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Short Title: BERNARD AND LUTHER ON MONASTICISM

ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX AND MARTIN LUTHER
ON MONASTICISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

James Herbert Pragman

May 1965

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Approved by: Carl S. Meyer
Advisor

[Signature]
Reader

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	Page
.....	1
.....	1
.....	2
.....	4
.....	4
.....	6
.....	25
.....	25
.....	36
.....	44
.....	53
.....	55
.....	58
.....	59
.....	69
.....	69
.....	74
.....	81
.....	93
.....	98
.....	98
.....	100
.....	100
.....	104
.....	106

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose and Need for This Study	1
The Limitations of This Study	2
Summary of the Conclusions	6
II. ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX: HIS APPRECIATION OF MONASTICISM	8
St. Bernard's Life and Work	9
St. Bernard's Thought on the Monastic Life	25
The Vows of Monasticism	25
The Nature of Monasticism	36
Monasticism and the Way of Salvation	44
Motivation for the Monastic Life: The Idea of Love	53
St. Bernard's Evaluation of the Monastic Life	55
III. MARTIN LUTHER: HIS APPRECIATION OF MONASTICISM	58
Luther's Monastic Experience	59
Luther's Thought on the Monastic Life	69
The Monastic Vows: Their Meaning and Implications	74
Monasticism and God's Will for Man	81
Monasticism and the Way of Salvation	93
Luther's Evaluation of the Monastic Life	98
IV. CONCLUSION	100
Summary of the Findings and Conclusions	100
Suggestions for Further Study	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	106

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Need for This Study

The question of the relationship between Martin Luther and St. Bernard of Clairvaux was first suggested to this writer by Dr. Lewis W. Spitz, Jr., in a seminar he conducted on the campus of Concordia Seminary for the Foundation for Reformation Research during the summer of 1964. Preliminary research was undertaken during that summer to see whether or not the study of this relationship would be feasible.

Originally, it was thought that the proposed study and research would result in a complete statement of the relationship between Luther and Bernard. Further study indicated, however, that the topic needed to be narrowed, for it soon became evident that the question of the relationship between Luther and Bernard would entail investigations in hamartiology, mariology, grace and free will, and mysticism. A thorough investigation of the relationship between Luther and Bernard was definitely beyond the scope of a thesis for the Master of Sacred Theology degree.

Preliminary research brought to light, however, that both men had much in common in terms of their life and work; in other words, both men had been monks and wrote about the monastic life. One of them was a thorough-going monk, but the other man had rejected monasticism in very definite terms.

It was thought that the depth of the relationship between Luther and Bernard would certainly be evident in their different approaches to monasticism. Consequently, the study of the relationship between Luther and Bernard in terms of monasticism was undertaken.

Actually, the study of the relationship between Luther and Bernard is an investigation into the Catholic Luther, a study of Luther's medieval theological heritage. Although Luther reformed the church and reoriented its theology, he retained an appreciation for those Christian theologians and churchmen who had preceded him and were transmitting to him the faith once delivered to the saints. In the investigation of one or more aspects of the relationship between Luther and Bernard, one confronts an interesting illustration of Luther's appreciation of the medieval Catholic tradition. The serious student of Luther must recognize that Luther basically approached the history of the Church and Christian thought with an evangelical perspective. Luther recognized that the theological tradition which he received through St. Bernard and many others did contain the light of Christ.

The Limitations of This Study

The study of this relationship, of course, involves a familiarity with the corpus of Bernard's and Luther's writings. Since Bernard's corpus of writings is much smaller than the collection of Luther's writings in the Weimar Edition, it was much easier to survey Bernard's writings than it was to survey

Luther's. Nevertheless, it was impossible to include in this study all the specific thought of both men with regard to monasticism, because both men imbedded their thoughts on monasticism within larger works dealing with problems not immediately relevant to monasticism. As a result, it was necessary to prescribe limitations as to which writings would be studied.

Since Bernard's corpus of writings was much smaller, it was much easier to include a greater number of works from his pen. The criterion for selection was the topic of monasticism itself: those works which dealt with the characteristics of monastic life. In other words, Bernard's "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici" was read because this work contains Bernard's denunciation of monastic wealth and the lack of ascetic discipline among the Cluniac monks. Also, his "De Laudi Novae Militiae ad Milites Templi," dealing with the organization and purpose of the Knights Templar, was consulted. And, of course, Bernard's "De Precepto et Dispensatione," containing his thoughts on the nature of the monastic vow and the possibility of dispensations from the vow, was thoroughly studied. In terms of mysticism within monasticism, it was imperative that Bernard's "De Diligendo Deo" be thoroughly read and studied. In connection with "De Diligendo Deo" Bernard's great work on the nature of monastic humility and perfectionism, "De Gradibus Humilitas," was thoroughly considered.

But perhaps the most illuminating works from Bernard's

pen on the nature and function of monasticism were his letters and the sermons he preached to the monks at Clairvaux. In both his letters and his sermons, Bernard applied the monastic ideal to concrete situations within monasticism. Consequently, it is in these materials, primarily in his sermons, that the picture of Christ in relation to monasticism was most clearly revealed.

Other works from the pen of Bernard, noted in the Bibliography at the conclusion of this thesis, were also consulted. However, the most significant Bernardine material for this study of the relationship between Luther and Bernard in terms of monasticism is that which is listed above.

The sources for the study of Luther's approach to monasticism are much more limited, because it is difficult to unearth Luther's thought on monasticism from the corpus of his writings. The works that specifically consider monasticism and the monastic vows themselves are few in number. However, Luther did publish one major treatise on this problem, his "De Votis" of 1521. Consequently, Luther's "De Votis" is the major source for the material dealing with Luther's approach to monasticism. Luther's approach in "De Votis" is not unique and different from his other comments in minor works dealing with the problems of monasticism. Thus, Luther's "Ursach und Antwort" of 1523 and his "Antwort auf etliche Fragen, Klostersgelübde belangend" of 1526 repeat many of the concerns he expressed in "De Votis." In 1533, Luther wrote "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch" which

reiterated major portions of his thought on monasticism expressed twelve years earlier.

In terms of secondary authorities, a representative number of the critical studies of Luther's life and thought were read. Most of the authorities were helpful, although their primary concern was the effect of Luther's monastic life on his development as the Reformer. It was difficult to discover a study of Luther's thought on monasticism.

Secondary authorities in the study of Bernard's life and thought were consulted, but there is a dearth of critical study in the twentieth century dealing with Bernard. Of course, some critical study of Bernard has been undertaken in the twentieth century, notably Joseph Lortz's edition of the papers presented at the first international congress on Bernard's life and work in 1953, Bernhard von Clairvaux, Mönch und Mystiker. In addition, work has been begun on a new critical edition of Bernard's writings; thus far, Jean Leclercq and his associates have produced a critical edition of Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some study of Bernard took place, but most of that which was published does not meet critical standards.

At the present time, Mabillon's edition of 1839, reprinted with additions by Migne in the 1850's and 1860's, must be used in the study of Bernard's thought. It will be noted in Chapter II that Mabillon's edition of 1839 was the work used in this study; however, since Migne's collection,

rather than Mabillon's edition, can be more frequently found in a reputable theological library, care has been taken to provide the interested reader with the information that will enable him to discover the material for himself in Migne's edition. For this reason, chapter and paragraph numbers for Bernard's treatises, standard for both Mabillon's and Migne's editions, have been used throughout.

Summary of the Conclusions

On the basis of the following study of the relationship between Luther and Bernard in terms of monasticism, what can be concluded? First of all, it must be said that Bernard regarded the monastic life as the highest of divine callings, and that he viewed monasticism as the best path to God. In fact, Bernard in his life attempted to apply the monastic ideal to the life and thought of the church. In short, Bernard was the monk's monk. This was the conclusion of his contemporaries and the goal of Bernard's life.

However, Luther's attitude toward monasticism was not so unqualified. Luther maintained that monasticism was not the only or even the best path to God. To be sure, monasticism could be a God-pleasing manifestation of the Christian life, but it was not the highest of the divine callings. Monasticism was just another divine calling, no more nor no less divine than the call to be a housewife or a farmer. To prove his point that monasticism could be God-pleasing, Luther turned to Bernard and used him as the exemplar of godly monasticism.

Thus far, nothing has been said about the relationship between Luther and Bernard in terms of monasticism. From Luther's point of view--and this is the only legitimate approach in ascertaining the relationship between the two-- Bernard was a good Christian who showed others how to live a God-pleasing monastic life and provided them with the courage and comfort they needed in this kind of life. On the other hand, for Luther, Bernard's very life was an indictment of the theological evils of monasticism: Bernard was a man who lived freely in the faith according to the spirit, not the letter, of monasticism. In short, Luther admired Bernard and appreciated him as one of God's saints, a flickering light in the darkness which had come to characterize monasticism in Luther's mind. Perhaps it can be said that Bernard was the exception that proved the rule: for Luther, monasticism in the sixteenth century by virtue of its legalism was an enemy of Christian faith and freedom.

CHAPTER II

ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX: HIS APPRECIATION OF MONASTICISM

"The mighty figure of the Cistercian monk St. Bernard overshadows all the kings and popes of the second quarter of the twelfth century."¹ St. Bernard of Clairvaux was the most influential man of his generation. Under his guidance and leadership, the Cistercian Order of monks spread from Citeaux and Clairvaux throughout France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and England. St. Bernard of Clairvaux resolved the papal schism of 1130. And St. Bernard was the preacher who created enthusiasm in Western Europe for the Second Crusade (1146-1148). St. Bernard also was responsible for the condemnation of Abelard's new theology at the Council of Sens (1141). Kings and emperors asked for and listened to his counsel. Popes and bishops empowered him to resolve church-wide theological and political problems. Abbots confided in him, and individual monks cherished his admonitions. The concerns of all men did not escape St. Bernard's meticulous attention. But St. Bernard's most durable legacy to the church was the vitality and strength of the Cistercian Order.

St. Bernard's immediate impact on his age is clearly evident in his work as preacher of the Second Crusade, as

¹James Westfall Thompson and Edgar Nathaniel Johnson, An Introduction to Medieval Europe: 300-1500 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., c.1937), p. 392.

arbiter of the Papal schism, and as the conscience of Western Christendom in judging the theology of Abelard, but St. Bernard judged his own life in terms of the monastic calling. To be a monk of Clairvaux--this was Bernard's first love. Bernard always returned to Clairvaux from his many travels and missions with a sense of peace and joy. To gain a valid understanding and appreciation of St. Bernard, it is necessary to understand St. Bernard the monk and abbot of Clairvaux.

St. Bernard's impact as a thinker and theologian cannot be divorced from his life's work. Consequently, the plan for this chapter is two-fold: the presentation of a brief summary of St. Bernard's life and a more thorough consideration of several aspects of St. Bernard's thought on the monastic life.

St. Bernard's Life and Work

St. Bernard was born around 1090 in a castle at Fontaines-les-Dijon in Burgundy, the third son of Tescelin and Aleth, who were very religious members of the lesser nobility.² In the

²Guillelmo olim Sancti Theoderici, Arnaldo Abbate Bonae-vallis, Gaufrido Abbate Clarae-vallensis, Gaufrido Monacho Clarae-vallensis, Philippo Monacho Clarae-vallensis, et al., "Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Vita et Res Gestae Libris Septem Comprehensae," Tractatus Posteriores, S. Doctoris Vitae, et Indices Generales, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, nec non Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), V, col. 2092 [Lib. I, Cap. I, 1]. Hereafter, this work will be cited as "Vita Prima Bernardi," followed by book (Lib.), chapter (Cap.), and paragraph numbers as illustrated in the brackets in the last sentence. This method of citation will make it possible

"Vita Prima Bernardi" little information is given about Bernard's childhood, although his contemporary biographers record that Bernard had five brothers and one sister.³ The sources also indicate that Bernard was educated by the secular clergy in the school they maintained at Chatillon-sur-Saone and that Bernard even persuaded the secular clergy at Chatillon to become a community of Canons Regular.⁴ Judging from Bernard's written treatises and sermons--those read in connection with this study--it is obvious that Bernard's education was thorough and of exceptional quality.

After the completion of his education at Chatillon, Bernard began to consider the problem of his future vocation. Bernard had been thinking about the matter of his vocation for some time prior to his entrance into the monastery at Citeaux, the mother house of all Cistercians.⁵ His decision for the monastic life was not at all similar to the somewhat sudden decision of

for the reader to locate the material in any critical edition of this work.

This same work has been reprinted in Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1855), CLXXXV. Any specific reference to Migne's edition of this work will be cited as "Vita Prima Bernardi," MPL. Migne's edition will only be cited in those instances where Mabillon did not choose to print the material in question.

An English translation of this work is also available: William of St. Thierry, et al., St. Bernard of Clairvaux: The Story of His Life as Recorded in the Vita Prima Bernardi by Certain of His Contemporaries, William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonnevaux, Geoffrey and Philip of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil, translated by Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1960).

³"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. I. Cap. I, 1.

⁴Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. I, 3.

⁵Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. III, 8-9.

Martin Luther four centuries later.

Bernard finally made his decision for the monastic life in a way-side chapel near Grancey-le-Chateau.⁶ But Bernard did not enter the monastery immediately. He spoke to his relatives and friends about his decision and attempted to convince them to join him. According to his biographers, the power of his eloquence was so great that wives and mothers hid their husbands and sons so that they would not hear Bernard and follow him into the monastery at Citeaux.⁷ Nevertheless, Bernard convinced all of his brothers--including his oldest brother who was married and the father of two daughters--and other relatives to join him. Thus, in 1113 when Bernard was about twenty-three years old, he and thirty companions simultaneously begged permission of Citeaux's Abbot, St. Stephen Harding, to become novices at Citeaux.⁸ With the entrance of thirty new novices, the Order of Citeaux gained strength and impetus for expansion and growth.

During the first two years after Bernard's entrance into the monastery at Citeaux, the biographers do not record any significant incidents. However, they do know that Bernard took great delight in reading and studying the Holy Scriptures; consequently, Bernard became thoroughly familiar with all the Scriptures.⁹

⁶Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. III, 9.

⁷Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. III, 15.

⁸Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. IV, 19.

⁹Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. IV, 24.

Bernard's development as a monk and leader of monks was phenomenal, however, for just two years after his entrance into the monastery St. Stephen Harding chose Bernard to lead twelve monks to found a Cistercian monastery at Clairvaux. Thus, in 1115, when Bernard was twenty-five years old, he left Citeaux and traveled to Clairvaux, his monastic home for the rest of his life.¹⁰

Life at Clairvaux was hard. The monks had to build the monastery from the materials at hand, and they had to provide food for themselves. They lived in absolute poverty and were satisfied with meager shelter and food. During the first winter life at Clairvaux was precarious. But the monks did not complain, for they lived only for the sake of Christ and Christ was enough food and clothing and shelter for any man.¹¹

During the first years of Clairvaux's existence, extreme asceticism characterized the life led by the monks under Bernard's leadership. It was only natural that the monks at Clairvaux would follow the example set by their abbot.¹² Bernard was a thorough-going ascetic. He slept little and ate little because he wanted to subjugate his flesh by all possible means. As a result, Bernard practically ruined his health. His biographers indicate that Bernard could hardly

¹⁰Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. V, 25.

¹¹Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. VII, 35.

¹²Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. VII, 31. Bernard had been ordained and given the episcopal blessing on his office by William of Champeaux, the bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne, the diocese in which Clairvaux was located.

eat, and what he did eat was frequently regurgitated; food for Bernard was not a way of strengthening life but only a way of warding off death.¹³ Bernard was too diligent in his asceticism. Consequently, William of Champeaux, Bernard's bishop, decided to make sure that the church did not lose the services of the abbot. William approached the convocation of Citeaux's abbots and asked permission to place Bernard under his authority for one year so that he could compel Bernard to take better care of his health.¹⁴ Permission was granted, and William ordered Bernard to take up residence in a cottage separated from the other buildings at Clairvaux. Bernard was also placed under the care of a physician appointed by William. Nevertheless, William's good intentions bore little fruit, and Bernard reverted to his former strict ascetic practices after the year of William's authority had elapsed.¹⁵ For Bernard, the body was of little value or consequence in view of the goal to which and for which he was striving. The salvation of the soul was far more important than the salvation of the body.

While Bernard was at Clairvaux, the condition and progress of the novices particularly concerned him.¹⁶ And he was also zealous for the older monks as they confronted again and

¹³Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. IV, 22.

¹⁴Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. VII, 32.

¹⁵Ibid., Lib. I, Cap. VIII, 38.

¹⁶Ibid., Lib. VII, Cap. XII, 17-18.

again the struggles and trials of the Christian life.¹⁷

Bernard honestly attempted to be a curate of souls within the walls of Clairvaux.

By 1135, the size of the community at Clairvaux had grown to such an extent that Bernard was forced to rebuild Clairvaux.¹⁸ At the same time, Bernard began his sermons or discourses on the Song of Songs--a famous series of eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters and the first four verses of the third chapter of the Song of Songs¹⁹--to build up his monastic brothers in the love of God and in the Christian faith. Clairvaux, its monks and its buildings, was Bernard's first love. Clairvaux was Bernard's home by choice and the monks of Clairvaux were his dearest friends. Although Bernard may have been too liberal in his use of rhetoric in some letters, his letters to the monks at Clairvaux clearly give the impression that he would much rather be a simple monk leading the Cistercian life of prayer and manual labor than a traveling emissary of the pope.²⁰

¹⁷Ibid., Lib. VII, Cap. VI, 8-9.

¹⁸Ibid., Lib. II, Cap. V, 30-31.

¹⁹Ibid., Lib. II, Cap. VI, 40.

²⁰Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, Epistolas Numero CCCCLXXXII Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Mellioem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), I, cols. 353-354.

Another edition of Bernard's letters, including some letters not contained in Mabillon's edition, is found in Migne's work: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Epistolas Numero

Bernard of Clairvaux epitomized the Cistercian Order, although he was not the founder of the Order. Bernard exemplified the Cistercian strict observance of the Rule of St. Benedict, to which all Cistercians vowed themselves. Bernard was the example to be followed. Perhaps the most impressive indication of Bernard's leadership and influence is the fact that at his death in 1153 the Cistercian Order had grown from one house in 1115 to three hundred and forty-three separate houses.²¹

The sources do not indicate the way in which Bernard's abilities and gifts came to the attention of the church beyond Clairvaux and the diocese of Chalons-sur-Marne. William of St. Thierry simply makes this observation:

The call of obedience sometimes drew him far away from his monastery to work in the Church's cause, but wherever he went and whenever he spoke, he could not remain silent about the things of God, nor could he cease to carry out God's work. And so it was that his reputation spread among men so widely that the

CCCCXCV," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne, (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 67-716.

In addition, some of Bernard's letters have been translated into English: Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Bernard of Clairvaux Seen Through His Selected Letters, translated from the Latin by Bruno Scott James (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1953). Hereafter this translation of Bernard's letters will be cited as Bruno Scott James.

Hereafter, all citations to Bernard's letters will have the following format: Bernard, Epistolas, followed by letter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus, a letter illustrative of Bernard's love of Cistercian monastic life is cited as follows: Bernard, Epistolas, CXLIII, 1-3. This letter was written ca. 1135.

²¹Thompson and Johnson, pp. 613, 618.

Church could not afford not to use so valuable a member of Christ's body for its designs.²²

The voice that came from Clairvaux was soon heard throughout Western Europe.

The first example of St. Bernard's influence in the affairs of the church, beyond the immediate concerns of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Order, is the Council of Troyes in 1128. Bernard was specifically invited to attend this council by Matthew du Remois, the Cardinal Bishop of Albano and a papal legate.²³ At Troyes, the Knights Templar was authorized by Pope Honorius II, and Bernard was responsible for formulating the Templar's Rule, basing that Rule on the Cistercian regulations.²⁴ Bernard even wrote a special commendatory treatise on the purposes and immediate goals of the Templars.²⁵ Bernard was very pleased

²²"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. I, Cap. VIII, 42. The translation is by Webb and Walker, p. 66.

²³Bernard, Epistolas, XXI, 1-2. This letter was written to Matthew of Albano ca. 1127.

²⁴T. F. Tout, The Empire and the Papacy: 918-1273 (Eighth edition; London: Rivingtons, 1958), p. 189; cf., Thompson and Johnson, p. 533.

²⁵Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Laudi Novae Militiae ad Milites Templi," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, cols. 1253-1278. This work is also included in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Laudi Novae Militiae ad Milites Templi," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 921-940.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "Ad Milites Templi," followed by chapter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively.

with the prospects for this new order of monks, since they would vindicate Christ by protecting pilgrims and the Holy Places in Palestine.²⁶

Two years after the Council of Troyes, Bernard was called upon to resolve a problem that occupied his attention for the next eight years of his life, the Papal Schism of 1130-1138. In 1130, at the death of Honorius II, two factions developed within the College of Cardinals at Rome. As a result, each faction elected its own pope. One faction elected Peter Pierleone, the son of a Jewish banker who had been converted to Christianity. Pierleone chose to call himself Anacletus II.²⁷ The other faction elected Gregory, the Cardinal deacon of St. Angelo, and he chose to call himself Innocent II.²⁸ Of course, both factions claimed that the opposing faction had perpetrated a terrible infraction of ecclesiastical law by electing an anti-pope.

The election of two popes greatly disturbed the Western Church. Both candidates appealed to the rulers of England, France, the Empire, and the Italian territories for support. In addition, the secular and regular clergy could not decide which candidate had been canonically elected. In an effort to resolve the matter, King Louis VI (died 1137) convened a

²⁶Bernard, "Ad Milites Templi," III, 4.

²⁷"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. II, Cap. I, 1.

²⁸Ibid.

council of the French Church at Etampes in 1130; he specifically commanded Bernard to be present at the council. When Bernard arrived at Etampes, the King and the bishops decided that Bernard should be their chairman and spokesman.²⁹ Bernard thoroughly studied the problem and concluded that Innocent II was the more qualified candidate.³⁰ Under the leadership and guidance of Bernard, the Northern Italian territories, the Empire, and England--in addition to France--decided in favor of Innocent II.³¹ Eventually, the only territories which pledged their allegiance to Anacletus II were the environs of Rome and Roger of Sicily's territories in Southern Italy and Sicily. Consequently, Bernard traveled to Italy and engaged Peter of Pisa, King Roger's spokesman, in public debate. Although Bernard convinced Peter of Pisa that the election of Innocent II was honorable, Bernard failed to convince King Roger.³²

The schism finally ended in 1138 after the death of Anacletus II. Bernard traveled to Rome and negotiated with the last partisans of Anacletus II and the successor they had elected, Victor IV. When Bernard convinced Victor IV to surrender the papal office and dignity to Innocent II, the eight-year papal schism came to its end.³³

²⁹Ibid., Lib. II, Cap. I, 3.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., Lib. II, Cap. I-II and VI, 5-9 and 32-38.

³²Ibid., Lib. II, Cap. VII, 41-48.

³³Ibid., Lib. II, Cap. VII, 47-48. Cf. Tout, p. 234.

It is recognized today, however, on the basis of ecclesiastical law, that the election of Anacletus II was completely valid.³⁴ Bernard actually based his decision at the Council of Etampes not upon the legality of Innocent II's election, but upon the essential holiness and piety of the two candidates. Bernard's decision in favor of Innocent II was based on the order of election, the merit of the electors, and the lives and reputations of the electees--with more weight being given to the last two arguments.³⁵ Bernard was not of the opinion that legalistic right and authority allows the church or its members to pursue a course of action unless the men involved exemplify the ideal of holy and pure living. The integrity of the papacy and of the church depends on the integrity of the individuals who hold the office of the papacy. And the ideal of pure and holy living is part of the monastic ideal. In Bernard's mind, the parochial ideal in force at Clairvaux became the ideal for church and papacy. In effect, Bernard himself had appointed Gregory, the Cardinal deacon of St. Angelo, to be Pope Innocent II.

Innocent II was the Bishop of Rome until 1143, when he died. He was succeeded by Celestine II, who reigned from September 1143 to March 1144, when he in turn was succeeded by Lucius II, who reigned until February 1145. The next pontiff

³⁴Hayden V. White, "The Gregorian Ideal and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXI (July-September 1960), 336. White marshals the evidence for a thorough study of the legal problems connected with the Papal Election of 1130.

³⁵"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. II, Cap. I, 3.

was Eugenius III, the former Abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Tre Fontane in the Italian Compagna.³⁶ Under Eugenius III, Bernard was called upon to make another great contribution as a churchman. Eugenius III designated Bernard as the preacher of the Second Crusade (1146-1148).

At Christmas 1145, King Louis VII (died 1180) of France gathered his court at Bourges. Since he had received the news that Edessa had fallen in 1144 to the Turks, Louis and his court determined to rescue Christendom in the East. It was decided that the court would convene again at Vezelay at Easter 1146 to initiate its plan. Pope Eugenius III was informed of this plan, but since he could not be present he gave Bernard the responsibility of preaching the Crusade at Vezelay in 1146.³⁷ Bernard appeared at Vezelay and gave the sign of pilgrimage, the cross of the crusader, to all those present. In addition, Bernard persuaded Conrad III, the Holy Roman Emperor, to participate in the crusade.³⁸ Western Europe took up the crusade with initial passion and purpose, largely as a result of Bernard's preaching and persuasive ability. In the judgment of one student of the Second Crusade, Bernard must be credited with interjecting personal and passionate enthusiasm, based on the eternal significance of the crusading vow made by each

³⁶Tout, p. 241.

³⁷"Vita Prima Bernardi," MPL, CLXXXV, 1205-1207.
Cf. Tout, pp. 191-192.

³⁸"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. VI, Cap. I, 1; Lib. IV, Cap. IV, 15.

crusader, into the hearts and minds of the crusaders.³⁹

But the Second Crusade failed. Since Bernard had been the preacher of the crusade, earnestly urging all within the sound of his voice to take up the crusader's cross, Bernard also received the blame for the failure of the crusade. Geoffrey of Clairvaux attempted to defend Bernard by noting that Bernard only preached the crusade because Pope Eugenius III instructed him to do so, and perhaps--in spite of the results--people's souls were saved as they made the pilgrimage of the crusade.⁴⁰ Bernard, however, did not attempt to excuse his participation in the crusade. He indicated only that God's ways are past man's judgments; how can anyone criticize what he does not understand?⁴¹ For Bernard, the call to work comes from God, and God alone has the right to judge the work and weigh the results.

As the Abbot of Clairvaux, Bernard had been called upon to adjudicate a Papal Schism (1130-1138) and to preach the Second Crusade (1146-1148). Between these two events, Bernard the Abbot of Clairvaux felt compelled to express himself on the theology of Abelard. As a result, Abelard was compelled by Pope Innocent II to spend the remainder of his life under the condemnation of the church and in monastic confinement.

The confrontation between Bernard and Abelard is the

³⁹Giles Constable, "The Second Crusade as Seen by Contemporaries," *Traditio*, IX (1953), 247.

⁴⁰"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. III, Cap. V, 15.

⁴¹Bernard, *Epistolas*, CCLXXXVIII, 1-2. This letter was written to his uncle Andrew, a member of the Knights Templar, in 1153.

confrontation of two ages and two ways of approaching theology. For Bernard, theology must be understood in terms of spirituality and experience. Only that theology was valid which concerned itself with the heightening of the spiritual life, the life that led to union with God. Knowledge and theology were never ends in themselves.⁴² Bernard maintained that the quest for learning and theology must be intimately related to the quest of monasticism, the salvation of the individual.⁴³ Consequently, for Bernard, Abelard's subtleties were nothing but a miserable attempt to look into the mind of God. In effect, Abelard was attempting to describe and explain the inscrutable mysteries of God. It would have been much better for Abelard, said Bernard, if he would heed the words of Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God."⁴⁴ In a letter

⁴²Jean Leclercq, The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture, translated by Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), pp. 6-9.

⁴³Ibid., p. 255. Cf. Bernard, Epistolas, CXCI, 1. This letter was written to Pope Innocent II in 1140.

⁴⁴Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Contra Quaedam Capitula Errorum Abaelardi (Epistola CXC seu Tractatus) ad Innocentium II Pontificem," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, cols. 1456-1458. This work is also included in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Contra Quaedam Capitula Errorum Abaelardi Epistola CXC seu Tractatus ad Innocentium II Pontificem," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 1053-1072.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "Contra

addressed to Pope Innocent II in 1140, Bernard rendered this summary judgment:

He insults the Doctors of the Church by holding up the philosophers for exaggerated praises. He prefers their ideas and their own novelties to the doctrines and faith of the Catholic Fathers. . . .⁴⁵

Bernard's condemnation became the judgment of the church at the Council of Sens in 1141.⁴⁶ Abelard then appealed directly to Pope Innocent II, but Bernard's opinions had already preceded Abelard to Rome. Innocent II forced Abelard to confine himself to a monastery. Some students of the Medieval Church have categorized Bernard as a doctrinaire and a very conservative force in twelfth-century Christianity, citing his confrontation with Abelard in support of their view; this approach has given offense to some of Bernard's apologists.⁴⁷ Regardless of one's judgment about the validity of Bernard's opposition to Abelard, it must be admitted that the theological conscience of Europe in the twelfth century received part of its form and substance from Bernard the Abbot of Clairvaux.

Capitula Errorum Abaelardi," followed by chapter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus, the particular reference referred to in the text above would be cited as Bernard, "Contra Errorum Abaelardi," VII, 17-18.

⁴⁵Bernard, Epistolas, CLXXXIX, 3. The translation is taken from Bruno Scott James, p. 210.

⁴⁶"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. III, Cap. V, 13-15.

⁴⁷Cf., S. St. Clair Morrison, "St. Bernard, Abelard and Arnald of Brescia," Irish Ecclesiastical Record, XCVII (May 1962), 304-312.

Until the end of his life, Bernard continued to interest himself in the affairs of the church. Geoffrey of Clairvaux reports that Bernard's last mission was the reconciliation of the townspeople of Metz with some neighboring princes.⁴⁸ But the man who had willingly submitted himself to the rigor of stringent ascetic discipline could not escape death. Death came to Bernard on August 18, 1153; his biographers report that his death was one of peace and joy, for Bernard was led by Christ from the body of death into the land of the living.⁴⁹ Two days later, Bernard was buried at Clairvaux.⁵⁰ The extraordinary quality and impact of Bernard's life was soon recognized. In 1174, less than twenty years after his death, Bernard was canonized by Pope Alexander III.⁵¹ Today, he is known as St. Bernard, the Mellifluous Doctor.

Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux, in his lifetime had been instrumental in resolving the Papal Schism in 1130, in preaching the Second Crusade of 1146-1148, in expressing the church's judgment on the theology of Abelard in 1140-1141, and in causing the Cistercian Order to flourish in Western Europe. The principles of Bernard displayed in each of these endeavors were first formulated in the crucible of monastic life at Citeaux and Clairvaux. For Bernard, the quest for salvation was the quest

⁴⁸"Vita Prima Bernardi," Lib. V, Cap. I, 1-3.

⁴⁹Ibid., Lib. V, Cap. II, 13.

⁵⁰Ibid., Lib. V, Cap. II, 15-16.

⁵¹Thomas Merton, The Last of the Fathers (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, c.1954), p. 44.

of the church, and the quest for salvation was the quest of monasticism. Bernard's life was not a duality of causes and effects, a duality of purposes and goals, but a unity of meaning: the application of the monastic ideal to the life of the church and its people.

St. Bernard's Thought on the Monastic Life

The recapitulation of St. Bernard's life and work has pointed to the conclusion that Bernard must be understood in terms of the monastic ideal. But this conclusion cannot be maintained without reference to his own writings and the enunciation of his own thought on monasticism. Consequently, the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to the presentation of Bernard's thought on monasticism. This presentation will be divided into five parts: the monastic vows, the nature of monasticism (asceticism, worship, and spiritual progression), monasticism and the way of salvation, motivation for the monastic life, and Bernard's personal evaluation of monasticism.

The Vows of Monasticism

The novice becomes a monk when he vows to live in obedience to the abbot of his monastery and to the Rule observed in that monastery; in poverty of worldly goods, and in perpetual chastity. Bernard of Clairvaux, as abbot and spiritual father of monks, attempted to interpret these vows for his monks. But Bernard's greatest concern was the correct understanding and application of the vow of obedience, as it

exemplified the Christian concept of obedience.

First of all, Bernard very clearly indicated that the vow is the result of a voluntary decision.⁵² No one and no institution may compel the individual to make a vow of any kind. The novice, after his period of probation, must freely come to his own decision about making the vows. But after the novice has come to his decision and has made his vows, compulsion begins; the vow then became a necessity which could not be abrogated or disregarded.⁵³ Once the vow has been made it must be kept; the monk has voluntarily committed himself and is irrevocably bound for life by the vow.

Bernard, however, recognized that in certain situations and because of certain circumstances a monk may obtain a

⁵²Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, cols. 1175-1176. This work is also reprinted in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 859-894.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," followed by chapter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus, the particular reference germane to the text above is cited as Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," I, 1-2.

⁵³Bernard, Epistolas, VII, 4. This letter was written to Monk Adam ca. 1126. Monk Adam had succeeded a certain Abbot Arnold, who had led a group of dissident monks away from an established monastery to form their own community, thus breaking their vow to obey the abbot and the Rule of their former monastery. In addition, see Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," III, 7.

dispensation from his vows. But Bernard did not attempt to define positively what situations and circumstances justify a dispensation. Even though dispensations could be obtained from the proper ecclesiastical authorities, dispensations were neither natural nor good.⁵⁴ A vow was made to be kept. Neither marriage,⁵⁵ nor the death of the abbot,⁵⁶ nor dissatisfaction with and antipathy toward the abbot and other monks⁵⁷ justified a dispensation from the vow. The only valid basis for a dispensation from a monastic vow was necessity: "'Ex necessitate enim fit mutatio legis.'"⁵⁸ Thus, a "higher necessity" must overcome the necessity of the vow. In the interim, in the life lived under the vow, the monks must patiently wait for the full revealing in Jesus Christ at the last day, living for Him and in Him, faithful to the vows of the monastic life.⁵⁹

Bernard's approach to the problem of the vow and dispensations from the vow was illustrated during his life by the counsel--often unsolicited--he gave to others who were faced with the dilemma of choosing between various forms of service in the church. Thus, Bernard wrote to Oger, a Canon Regular

⁵⁴Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," II, 4.

⁵⁵Ibid., XVII, 52.

⁵⁶Ibid., XVIII, 55.

⁵⁷Ibid., XVIII, 56.

⁵⁸Ibid., II, 5. Bernard is quoting Pope Leo.

⁵⁹Ibid., XX, 61.

who had resigned his position as Superior at Saint-Nicolas-des-Pres in 1139, that either he should never have undertaken the care of souls or he should have never relinquished his calling: the vow could not be broken at will.⁶⁰ To a nun of the convent of St. Mary of Troyes, who wanted to leave the convent and found a community that would be stricter in its monastic observance, Bernard wrote that she should remain where she was and edify her sisters in the religious life.⁶¹ To the abbot of St. John of Chartres, who had been nominated to become the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Bernard wrote that the vow and the responsibility of the vow made him a servant of other monks; he may not forget and forsake those whom he was called to serve.⁶²

Perhaps Bernard's approach to the monastic vow was best expressed in his famous first letter, addressed to his "nephew" Robert in 1119. Robert's parents had promised him as an infant to Cluny, but as a young man Robert joined Clairvaux. Later, troubled by his conscience because he had not fulfilled his parents' promise, Robert fled from Clairvaux and went to Cluny. Bernard wrote:

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? Why then are you so anxious about the vow your parents

⁶⁰Bernard, Epistolas, LXXXVII, 1. This letter was written ca. 1139.

⁶¹Bernard, Epistolas, CXV, 2. This letter is undated.

⁶²Bernard, Epistolas, LXXXII, 1-2. This letter was written ca. 1128.

made and yet so regardless for your own? It is out of your own mouth and not out of the mouth of your parents that you will be judged. Of your own vow, not of theirs, will you be called to render an account. Why does anyone try to bamboozle [sic!] you with an Apostolic absolution, you whose own conscience is bound by a divine sentence, "No one putting their hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God?" [Luke 9:62]⁶³

For Bernard of Clairvaux, the vow--once made--continues without interruption for the life of the one who vows. Dispensations may be granted, but only because a higher necessity than the vow dictated a dispensation. Bernard, however, did not indicate what that higher necessity might be. Bernard's understanding of the concept of the vow easily resolved itself in terms of black and white distinctions, with very few--if any--shades of grey.

On the surface, Bernard's comments on the vow of obedience also seemed to be quite categorical. Bernard wrote:

Do you not know that "to obey is better than sacrifice" [1 Sam. 15:22]? Have you not read in the Rule [of St. Benedict, Chap. 49] that whatever is done without the approval of your spiritual father must be imputed to vainglory and therefore has no merit? Have you not read in the Gospel how the boy Jesus set an example to dedicated youth, not disdaining to follow His parents to Nazareth, though He was Master and they learners, He God and they but human beings, He the Word and Wisdom and they only a carpenter and his wife? "And He was subject unto them," the sacred history [Luke 2:51] adds! How long will you be wise in your own eyes? God entrusts Himself to mortals and submits to them, and do you still walk in your own ways? You had received a good spirit,

⁶³Bernard, Epistolas, I, 9. Actually, Robert was Bernard's cousin, not his nephew. The translation is taken from Bruno Scott James, p. 15.

but you use it ill; and I am fearful lest Satan should overthrow you through the lack of prudence.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the vow of monastic obedience was limited in its application. The monk only vowed obedience according to the Rule of St. Benedict. What was not included in this Rule was not vowed and, consequently, was not subject to obedience. Monastic obedience must not be slavish and totalitarian, but brotherly.⁶⁵

The vow of monastic obedience must not be interpreted legalistically. The criterion for determining what was to be obeyed and what was to be disregarded was the Rule of St. Benedict. However, Bernard recognized that it was sometimes

⁶⁴Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, Sermones in Cantica, Numero LXXXVI, Compectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), IV, col. 2769. This work is also reprinted in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Sermones in Cantica Numero LXXXVI," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1854), CLXXXIII, cols. 785-1198.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, followed by the sermon and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus the particular reference in the text above is cited as Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XIX, 7. The English translation is from Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, translated and edited by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1952), p. 49.

Cf., Saint Benedict, The Rule of Saint Benedict, edited and translated by Abbot Justin McCann (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1952), pp. 114-115. This edition of the Rule contains the Latin text and English translation on facing pages. Hereafter, this Rule will be cited as The Rule of Saint Benedict, followed by the chapter number: thus The Rule of Saint Benedict, Chap. 49.

⁶⁵Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," IV-V, 10-11 and XVI, 48.

difficult to determine what was to be obeyed and what was to be disregarded. Besides determining what was good or bad, the monk was also faced with situations in which he had to decide between what was good and what was better, between what was bad and what was less bad, between what was done out of inner necessity and compulsion and what was done out of love for God.⁶⁶ Applying the vow of monastic obedience to the situations that arose in daily monastic life was sometimes quite difficult. Even St. Benedict's Rule, said Bernard, recognized the dilemma of obedience when it allowed degrees of liability and punishment.⁶⁷

To compound the problem of monastic obedience, the monk was never free from the power and influence of sin. Sin constituted a burden upon the monk as he attempted to apply the vow of obedience in his life.⁶⁸ However, it was not disobedience which condemned and consigned the monk to hell but his own impenitence if he failed to recognize the imperfect way in which he kept the vow of obedience.⁶⁹ If the monk failed to repent of his sin--both the burden that he bore and the imperfect obedience which resulted--then the monk received the condemnation of eternity.

Bernard resolved the dilemma of monastic obedience by

⁶⁶Ibid., VII, 13-16.

⁶⁷Ibid., XII, 29: "An non denique et apud sanctum Benedictum propriae et distinctae ab invicem sententiae inveniuntur, alia de levioribus, alia de gravioribus inscripta culpa?" Cf., The Rule of Saint Benedict, Chaps. 24-25.

⁶⁸Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," X, 23-24.

⁶⁹Ibid., XIII, 32-34.

making the Christian conscience, instructed in the faith, the arbiter of obedience, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" [Romans 14:23].⁷⁰ The conscience of the monk, instructed in the faith, had to decide between what was good and bad, between what was good and better. If the conscience was disregarded, if the conscience made the wrong decision, the whole person was condemned and thrown into darkness.⁷¹ In addition, Bernard directed the attention of his monastic brothers to a more objective source of consolation and strength for the life of monastic obedience. The burden of obeying could be lightened and the monk could be consoled through Jesus Christ, "Who is the propitiation for sin."⁷² Moreover, Bernard urged his readers to trust in God and draw their strength for obedience from God Himself.⁷³

The vow of monastic obedience could be applied in the life of the monk only with extreme care and concern, for it was difficult to arrive at certain and absolutely correct decisions. Even though Bernard did direct the attention of his readers to Christ and God for strength and support, Bernard's thought created uncertainty and trepidation in the monastic life of those he counseled. The monk must obey, but the monk

⁷⁰Ibid., XIV, 35.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., X, 24. Bernard quoted 1 John 2:1-2 at this point: "'advocatum habemus Jesum Christum Justum; et ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris.'" "

⁷³Ibid.

must also continually ask himself, "Is my obedience the best possible obedience?"

Unlike the vow of monastic obedience, the vow of poverty was relatively simple for Bernard to understand and apply because the vow of poverty was the negation of worldly concerns and appetites. Wealth and opulence and material beauty could only entice the monk away from his true calling.⁷⁴ Jean Leclercq makes this judgment:

For St. Bernard, the royal road which bends neither to the right nor to the left is the one on which those march who, wanting to avoid bypaths, detours and occasions for dissipation resulting from the possession of earthly goods, sell all that they have and devote themselves to God alone.⁷⁵

The application of the vow of monastic poverty involved the ability to distinguish between the spirit and the body, between God and the things of the world. Bernard's concept of monastic poverty was probably most clearly expressed--although mixed with a liberal measure of satire and rhetoric--in the Apology he addressed to William of St. Thierry.⁷⁶ In this

⁷⁴Norman F. Cantor, "The Crisis of Western Monasticism, 1050-1130," American Historical Review, LXVI (October 1960), 51-52.

⁷⁵Leclercq, p. 133.

⁷⁶Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici Abbatem," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, cols. 1221-1246. This work is also reprinted in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Apologia ad

Apology, Bernard severely criticized the Cluniac monks for the opulence of their buildings, the softness of their habits, and the superabundance of rich foods and drink with which they nourished themselves. As far as St. Bernard was concerned, the Cluniac monks have either forgotten or deliberately rejected the monastic ideal of simple poverty.⁷⁷ In a letter to Thomas, the Provost of Beverly, apparently a man of some wealth, Bernard indicated that the wealth of this world soon passes away and that only the wealth of a good conscience is acceptable before God.⁷⁸

Bernard's whole approach to the vow of monastic poverty will become clearer in another section of this chapter as Bernard's thought on asceticism is presented.⁷⁹ Let it suffice at this point to conclude that monastic poverty, for Bernard, must be understood literally.

The third vow, the vow of perpetual chastity, did not receive extensive treatment or exposition from Bernard's pen. Of course, he expected all monks to live a chaste and pure

Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici Abbatem," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 895-918.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici," followed by chapter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively.

⁷⁷Bernard, "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici," IX, 20-21.

⁷⁸Bernard, Epistolas, CDXI, 3.

⁷⁹Infra, pp. 36-38.

life in the unmarried estate, and he specifically enjoined the Knights Templar to live the celibate life.⁸⁰ But Bernard did not maintain that perpetual virginity was the sine qua non of salvation; in fact, emphasis on virginity could lead to a terrible kind of spiritual pride:

The more honourable the gift of chastity, the greater the injury you do it in tarnishing its beauty within you by any admixture of pride. It would have been better for you not to be a virgin than to be puffed up and grow insolent by virginity. Virginity is not for all; it is for the few; and there are few among the few that unite humility with virginity. Wherefore, if you can only admire the virginity of Mary without being able to imitate it, study to copy her humility, and it will be sufficient for you. But if with virginity you possess humility, then you are great indeed.⁸¹

Virginity was a great gift of God, but it was not something that everyone should desire because God does not give

⁸⁰Bernard, "Ad Milites Templi," IV, 7.

⁸¹Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Laudibus Virginis Matris," Sermones de Tempore, et de Sanctis, ac de Diversis, Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), III, cols. 1669-1670. This material can also be found in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Sermones de Tempore et de Sanctis, ad de Diversis," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1854), CLXXXIII, cols. 55-88.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "De Laudibus Virginis Matris," followed by sermon and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus, the quotation in the text above is cited as Bernard, "De Laudibus Virginis Matris," I, 6. The translation is from Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons of St. Bernard on Advent & Christmas, Including the Famous Treatise on the Incarnation called Missus Est, translated by an inhabitant of St. Mary's Convent, York [England] (London: R. & T. Washbourne, Ltd., 1909), p. 30.

this gift to everyone. For Bernard, there was even a greater gift, that of humility; virginity without humility was damnable.

The vows of monasticism must be made in all seriousness and with all understanding; they must be freely made, without compulsion. But after the monk has vowed poverty, obedience, and chastity, he was expected to persevere in what he had vowed. Dispensations were possible, but they were exceptional and not at all ordinary to the monastic life. Bernard expected all monks to live joyfully under the vows, waiting for the End-time when Christ would reveal Himself and take to Himself those who had persevered in the fight of faith.

The Nature of Monasticism

Ideally, the monk obeyed his abbot according to the specific Rule in force in his monastery; he lived apart from and without regard for the accumulation of possessions, and he lived without a wife and family. This kind of life, however, was not an end in itself, but only a means. The monastic life was undertaken voluntarily so that the pilgrimage through life with God would not be hindered by the responsibilities of wife and family, the struggle to earn daily bread, and the burden of autonomy. In this section, the purposes and goals as well as the method or process of monastic life--in short, the nature of monasticism--according to Bernard will be discussed.

Within the Cistercian community, monastic life was strongly influenced by ascetic ideals: withdrawals from the

world and the submission of the flesh.⁸² The Cistercians stressed the ascetic ideal vigorously. Bernard's comments on asceticism exemplify the spirit of the Cistercian Order.

Bernard emphasized the needs of the body over against human desires. Thus, food and clothing were to be simple in preparation and appearance, just sufficient to sustain and shelter the body so that the soul could wage its battle for spiritual life.⁸³ The appearance and cleanliness of the body was also unimportant, for the monk must flee the vanities of the world.⁸⁴ And the body itself must be kept firmly in subjection, disciplined through physical punishments and manual labor.⁸⁵ While in the physical body, the monk must die to the world so that after the death of the body, the monk might live forever with God. Through the death of the body, the monk was clothed in joy.⁸⁶ Bernard maintained that the cares of the world--the quest for food, clothing, shelter, and the amenities of life--contended with the call of God and eventually

⁸²Norman F. Cantor, "The Crisis of Western Monasticism, 1050-1130," American Historical Review, LXVI (October 1960), 65-66. Cf., Tout, pp. 202-203.

⁸³Bernard, "Ad Milites Templi," IV, 7; Bernard, "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici," X, 24-26.

⁸⁴Bernard, "Ad Milites Templi," IV, 7.

⁸⁵Bernard, Epistolas, I, 2, and Epistolas, CII, 1-2. The date for the second letter is unknown; the date for the first letter, addressed to his cousin Robert, is 1119.

⁸⁶Bernard, Epistolas, CV. This letter is undated; it is addressed to a certain Romanus, a subdeacon of the Roman Curia.

obliterated God's call.⁸⁷ In a letter addressed to the Cistercian monks at St. Anastasius, outside Rome, Bernard expressed himself quite clearly. Even though the monks at St. Anastasius were frequently plagued with sicknesses of every kind, they should not be so anxious to secure medical assistance; rather, they should be more concerned about the health of their souls.⁸⁸

Bernard's thought on asceticism also extended to architecture and sculpture. The magnificent and colorful buildings and furnishings at Cluny were judged by Bernard to be a basic infringement on the simplicity of the Benedictine Rule.⁸⁹ Monks were soldiers of God, not to be pampered by physical beauty and ornate quarters. The desires of the body must never be served.⁹⁰

Bernard himself practiced the asceticism he taught others.⁹¹ In the year of his death, 1153, Bernard indicated to Arnold of Bonnevaux the results of asceticism in his own body. He

⁸⁷Bernard, Epistolas, CVII, 13. This letter is undated; it is addressed to Thomas, Provost of Beverly.

⁸⁸Bernard, Epistolas, CCCXLV, 2. This letter was written ca. 1140.

⁸⁹Bernard, "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici," XII, 28-29.

⁹⁰Ibid., IX, 22. A very brief, but adequate, summary of the ascetic emphasis in Bernard's Apology to William of St. Thierry is found in M. D. Knowles, Cistercians and Cluniacs: The Controversy between St. Bernard and Peter the Venerable (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 18-19.

⁹¹Supra, pp. 12-13.

could not consume solid food, and he could not eat any great quantity of food at any one meal. His feet were swollen, as though he had dropsy, and death was imminent.⁹² And yet, this condition did not deter Bernard from upholding the ascetic as the teacher of Christendom and the savior of the papacy.⁹³

Although Bernard lived the ascetic life and counseled others to do the same, the ascetic life also was not an end in itself. The ascetic life destroyed self-will and self-service so that the work of God could be performed. And the work of God was worship, a work which should be performed joyfully and wholeheartedly.⁹⁴ Bernard commented on the purposes and manner of worship:

I exhort you, therefore, beloved, to apply yourselves to the Divine praises with complete attention, and with energy. When I say energy, I mean that you should wait upon the Lord with zest as well as reverence; you should not be lazy and drowsy, yawning and sparing your voices, lopping your words off short in the middle or leaving whole words out; you must not sing through your noses, in a soft, feeble, womanish voice, but must pronounce the utterances of the Holy Spirit with the manly voice and disposition that their dignity requires. And when I say that you should recite your Office with complete attention, I mean that, while you chant, you should think of nothing except what you are chanting. It is not only empty, idle thoughts that I am bidding you avoid; at that time and in that place, you should repress also all thoughts about the work which some of you are given for the common good, though at other times such thoughts must often occupy your

⁹²Bernard, Epistolas, CCCX.

⁹³This is the judgment of Hayden V. White, "The Gregorian Ideal and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXI (July-September 1960), 347.

⁹⁴Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XLVII, 8.

minds. I would even advise you not to take with you, when you go to choir, the thoughts which were suggested to you by the books you were reading in the cloister just before, or those which you may get from hearing me discourse, here in the place of listening to the Holy Spirit. They are profitable thoughts; but they will be of small profit to you, if you turn them over while you sing the psalms! For the Holy Spirit does not like you to bring forward at that time something other than your duty, which makes you neglect the thing that is your duty to do.⁹⁵

Bernard exhorted the monks committed to his care to be diligent in the work of God, in worship, giving attention to both the content and the method of worship. Building on the results of asceticism and worship, the monk must progress to the achievement of his goal, union with God.

For Bernard, Clairvaux was an earthly Jerusalem connected to the one in heaven by wholehearted devotion, by conformity of life and by a certain spiritual affinity.⁹⁶ The monks at Clairvaux engaged in a spiritual pilgrimage which would eventually result in their transfer from the earthly Jerusalem at Clairvaux to the heavenly Jerusalem. Because this pilgrimage and quest was so very important, Bernard insisted that monks must cast off everything superfluous so that the monastic quest was not interrupted or made impossible by vanities.⁹⁷ The monk was flying upward from the burdens of life and humanity to the

⁹⁵Ibid. Italics were supplied in the translation, Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, translated and edited by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1952), pp. 147-148. Cf., Bernard, Epistolas, CCCXCVIII, 2. This letter, undated, was addressed to Abbot Guy of Montier-Ramey in response to Abbot Guy's request that Bernard prepare an Office in honor of St. Victor.

⁹⁶Bernard, Epistolas, LXIV, 2. This letter was written to Alexander, the Bishop of London, ca. 1129.

⁹⁷Bernard, "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici, XIII, 30.

life of the New Heavenly Jerusalem.⁹⁸

Bernard used several concepts to express the idea of spiritual progression from earth to heaven. One method Bernard used was his definition of the four stages of love. In the first stage of love, the individual loved himself for his own sake.⁹⁹ He was concerned about no one but himself. Everything he did was centered in himself. The second stage of love was loving God selfishly, because the individual discovered that God could serve his own individual welfare.¹⁰⁰ The third stage was loving God for God's own sake. The individual arrived at this stage of love when he realized that God is lovely and gracious in and of Himself. Bernard was of the opinion that

⁹⁸Leclercq, p. 72.

⁹⁹Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Diligendo Deo, Liber seu Tractatus ad Haimericum S. R. E. Cardinalem et Cancellarium," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, cols. 1360-1361. This work is also reprinted in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Diligendo Deo, Liber seu Tractatus ad Haimericum S. R. E. Cardinalem et Cancellarium," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 973-1000.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "De Diligendo Deo," followed by chapter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus, the specific reference cited in the text above is Bernard, "De Diligendo Deo," XV, 39.

In addition, see Bernard, Epistolas, XI, 8, for a summary of the four stages of love. This letter was written ca. 1125 to Prior Guy and other monks of the Grande Chartreuse.

¹⁰⁰Bernard, "De Diligendo Deo," VIII, 25 and XV, 39.

the individual remained at this stage of love for a long period of time.¹⁰¹ The fourth and final stage of love was man loving himself solely for God's sake.¹⁰² Bernard admitted that he had not attained to this fourth stage of love, and he suggested that the fourth stage was only attained after death at the resurrection of all the dead.¹⁰³

Bernard also used the concept of humility to describe the ascent of the soul from the prison of earth to the freedom of heaven. In effect, Bernard prescribed a system of ascent based on the concept of humility.

Humility, as Bernard defined it in his "De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae" is that thorough self-examination which makes a man contemptible in his own sight and thus forces him to turn his complete attention to God and His truth.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹Ibid., IX, 26 and XV, 39.

¹⁰²Ibid., X, 27 and XV, 39.

¹⁰³Ibid., XI, 31.

¹⁰⁴Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, col. 1283. This work is also reprinted in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae, Tractatus," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 941-972.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "De Gradibus Humilitatis," followed by chapter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus, Bernard's definition of humility is cited as follows: Bernard, "De Gradibus Humilitatis," I, 2.

By truth, the monk ascends to God.¹⁰⁵ But, said Bernard, there are three steps of truth: truth in oneself (ascertained by judging oneself), truth in one's neighbors (ascertained by sympathizing with them), and truth in its own nature (ascertained by contemplating with a pure heart).¹⁰⁶ Bernard then used the remainder of "De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae" to show his readers how one attains to the first step of truth by walking in the path of humility. However, Bernard showed the path of humility by inverting the path (or ladder) of humility and speaking in terms of pride.¹⁰⁷ Bernard's rationale for this method was that in walking from one step of humility to another, the monks were simply retracing the journey they made from one step of pride to the next step of pride.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the first step of humility going up is the twelfth step of pride going down. By retracing his journey of pride, the monk should become humble and cross the threshold of the first step of truth, which would then allow him to attain the remaining two steps of truth.

In the monastery, the goal was the attainment of full truth, of full union with God, of full fellowship with the

¹⁰⁵Bernard, "De Gradibus Humilitatis," II, 5.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., III, 6.

¹⁰⁷The path of pride was divided into twelve steps or ladder-rungs: curiosity, frivolity, foolish mirth, boastfulness, singularity, conceit, audacity, excusing sins, hypocritical confession, defiance, freedom to sin, and habitual sinning. Bernard, "De Gradibus Humilitatis," X-XXI, 28-51.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., IX, 27.

Divine. Everything in the life of the monk must contribute to the attainment of this goal. Therefore, the body was severely subjugated and worship was performed so that by all means spiritual progression became a reality in the life of each monk.

Monasticism and the Way of Salvation

The Idea of spiritual progression, including both the goal and the process of attaining the goal of monasticism, was intimately related to an understanding of the way of salvation. In monasticism, the monk attempted to fulfill his desire for God by striving daily for a closer relationship with Him, a closer and more intimate union. In other words, monasticism was a quest for reconciliation. A sense of alienation undergirded the quest and its basic idea of spiritual progression. But reconciliation between God and man could never be realized apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ. And this consideration led to the study of human acceptance or apprehension of Christ through faith and the manifestation of this faith through good works.

God is the way of salvation: ". . . Domini est salus; imo ipse salus, ipse et via est ad salutem. . . ." ¹⁰⁹ God

¹⁰⁹ Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio, Tractatus, ad Guillelmum Abbatem Sancti-Theoderici," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Com- plectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata

manifested Himself as the way of salvation by sending His only Son into the world.¹¹⁰ Christ came into the world and took on Himself human nature, though without sin and concupiscence, thereby liberating people from the power and condemnation of sin.¹¹¹ Because Christ was fully human and, thus, experienced the weakness of humanity, Christ is patient and merciful in receiving sinners.¹¹² One translator of Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs has paraphrased Bernard's attitude

et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, col. 1394. This work has also been reprinted in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio Tractatus, ad Guilelmum Abbatem Sancti-Theoderici," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1862), CLXXXII, cols. 1001-1030.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio," followed by chapter and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus the particular reference germane to the text above is cited as Bernard, "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio," XIII, 43.

¹¹⁰ Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "In Festo Annuntiationis Beatae Mariae Virginis," Sermones de Tempore, et de Sanctis, ac de Diversis, Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), III, col. 2106. This material is also printed in Migne's edition: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, "Sermones de Tempore et de Sanctis, ac de Diversis," Patrologiae: Patrum Latinorum, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1854), CLXXXIII, cols. 383-398.

Hereafter, this work will be cited as Bernard, "In Festo Annuntiationis Beatae Mariae Virginis," followed by sermon and paragraph numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. Thus, the particular reference to the text above is cited as Bernard, "In Festo Annuntiationis Beatae Mariae Virginis," III, 1.

¹¹¹ Bernard, "In Festo Annuntiationis Beatae Mariae Virginis," II, 5.

¹¹² Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, IX, 5. Cf., Bernard "De Gradibus Humilitatis," III, 8-10.

toward Christ's humanity as follows:

Black indeed was He Who had "no form nor comeliness" [Isaiah 53:2], Who was "a worm and no man, a very scorn of men and the outcast of the people" [Psalm 22:6], Who was even made to be sin for our sakes. But ask the apostles how they saw Him on the mount, or ask the angels what He is like on Whom they yearn to look; and they will tell you He is beautiful. He is, then, beautiful in Himself, and black but for thy sake. How beautiful art Thou, Lord Jesus, in the humanity that Thou dost share with me, how beautiful not only in Thy deeds of wonder but in Thy truth, Thy gentleness, Thy righteousness! Blessed is he who, pondering Thy life as Man with men, sets out with all his might to copy Thee!¹¹³

But Christ was more than a perfect man, able to commiserate with mankind and fulfill for man what man could not fulfill for himself. Christ was also the Holy God and, as God, overcame the Devil and death. According to Bernard, one of the primary blessings of the Incarnation was the liberation of man from the power of the Devil.¹¹⁴ The result of this liberation was that man no longer needed to fear enslavement in hell throughout eternity.

Bernard was concerned to show the application of Christ's passion and death in the lives of Christians. Christ suffered and died for people so that they would not have to suffer and die eternally. Christ's death was the charter of man's eternal freedom from death.¹¹⁵ In this connection, Bernard cited Romans 5:18-19, by one man (Adam) sin and death entered the world and

¹¹³Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XXV, 9. The paraphrase is from Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, translated and edited by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1952), pp. 74-75.

¹¹⁴Bernard, "Contra Capitula Errorum Abaelardi," V, 11-14.

¹¹⁵Bernard, "Ad Milites Templi," XI, 18.

by another man (Christ) life and righteousness re-entered the world.¹¹⁶ Thus, if all men were guilty coram Deo by virtue of the Fall, they were also alive coram Deo by virtue of Christ's death. As Bernard himself wrote: "Mors itaque Christi, mors est meae mortis: quia ille mortuus est, ut ego viveram."¹¹⁷ Bernard even urged the Knights Templar to re-capture the sepulchre of Christ in Palestine, not because it was a holy place, but because it was the sign or the seal of man's resurrection and his eternal freedom from death.¹¹⁸

Bernard told his monks at Clairvaux that he was comforted and encouraged in the monastic quest by the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ. In Christ's total life, Bernard was supplied with everything that he lacked for salvation.¹¹⁹ In one of his sermons, Bernard provided the monks at Clairvaux with this advice:

Meditate, then, upon these things--God's goodness in creating you and all the world, the Lord's Self-emptying for our redemption, His taking flesh, His bearing of the cross, His death. Steep yourselves in odours such as these, that by them the foul stench of your sins may be dispelled and your own hearts be rendered redolent of these same fragrances, which are as strong to save as they are sweet.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶Ibid., XI, 23.

¹¹⁷Ibid., XI, 27.

¹¹⁸Ibid., XI, 29.

¹¹⁹Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XLIII, 2.

¹²⁰Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XI, 7-8. The translation is taken from Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, translated and edited by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1952), p. 36.

By meditating on this Christ, by preaching this Christ to all men, the darkness of sin and spiritual blindness would be removed, for Christ has illuminated mankind.¹²¹ Christ not only saved mankind through His total life and work, but Christ also provided mankind with the daily strength necessary for life. Christ was the great example which all men--including monks--must follow in their quest for salvation.¹²² Bernard's Christological thought was perhaps best summarized in these words from his "De Deligendo Deo":

So it behoves us, if we would have Christ for a frequent guest, to fill our hearts with faithful meditations on the mercy He showed in dying for us, and on His mighty power in rising again from the dead. To this David [in Psalm 62:11] testified when he sang, "God spake once, and twice I have also heard the same; that power belongeth unto God; and that Thou, Lord, art merciful. [sic] And surely there is proof enough and to spare in that Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification, and ascended into heaven that He might protect us from on high, and sent the Holy Spirit for our comfort. Hereafter He will come again for the consummation of our bliss. In His Death He displayed His mercy, in His Resurrection His power; both combine to manifest His glory."¹²³

And, in another place, Bernard expressed himself precisely: "Mihi autem absit gloriari, nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi, in qua est salus, vita et resurrectio nostra."¹²⁴

¹²¹Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XV, 6.

¹²²Bernard, "De Gradibus Humilitatis," I, 1 and III, 6-7.

¹²³Bernard, "De Diligendo Deo," III, 9. The translation is from Bernard of Clairvaux, On Loving God and Selections from Sermons, edited [and translated] by Hugh Martin (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1959), p. 25.

¹²⁴Bernard, "Contra Capitula Errorum Abaelardi," IX, 24.

In the Christological thought of Bernard, no extensive effort was made to understand Christ precisely in terms of "person," "nature," and "substance," in terms of "humiliation" and "exaltation." In addition, no one theory of atonement was characteristic of Bernard's soteriology, although the idea of freedom--from death, from the Devil--was expressed frequently. For Bernard, Christ was not a person to be studied and analyzed and synthesized, but a person to be encountered and incorporated into oneself. Christ was the heart and core of salvation, the Redeemer, the Mediator, the Reconciler, and the Savior. Without Christ salvation did not exist.

Bernard's understanding of Christ--Who He is and what He does--was never divorced from faith, for it was by faith that the individual was able to know Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior. For Bernard, faith was certainty about Christ.¹²⁵ The only faith Bernard knew was faith in Christ alone.¹²⁶ And faith it is which must inform conscience.¹²⁷ In this life, faith was the beacon light by which the Christian walked, although faith was only a shadow of the full light in Christ which is to come.¹²⁸ Bernard also wrote that the Christian's

¹²⁵Ibid., IV, 9.

¹²⁶Bernard, "De Laudibus Virginis Matris," IV, 2.

¹²⁷Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," XIV, 41.

¹²⁸Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XXXI, 9-10.

justification and forgiveness of sins comes by faith,¹²⁹ because the salvation of the Christian was the work and gift of God.¹³⁰ Repeating St. Paul's words in Romans 3:28, Bernard affirmed that God justified man by grace through faith.¹³¹ The righteousness of the Christian by faith was the result of the work of Christ. It has been suggested by several scholars that Bernard was the great precursor of Martin Luther in declaring unhesitatingly that righteousness comes by faith and that righteousness is essentially the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake.¹³² The evidence does warrant the conclusion that salvation belonged to man, as far as Bernard was concerned, only because man received in faith that which was given to him by God.¹³³

But faith could not stand alone in the history of the

¹²⁹ Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XXII, 7: "Per justitiam deinde, quae ex fide est, solvit funes peccatorum, gratis justificans peccatorem." Ibid., XXII, 8: "Quamobrem quisquis pro peccatis compunctis esurit et stitit justitiam, credat in te qui justificas impium, et solam justificatus per fidem, pacem habebit ad Deum."

¹³⁰ Bernard, "In Festo Annuntiationis Beatae Mariae Virginis," I, 1: "remissionem peccatorum habere non possis, nisi per indulgentiam Dei. . . ."

¹³¹ Ibid., I, 3: "Sic enim arbitratur Apostolus, gratis justificari hominem per fidem."

¹³² August Wilhelm Dieckhoff, Justin, Augustin, Bernhard und Luther: Der Entwicklungsgang christlicher Wahrheitserfassung in der Kirche als Beweis für die Lehre der Reformation (Leipzig: Justus Naumann, 1882), pp. 56-59, and Theo. Dierks, "The Doctrine of Justification According to Bernard of Clairvaux," Concordia Theological Monthly, VIII (October 1937), 749.

¹³³ Cf., Bernard, "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio," XIV, 47-49.

Christian life. Faith was the basis for good works, for God Himself has said that man cannot please Him without faith and that whatever is done without faith is sin.¹³⁴ Faith must manifest itself in works of love,¹³⁵ for it was only by the works of love that the Christian became known and recognized and his faith became visible.¹³⁶

Thus far, Bernard's christological and soteriological thought and his comments on faith and works are quite clear and precise. Nevertheless, Bernard distorted the beauty of his thought on the way of salvation in his consideration of the relationship between divine grace and man's free will. Bernard had said that salvation was the work and gift of God, accepted by the individual through faith, which in turn was manifested in good works. But then--or, at the same time-- Bernard wrote, "Consentire enim salvari est."¹³⁷ Free will was necessary in the wider work of salvation because it was the agent by which man and God were brought together. If man had not decided that he wanted to be saved, he could not have received the free gift of salvation offered by God through Christ.¹³⁸ Bernard also wrote that the difference between a good or a bad decision of the free will was the result of the

¹³⁴Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, LI, 2. Cf., Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 14:23.

¹³⁵Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, XXIV, 7-8.

¹³⁶Bernard, Epistolas, CVII, 1. This letter is addressed to Thomas, Provost of Beverly; it is undated.

¹³⁷Bernard, "De Gratis et Libero Arbitrio," I, 2.

¹³⁸Ibid., I, 1-2.

working of the grace of God.¹³⁹ In another place, Bernard wrote that free will has not been impaired by the Fall of Adam into sin.¹⁴⁰ In addition, Bernard maintained that free will was not curtailed by the temptations and difficulties of life, because Christ always preserved the free will in those who accepted Him.¹⁴¹ For Bernard, grace and free will were not mutually antagonistic, but complementary: God's grace drew those who would be drawn to Him.¹⁴² Because he was serving God's church willingly, Bernard wrote, he would receive glory; this thought, said Bernard, gave him comfort and respite.¹⁴³ Luther, however, found it difficult--if not impossible--to agree with Bernard on the relationship between grace and free will.

It is quite difficult to form a synthesis of Bernard's thought on christology, soteriology, faith, and works. For the most part, Bernard expressed himself clearly and even brilliantly: Christ was his Savior, the God-man Who lived, worked, and died, and then rose again for him. On the basis of this faith Bernard performed good works. But then Bernard's thought on the nature of free will rises to the surface and

¹³⁹Ibid., VI, 16-18.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., VIII, 24.

¹⁴¹Ibid., IX, 37.

¹⁴²Ibid., IX, 36.

¹⁴³Bernard, Epistolas, CXLIV, 3. This letter was written to the monks at Clairvaux ca. 1137.

obscures the evangelical clarity otherwise prevalent. Bernard seems to say that because he has made a free choice to be saved, he can accept salvation from God in Christ.

Motivation for the Monastic Life: The Idea of Love

The monastic quest for salvation, for union with God, was unified and given wholeness in Bernard's thought by love.¹⁴⁴ Love was the heart and core of Bernard's whole understanding of the nature and function of the church.¹⁴⁵ Bernard described what he meant by love in his famous series of sermons on the Song of Songs when he described the love-relationship between the bride and the bridegroom, the soul or the church and Christ: it was a burning, ardent, rapturous love that knew only the Beloved and only served Him.¹⁴⁶ Bernard specifically told the monks that the motivation for obedience within the monastery was love. Any obedience or service rendered to the abbot and the other brothers for any reason but love was counterfeit obedience and service.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴Leclercq, p. 276. Cf., John Herman Randall, Jr., The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age (Revised edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, c.1940), pp. 68-69.

¹⁴⁵Yves Congar, "Die Ekklesiologie des hl. Bernhard," Bernhard von Clairvaux, Mönch und Mystiker: Internationaler Bernhardt-kongress, Mainz 1953, edited by Joseph Lortz (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1955), p. 77.

¹⁴⁶Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, VII, 3.

¹⁴⁷Bernard, "De Precepto et Dispensatione," VI, 12.

But I serve him willingly because charity sets me free. To this willing service I exhort you, dearest brethren. Serve him with the charity which has no room for fear, for which nothing is too much, which looks for no reward, and which yet impels as nothing else can. No fear has the same power to spur us on, no reward can so attract us, no sense of obligation can demand so much of us. Let this be the bond between us, by this let me be ever present to you, especially at the hours of prayer, dearest brothers.¹⁴⁸

Bernard also indicated why members of the church should have love for God, why love should be the power for their lives: they owe such love to God because He first loved them through Christ.¹⁴⁹ In gratitude the Christian, the monk, must love God.¹⁵⁰ Bernard did not seem to know of a love that was spontaneous.

There was, however, another facet of love which Bernard expressed succinctly in his letter to Thomas, Provost of Beverly:

Let no one who loves God have any doubt that God loves him. The love of God for us precedes our love for him and it also follows it. How could he be reluctant to love us in return for our love when he loved us even when we did not love him? I say he loved us. As a pledge of his love you have the Spirit, and you have a faithful witness to it in Jesus, Jesus crucified. A double and irrefutable argument of God's love for us. Christ died and so deserved our love. The holy Spirit works upon us and makes us love him. Christ has given us a reason for loving himself, the Spirit the power to love him. The one commends his great love to us, the other gives it. In the one we see the object of our love, by the other we have the power to love.

¹⁴⁸Bernard, *Epistolas*, CXLIII, 3. This letter was written to the monks at Clairvaux ca. 1135. The translation is from Bruno Scott James, p. 173, adapted by the present writer.

¹⁴⁹Bernard, "De Diligendo Deo," I, 1.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, II, 2-6 and V, 15.

The former provides the occasion for our love, the latter provides the love itself. How shameful it would be to look with ungrateful eyes upon the Son of God dying for us! But this could easily be were the Spirit lacking. "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us" [Romans 5:5]. Loved we love in return, and loving we deserve to be still more loved.¹⁵¹

Thus, man earned the right to be loved by God! Thus, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit proved that God loves! Thus, man was certain that God loved him in so far as he knew that the love of God by virtue of the Spirit's working existed in him! It is with justification that Dieckhoff criticized Bernard's theology of love as semi-pelagian.¹⁵²

St. Bernard's Evaluation of the Monastic Life

Before this chapter can be concluded, however, it is necessary to notice Bernard's personal evaluation of monasticism, that life of asceticism, worship and spiritual progression, motivated and empowered by love. It should be obvious at this point that Bernard appreciated monasticism as the Christian life. Monasticism was the way in which true spirituality could be fostered; the way in which the things of the world were excluded so that the things of God could be served; the way in which the individual could rise to meet God. Monasticism was The Way par excellence.

¹⁵¹Bernard, Epistolae, CVII, 8. The translation is from Bruno Scott James, pp. 150-151. Cf., Bernard, Sermones in Cantica, I, 8.

¹⁵²August Wilhelm Dieckhoff, pp. 60, 63.

Bernard appreciated the efforts of all monastic communities to live the Christian life. Whether the monks were Cluniacs or Cistercians was of no great concern for Bernard, for "Unum opere teneo, caeteros charitate."¹⁵³ The unity of the church was so great that the multiplicity of orders was unimportant, for they all had the same goal and purpose. The church held and embraced all who sought God's truth with sincerity: "Sicut itaque illic multae maniones in una domo; ita hic multi ordines sunt in Ecclesia una. . . ."¹⁵⁴ But Bernard also indicated quite clearly that monasticism was of far greater value and meaning than any other office or institution within the church. When the Cistercian Abbot of Tre Fontane near Rome was elected as Pope Eugenius III, Bernard wrote a letter to the Roman Curia in which he criticized the Curia for taking a man away from monastic simplicity and entangling his soul with the cares of the world and the church at large.¹⁵⁵

Perhaps the best expression of Bernard's appreciation of monasticism was contained in a short letter he wrote to the parents of Geoffrey of Peronne to console them on the loss of their son as he entered the monastery:

If God is making your son his own, as well as yours, so that he may become even richer, even more noble, even more distinguished and, what is better than all this, so that from being a sinner he may become a

¹⁵³Bernard, "Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti-Theoderici," IV, 8.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Bernard, Epistolas, CCXXXVII, 1. This letter was written in 1145.

saint, what do either you or he lose? But he must prepare himself for the kingdom which has been prepared for him from the beginning of the world. He must spend the short time which remains of his life on earth with us in order to scrape off the filth, of secular life and shake off the dust of the world, so as to be fit to enter the heavenly mansion. If you love him you will surely rejoice because he is going to the Father, and such a Father! It is true that he is going to God, but you are not losing him, on the contrary, through him you are gaining many sons. All of us at Clairvaux or of Clairvaux will receive him as a brother and you as our parents.

Knowing that he is tender and delicate perhaps you are afraid for his health under the harshness of our life. But this is the sort of fear of which the Psalm [14:5?] speaks when it says: "Fear unmans them where they have no cause to fear". [sic] Have comfort, do not worry, I shall look after him like a father and he will be to me a son until the Father of mercies, the God of all consolation, shall receive him from my hands. Do not be sad about your Geoffrey or shed any tears on his account, for he is going quickly to joy and not to sorrow. I will be for him both a mother and a father, both a brother and a sister. I will make the crooked path straight for him and the rough places smooth. I will temper and arrange all things that his soul may advance and his body not suffer. He will serve the Lord with joy and gladness, his son will be of the Lord's, for great is the glory of the Lord.¹⁵⁶

Bernard understood and appreciated monasticism as the one path open to people by which they could walk from death to life, away from the world and its temptations to God. In the fellowship of monks, life was joy for God was near.

¹⁵⁶Bernard, Epistolas, CX, 2. This letter is undated. The translation is from Bruno Scott James, pp. 160-161, adapted by the present writer.

CHAPTER III

MARTIN LUTHER: HIS APPRECIATION OF MONASTICISM

The portrayal of Luther's career will demonstrate it in detail, but let it be said at the outset that Luther must be understood first and foremost on the basis of his training in the monastery and his theological study.¹

Franz Lau's judgment on the impact of Luther's monastic experience for the Reformation is not so much a startling revelation of fact as it is the expression of a truth which is easily forgotten. For nearly twenty years of his life, from July 17, 1505, until October 9, 1524,² Luther was an Augustinian Eremit. As a monk Luther studied theology, became a professor of theology, and was granted the degree of Doctor of Theology. Seven years before he voluntarily left monasticism, Luther nailed the Ninety-five Theses on the church door at Wittenberg. Luther, the Augustinian Eremit, traveled to Augsburg, Leipzig, and Worms to debate and confess the theology of the emerging Reformation. A study of Luther's theology cannot overlook Luther's monastic experience, for it is within the framework of monasticism that the seed of reform was planted, grew, and began to produce fruit.

¹Franz Lau, Luther, translated by Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, c.1963), p. 31.

²Georg Buchwald, Luther-Kalendarium (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger Eger & Sievers, 1929), p. 1; Karl Benrath, Luther im Kloster, 1505-1525: Zum Verständnis und zur Abwehr (Halle a. d. S.: Kommissionsverlag von Rudolf Haupt, 1905), p. 88.

Luther's monastic experience as the background for Luther's own concepts about monastic life will constitute the scope of the present chapter. It should be obvious at the end of this chapter that Luther quite clearly rejected monasticism while paradoxically admitting the possibility of a God-pleasing monastic life. In Luther's treatment of monasticism, it will also be noticed that St. Bernard of Clairvaux was referred to again and again. On the basis of the presentation of Bernard's life and thought on monasticism in the previous chapter, it should be possible to draw some conclusions in the succeeding chapter about Luther's appreciation of Bernard with special reference to the concept of monasticism and its institutional form.

Luther's Monastic Experience

Martin Luther presented himself at the gates of the Augustinian Eremite monastery in Erfurt on July 17, 1505.³ Luther's decision to enter the monastery seems to have been a sudden one. Only six months earlier, on the Feast of the Epiphany, Luther had been granted the degree of Master of Arts⁴ by the faculty of Arts at the University in Erfurt. Luther's academic life had been centered in the study of "philosophy" (logic, dialectic, law, grammar, rhetoric, metaphysics, natural science, and ethics), under the direction of

³Buchwald, p. 1.

⁴Benrath, p. 21.

a faculty strongly influenced by the Renaissance Humanism of Italy.⁵ Consequently, Luther's decision to enter the monastery of Augustinian Eremites at Erfurt surprised his friends and associates.

Scholars have not been able to determine precisely what caused Luther to forsake the study of the free arts and enter the monastery. A number of causes have been suggested--the plague and subsequent death of some of his classmates at Erfurt,⁶ a serious knife-wound which Luther accidentally inflicted upon himself,⁷ and the frightful experience of being hurled to the ground by a bolt of lightning near Stotterheim⁸--but no one is able to indicate the precise cause for Luther's decision. It is recognized, however, that Luther's decision was quickly reached, probably because Luther himself felt that he had received a terrifying call from heaven.⁹ For the medieval man, the heavenly call could only be obeyed completely in the monastic setting.¹⁰

⁵Ibid., pp. 19-21.

⁶Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁷Otto Scheel, Martin Luther: Vom Katholizismus zur Reformation (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1921), I, 245-248.

⁸Robert Herndon Fife, The Revolt of Martin Luther (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 73-74.

⁹Scheel, I, 244, 250. Cf., Schwiebert, Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1950), p. 141.

¹⁰Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1950), pp. 32-33.

Near Stotterheim on July 2, 1505, Luther had vowed in the name of Ste. Ann that he would become a monk.¹¹ During the next two weeks, before he entered the monastery at Erfurt on July 17, Luther put his affairs in order and selected the monastery he would join. In Erfurt, he had a wide choice; at the end of the fifteenth century Erfurt was the location for twenty-two cloisters and monastic houses.¹² Luther decided to join the Order of Augustinian Eremites, the observant branch of the Augustinian Order founded in 1255.¹³

When Luther chose to join the Augustinian Eremites, he chose to take the monastic life very seriously. The Eremites diligently observed the monastic life, because the observance of both the letter and the spirit was their goal.¹⁴ But of greater significance for Luther's later life was the emphasis which the Augustinian Eremites placed on the study of the

¹¹Benrath, pp. 25-26.

¹²Th[eodor von] Kolde, Das religiöse Leben in Erfurt beim Ausgange des Mittelalters: Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte der Reformation (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1896), p. 3.

¹³See the editor's critical comments on the history and purpose of the Augustinian Eremites in Martin Luther, Letters I, edited and translated by Gottfried G. Krodel, in Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c.1963), XLVIII, 6, n. 3. Hereafter, this translation of Luther's letters will be cited as American Edition, XLVIII. In addition, Benrath, pp. 10-17, presents a succinct history of the Augustinian Eremites.

¹⁴Alphons Victor Müller, "Der Augustiner-Observantismus und die Kritik und Psychologie Luthers," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, XVIII (1921), 34.

Church Fathers and the Holy Scriptures.¹⁵ In short, the Augustinian Eremites exemplified a whole and perfected Catholicism, not a rotting and decayed Catholicism. In this setting, the Lutheran Reformation took seed and grew.

One year after his entrance into the monastery, Luther took the vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity.¹⁶ In the following year, on April 3, 1507, Luther was ordained as a priest, and on May 2 he consecrated the Eucharistic elements for the first time.¹⁷

It was not until 1510, however, that Luther rose to prominence among the Eremites; at that time he was selected to accompany Anton Kresz on a journey to Rome. The purpose of this trip was to appeal the decision to merge the observant and conventual branches of the Augustinian Order in Germany.¹⁸ Luther spent about one month in the Eternal City, from the end of December 1510 until the end of January 1511.¹⁹ There

¹⁵Lau, pp. 28-31.

¹⁶Benrath, p. 36.

¹⁷Buchwald, p. 1.

¹⁸Luther and Kresz went to Rome in behalf of the Eremite houses which did not want to merge with the conventual (or lax) branch of the Order in Germany. It should be noted that John von Staupitz, the Vicar of the German Eremites, supported the proposed merger; thus, Luther stood in opposition to Staupitz on this matter. The purposes and results of the trip to Rome have been adequately studied in Bernath, pp. 55ff.; Schwiebert, pp. 180ff.; and Alphons Victor Müller, "Der Augustiner-Observantismus und die Kritik und Psychologie Luthers," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, XVIII, 6ff.

¹⁹Buchwald, pp. 1-2. Cf., Schwiebert, pp. 183, 192.

can be no doubt that Luther saw a corrupt Rome, teeming with poverty and scandal,²⁰ but it is difficult to determine Luther's immediate reaction to conditions in Rome in 1510-1511. In Benrath's judgment, Luther's appreciation and understanding of the Church was heightened, in spite of what he saw, by his visit.²¹

The appeal of the Eremites was denied in Rome, and Luther and Kresz returned to Erfurt, arriving in that city in the late spring or early summer of 1511. In that same summer, Luther left Erfurt to begin his career as a teacher of theology at the University in Wittenberg.²²

In Wittenberg, Luther combined the roles of student--earning the coveted Doctor of Theology degree on October 19, 1512²³--lecturer, and monastic official. Shortly after Luther arrived, he was made the sub-prior of the Eremitic monastery in Wittenberg with special responsibility for the novitiate program.²⁴ Several years later, in 1515, Luther was elected for a three-year term to the position of District Vicar for the Eremites in Central Germany, with primary responsibility for the temporal and spiritual welfare of ten Eremitic houses.²⁵

²⁰Schwiebert, pp. 186, 191.

²¹Benrath, pp. 57-58.

²²Schwiebert, p. 192.

²³Buchwald, p. 2.

²⁴Benrath, p. 60; Schwiebert, p. 195.

²⁵Benrath, p. 60. Examples of Luther's activity as District Vicar can be found among his letters. In a letter to John Lang, addressed from Langensalza on May 29, 1516, Luther gave Lang

Luther was fully involved in the life and work of the Augustinian Eremites. From 1518, however, until 1524 when he left the monastery, Luther became increasingly involved in the reformatory movement. There is nothing to indicate that Luther's monastic experience left anything to be desired in terms of attitude or activity. On the surface, Martin Luther was a good--if not excellent--monk.

Nevertheless, Luther's monastic experience was anything but tranquil. Luther entered the monastery at Erfurt as a loyal son of the medieval church, but he left the monastery at Wittenberg as the Reformer. Luther's monastic experience culminated in a traumatic crisis.

The crisis was inherent in the medieval theological foundations of monasticism.

Now man is again assured that he can render satisfaction to God by special good works, such as fasting, prayers, alms, pilgrimages, various ecclesiastical services, and mainly by means of the powerful sacrifice of monasticism. It was but logical when one ascribed the mightiest expiatory effect to the greatest sacrifice, the entry into a cloister, and declared that a monk, after the performance of his vows, was as pure and innocent as a newly baptized child.²⁶

instructions on the best method of keeping records of expenditures for the maintenance of guest rooms at the Erfurt monastery: Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel, edited by G. Bebermeyer (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1930), I, 41-42. Hereafter, this volume will be cited as WAB, I, followed by page and line numbers where applicable. In another letter, written from Wittenberg on September 25, 1516, to Michael Dressel, Prior of the Monastery at Neustadt, Luther deposed Dressel because the other brothers could not work with Dressel; Luther also gave instructions in this letter for the election of a new prior; WAB, I, 57-59.

²⁶ Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought,

Monastic life was thought of as a work of atonement and expiation for sin; it was the ultimate human sacrifice by which sin is removed and the individual becomes acceptable before God. The effect of monasticism is the effect of baptism, holy purity. It was even asserted in some parts of the medieval church that monasticism was more effective than the first baptism.²⁷ Monasticism for the medieval church was regarded as the sure avenue to God.

Luther accepted monasticism in 1505 in such terms. He earnestly attempted to complete the quest of monasticism in his own life: he was striving for holiness, purity, and peace with God.²⁸ Later, in 1533, Luther frankly admitted that he honestly and diligently attempted to be an exemplary monk: "If there was ever a monk who got to heaven by monkery, it was I--as all those who knew me in the monastery will testify."²⁹

translated by Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1958), pp. 162-163.

²⁷Robert Herndon Fife, Young Luther: The Intellectual and Religious Development of Martin Luther to 1518 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 89-90.

²⁸Bainton, p. 45. Cf., John C. Mattes, "Luther's Fundamental Experience: The Significance of His Valuation of the Human Soul for the Present Conflicts with Totalitarianism," Lutheran Church Quarterly, X (October 1937), 422-423.

²⁹Martin Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch," D. Martin Luthers Werke, edited by Karl Drescher (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1912), XXXVIII, 143, 26-28. Hereafter, this work will be cited as Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, followed by page and line numbers, as illustrated in the preceding citation.

But the monastic quest did not give Luther any peace.

It is difficult to indicate when Luther began to realize the full extent of the crisis facing him in monasticism. Perhaps his recognition of the crisis began at his first Mass on May 2, 1507, when his father bitterly said, "Gott gebe, dass das Gelübde nicht ein Vertrug und teuflich Gespenst sei!"³⁰ Perhaps Hans Luther's words caused Martin to see for the first time the abyss between the ideal of monasticism and his own accomplishment of that ideal; his intentions and his results did not coincide.³¹ This tension did not confine itself to monasticism. The crisis in Luther's life began to include christology, grace and free will, and the essential but arbitrary righteousness of God.³² Eventually, the conflict became so comprehensive that it can be described in these words:

for Luther Justitia was the problem, not to be softened by putting alongside it other ideas, such as the mercy (miserercordia) or the goodness (bonitas) of God. Luther did not need to be told that all medieval theologians had a doctrine of Grace and of Justification. The illumination came when, through this very conception "Justice", [sic] there burst the saving intervention of a merciful God, displayed in Jesus Christ and freely bestowed on sinners.³³

But in the midst of the crisis, Luther's despair was total:

"Denn ich kandte Christum nicht mehr denn als einen gestrengen

³⁰Benrath, p. 44.

³¹Schwiebert, pp. 152-153.

³²Gerhard Ritter, Luther: His Life and Work, translated by John Riches (New York: Harper & Row, c.1963), pp. 28-30.

³³[Ernest] Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, 1521 (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Co., 1951), p. 35.

richter, für dem ich fliehen wolt und doch nicht entfliehen kundte."³⁴

In the bottomless depths of despair, Luther cried out for help and the monastic brotherhood attempted to meet his need as much as possible. John von Staupitz, the Vicar of the German Eremites, attempted to direct Luther's attention to the wounds and blood of Christ as a source of comfort and assurance.³⁵ Even at the beginning of the crisis in Erfurt, Luther's attention had been directed by an old priest to another comforter of monks, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.³⁶ Luther tried to lose himself in meditation on the passion and death of Christ, as Bernard had done, but he was not able to obtain peace.³⁷ Nevertheless, Bernard did make a deep impression on him, particularly in his understanding of the nature of justifying faith.³⁸ Bernard seemed to be a flickering candle in the terror of darkness.

Although Luther's struggle was lightened somewhat by those who comforted, strengthened, and directed him to sources of comfort, Luther later recalled that his monastic life was always haunted by his father's words of rebuke. In a letter

³⁴Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, 148, 11-12.

³⁵Benrath, p. 49.

³⁶Schwiebert, p. 170. Cf., Benrath, pp. 29-30.

³⁷Philip S. Watson, Let God be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1947), p. 19.

³⁸Schwiebert, p. 171.

to Melanchthon, dated September 9, 1521, from the Wartburg, Luther wrote,

I remember when I made my vow, my earthly father was terribly angry with this; after he was reconciled to the idea, I had to listen to the following: Let's hope that this was not a delusion from Satan. This word took such deep root in my heart that I have never heard anything from his mouth which I remembered more persistently. It seemed to me as if God had spoken to me from afar, through my father's mouth--it was late, yet it was enough to punish and admonish me.³⁹

It is not surprising, therefore, that Luther prefaced his major treatise on the vows of monasticism with a letter to his father.⁴⁰ In this open letter, Luther recounted his father's remarks and the anxiety his father's words caused him.

Luther was a good monk, but a monk who was deeply troubled and disturbed because the goals of monasticism were not accomplished in his life. Out of this environment, Luther emerged to pen his judgment on monasticism and its vows. Although Luther's judgment was far from irenic, he was still able to look upon St. Bernard of Clairvaux with appreciation and he asserted the possibility of a God-pleasing monastic life.

³⁹Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel, edited by Otto Clemen (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1931), II, 385, 96-101. Hereafter, this volume of Luther's letters will be cited as WAB, II, followed by page and line numbers (as illustrated in the previous sentence). The translation is from the American Edition, XLVIII, 301.

⁴⁰Martin Luther, "De Votis Monasticis Martini Lutheri Iudicium," D. Martin Luthers Werke, edited by Gustav Kawerau and Nicolaus Müller (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus, 1889), VIII, 573-576. Hereafter this work will be cited as Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, followed by page and line numbers.

Luther's Thought on the Monastic Life

Until 1521, Luther had not thoroughly considered the problem of clerical celibacy in particular and the monastic life in general. Luther did not believe in clerical celibacy by 1521, but he maintained that Christian liberty should be exercised with regard to this problem.⁴¹ Nevertheless, while Luther was residing in the Wartburg, the question of monastic vows and clerical celibacy was asked and demanded an answer.

The issue was dramatically raised by the publication of Carlstadt's theses on the monastic vows, Super Coelibatu Monachatu et Viduitate, which Luther was acquainted with by July of 1521.⁴² In his theses, Carlstadt argued that a priest must be married and that a priest also must have a family; unless a priest is a husband and father, he is unfit for the priesthood.⁴³ Luther received a copy of Carlstadt's theses at the beginning of August 1521. He penned his reaction to Carlstadt's efforts in a letter to Melanchthon, dated August 3,

⁴¹Schwiebert, p. 524.

⁴²The editors' introduction to Martin Luther, "Iudicium Martini Lutheri de Votis," D. Martin Luthers Werke, edited by Gustav Kawerau and Nicolaus Müller (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1889), VIII, 315-316. The "Iudicium Martini Lutheri de Votis" is actually composed of two sets of theses. The first set of theses is entitled "Episcopis et Diaconis Ecclesiae Vuittembergensis de voto religionum disputantibus Martinus Lutherus servus haec mittit," and the second set is entitled "An liceat perpetuum vovere votum." Following the accepted usage, these two sets of theses will be cited as Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, followed by page and line numbers.

⁴³The editors' introduction to Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 315.

1521. In this letter, Luther indicated that he appreciated Carlstadt's effort and diligence, but that Carlstadt's exegesis of the Scriptural passages involved (Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2; 1 Timothy 5:3ff.) left much to be desired.⁴⁴ In the same letter Luther wrote:

I am absolutely certain that there is quite an easy solution to all these problems, even though we don't as yet see what it is. For if Christ were here, I do not doubt that he would dissolve these chains and would annul all vows. He would not allow anyone to be oppressed by an unbearable or involuntary burden, since he is Savior and Bishop of all souls. Therefore it almost seems to me that at this point one has to use the freedom of the Spirit and has to break through whatever is in the way of the salvation of souls. For Christ has not yet made known by any oracle, sign, or witness that he is pleased with this vowing business. It might be quite dangerous to follow something of which it is not at all certain Christ approves, especially since we see that so many souls perish unavoidably and against their will.⁴⁵

Although Luther was critical of Carlstadt's resolution of the problem of monastic vows, he simply did not know how to resolve the problem of monastic vows as late as August 5, 1521.⁴⁶ During the remainder of August and early September 1521, correspondence between the Wartburg and Wittenberg frequently included discussions of the problem. The problem could be rather simply stated--under the freedom of the Gospel, what is the status and validity of the person who has bound

⁴⁴WAB, II, 373-374, 5-23. This letter was written from the Wartburg.

⁴⁵WAB, II, 375, 57-67. The translation is from the American Edition, XLVIII, 286. This letter was written from the Wartburg.

⁴⁶WAB, II, 380, 36-37. This letter was written to George Spalatin from the Wartburg on August 5, 1521.

himself irrevocably by vowing holy orders?--but resolving the problem required a great deal of thought and prayer.

Melanchthon suggested one resolution of the problem in a letter to Luther. Melanchthon's solution was the rejection of monastic vows on the principle that it was practically impossible to keep and perform the vows. In a letter to Melanchthon, dated September 9, 1521, Luther rejected this solution, because Melanchthon's principle also justified the rejection of God's holy commandments.⁴⁷ Luther did not consider the results of the vows as a valid criterion for their rejection. The problem of keeping or rejecting the monastic vow centered ultimately in the concept of the vow itself.⁴⁸ The vow must be rejected--if it is to be rejected at all--on a priori, not a posteriori, grounds, said Luther.

During August and early September of 1521, Luther was beginning to formulate some thoughts on the problem of the vows. On September 9, 1521, Luther sent one set of theses on monastic vows to Melanchthon,⁴⁹ and he promised to send Nicholas von Amsdorf another set of theses.⁵⁰ By October 8, 1521, both

⁴⁷WAB, II, 383, 14-23. This letter was written from the Wartburg. Luther summarized Melanchthon's solution in this letter.

⁴⁸WAB, II, 383, 42-45.

⁴⁹The editors' introduction to Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 317. This is the first set of theses, "Episcopis et Diaconis Ecclesiae Vuittembergensis de voto religionum disputantibus Martinus Lutherus servus haec mittit." Cf., WAB, II, 385, 110-114.

⁵⁰The editors' introduction to Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 317. This is the second set of theses, "An liceat perpetuum vovere votum." Cf., WAB, II, 390, 4-12.

sets of theses were printed and in circulation.⁵¹ Luther's associates in Wittenberg, Melanchthon and Bugenhagen, were of the opinion that Luther's theses would result in the liberation of all monks from the ungodly vows.⁵²

Luther's theses on the monastic vows, however, were not his final answer. In a letter to George Spalatin, dated November 11, 1521, from the Wartburg, Luther indicated that he had prepared a little book or treatise which would thoroughly consider the monastic vows and free young people from the hell of celibacy.⁵³ On November 21, 1521, Luther's definitive statement on monastic vows, "De Votis," was ready for publication.⁵⁴ Because of several delays, however, "De Votis," was not published until January of 1522.⁵⁵

Luther apparently gave his final resolution to the problem of monastic vows in "De Votis." Although he had occasion to reconsider his resolution of the monastic problem in later years, he would refer his readers to what he had already written in "De Votis." In a work addressed to Leonhard Koppe, who had been instrumental in effecting the escape of twelve

⁵¹The editors' introduction to Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 317. Cf., Schwiebert, p. 525.

⁵²The editors' introduction to Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 317.

⁵³WAB, II, 403, 44-48.

⁵⁴Schwiebert, p. 525.

⁵⁵The editors' introduction to Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 565-566.

nuns from the Cistercian convent at Nimbschen bei Grimma on April 4, 1523, Luther stated that the evangelical basis for the rejection of monastic vows had already been presented in his little book on the subject.⁵⁶ As far as Luther was concerned, "De Votis" was his answer to the problem of monastic vows. This conclusion is further validated by Luther's answer to the request of Graf Wilhelm VI of Henneberg for a clarification of the Biblical basis for monastic vows. In Luther's answer, written in 1526, he specifically referred Graf Wilhelm to his little book on monastic vows.⁵⁷ "De Votis" is Luther's only major treatise dealing specifically with monasticism and its vows.

"De Votis" will therefore supply the form and content of the following presentation. The material will be divided into four parts: Luther's understanding of monastic vows and his judgment upon them; his understanding of monasticism in relationship to the will of God; the relationship between monasticism and the way of salvation; and Luther's personal evaluation of monasticism. This presentation of Luther's thought on

⁵⁶Martin Luther, "Ursach und Antwort, dass Jungfrauen Klöster göttlich verlassen mögen," D. Martin Luthers Werke, edited by Paul Pietsch (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1900), XI, 396, 5-7. Hereafter, this work will be cited as Luther, "Ursach und Antwort, 1523," WA, XI, followed by page and line numbers (as illustrated in the previous sentence).

⁵⁷Martin Luther, "Antwort auf etliche Fragen, Kloster-gelübde belangend," D. Martin Luthers Werke, edited by Paul Pietsch (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1897), XIX, 287, 5-6. Hereafter, this work will be cited as Luther, "Antwort auf etliche Fragen, 1526," WA, XIX, followed by page and line numbers (as illustrated in the previous sentence).

monasticism is not an end in itself, but rather a means of understanding Luther's appreciation of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, whose writings seemed to help Luther in the abyss of theological crisis.

The Monastic Vows: Their Meaning and Implications

"Omne quod non est ex fide, peccatum est"--with these words Luther began his first set of theses on the monastic vows.⁵⁸ This first thesis is Luther's archimedean point in his evaluation and study of the monastic vows of obedience, poverty, and perpetual chastity. On the basis of his study of these vows, Luther was of the opinion that he could evaluate monasticism as a whole.

The vow of obedience engaged Luther's attention because Luther realized that two kinds of obedience were being confused with each other. There is both a spiritual and a physical kind of obedience.⁵⁹ In spiritual obedience, Christians promise to be subject to one another in love; this is the kind of obedience which is vowed at Holy Baptism. Physical obedience, however, completely contradicts spiritual obedience because it obliterates spiritual obedience. In other words, said Luther, obedience must be motivated by love, not by legal force.⁶⁰ In Holy Baptism, Christians have freely vowed obedience to one another as members of the communion of saints.⁶¹

⁵⁸Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 323, 6.

⁵⁹Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 645, 15-18.

⁶⁰Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 328, 16.

⁶¹Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 645, 15-16.

For Luther, no further obedience, not even monastic obedience, needs to be vowed.

The practical effect of the monastic vow of obedience was that it erected a wall of separation between the clergy and the laity. Luther said that this wall was erected because the monks interpreted their vow of obedience as something that freed them from obedience and service to fellow Christians.⁶² The monks had forgotten St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who said that the monastic vow of obedience was only applicable to that which was set forth in the monastic Rule.⁶³ The vow of obedience does not free the monks from ordinary Christian obedience. Nevertheless, monks have insisted that their vow of obedience separates them from other Christians.

Monks have also maintained that the vow of obedience binds them for life: they cannot leave the monastery for another monastery; they cannot return to secular life; they cannot change positions within the organized church. Nevertheless, monks have become bishops, cardinals, and even popes. If the vow of obedience was an "essential vow," how could the vow be dispensed with so that a monk could leave the monastery and become a bishop or secular cleric?⁶⁴ Even St. Bernard of Clairvaux failed to perform his vow of obedience according to the rigid interpretation of this vow, because he left the

⁶²Ibid., VIII, 586, 14-15.

⁶³Ibid., VIII, 586, 15-19. Cf., Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, 161, 30-34.

⁶⁴Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 647, 27-30.

monastery to travel throughout Europe while he was a monk. And yet, said Luther, Bernard did not sin because he lived according to the spirit of the vow of obedience.⁶⁵ Bernard never left the monastic life for another office. Luther, thus, condemned monks who left the monastery to become bishops. By becoming bishops, such monks actually abandoned the true task of the bishop, the preaching of God's Word. Luther asserted that everyone knew that the best preachers and teachers of God's Word were monks such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux.⁶⁶

On the basis of the monastic vow of obedience, Luther maintained that the monks excused themselves from the wider, spiritual obedience vowed in Holy Baptism. By vowing obedience according to a monastic Rule and to an abbot, the monks thought that they were freed from obedience to other Christians. On this basis, the monastic vow of obedience must be rejected. In effect, the monastic vow of obedience is blasphemy because it implies that Holy Baptism is not sufficient.

Luther's attack on the vow of poverty followed the same format as his attack on the vow of obedience. All Christians have vowed spiritual poverty in Holy Baptism.⁶⁷ To assert that some other poverty in addition to spiritual poverty was necessary is blasphemy. Besides, the monks have simply used the vow of poverty to increase their collective wealth; while

⁶⁵Ibid., VIII, 641, 14-17.

⁶⁶Ibid., VIII, 648, 25-28.

⁶⁷Ibid., VIII, 641, 27-29, and 642, 4-8.

they may not possess anything individually, nothing has stopped monasteries from collecting gifts and rents. The result has been that the monks have ingeniously exempted themselves from their own vows.⁶⁸

The only kind of God-pleasing poverty was the poverty exemplified by the early Christians in Jerusalem. Those Christians held everything in common for the benefit of the whole Christian brotherhood. The Jerusalem Christians were spiritually poor, but they had an abundance of goods; God was delighted.⁶⁹

Luther also criticized the "essential" nature of the vow of poverty because it could be dispensed with when a monk became a bishop or another church prelate. If the vow could be dispensed with, why should it be called "essential"?⁷⁰ The vow of poverty was a vow of the devil which has kept Christians from loving and serving one another; consequently, said Luther, the vow of poverty has resulted in the rejection of God's holy will.⁷¹

The third vow of monasticism, the vow of perpetual chastity, received much more attention from Luther's pen than the other two vows. In the history of the vows of obedience and

⁶⁸Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, 162, 37-40, and 163, 1-10.

⁶⁹Cf., Acts 2:44 and 4:32. Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 642, 19-37.

⁷⁰Ibid., VIII, 643, 12-24.

⁷¹Ibid., VIII, 645, 5-8.

poverty, the monks had been able to re-define the nature of monastic obedience and poverty, distinguishing them from spiritual obedience and poverty. With regard to the vow of chastity, however, Luther said that the monks did not re-define or re-interpret the nature of the vow; as a result, monks have found themselves bound in a struggle with their own flesh.⁷²

By implication the vow of chastity or celibacy has labeled marriage and the marriage bed unclean and unchaste, thus denying the goodness of God's creation.⁷³ The monks have maintained that being celibate was more meritorious than being married, but neither Christ nor St. Paul provide support for this view.⁷⁴ There is no inherent merit in remaining celibate, because the Kingdom of Heaven will not be awarded on the basis of celibacy.⁷⁵ As a matter of fact, said Luther, the only paradise possible for people before they die is marriage.⁷⁶

Whether to marry or not to marry is essentially a free thing, something that God has not legislated for His people.⁷⁷

⁷²Ibid., VIII, 649-651.

⁷³Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, 162, 10-36. Cf., 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 and Hebrews 13:4.

⁷⁴Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 585, 12-23.

⁷⁵Ibid., VIII, 652, 32-40, and 653, 1-24.

⁷⁶WAB, II, 397, 47-58. This letter was addressed to Nicholas Gerbel from the Wartburg on November 1, 1521.

⁷⁷Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 583, 30-34.

There is nothing in Scripture which makes the vow of celibacy obligatory. Nothing has been promised in Scripture to those who live the celibate life.

Luther maintained that the vow of celibacy has been so disastrous for Christians because it has obliterated the vow of Holy Baptism: in Holy Baptism people vow what God graciously gives them, but in the vow of celibacy people vow what God has not given them.⁷⁹ Human frailty, said Luther, is so great that it is perilous to vow celibacy when God has not blessed the flesh with the ability to live the celibate life.⁸⁰ Even though monasticism attempted to exclude those incapable of living the celibate life by its year of probation for all new aspirants, some who did not have the gift of celibacy became monks.⁸¹ God must give the gift of celibacy; otherwise, the celibate life and the vow of celibacy is a travesty of the Christian life begun in Holy Baptism.

Nevertheless, celibacy could be a reality in the lives of some people. Three kinds of people could be celibate, said Luther according to Mattes: the physically impotent, those who had been emasculated, and those who were physically normal

⁷⁹Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 659, 30-37.

⁸⁰Martin Luther, "An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung," D. Martin Luthers Werke, edited by J. F. Knaake (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus, 1888), VI, 441, 31-34. Hereafter, this work will be cited as Luther, "An den christlichen Adel, 1520," WA, VI, followed by page and line numbers (as illustrated in the preceding citation).

⁸¹Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 660, 24-40, and 661, 1-9.

but endowed with the gift of continence.⁸² For the physically normal person--unless God Himself granted the gift of continence--the vow of celibacy could not be vowed without detriment to his soul's salvation.⁸³ Moreover, Luther held that the celibate life could be a reality in the life of a Christian and that it had certain advantages over married life. Luther stated:

The Gospel teaches us to sit in the lowest place and to respect one another as superior [Luke 14:10 and Philippians 2:3]. Consequently, virginity must be held and taught so that it is served under no law, no necessity, no hope of wages, but with a free and willing mind, so that in grace a virgin may thus think of the example: Although I may be able to marry, nevertheless it is pleasing to remain a virgin, not because of commandments, not because of decrees, not because of its preciousness and greatness above other virtues, but because it has been given to me to live this way, just as it has been given to others to marry or to be farmers. For I do not want the vexations of the married estate; I want to be free from cares and keep myself for God. Behold, this is being a virgin in Christian simplicity which glories not in itself but in Christ.⁸⁴

God gives the gift of celibacy. No one must ever seize the gift. And no one can claim any special merit because he lives the celibate life.

Because celibacy has not been commanded by God in the Scriptures, said Luther, the laity and the clergy must be given the ecclesiastical freedom to marry or not to marry.⁸⁵

⁸²John C. Mattes, "Luther's Views Concerning Continence: A Correction of Some Current Misrepresentations," Lutheran Church Quarterly, IV (October 1931), 412.

⁸³Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 659, 1-13.

⁸⁴Ibid., VIII, 611, 34-39, and 612, 1-4. The translation is by the present writer.

⁸⁵Luther, "An den christlichen Adel, 1520," WA, VI, 441, 11-12.

Consequently, for Luther the only God-pleasing vow of celibacy had to take this form: "I vow celibacy as long as it is possible for me; should I, however, not be able to remain celibate, then I shall be free to marry."⁸⁶ The vow of monastic celibacy, wrote Luther, had been responsible for incredible sins. Christian freedom had been curtailed by monastic vows; under the imperative of the Gospel, this freedom must be restored. It is because of Luther's approach to the vow of celibacy and the problem of clerical celibacy that Luther's Reformation must be credited with restoring the honorableness of married life.⁸⁷

Luther thoroughly rejected the theological presuppositions of the three monastic vows. All three vows have perverted God's Word and will, resulting in the burdening of consciences. Consequently, the vows along with their attendant evils must be corrected. Luther, however, did not reject the concepts which these vows attempted to foster. Christian obedience, poverty, and celibacy can be God-pleasing manifestations of the Christian life. But in Luther's judgment, monasticism had perverted its vows.

Monasticism and God's Will for Man

Although Luther's "De Votis" proposed to consider only

⁸⁶Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 633, 1-2. The translation is by the present writer.

⁸⁷Waldemar Kawerau, Die Reformation und die Ehe: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1892), p. 3.

the monastic vows, Luther's thought expanded into a complete consideration of the institution of monasticism. Throughout his "De Votis," and in his later expressions on the subject of the vows, Luther frequently expanded his judgments to include all of monasticism. At the root of Luther's criticism of monasticism was his belief that monasticism had lost its evangelical fervor and had become a legalistic institution.

First of all, monasticism was contrary to God's Holy Word. And this is true, said Luther, because there is nothing in Scripture to warrant and substantiate the monastic institution.⁸⁸ The vows of monasticism are not rooted at all in God's Word.⁸⁹ Of course, examples of vows can be found in Holy Scripture (for example, Paul's vow of Mosaic purity in Acts 18:18 and 21:24), but these vows are limited in time and are pertinent to the Old Covenant, not to the New Covenant in Christ.⁹⁰ Nothing in Scripture, said Luther, validates monastic vows.

According to Luther, the basic reason for the perversions of monasticism was the abysmal ignorance within monasticism of what the Gospel is. The monks maintained that the Gospel must be supplemented and improved by the addition of monastic legislation.⁹¹ Consequently, because they misunderstood God's Word revealed in Jesus Christ, they actually blasphemed God

⁸⁸Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 334, 32-33.

⁸⁹Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 578, 6-11.

⁹⁰Ibid., VIII, 578, 11-15.

⁹¹Ibid., VIII, 580, 2-6.

and His Word.⁹² One of the reasons Luther listed to justify Leonhard Koppe's action in helping twelve nuns escape from their convent in 1523 was that they were being subjected to a perverted understanding of the Gospel--actually, in their situation, the Gospel was totally absent.⁹³

Earlier, in 1521, Luther had summarized his judgment that monasticism was contrary to God's Word and Gospel:

If it is contrary to the gospel to declare the [particular] usages of food, place, person, time, and other things to be sin, where then will the vows, the monasteries, the rules, and the statutes remain? For all these things are contrary to the gospel. And so it is as true that it is contrary to the gospel to make sins out of these things as it is certain that the gospel is the gospel. What will you do now? Whom will you force into obedience? Whom will you call back, once he has left [the monastery]? Whom will you accuse of being an apostate if you will teach, as you ought to, that we are free here--and are not involved in any sin? You may perhaps want some advice from me; indeed you don't need my counsel. I am certain you will not do or allow anything to be done which would be contrary to the gospel, even if all the monasteries would have to perish.⁹⁴

Thus, Luther would not agree with Duke George that he had perjured himself by leaving the monastery, because monasticism must not be judged by human laws but by the Word of God, the Gospel.⁹⁵ The Christian's confidence is the Lord of Hosts--

⁹²Ibid., VIII, 583, 20-28.

⁹³Luther, "Ursach und Antwort, 1523," WA, XI, 396, 35-36, and 397, 1-11.

⁹⁴WAB, II, 415, 7-16. This letter was addressed to Wenceslas Link. It was written from the Wartburg on December 18, 1521. The translation is from the American Edition, XLVIII, 357-358.

⁹⁵Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, 144, 13-25.

not monastic vows and the monastic life--as the Lord of Hosts Himself speaks through the Word. The monastic vows must be rejected because they contradict God's Holy Word, attempt to supplement God's Holy Word, and pervert the monks' understanding of that Word.

The monastic vows are also contrary to the Christian faith. There is only one kind of faith possible for the Christian, wrote Luther: Christian faith is complete and perfect trust and confidence in Jesus Christ.⁹⁶ And this faith, accepting the forgiveness of sins in Christ, makes consciences certain and makes people free from sin.⁹⁷ For the vows to be acceptable and God-pleasing, they must be vowed in this faith. Otherwise, the vows are damnable.⁹⁸

Essentially, the vows are laws by which monks have attempted to justify themselves before God; consequently, monastics have attempted and do attempt to justify themselves prior to faith and without faith.⁹⁹ As a result of the monastic attempt to gain justification before God through the law of vows, the monks have also denied their baptism which has made them children of God and brought them into the Christian faith.¹⁰⁰ Luther concluded that monks have made the path of

⁹⁶Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 592, 18-29.

⁹⁷Ibid., VIII, 594, 1-16.

⁹⁸Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 325, 31-32, and 326, 1-7.

⁹⁹Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 595, 1-6.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., VIII, 595, 28-35.

monastic vows the way of salvation, while the Biblical way of salvation has always been faith in Christ. Therefore, the vows and their perversions in monasticism must be rejected and condemned.

Nevertheless, monasticism need not militate against the Christian faith. In the history of monasticism, examples of monastics who lived under the vow and yet grasped the true faith can be cited. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, for Luther, was one such example.¹⁰¹ St. Bernard did not compromise his faith under the monastic vows; this was demonstrated for Luther by Bernard's famous death-bed statement.¹⁰² Luther liked to cite Bernard's death-bed statement to demonstrate the possibility of being a genuine Christian and a monk at the same time. The "Vita Prima Bernardi" provides the full statement:

When it seemed that he [that is, St. Bernard] was drawing his last breath, in ecstasy he thought he stood before the judgment seat of God, while Satan stood opposite, hurling shameless accusations at him. The devil's stream of abuse ceased at last, and now it was the saint's turn to plead his own cause. Not in the least frightened or put out, he said: "I readily admit that my own merits do not deserve to win me heaven. But my Lord has won it for me as a right, in two ways: by possessing it as His Father's inheritance, and by winning it through the merits of His blessed passion. Well pleased by the sufferings of His Son, God gives me heaven as my inheritance, and thus I shall not be damned since I lay claim to the gift He has bestowed upon me."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹Ibid., VIII, 600, 26-29.

¹⁰²Ibid., VIII, 601, 24-28.

¹⁰³Guillelmo olim Sancti Theoderici, Arnaldo Abbate Bonae-vallis, Gaufrido Abbate Clarae-vallensis, Gaufrido Monacho Clarae-vallensis, Philippo Monacho Clarae-vallensis, et al.,

For Luther, Bernard was the example for all monks. If all monks would live according to Bernard's example, there would be no doubt within monasticism that a man was saved by faith in Christ, not by the works prescribed by the vows.¹⁰⁴

According to Luther, monasticism was even contrary to the works which God has commanded in his Holy Commandments: the works of divine worship, obedience to parents and masters, and love for the neighbor. The keeping of God's commandments is the highest service of the Christian, wrote Luther.¹⁰⁵

The monastic vows contended/with the first table of God's law and the work it prescribes, worship or the praise and honor of His Holy Name. All Christians have been baptized into the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but the monks have not relied on God's Name for their salvation; they have relied on the name of their monastic order.¹⁰⁶ Thus,

"Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Vita et Res Gestae Libris Septem Comprehensae," Tractatus Posteriores, S. Doctoris Vitae, et Indices Generales, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), V, col. 2131 [Lib. I, Cap. XII, 57]. The translation is taken from William of St. Thierry, et al., St. Bernard of Clairvaux: The Story of His Life as Recorded in the Vita Prima Bernardi by Certain of His Contemporaries, William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonnevaux, Geoffrey and Philip of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil, translated by Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1960), p. 74.

¹⁰⁴Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 602, 1-5.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., VIII, 573, 14-15.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., VIII, 618, 6-10.

said Luther, the monks have made sacrilege of the very Name by which everything and everyone is sanctified.¹⁰⁷

In addition, said Luther, the true worship of God has been destroyed in monasticism. Monks have substituted ceremonies, postures, songs, readings, and vestments for the true worship of God; this is human, not divine, worship.¹⁰⁸ Luther's comments on the perversions of liturgical worship within monasticism are still quite devastating:

For all these things [i.e. worship activities] take place not for teaching and hortatory purposes, but to do much in devotions. For it is enough, as far as they are concerned, to have read, sung, and cried out in a certain way. This work is sought after and called the worship of God. But what really is read or sung, or why it is read or sung does not enter into their mind at all, nor is there any prophet who interprets for and teaches [them]. In the same manner, so that they may not be idle in this wondrous worship of God, they occupy themselves with great concern and solicitude by reading to others, by chanting to others, by distinguishing rightly, by making the right pauses, by making correct conclusions, by paying special attention, hoping this one thing: that it is read and sung well, devotedly, and laudibly. This is the ultimate end of this divine worship.¹⁰⁹

For Luther, the Roman Mass, because it is a sacrifice which God despises, was the culmination of the monastic abomination of worship.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷Ibid., VIII, 619, 1-8.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., VIII, 621, 12-17.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., VIII, 621, 26-33. The translation is by the present writer.

¹¹⁰Ibid., VIII, 651, 9-26.

Although the work of worship within monasticism can be a terrible abomination, it is possible for a monk to perform the work of worship without condemnation. Luther cited St. Bernard of Clairvaux again to show that within monasticism a monk could hear the Word of God and worship the Lord of Hosts in sincerity and truth. Luther asserted that he could make this judgment on the basis of Bernard's sermons, which he preached to the monks at Clairvaux.¹¹¹ Thus, within monasticism the first table of God's Holy Law could be kept, although it frequently was violated.

Moreover, monasticism frequently contradicted the second table of God's Law which has commanded Christians to obey their parents and masters and to love their neighbors. Monks have maintained that obedience to the abbot was better than obedience to parents and masters.¹¹² In addition, monks have asserted that spiritual fathers are more important than physical fathers,¹¹³ and that the commandment to love the neighbor is sufficiently exercised within the monastic community.¹¹⁴

Luther rejected all three arguments proposed by the monks. In Holy Baptism, all Christians have vowed obedience to God, but the monks have used this baptismal obedience to deny

¹¹¹Ibid., VIII, 622, 28-33.

¹¹²Ibid., VIII, 624, 29-30.

¹¹³Ibid., VIII, 624, 31-32.

¹¹⁴Ibid., VIII, 624, 33.

obedience to any other Christian.¹¹⁵ The monks have thus bypassed God's injunction to render obedience and service. Actually, said Luther, obedience and service to parents and neighbors is the only meaningful and honorable worship of God.¹¹⁶

The monks have also said that obedience to spiritual fathers is more important than obedience to physical fathers. But if this were true, chaos and disorder would characterize society: husbands would have the right to leave their wives for the monastery, contracts would be broken, and families would be destroyed.¹¹⁷ For Luther, the monks had to be condemned because they used God's Word to overthrow God's Word.

The contention that true Christian love could be exercised sufficiently enough within the monastery was another travesty of the nature of God's commandment. True Christian love, as defined in 1 Corinthians 13, is not selective nor prejudicial, and it does not forbid work and service among the poor and needy of the world, declared Luther.¹¹⁸ The monks have created a complete travesty of God's commandment to love the neighbor as themselves.

Luther, however, was zealous to indicate that the perversions of God's commandments need not result within monasticism. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the monk's monk, was not

¹¹⁵Ibid., VIII, 625, 1-12.

¹¹⁶Ibid., VIII, 626, 24-31.

¹¹⁷Ibid., VIII, 627, 33-35.

¹¹⁸Ibid., VIII, 628, 6-16.

guilty of a narrow and prejudicial manifestation of love; through his service and work in the universal church, Bernard manifested the kind of love which should characterize monasticism.¹¹⁹ Bernard lived under the vow, but he was not guilty of the perversions of God's commandments evident in monasticism.¹²⁰ If the monks could not or would not follow the example of St. Bernard, if they pitted commandment against commandment, if they perverted God's holy commandments, then Luther would advise them to recall their vows, remove themselves from the monastery, and return to a God-pleasing observance of the commandments in secular life.¹²¹

Luther's fourth criticism of the monastic vows and monasticism was that it was contrary to natural reason with which the Creator has endowed His creatures. Thus, some of the vows and demands of monasticism have not been fulfilled because the human flesh is weak.¹²² Of course, monks have attempted to bypass the impossibility of certain monastic regulations by equating good intentions with the performance of the vow. Nevertheless, good intentions have not been and never are a valid substitute for the full performance of the vow.¹²³ Luther noted that the struggle between the vow and the actual perfor-

¹¹⁹Ibid., VIII, 628, 24-30.

¹²⁰Ibid., VIII, 617, 33-35.

¹²¹Ibid., VIII, 628, 34-39, and 629, 1-21.

¹²²Ibid., VIII, 628, 4-26.

¹²³Ibid., VIII, 630, 27-31.

mance of the vow had become acute in the matter of clerical celibacy. Celibacy, wrote Luther, was a gift of God; unless God gave the gift, the flesh would make it impossible for the vow to be performed without blemish.¹²⁴

Luther's ultimate--and fifth--concern about the monastic vows was the preservation of Christian or evangelical liberty. Christians must live under the rule of faith and freedom, and nothing must impair this rule.¹²⁵ God has given evangelical liberty to the Christian, and no one has the right to destroy this liberty.¹²⁶ The vows of monasticism, however, have destroyed the Christian's liberty and will continue to do so. God has freed all men by the Gospel from impiety and sacrilege, but by accepting the legalism of the vows the individual has re-created bondage and slavery.¹²⁷ To submit to the vows of monasticism in a spirit of legal servitude was no less impious than to deny and apostatize from the faith.¹²⁸

Luther defined Christian or evangelical liberty as "the freedom of conscience, by which the conscience is absolved from works, not that none should be done, but that it trusts confidently in none."¹²⁹ By making monastic vows, the con-

¹²⁴Luther, "Ursach und Antwort, 1523," WA, XI, 398, 1-12.

¹²⁵Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 326, 23-26.

¹²⁶Ibid., VIII, 330, 3-4.

¹²⁷Ibid., VIII, 334, 18-29.

¹²⁸Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 605, 7-10.

¹²⁹Ibid., VIII, 606, 30-32. The translation is by the present writer.

science is bound so that it demands the performance of works as the sign of justification and acceptance before God. Conscience must only be bound to Christ; anything that destroys the conscience's trust in Christ is damnable.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, Luther maintained that it was possible to make vows of monasticism without burdening conscience and thus destroying Christian liberty. Luther wrote to Melanchthon:

For he who is free can, just as the Apostle Paul, submit himself to all vows, and to the dominion of all men, in the same way in which St. Bernard and others who were monks in the truest sense of the word surrendered themselves to [living under] a vow.¹³¹

St. Bernard of Clairvaux again provided Luther with an example of a monk who could simultaneously live under the vow and maintain his Christian liberty in the freedom of conscience. Bernard performed the monastic life apart from the compulsion of human law but under the compulsion of the Spirit.¹³²

Perhaps Luther's understanding of the tension between evangelical freedom and monastic vows may be best expressed in his own words:

Therefore, we finally make an end of this disputation by concluding that although poverty, obedience, and chastity can be constantly served, these items cannot be vowed, taught, and required. Because in keeping [the vows], Evangelical freedom remains, but in teaching,

¹³⁰Ibid., VIII, 609, 36-40, and 610, 1-2.

¹³¹WAB, II, 383, 27-30. This letter was dated September 9, 1521, from the Wartburg. The translation is from the American Edition, XLVIII, 299.

¹³²Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 612, 27-30.

vowing, and enforcing the vows, Evangelical freedom does not remain; therefore, the saints who have served these vows have served freely; they would have even served if they had not vowed, even if they had not been taught and forced. Consequently, their vow, although foolish for them, has harmed nothing on account of faith and the freedom of the Spirit. However, it is quite another thing if something that has not been taught nor exacted is done and the same is then taught and required as something that must be done. For this is to make a law out of the act, a commandment out of the work, a rule out of the example, a necessity out of that which happens; what kind of a thing is more absurd and pernicious? But first it is from God, then secondly from men; therefore with the first it must remain; the second must certainly be discharged. We do not therefore condemn the matter of vows if anyone wishes to follow [a vow], but we do condemn the doctrine and commandment [of vows].¹³³

In Luther's mind, the escape of the nuns from the Cistercian convent at Nimbschen bei Grimma was justified because evangelical liberty had been destroyed in that convent.¹³⁴

Luther evaluated the vows of monasticism and the resulting monastic life on the basis of God's Holy Will and the revelation of that Will in His Holy Word. Luther concluded that the vows of monasticism were contrary to God's Will, although this contradiction need not be inherent to monasticism. The life of poverty, chastity, and obedience could be God-pleasing if it was lived in the freedom of conscience, liberated by Christ.

Monasticism and the Way of Salvation

Within the monastic life, individuals attempted to walk

¹³³Ibid., VIII, 616, 26-38. The translation is by the present writer.

¹³⁴Luther, "Ursach und Antwort, 1523," WA, XI, 397, 12-21.

from death to life in Christ, to follow the way of salvation. But the monastic life had often produced confusion about the essential character of the way of salvation. For Luther, Christianity centered in Christ; all Christianity--whether it was lived under the monastic vows or apart from them--had to have Christ as its foundation-stone.

Luther's concept of Christ was very powerful. As the Son of God Christ overcame the wrath of God, destroyed the power of sin, death, and the devil, and granted eternal life to His faithful people. As man Christ dwelt among men, but without sin, so that man could lay hold on God.¹³⁵ Luther will accept no person or institution but Christ as the fount and source of true holiness.¹³⁶ Anything or anyone that would usurp Christ's role in the salvation of the world was damnable from eternity; Luther applied this judgment to monastic vows if they replaced Christ the Savior.¹³⁷ As Luther himself said,

For him who believes in Christ, there are no works so evil which can accuse and condemn him, nor again any so good which defend and save him, but all our works accuse and condemn us; moreover, only the works of Christ defend and save us.¹³⁸

Salvation comes to man through the blood and death, the life

¹³⁵A brief summary of Luther's understanding of Christ can be found in Paul M. Bretscher's article "Luther's Christ," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI (April 1960), 212-214.

¹³⁶Philip S. Watson, "Luther and Sanctification," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXX (April 1959), 245.

¹³⁷Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 579, 1-10.

¹³⁸Ibid., VIII, 608, 19-22.

and work of Jesus Christ; no monk by his own work and effort can be saved or be certain of his salvation.¹³⁹ Because the vows produced confusion about the way of salvation, Luther demanded that the vows and the resulting evils be completely abolished.¹⁴⁰

Confusion about the way of salvation within monasticism was perhaps best illustrated for Luther by the monastic equation of baptism with the monastic vows: monasticism was a second--and perhaps more effective--baptism. Luther wrote that he heard another monk say that monasticism was a second baptism, perhaps even more efficacious than the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.¹⁴¹ This attitude, declared Luther, was damnable: it was blasphemy against Christ, because the washing of regeneration in the first baptism was all that Christ has required of his people.¹⁴² If a monk entered/monasticism because he believed that monasticism was a second baptism, then his monastic life was damnable.

There is no doubt that by 1522 Luther thoroughly rejected the concept of monasticism as a second baptism. What is most interesting, however, is that St. Bernard of Clairvaux was in part responsible for fostering the idea of the second baptism

¹³⁹Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, 145, 31-39, and 146, 1-5.

¹⁴⁰Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 619, 27-37.

¹⁴¹Ibid., VIII, 596, 18-23.

¹⁴²Cf., Benrath, p. 37.

within monasticism.¹⁴³ Although it cannot be asserted that Luther knew of Bernard's role in developing this thought, it is difficult to understand how Luther could have been unfamiliar with this aspect of Bernard's thought on monasticism. In "De Votis," Luther specifically cited Bernard's "De Precepto et Dispensatione," which contains one of Bernard's statements on monasticism as a second baptism.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Luther did not refer to Bernard when he condemned this concept.

It is only by faith in Christ, said Luther, not by the

¹⁴³Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 596, n. 1. It is possible to cite four references where Bernard alluded to monasticism as a second baptism. The first reference is found in an undated letter addressed to Thomas, the Provost of Beverly: Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis, Epistolas Numero CCCCLXXXII Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), I, cols. 725-727. This letter is known as Epistola CDXI.

The second reference is found in Bernard's treatment of vows and dispensations: "De Precepto et Dispensatione," Tractatus Morales, Doctrinales et Polemicos Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), II, cols. 1208-1209. This reference is to Chapter XVII, Paragraph 54.

The third and fourth references are found in the collection of Bernard's sermons: Sermones de Tempore, et de Sanctis, ac de Diversis, Complectens, in Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-vallensis Opera Omnia post Horstium denuo Recognita, Repurgata, et in Meliorem Digesta Ordinem, necnon Novis Praefationibus, Admonitionibus, Notis et Observationibus, Indicibusque Copiosissimis Locupletata et Illustrata, edited by John Mabillon (4th revised and augmented edition; Paris: Gaume Fratres, 1839), III, cols. 2337-2338 and 2429-2430. The references are to Sermon XI, Paragraph 3, and Sermon XXXVII, Paragraph 2.

¹⁴⁴Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 586, 13-14, and 634, 1.

second baptism of monastic vows, that the individual is saved. If the monk believes that his monasticism has the same effect as the first baptism, then he has forsaken Christ and based his salvation on works prescribed by the vows. If works of monasticism are done without faith in Christ, they must also be condemned.¹⁴⁵ Although the monastic life may produce good works with admirable results, it is not on the basis of such results that works must be evaluated. Good works are to be judged by looking into the heart of him who does the work.¹⁴⁶ Everything which is not of faith, declared Luther, is sin!¹⁴⁷

Good works have never given forgiveness of sins and righteousness to the monks; rather, good works have always resulted from forgiveness of sins and righteousness.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, Luther maintained that it was possible for a monk to be justified by faith, not by works, within the work-righteousness system of monasticism. St. Bernard of Clairvaux again provided Luther with an example of a monk who was justified by faith in Christ and did not put his trust in good works.¹⁴⁹ By Christ alone all men have been, are, and will be justified. Luther firmly declared that good works were the results of a firm

¹⁴⁵Luther, "Themata de Votis," WA, VIII, 326, 19.

¹⁴⁶WAB, II, 384, 90-95. This is from Luther's letter to Melancthon of September 9, 1521, from the Wartburg.

¹⁴⁷Cf., Romans 14:23. Luther, "De Votis," WA, VIII, 591, 9-12.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., VIII, 595, 6-14.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., VIII, 602, 23-26.

faith in the Christ Who redeemed and saved all men.

Luther's Evaluation of the Monastic Life

It should be obvious at this point that Luther's rejection of the evils of monasticism was complete. But it would be an oversight to suggest that Luther rejected monasticism per se. At the very beginning of his "De Votis," Luther indicated that he was not going to consider whether there was such a thing as a legitimate vow, but only to determine which vows were legitimate, condoned, and even commanded by Scripture.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Luther's polemic against monasticism and its vows became so bold that it is somewhat difficult to maintain the viewpoint the Luther admitted the possibility of a valid monasticism.¹⁵¹ However, Luther also declared that some monks in the history of monasticism, such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, had been good monks and good Christians. For Luther in the sixteenth century, Bernard provided the pattern for an evangelical monastic life.¹⁵² E. G. Schwiebert has penned a very adequate summary of Luther's principle with regard to monasticism:

Beginning with the basic assumption that justification comes only by faith in Christ Jesus, Luther drew the conclusion that the determinative factor in monasticism was the spirit in which it was performed. If the

¹⁵⁰Ibid., VIII, 577, 22-24.

¹⁵¹Luther, "Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch, 1533," WA, XXXVIII, 148, 27-32.

¹⁵²Ibid., XXXVIII, 154, 7-26.

Gospel were to be displaced by a life of work-righteousness, then the purpose was wrong. If, however, a monk took his vows in the spirit of St. Bernard, trusting solely in Christ's merits, monasticism was not wrong. As for the vow itself, claimed Luther. . . , that should not be perpetual and binding. Christian liberty should permit both the taking and the revoking of such a vow.¹⁵³

Luther's language in "De Votis" was quite harsh and condemnatory, but Luther's judgment on monasticism was basically irenic. Monasticism, for Luther, was a valid form of the Christian life, as long as it was freely undertaken and did not become a law unto itself. A Christian could vow to live in poverty, obedience, and chastity, but the Christian must not be instructed that these vows were irrevocable. If the vows were held to be irrevocable, then the centrality of Christ has been destroyed by the legalistic performance of the vows. That monasticism could be evangelical, not legalistic, was amply demonstrated for Luther in the life and work of St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

¹⁵³Schwiebert, pp. 524-525.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Findings and Conclusions

St. Bernard of Clairvaux both in his life's work and in his writings approached monasticism as the Way par excellence to God, as the summit of religious life. Consequently, Bernard would severely criticize those who wanted to leave the monastic life and return to secular life or even to some other position of service within the church. Of course, the way to God was a rocky path which could only be followed if the body was subjected through the rigors of ascetic discipline. Also, if the monk was to complete his journey through life successfully, he had to rely on God's Christ for strength, comfort, and forgiveness. Nevertheless, the rocky path could be completed successfully in the life of spiritual progression from the body of death to the life of the soul in God. St. Bernard walked from Clairvaux, the earthly Jerusalem, to the Heavenly Jerusalem where love would be rewarded and perfect love would be revealed. Bernard's monastic life was a deliberate undertaking for the salvation of his soul, not at all similar to Luther's cataclysmic decision for monasticism. Bernard had no illusions about the goal of his calling as a monk nor the prospects that awaited him in eternity.

St. Bernard, however, was not as precise as he could have been in understanding the relationship between God's action in

the religious life and man's response through free will. But to maintain that Bernard wanted to be a precise, systematic theologian would be to go beyond what the evidence warrants. Bernard was far more concerned with the religious life than he was with the form and content of theological truth--his condemnation of Abelard's theology notwithstanding. Of course, Bernard must not be excused if his life and thought contributed to obscure evangelical truth, but to evaluate Bernard in terms of Reformation or post-Reformation Lutheran theology involves the denial of historical method.

Bernard was the monk's monk, the monastic leader who sustained others in leading the life of faith. The ideal of holy and pure living in the faith of Christ was Bernard's ideal and--as far as Bernard was concerned--the ideal of the whole church.

No doubt, Luther grasped the life and thought of Bernard in just these terms: Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux, was a good Christian monk, the manifestation of everything good, holy, and pure in monasticism. Bernard lived under the binding and irrevocable vows of monasticism in the spirit of evangelical freedom. For Luther, Bernard's death-bed statement was a precious gem, which was not only comforting in itself but also proved that the monastic life need not militate against the Christian faith.

For what purpose did Luther cite Bernard in his writings on the monastic vows? At this point, two possible conclusions present themselves: Luther cited Bernard because he wanted to

indicate that monasticism could be God-pleasing, or Luther cited Bernard as a weapon of indictment against sixteenth century monasticism. In other words, Luther cited Bernard for either irenic or polemical reasons. The truth of the matter probably demands the acceptance of both reasons. Luther did appreciate Bernard as a good Christian monk who could comfort and exhort others living in the despair of theological crisis. But Luther also cited Bernard to indicate to monasticism and to monastics in the sixteenth century that St. Bernard's example was not being reflected. For Luther, Bernard was the example that proved there could be a valid, God-pleasing monastic life and Bernard also demonstrated the degradation of sixteenth century monasticism. Thus, Luther appreciated Bernard for a purpose.

Luther's own monastic experience, however, was not lax or faithless or scandalous. The Augustinian Eremites, just as the Cistercians of Bernard's generation, genuinely attempted to be good Christian monks. Luther never criticized the morality of the Augustinian Eremites, but he did criticize--and severely--the contemporary theological justifications for the monastic life. The degradation that Luther criticized was not so much moral degradation--although monastic morality certainly left much to be desired in some instances--as the theological degradation and poverty of monasticism. Monasticism since the time of Bernard--and perhaps already before Bernard's generation--had forgotten its original purpose: to live the Christian life unhindered by the cares of the world. It was

on theological grounds that Luther criticized the monasticism he knew. It is difficult, however, to maintain that Luther did not find some elements of theological petrification in the life and thought of Bernard. It is only necessary to refer to Bernard's thought with regard to the vow of obedience and the possibility of dispensations from that vow to see the kind of monastic legalism which Luther detested.

At this point, it is also necessary to note that Bernard contributed to some of the monastic theological "evils" which Luther abhorred; for example, the concept of monastic vows as a second baptism. Whether or not the Church at Rome actually taught that monastic vows were a second baptism is beyond the scope of this thesis, but Luther at least criticized practical monasticism for this assertion. Luther read Bernard, even one of Bernard's works which contained the idea of the second baptism, but Luther did not cite Bernard's statements to prove his case or document his criticism. Perhaps because Bernard had helped him during the crisis period of his own monastic life, Luther did not include Bernard in his condemnation of this idea. At any rate, Luther knew how to select his evidence.

St. Bernard was a churchman zealous for the Gospel in Jesus Christ. In the study of Luther's relationship to and appreciation of Bernard in terms of monasticism, it becomes clear that Luther's concern also is the Gospel. For Luther, Bernard was a flickering light in the darkness of medieval theology. Luther's appreciation of Bernard in terms of monasticism was genuine, but perhaps somewhat selective. As far

as Luther was concerned, Bernard gave form and substance to the ideal of evangelical monasticism.

Suggestions for Further Study

The study of Luther's relationship to Bernard has not yet been completed, nor will it be until further research and study has taken place. This study of the relationship between Luther and Bernard in terms of monasticism has been worthwhile, but it has emphasized the need for further study.

One theological question that needs to be answered in the study of the relationship between these two men is the problem of grace and free will. This problem has been alluded to in the text above, but no thorough attempt was made to describe the doctrine in the thought of each man and the resulting implications for Luther's appreciation of Bernard.

Closely related to the question of grace and free will is the theology of salvation: christology and soteriology. Of course, this theological area has been discussed briefly above, but only in so far as the matter was germane to monasticism. This theological area needs further study because Bernard is often recognized for his interest in Marian theology. The implications of Bernard's mariology for Luther's appreciation of Bernard could be very illuminating. The study of Bernard's christology and soteriology in the light of Luther's theological emphases in these areas could be very rewarding.

Another important area of study in the relationship between

Luther and Bernard is hamartiology. The monastic life assumes a certain attitude toward sin and its expiation, but a thorough study of this doctrine was not immediately germane to this thesis. Any complete study of Luther's relationship to Bernard, however, would have to include an investigation of this question.

Perhaps more basic yet to a thorough investigation of Luther's appreciation of Bernard would be a study of Luther's own knowledge of Bernard's life and work. This investigation should attempt to answer the question of Luther's appreciation of Bernard as an active churchman and reforming theologian. Such a study would not simply be a critical study of Bernard's impact on his own age, but a study of Bernard's impact viewed through the eyes of Martin Luther. Although this kind of study would pose methodological difficulties, it would be of great value in attempting to define Luther's appreciation of Bernard. This kind of study might even be fruitful toward gaining an understanding of Luther's own self-concept as churchman, pastor, reformer, theologian, and spiritual leader.

The primary purpose for this thesis has been to gain an understanding of Luther's Catholic heritage in the person of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, as that heritage took shape and was transmitted in monasticism. Any additional study in the relationship between Luther and Bernard can only be justified in terms of the promise it holds for the understanding of Luther's theological heritage. At this point it can be said that Luther appreciated Bernard because Bernard, in Luther's mind, exemplified the life of evangelical freedom and faith.

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