20TH AUGUST BERNARD OF CLARIVAUX 1090-1153

BACKGROUND

It is probably no exaggeration to state that the Cluniac monastic foundations had done a great deal to hold things together during the difficult period to the middle of the eleventh century, but their success had accumulated all sorts of responsibilities that were seen to divert them from the fundamental duty of what Benedict termed the ’opus dei’; prayer and worship.

The Cluny ’brand’ had had to develop an educational facility, principally because of the number of child oblates for whose formation they were responsible. They were acquiring huge wealth in land, property and serfs, largely because they tended to prefer vocations from upper class families. These estates required administration, so the monks became responsible for managing farms, mills and all the economic paraphernalia associated with secular life, but at the same time the call on their resources from increasing elaborations of their liturgy kept them from both manual labour and private prayer. Effectively Cluny was seen to have done its best work and those responding to the call of God were beginning to look elsewhere.

At the same time something of an economic and cultural boom brought the emergence of a middle class, increased social mobility and diversity which had its effect within the church.

By the middle of the 11th century the papacy had become a prize contended for by the grandest Italian families: the Holy Roman Emperor decided to take on the reform of the church by placing his own nominee onto the papal throne, and in 1053 Leo IX initiated a programme of administrative and structural reform which his successors consolidated over the next 20 years, and particularly In 1073 with the election of Gregory VII, who reigned for another 12 years.

Another important impetus for general reform in the monasteries and the broader church came from the fulminations of Peter Damian, who impugned many abuses that the Papacy was beginning to deal with.

Some of these papal reforms included:

* Calling to Rome the best churchmen he knew to act as a supporting counsel: these men he called cardinals and formed them into a college who would elect the next pope. Peter Damian himself became a cardinal.
* Lay investiture was a real problem: in a feudal society kings and magnates appointed their own nominees to take ecclesiastical posts to gain political allies: land meant soldiers, and it was important to be able to call on these whenever necessary. Leo now insisted that appointments and investitures were the business of the church.
* He appointed papal legates to travel around and attend to and enforce his letters and decrees: This meant that the Pope was putting himself forward not simply as the ruler of central Italy, but of the whole of Christendom.
* It was in Leo’s papacy that it was decreed that priests were to remain unmarried, which was already enshrined in canon law; but by now they could be handing on their ‘vocations’ to their children, whether born in or out of marriage.

In addition to these administrative and centralising reforms, this was the time of the cathedral school, which rather broadened the educational opportunities for those other than monks and were the predecessors of the first universities.

Many brighter spirits were seeking a life of greater simplicity and solitude, and while we think of Bernard of Clairvaux as almost the founder of the Cistercian order, he shares this honour with several early abbots such as Stephen Harding, [who comes up later in the calendar] but there was an entire rash of other monastic foundations about this time, some of which failed, whilst others arose and developed with far less impact than the Cistercians. Furthermore, it is a gross injustice to Bernard to think of him solely as one of the ‘big beasts’ of the Cistercian order, when in truth he was so much more.

In around 1075, with papal reforms well on the way, St Robert founded a Benedictine monastery at Molesme, in France, and such was his charisma and holiness, and his pastoral heart that he attracted some of the best vocations around at the time. These included Guarenus [Warren], who left to found his own house of mixed vocations to the life of hermit and of Kaleots, two or three monks sharing a small house; and St Bruno, who came to him while in process of working out his calling: Robert sent him to a grange attached to the monastery, and In 1084 Bruno founded ‘la Grande Chartreux’ near Grenoble which became the first Carthusian house.

In Tuscany at this time there arose two new orders: the Camaldolese, who were hermits living close together; and the Valambrosians, who lived similarly, with the important difference that they introduced a system of lay brothers to relieve the monks from the business of everyday life.

In 1098 Robert, together with Steven Harding, Alvaric and 18 more of the most fervent monks left Molesme to found a new monastery at Citeaux, in marshland granted them by the duke of Burgundy, but Molesme began to deteriorate without Robert, who was called back by the papal legate, after petition by the monks he had left behind, which is testimony to his own charisma and holiness.

For all that Robert had reduced the commitments at Molesme, it retained schools and parishes which were still felt to be burdensome; not to mention that they had 35 dependent priories. The smaller hermit communities were respected more than emulated. So, while there was a need for a stricter order than Cluny, monks needed to live in community with all the advantages of psychological and physical security and access to the sacraments.

At the same time, those who wished to return to what they conceived to be the original Benedictine purity had to re-think what that purity meant for vocations at the end of the 11th century, when Monte Casino had been destroyed by the Lombards more than half a millennium since, and the reforms of the ninth century under Benedict of Amiane, and the more recent Cluniac movement had brought about some changes to the original Benedictine way of life that could not be reverse.

In 1112 Bernard presented himself at Citeaux with no less than 30 of his male relatives.

**…. …. …. ….**

LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

He’s known as BERNARD of CLAIRVEAUX because within a mere three years of his arrival at Citeaux he and his followers had emigrated there to found ‘his own’ monastery. Needless to say, he’s nothing to do with huge dogs with miniature brandy barrels round their necks though it could be said that he shared their commanding and charismatic presence, which, in his case, however, proved something of a mixed blessing.

Bernard was born of a noble family at Fontaines, near Dijon, in 1090, and was intended for military service as a knight, and he certainly had the necessary qualities of leadership. He was educated in rhetoric and the classics, without very much theology.

At age 22, in 1112, he entered the monastery of Citeaux, together with 30 of his family and followers, and such was his progress that three years later, in 1115, he was sent to found another Cistercian house in a deserted valley which he named ‘valley of light, = Clairvaux.’ By the time of his death in 1153 there were hundreds of Cistercian monasteries all over Europe, including Rievaulx and Fountains abbeys in Yorkshire.

Bernard was really larger than life; probably the most important figure in 12th-century church until Pope Innocent III at the turn of C13.

In his own quest for simplicity and holiness you might have thought he’d have been at home with the Cistercians, and he was always aware that Clairvaux lay at the centre of his spiritual life, but how and why would a preacher of Bernard’s stature and charisma be expected to be confined to a silent order? The problem was that he was also endowed with huge Charisma: It is said that wives shut up their husbands, in case they might be lured by Bernard into joining his monastery! When the church wheeled him out to preach the second crusade, there were so many takers that Bernard had to cut linen crosses from his own habit to enrol the crowds of volunteers!

Whatever his love and loyalty to his monks, Bernard could not always resist the church’s willingness to deploy these gifts in order to head up its own campaigns. One might wonder whether, had he been born a century later, he might have founded an order of friars, because it’s almost as though monastic life as it was couldn’t satisfactorily contain the breadth of Bernard’s personality and gifts.

Bernard’s talent as orator and preacher are best shown in his masterpiece; a series of eighty-five and a half homilies based on the Song of Songs, which he never completed, even though he worked on them over 15 years, [with an 8-year break between No’s 26 & 27. It is in these writings, and his counsel to Pope Eugenius, one of his many protegees, entitled ‘On Consideration’, that we meet Bernard and get a clue as to how he inspired such love and loyalty both as what we would nowadays call ‘Influencer’ and as a wise and compassionate spiritual director with real pastoral gifts and insight.

The impact on Dante of Bernard’s writings a century and a half later, brought about his selection as guide at the climax of ‘the Divine comedy’ to introduce the writer to the Virgin Mary. Many important church leaders, including Pope John 23rd, drew strength and inspiration from this sensitive and insightful advice.

There is a short but powerful ‘Treatise on the love of God,’ written in 1128, that makes use of some of the mystical thought that he brings to maturity in the Song of Sons series, but it is otherwise clear in its aim of showing us that love is a duty we owe to God for his benefits to us, though he goes on to say that merely loving him for these benefits is no love at all.

In sermons 66 & 67, on knowledge and ignorance, Bernard regards the despair he imagines Judas felt after the crucifixion as being based in ignorance, because if the ignorant only knew God for what he is they would beg his mercy, whatever they may have done wrong; but in Bernard’s view, which goes right back to some of the fathers, those who refuse to adhere to church doctrine do so through sin and character defects. This chimes with his mistrust of learning. In one of the early sermons, he asserts that he is ‘not interested in the meaning of words, because he seeks to move the heart.’

This undoubted ‘Magnum Opus’ of Bernard’s on the Song of Songs is not a commentary, and only uses a few selected passages as a basis for his mystical constructs: he takes the first 10 days just to deal with the kiss on the mouth, the mouth representing the soul’s momentary union with God: kisses to the feet and hands of Jesus represent different attributes of God, so that the soul has to kiss the feet and hands before reaching the mouth: the whole bible is mined for this mystical theology.

At sermons 25 to 29 he deals with the bride’s assertion that she is black but beautiful.’ Sermon 26 suddenly goes into Bernard’s very deep and human expression of grief for the loss of his brother Gerard, and this after he has taken a necessary break from these daily homilies for 8 years. Bernard opens himself up completely in a way that might surprise a contemporary reader in negotiating and sharing his feelings. In process of these sermons Bernard totally turns round the taunts of the other women against the bride: every black Christian woman should read them.

Of knowledge as learning he insists that this must be thoroughly rooted in love and humility otherwise it is of the Devil!

To understand this attitude of Bernard’s explains the basis on which he flew at Peter Abelard and pulled as many levers as he could among senior churchmen to get some of his statements condemned. In fairness, Abelard may have been a brilliant logician and theologian, but to read what passes for his autobiography shows him, even on his own admission, to have been an arrogant and boastful egotist, and perhaps it was this in him that got up Bernard’s nose, as it did for many others. Nevertheless, through the good offices of another unlikely friend of Bernard’s, Abbot Peter the Venerable of Cluny, it seems that some kind of reconciliation was brought about to a very nasty quarrel.

Another thing for which Bernard is known is his encouragement of the cult of Mary, and to this day every Cistercian monk precedes his given name with ‘Mary,’ which many nowadays simply reduce to the letter ‘M.’

In his lectures to Cistercian novices of 1962, Thomas Merton suggests that, while Bernard was a holy man and brilliant abbot, he could also be somewhat duplicitous in winning the finest vocations from the Benedictines to his Cistercian order; and goes on to suggest that the prevailing ethos was that if a monk weren’t a Cistercian, he was already half-way to Hell! Tolerance was never Bernard’s strong suit although his friendship with Peter the Venerable is surprising in view of his absolute hatred for Cluny. Merton goes on to say that when Bernard sought to bring a cantor in from Rome to re-organise the chant, the fellow ‘messed it up.’

It is also important to mention Bernard’s promotion of Abbess Hildegard, but equally so to bear in mind her wisdom and diplomacy in how she approached him, the more so because while peter Damian was content to become a cardinal with ‘hard power,’ Bernard seems to have been content with ‘soft,’ though to be abbot of a prestigious monastery was certainly power indeed.

Bernard suffered something of a blowback when, having accepted the task of preaching the second crusade, his followers proceeded to attack the Jews, In mitigation it must be pleased that this was none of Bernard’s own doing, but, having lit the fire and fanned the flames, he felt responsible enough to write to the Patriarch of Jerusalem condemning anti-Semitism in the strongest possible terms. Still, the crusade failed dismally, and Bernard’s reputation never recovered during the remainder of his life.

Merton’s approach to Bernard’s vocation is that, while his first hagiographer, William of St Thierry, clearly loved him, there are tell-tale signs that Bernard was aware that, whilst he dedicated himself entirely to the service of God, during his formation he came to understand that some of the gifts he possessed could be liable for rewards far greater than may be appropriate.

To his novices Merton explains that over 800 years it necessary that things changed: Bernard in one of his letters sends a run-away monk back to his Benedictine abbot, advising him not to put the poor fellow through the whole discipline prescribed for runaways: pushed by the gate-keeper into chapel to prostrate before the abbot; receiving the ‘discipline [flogging]’ during the long recitation of the ‘Miserere,’ and further prostrating himself at the feet of every monk: after this he remained, for the rest of his life, in the very lowest place in the monastery. Bernard realised, as we would today, that nobody in their right mind would think of returning to their monastery to face all that, and mediaeval music became the richer for the minstrels and goliards who were content to make an insecure living by means of worldly talents rather than returning.to their monasteries.

Bernard died in 1153, his reputation severely dented after the disastrous failure of the second crusade, so that, in one sense, he himself was made to carry the cross. And by so doing, became a true saint.

**\*\*\* \*\*\* \*\*\* \*\*\* \*\*\***

20TH AUGUST WILLIAM & CATHERINE BOOTH

William was born in Nottingham in 1828, and married Catherine in 1855. His style of preaching was criticised by many of his Methodist colleagues, and in 1860 he left the church to start a denomination of his own, which spread rapidly round the world.

When we looked at the Wesley’s you may recall a quote from the socialist historian E P Thompson, whose article on Methodism in his book ‘The making of the English working class,’ excoriated the second generation of Methodist leaders for rapidly becoming an instrument of the middle classes, whereas the Wesley’s’ original ministry was to the industrial and urban poor who had really rather been lost in the stampede for wealth and influence in C18.

There was a call to minister to the poorest which various Anglican social reformers such as the Clapham sect, Octavia Hill, and later the Barnet’s were beginning to address by the middle of C19, although, as usual, there was a reaction, and the pioneering Christian socialist F D Maurice lost his professorship at London University for his work. Interesting, then, that, as we saw last week, Anglo-Catholic clergy who couldn’t find a living otherwise, took up parish work in the slums and set up the Christian Social Union, so that, rather than a division according to churchmanship, there now emerged one as to who was on the side of the angels, and who would rather ‘pass by.’

This is roughly the base line of a passage from Booth’s book ‘In darkest England and the way out,’ which is, frankly, an appeal for money, but made in a rather more sympathetic manner than most: he writes:

‘That you do not like the Salvation Army I venture to say, is no justification for withholding your sympathy or practical co-operation in carrying out a scheme which promises so much blessedness to your fellow men. You may not like our government, our methods, our faith. Your feeling towards us might, perhaps, be duly described by an observation that slipped from the tongue of a somewhat celebrated leader of the evangelistic world, who, when asked what he thought of the Salvation army, replied that he; ’did not like it at all, but he believed that God Almighty did.’

Perhaps, as an agency, we may not be exactly of your way of thinking, but that is not the point. Look at that dark ocean, full of human wrecks, writhing in anguish and despair. How to rescue those unfortunates is the question. The particular character and the methods employed, the peculiar uniforms worn by the life-boat crew, and the mingled shouting of the rescued and the rescuers, may all be contrary to your tastes and traditions. But all these objections and antipathies, I submit, are as nothing compared with the delivering of the people out of that dark sea.

Liberal Christians may well take the attitude, as many non-Christians do, that, whilst, indeed, we find aspects of the Army’s government and traditions contrary to our own’, the Salvation Army is well established in no less than 131 countries, and as the founder of AA wrote to over-enthusiastic members who imagined there was only one way of sobering up drunks: ‘Let’s be friendly with our friends. Whilst, however, one might feel that a recovered alcoholic may be free to find a spiritual path of their own, modern developments in ‘hands-on’ evangelism may find this position somewhat disingenuous, particularly when material and emotional help can emanate nowadays from drug barons and terrorists: it’s a complex ethical nut to crack.

There appear to be no N C O’s in the army; the officers begin at lieutenant. The structure of the organisation is divided into five provinces, and it’s usually either a colonel or Commissioner heading up any one project, which can include rescue work at major disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes; there exist on-going projects against slavery poverty and homelessness, including campaigns at government level.

There are eleven ‘articles of faith’ which would place the church on the extremity of orthodoxy, which is to say they are Trinitarian; believe in the two natures of Christ; and their order of service wouldn’t be out of place in many other Evangelical venues.

Salvationists believe in the inerrancy of the bible, and do not regard either baptism or the Eucharist as sacraments, believing that the grace of God is available everywhere, and that too much emphasis is placed on the sacraments in other denominations, at the expense of action.

They believe in a real Hell, and that homosexuality, although not a sin in itself and not amenable to change in an individual; is, however, amenable to the practice of restraint as are the impulses of heterosexuals. For this reason, the Army will not accept homosexual men and women as officers, a position which has attracted a good deal of criticism from the LGBT lobby. Until recently marriage was only allowed between officers, but that has been relaxed of late.