

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard of Clairvaux, O.Cist (1090 – August 20, 1153) was a French abbot and the primary builder of the reforming Cistercian order.

After the death of his mother, Bernard sought admission into the Cistercian order. "Three years later, he was sent to found a new abbey at an isolated clearing in a glen known as the *Val d'Absinthe*, about 15 km southeast of Bar-sur-Aube. According to tradition, Bernard founded the monastery on 25 June 1115, naming it *Claire Vallée*, which evolved into *Clairvaux*. There Bernard would preach an immediate faith, in which the intercessor was the Virgin Mary." In the year 1128, Bernard assisted at the Council of Troyes, at which he traced the outlines of the Rule of the Knights Templar, who soon became the ideal of Christian nobility.



On the death of Pope Honorius II on 13 February 1130, a schism broke out in the Church. Louis VI of France convened a national council of the French bishops at Étampes in 1130, and Bernard was chosen to judge between the rivals for pope. After the council of Étampes, Bernard went to speak with the King of England, Henry I, Beauclerc, about the king's reservations regarding Pope Innocent II. Beauclerc was sceptical because most of the bishops of England supported Anacletus II; he convinced him to support Innocent. Germany had decided to support Innocent through Norbert of Xanten, who was a friend of Bernard's. However, Innocent insisted on Bernard's company when he met with Lothair III of Germany. Lothair became Innocent's strongest ally among the nobility. Despite the councils of Étampes, Wurzburg, Clermont, and Rheims all supporting Innocent, there were still large portions of the Christian world supporting Anacletus. At the end of 1131, the kingdoms of France, England, Germany, Castile, and Aragon supported Innocent; however, most of Italy, southern France, and Sicily, with the patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, and Jerusalem, supported Anacletus. Bernard set out to convince these other regions to rally behind Innocent. The first person whom he went to was Gerard of Angoulême. He proceeded to write a letter known as Letter 126, which questioned

Gerard's reasons for supporting Anacletus. Bernard would later comment that Gerard was his most formidable opponent during the whole schism. After convincing Gerard, Bernard traveled to visit the Count of Poitiers. He was the hardest for Bernard to convince. He did not pledge allegiance to Innocent until 1135. After that, Bernard spent most of his time in Italy convincing the Italians to pledge allegiance to Innocent. He traveled to Sicily in 1137 to convince the king of Sicily to follow Innocent. The whole conflict ended when Anacletus died on 25 January 1138. In 1139, Bernard assisted at the Second Council of the Lateran. Bernard denounced the teachings of Peter Abelard to the pope, who called a council at Sens in 1141 to settle the matter. Bernard soon saw one of his disciples elected as Pope Eugenius III. Having previously helped end the schism within the church, Bernard was now called upon to combat heresy. In June 1145, Bernard traveled in southern France and his preaching there helped strengthen support against heresy.

Following the Christian defeat at the Siege of Edessa, the pope commissioned Bernard to preach the Second Crusade. The last years of Bernard's life were saddened by the failure of the crusaders, the entire responsibility for which was thrown upon him. Bernard died at age 63, after 40 years spent in the cloister. He was the first Cistercian placed on the calendar of saints, and was canonized by Pope Alexander III on 18 January 1174. In 1830 Pope Pius VIII bestowed upon Bernard the title "Doctor of the Church".

Early life (1090–1113)

Bernard's parents were Tescelin, Lord of Fontaines, and Aleth of Montbard, both belonging to the highest nobility of Burgundy. Bernard was the third of a family of seven children, six of whom were sons. At the age of nine years, he was sent to school at Châtillon-sur-Seine, run by the secular canons of Saint-Vorles. Bernard had a great taste for literature and devoted himself for some time to poetry. His success in his studies won the admiration of his teachers. He wanted to excel in literature in order to take up the study of the Bible. He had a special devotion to the Virgin Mary, and he would later write several works about the Queen of Heaven.

Bernard would expand upon Anselm of Canterbury's role in transmuting the sacramental ritual Christianity of the Early Middle Ages into a new, more personally held faith, with the life of Christ as a



model and a new emphasis on the Virgin Mary. In opposition to the rational approach to divine understanding that the scholastics adopted, Bernard would preach an immediate faith, in which the intercessor was the Virgin Mary.

Bernard was only nineteen years of age when his mother died. During his youth, he did not escape trying temptations and around this time he thought of retiring from the world and living a life of solitude and prayer.

In 1098 Saint Robert of Molesme had founded Cîteaux Abbey, near Dijon, with the purpose of restoring the Rule of St Benedict in all its rigor. Returning to Molesme, he left the government of the new abbey to Saint Alberic, who died in the year 1109. In 1113 Saint Stephen Harding had just succeeded him as third Abbot of Cîteaux when Bernard and thirty other young noblemen of Burgundy sought admission into the Cistercian order.

Abbot of Clairvaux (1115–28)

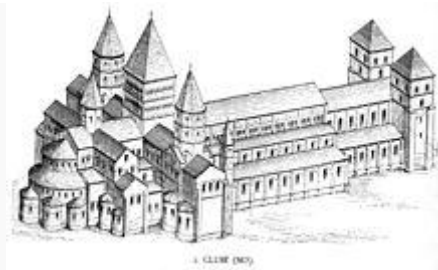


Bernard exorcising a possession, altarpiece by Jörg Breu the Elder, c. 1500.

The little community of reformed Benedictines at Cîteaux, which would have so profound an influence on Western monasticism, grew rapidly. Three years later, Bernard was sent with a band of twelve monks to found a new house at Vallée d'Absinthe, in the Diocese of Langres. This Bernard named Claire Vallée, or Clairvaux, on 25 June 1115, and the names of Bernard and Clairvaux would soon become inseparable. During the absence of the Bishop of Langres, Bernard was blessed as abbot by William of Champeaux, Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne. From

that moment a strong friendship sprang up between the abbot and the bishop, who was professor of theology at Notre Dame of Paris, and the founder of the Abbey of St. Victor.

The beginnings of Clairvaux Abbey were trying and painful. The regime was so austere that Bernard became ill, and only the influence of his friend William of Champeaux and the authority of the general chapter could make him mitigate the austerities. The monastery, however, made rapid progress. Disciples flocked to it in great numbers and put themselves under the direction of Bernard. His father and all his brothers entered Clairvaux to pursue religious life, leaving only Humbeline, his sister, in the secular world. She, with the consent of her husband, soon took the veil in the Benedictine nunnery of Jully-les-Nonnains. Gerard of Clairvaux, Bernard's older brother, became thecellarer of Citeaux. The abbey became too small for its members and it was necessary to send out bands to found new houses. In 1118 Trois-Fontaines Abbey was founded in the diocese of Châlons; in 1119 Fontenay Abbey in the Diocese of Autun; and in 1121 Foigny Abbey near Vervins, in the diocese of Laon. In addition to these victories, Bernard also had his trials. During an absence from Clairvaux, the Grand Prior of Cluny went to Clairvaux and enticed away Bernard's cousin, Robert of Châtillon. This was the occasion of the longest and most emotional of Bernard's letters.



The abbey of Cluny as it would have looked in Bernard's time.

In the year 1119, Bernard was present at the first general chapter of the order convoked by Stephen of Cîteaux. Though not yet 30 years old, Bernard was listened to with the greatest attention and respect, especially when he developed his thoughts upon the revival of the primitive spirit of regularity and fervour in all the monastic orders. It was this general chapter that gave definitive form to the constitutions of the order and the regulations of the *Charter of Charity* which Pope Callixtus II confirmed 23 December 1119. In 1120, Bernard authored his first work, *De Gradibus Superbiae et Humilitatis*, and his homilies which he entitled *De Laudibus Mariae*. The monks of the abbey of Cluny were unhappy to see Cîteaux take the lead role among the religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church. For this reason, the Black Monks attempted to make it appear that the rules of the new order were impracticable. At the solicitation of William of St. Thierry, Bernard defended the order by publishing

his *Apology* which was divided into two parts. In the first part, he proved himself innocent of the charges of Cluny and in the second he gave his reasons for his counterattacks. He protested his profound esteem for the Benedictines of Cluny whom he declared he loved equally as well as the other religious orders. Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, answered Bernard and assured him of his great admiration and sincere friendship. In the meantime Cluny established a reform, and Abbot Suger, the minister of Louis VI of France, was converted by the *Apology* of Bernard. He hastened to terminate his worldly life and restore discipline in his monastery. The zeal of Bernard extended to the bishops, the clergy, and lay people. Bernard's letter to the archbishop of Sens was seen as a real treatise, "*De Officiis Episcoporum.*" About the same time he wrote his work on *Grace and Free Will*.

Doctor of the Church (1128–46)

In the year 1128 AD, Bernard participated in the Council of Troyes, which had been convoked by Pope Honorius II, and was presided over by Cardinal Matthew, Bishop of Albano. The purpose of this council was to settle certain disputes of the bishops of Paris, and regulate other matters of the Church of France. The bishops made Bernard secretary of the council, and charged him with drawing up the synodal statutes. After the council, the bishop of Verdun was deposed. It was at this council that Bernard traced the outlines of the Rule of the Knights Templar who soon became the ideal of Christian nobility. Around this time, he praised them in his *Liber ad milites templi de laude novae militiae*.

Again reproaches arose against Bernard and he was denounced, even in Rome. He was accused of being a monk who meddled with matters that did not concern him. Cardinal Harmeric, on behalf of the pope, wrote Bernard a sharp letter of remonstrance stating, "It is not fitting that noisy and troublesome frogs should come out of their marshes to trouble the Holy See and the cardinals."

Bernard answered the letter by saying that, if he had assisted at the council, it was because he had been dragged to it by force. In his response Bernard wrote,

Now illustrious Harmeric if you so wished, who would have been more capable of freeing me from the necessity of assisting at the council than yourself? Forbid those noisy troublesome frogs to come out of their holes, to leave their marshes . . . Then your friend will no longer be exposed to the accusations of pride and presumption.

This letter made a positive impression on Harmeric, and in the Vatican.

Schism

Bernard's influence was soon felt in provincial affairs. He defended the rights of the Church against the encroachments of kings and princes, and recalled to their duty Henri Sanglier, archbishop of Sens and Stephen of Senlis, bishop of Paris. On the death of Pope Honorius II, which occurred on 14 February 1130, a schism broke out in the Church by the election of two popes, Pope Innocent II and Pope Anacletus II. Innocent II, having been banished from Rome by Anacletus, took refuge in France. King Louis VI convened a national council of the French bishops at Étampes, and Bernard, summoned there by consent of the bishops, was chosen to judge between the rival popes. He decided in favour of Innocent II. This caused the pope to be recognized by all the great powers. He then went with him into Italy and reconciled Pisa with Genoa, and Milan with the pope. The same year Bernard was again at the Council of Reims at the side of Innocent II. He then went to Aquitaine where he succeeded for the time in detaching William X of Aquitaine, Count of Poitiers, from the cause of Anacletus.^[4]



St Bernard in a medieval illuminated manuscript

In 1132, Bernard accompanied Innocent II into Italy, and at Cluny the pope abolished the dues which Clairvaux used to pay to that abbey. This action gave rise to a quarrel between the White Monks and the Black Monks which lasted 20 years. In May of that year, the pope, supported by the army of Emperor Lothair III, entered Rome, but Lothair, feeling himself too weak to resist the partisans of Anacletus, retired beyond the Alps, and Innocent sought refuge in Pisa in September 1133. Bernard had returned to France in June and was continuing the work of peacemaking which he had commenced in 1130. Towards the end of 1134, he made a second journey into Aquitaine, where William X had relapsed into schism. Bernard invited William to

the Mass which he celebrated in the Church of La Couldre. At the Eucharist, he "admonished the Duke not to despise God as he did His servants". William yielded and the schism ended. Bernard went again to Italy, where Roger II of Sicily was endeavoring to withdraw the Pisans from their allegiance to Innocent. He recalled the city of Milan to obedience to the pope as they had followed the deposed Anselm V, Archbishop of Milan. For this, he was offered, and he refused, the archbishopric of Milan. He then returned to Clairvaux. Believing himself at last secure in his cloister, Bernard devoted himself with renewed vigor to the composition of the works which would win for him the title of "Doctor of the Church". He wrote at this time his sermons on the *Song of Songs*. In 1137, he was again forced to leave his solitude by order of the pope to put an end to the quarrel between Lothair and Roger of Sicily. At the conference held at Palermo, Bernard succeeded in convincing Roger of the rights of Innocent II. He also silenced the final supporters who sustained the schism. Anacletus died of "grief and disappointment" in 1138, and with him the schism ended.

In 1139, Bernard assisted at the Second Council of the Lateran, in which the surviving adherents of the schism were definitively condemned. About the same time, Bernard was visited at Clairvaux by Saint Malachy, Primate of All Ireland, and a very close friendship formed between them. Malachy wanted to become a Cistercian, but the pope would not give his permission. Malachy would die at Clairvaux in 1148.

Contest with Abelard

Towards the close of the 11th century, a spirit of independence flourished within schools of philosophy and theology. This led for a time to the exaltation of human reason and rationalism. The movement found an ardent and powerful advocate in Peter Abelard. Abelard's treatise on the Trinity had been condemned as heretical in 1121, and he was compelled to throw his own book into the fire. However, Abelard continued to develop his teachings, which were controversial in some quarters. Bernard, informed of this by William of St-Thierry, is said to have held a meeting with Abelard intending to persuade him to amend his writings, during which Abelard repented and promised to do so. But once out of Bernard's presence, he reneged. Bernard then denounced Abelard to the pope and cardinals of the Curia. Abelard sought a debate with Bernard, but Bernard initially declined, saying he did not feel matters of such importance should be settled by logical analyses. Bernard's letters to William of St-Thierry also express his apprehension about confronting the preeminent logician. Abelard continued to press for a public debate, and made his challenge widely known, making it hard for Bernard to decline. In 1141, at the urgings of Abelard, the archbishop of Sens called a council of bishops, where

Abelard and Bernard were to put their respective cases so Abelard would have a chance to clear his name. Bernard lobbied the prelates on the evening before the debate, swaying many of them to his view. The next day, after Bernard made his opening statement, Abelard decided to retire without attempting to answer. The council found in favor of Bernard and their judgment was confirmed by the pope. Abelard submitted without resistance, and he retired to Cluny to live under the protection of Peter the Venerable, where he died two years later

Cistercian Order and Heresy

Bernard had occupied himself in sending bands of monks from his overcrowded monastery into Germany, Sweden, England, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland, and Italy. Some of these, at the command of Innocent II, took possession of Three Fountains Abbey, from which Pope Eugenius III would be chosen in 1145. Pope Innocent II died in the year 1143. His two successors, Pope Celestine II and Pope Lucius II, reigned only a short time, and then Bernard saw one of his disciples, Bernard of Pisa, and known thereafter as Eugenius III, raised to the Chair of Saint Peter. Bernard sent him, at the pope's own request, various instructions which comprise the *Book of Considerations*, the predominating idea of which is that the reformation of the Church ought to commence with the sanctity of the pope. Temporal matters are merely accessories; the principles according to Bernard's work were that piety and meditation were to precede action.

Having previously helped end the schism within the Church, Bernard was now called upon to combat heresy. Henry of Lausanne, a former Cluniac monk, had adopted the teachings of the Petrobrusians, followers of Peter of Bruys and spread them in a modified form after Peter's death. Henry of Lausanne's followers became known as Henricians. In June 1145, at the invitation of Cardinal Alberic of Ostia, Bernard traveled in southern France. His preaching, aided by his ascetic looks and simple attire, helped doom the new sects. Both the Henrician and the Petrobrusian faiths began to die out by the end of that year. Soon afterwards, Henry of Lausanne was arrested, brought before the bishop of Toulouse, and probably imprisoned for life. In a letter to the people of Toulouse, undoubtedly written at the end of 1146, Bernard calls upon them to extirpate the last remnants of the heresy. He also preached against the Cathars.

Second Crusade (1146–49)

News came at this time from the Holy Land that alarmed Christendom. Christians had been defeated at the Siege of Edessa and most of the county had fallen into the hands of the Seljuk

Turks. The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the other Crusader states were threatened with similar disaster. Deputations of the bishops of Armenia solicited aid from the pope, and the King of France also sent ambassadors. The pope commissioned Bernard to preach a Second Crusade and granted the same indulgences for it which Pope Urban II had accorded to the First Crusade.



There was at first virtually no popular enthusiasm for the crusade as there had been in 1095. Bernard found it expedient to dwell upon the taking of the cross as a potent means of gaining absolution for sin and attaining grace. On 31 March, with King Louis present, he preached to an enormous crowd in a field at Vézelay. James Meeker Ludlow describes the scene in *The Age of the Crusades* as follows:

A large platform was erected on a hill outside the city. King and monk stood together, representing the combined will of earth and heaven. The enthusiasm of the assembly of Clermont in 1095, when Peter the Hermit and Urban II launched the first crusade, was matched by the holy fervor inspired by Bernard as he cried, "O ye who listen to me! Hasten to appease the anger of heaven, but no longer implore its goodness by vain complaints. Clothe yourselves in sackcloth, but also cover yourselves with your impenetrable bucklers. The din of arms, the danger, the labors, the fatigues of war, are the penances that God now imposes upon you. Hasten then to expiate your sins by victories over the Infidels, and let the deliverance of the holy places be the

reward of your repentance." As in the olden scene, the cry "*Deus vult! Deus vult!*" rolled over the fields, and was echoed by the voice of the orator: "Cursed be he who does not stain his sword with blood."

When Bernard was finished the crowd enlisted en masse; they supposedly ran out of cloth to make crosses. Bernard is said to have given his own outer garments to be cut up to make more. Unlike the First Crusade, the new venture attracted royalty, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, then Queen of France; Thierry of Alsace, Count of Flanders; Henry, the future Count of Champagne; Louis' brother Robert I of Dreux; Alphonse I of Toulouse; William II of Nevers; William de Warenne, 3rd Earl of Surrey; Hugh VII of Lusignan; and numerous other nobles and bishops. But an even greater show of support came from the common people. Bernard wrote to the pope a few days afterwards, "Cities and castles are now empty. There is not left one man to seven women, and everywhere there are widows to still-living husbands."

Bernard then passed into Germany, and the reported miracles which multiplied almost at his every step undoubtedly contributed to the success of his mission. Conrad III of Germany and his nephew Frederick Barbarossa, received the cross from the hand of Bernard. Pope Eugenius came in person to France to encourage the enterprise. As in the First Crusade, the preaching inadvertently led to attacks on Jews; a fanatical French monk named Radulphe was apparently inspiring massacres of Jews in the Rhineland, Cologne, Mainz, Worms, and Speyer, with Radulphe claiming Jews were not contributing financially to the rescue of the Holy Land. The archbishop of Cologne and the archbishop of Mainz were vehemently opposed to these attacks and asked Bernard to denounce them. This he did, but when the campaign continued, Bernard traveled from Flanders to Germany to deal with the problems in person. He then found Radulphe in Mainz and was able to silence him, returning him to his monastery.

The last years of Bernard's life were saddened by the failure of the Second Crusade he had preached, the entire responsibility for which was thrown upon him. Bernard considered it his duty to send an apology to the Pope and it is inserted in the second part of his "*Book of Considerations*." There he explains how the sins of the crusaders were the cause of their misfortune and failures. When his attempt to call a new crusade failed, he tried to disassociate himself from the fiasco of the Second Crusade altogether.

Final years (1149–53)



Bernard receiving milk from the breast of the Virgin Mary. The scene is a legend which allegedly took place at Speyer Cathedral in 1146.

The death of his contemporaries served as a warning to Bernard of his own approaching end. The first to die was Suger in 1152, of whom Bernard wrote to Eugenius III, "If there is any precious vase adorning the palace of the King of Kings it is the soul of the venerable Suger". Conrad III and his son Henry died the same year. From the beginning of the year 1153, Bernard felt his death approaching. The passing of Pope Eugenius had struck the fatal blow by taking from him one whom he considered his greatest friend and consoler. Bernard died at age sixty-three on 20 August 1153, after forty years spent in the cloister.¹ He was buried at the Clairvaux Abbey, but after its dissolution in 1792 by the French revolutionary government, his remains were transferred to the Troyes Cathedral.

Theology

Main article: Doctor Mellifluus

St. Bernard of Clairvaux was named a Doctor of the Church in 1830. At the 800th anniversary of his death, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical on Bernard, *Doctor Mellifluus*, in which he labeled

him "The Last of the Fathers." Bernard did not reject human philosophy which is genuine philosophy, which leads to God; he differentiates between different kinds of knowledge, the highest being theological. Three central elements of Bernard's Mariology are how he explained the virginity of Mary, *the "Star of the Sea"*, how the faithful should pray on the Virgin Mary, and how he relied on the Virgin Mary as Mediatrix.

Bernard also held some doctrines which the Reformers would later rekindle at the beginnings of the Protestant movement. Some people have therefore equated him with a Protestant before there were Protestants. In truth he held to a mix of the Reformers' doctrines and the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church of his day. Bernard was skeptical of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Also of great importance to the Reformers would be Bernard's conception of justification. Calvin quotes Bernard several times to show the historical validity of *Sola Fide*, which Luther described as the article upon which the church stands or falls. Calvin also quotes him in setting forth his doctrine of a forensic alien righteousness, or as it is commonly called imputed righteousness.

Spirituality

Bernard was instrumental in re-emphasizing the importance of Lectio Divina and contemplation on Scripture within the Cistercian order. Bernard had observed that when Lectio Divina was neglected monasticism suffered. Bernard considered Lectio Divina and contemplation guided by the Holy Spirit the keys to nourishing Christian spirituality

Works





An engraving of The Lactation of Saint Bernard. The Virgin Mary is shooting milk into the eye of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux from her right breast which allegedly miraculously cured an eye affliction.

The works of Bernard include the following:

- *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, (*The Steps of Humility and Pride*) his first treatise, written in the mid-1120s.
- *Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti Theoderici Abbatem* (*Apology to William of St. Thierry*), written in the defence of the Cistercians against the claims of the monks of Cluny.^[27]
- *De Conversione Ad Clericos Sermo Seu Liber* (*On the Conversion of Clerics*), a book addressed to the young ecclesiastics of Paris written in 1122.
- *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* (*On Grace and Free Choice*), written c1128, in which the Roman Catholic dogma of grace and free will was defended according to the principles of St Augustine.
- *De diligendo Dei*, (*On Loving God*), possibly written c1128,^[30] which outlines seven stages of ascent leading to union with God.
- *De Laude Novae Militiae*, (*In Praise of the New Knighthood*) addressed to Hugh de Paynes, first Grand Master and Prior of Jerusalem (1129). This is a eulogy of the Knights Templar order, which had been instituted in 1118, and an exhortation to the knights to conduct themselves with courage in their several stations.
- *De praecepto et dispensatione libri* (*Book of Precepts and Dispensations*), written c1141-4), which contains answers to questions upon certain points of the Rule of St Benedict from which the abbot can, or cannot, dispense.
- *De Consideratione* (*On Consideration*), written c1148-53, addressed to Pope Eugenius III.^[33]
- *Liber De Vita Et Rebus Gestis Sancti Malachiae Hiberniae Episcopi* (*The life and death of Saint Malachy, the Irishman*).
- *De Moribus Et Officio Episcoporum*, which is a letter addressed to Henry, Archbishop of Sens on the duties of bishops.

His sermons are also numerous:

- Most famous are his *Sermones super Cantica Conticorum* (*Sermons on the Song of Songs*). Although it has at times been suggested that the sermon form is a rhetorical device in a set of works which were only ever designed to be read, since such finely polished and lengthy literary pieces could not accurately have been recorded by a monk while Bernard was preaching, recent scholarship has tended to tend toward the theory that, although what exists in these texts was certainly the product of Bernard's writing, they likely found their origins in sermons preached to the monks of Clairvaux. Bernard began to produce these in 1135, and died still not having completed his series, with 86 sermons complete. (These sermons contain an autobiographical passage, sermon 26, mourning the death of his brother, Gerard.) (Sometime after Bernard of Clairvaux died, the English Cistercian Gilbert of Hoyland was asked to continue Bernard's incomplete series of 86 sermons on the biblical Song of Songs. Gilbert wrote 47 sermons before he died in 1172, taking the series up to Chapter 5 of the Song of Songs. Another English Cistercian abbot, John of Ford, wrote another 120 sermons on the Song of Songs, so completing the Cistercian sermon-commentary on the book.)
- There are 125 surviving *Sermones per annum*, or *Sermons on the Liturgical Year*.
- There are also the *Sermones de diversis* (*Sermons on Different Topics*).
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Stained glass representing Bernard. Upper Rhine, ca. 1450.

Bernard's theology and Mariology continue to be of major importance, particularly within the Cistercian and Trappist orders. Bernard led to the foundation of 163 monasteries in different parts of Europe. At his death, they numbered 343. His influence led Pope Alexander III to launch reforms that would lead to the establishment of canon law. He was the first Cistercian monk placed on the calendar of saints and was canonized by Pope Alexander III 18 January 1174. Pope Pius VIII bestowed on him the title of Doctor of the Church. He is fondly remembered as the "Mellifluous Doctor" (the Honey-Sweet(-voiced) Doctor) for his eloquence.

The Cistercians honor him as only the founders of orders are honoured, because of the widespread activity which he gave to the order.

Saint Bernard's Prayer to the Shoulder Wound of Jesus is often published in Catholic prayer books.

Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy" places him as the last guide for Dante, as he travels through the Empyrean (*Paradiso*, cantos XXXI–XXXIII). Dante's choice appears to be based on Bernard's contemplative mysticism, his devotion to Mary, and his reputation for eloquence.

He is also the attributed author of the poems often translated in English hymnals as "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" and "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee".