

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX—theologian, mystic, philosopher, preacher, b. around 1090 in Fontaines near Dijon, d. August 20, 1153 in Clairvaux.

He was born into a knightly family of Burgundy. In 1112 he entered the Cistercian abbey in Cîteaux. In 1115 he founded the abbey in Clairvaux where he was abbot until his death. He reformed religious life in the abbey and especially recommended the practice of contemplation. He gave valuable directions for the reform of all levels of hierarchy in the Church. He played an important role in political matters. He was an adviser to popes, kings, and princes. He had a strong influence on secular and clerical authorities. In 1138 he contributed to the ending of a schism in the Church. In 1146 he called for a crusade that ended in failure in 1148. He took part in many theological controversies. In particular, he opposed dialectics in the theology of Gilbert de la Porrée (he contributed to the condemnation of Gilbert's positions at a synod in Reims in 1148), and Peter Abelard. He is regarded as the creator of the speculative mysticism of the west and one of the greatest Catholic mystics. He was canonized on January 18, 1174 by Pope Alexander III, and on July 17, 1830, Pope Pius VII recognized him as a doctor of the Church.

He wrote ascetic-mystical, dogmatic-apologetic, and moral treatises, as well as speeches and letters. His most important works, which are characterized by their outstanding values of style, are *Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis* (*O stopniach pokory i pychy* [On degrees of humility and pride], around 1121; PL 182, 941–972); *De diligendo Deo* [*O miłowaniu Boga* [On loving God], around 1126; PL 182, 973–1000); *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (*O lasce i wolnej woli* [On grace and free will], around 1127; PL 182, 1001–1030); *De consideratione* [*O rozważaniu* [On consideration], 1149–1153; PL 182, 727–808), and *Sermones in Cantica canticorum* (*Kazania na temat "Pieśni nad Pieśniami"* [Sermons on the topic of "The Song of Songs"], PL 183, 785–1197)—written in various periods.

Bernard of Clairvaux was one of the creators of medieval speculative mysticism, which developed in the west over the course of the following centuries. His doctrine of mystical love was based on his personal experience of ecstasy, to which he gave a completely developed interpretation.

Bernard stated that his philosophy was "to know Jesus Crucified". The source of knowledge and wisdom is not the reason, but mystical union with Christ, in which dialectic is misleading and superfluous. Despite a clear accent on supernatural cognition, Bernard did not completely repudiate the value of the rational factor in man's life. He stated that all cognition begins from sense cognition, and he located his own theory of cognition marked by its mysticism in the current of *a posteriori* realism.

Although Bernard's philosophy shows mysticism's connection with theory, especially with regard to the domain of cognition, and in large measure it is contained in theological-mystical considerations, Bernard was also the author of texts with a strictly philosophical character that did not exhibit any direct connection with mysticism but belonged to the level of natural consideration, which is a clearly distinguished level for Bernard.

According to Bernard, the universe created by God is composed of beings that are the trace and expression of His creative action. They create an unequal order, since God ordered them in a perfect manner, giving to each existing being the meaning of being and joining it with the rest of the beings into a whole. God created the world, giving beings existence so that all

beings, according to the nature they possess, participate in Him. The lowest degree of participation is mere existence, a higher level is the possession of life, and the next level is the light of reason.

Being the cause that gives beings existence, God retained the complete separateness of his nature. Between God, the cause of the world, and finite created beings there is a sharp and insurmountable ontological difference. Bernard defended the dualism of God and creation and opposed the pantheistic mysticism taught by Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Eriugena.

Bernard's vision of reality contained a unique typology of beings. In the universe Bernard distinguished the world of bodies (material beings) from the world of incorporeal beings. All incorporeal beings, with the exception of God, are dependent in some way upon the world of bodies. With regard to differences in their relation to the world of bodies, Bernard divided incorporeal beings into four groups.

The closest connection with the body occurs among animal souls, which stand lowest in the hierarchy of incorporeal beings. These souls cannot exist without a connection with a body. They constitute the principle that animates the animal organism and they perish at the moment of its death. Also, in their activity they do not go beyond the sphere of the body. The animal's soul thus understood by its nature transcends the body and is incorporeal, but since it is completely joined with the body it is also non-spiritual.

The human soul stands at the next level in the hierarchy. It is dependent upon the body already in its action, but does not depend upon the body in exist, and after the organism's biological death it still exists. The dependence of man's soul upon the body is manifest in acts of cognition, in which bodily sense organs play a role. After the model of the angels, who occupy the next level in the hierarchy, and in distinction from the irrational animals, man's soul is endowed with reason. The reason is to be man's guide in life providing him with directions. The reason is the factor that enables man to distinguish what is beneficial or not beneficial, good or evil, hence the reason determines man's dignity. The use of the reason in typically theoretical ends (knowledge for the sake of knowledge) does not have greater value, but man has the duty before God of using the reason in order not to fall to the level of beasts, but to preserve in himself the dignity God gave him. Although he was a mystic, Bernard respected the superior value of the reason in the natural order.

God, who is Love, created man in a pure act of love according to his image and likeness, and it is the human soul that is marked by the likeness of God. The free will is the essence of the divine image and likeness in the soul. According to Bernard's theory of free will, the will is the faculty whereby man is free from internal necessity and coercion.

Pure spirits are ahead of human souls in the hierarchy, for by their nature they are not joined with bodies in existence or action. In the area of cognition, this independence is manifest in cognitive acts, in which there is an immediate intuitive penetration of reality to the mind that does not require the participation of sense cognition. Pure spirits are dependent in their existence on the Creator and hence are limited in their action by a defined location connected with the tasks assigned to them. Although they do not possess a corporeal element, they can—in view of their performed functions—assume a body for a certain time as an instrument of action.

The supreme being, God, is the only spiritual being who is not dependent in any respect upon the world of bodies, for He is absolutely incomposite, and what is more essential, He is unlimited. His omnipotent will is sufficient reason for his being, whereby all his actions are not subject in the least degree to any conditions. Not only does He most perfectly know all beings, but He can directly impart infused knowledge to others. God, in view of his nature, is transcendent in relation to all creation.

For Bernard, ethical questions and the theory of knowledge are connected into a whole with the problematic of the human soul.

The will is what determines the proper choice of motivations proposed by the reason, hence the act of will is always joined with an act of cognition, but the will is not determined by the reason, and it retains the ability of choose. By will man can choose God, can will to be like God, or can desire earthly things alone. As a consequence of the possession of such freedom, man has the ability to perform moral evil, which is the deformation of the likeness of the human soul to God.

The beings that form the universe do not constitute truth, they are only symbols of truth. Truth is made accessible to human cognition by God's Revelation. Man can read the truth in the beings that exist in the world when he joins the process of cognition with the process of moral self-perfection. Christ is the way that leads to the truth; knowledge of value is not achieved by the reason alone, which has very limited cognitive abilities, but only by mystical union with Christ. To know God as the Supreme Being is the final end of cognition. For Bernard, cognition is man's return to God and cannot be isolated from love. Only love can lead to truth. The reason turns out to be too weak, and God's assistance as He gives grace to those who deserve it by their life is necessary. The attainment of truth is founded on humility. Humility is the virtue whereby man, as he knows exactly to what end he exists, becomes diminished in his own eyes. Once he has achieved the final of the twelve stages of humility, a man enters the first degree of truth (recognizing his own misery), after which he passes on to the degree of charity (compassion for his neighbor on account of his misery), and then the third and highest degree of truth, which is pure truth attained in the contemplation of heavenly things. The full and true knowledge of God is achieved in the mystical life. Therefore mystical ecstasy is the highest and culminating point of knowledge. The human soul is then in a certain manner separated from the body so that there is a unique union of man with God for a moment. God's grace can lead to such a union, but even with this deification of the human soul, man's substance remains infinitely different from God's substance. Man's union with God then does not consist in a common essence with God, but in a community through likeness that is based on the harmony of man's will, which is the essence of the human soul's image of God, with God's will. Love makes man's will conform in an ideal manner to God's will. As he loves God for His own sake, man arrives for a moment at the highest boundary to which man can arrive in earthly life by ecstasy. There occurs a harmony of human love with God's love, which is the apex of man's moral perfection and the limit of his cognitive abilities. Bernard of Clairvaux was a proclaimer of mysticism and thought that familiarity with God was the best and even the only way to know the truth.

Philosophy as Bernard conceived it is not theoretical knowledge, a passive opinion on Christ, but the active and humble attainment of the ability to guide oneself according to the model of Christ. The task of philosophy is to help make human life deeper so that man deserves the grace of God, which leads him to truth. The acquisition of truth is possible only

by raising and deepening the spiritual life. The human reason's efforts turn out to be misleading, hence Bernard rejected dialectics.

Dialectical theology, like the secular sciences, do not have any greater value for Bernard. He saw mysticism and rationalism as being in opposition, used intuition and contemplation as a method for acquiring knowledge, but did not use reasoning as did scholasticism. Bernard did not reject *a posteriori* realism. He said that all human knowledge begins from sense knowledge. The human reason, as it draws data from sense cognition, which provides information about the number and differences of beings, by analysis arrives at the existence of God, but it cannot know God in a full and true way. God is of another nature than all the beings He has created, and so man cannot know Him directly by natural cognition, but must have the supernatural help that makes mystical cognition possible.

E. Vacandard, *Vie de saint Bernard, abbé de Clairvaux*, P 1897–1898, 1927⁵; J. Ries, *Das geistliche Leben, in seinen Entwicklungsstufen nach der Lehre des hl. B.*, Fr 1906; G. G. Coulton, *St. Bernard, His Predecessors and Successors, 1000–1200 A. D.*, C 1923, repr. NY 1979; E. Butler, *Western Mysticism. The Teaching of SS Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, NY 1924, Lo 1951²; A. J. Luddy, *Life and Teachings of St. Bernard*, Db 1927; *Saint Bernard et son temps*, Dijon 1928–1929; A. Wilmart, *Auteurs spirituels et textes devots du moyen âge latin. Études d'histoire littéraire*, P 1932; É. Gilson, *La théologie mystique de Saint Bernard*, P 1934, 1980⁴; M. Pachucki, *Święty Bernard Doktor Kościoła* [Saint Bernard Doctor of the Church], Pz 1934; J. Weingartner, *Abelard und Bernard. Zwei Gestalten des Mittelalters*, In 1937; O. Castrein, *Bernard von Clairvaux. Zur Typologie des mittelalterlichen Menschen*, Lund 1938; É. Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, Lo 1940; Baudry J., *Saint Bernard*, P 1946; J. Leclercq, *Saint Bernard mystique*, Bruges 1948; idem, *Saint Bernard et Origen d'après un manuscrit de Madrid*, *Revue Benedictine* 59 (1949), 183–195; idem, *Textes sur Saint Bernard et Gilbert de la Porrée*, MS 14 (1952), 107–128; W. Williams, *St Bernard of Clairvaux*, We 1952; J. Calmette, H. David, *St. Bernard*, 1953; L. Cristiani, *Saint Bernard de Clairvaux*, P 1962; J. Leclercq, *Recueil d'études sur saint Bernard et ses écrits*, I–III, R 1962, 1969; W. Hiss, *Die Anthropologie B. von Clairvaux*, B 1964; J. Lewicki, *W sprawie poglądów filozoficznych św. B. z Clairvaux* [In the matter of St. Bernard of Clairvaux's philosophical views], RF 16 (1968) n. 1, 75–82.

Aleksandra Gondek