

THE BOOK OF SAINTS

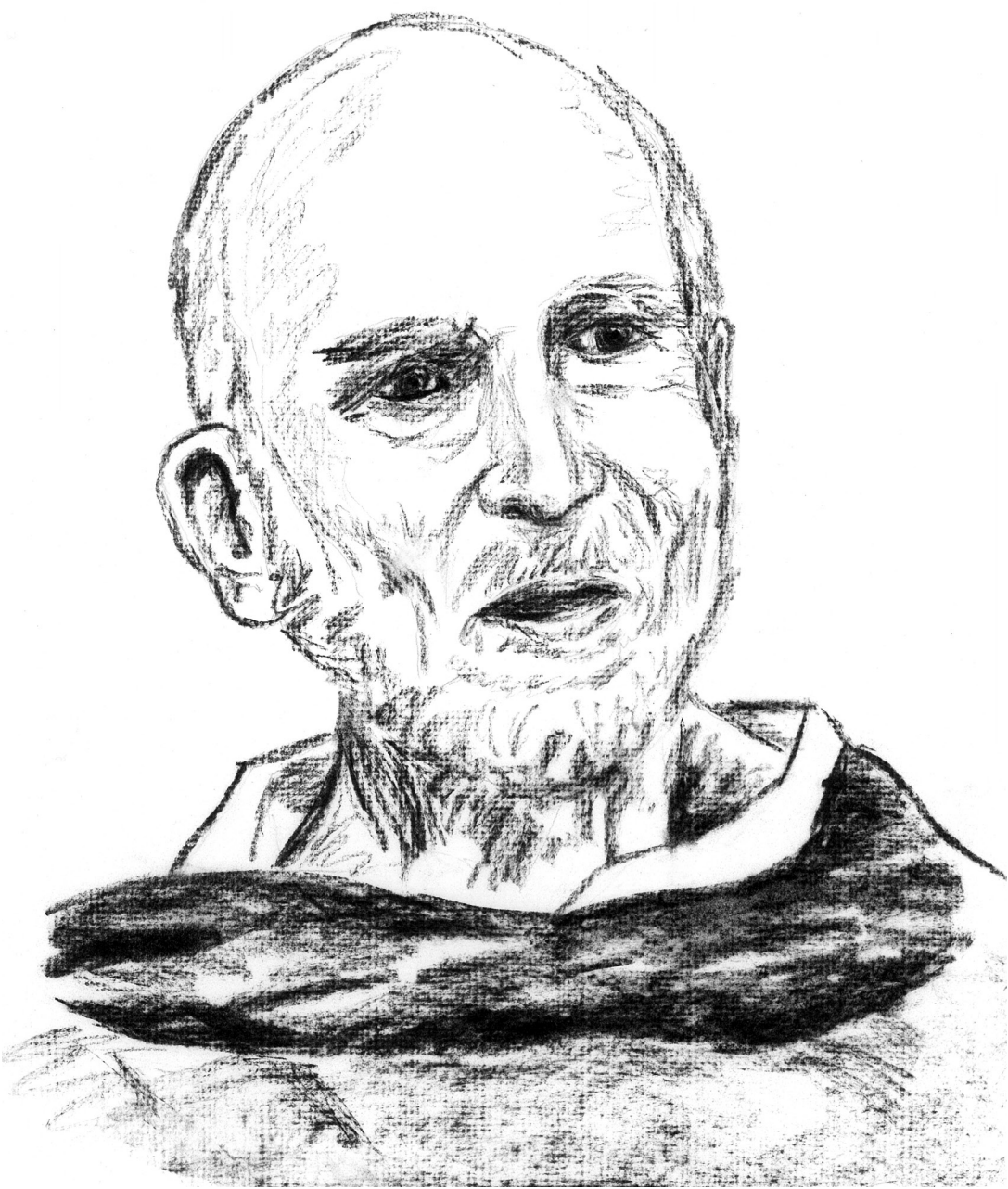
the middle era

AL TRUESDALE, Editor

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BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX



The remarkable record of service to Christ and his church left by Bernard of Clairvaux (AD 1090–1153) marks him as a giant of Christian discipleship and teaching. He was a major leader of the church in the first half of the twelfth century and remains a towering guide for Christian spirituality. Yet there is nothing in his record to indicate Bernard ever saw himself as anything other than a thoroughly graced servant of the Lord.

He was born in Fontaine-lès-Dijon to parents of the highest nobility who carefully oversaw his education. At age nine he was sent to a famous school, where he excelled in the study of poetry and literature, an interest motivated by his love for Scripture. He would later become a poet of the sufferings of Jesus, and the virginity of Mary.

In 1112 Bernard entered the Abbey of Cîteaux, where he received an education in monastic formation. In 1115 he was sent to establish a new monastery in Clairvaux, or the Valley of Light. As a young abbot, Bernard published sermons on Gabriel's announcement to Mary. Those sermons marked him as a gifted writer and teacher. His fame and personal charm drew many to Clairvaux. He would later invest his abilities in a reform of Cistercian monasteries.

News of Bernard's talents spread far beyond monastic circles. Rulers sought his counsel. His most famous service as a counselor came in 1130 when he helped heal a dispute that had bred division in the papacy and the church. Bernard also worked to bring peace between France and England. At the request of a former student, Pope Eugene III, in 1145 Bernard preached the beginning of the Second Crusade. In the closing years of his life, Bernard rose from his sickbed and traveled to Rhineland to defend Jews against persecution.

In addition to his astonishing productivity in establishing Cistercian monasteries, Bernard wrote many works of Christian formation

that teach growth in Christian holiness. For example, his *On Loving God* maps the path by which God's grace guides Christians to perfect love for God.

Bernard died at Clairvaux in 1153.

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Why should we love God, and in what measure? The reason for loving God is God himself. And the extent to which God should be loved is immeasurable.

Could any greater claim be made on our love than that Christ freely gave himself for unworthy sinners? What more regal gift could God have offered?

Ought not God to be loved in return when we consider *who* loved, *whom* he loved, and *how much* he loved? For *who* is he that loved us? The One Christians confess, “You are my God.” Is this not the ultimate demonstration of that love that refuses to seek its own interests?

For *whom* was such inexpressible love demonstrated? To God’s enemies, for “when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” So it was God Almighty who loved us freely and loved us while we were still his enemies.

And *how* great is God’s love? He “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” And what about the *measure* of God’s love? “He did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all.” This is the claim that the holy, supreme, and omnipotent God has on us who were defiled. God has wondrously offered his love so that we need no longer remain in our sins.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. I

O LORD MY GOD, also bestow on me understanding to know you, zeal to seek you, wisdom to find you, a life that is pleasing to you, unshakable perseverance, and a hope that will one day be fulfilled in your glorious presence. Amen.

ATTRIBUTED TO THOMAS AQUINAS, “PRAYERS BY ST. THOMAS AQUINAS,”
2 HEARTS NETWORK



FOR REFLECTION: Pss. 16:2; 63:1-8; 73:23-26; **John 3:16-18**; 15:9-17; 17:20-23; **Rom. 5:10-11; 8:31-39**; 1 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:21-23; 1 John 4:7-21

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No benefit is derived from having a gift if one does not know he possesses it. But some people who know they possess a gift fail to recognize it came from God. Instead, they glorify themselves, believing the gift resulted from their own efforts. They commit the sin of vainglory by failing to glorify God as the Giver of all good things. The apostle Paul asked, “What have you that you did not receive?” If all that we have is a gift from God, then why engage in self-glory and act as though it were not given? Proper glory glorifies God in all things, for the Lord alone is the Truth. Recognize the value of the gift, but don’t glory over it as your own.

As God’s people we must know *first* what we *are* and *second* that we *are not* of ourselves. Unless Jesus’ disciples thoroughly understand this truth, they will fail to glorify God, and their glorying will be in vain. If Jesus’ disciples do not with thanksgiving rejoice over God’s gifts of grace, they will end up living as beasts that perish.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. 2

NOW LET MY PRAISE and blessing and thanksgiving be rendered to you, O Lord my God, for all your gifts and bounties, no merits of mine requiring, nay, my sins notwithstanding. You have lavished benefits on me in soul and body. Such have been your mercies and goodness that I now see that you have blessed me from my cradle. But I pray you, Lord, I pray you, let me never be unthankful for such great benefits or forgetful of so many mercies. Amen.

ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, *BOOK OF MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS*,
MEDITATION 18, SEC. 91



FOR REFLECTION: Pss. 35:18; 50:14; 75:1; Song of Sol. 1:8; John 14:6;
1 Cor. 1:31; 4:7; Rom. 8:31-32; Eph. 5:15-20; Heb. 12:13-16; Rev. 11:17

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If a person is ignorant of the fact that he is distinguished from the lower creatures for no reason other than God's special gifts, he will soon betray his God-given dignity and begin to behave like some of the creatures. His ignorance will result in bondage to passions, and he will increasingly resemble creatures not made in God's image.

Christians must be vigilant. We must neither rank ourselves too low in God's order of creation nor think of ourselves too highly. The latter error follows from foolishly crediting to our own accomplishments what good might be found in us. But there is a kindred and more grievous error: the sin of presumption, which means intentionally and arrogantly usurping God's glory for oneself because of goods that are God's alone. While ignorance may be brutish, arrogance is satanic.

To guard against the sin of presumption, virtue must be added to dignity and wisdom. Virtue will seek and find the Author and Giver of all that is good.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. 2

AUTHOR AND FOUNTAIN OF ALL LIFE AND BLESSEDNESS! We rejoice to consider what beautiful things you will accomplish in those who yield themselves to you. O that the holy life of the blessed Jesus, and the excellent graces that appeared so eminently in him, would always be the pattern for our formation. May we never cease our pursuit of our Lord's likeness till that new and divine nature reigns in us. For to you belong all glory, honor, and worship, to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

HENRY SCOUGAL, *THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE SOUL OF MAN*, PT. I



FOR REFLECTION: Gen. 1:26-27; 8:21; Exod. 20:4; 23:24; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 5:8; Pss. 94:10; 136:25; Luke 12:47; Rom. 1:18-32; 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4; Col. 3:10

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(Of Love and Its Recompense)

Love is an affection of the soul, not a contract. It is neither given nor received on the basis of a mere agreement. Instead, love is spontaneous in its origin. If you love to gain something else in return, then what you really love is that “something else.” Paul did not preach the gospel because he wanted to earn bread. No, he ate so that he might be strengthened to preach the gospel. What he loved was not bread but the gospel.

On a lower level, it is the reluctant, not the eager, whom we urge by promising rewards. Who would think of paying a person to do what he already longs to do? No one would hire a hungry person to eat, a thirsty person to drink, or a mother to nurse her infant. Who would think of bribing a farmer to dress his own vineyard, cultivate his orchard, or repair his dwelling? So all the more, one who loves God truly asks no other recompense than God himself. If he should require anything more, it would be the prize he loves, not God himself.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. 7

I LOVE YOU, O my God, above all things, because you have been so good, so patient, so loving to me, notwithstanding all the sins by which I have so grievously offended you. I love you, O blessed Jesus, my Savior, because you did suffer so much for love of me, an ungrateful sinner, and did die on the cross for my salvation.

O make me love you more and more, and show my love to you by faithfully keeping your commandments all the days of my life. Amen.

“ACTS OF FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE,” A SHORT SERVICE OF COMFORT AND HOPE
FOR SICK COMMUNICANTS, IN A BOOK OF OFFICES (1914)



FOR REFLECTION: Pss. 18:1-3; 63:1-3, 7-8; 84:2-4; Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 14:27-28; John 14:20-23; 1 Cor. 13:5; Phil. 1:9-11; 1 Pet. 1:7-9

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At first a person may “love” God because of the benefits he derives, not because of who God is. But can such a person not see how little he can do by himself and how radically dependent he is on God’s goodness? Such recognition should cause a person to abandon his self-centered disposition toward God. When recurring tribulations cause a person to flee to God for his unfailing help, would not even a heart as hard as iron and as cold as marble be softened by the Savior’s goodness? Would not a person turn away from loving God selfishly and begin to love him just because of who he is? Would he not be overcome by God’s free grace that invites us to love him unselfishly?

Loving God just because he is God must become spontaneous and pure in his children. Such love is expressed not only verbally but also in deed. By loving our neighbor and by how we use this world’s goods we return God’s love. When we love in this way, then we love as God has loved us. No longer do we love God for what we might selfishly gain, but we seek the things that are of Christ and that are to his benefit, just as he sought not his own well-being but our own.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. 9

O MY LORD AND MOST MERCIFUL GOD, my Creator, my Salvation, my Life, my Hope, my Consolation, and my Refuge, govern and uphold my power of free choice by your grace and all-merciful loving-kindness, that I may not by an ill use of freedom offend you. Amen.

ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, *BOOK OF MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS*,
MEDITATION 19, SEC. 98



FOR REFLECTION: Pss. 34:8; 49:18; 118:1; Matt. 25:35-40; Luke 10:47; John 3:18; 4:42; 15:12; Gal. 6:2; James 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:18; 4:19-20

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To love our neighbor's welfare as much as our own is true charity out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and a transparent faith. Whosoever loves another in order to seek his own prosperity is exposed as not loving the good for its own sake. One person praises God because God is powerful, another because his gifts are bountiful, and yet another simply because of God's essential goodness. The first person is a slave to fear. The second is greedy and lusts for more benefits. But the third person is a true child of God who honors his Father. The first two types are driven by self-interest.

Neither fear nor self-interest can transform one in God's image. Fear and self-interest may change a person's appearance to make him look like a child of God, and may even modify his conduct, but will never change his heart. A slave may do God's work, but because he toils involuntarily, he remains a slave. A mercenary may serve God, but because he places the price of gain on his service, he remains chained to greed. Where there is self-interest, there is isolation. Fear constrains the slave, and greed the selfish person. But the love that characterizes the child of God never keeps a record of anything of its own.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. 12

O LORD AND SAVIOR, from whom we have all received one blessing after another, here and everywhere, now and always, arrange the days of our lives in the order of your good pleasure, and by your Holy Spirit direct our hearts, tongues, and actions by your mercy in accordance with your will. May we truly study by your grace to speak and to do what pleases you. Amen.

ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, *BOOK OF MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS*,
MEDITATION 18, SEC. 91



FOR REFLECTION: Pss. 19:7; 49:16-19; 118:1; Matt. 6:24; 13:44; Luke 12:15; John 12:4-6; 1 Cor. 13:5; Phil. 4:11-12; Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:5; 1 John 4:8

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One law is associated with the spirit of servitude. Its disposition is fear. There is another law having to do with the spirit of liberty. Its disposition is tenderness and love. The children of God do not live according to the first law. And they cannot live without the second. Paul explained that we have received a “spirit of adoption,” not the “spirit of bondage” and “fear,” by which we name God as our Father. So it is incorrect to say that the righteous have no law, but simply that the law of servitude does not apply to them. The law of fear is imposed on rebels. The law of love is given to God’s obedient children. The God who is love is its Author. That is why Jesus could say, “Take my yoke upon you.” He meant, “I will not impose my yoke upon you if you are reluctant, but if you will, you may bear it.” Under any conditions other than loving obedience, the yoke of Christ produces weariness instead of rest for our souls.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. 14

O GOD, FOUNT AND ORIGIN, Giver and Preserver of all virtues, increase in me, I beseech you, true faith, unfailing hope, and perfect charity; profound humility, invincible patience, and perpetual chastity of body and mind. Give me wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance; discretion in all things, and a watchful sensibility, that I may wisely distinguish between good and evil. Amen.

ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, *BOOK OF MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS*,
MEDITATION 18, SEC. 90



FOR REFLECTION: Matt. 11:29-30; Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 4:1-9; Phil. 2:12-15; 1 Tim. 1:9

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We are told “perfect love casts out fear.” But in fact love is never without a fear that is godly. Godly fear doesn’t destroy loving devotion. Rather, when mixed with such devotion, godly fear refines devotion. Then the oppressive burden of fear that was once unbearable, because it was slavish, becomes bearable. Godly fear is pure and filial. By contrast, servile fear generates suffering—the cause and its effect. Moreover, love is never without desire, but now it is desire governed by love.

Love perfects the law of service by infusing devotion, just as it perfects the law of wages by restraining covetousness.

Self-interest is restrained within proper boundaries when governed by love. It will now reject evil things and prefer the good. It will be satisfied with the good only as it promotes the better. Similarly, by God’s grace God’s people will care for their bodies, not as ends in themselves, but in service to the human spirit. And they will cultivate the well-being of the spirit only as it promotes worship of God.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *ON LOVING GOD*, CHAP. 14

ALMIGHTY, ETERNAL, JUST, AND MERCIFUL GOD, grant us the grace to do for you alone all that we know you want us to do and always to desire what pleases you. Thus inwardly cleansed and enlightened, and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, may we be able to follow in the footprints of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And by your grace alone, may we make our way to you, Most High, who lives and rules in perfect Trinity and simple Unity and is glorified, God all-powerful forever and ever. Amen.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI, “LETTER TO ALL THE FRIARS” (CA. AD 1224),
THE WRITINGS OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI



FOR REFLECTION: Pss. 34:9-11; 89:7; 111:10; Prov. 8:13; 19:23; Isa. 8:12-13; Matt. 5:17; 10:28; Luke 12:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:11-15; 7:1; **1 John 4:18**



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Christ-followers from earliest times to the present enrich us with their insight and inspiring examples.

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