

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON'S APPROPRIATIONS
OF BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

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Introduction

One of the great marks of the preaching and writing ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon was his vast knowledge of other preachers and writers. Throughout his sermons, articles, and books he often cites great men and women that came before him. He surely took to heart the words of John of Salisbury, “We are like dwarves sitting upon the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature adds to ours.”¹ Spurgeon was surely in his time a “shoulder stander” but he was no dwarf; and today, as he stood so tall on the shoulders of others, many are taking their post atop his broad shoulders. Lewis Drummond said of him, “Spurgeon vividly recognized that Christians who truly want to walk with God must look back to the past and all that God has done in the lives of those who have preceded them. Therefore he immersed himself in their writings.”² From the Patristic

¹ John, and Daniel D. McGarry. *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: a twelfth-century defense of the verbal and logical arts of the trivium*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1955. (3.4). (John of Salisbury quoting Bernard of Chartres in his work *The Metalogicon*)

² Lewis A. Drummond. *Spurgeon: prince of preachers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992. 572.

writers, Spurgeon refers to Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, Jerome, and most obviously Augustine.³

Spurgeon's love for the Puritans is most widely noted. He constantly read and spoke fondly of them, saying (Dickson on the Psalms) "drops fatness," (Sibbes) "scatters pearls and diamonds with both hands," and (Ferguson of Ayrshire) is "a grand, gracious, savoury divine." He once said, "I have been charged with being a mere echo of the Puritans, but I would rather be an echo of the truth than the voice of falsehood. Rest assured that there is nothing new in theology except that which is false."⁴ It was also said of Spurgeon that to hear him was like hearing a second John Bunyan; but Spurgeon's catholicity of shoulder-standing extended to George Fox, Richard Baxter, John Owen, George Whitefield, John Gill, and his own predecessor Benjamin Keach.⁵

What is less known is Spurgeon's admiration for the great poet of the Medieval Church, Bernard of Clairvaux. Spurgeon's spirituality was strictly biblical, so while in many ways he differed from St. Bernard, he did have great admiration for the medieval mystic. Of all the medieval authors, Bernard had the most impact and prominence in the ministry of Spurgeon.⁶ Throughout the great canon of Spurgeon's sermons and other works, he cites the great Saint of

³ Lewis A. Drummond. *Spurgeon: prince of preachers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992. 572.

⁴ James Gordon. *Evangelical Spirituality*. SPCK, 1991. 169.

⁵ Fox was a Quaker, Baker and Owen were of course Puritan authors but are often couched outside of the fold of Bunyan. It is noted in Puritan work Owen's great respect for the preaching ability of Bunyan, the "tinker." Benjamin Keach had pastored the Southwark church in London that would later become The New Park Street Church and then the Metropolitan Tabernacle under Spurgeon's leadership. Lewis A. Drummond. *Spurgeon: prince of preachers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992. 573.

⁶ Lewis A. Drummond. *Spurgeon: prince of preachers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992. 569, 573.

Clairvaux more than sixty times, not to mention using Bernard's hymns in the Metropolitan Hymnal. Throughout these citations, much can be learned about the spirituality of Bernard and the effect it had on Charles Spurgeon, his congregation, and his readers for years to come. The thread of passion that ran from twelfth century Clairvaux through nineteenth century London carries to twenty-first century churches all around the globe.

The following is a survey of the Spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux through the appropriations of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. After an overview of the life events of St. Bernard this essay will consider the importance of Bernard and five key markers of his spirituality using only the words written and spoken through the ministry of Charles Spurgeon. More than eight hundred years after the medieval giant's death, his words would ring loud through the mouth and pen of one of "dwarves" on his shoulders, a dwarf that would grow into a giant.

Life of Bernard

Thomas Merton once wrote, "St. Bernard is too important to be overlooked. He belongs on the bookshelves of every educated man, along with St. Augustine, and St. Gregory, St. Anselm and St. Thomas Aquinas."⁷ It was also said of Bernard that he preached so effectively that mothers would lock up their sons in their homes, prohibiting them from hearing Bernard preach lest they follow him to the monastery.⁸ He lived in the twelfth century, the highpoint of the Middle Ages from the viewpoint of spirituality. It was the age when the West

⁷ Henri Daniel-Rops. *Bernard of Clairvaux*. New York: Hawthorn Books. 1964, 7.

⁸ Lewis A. Drummond. *Spurgeon: prince of preachers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1992. 311.

achieved an integral and balanced humanism.⁹ By God's providence, it was the right time for Bernard. At no other period since the death of Charlemagne in the ninth century, would he have found a world so ready for his saintly life or so open to the thrill and power of his personality.¹⁰ His biographers say that his arrival to the order of Cîteaux in 1112 was the defining moment in the history of 12th century monasticism. While this may be a bit of an exaggeration there can be little doubt of the profound impact of St Bernard.¹¹

Bernard was born near Dijon in Burgundy in 1091, and he died at his abbey of Clairvaux in 1153.¹² Bernard's family belonged to the minor nobility of Burgundy; his father being a knight, and his brothers destined to become the same. Bernard however, was sent by his parents to a small school kept by the Canons Regular at St. Vorles, near Dijon.¹³ When Bernard was still young, his father Tescelin was killed in the first Crusade. "His mother, Aletta, was of the same devout type as Anchusa, the mother of Chrysostom, Nonna, the wife of Gregory

⁹ Bernard, and G. R. Evans. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.13.

¹⁰ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 76.

¹¹ F. Donald Logan. *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 139.

¹² John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 77.

¹³ Bernard, and G. R. Evans. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987. 15.

Nazianzen, and Monica, the mother of Augustine; women who adorned with a life rich in faith and prayers and good works the gospel they so ardently believed.”¹⁴

One of the most significant events of Bernard’s life occurred even before his birth. His biography accounts that “while Aletta was still carrying Bernard in her womb, she had a dream which foretold of things to come. She dreamed that she had within her a barking dog, which had a white coat and a tawny back.” The dream led Aletta to a holy man who interpreted her dream saying: “There is no need to be afraid, because this dream foretells nothing but good. You are to be the mother of a wonderful dog who is destined to be the guardian of the Lord’s house. You have heard him barking, because soon now he will rush out against the enemies of the faith. He is to be a marvelous preacher, and as a dog will lick its master’s wounds clean of all that may poison them, so the words that his tongue speaks will heal and cure many of the evils that disease men’s souls.”¹⁵

Another influence on Bernard’s life was the instruction he received from his teachers at St. Vorles. Their charge, “to be poor with the poor Christ” became Bernard’s maxim in life.¹⁶ Beyond his school and the influence of his family, Bernard was just a boy when the strict order of Cîteaux was founded in 1098; otherwise, Bernard would have likely known about and had

¹⁴ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 77.

¹⁵ Vp, b. I, c. I, 2; P.L., CLXXXV, 227–228. Transl. Webb and Walker, 14, 15. *From Adriaan Hendrik Bredero, Bernard of Clairvaux : Between Cult and History*, 1st English ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996. 29.

¹⁶ Henri Daniel-Rops. *Bernard of Clairvaux*. New York: Hawthorn Books. 1964. 31.

contact with the monastery and order of life therein.¹⁷ A second remarkable event from roughly the same time that must have influenced Bernard's later actions was no doubt the Crusader's conquest (or the "Deliverance", as it was rather called in his circles) of Jerusalem in 1099. This feat must have made a considerable impression on young Bernard from a religious point of view; as well as upon the militant nobility, to which Bernard's family belonged.¹⁸

What may be called Bernard's conversion came about through a swift, intense, mental vision of his mother Aletta and of her hopes for him. It happened one day as he was on his way to the military camp where his brothers were engaged in a liege. As he journeyed, his mother appeared with him and in this vivid realization of her, she shook him with emotion. He found a church nearby, and before its altar gave himself in a flood of tears, irrevocably to God His service. Before entering the monastic life, he persuaded his brothers, other family, and some friends numbering thirty in all, to join him. Together they entered the monastery of Cîteaux and became monks of the Cistercian order.¹⁹

From the beginning of his new life, Bernard kept the rules of Cîteaux with absolute obedience. Not strong enough for field work, he assumed the menial duties of the kitchen. He prayed often, spoke little, meditated much, and studied hard.²⁰ Just three years into his time at

¹⁷ Adriaan Hendrik Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux : Between Cult and History*, 1st English ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996. 12.

¹⁸ Adriaan Hendrik Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux : Between Cult and History*, 1st English ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996. 12.

¹⁹ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 77-78.

²⁰ Specifically studying and committing to memory much of the Bible. John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 78.

Cîteaux, he was chosen at the age of twenty-five to lead as abbot a colony of monks to form a new monastery at Clairvaux. This is where he would remain until his death.²¹

With Bernard as its leader, Clairvaux flourished unlike any other monastery of its day. Men of all ranks and stations crowded to it; knights and scholars, rulers and ruled, rich and poor looked upon it with favor, and held its purity, strict devotion to God, and monks in high esteem. From the monastery, monks went all over Europe, founding new monastic orders and restoring the old. When Bernard came to his life's end, 160 monasteries had been established under his encouragement and leadership; and all the while more than seven hundred monks were still living at Clairvaux.²²

Experience and thought are the two guidelines to follow in considering Bernard's life, work, and doctrine; three realities that are really inseparable.²³ From his devotion to Christ, both private and public, flowed all other aspects of his influential ministry. Some characteristics of his ministry were his writing, his love for the virgin Mary, his healing, and his important work away from Clairvaux.

Bernard was one of the prolific writers of the Middle Ages. The influences of his pen not only carried to his contemporaries, but even carries on today. He wrote constantly in Clairvaux's scriptorium. Treatises of various types full of high thinking and fervent piety came

²¹ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 79.

²² John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 81.

²³ Bernard, and G. R. Evans. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.14.

from his pen. He wrote letters to all quarters of Europe, to all classes and conditions of men. Nearly five hundred of them have been preserved.²⁴

Also characteristic of Bernard was his love for the Virgin mother, Mary. In hymn and sermon he sang and preached her praises as the mediator, whom the most wretched of sinners could approach to intercede for them at the throne of her son.²⁵ Bernard's love for Mary was so deep and so well known, that when Dante in the *Divine Comedy* approached the divine throne in paradise, he chose St. Bernard as his guide to present him at the throne of the Virgin, so that she would introduce him to the presence of the very God.²⁶ Dante even described Mary as the "one that charmed him" (Bernard).²⁷

Many also sought Bernard's healing touch for themselves or others throughout France and in Germany. John Humpstone said, "though many of these people understood nothing of the language he spoke, until the interpreter gave its sense, the intensity of Bernard's uninterpreted words, the sight of his emaciated face, from a flame within his heart, and the pleading tones of his masterful voice made such an impression that all who heard him were carried away. There

²⁴ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 80.

²⁵ F. Donald Logan. *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 147.

²⁶ F. Donald Logan. *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 147.

²⁷ Alighieri Dante, and H.F. Cary. *The Divine Comedy*. New York: Grolier, 1973. 330.

was with him such a divine power and such a devotion to the main purpose of his life, that a great religious awakening attended his efforts.”²⁸

Due to his great leadership ability Bernard was continually called away from Clairvaux for various tasks in the larger church. For example, he was called to dictate the election of Pope Innocent II. Perhaps most importantly, Bernard was called to tour Europe and to preach the Second Crusade, calling men of all nationalities to service, for the protection of the Holy City and the Holy Sepulchre from the Islamic forces.²⁹

To conclude, in William of St. Thierry’s *Vita Prima* he describes Bernard in the most fitting manner, echoing the sentiments of the apostle Paul; Thierry wrote, “His speech, whatever persons he spoke to for the edifying of souls, was adapted to his audience; for he knew the intelligence, the habits, the occupations of each and all. To country folk he spoke as if born and bred in the country; and so to other classes, as if he always had been occupied with their business. He was learned with the erudite, and simple with the simple, and with spiritual men rich in illustrations of perfection and wisdom. He adapted himself to all, desiring to gain all for Christ.”³⁰

Bernard Through Spurgeon

²⁸ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 86.

²⁹ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 85.

³⁰ John Humpstone. *Man and Message, Eminent Preachers Who Exemplify Chief Principles of Ministerial Efficiency: The Samuel A. Crozer Lectures for 1926*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1927. 94.

Importance

Throughout Charles Spurgeon's ministry, he listed Bernard among the great men of Faith. In one of his sermons at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Spurgeon gave a Hebrews 11-inspired list of Saints that have received the fullness of Christ. He, like the author of Hebrews, begins with men such as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham; but he then continues this list through the centuries of Church History to include men such as: Luther, Calvin, Jerome, and John Knox. He then said, "You should turn over the list of the great preachers, and summoning them one by one, you should say to Augustine, to Chrysostom, to Bernard, and to those in later days, such as Latimer, Tindal, and Hooper, and to the men who later still with Whitfield and with Wesley preached the Word, 'Whence came your boldness in confession? Whence your strength to bear the calumny of the age and to be the butt of human scorn, and yet never to flinch, much less to withdraw your testimony;' and they all reply, 'Of his fullness have all we received.'" ³¹ In Spurgeon's exposition of Psalm 31:5 from his *The Treasury of David*, he gave a similar list of those whose who died with the Lord's words, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." Spurgeon writes, "these were the last words of Polycarp, of Bernard, of Huss, of Jerome of Prague, of Luther, Melanchthon, and many others." He then quoted Martin Luther who wrote, "Blessed are they, who die not only *for* the Lord, as martyrs, not only *in* the Lord, as all believers, but likewise *with* the Lord, as breathing forth their lives in these words, 'Into thine hand I commit my spirit.'" ³² Bernard's name, often being counted among the great leaders of the church, shows

³¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 7, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 7*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

³² Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 2: Psalms 27-57*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 66.

that Spurgeon saw him not only as a quotable figure from medieval times, but as one of the strong pillars that the church was built upon.

It should be noted however, that while Spurgeon often heralded the importance of Bernard, he did not do so without pointing out Bernard's fault of the "Romish Church." In one sermon, Spurgeon directed his congregation to read the works of those with whom they may regularly disagree reasoning that those authors may have edifying points. He then said of Bernard, "What Protestant can refuse to love the holy Bernard? Was there ever a more consecrated servant of God or a dearer lover of Christ than he? Yet he was most sorrowfully in bondage to the superstitions of his age and of the Romish Church."³³

³³ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 29, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 29*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

While Spurgeon had many heroes, his hero of the Medieval Church was plainly Bernard. Those under the pastoral leadership of Charles Spurgeon would have well known this leader in the medieval church, and aimed to duplicate his spirituality. Spurgeon said in a January 1886 address to the Evangelical Alliance:

I believe that the strength of the Church lies in that inner circle of champions which is composed of the thoroughly consecrated, the men who are favoured of the Lord. Holy Bernard was the light of his age, and passing on from age to age we see men who blazed with the light of God; but we ought each one of us to seek to be saints in the highest sense of the word. We must aim at being the holiest of men and women. Let it be ours to be like the mountain-tops that catch first the beams of the rising sun, and reflect the light upon the lowlands. If we are not such, we ought to be; and wherein we are not all that we ought to be, we sin. Let us now lay bare our hearts before God, and ask Him to search us that so our guilt may be perfectly removed, and we may be clean in His sight, and so enter with joyous hearts into the New Year. May the Holy Spirit pour upon us the spirit of grace and of supplications! Amen.³⁴

Dependence

Bernard's utter dependence on Christ is perhaps the area of his spirituality most clearly seen through the preaching and writing of Charles Spurgeon. In Spurgeon's exposition of Psalm 14:1, he uses Bernard's words to display the utter hopelessness of man and consequently, man's great dependence on Christ.

'Men,' says Bernard, 'because they are *corrupt* in their minds, become *abominable* in their doings: *corrupt* before God, *abominable* before men. There are three sorts of men of which none doeth good. There are those who neither understand nor seek God, and they are the dead: there are others who understand him, but seek him not, and they are the wicked. There are others that seek him but understand him not, and they are the fools.' 'O God,' cries a writer of the middle ages, 'how many are here at this day who, under the name of Christianity, worship idols, and are abominable both to thee and to men! For every man worships that which he most loves. The proud man bows down before the idol

³⁴ An address delivered at Mentone, during the week of universal prayer, in connection with the Evangelical Alliance, in January, 1886. C. H. Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting: Forty Addresses at Metropolitan Tabernacle and Other Prayer-Meetings*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 63.

of worldly power; the covetous man before the idol of money; the adulterer before the idol of beauty; and so of the rest.’ And of such, saith the apostle, ‘They profess that they know God, but in works deny him, being *abominable* and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.’ Titus 1:16. ‘*There is none that doeth good.*’ Notice how Paul avails himself of this testimony of the epistle to the Romans, where he is proving concerning ‘both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.’ Rom. 3:9.³⁵

This type of utter dependence on Christ by the medieval saint is cited in many other places throughout the writing of Spurgeon. From the treasury of David he cited Bernard to say: “So far from being able to answer for my sins, I cannot answer even for my righteousness,”³⁶ also Spurgeon used the words of the saint to answer the question of Psalm 24:3 (Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?) Bernard wrote, “such an High Priest became us, because he knows the difficulty of that ascent to the celestial mountain, he knows the weakness of us that have to ascend.”³⁷

Bernard’s dependence on Christ as seen through the ministry of Charles Spurgeon, flowed from his dependence on the Bible. In his commentary for Psalm 119:33 in *The Treasury of David* Spurgeon cited Bernard’s phrase, “He who is his own pupil, has a fool for his master.”³⁸ Here Bernard points to a man’s great dependence on the word of God for truth and learning. In another commendation for the digestion of God’s word, Spurgeon used again the great medieval leader: “Bernard observes, bodily bread in the cupboard may be eaten of mice, or moulder and waste: but when it is taken down into the body, it is free from such danger. If God enable thee to

³⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 1: Psalms 1-26*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 170.

³⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 5: Psalms 111-119*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 165.

³⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 1: Psalms 1-26*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 383.

³⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 5: Psalms 111-119*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 215.

take thy soul-food into thine heart, it is free from all hazards.”³⁹ When speaking of the use of time he cited his hero Bernard’s words: “not a word of the Scriptures—nothing of the salvation of the soul; but trifles, and toys, and laughter, and words light as the wind, ‘eat up the time.’”⁴⁰

Bernard’s spirituality of dependence on his beloved Christ surely left a great impression on the life and ministry of Spurgeon. Spurgeon, like Bernard, was very aware of his own sinfulness. In his book of sermon notes we find Bernard’s phrase, “The more vile Christ hath made himself *for* us, the more dear he ought to be *to* us.”⁴¹ Beyond the aforementioned citations, the echoes of Bernard’s life, an important man of the twelfth century, are seen in Spurgeon years later. After all of his success, the pride that did not overtake Charles Spurgeon is evidence that he had great “instructors” on humility and dependence.

Humility

From Bernard’s utter dependence on Christ flowed his great humility. Throughout the ministry of Spurgeon, the humility of Bernard is admired with great awe. Spurgeon is often pointing to the amazing examples of Bernard’s humble life, even to the point of caution. A story found twice in the vast catalogue of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one that clearly left an impression on him, is the story of Bernard and his uncle’s donkey. From his, *Flowers from a Puritan’s Garden*, Spurgeon writes, “We have read that when Bernard visited a monastery of ascetic monks, they were shocked because the saddle on which he rode was most sumptuously

³⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 5: Psalms 111-119*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 165.

⁴⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel: 1865*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 18.

⁴¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *My Sermon Notes, Volumes 3 & 4: Matthew to Revelation*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 53-54.

adorned. They thought that this ill became his profession as a meek and lowly man. Judge of their surprise and satisfaction when he told them that he had never so much as noticed what it was whereon he sat. The fact was, that the horse and saddle were not his own but had been lent to him by his uncle, and their nature had not been perceived by him during the whole of his journey. This is the way to use all earthly treasure, making small account whether we have it or not.”⁴² In a sermon wherein Spurgeon cited the same story, he entreated his congregation to be as Bernard, letting the soul rise above trivial things like the adornment of a horse; “If thou art rich, and thou hast a cloth with a gold fringe to it, do not be conscious of its existence; let thy soul rise above it. If thou art poor, and thou hast no saddle at all, do not notice thy lack; but let thy soul soar above such matters.”⁴³

In an 1868 edition of *The Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon wrote of the danger of riches that lead to pride. He cited Bernard who said: “pride is the rich man’s cozen, it blows him up like a bladder with a quill; then he grows secure, and so falls into sudden ruin.”⁴⁴ In another sermon, Spurgeon cited Bernard to say, “There is one thing to be said for humility, that it never can by any possibility do one harm.”⁴⁵ And in Spurgeon’s exposition of the Psalm of

⁴² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden, Distilled and Dispensed*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 263.

⁴³ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 40, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 40*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

⁴⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel: 1868*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 42.

⁴⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 13, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 13*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).

Crucifixion (Psalm 22), he mentions that Bernard calls humility a “self-annihilation.”⁴⁶ The key to Bernard’s humility was surely that he thought less of himself than other men. He would not allow a man’s fortune or shortcoming to become a source of jealousy or pride. Regarding Bernard’s charity, Spurgeon highlighted the Medievalist’s humility saying, “When Bernard chanced to espy a poor man meanly appareled, he would say to himself, ‘Truly, Bernard, this man hath more patience beneath his cross than thou hast;’ but if he saw a rich man delicately clothed, then he would say, ‘It may be that this man, under his delicate clothing, hath a better soul than thou hast under thy religious habit!’ ”⁴⁷

In all of his admiration however, Spurgeon was careful to communicate the shortcomings of his heroes alongside their victories. In a sermon on the self-denial of Christ, Spurgeon uses the misunderstanding of Bernard to teach his congregation. He said:

Saint Bernard was a man whom I admire to the last degree, and I count him to be one of the Lord’s choice ones; yet in the early part of his life there is no doubt that he lessened his powers of usefulness to a large extent by the emaciation which he endured, and the way in which he brought himself to death’s door. At times he was incapable of activity by reason of the weakness which he had incurred through fasting, and colds and exposure, there is no need to inflict useless torture upon the body. When did the Savior thus behave himself? Point me to a single mortification of a needless kind. Enough self-denial comes naturally in every Christian man’s way to make him try whether he can deny himself in very deed for the Lord’s sake.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 1: Psalms 1-26*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 339.

⁴⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden, Distilled and Dispensed*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 87.

⁴⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 29, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 29*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998. The remainder of this section of Spurgeon’s sermon is worth noting: You are thus tested when you are put in positions where you might get gain by an unrighteous act, or win fame by withholding a truth, or earn love and honor by pandering to the passions of those about you. May you have grace enough to say, “No; it cannot be. I love not myself, but my Lord. I seek not myself, but Christ. I desire to propagate nothing but his truth, and not my own ideas”: then will you have exhibited the self-denial of Jesus. These self-denials will sometimes be hard to flesh and blood. And then

Time with God

In his *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden*, Spurgeon wrote:

St. Bernard hath a pretty note of Martha's complaining of Mary, that she sat at Jesus' feet, while herself was employed in all the business of the family. 'Oh,' saith St. Bernard, 'that is a happy family where Martha complains of Mary!' Oh, how few families do thus complain! The world eats up our time, our care, and our thoughts, and God hath but a little share, little worship, little reverence.⁴⁹

Spurgeon often spoke of time alone with God or time in prayer with such conviction and he used the life and writing of St. Bernard to make this discipline clear. When writing of the necessity of solitude in gaining the deep knowledge of Christ, Spurgeon wrote in *The Saint and the Savior*:

"It was a sweet saying of Bernard, 'O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband, Christ, is bashful, and will not be familiar in company? Retire thyself by meditation into thy closet, or into the fields, and there thou shalt have Christ's embraces.' Rebekah went to the well, and was met by one who gave her jewels of gold, and found her a husband; let us go to the well of prayer, and we shall meet Jesus, but those who tarry at home shall lack."⁵⁰

Spurgeon echoed Bernard's thoughts on the need for solitude for the purpose of focus.

Both men knew how difficult it was to keep one's thoughts stayed upon the Lord. In one of his

in the Church of God to be able to give all your substance, to devote all your time, to lay out all your ability — this is to walk as Jesus walked. When weary and worn, still to be busy; to deny, yourself things which may be allowable, but which if allowable to you would be dangerous to others — this also is like the Lord. Such self-denial as may be helpful to the weak you ought to practice. Think what Christ would do in such a case, and do it; and, whenever you can glorify him by denying yourself, do it. So walk as he did who made himself of no reputation, but took upon himself the form of a servant. and who, though he was rich, brought himself down to poverty for our sakes, that we might be rich unto God. Think of that.

⁴⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden, Distilled and Dispensed*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 132-33.

⁵⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Savior: The Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 397.

sermon's Spurgeon said, "Bernard complained much of the wandering of his thoughts in prayer, and when some one said he thought Bernard must be a very great sinner to let his thoughts wander so, Bernard said, 'I will give you a trial. I will give you a horse, if you can say the Lord's Prayer and think of nothing else.' So the man began, 'Our Father which art in heaven,'" when he stopped short, and turning round, said, 'But you must give me the bridle to get him home with.'" So hard is it to keep the mind upon the object of devotion.⁵¹ For both men, the hope of solitude and focus was not arbitrary but was sought in the hope of rich personal prayer.

Through Spurgeon's words one can feel Bernard's great love for prayer. He preached: "Holy Bernard was want to say, and I believe that he could say it truly (it was in Latin, but I will give you the English of it), 'O my Jesus, I never went from thee without thee!' He meant that he never left his knees, and left Christ behind him; he never went out of the house of God, and left Christ behind him; but he went through the outward act of devotion with a consciousness of the presence of Christ."⁵² Likening Bernard to David in his exposition of the Psalms, Spurgeon quoted Bernard's words, "How oft hath prayer found me despairing almost, but left me triumphing, and well assured of pardon!"⁵³

Amazingly, throughout both of their illustrious and busy ministries, prayer remained central to everything they did. Both of these great men found time for private devotion to God, and richness of that time was and is plainly felt through their public works. While many

⁵¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 11, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 11*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

⁵² Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 41, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 41*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

⁵³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 1: Psalms 1-26*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 65.

throughout Christendom have found every excuse not to pray, Bernard and Spurgeon both lived by all of the reasons to pray.

Work Ethic

Neither Spurgeon nor Bernard were still in their devotions; both had an amazing work ethic, and Spurgeon loved to use the words of Bernard to stir his congregation to action. In his *Flashes of Thought* Spurgeon writes: “St. Bernard says: ‘Is thy work hard? set a harder resolution against it, for there is nothing so hard that it cannot be cut by something harder still.’ May the Spirit of God work in thee invincible resolution and unconquerable perseverance. Let not the iron break the northern iron and the steel. Under persecutions and difficulties, let God’s people resolve on victory, and by faith they shall have it, for according to our faith so shall it be unto us.”⁵⁴

“Is thy work hard? set a harder resolution against it, for there is nothing so hard that it cannot be cut by something harder still” was Spurgeon’s favorite of all of St. Bernard’s quotable one liners. He used this phrase three other times throughout his published library of works. He cited several other words from Bernard on the idea of work or action. When challenging his congregation towards spiritual growth Spurgeon cited the words of Bernard, “he is not good at all who doth not desire to be better.”⁵⁵

Though some may point to Bernard as a mystic, his love for work and duty should never be overlooked. In all of this, Spurgeon recognized that Bernard found Christ in every duty saying in an 1868 edition of *The Sword and the Trowel*, “St. Bernard, who found God in every

⁵⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Flashes of Thought*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 483.

⁵⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 29, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 29*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

duty, and communion with him in every prayer; this was true, sincere, complete Christian duty.”⁵⁶ This was not an endless duty however, but one that eventually led to the desire of Christ as Spurgeon uses Bernard to communicate in an exposition of Psalm 90:14: “(St. Bernard also expresses it in his mellifluousness) *Mutua interminabili inexplicabili generatione, desiderium generalis satietatem, et satietas parit desiderium*, By a mutual and reciprocal, by an undeterminable and inexpressible generation of one another, the desire of spiritual graces begets a satiety, and then this satiety begets a farther desire. This is a holy ambition, a sacred covetousness.”⁵⁷ Bernard went so far as to desire the anger of God; we see him cited later in *The Treasury of David* saying: “O Lord, be angry with me. For if thou chidest me not, thou considerest me not; if I taste no bitterness, I have no physic; if thou correct me not, I am not thy son.”⁵⁸

While both Spurgeon and Bernard realized the need for rest and solitude there was no love for pleasure in either of them. They were both on guard for their souls and for those under their lead at all time. Perhaps their work ethic is best summed up by the words of St. Bernard cited in Spurgeon’s exposition of Psalm 121:4, “he who keepeth Israel should neither slumber nor sleep, for he who assails Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.”⁵⁹ This of course is not only true of Israel but of all of people of God through Christ.

⁵⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel: 1868*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 42.

⁵⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 4: Psalms 88-110*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 84.

⁵⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 5: Psalms 111-119*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 282.

Joy in Christ

The goal of any spiritual discipline is Christlikeness. When considering the great Saint of the twelfth century through the appropriations of Charles Spurgeon, Christlikeness is what is found. The climax of Bernard's spirituality was his overwhelming joy in Christ. When teaching his students to this end Charles Spurgeon gave them this account:

A beautiful story is told of the famous Bernard. He preached one day to a congregation with marvelous eloquence and poetic diction; he charmed them all; but when the sermon was done, Bernard was observed to walk away disquieted. He wandered into the wilderness, and spent the night alone, fasting because of his sadness. The next day, at the time for preaching, he was ready, and delivered himself of a commonplace discourse, of which the great gentlemen who had listened to him the day before thought nothing; but the poor of the people understood his words, and drank them in; and though he heard the censures of the critics, he was observed to walk away with a smile upon his face, and to eat his bread with a merry heart. When one asked him the reason, he said, '*Heri Bernardum; hodie Jesum Christum*. Yesterday, I preached Bernard; but to-day, Jesus Christ.' You, my brethren, will feel happy when you have preached unto them Jesus; and, whoever frowns, your sleep will be sweet to you, for your Master will have accepted you.⁶⁰

In another of his sermons, Spurgeon gave his congregation words of Bernard that well explain the joy of his heart: "The words of Bernard may here instruct us: 'That is the true and chief joy which is not conceived from the creature, but received from the Creator, which (being once possessed thereof) none can take from thee: compared with which all other pleasure is torment, all joy is grief, sweet things are bitter, all glory is baseness, and all delectable things are despicable.'"⁶¹ In yet another sermon, Spurgeon spoke of the delirious love that is evident in the work of Bernard saying, "See how holy Bernard seems to go into a delirium of love when he

⁵⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 6: Psalms 120-150*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 20.

⁶⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 116-117.

⁶¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 11, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 11*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

talks about his divine Master! O Bernard, thou canst not tell how the Father loves Jesus, how he delights in his sacrifice, how he takes pleasure in his exaltation! In the putting away of sin by the blood of Jesus the Father has an infinite content, and so have we. Beloved, we rejoice in the divine satisfaction for sin; it is a well of divine delight to us.”⁶²

Perhaps Bernard’s joy in Christ was best seen in his poetry and song. Spurgeon wrote “Think of the Canticles of holy Bernard, how they flame with devotion. Saints and martyrs have been nourished at this table of blessing.”⁶³ These words did flame with devotion and Spurgeon often cited the poet’s rich expressions. To describe the satisfaction in Jesus to his congregation he used the line of Bernard, “honey to the mouth, music to the ear, and heaven to the heart.”⁶⁴ In another sermon on the same topic, Spurgeon again gave the words of Bernard, “Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills my breast.”⁶⁵ He also quoted *the Cluniac* to sing, “Their breasts are filled with gladness, their mouths are tuned to praise, what time, now safe for ever, on former sins they gaze: The fouler was the error, the sadder was the fall, the ampler are the praises of Him who pardoned all.”⁶⁶

⁶² Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 33, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 33*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

⁶³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel: 1883*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 233-34.

⁶⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 13, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 13*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

⁶⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, vol. 12, *Spurgeon's Sermons: Volume 12*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Spurgeon's Sermons. Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998.

⁶⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume 4: Psalms 88-110*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009. 38.

Coming as no surprise in the Metropolitan Hymnal there were a selection of Bernard's songs, translated to English of course and used for worship. From hymn number 275, *A Crown of Thorns*, Bernard gives these words: "O Lord of life and glory, what bliss till now was Thine! I read the wondrous story, I joy to call Thee mine."⁶⁷ From hymn number 786, *Thy Name is as Ointment Poured Forth* Bernard wrote, "Jesus, our only joy be Thou, as Thou our crown wilt be; Jesus, be Thou our glory now, and through eternity."⁶⁸

The joy of Christ was in the heart of Bernard and through the spirit of God that same joy was made manifest in the heart of Spurgeon. Even though Bernard of Clairvaux and Charles Haddon Spurgeon had many theological differences, the nineteenth century giant in the church admired the Christlikeness that he read in his forbearer. Spurgeon knew and was able to communicate the Joy that God had given Bernard and this served as an inspiration through song and sermon to many who would come underneath his pastoral leadership.

Conclusion

Charles Spurgeon never set out to write a doctoral thesis on the Spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux. He never published an article on Bernard or gave a lecture on the life of this medieval saint. In other words, he never had an over purpose to speak of the man. There were many reasons that Spurgeon would have chosen not to cite Bernard. The medieval saint obviously had controversial views on the Crusades and was a part of the medieval church, a period of church history that many protestants have tried to forget. Yet over and over throughout his sermons, books, articles, notes, addresses, and lectures the great preacher of the nineteenth

⁶⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Our Own Hymn Book: A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Public, Social and Private Worship*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009.

⁶⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Our Own Hymn Book: A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Public, Social and Private Worship*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009.

century points people to the great monk of the twelfth century. It is because a Spirituality so rich in dependence, humility, love for time with God, hard work, and joy is impossible to ignore.

Charles Spurgeon served his church well in opening their eyes to one of the church's great men and I pray he serves us likewise in pointing us to a teacher and model in piety.

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