

Bernard of Clairvaux's Writings on Violence and the Sacred

ANDREW PEDRY
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Monk, exegete, political actor and reformer, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was not just a man of his times; he was a man who shaped his times. Bernard's writings on Christian morality and the transformation of the human spirit in the pursuit of God reverberated in his time and have remained influential through the Protestant Reformation and into the modern era. The apparent contradiction between his writings on love and those on warfare has resulted in an artificial separation of his writing by scholars; those who are studying monasticism or Bernard in general tend to ignore or gloss over his writings on violence, while those studying the Crusades, warfare, or masculine identity often only look at those writings while ignoring Bernard's less topical work. This separation of his writings, though convenient, conceals a deep continuity which runs throughout Bernard's corpus and cheats Bernard of his intellectual completeness. This paper explores Bernard's writings on the issues of physical and spiritual violence, demonstrates that they are a coherent part of his wider set of beliefs and shows that, when studied side by side with his other writings, they clarify his thoughts on acceptable monastic and Christian life.

Monk, exegete, political actor and reformer, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was not just a man of his times—he was a man who shaped his times. Bernard was the son of an aristocratic French family, gifted with an unusually lettered education and drawn from young manhood into the monastic community. In his time he championed a monastic reform movement that swept the Western world and provided the oratorical spark that ignited the Second Crusade (1147-1149). Bernard's writings on Christian morality and the transformation of the human spirit in the pursuit of God reverberated in his time and have remained influential through the Protestant Reformation and into the modern era.¹

¹ This paper is an abridged version of a longer paper prepared in 2011 for the history department honors program at George Mason University titled "Violence and the Sacred in the Mind of Bernard of Clairvaux." Theo Bell, "Luther's Reception of Bernard," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (October 1995), 247. Pope Benedict XVI, "General Audience: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux" (speech, St. Peter's Square, Vatican City, 21 October 2009), accessed 15 December 2011, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20091021_en.html. Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, "Early Citeaux," accessed 15 December 2011, http://www.ocso.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=122&Itemid=178&lang=en.

A man sworn to earthly nonviolence, poverty and obedience, he was the product of a knightly family; he envisioned himself and his monastic brethren as spiritual soldiers on the front lines of a cosmic war. Bernard explored themes of spiritual and earthly violence throughout his many compositions; however, among the wide body of his surviving literature, he is best known for his influential writings on Christian love and his exegesis of the Song of Songs. The apparent contradiction between his writings on love and those on warfare has resulted in an artificial separation of his writings; those who are studying monasticism or Bernard in general tend to ignore or gloss over his writings on violence, while those studying the Crusades, warfare, or masculine identity often only look at those writings while ignoring Bernard's less topical work. This separation of his writings, though convenient, conceals a deep continuity which runs throughout Bernard's corpus and cheats Bernard of his intellectual completeness. This paper explores Bernard's writings on the issues of physical and spiritual violence, demonstrates that they are a coherent part of his wider set of beliefs and shows that, when studied side by side with his other writings, they clarify his thoughts on acceptable monastic and Christian life.

As will be discussed in more detail, Bernard's emphasis on personal transformation permeates all of his writings, including those intended for broad or institutional audiences. During Bernard's life, there were numerous reinterpretations of the monastic religious life; one of the most novel expressions of monasticism in the twelfth century was that of the *Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici*, the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon. Colloquially known as the Templar Order, they represented a form of monasticism that, despite its novelty, Bernard supported. Bernard was an active participant at Pope Honorius II's 1128 Council of Troyes, when the Templars were

officially recognized and their Rule finalized.² Though the details of Bernard's contributions to the Templar Rule are not precisely understood, at the very least he was the council's primary editor to the *ad hoc* Rule that the Templars had been living under since their inception, if not the work's primary author.³ Whether Bernard authored the Templars' Latin Rule from his own inspiration or edited and codified an informal, preexisting set of regulations, the surviving Latin Templar Rule can be considered one of Bernard's works.

By personal request of Pope Eugene II in 1146, Bernard began compiling and preaching sermons in favor of the Second Crusade. He traveled across hundreds of miles preaching to wide and varied audiences; to those areas he was unable to reach in person he sent his sermons in the form of letters with the weight of the Pope behind his pen. Though he took up the Crusade's cause with gusto, when asked to lead the Second Crusade in person, Bernard vehemently turned down this position. His leadership was intended for a spiritual battlefield, as the monastic life was one of spiritual warfare, and his inviolate vows precluded translating his duties as a spiritual warrior into those of a physical warrior.

² It is interesting that in both the prologue to the *Templar Rule* and in Odo of Deuil's *De Profectione Ludovici VII in Orientem* there are closely paralleling scenes where the preparations of the protagonists, Hugues and the King's nobles, respectively, are evaluated and criticized by the Pope or church officials. In neither case does this criticism appear to be genuinely intended to convey the idea that anything was truly wrong as much as it suggested the superiority of wisdom possessed by the church evaluators; the critique is less a reflection of the corrected than it is admiration of the correctors.

In the prologue to the *Templar Rule*: "And the conduct and beginnings of the Order of Knighthood we heard in common chapter from the lips of the aforementioned Master, Brother Hugues de Payens; and according to the limitations of our understanding what seemed to us good and beneficial we praised, and what seemed wrong we eschewed." From Judith Upton-Ward, trans., *The rule of the Templars: The French Text of the Rule of the Order of the Knights Templar*, (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 1992), 21.

In the *Journey*: "The pope, moreover, confirmed the arrangements [for preaching the crusade] which were satisfactory and corrected many irregularities while waiting for the King to arrive." From Odo of Deuil, *De Profectione Ludovici VII in Orientem*, ed. and trans. Virginia Berry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 17.

³ The view that Bernard was the Rule's author is supported by Malcolm Barber, "The Origins of the Order of the Temple," *Studia Monastica* 12 (1970): 219-40, 231; Stephen Howarth, *The Knights Templar* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 52; and Thomas Parker, *The Knights Templar in England* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1963), 3. The view that Bernard was an editor of a pre-existing "primitive rule" is supported by Desmond Seward, *The Monks of War: The Military Religious Orders* (Hamden, Conn.: The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1972), 22-23; Edward Burman, *The Templars: Knights of God* (London: Crucible Press, 1986), 29; Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and Their Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 6; and Upton-Ward, *The Rule of the Templars*, 11.

However, this personal limitation did not preclude him from writing in support of the monastic Knights Templar, nor did it keep him from supporting or preaching for the Second Crusade.⁴

Scholarship on Bernard has picked up considerably since Jean Leclercq and H. M. Rochais edited the works of Bernard for publication in the *S. Bernardi Opera*. Among the many authors of subsequent scholarship, several have stood out by producing influential works; Leclercq and G. R. Evans are two such authors, whose *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* and *The Mind of Saint Bernard*, respectively, have informed scholarship for decades.⁵ Leclercq's work helped cement the primary focus of Bernard scholarship on the issues of love, the monastic life, and the relationship between the human and the divine.⁶ Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs, one of Bernard's most famous and influential series of tracts, holds a central place in *Monks and Love*, and it has continued to be one of Bernard's most-studied works as well as the work with which he is most often associated. Yet Bernard also wrote extensively on violence, and as Katherine Allen Smith reminds us in her *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*, "divisions modern historians draw between the sacred and secular in the premodern world are more likely to reflect their own outlooks than those of their subjects, and that too neatly compartmentalizing the study of the past...can prevent us from appreciating the complexity of earlier worldviews."⁷

⁴ Bernard also may have been expressing concerns over his practical qualifications, but under the circumstances a spiritual interpretation of his opposition makes more sense.

⁵ G. R. Evans, *The Mind of Saint Bernard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979); Jean Leclercq and H.M. Rochais, eds., *Tractatus et Opuscula*, Vol. 3 of *S. Bernardi Opera*, (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963). Brian McGuire recently edited *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, Brill 2011, which was published after this paper was completed.

⁶ Michael Goodich, review of Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France*, *American Historical Review* 85 (1980): 377-78.

⁷ Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*, *Studies in the History of Medieval Religion*, Vol. 37 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2011), 199.

The discussion of monasticism and sacred violence in the High Middle Ages has, as Smith points out, traditionally drawn a bright line between monks and secular warriors.⁸ However, during the High Middle Ages, the Peace of God movement, the Crusades and military orders all began to blur the boundaries regarding appropriate expressions of violence—that is, physical violence that could be committed with a minimal spiritual burden.⁹

Between 1126 and 1135 CE Bernard of Clairvaux penned *De Laude*, a tract which held up the nascent monastic military order of the Templars as a model of the Christian knightly life. Though the tract broke new ground in the religious justification of violence by professed monks, Bernard's typical eloquence and religious thoroughness expressed throughout *De Laude* made it a tract which can be used to explore the wider world of monasticism, reform, masculinity, and psychology in twelfth-century Western Europe.

Manuscript copies of *De Laude* were frequently held within larger collections of Bernard's writings, indicating that collectors of the period considered *De Laude* to be a work congruent with Bernard's other works.¹⁰ Despite *De Laude*'s inclusion with Bernard's other writings by his contemporaries, the fundamental difficulty that scholars have grappled with when interpreting *De*

⁸ Smith, 199.

⁹ Some prominent works on the Peace of God movement, the Crusades as an idea and the military orders (with a view towards their religious place as opposed to military or organizational studies) are:

Peace of God: Thomas Head and Richard Landes, ed., *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); T. Head, "The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine," *Speculum* 74 (1999); J. Bowman, "Councils, Memories, and Mills," *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999).

Crusades: Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Marshall Baldwin and Walter Goffort (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977); Andrew Holt, "Between Warrior and Priest, the Creation of a New Masculine Identity During the Crusades," in Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *Negotiating Clerical Identities, Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), 185-203; Norman Housley, *Fighting for the Cross, Crusading to the Holy Land* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008); William J. Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia c.1095-c.1187* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2008); Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania University Press: 1991).

Military Orders: Giles Constable, "The Place of the Crusader in Medieval Society," *Viator* 29 (1998): 392-403; Tom Licence, "The Military Orders as Monastic Orders," *Crusades* 5 (2006): 39-53; Simonetta Cerrini, ed., *I Templari, la guerra et la santità* (Rimini, Italy: Il Cerchio, 2000): 7; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *Templars and Hospitallers as Professed Religious in the Holy Land* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

Laude is its apparent contradiction with Bernard's largely pacifistic writings. Though Bernard used martial rhetoric extensively in his other compositions, in *De Laude* he took the significant step of justifying to the world the redemptive value of a life centered on warfare by individuals who had taken monastic vows. Though the idea was not a novelty in ecclesiastical writing, the striking difference between Urban II's call to arms and *De Laude* lies in the nature of the persons engaging in warfare. Urban II was addressing secular knights; *De Laude*, while largely written to a secular audience, exhorts the spiritual value of warfare solely within the context of a monastic life. Understanding this dichotomy has been the driving force behind the scholarship which has addressed *De Laude* over the last forty years.

This scholarship would have us relegate *De Laude* to a position of singularity outside of Bernard's larger corpus, arguing that it was composed under unique circumstances and should not be seen as a part of Bernard's comprehensive intellectual whole. Scholars who have supported this opinion have tended to consider the idea of the Templars as fully Christianized warriors as an entirely novel concept, *De Laude* as a work of propaganda, and the Templars' link to the Holy Land as crucial for Bernard's support.¹¹

Another group of scholars, starting with the first modern examinations of *De Laude* in the 1970s and continuing to today, has concluded that *De Laude* represents an unusual but not anomalous part of Bernard's writings. Bernard's intellectual capability and conservatism, sometimes helpfully detailed by scholars of differing conclusions, lend credence to the notion that Bernard would not have supported the Templars unless he felt that their lifestyle were truly a valid path to God. These scholars largely

¹⁰ Leclercq and Rochais, 208.

¹¹ G. R. Evans, *The Mind of Saint Bernard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 22; C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism, Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1984), 167; William J. Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia c.1095-c.1187* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2008) 84, 101; Norman Housley, *Fighting for the Cross, Crusading to the Holy Land* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 103.

interpret the Templars as a manifestation of a gradual Christianization of western warfare. They see *De Laude* principally as a work of spiritual guidance and emphasize Bernard's cautious and metaphorical treatment of the Holy Land in the second part of *De Laude*.¹²

The purpose of Bernard's voluminous and diverse compositions was to lead Christians closer to God. To Bernard, the relationship between the human and the divine revolved around the submission of the self, its sins, and its inherent selfishness in order to come to a state of universal conscious attention to God. An absolute focus on God would lead to an increasing love of God and mystical union with God as the purity of the divine came to replace the corrupt, worldly self-interest present in "normal" life.

The transformation from a world-focused and selfish individual to one whose focus was on the divine and whose actions reflected the immeasurable glory of God was a central idea in Bernard's writings. In his study of Bernard's writings on transformation, G. R. Evans marks Bernard's concept of personal reorientation, especially his ideas on austerity, as a vehicle for that change. To Bernard, the denial of fleshly desires and the completion of charitable actions, though valuable, were means to an end; a lifestyle of austerity, on the other hand, allowed the elimination of distractions from contemplating the divine. Thus, the devout Christian needed to combine material lifestyle changes with thought-process changes to effect a complete Christian life. This paradigm shift was a lifetime's pursuit, not the result of an initial conversion, and it was not an attempt to realize unaided human potential, but to become a reflection of the divine ideal laid out by Christ.¹³ Emphasis on personal, not institutional transformation permeates Bernard's writings; when Bernard tried to reform institutions it was for the

¹² Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Baldwin, Marshall and Goffort, Walter (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 57; Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 91; Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood, A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 47.

¹³ G. R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (Cary, N.C.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22. Drawing on *Quadragesima* 2.4.

purpose of creating or recreating organizations that would allow for personal transformation. This rationale holds true for his writings to Cluny, to crusaders, and to the military orders.

Bernard recognized that people could experience this transformation through different lifestyles, but he held that the monastic path was the surest. This surety in the monastic path was due to the required obedience, isolation and austerity, but also to a powerful sense of communal membership rooted in martial imagery that forced its participants to live a life focused on the divine.

Bernard wrote constantly about the monastic life. He addressed several themes with particular frequency, including obedience, love, and human transformation, but also the nature of the monastic life as spiritual warfare. All of these were addressed in his writings to Cistercian houses, Cluniac houses, and the Templar Order.

The emphasis on obedience as a hallmark of monastic life ran throughout the Benedictine Rule and was consistent in Bernard's thoughts. The utmost importance of obedience was elegantly summarized in Bernard's fiftieth sermon on the Song of Songs: "But listen to what our Lord commands us regarding our love of Himself: 'if you love Me,' He says, 'keep My commandments.'" ¹⁴ A supreme love of God is expressed through obedience to His commands. In the monastic tradition, the abbot—or, in the Templar Order, the Grand Master—is the worldly representative of God in the lives of the monks. Thus, acting in obedience to the abbot or Grand Master reflected obedience to God and was also a means of displaying love and devotion to God.

In the very first sentence of the prologue to the Templar Rule, Bernard makes reference to obedience as a prime virtue of the Templar, one that would mark them as the disciples of a religious life, and which would become critical in his later justification of the Templars' acts of physical violence: "We speak firstly to all those who secretly despise their own will and desire with a pure heart to serve the sovereign king as a knight and...desire to wear, and wear permanently, the very noble armor of

obedience.”¹⁵ The language used in this call to the monastic life is very similar to the opening lines of the Benedictine Rule: “Now then I address my words to you: whoever is willing to renounce self-will, and take up the powerful and shining weapons of obedience to fight for the Lord Christ, the true king.”¹⁶ In both Rules the authors convey the message of total subjection to a martial lord, one who requires both obedience and valor in his service. Bernard spelled out the very purpose of the Templars in the last paragraph of their Rule:

It pleased the common council that the deliberations which were made there and the consideration of the Holy Scriptures which were diligently examined with the wisdom of my lord H[onorius], pope of the Holy Church of Rome, and of the patriarch of Jerusalem and with the assent of the chapter, together with the agreement of the Poor Knights of Christ of the Temple which is in Jerusalem, should be put in writing and not forgotten, steadfastly kept *so that by an upright life one may come to his creator.*¹⁷

In the prologue to the Benedictine Rule, Benedict similarly wrote: “Look, the Lord in His devotion to us shows us the way to life. Therefore, let us belt our waist with faith that leads to the performance of good works. Let us set out on his path with the Gospel as our guide so that we may be

¹⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Three Sermons on the Song of Songs,” in Pauline Matarasso, ed. and trans., *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 69.

¹⁵ *Primo eis dicimus qui corde casto suum arbitrium spernant et qui equites desiderant corde casto regi valido servient et . . . perpetuo arma oboedientiae nobilissima gerere desiderant* Latin translations of quotes from the Rule mine from the 1992 English translation of the *Templar Rule* by Judith Upton-Ward, 19.

¹⁶ *Ad to ergo nunc mihi sermo dirigitur, quisquis abrenuntians propriis voluntatibus, Domino Christo vero regi militaturus, oboedientiae fortissimo atque praeclara arma sumis.* Text from Dom Jean Neufville, ed., *The Rule of Benedict: Regula Benedicti*, ed. Dom Jean Neufville, *Sources Chretiennes*, 181-182, Reprinted ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 1.

¹⁷ *Concilio communi placuit ut rationes quae ibi factae sunt et deliberationem Sanctae Scripturae, quae sapientia domini H[onori] pontificis maximi ecclesiae Romanae et patriachae Hierosolymari diligenter probatae sunt assensu conventus canonicorum, una cum consensu pauperum Christi Templi commilitum, quod Hierosolymae est, debent describi et non in animo obliterabuntur et fideliter servatae ut vita probata ad creatorem iter sit.* Text from Upton-Ward, *The Templar Rule*, 21. Emphasis mine.

worthy to see Him who called us into His kingdom.”¹⁸ Both the Benedictine Rule and Templar Rule were set down as a path of faith and action which would lead to a personal and mystical relationship with God.

At their inception, the primary duty of the Templars was to protect pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land. By definition, then, the warrior-monks of the Temple were obliged to engage with the outside world in order to fulfill the duties of their purpose; a solitary existence within the cloister's confines would have curtailed their ability to engage worldly threats as was their *raison d'être*. Bernard recognized this inherent difference between the Templar and Cistercian purposes and tailored the Rule and *De Laude* to reflect those differences. Both documents stressed the obedience, poverty, and self-denial central to the Cistercian life, but they were markedly more silent in the area of travel and worldly contamination. The section of the Templar Rule called “On Brothers Sent Overseas” reads:

Brothers who are sent throughout diverse countries of the world should endeavor to keep the commandments of the Rule according to their ability and live without reproach with regard to meat and wine, etc. so that they may receive a good report from outsiders and not sully by deed or word the precepts of the Order, and so that they may set an example of good works and wisdom; above all, so that those with whom they associate and those in whose inns they lodge may be bestowed with honor. And if possible, the house where they sleep and take

¹⁸ *Ecce pietate sua demonstrate nobis Dominus viam vitae. Succinctis ergo fide vel observantia bonorum actuum lumbis nostris, per ducatum evangelii pergamus itinera eius, ut mereamur eum qui nos vocavit in regnum suum videre.* Text from Dom Jean Neufville, ed., *The Rule of Benedict: Regula Benedicti*, ed. Dom Jean Neufville, *Sources Chretiennes*, 181-182, Reprinted ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 4.

lodging should not be without light at night, so that shadowy enemies may not lead them to wickedness, which God forbids them.¹⁹

In this passage, travel is presented as a given, an unavoidable element of the Templars' existence. Significantly, many knights of the Order were recruited in the West and had to make the arduous journey across Europe to reach the Holy Land. As a result, many Templars were required to travel both within the Holy Land in execution of their duties and internationally to maintain the Order. The knights were told to mind their behavior both to protect their purity and the Order's reputation.

In a now-familiar pattern, Bernard portrayed the Crusades as an opportunity for inward reflection and meditation on God, an opportunity to turn events and places based in the material world into reasons for spiritual understanding that, if approached with the appropriate humility, would lead to growth.²⁰

Bernard took a similar approach with the Templars. As long-term residents of the Holy Land, they would be surrounded by these sites, and Bernard saw in that both a risk and an opportunity.²¹ The risk was that the Templars, like the crusaders or western monks distracted by their pilgrimage, would become focused on the physical locales; the opportunity was a chance for intense and constant reminders about the need for their strict devotion to the Christian life. For monks, crusaders, and Templars, Bernard's basic message was the same: the important journey is inward, and outward journeys are nothing more than an aid.

¹⁹ *Fratres qui per regiones varias missi sunt nitor debent leges regulae perservare ut possunt et sine opprobrio ad carnis et vini et ceterorum rationem vivere ut bonam famam hominum externorum excipiant, ne praecepta ordonis facto aut verbo maculis aspergant, ut factorum bonorum et sapientiae exemplum ad imitandum proponant; praecipue ut ii quibuscum conversantur et quorum in diversoria manent honorabentur. Et, si fieri potest, domus quo ad dormiendum morantur non debet nocte esse sine luce ne umbrae infestae eos ad nequitiam ducant, quam Deus prohibet.* Text from Upton-Ward, *The Templar Rule*, 28.

²⁰ William Purkis, *Crusading Spirituality in the Holy Land and Iberia, c. 1905-c. 1187*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2008), 88.

Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*. 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 124.

²¹ Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46-47.

Bernard's differing recommendations on contact with the non-monastic world in his addresses to other monks and the Templars shows a philosophical flexibility without the need for compromise. Bernard was more comfortable with the stark separation between monastic and secular worlds found in the monastery, where all interaction was carefully limited and overseen. This care manifests in his writings to and on behalf of the Templars, but there was less of Bernard's stark warning against all contact that appears in his other writings, reflecting the inevitable concessions he made based on the Templar's role. These concessions do not mean that Bernard's acceptance of the Templars' contact with the secular was a foregone conclusion. Instead, it shows that Bernard was willing to expand some of the important Cistercian boundaries without feeling that the Templars had jettisoned something absolutely integral to the character of monasticism. As Evans describes Bernard's approach to issues that bordered on the unorthodox,

Bernard's concern was always the same when he encountered teaching [or monastic ideas] which appeared unorthodox; his first anxiety was not whether there really was unorthodoxy in what was being said, but the damage which might be done to those unable to understand the subtleties of the argument, and therefor likely to be misled into heresy.²²

The Templar Order's necessary possession of material wealth, including armor, weapons, and war horses, was a potential sign of unorthodoxy that could confuse "those unable to understand" and the knights themselves.

Bernard's praise for the Templars' austerity can be understood as both a parallel to the Cistercian ideal of austerity, which can be considered the most outward mark of Bernard's distinctive Cistercianism, and as a refutation of the secular materialism common in the knightly culture from which

²² Gillian R. Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 83-84.

the Templars were drawn. The isolated and austere monastic life was designed to assist monks in their efforts to wean themselves from the world, and many of the clauses in the Benedictine and Templar Rules address specifics of self-denial. Self-denial was a vehicle to focus the mind on the divine reality that transcended the concerns of the flesh.

A perceived lack of austerity among his fellow monks was a source of regular concern for Bernard: “Alas, poor wretched monk that I am, why have I lived to see the monastic order come to this?”²³ Bernard criticized the monks of his day when he wrote, “I am coming to the major abuses, so common nowadays as to seem of lesser moment. I pass over the vertiginous height of churches, their extravagant length, their inordinate width and costly finishings. As for the elaborate images...”²⁴ In this work, “An Apologia for Abbot William,” Bernard draws a distinction between the inappropriateness of wealth in monastic communities and wealth in ecclesiastical churches, where “bishops are under an obligation both to the wise and the foolish.”²⁵ However, this transient and conditional acceptance of ecclesiastical expressions of wealth is not consistent in Bernard’s writings. In “On Consideration,” Bernard warns the Pope himself, “Much less should you be found pillowed in pleasures...”

Bernard’s condemnation of attachment to material wealth transcended the cloister’s walls. Despite his grudging acknowledgment that fools needed to be led to God with sparkling trinkets overseen by bishops, Bernard regularly condemned displays of wealth among secular society for the same reasons that he condemned it in monastic society: it was a distraction from the contemplation of God and an expression of vanity and worldly attachment. When Bernard focused on criticism of the secular warrior culture in *De Laude*, he used not only high-handed social and religious criticism, but also a kind of sarcastic belittling well-suited to the war-camps and campaign trails which his audience called home. This scorn was less expected from the mouth of a monk—and perhaps more effective for that:

²³ Bernard, *An Apologia for Abbot William* in *The Cistercian World*, 53.

²⁴ Bernard, *An Apologia for Abbot William* in *The Cistercian World*, 55-56.

²⁵ Bernard, *An Apologia for Abbot William* in *The Cistercian World*, 57.

You cover your horses in silks and dress your armor with swatches of flowing cloth; you figure your lances, shields and saddles; your bridles and your spurs you adorn with gold and silver and jewels; and with all this display, you rush only towards death, in shameful madness and shameless idiocy. Are these the tokens of chivalry or the trappings of women?²⁶

In contrast to this, he writes that the Templars:

...are wary of all excesses in food and dress; they concern themselves only with necessities...they live without private property... They swear off dice and gaming; they detest hunting, and take no pleasure in the absurd cruelty of falconry... They keep their hair short, having learned from the Apostle that it is shameful for a man to wear his hair like a woman. Never do they set and rarely do they wash their hair, preferring to go about disheveled and unkempt, covered in dust and blackened by the sun and their armor.

When battle is at hand, they arm themselves with faith within and steel without, rather than with gold, so that when armed, rather than prettified, they instill fear in their adversaries rather than incite their greed. They choose to have horses that are strong and quick, rather than showy or well-dressed. They attend to battle rather than

²⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Liber ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae*, trans. David Carbon, in J. Leclercq and H. M. Rochais, eds., *Liber ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae*, in *S. Bernardi Opera*, Vol. 3 (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963), 206-39, accessed 17 December 2012, <http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/chivalry/bernard.html>.

display, to victory rather than glory, and concern themselves to inspire fear rather than wonder.²⁷

These passages address the many dangers of worldly attachment and give insight into why Bernard condemned them. Bernard's attack on his audience's masculinity is an attack on the basic idea that material wealth displayed on one's battle-harness was manly, an idea that has roots in Western Europe stretching back to at least the Bronze Age.²⁸ Tradition aside, Bernard still attacked this idea with a comparison to frivolous female behavior, in unstated contrast to the manly austerity displayed by Christ, the Apostles and many of the warrior-heroes of the Old Testament. Bernard's attack on private property, falconry and hunting are attacks on the grounds and symbols of masculine aristocracy itself. Possessing private property led to the necessity of oath-taking or oath-receiving in order to protect and manage those properties—oaths and loyalties that would have been better served directed to God. Furthermore, property, being the foundation of wealth in Western Europe, was the prize and object of private wars that were a source of sin and mortal danger to their participants. Bernard was not just trying to change warriors' actions—he was trying to alter the very foundations of their identity and the nature of the things they valued.

In this effort, Bernard carried on with his consistent goal of turning people away from worldly distraction and toward an introspective pursuit of God. Bernard saw his contemporaries, secular and monastic alike, as Christians who all needed to reach the same selfless relationship with God. Monks had embarked on the safest route to reaching that relationship, but the basic necessities for achieving that relationship, austerity and obedience foremost among them, were common to all Christians.

²⁷ Bernard, *De Laude*.

²⁸ Jan-Heinrich Hunnefeld and Stefan Schwenzer, "Traditionen, Innovationen und Technologietransfer - zur Herstellungstechnik und Funktion älterbronzezeitlicher Schwerter in Niedersachsen," *Praehistorische Zeitschrift* 86, no. 2 (July 2011): 207.

Bernard's writings about the role of monks, crusaders and secular warriors in the context of violence and personal spiritual transformation show remarkable continuity and integration with his broader writings on the Christian life. Intrinsic to the Templar's novelty was the justification of violence done by professed monks. It is the apparent disconnect between Bernard's advice to the brethren of St. Anastasius to "seek humility before all things and peace above all things for the sake of the indwelling Spirit of God which rests only on the peaceful and humble"²⁹ and his support for a monastic order whose express purpose was to protect one group of people by killing others that has seemingly caused such discomfort to Bernard scholars. Yet the humility that is so important to Bernard's monasticism, connected as it is to the subjugation of self-will and the acceptance of discipline, is a common vein running through *De Laude*:

Christ's knights have discipline and never disdain obedience... [they] wear what [their Grand Master] has given them, and... they concern themselves only with necessities. They have a joyous and sober life... When battle is at hand, they arm themselves with faith within and steel without, rather than with gold... They are not unstable or impetuous [in battle]...³⁰

What separated the Templar from his secular peer on a spiritual level was the monastic purity that resulted in a Templar being "God's agent for punishment of evil-doers and for glorification of the good."³¹ In contrast, the lives taken by a secular knight were damnation to his soul and an abomination before God. Earlier writings and epic stories, from the exhortations of the Christian Roman emperors, to the Chronicles of the Carolingians, to the heroic figures of Beowulf and Roland, expressed the potential

²⁹ Bernard to the brethren of St. Anastasius, "Letter 388," in *The Letters of St Bernard*, trans. Bruno James, (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 458.

³⁰ Bernard, *De Laude*.

for violence done in a way that was pleasing to God. Nevertheless, these earlier ideas did not bridge the gap between divinely accepted violence that was still seen as a source of impurity and violence that could be done within the divinely pleasing monastic lifestyle of the Templars.

Even before Bernard was ever approached by the Templars he wrote of monks as spiritual warriors, drawing on a common imagery from a shared social status in order to build resonance with his audience. More importantly, Bernard's use of warrior imagery was indicative of a powerful belief that monks were engaged in spiritual warfare, warfare that was no less deadly for its lack of physical wounds. Not only was Bernard's vision of monasticism a militant one, but the social views of divinely justified violence across Western Europe were beginning to change. In the writings surrounding the First and Second Crusade, both lay and religious writers explored the changing nature of violence in the context of highly religiously motivated conflicts. Bernard's ideas on violence and the sacred expressed in *De Laude* and the Templar Rule bring Bernard's ideals together with expressions of the most cutting-edge social expectations of the time.³²

Though writing as a spiritual counselor, Bernard opened *De Laude* with expressions of humility which bordered on deference. "To Hugh," he writes in one letter, "Christ's knight and master of Christ's knighthood, Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux in name only..."³³ Though Bernard appears to be elevating Hugh spiritually, even perhaps to a plane above his own, he makes reference to the Templars as knights and not as monks four times within the title, greeting, and first line.³⁴ Despite the fact that the Templars

³¹ *Dei enim minister est ad vindictam malefactorum, laudem vero bonorum* (Rom. 13:4)

³² For a comprehensive analysis of martial imagery in monasticism, see Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*.

³³ *Hugoni, militia Christi et magistro militiae Christi, Bernardus Clarevallis solo nomine abbas*. From *De Laude* in J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais, eds., *S. Bernardi Opera Vol. III, Tractatus et Opuscula*. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963).

³⁴ In the title: "*milites templi*." In the prologue's greeting: "...*militia Christi et magistro militiae Christi*..." In the prologue's first line: "*commilitonibus*." J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais, *S. Bernardi Opera*, 213.

were a professed religious order following a rule that he himself had written in 1129,³⁵ right from the opening remarks *De Laude* clearly defines the Templars principally as knights. This was a sharp divergence from Bernard's focus on the Templars as a professed religious order in their Rule. Some prominent, if now dated, scholarship has suggested that Bernard's extensive use of "knight" in reference to the Templars indicates *De Laude's* intended purpose as spiritual guidance for all knights, Templar or otherwise.³⁶ This position seems to best incorporate the overall tone of the tract, Bernard's approach to spirituality, and the historical context in which *De Laude* was written.

In 1098 Urban II invoked the idea of Christian knights fighting a justified holy war against a heathen enemy. In Urban's rhetoric, the ideal knight was one who served as the sword and shield of the Church, fighting not other Christians, but heathen enemies who threatened the greater body of Christendom. Bernard's refinement of these ideas by adding the layers of morality and justification contained within the Templar Rule allowed him to justify the idea of the warrior-monk. Bernard evolved the idea and institution by providing the religious justification to fit already-existing phenomena: warriors whom society viewed as acceptable to God. This refinement allowed Bernard, a reformer, to stand behind this established but contentious idea.³⁷

According to *De Laude*, three elements were needed for a knight's act of violence to be justified. First, the knight must have killed without the burden of base emotion: he must have been free from desire, hate, wrath, and all other emotions offensive to God. Second, the object of violence must have been a valid enemy. As expressed in *De Laude*, such an enemy needed to be evil and a threat to Christians. Finally, the knight must have been acting in obedience to God or his valid representative.

³⁵ "The Latin Rule was established in January 1129, at the Council of Troyes in Champagne. Hugh of Payns, the co-founder of the Temple, first explained the customs which he and his companions had followed until that time. The new Rule was then drafted in the light of extensive discussion among the ecclesiastics and seculars present. It attracted wide interest in monastic circles, especially among the Cistercians and the Victorines. [Latin]" *Regula pauperum commilitonum Christi Templique Salomonici*, ed. S. Cerrini. Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis (forthcoming) in Malcolm Barber and Keith Bate, eds., *The Templars, Selected Sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 31.

Presumably, all of these criteria needed to be met for divine justification; a partial meeting of the criteria was not enough. This is supported by Bernard's singling out the Templars as just in their killing but excluding by omission all other knights in the Holy Land. Thus, place and enemy alone are not enough; their internal monastic purity was a critical component in the Templar's justification. Bernard asserted the importance of emotive intent when he wrote that

The heart's disposition, not the fortunes of war, determine defeat or victory for the Christian... It is a joyless victory when you overcome a man but surrender to vice, and you vainly glory in having overcome a man when wrath or pride has mastered you. I know there are those who kill not out of a lust for revenge, nor a fever for conquest, but simply in self-defense; but I would not call even this a good victory, since dying in the flesh is a lesser evil than dying in soul. The soul does not die because the body is killed; rather, 'it is the soul that sins that will surely die.'³⁸

³⁶ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 89.

³⁷ When he protested against the unnecessary involvement of monastic or ecclesiastical persons in secular affairs.

³⁸ *Ex cordis nempe affect, non belli eventu, pensatur vel periculum, vel victoria christiani. Si bona fuerit cause pugnantis, pugnae exitus malus esse non poterit, sicut nec bonus fuerit causa pugnantis, pugnae exitus malus esse non poterit, sicut nec bonus iudicabitur finis, ubi causa non bona, et intention non recta praecesserit. Si in voluntate alterum occidendi te potius occidi contigerit, moreris homicida. Wuod si praeuales, et voluntate superandi vel vindicandi forte occidis hominem, vivis homicida. Non autem expedit sive mortuo, sive vivo, sive victoria, sive victo, esse homicidam. Infelix victoria, qua superans hominem, succumbis vitio et, ira tibi aut superbia dominante, frustra gloriaris de homine superato. Est tamen qui nec ulciscendi zelo, nec vincendi typho, sed tantum evandendi remedio interficit hominem. Sed ne hanc uidem honam dixerim victoriam, cum de duobus malis, in corpore quam in anima mori levius sit. Non autem quia corpus occiditur, etiam anima moritur; sed anima, quae peccaverit, ipsa morietur.* Bernard, *De Laude*.

In *De Laude*, enemies were deemed valid targets of attack if they were evil³⁹ and a threat to Christians.⁴⁰ Evil specifically referred to paganism,⁴¹ but Bernard acknowledged that conversion would have been preferable to killing:

Pagans would not even have to be slaughtered, if there were some other way to prevent them from besetting and oppressing the faithful. But now it is better that they be killed than that the rod of these sinners continue to imperil the lot of the just, preventing the just from reaching out their hands against iniquity.⁴²

“[Templar] chivalry is truly holy and safe,”⁴³ Bernard writes, contrasting it with secular chivalry, “when Christ is not the sole cause of chivalrous doings.”⁴⁴ Obedience in following the directives of Christ was thus central to righteous battle, and in both the Benedictine Rule and the Templar Rule, the abbot or Grand Master, when acting righteously, is frequently referred to as acting for his disciples as a representative of Christ. “Christ’s knights have discipline and never disdain obedience.”⁴⁵ This obedience was obedience to their Grand Master, and thus, to God.

As Leclercq so succinctly said of *De Laude* and of Bernard’s writings on the Song of Songs in 1979,

These more important writings also show that Bernard had a very precise and elaborate doctrine of war, of protocol for waging it in a just

³⁹ “...he is God’s agent of punishment of evil-doers...” “Clearly, when he kills an evil-doer, he is not a homicide...” Bernard, *De Laude*.

⁴⁰ “...[killings by a Templar are] the defense Christ provides for Christians.” Bernard, *De Laude*.

⁴¹ “The Christian glories in a pagan’s death, because Christ is glorified...” Bernard, *De Laude*.

⁴² *Pagani quippe trucidandos non essent si alio modo possemus eos prohibere quin fideles obsidant et opprimant. Sed nunc melior est eos necare ne virga illorum peccatorum sortem piorum in periculum mittant et prohibeant quin pii manus contra iniquitates ostendant.* Bernard, *De Laude*.

⁴³ *Quod [Templum] militarium est verum sanctum et tutum* Bernard, *De Laude*.

⁴⁴ *Cum Christus non est causa facti casti* Bernard, *De Laude*.

⁴⁵ *Milites Christi habent disciplinam castrensem et nunquam oboedientia spernunt.* Bernard, *De Laude*.

cause and with right motives. In this rather circumscribed area of his thought, he propounds a theology of restrained violence which is the outcome of a very deliberate reflection and meditation.⁴⁶

The concepts of sacred action were not static in the Middle Ages; they evolved with society, slowly in some periods and more dramatically in others. The High Middle Ages witnessed the Peace of God, the Crusades, and the development of the military and mendicant orders. Though each of these movements or institutions developed for their own reasons in response to particular temporal, social, and geopolitical forces, all of them are examples of the evolution of the sacred life in medieval Christianity. These movements all illustrate a trend toward social connectedness rather than isolation in the spiritual ideal; adherents were intended to be spiritually pure through isolation from the temptations of the world and the unacceptable behaviors of the common world, but they were to do so in increasingly physical contact with the rest of society.

Perhaps the most difficult issue for theologians during this movement was that of reconciling the need for a mechanism to ensure the spiritual purity of knights who wanted to engage in warfare pleasing to the Church and the egotistical nature of High Medieval knightly warfare, the worldly contact inherent in warfare and most importantly, the intense and sinful emotions evoked by war. The writings of Bernard of Clairvaux were instrumental in legitimizing the idea of the Christian warrior in this period, not only for the warriors themselves, but also for monks, priests and society in general. This shift in thinking relied upon casting physical warfare in the name of God as an extension of the internal struggle monks were already waging in isolation and providing clear guidelines for overcoming both moral and worldly challenges in a manner that would deepen, not alienate, the practitioner's relationship with God. Despite the military *raison d'être* of the Templars being the obvious difference between the Poor Knights of Christ and Bernard's Cistercian brothers, the intellectual continuity between these two

⁴⁶ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 91.

organizations was considerable. Bernard viewed both as expressions of Christian ideals that provided a model for their contemporary peers. Both he considered warriors, though the Cistercians were spiritual warriors and the Templars were physical warriors fighting a fundamentally spiritual war. Both lived according to very similar Rules emphasizing obedience, austerity, and focus on divine contemplation. Both communities were warned against imitating or interacting with the secular world, though Bernard showed flexibility in this regard as he developed the Templar's Rule. Bernard's preaching in the run-up to the Second Crusade also echoed the same intellectual and spiritual themes present in his monastic and Templar writings. Bernard's overall intellectual consistency between his monastic and Templar writings mean that these issues should be viewed as elements of a consistent corpus of writing and thought, not two disparate categories inappropriate for comparative examination. Reading Bernard as a whole person, a thinker whose disparate ideas reflect the complexity of his age and his intellectual sophistication, provides us with a model for examining other prolific luminaries. Beyond the immediate application of these conclusions to Bernard, a close comparative evaluation of his writings begins to illustrate the enormous impact that one man had in articulating the theology of war. Over the next several decades, Bernard's theology of war became integrated into the accepted Western European notion of just war. While asserting that Bernard was singularly responsible for this point of view ignores the long, building tradition which was so well expressed in his writing, his writings were undoubtedly a watershed moment in the development and articulation of Western Europe's theology of war.

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