's teachings are to be found. To begin with Abelard, the novelty of his philosophy stems from his position that "[...] pagan philosophers shared some understanding of truths manifest through divine revelation to Jews and then to Christians" (Mews 2009, 98). Going as far back as the Church Fathers, there had been great hesitance about employing classical writing to elucidate Christian concepts and then only in a role subordinate to Scripture (Cook and Herzman, 61). In contrast, Abelard, as one of the earliest proponents of scholasticism,<sup>46</sup> argued that "[...] reason has to precede authority, an inversion of the argument that Anselm [of Canterbury] had put forward, that one had to believe in order to understand." (Mews 2009, 105).

Whereas logic – or dialectics as it was then called – had long been the least prioritized part of the *trivium*, Abelard exalted it.<sup>47</sup> As he recognized that doctrinal statements were often molded by the rhetorical idiosyncrasies of their author, "one had to subject all written claims to the scrutiny of reason." (Mews 2009, 104). Of his works, the most exemplary of this approach is the *Sic et Non* ("Yes and No"), an evolving anthology of patristic texts<sup>48</sup>, classical writing, and Scripture organized around a variety of theological subjects, e.g., the Trinity. Each topic saw the pertinent texts divided to support a thesis and an antithesis, with the implicit hope that the reader would utilize these to reach a synthesis. It is important to note that Abelard did not belittle the achievements of these texts, but in a spirit akin to Bernard of Chartres famous metaphor that we are "[...] dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants", he sought to reach greater insight perched on their foundation.

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<sup>46</sup> The attempted reconciliation of classical philosophy with Scripture by means of dialectical reasoning.

<sup>47</sup> In medieval education, the *trivium* ("the three ways") comprised the three subjects taught first.

<sup>48</sup> The patristic writings are the writings of the Church Fathers (i.e., Augustine etc.).

Abelard's novelty was found not only in the scholastic method, but also the fully-fledged inclusion of classical – pagan – philosophers among those who could provide the aforementioned foundation for insight. However, it is noteworthy that Abelard operated within the hegemony of the Christian religion: He fully accepted the principal truth of Christianity, which consequently meant that his inquiries were of a hermeneutical nature, as he sought to expound the meaning of Christian discourse's quintessential notions (Mews 2009, 101). Abelard himself, in the *Misfortunes*, tells why he composed the treatise on the Trinity that was later condemned at Soissons:

“[I] composed a theological treatise on divine unity and trinity for the use of my students who were asking for human and logical reasons on the subject, and demanded something intelligible rather than mere words. In fact they said that words were useless if the intelligence could not follow them, that nothing could be believed unless it was first understood.” (Abelard, 20)

The latter part of the above quote highlights one of the key differences between Bernard and Abelard, when understood in conjunction with one of Bernard's accusations against Abelard: “When the Prophet says, ‘Unless you believe, you shall not understand’, this man decries willing faith as levity, misusing that testimony of Solomon: ‘He that is hasty to believe is light of head’” (Bernard, Letter 249). As aforementioned, this and similar quotes from Bernard's letters on Abelard lead to an interpretation of Bernard as wholly opposed to reason, an interpretation encapsulated in the Wikipedia article about Abelard, in which Bernard is described as one “[...] in whom was incarnated the principle of fervent and unhesitating faith, to which rational inquiry like Abelard's was sheer revolt” (Wikipedia 2009).<sup>49</sup> Even so, Bernard's objections against Abelard are not based on an outright dismissal of the dialectical means which Abelard utilized, but rather his stated end. He found that Abelard was ready to supply a reason for everything, even that which transcends reason, and therefore presumed against *both* reason *and* faith (Mews, UNPUB., 1).

<sup>49</sup> While we acknowledge the taboo of citing Wikipedia, the opportunity to highlight this perception of Bernard – which, despite several revisions to the article, has never been contested – was too good.

In fact, Bernard argues that Reason in the hands of scholars is a good tool in combating heretics (McGuire, Bernard, 115). While, as he himself notes, untrained in dialectics compared to Abelard (Bernard, Letter 239), it is noteworthy that Bernard in an untranslated letter from around 1125 – at the request of Hugo of St. Victor<sup>50</sup> – refutes three propositions traditionally associated with Abelard using thesis and antithesis (Mews, UNPUB., 14-16). Overall, Bernard did utilize reason to “[...] solve apparent contradictions among authorities, to create dilemmas, to drive home arguments and to rebut objections” (McGuire, Bernard 2009, 111).<sup>51</sup> Bernard was no stranger to dialectics, but contrary to Abelard he believed that its capacity to elucidate Scripture, and thereby the human condition, was heavily curbed. As previously shown,<sup>52</sup> he instead emphasized contemplation.

This can be seen in a letter to another Cistercian abbot, Ailred of Rievaulx, who felt insufficiently learned to write about charity as Bernard had requested, Bernard states that “[...] knowledge that comes from the school of the Holy Spirit rather than the schools of rhetoric will savour all the sweeter to me [...]” (Bernard, Letter 177). This ‘school of the Holy Spirit’ is the hard work, asceticism and contemplation of the Cistercian life:

“Indeed, to this day he [Bernard] confesses that whatever competence he has in the Scriptures, whatever spiritual sensitivity he has for them, stems mainly from his meditating or praying in woodland or field. And among his friends he jokes merrily of having had no other masters for such lessons but the oaks and the beeches” (William, 23)

That Bernard joked with friends underlines the fact that to him, contemplation does not entail isolation, as he in contradistinction to the Desert Fathers embraced friendship as an integral part of monastic life: “In love and friendship with other persons the human person makes their way to the font of love.” (McGuire, Bernard 2009, 119).

<sup>50</sup> Hugh was a learned canon from Paris – that he would turn to the then young Bernard highlights that he to some degree must have had a good reputation in Paris' schools (McGuire, Bernard 2009, 110).

<sup>51</sup> The author of the quote is Hugo Feiss, it is reproduced in McGuire.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 3.

Many of Bernard's sermons, in particular one about his biological brother Gerald's death, find him investigating his own experiential and emotional life to cast light on Scripture, thus encouraging his brethren to do the same (McGuire, Bernard 2009, 112-115). In doing so, Bernard himself actually departed from tradition and can akin to Abelard be labeled as an innovator – albeit of speculative mysticism, not scholasticism. However, a key difference between the two is Bernard's adherence to the then standing Church doctrines and the authority of the Church Fathers.<sup>53</sup> His objections to Abelard are thus not only methodological, but also concern Abelard's actual findings (explained later). In the letter to Bernard which began his prosecution of Abelard, William of St. Thierry unwittingly clarified the main difference between Bernard and Abelard, by writing that Abelard undermined the foundation of Christianity with his attempt to elucidate Christian notions through 'certain knowledge' – and not through what was felt in the heart (McGuire 2009, 159).

#### 4.4.3. Their Relationship before Sens

In his *Misfortunes*, Abelard describes how his life at the Paraclete eventually became untenable due to the backbiting of two "new apostles" who: "went up and down the country, slandering me shamelessly in their preaching as much as they could" (Abelard, 32-33). Abelard describes the two 'apostles' as boasting that they had reformed respectively the life of the Canons Regular and the life of the monks, which has led the two to be fairly conclusively identified as Norbert of Xanten<sup>54</sup> and Bernard of Clairvaux<sup>55</sup>. Since Abelard abandoned the Paraclete approximately one and half decade before the Council of Sens, this has long been seen as *the* damning evidence that Sens was merely the culmination of a long and vicious prosecution of Abelard at the hands of Bernard. However, this view is somewhat problematic, as will be summarized now.

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<sup>53</sup> William tells in *Vita Prima* how: "[Bernard] humbly read the saintly orthodox commentators and by no means equated his own interpretations with theirs; rather he submitted his to theirs for them to shape up" (William, 24).

<sup>54</sup> Norbert was the sanctified founder of the Premonstratensian order of canons regular (c. 1080-1134).

<sup>55</sup> The identification of Bernard has been contested (cf. Little 1977), but is currently consensus.

First of all, Bernard was at the time (c. 1125) still relatively rigid in his role as the abbot of Clairvaux, and certainly not the wandering preacher that Abelard seems to suggest (Little, 156). Secondly, no sources exist which record any sort of hostility towards Abelard from Bernard's side (Little, 158) – although this is at best inconclusive evidence, as Bernard's criticism could have been oral or simply been lost in the course of time. Still, both of them had been present in 1131 at the consecration of the abbey of Morigny's altar by Innocent II; any existing enmity between the two were not mentioned by the abbey's chronicle, which would be a strange omission given both of their fame and importance (Little, 167). Thirdly, Bernard's initial reply to William's accusations about Abelard suggests unfamiliarity with the particulars of Abelard's 'heretic' teachings, which is incongruent with a long standing hostility between the two (Bernard, Letter 236).<sup>56</sup>

Fourthly, in Bernard's aforementioned reply to Hugo St. Victor (c. 1125), the person who had authored the three propositions, which Bernard refutes, is never identified and has only by historians been found to be Abelard.<sup>57</sup> This entails one of two possible scenarios, either Bernard was simply unaware that they were linked to Abelard, or he consciously opted to keep a 'professional' distance and refrain from *ad hominem* arguments<sup>58</sup> (Little, 165). Neither possibility is consistent with the image of Bernard hounding Abelard. Finally, the two actually exchanged letters, at some point between 1131 and 1135 (Little, 167), about their disagreement over the minute wording of the Lord's Prayer. While highlighting each of their particular styles of argumentation – forebodingly Bernard was the conservative and Abelard the innovator – they traded barbs within the pretext of friendship, with no mention of any earlier hostilities (Mews, UNPUB., 16-17).

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<sup>56</sup> Although this may be caused by the both 'newness' of some of Abelard's teachings and the need for meticulous inspection of them all – a letter written by several bishops to Innocent II after Sens states "that St. Bernard had frequently heard of Abelard's errors from various sources [...]" (Little, 158).

<sup>57</sup> Mews concludes that the propositions were Abelard's, albeit highly distorted and without internal coherence. Hugo had probably heard of them from an inaccurate third party (Mews, UNPUB., 15).

<sup>58</sup> If so, he certainly did not make the same decision in relation to the Council (McGuire 2009, 168).

What then, when Abelard in c. 1132 wrote *Misfortunes*, led him to count Bernard among his most prominent prosecutors during his time at the Paraclete? The answer probably lies in their differing friendships, as each had aligned themselves with opponents of the other.<sup>59</sup> To explain, Stephen of Garlande's patronage of Abelard and Bernard's friendship with William of Champeaux must be detailed. In Abelard's narrative, William – who had been Abelard's teacher at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century – had been antagonized by Abelard's successful criticism of his realistic doctrine of universals: Jealous of Abelard's overall success, William was feverishly set on obstructing Abelard's career (Abelard, 4).

To Bernard, however, William was the bishop of Châlons with whom he, with a biblical reference from William of St. Thierry, became: “[...] one heart and one soul in the Lord” (William, 31). It was William of Champeaux who at one point obtained an extraordinary permission from the Cistercians to oversee Bernard's health at a time where his troublesome relationship to food threatened to kill him (William, 32). And finally, it was William of Champeaux who is credited in the *Vita Prima* with awakening “the whole expanse of Gaul [...] to the devotion and reverence due to this Man of God! [Bernard]” (William, 31). While Bernard only knew William of Champeaux from c. 1115 to his death in 1121, they had a major influence on each other: William drawn to Bernard's ideals about monasticism, Bernard influenced by William's love of language (Mews, UNPUB., 6-8).<sup>60</sup>

Stephen of Garland was the archdeacon of Paris from c. 1095 and a vital member of the government through much of Louis VI's reign (1108 – 1137). His patronage of Abelard is referred to by Abelard both implicitly and explicitly in *Misfortunes*. Implicitly, in that Stephen is most likely one of the enemies of William of Champeaux which helped Abelard establish a school after his initial quarreling with William (Mews, UNPUB., 4). Explicitly, in that it was Stephen who persuaded Suger to let Abelard leave St. Denis (Abelard, 3).

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<sup>59</sup> William of St. Thierry had, for example, been opposed to Abelard at Soissons (Mews, UNPUB., 23).

<sup>60</sup> The relationship is further noteworthy due to the scholastic roots of William's philosophy.

While Abelard therefore must have counted Stephen among his closest allies, Bernard's appraisal of Stephen was entirely different. In 1127, Bernard wrote to Suger (whom they also had opposing ideas about) and praised the reform Suger had instituted at St. Denis, while strongly encouraging him to have nothing to do with Stephen because of the unholy union of ecclesiastical and temporal titles he represented: “I ask you what sort of monster is this that being a cleric wishes to be thought a soldier as well, and succeeds in being neither?” (Bernard, Letter 80). As Mews notes, the letter makes it clear that Bernard was aligned with forces opposed to Abelard's patron (Mews, UNPUB., 14).<sup>61</sup>

Accordingly, while Bernard had seemingly not actively engaged in polemic against Abelard specifically, he was targeting Abelard's backing – knowingly or not. Given the close geographical proximity of the Paraclete and Clairvaux in Champagne, Abelard's statements in *Misfortunes* about Bernard seems to stem from a realization that Bernard's ever growing influence, nurtured in its infancy by his old enemy William, indirectly endangered his position at the Paraclete. Bernard's unsuccessful attempt in 1126 to have Alberic of Reims, one of the chief prosecutors of Abelard at the Council of Soissons, promoted to the then available see of Châlons could only have furthered this fear in a man “[...] who had already suffered so much at the hands of his enemies.” (Little, 157).

Abelard's statement in a letter written just before the Council of Sens that Bernard had secretly been against him for a long time, but had until then pretended to be friendly (Little, 158), seems to support the view that Bernard was to an extent ‘tolerant’ (or at least largely ignorant) of Abelard until William of St. Thierry demanded that he act. In connection, the letter exchange between them, begun by Abelard, can be seen as an attempt to establish friendly relations between the two: An attempt overpowered by both their different philosophical approaches and the steadfastness of their convictions.

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<sup>61</sup> At the time of *Misfortunes* writing, Stephen and Bernard were also on different sides in a conflict between the schools St. Genevieve and St. Victor in Paris (Mews, UNPUB., 20).



#### 4.4.4. The Immediate Prelude & Council Proper

While their differences would ensure that their relationship would always be uneasy, their enmity was latent until Bernard's attention was directed squarely towards Abelard at William of St. Thierry's request. Some historians, among them McGuire (McGuire 2009, 159), has apologetically emphasized Bernard's willingness to heed his friends' calls for action – a willingness evident e.g., in the struggle over the see of York – to help explain Bernard's prosecution of Abelard. And while the course of events during the prelude to the Council of Sens underline that Bernard received William's warnings with grave concern, it is arguable that Bernard's fiery resolve to have Abelard condemned was primarily sparked by the inflammable situation the Western Church found itself in at the time.

Nevertheless, before this can be substantiated, a quick outline of the events leading up to and at the Council of Sens is needed. Bernard received William's letter listing the faults of Abelard in Lent 1140 (Mews, UNPUB., 23-24), and as previously mentioned stated his unfamiliarity with the particulars of Abelard's teachings, but stated that "in my opinion your misgivings are well called-for and reasonable" (Bernard, Letter 236). Bernard suggested that they meet to discuss the matter, the eventual fruit of which was his treatise "The Errors of Abelard" calling for Abelard's excommunication. Whilst including a list of 19 of Abelard's propositions that Bernard and William found heretical, Bernard's emphasis was on Abelard's understanding of the Redemption. In an example of their theological differences, Abelard thought that Satan had no rights over Man prior to Jesus' death on the cross, not being, as McGuire formulates it, "a just player in the battle for Man's salvation"<sup>62</sup> (McGuire 2009, 169). On the other hand, Bernard held that the cession of Man to Satan's prerogative inherent in the Fall of Man was the cause d'être for Christ's redemption of Man; by striking against an innocent Satan had voided his power: There had to be had been captivity before there could be redemption (McGuire 2009, 169).

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<sup>62</sup> Translated from Danish: "[...] ikke en retfærdig spiller i slaget om menneskets frelse."

While Abelard's understanding of the Redemption can be seen to empower the image of God's love for Man. It, to Bernard, represented a radical disfiguration of Christianity itself. In the intervening year between William's letter and the Council of Sens, the two exchanged letters in which each refined their arguments – Abelard attested his orthodoxy while concomitantly defending his teachings (Mews, UNPUB., 27-30). In a letter to Innocent II sent to him after the Council by the bishops who had been attendance, it is written that Bernard had met with Abelard both privately and before witnesses to remonstrate with him before their eventual confrontation at Sens (Bernard, page 328). While it is unknown what occurred at these meetings, it is imaginable that a combination of their staunch, differing convictions, Abelard's previously mentioned abrasive confidence, Bernard's recorded loathing of self-important scholars (McGuire, Bernard 2009, 115-116), and the magnitude of the concessions required before they could conciliate meant that any potential peaceful solution of their conflict was rendered impossible.

In any case, at one point in the first half of 1141, Abelard requested the opportunity to defend himself at a forthcoming Council, to be held at Sens (Mews, UNPUB., 24). Despite Bernard's usual self-assuredness in matters of debate, he was hesitant about attending the Council – as both he and a confident Abelard expected that their disputation were to be conducted in a scholastic fashion<sup>63</sup> - but was convinced to attend by friends<sup>64</sup> who "[...] feared that my absence would serve only to increase the influence of the man and the scandal of the people." (Bernard, Letter 239). However, events would take an unexpected turn at the Council when Abelard, after having been called upon by Bernard to defend himself, refused to do so and instead proclaimed that he would take his case to Rome itself (Bernard, Letter 329). He subsequently departed for Rome while Bernard scrambled to send letters to the Pope and Curia stating his case.

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<sup>63</sup> It was then that Bernard's quote that he was untrained in dialectics compared to Abelard was made.

<sup>64</sup> Mews speculates that may have Suger who persuaded Bernard to attend (Mews, UNPUB., 30).

The reasons why Abelard made this surprising decision are unclear. The same cannot be said for Bernard's interpretation, as God's intervention in favor of the 'just' is more than implied. In his first letter to Pope Innocent II after the Council, Bernard presents himself as David versus Goliath – the unprepared, humble servant of God whose only thoughts were: “Take no thought how or what to speak: for it will be given you in that hour what to speak’ and ‘With the Lord to aid me, I have no fear of the worst that man can do.’” (Bernard, Letter 239). Abelard's supporters, however, purported that Bernard alone had met the assembled bishops, who were to judge in the matter, and persuaded them all to condemn Abelard the day before the disputation proper (Mews, UNPUB., 30). A grave breach of procedure in the eyes of Abelard's supporters, but certainly among the measures which Bernard would consider par for the course. Thus facing a ‘hung jury’, Abelard would have felt that his chances were larger with a direct appeal to Rome. Whether or not Bernard had swayed the bishops against Abelard beforehand, there is ample reason to believe that Abelard did indeed believe his chances to be stronger with Rome.

#### 4.4.5. The Council of Sens: Context & Aftermath

Indeed, in the letter from the bishops at Sens to the Pope, they condemn Abelard and urge the Pope to do likewise. Nonetheless, Abelard's main comfort was paradoxically also what seemed had invoked Bernard's fierce opposition to him: His knowledge that his teachings were increasingly viewed sympathetically by influential figures in Rome (Bernard, 241) – most notably the cardinal Guy of Castello, who in 1143 became Pope Celestine II (Mews, UNPUB., 25). In relation, as foreboded earlier, the redating of the Council of Sens to the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1141<sup>65</sup> – hence William's letter arrived Easter 1140, having arrived at Easter a year before Sens – helps contextualizing Bernard's prosecution of Abelard for the historian, as it significantly worsens the state which the Church found itself in compared to one year earlier: A reemergence of the schism seemed acutely imminent.

<sup>65</sup> One of the more compelling reasons to do so is that Bernard wrote the cardinal Stephen of Palestrina, only appointed in Easter 1141, immediately after the council of Sens (Mews, UNPUB., 23).

In April 1139, after the death of his rival Anacletus II, Innocent II had convoked the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lateran Council to affirm his authority over both the Church as a whole and Rome, whose majority had supported his opponent in the Schism and was “[...] effectively moving into a situation of conflict with the papacy over its claims to temporal lordship” (Mews, UNPUB., 24).<sup>66</sup> Two of the key members of Anacletus' old party, the canon Arnold of Brescia and the cardinal Hyacinth Bobbone, were partly responsible for the failure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lateran Council to fully neutralize the lingering effects of the Schism. As both had made movements to associate with Abelard,<sup>67</sup> whose teachings had steadily grown in popularity since his reemergence in Paris c. 1133; Bernard observed a new division of the Church in the making along the lines of the old: “A new gospel is being forged for peoples and for nations, a new faith is being propounded, and a new foundation is being laid besides that which has been laid.” (Bernard, Letter 239).

In the around 20 letters that Bernard sent to the Pope and the Curia to persuade them to excommunicate Abelard, three arguments was oft repeated amidst the rhetorical accommodations Bernard makes to heighten the effect on the respective recipient(s).<sup>68</sup> The first of these is the above conjectures of a new faith. The second links Abelard to Arius, Pelagius and Nestorius –whose teachings had caused major internal strife in the Church (Bernard, e.g., letter 243). The third is wordplay on Anacletus' birth name Peter Leone:

“We have escaped the roaring of Peter the Lion who occupied the see of Simon Peter only to encounter Peter the Dragon who assails the faith of Simon Peter. [...] The former was harmful only so long as he was alive, death put an end to both his life and the harm he could do; but the latter by writing new dogmas has made provision for passing on his virus to future generations, for poisoning every generation that is to come.” (Bernard, Letter 242)

<sup>66</sup> The problems were not solely Roman – e.g., in Reims the clergy was evicted (Mews, UNPUB., 26)

<sup>67</sup> In letter 239, Bernard describes Arnold of Brescia, who was condemned for heresy at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lateran Council and banished from Italy, as Abelard's shield bearer, and continues: “Masters Peter and Arnold, the pest of which you rid Italy, have made common cause against the Lord and his anointed.”

<sup>68</sup> Letter 240 to Guy is notably subdued, clearly indicating an awareness of Guy's ties to Abelard.

When one operates erroneously with the presumption that the Council took place in 1140, these arguments become nothing but rhetorical flourishes; devious exaggerations to have Abelard condemned for *harboring* novel ideas about the core notions of Christianity. However, with the intensification of the overall situation that the redating of the Council of Sens entails, Bernard's prosecution of Abelard is concerned with the *spreading* of Abelard's undogmatic teachings. Still, with our method in mind, it must be conceded that there are some caveats to this reading of Bernard's prosecution of Abelard. First and foremost, why did Bernard, who had travelled so much to combat schism, not go to Rome himself to ensure that Abelard was excommunicated, given the uncertainty that Abelard's purported supporters there represented? Bernard himself tells Innocent:

"If only I were not kept by my care for the brethren, if only I were not hampered by the weakness of my body, how glad I would be to see with my own eyes the friend of the Bridegroom defending, heart in hand, the bride in the absence of her spouse!" (Bernard, Letter 242)

While his notoriously bad health could very well be the actual cause, his claim that he was kept by the "care for the brethren" seems incongruent with his former, albeit uneasy, willingness to make this concession in the prevention of schism, as well as his emphasis on the dangers of 'Peter the Dragon' exceeding those of 'Peter the Lion'. Thus construable as yet another of Bernard's rhetorical flourishes,<sup>69</sup> it helps emphasize that Bernard's evident inclination to utilize all available rhetorical means often entails that his genuine motivation – to act as he does – becomes obfuscated. In any case, a travel to Rome would have been redundant for Bernard. Abelard, on his way to Rome, was met at Cluny with the news that Rome had excommunicated him and that his writings were to be burned. Nevertheless, this burning reportedly never took place, as Abelard sought refuge cloistered in Cluny under the patronage of its abbot Peter the Venerable, who succeeded in reversing the excommunication and negotiated a truce with Bernard (Mews, UNPUB., 31).

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<sup>69</sup> It is like other parts of letter 242 intended to remind Innocent of the debt he owes Bernard for the sacrifices made by the abbot in his name.

## 4.5. Sub-Conclusion

While, as mentioned in the introduction, Bernard's remains were thrown on the dung-heap in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Abelard and Heloise were moved to the famous Père Lachaise graveyard in Paris and entombed together in one of the most fêted tombs in France (McGuire 2009, 155). This discriminating treatment of their remains – an expression of their respective modern reputations -- is understandable given Man's proclivity to understand history in contrasts. Yet, it is somewhat unfair towards the Bernard that emerges from the utilization of our method. In his dealings contra Abelard, he appears genuinely concerned by the prospect of a new, heretical faith, the seeds of which were sown by Abelard. As steadfast in his convictions as he was, Bernard likely felt that his persecution of Abelard saved the souls of those who would have otherwise strayed away from the 'true' orthodox path to God. The argument is not that Bernard's fanaticism is necessarily commendable or agreeable from a modern viewpoint, only that it – through the lenses of historical relativity – was to an extent understandable, as we will discuss further in the next chapter.

In extension, it must be remembered that Bernard 'only' called for the excommunication of Abelard. No matter what Bernard's intentions were, no matter what his intended 'end' was, he only utilized rhetorical means: Unlike other similar clashes within, the antagonism between Bernard and Abelard was only violent orally. In fact, the very reconciliation of the two, which entailed a partial gagging of Abelard, and the lack of direct enmity between them before 1140 recapitulates the fact that there is a certain measure of tolerance to be found in him, albeit with clear imperfections: Imperfections that arose from Bernard's willingness to engage in rhetorical Realpolitik to achieve his goals. His fundamental impetus was his desire for reform, the movement of which required a unified Western Church under the leadership of an uncorrupted Pope – in this sense, *De Consideratione*, written in the years immediately preceding his death, is his political will.

## 5. Discussion: Bernard - Megalomaniac or Saint?

By now, the reader has experienced a multitude of different facets of Bernard. It is the aim of this section to reiterate and compare those facets and view them in different lights. As we have only limited access to Bernard's thoughts and actions, it is impossible to produce a fully fledged image of him – it is impossible to locate the 'real' Bernard, who will thus remain a chimera. However, on the basis of the material available, it is possible to produce different interpretations of Bernard; critical, skeptical and optimistic. As such, this section will attempt to construct and compare different 'Bernards' and contextualize the results with the interpretations of Bernard made by other Bernardine scholars, mentioned in our historiography.

Bernard's metaphor of himself as a chimera has definitely caught on. In the field of Bernardine studies, which arguably originated almost 900 years ago with the writing of his *Vita*, no definite conclusion has been reached on the personality of Bernard. This is likely due to the historical nature of the topic; it is impossible to obtain complete insight on the matter. However, scholars still pass judgment on him, resting their claims on fashionable theories, models and other tools. We will not do that; instead, the discoveries made in this chapter will be based on the analytical readings of his different texts and our walk-through of his involvement with Abelard, supplemented by the impressions he made on his contemporaries as can be read in the *Vita*.

### 5.1. Bernard the Megalomaniac?

This section will attempt to view Bernard in a critical, somewhat negative light, in relation to the criticism that some historians have poured over him.

In his book, *Den Første Europæer*, Brian McGuire likens Bernard to a rock star, claiming that he knows "which buttons to push in order to excite the crowd"<sup>70</sup>. This notion is developed by explaining how the miracles performed by Bernard, on occasion, led to entire cities loving him. This hypothesis is an excellent point of departure for a critical assessment of Bernard; was his constant traveling, writing and interfering in matters beyond his responsibility in reality rooted in a need to control and bend people to his will?

Bernard can be extremely rough with his addressees. By the use of irony, reason, Scriptural references and other oratory tricks, he ruthlessly dismantles the arguments of the opposition. In these situations, he is not afraid to argue *ad hominem* or resort to other methods of discrediting his opponent (McGuire 2009, 168). In this light, he can be seen as tyrannical, unsympathetic and stubbornly close-minded. To investigate this, interpretation of certain examples with the specific purpose of attempting to uncover hidden motives is required. Taking a look at Bernard's deep political involvement, including the extensive traveling, will serve as a point of departure. By now, it should be clear that any kind of excessive traveling is against the Rule. Bernard did have moral scruples breaking this specific rule – yet he seems to justify it as a 'necessary evil'.

While it is easy to just accept this explanation, the point does deserve further inquiry: How come the other abbots got by fine without traveling as much as Bernard did? An explanation could be that his famous character could contribute to the growth of the Order, and thus Bernard committed a 'lesser sin' for the greater good. However, this point

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<sup>70</sup> Translated from Danish: "som forstår hvilke knapper, der skal trykkes på for at begejstre et publikum"

also requires more investigation – was Bernard himself not responsible for the fame attributed to him? To answer this, we return to McGuire’s rock star statement; we can see that he supports this claim by mentioning several miraculous healings which were either performed in public, to the crowd’s great satisfaction, or were later told stories about – both events contributed to Bernard’s fame. Bernard himself stated that the miracles were not for the exaltation of the one man, but for the salvation of many. Furthermore, they serve a secondary purpose, namely to demonstrate the power of God, inspire believers to strive for greater holiness and instill fear in non-believers (Holdsworth, 170). This might serve as an explanation for Bernard’s many public appearances; he was simply promoting the Cistercian concept of Christianity.

In the article, 'Saint Bernard and the Historians', Bredero attributes the political activity of Bernard to “his continual striving for the promotion and expansion of the Cistercian Order” (Bredero, 58), pointing to the fact that Bernard took any chance to found a new monastery, even when his business in the area was related to something completely different. This is somewhat similar to above, namely that the purpose of political involvement for Bernard was primarily to gain and remain in control. While this assumption is flawed, and while it *does* indicate that Bernard possessed ambitions concerning the spread of the Cistercian Order, it does not mean that his high level of political activity and travel can be solely attributed to those ambitions.

Exactly this desire to spread what he held as wholly good can be seen as Bernard’s steadfast belief in his connection to God. And his desire to implement these beliefs in the contemporary world could also very well be the motivation for his deep political involvement. The facts remain, that in his time Bernard was extensively involved in both international politics and the expansion of the Order. This indicates an interest in control and domination on Bernard’s part. This is also evident in the case of his letter to Jorannus concerning the loss of Drogo. Here, Bernard advises him to follow his example and “hold

his peace” in spite of having reacted in a completely opposite manner upon his loss of Robert. Here, one could easily imagine a sly, manipulative Bernard, using every trick in the book for the Cistercian cause. Additionally, the contradictive messages to Hugh and Drogo support this notion. However, counter-evidence to the notion of a power-hungry Cistercian abbot can be produced. Bernard could have attempted to climb the ranks of the Church and in doing so arguably have achieved more power. In fact, one might consider Bernard to be the perfect candidate for the papal office. In spite of this, he never attempted anything of such nature. This can be interpreted in several ways; one could be that Bernard was simply not interested in gaining influence in matters unrelated to the Order, and thus straying away from the path to God. Maybe he preferred to interfere in politics only when they pertained to the Cistercians or Bernard’s affiliates. While it is tempting to accept this explanation, other interpretations could be made. Should Bernard have chosen a higher position in the Church hierarchy, he would officially have gained more influence. Yet this would also have limited his powers in matters outside the ‘jurisdiction’ of his position. Had Bernard been Pope, he would have had less influence on matters concerning Cistercians. The nature of his position would also require him to enter conflicts in which he, as an abbot, would not have to deal with nor have any interest in. As such, remaining an abbot can possibly have yielded more influence than a position of Pope would. Due to his oratory skills and excellent reputation, Bernard was able to influence the peers of medieval society – yet because he was only an abbot, he was never *required* to do these things. Hence, as an abbot, Bernard could pick his battles, dedicate enough time to each cause and remain in control of his own actions. As a result, there were never any official expectations toward Bernard – his job was that of an abbot, to take care of his monks. Because of these things, one could argue that Bernard had more power as an abbot than he would have had as a Pope; by use of his excellent skills in writing, he was still able to persuade the Pope in certain matters. On top of this, he could advise other people in other influential positions without having to play by a set of ‘rules’

which dictated how he should behave – due to the nature of his position, he could write as ‘Bernard, the man of God’, ‘Bernard the Cistercian Abbot’, ‘Bernard the fool’ or ‘Bernard, the son of a knight’, all options he used repeatedly. All this goes to show that his position as an abbot, constrained him very little.

In the end, it is impossible to know whether Bernard himself had really figured this out. However, Bernard’s extensive involvement in politics indicates that he, in one way or another felt it necessary to act. Taking into account the amount of time spent on these matters, be it by writing letters, traveling or conversing, it seems reasonable to conclude that in one way or another, Bernard enjoyed it – yet, we can never know. The man put himself through what modern people might think of as torture by his extreme asceticism and simple lifestyle, just to please God. If one assumes that Bernard did not enjoy his level of influence and being involved in politics, one might categorize his involvement as ‘mental labor’ – even though he did not enjoy it, he did it because God wanted him to.

## 5.2. Bernard the Saint?

This section will attempt to construct an image of Bernard in a positive light, including more positive critiques.

On the final page of his book, Leclercq concludes on Bernard that “where he showed himself to be a saint was in the knowledge of his shortcomings, the admission of his failings, and in spite of these his faithfulness in following Christ.” (Leclercq, 150). In this statement, Leclercq wisely avoids commenting on Bernard’s actions which, as we have seen, can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. Instead of looking at the actions, he chooses to look at the thoughts behind the actions – this, however, assumes that Bernard’s actions were indeed motivated by faithfulness in Christ rather than a need for personal glory. This statement will be accepted for the time being in an attempt to locate Bernard’s relation to Christ and the meaning hereof.

It is clear that Bernard believed the Cistercian way of life to be the path to salvation – this has been shown several times already<sup>71</sup>. As such, the letter to Robert can be read as an attempt to redeem a soul on the path to Hell – here, Bernard tries to save his nephew. In a similar manner, the letter to Adam can be seen as Bernard’s attempt to save those who, in following Arnold’s command, have brought scandal upon themselves. This is an excellent example, in that it proves Bernard’s diligence and conviction; in spite of the Adam having acquired an apostolic license from the Pope, Bernard still believes his actions to be sinful, making the point that an apostolic license does not diminish the severity of the sin. In this case, Bernard goes against the highest human authority in Christianity in order to save souls – this both shows how important the matter is for Bernard, and how certain he is of himself being right. In another context, namely *De Consideratione*, Bernard attempts to keep the Pope, Eugenius III, close to his Cistercian roots. This can be read as an attempt to transfer the Cistercian values, the path to salvation, to a broader audience. Something very similar happens in his interactions with Suger, in which Bernard not only unveils his emphasis on friendship, but praises Suger for his advancements in regards to St. Denis. We might also locate this kind of praise in the letter to Drogo, where Bernard congratulates him for being on a higher, harder path to heaven. The same attitude can be found in the letter to Robert, in which he is reproached for abandoning the hardships at Clairvaux and thus deserting the path to salvation.

When reading the letters of Bernard, one thing will surprise many modern readers; his extreme humility and courtesy, at times even toward those who opposed him. Simply reading the way he greets his reader, the few introductory lines, gives an impression of this; he often puts the flattered recipient on a pedestal while belittling himself and his achievements, calling himself a sinner, a humble servant and his huge amount of followers ‘a little flock’.

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<sup>71</sup> For an example, see pages 57-58.

The condemnation of Abelard is similar to the letter to Adam; here, Bernard scolds one person for bringing scandal on many. While Arnold brought scandal on his followers and those he left at home, Abelard brought it on his followers by teaching them heretical material. As such, the attempted censorship can be read as Bernard extinguishing a heretical fire before it spreads – if Abelard was allowed to continue his teaching, many people would have followed him on his path straight to Hell. In this sense, which compared to this project’s view of Bernard more plausible, his actions are not so much motivated by megalomaniacal factors, but by unwavering faith.

## 6. Conclusion

Providing any definitive conclusion on a multifaceted person such as Bernard is impossible – as has been stated, this is due to the fact that sufficient material to pass judgment with irreversible academic certainty, simply do not exist. As such, it would be outright ridiculous to attempt to do so – instead, this section will reflect on the discoveries made in an attempt to unify them and, in doing this, derive meaningful information about this 'difficult saint'. First and foremost, Bernard was an abbot who did what he could to secure the prosperity of his monastery and the Order. Both in his political interaction and in his daily monastic life, Cistercian success appears to be his main priority. This is evident in many ways; First, we may consider the rapid expansion of the Cistercian Order during his time – coupled with Bernard’s extensive traveling, this is indicative for his success in this matter. A second piece of evidence can be found in his repeated attempts at influencing or converting people to the ways of the Order; *De Consideratione*, the praise of Suger and Drogo are examples of this, as is the public displaying of miracles, demonstrating his connection to God. On the other hand, the letters to Adam and Arnold can be seen as an attempt to hold the Order together in times of disarray, while the criticism toward Abelard could be an attempt at retaining Cistercian power when threatened by a new generation of believers.

Bernard was so certain in his belief, that it was inconceivable that the even the Pope held an opposing view on theology, as in the case of leaving one’s monastery.<sup>72</sup> Bernard was indeed assured that he was following the will of God. As such, it is hard to blame him for his sometimes merciless treatment of his opponents. In an age where logical reasoning was superseded by religious adherence, where the law of God had primacy over the law of man, Bernard’s attempts to silence blasphemers, correct theological “misconceptions”,

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<sup>72</sup> See section 3.5.

convert pagans and strengthen the monastic Order seems more like a virtue than a sin. On the contrary, it might indicate Bernard's desire to spread what he knew was good, the Order, as much as possible – he could do this as a byproduct of his travels. This duality is also exemplified in his *De Consideratione* where he not only advocates the Pope on how to conduct himself, but also gives him spiritual comfort.

His at times thunderous and scolding rhetoric contrasts the picture of the abbot who simply went all out for what he believed to be good. However, it is a side which one has to accept as a part of a whole. Bernard himself does confess to the duality within him. However, one could question whether he manages to conciliate his role as an abbot to his actions as a politician. Arguably, he did. Although breaking some minor rules in the Rule, Bernard does it for a “greater good”. Having been instrumental to the massive Cistercian spread in his lifetime, and at the same time acting as an influential authority on the politics of his time. In this sense, he succeeded in conciliating the two.

One might suggest different motives behind his actions, be they power, a need to control or something different – but refuting his dedication to God is impossible. In Bernard, we meet a man of great faith and powerful spirituality. In the *Vita*, Bernard's spiritual life appears through the testimonies of his close contemporaries and the performing of miracles. It is very likely that the miracles themselves served Bernard as an affirmation that God was with him, a feeling he could have had his entire life. One could suggest that Bernard and his contemporaries were lying about the miracles in order to achieve power and recognition. This might be the most probable answer, yet it does not account for the miracles which were witnessed by large masses of people, and nor does it do justice to the person behind the miracles. Even if the most critical reader decides to brush away the *Vita*, claiming it holds no informative value due to the presence of unexplainable miracles - the letters, the treatises and other writings still remain; almost each of these contains pieces of Bernard's personality, spirituality and genuine love in God.

Thanks to this vast amount of surviving writings, it is possible to get a considerably detailed impression of Bernard. Having uncovered Bernard by the sources used in this project, it is tempting to ask whether Bernard was a fanatic? Indeed he was a man of fiery dedication to say the least. As we have no conclusive evidence of ulterior motives<sup>73</sup>, we cannot conclude that he was fanatical on the premise of seeking power or manipulating. However, we do feel that Bernard was man who followed what he believed to be true. In his time, when logic and reason was superseded by biblical adherence, he followed the path which he believed to be correct and he did so with every fiber of his body, dedicating himself completely to the cause of serving God – perhaps even bordering on being fanatic. However, he did so in the belief that this, the Cistercian concept of Christianity, was the path to salvation.

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<sup>73</sup> E.g. a personal need to control, to command or to be in high esteem.



## 7. Appendix

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## 7.2. Historical Overview

The period we today call the Middle Ages is typically dated approximately from the fifth to the 15th century. Historians have dated the period from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Reformation of Western Christianity. The historical overview in this project delimit the Middle Ages into two periods; the early Middle Ages (500-1000) and High Middle Ages (1000-1300), the latter of which is the most relevant period in our project. This historical overview is based primarily on Morris Bishop's treatment of the Middle Ages, *The Penguin Book of the Middle Ages*.

### **The Early Middle Ages**

Many historians consider this period to be a continuation of the culture developed in the Roman Empire - elements such as language, institutions, law, literature and arts were carried on (Bishop, 9). However, the fall of the Roman Empire was also the beginning of new cultures and the formation of the new world, which later has developed into modern society. The most common date for the breakdown of the Roman Empire is A.D. 476, when barbarians disposed the Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus (Bishop, 10). It was the beginning of the so-called "Dark Age", where society at large was deeply marked by discouragement and fear for the future, marked by a great deal of depression and where the Roman organization and principles disappeared.

### ***Economic and Cultural consequences***

After the end of the Roman era, the social breakdown reached critical proportions. Western society had been developed by Roman culture and architecture, which had been a major influence for the civic infrastructure and civilization. Although most Roman civic structure remained, cities and communities lost their economic security because it was no longer safe to travel with goods as an economic consequence of the breakdown, which resulted in a collapse of trade. Also the infrastructure in the cities, e.g. street lighting and fresh water for public baths were falling apart as the population shrank (Bishop, 11). But

the living conditions were even more hopeless in the countryside. The problem was that the agriculture had been affected by the dissolved slavery, which had a big influence on the production, the economy and the workforce. The Roman economy depended on conquest, tribute and slavery and as a consequence of the economic downturn; the communities and the cities started to reduce their standards of living and began being more self-sufficient.

This development was continuous in the Early Middle Ages and the result of the development was that people from higher society, intellectuals and especially large landowners, started to gain more power and influence. Some landowners had their own private army to protect their goods and as the landowners gained more power in the different communities, the large landowners started to purchase the holdings of small landowners in return for protection. Small landowners started to become servants of the large landowners, but this was not important for the small landowners, as even though they lost their freedom, they gained security instead (Bishop, 12-13).

### ***Christianity and the Church***

The fall of the Roman Empire was also the rise of Christianity and the Church in the Western Society where Christianity and its divine appeal were very welcome. The success of the Church stemmed from its organization. Leaders of communities converted to Christianity and became priests and bishops.

The Church was organized into provinces and as the influence of the Roman Empire decreased, the Church began functioning as the unifying civil and social institution in society; Christianity became the official religion of Rome and the rest of Western Europe. Another reason why the Church had so much success at the time was the monks. With economic and cultural stagnation prevailing through Western Europe, the monks managed to hold the people together with hope and care, while they preserved and created culture:

“Reasonably secure, they preserved the ancient culture in their libraries, copying old books, making new ones, and conducting almost the only school. Monastery walls sheltered men with the impulse to escape the world, to seek virtue and reflect on man’s soul and his destiny.”

**(Bishop 1971, 14)**

Having originated in Eastern Europe and Egypt, monasticism spread to Western Europe as well. However, while the church was an institutional success, the monasteries did not have any guidance or rules to follow. One of the first to lay down a rule set for monastic practice was St. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-543) (Bishop, 14). His rule set, the Regula Benedicti, is still a major influence for many monasteries today, as elaborated upon elsewhere in the project.

### **The High Middle Ages**

The High Middle Ages was a turning point for western civilization. The population explosion was creating social and labor disturbances. The western countries started to expand as a reaction to the situation. Christians in Spain tried to conquer territory southwards and the Germans conquered the Slavic territories in the East. The Normans from northern France conquered the English kingdom and the southern territories of Italy. The French were very active conquering other territories, and in 1099 they started the first crusade for the Holy Land. The expansion offset the population explosion and the cities began to grow. Markets were created and new agricultural techniques encouraged families to expand and exploit the new resources, resulting in an explosion in business, industry and culture (Bishop, 46).

In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the development was fueled by the technical innovation happening in the western countries during the territorial expansion. Castles and cathedrals were built in the cities, which created wealth. Literature and art flourished in this period, and while the knights fought in the crusades, Western civilization had become more stable. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the new universities, scholars created new philosophical ideas and theories, at a faster pace than before. The intellectual and

economic prosperity gave the population an optimistic spirit and spiritual satisfaction, while the people began to increasingly believe in the Church and its principles. The new spirit of optimism was a result of the rise of material wealth. Even the lower class could afford material goods such as chimneys and metal kitchenware and the bourgeois lived in luxury. Before the High Middle Ages, the female sex did not have status or much to say compared to the male sex. But in the High Middle Ages women began to gain status and were treated with more dignity and respect, although still far from equals to men. Romances flourished at the time and the concept of social life developed (Bishop, 47).

### ***The Church***

Through the High Middle Ages the Church rapidly gained power and wealth in the western society due to the enormous territorial holdings of the Church. Some bishops were feudal lords and they had great influence on the nobles and the king. As the power of the Church grew, the king and noble lords began to take advice from the bishops and the Church in political issues. It was no longer solely a religious and spiritual institution, but also a political one. The result was that it started to act like an instigator of political wars. The Church’s new influence created a lot of conflict between countries. Many monks and supporters of the Church did not approve of the secular interests of the Church (Bishop, 80-81). As a consequence hereof, the Christian Order recovered the old structure of monasticism. Many new monasteries were founded all over the European continent, returning to the old principles, without material wealth, which had been the philosophy of early Christianity. One of the most influential orders was the Cluniac at Cluny in Burgundy. It was founded in 910 and answered solely to the Pope. The Cluniac was based on the practices of the Benedictine Rule, meaning that one could only reach Heaven through prayer and worship: “Since human efforts to tread down triumphant evil had availed little, Cluny proposed to assail Heaven with concentrated and continuous prayer and worship” (Bishop, 82). In 1098 a group of Benedictine monks wanted to

practice a more pure form of the Benedictine Rule, and thus in Dijon at Cîteaux they formed a new order called the Cistercians. The monks wanted to build their own homes and to be self-sufficient, and the Cistercian Order was expanding rapidly under the influence of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Like the Cluniac, The Cistercians also followed the Benedictine Rule but rejected the Cluniac interpretation of it (Bishop, 82-83).

## **7.3. Additional Requirements**

### **7.3.1. Dimension Anchoring**

As a project concerned solely with the understanding of a historical figure – Bernard of Clairvaux – and a project based mainly on primary sources and utilizing many of the traditional tools of the historian, this project must be said to be rooted squarely in the History & Culture dimension.

### **7.3.2. Danish Summary (Dansk Referat)**

Dette projekt omhandler helgenen og abbeden Bernard af Clairvaux, som levede i det 12. århundrede og var på daværende tidspunkt en enormt indflydelsesrig person. I projektet, hvis metode er baseret på Gadamer's teorier, forsøges det at lokalisere manden bag legenden. For at opnå dette er primærkilder blevet læst, analyseret og kontekstualiseret med sekundære kilder for at belyse Bernard som han fremførte sig og blev set af sine medmennesker. Projektet konkluderer, at selvom det er umuligt at dømme Bernard definitivt på grund af det begrænsede antal primærkilder, er det stadig muligt at skabe meningsfulde teorier og fortolkninger af hans breve, mirakler og handlinger som både abbed og politiker – han var virkelig en besværlig helgen.

### **7.3.3. Abstract**

This project concerns itself with the controversial 12<sup>th</sup> century saint and abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, so influential that his contemporaneity has been called 'The Age of Bernard'. The project bases its method on Gadamer in an attempt to locate the man behind the legend. Working towards this, primary sources have been read, analyzed and contextualized with secondary sources in order to shed light on Bernard as he conducted himself and was seen by his contemporaries. The project concludes that while passing definite judgment on Bernard is impossible due to the limited availability of primary sources, it is possible to produce meaningful theories and interpretations of his letters, miracles and actions as both an abbot and a politician – he truly was a 'difficult saint'.

### 7.3.4. The Two Year Progression Frame

| 1. Module         | 2. Module         | <u>3. Module</u>         | 4. Module         |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Technique         | Technique         | Technique                | Technique         |
| Method            | Method            | Method                   | Method            |
| Theory of Science | Theory of Science | <b>Theory of Science</b> | Theory of Science |
| Prof. Standards   | Prof. Standards   | Prof. Standards          | Prof. Standards   |

According to the H.I.B. study guidelines, the focus of third semester projects is on theory of science. As such, this section will contain brief meta-reflections on our choice of method – the method itself, as well as our reasons for choosing it, is introduced in detail in the methodology section. In setting out to write this project, we quickly became aware of the need for a method which could work in conjunction with the aims of the project. Due to the historical nature of the project, a method which could overcome the temporal gap between our research subject and ourselves was required.

Seeking inspiration in projects of a similar nature, we found several interesting theories which we believed could support our project's aims. Accordingly, we delved into each theory in an attempt to find the one which could support our ambitions the best. One by one, the different theories were discarded for a variety of reasons until we finally selected a combination of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the principle of charity. At this point in the project, our main focus came to be the understanding and formulating of our methodology. When this had been achieved, each group member could begin writing while constantly keeping the method and goals of the project in mind.