

The Steps of Humility and Pride



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The Steps of Humility and Pride

By
Bernard of Clairvaux

Introduction by
M. Basil Pennington OCSO

Translated by
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INTRODUCTION

THE STEPS OF HUMILITY is Bernard of Clairvaux's first published work.¹ And yet surely it is not the work of an amateur as both its immediate popularity and its continued popularity through the centuries clearly attest.² It has been published in English translation more frequently than any of his other works with the possible exception of his treatise, *On Loving God*.³

The title of the treatise does not really prepare the reader for what is to be found in it.⁴ This is not a new discovery. Bernard's first critics said the same. And the sensitive young Abbot felt the need to defend himself in his *Retractatio*.⁵

1. Godfrey of Langres, to whom this Treatise is addressed, in the Fourth Book of the *Life of St Bernard* (*S. Bernardi Vita Prima*) speaks of "his first work concerning the steps of humility."—c. 8, PL 185:320. For a fuller treatment of this question and indeed for an excellent introduction in general, see the Introduction in *S. Bernardi Opera* (hereafter OB) ed. J. Leclercq, H. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses) vol. 3 (1963) pp. 3-11. On this particular point see also, J. Leclercq, "Le premier traité authentique de saint Bernard?" *Recueil d'études sur saint Bernard et ses écrits* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura) vol. 2 (1966) pp. 51-67, reprinted from *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 48 (1953): 196-210.

2. This is evident from the diffusion of the mss. See OB 3:4ff.

3. See the Bibliography below, pp. 133-135.

4. Mills echoes the sentiment of many when he says in his Introduction: "The title of the book is somewhat misleading." Saint Bernard, *The Twelve Degrees of Humility and Pride*, tr. B. R. V. Mills (London: SPCK, 1929), p. viii.

5. "Some have objected to the title: 'The Steps of Humility,' on the ground that I have described the steps not of humility but of pride. They must not have understood or have not noticed my note at the end where I briefly explain the title."—below, p. 25.

THE RETRACTATIO

A tradition going back to manuscripts contemporary with Bernard himself places the *Retractatio*⁶ at the head of the treatise.⁷ It is certainly an important document, not so much because of the correctives it brings to the text as for what it tells us about the author. It assures us that he "practices what he preaches." It may be spirited, but it certainly is the expression of a truly humble man. Where he had been wrong, he readily confessed it. He had no desire to conceal it; he wanted to right the wrong. We see a man who readily accepted himself as fallible, a man genuinely and courageously self-possessed. He did not have to be right. This same spirit is evinced in his willingness to set forth a personal opinion as a personal opinion. Yet his was true humility, based on truth. Where his critics are wrong he was not ready to make any false protestations but firmly stood his ground. All the virtues are interconnected; the truly humble man is also truthful and courageous.

But the *Retractatio* tells us something else about the author, something it is well to keep in mind when reading not only this treatise but all his subsequent writings. Bernard tells us here that when he quoted Scripture he depended on his memory, and not a verbal memory, but rather a general sense of the passage.⁸ This was true even in a case where the text in question was the basis of his whole line of reasoning. Thus as we

6. The English "Retraction" does not do justice to the content of the Latin word; it is rather a reconsidering of the matter—in this case, in the light of some objections, which are answered with both a retraction and a spirited defense.

7. See OB 3:5ff.

8. "I quoted, as I thought, the text and then found that it was not in the Gospel at all. I had no intention of falsifying the text but I was depending on my memory of the general sense of the passage and made a slip in the words."—below, p. 25. Dom Jean Leclercq has pointed out to me that Wordsworth and White in their *Novum Testamentum latine* (Oxford, 1889-98) indicate that at Mk 13:32, the text Bernard quoted, *filius hominis* (Son of Man), is found in some mss, including the *Book of Armagh* (*Dublinensis*) and the *Book of Kells* (Dublin) (see Wordsworth and White, 1:253) so a certain "Irish" tradition may have influenced the text first quoted by Bernard. I am grateful to Dom Jean Leclercq for this indication and for the other helpful suggestions he made after reading this Introduction.

read St Bernard we should not be surprised at times to find that his Scriptural texts are not exactly those found in our Bibles. He may have had in mind the Vulgate or the Old Latin version,⁹ or more likely texts from these employed in the liturgy where they are sometimes adapted to the context. Or he may, as he admits here, have been speaking from the general sense of the passage. Bernard was not usually too concerned with the literal sense of the Scriptural texts he employed (though sometimes he certainly was, as we can see from this treatise). He was quite ready to leave this husk to get at the inner meat, the typological meaning.¹⁰ And even there, for this man so typically monastic, it was the practical moral sense that most interested him—what he and his brethren could be doing to respond to the reality revealed—rather than the allegorical or anagogic meanings.¹¹

The *Retractatio* also tells us something about the diffusion of Bernard's works. We do not know exactly when it was writ-

9. Watkin Williams in his Preface quotes Dr White, Dean of Christ Church: "... his considered opinion is that St Bernard 'probably used an ordinary Vulgate text which had preserved a certain number of Old Latin readings, as so many of the Vulgate mss did; and also that he often quoted from memory.' " Williams goes on to say, still depending on White: "a salient instance of the former would be the addition of 'quanto magis' in John xiii. 15." There is no indication that White considered the possibility that Bernard received some of his Scripture sources through the liturgy. See *Select Treatises of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, Cambridge Patristic Texts, ed. W. Williams and B. Mills (Cambridge: University Press, 1926) pp. viif.

10. "Let us now endeavor, under the guidance of the Spirit of truth, to extract the mystical meaning which lies underneath the rind of the letter."—SC 51:2, OB 2 (1958) p. 84; CF 31; "Such is the literal sense, the portion of the Jews. But for me, following the counsel of the Lord I will search for the treasure of spirit and life hidden in the profound depths of these inspired utterances."—SC 73:1-2; OB 2:234; CF 40.

11. "I had indeed hoped that the discussion of the mystical sense of our text would not have detained us so long. I actually thought that one sermon would suffice, and that passing quickly through that shadowy wood where allegories lurk unseen, we should arrive, after perhaps one day's journey, on the open plain of moral truth."—SC 16:1; OB 1:89-90; CF 4:115. For an excellent and comprehensive treatment of the way in which the Cistercian Fathers and their contemporaries used the Scriptures with their four senses see H. de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'Ecriture*, 4 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959-1964). There are many references to St Bernard in the indexes.

ten but it could have been only a matter of a few years after the initial publication.¹² Yet already "many copies had been made." For those times this was significant. Copies were made only by the painstaking labors of a copyist. One did not undertake the expenditures and troubles involved in copying a book unless there was a real demand for it. Bernard's writings, even in his lifetime, were in great demand and widely read.¹³

Bernard would learn from his experience with the *Steps of Humility*. In the future he would be more cautious in publishing.¹⁴ Usually he would submit his work to friends for their judgment.¹⁵ He was however not always fortunate in his choice of critics. We know now that some of the sharpest passages in his *Apologia* were not originally his own but were inspired by one of these chosen critics.¹⁶ We find, too, that these critics sometimes could not resist the temptation to "leak" the work.¹⁷

12. The "long after" (*multo post*) of the *Retractatio* has to be understood in the context. It was much too late after publication for Bernard to introduce into the text the corrections he would like to make. It does not mean necessarily that many years had elapsed. After the publication of many more significant and controversial works he would not have been apt to concern himself about publishing a retraction concerning relatively minor matters in this first treatise.

13. The diffusion of the *mas* solidly establishes this.

14. Unlike most of his works there seem to have been no successive redactions of the treatise; the first one was published. See the Introductions in OB and CF.

15. Eg. in the case of his next treatise, the *Apologia*. He had sent it to Oger, a Canon Regular of Mont-Saint-Eloi, and wrote to him in this vein: "... do not, on any account, allow anyone to see or copy the aforesaid booklet until you have been through it with him (William of St Thierry), discussed it with him, and have both made such corrections as may be necessary that every word of it may be supported by two witnesses. I leave to you both to decide whether the preface you have put together out of my letters will stand, or whether it would not be better to compose another."—Ep 88:3; PL 182:213; tr. B. S. James, *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux* (Hereafter cited as LSB) (London: Burns and Oates, 1953), Letter 91 (James' numbering is different from that of the PL), pp. 136f. This is cited in Leclercq's Introduction in CF 1:7f. In his Prologue to the treatise, *On Grace and Free Will*, Bernard wrote to William of St Thierry: "You please read it first . . . if you notice something obscurely stated . . . do not hesitate either to emend it yourself or else to return it to me for emendation. . . ." OB3:165, CF19. See also two articles by Leclercq, "Les formes successives de la lettre-traité de s. Bernard contre Abélard" in *Revue bénédictine* 78 (1968): 87-105 and "Les lettres de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry," *ibid.* 79 (1969): 375-391. Also, CF 1:7ff.

16. See CF 1:24f.

17. So Bernard had to write to Oger: "That other booklet I lent you, I had meant you only to read, but you tell me that you have had it copied. . . . I did not intend that you should send it to the abbot. . . ."—Ep 88:3, *loc. cit.*

GODFREY OF LANGRES

Like most of Bernard's works, this first one was written in response to the behest of a friend who had some title to make such a demand on the busy abbot. Besides the title of friendship, often there were other accompanying claims. In this case it was that of filiation. The *Steps of Humility* were written for Godfrey of Langres who was then abbot of Clairvaux's second foundation, Fontenay.¹⁸

We should know more about this man for he was perhaps the man closest to Bernard, the Abbot. For a time he was Bernard's prior, then he was sent off to head the second foundation. Soon again we find him back at Clairvaux.¹⁹ We might well ask why? We have seen parallel instances in modern times and the reasons are various. Some men make excellent priors but poor first superiors. This may have been the case with Godfrey. But his subsequent election as Bishop of Langres in 1139 and his successful administration of that diocese for about twenty-three years would seem to indicate he had real ability to lead and govern. The reason for the return might have been the same as that which motivated his later resignation from the bishopric: a nostalgia for Clairvaux, a basic lifelong attraction to live the simple, free life of a monk. We have parallels to this, as for example in the case of the Blessed Humbert, the founding abbot of Igny, who after ten years of service, in spite of Bernard's strong disapproval, laid down his charge and returned to the ranks of Clairvaux.²⁰ But the real answer perhaps lay in the needs of Bernard and Clairvaux. It was a rapidly developing community. Young and old were flocking to it, foundations were going forth from it at a dis-

18. Fontenay was founded in 1119. See L. Janauschek, *Originum Cisterciensium* (Vienna: Hoelder, 1877) p. 8, where all the details are given as well as a brief biographical sketch of Godfrey.

19. There is some discussion as to when he returned to Clairvaux. Leclercq (OB 3:3), citing Vacandard (*Vie de saint Bernard, Abbé de Clairvaux* [Paris: Lecoffre, 1895] 1:166 note 4), sets his return sometime before 1126. Janauschek (*loc. cit.*) and Mills (*op. cit.* vii), citing Gallia Christiana (4:374) has him return around 1135.

20. See J. Morson and H. Costello, Introduction in Gueric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons I*, CF 8:xvi.

turbing rate.²¹ Bernard would often be off on the business of Church and State.²² There was need of an exceptionally capable second-in-command. Yet he would have to be very truly a second-in-command, there was no room for undue independence. Bernard, the genius, even with all his commitments kept a close watch on things. Bernard, the spiritual father, knew his sons and kept in close personal contact with each one of them, as is evident from some of the stories that have come down to us.²³ The prior would "perform respectfully the duties enjoined on him by his abbot and do nothing against the abbot's will or direction."²⁴

THE YOUNG BERNARD

Whether we are reading the treatise to get better in touch with the exciting, unusual and extremely significant period of history during which it was written, or to get to know a fascinating personality better, or simply to deepen our own spiritual insight, we do well to consider the man who speaks to us, to have a real feel for him, so that, in a sense, we can enter into dialogue with him.²⁵

Bernard of Fontaines was by origin a man of the upper classes. His family had its place among the nobility of the emerging French nation. He was well educated. His writings give evidence of some familiarity with the classics and an excellent training

21. In the years Godfrey would have been prior, if we accept Leclercq's date, Clairvaux would have acquired 25 new daughter houses. In all it was to acquire 65 during Bernard's term of office. See the chart in the back of Janauschek.

22. It was during Godfrey's tenure that Bernard had among other things to struggle with the papal schism which was settled just prior to Godfrey's election as bishop, an election, incidentally, which was first given to Bernard who declined the office.

23. See J. Leclercq, "St Bernard of Clairvaux and the Contemplative Community" in *Contemplative Community: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, CF 21 (1972) pp. 108-149.

24. RB 65:16.

25. Still perhaps the best biography of Bernard is that of Vacandard (cited above in note 19) but one should not overlook the *Vita Prima* PL 185:225-416, partial tr. G. Webb and A. Walker, *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* [London: Mowbray, 1960]). The most recent authoritative study on Bernard is that of Leclercq, *St Bernard and the Cistercian Spirit*, CS 16.

in composition. He uses every literary form, is masterfully at home in all of them. In the fullest sense of the word, he is literate.

And he had extraordinary powers of leadership. When he decided Cîteaux was the right answer, he did not go alone. He led thirty relatives and friends into the marshes. He was not a naive lad, unfamiliar with the ways of the world. He pursued a married brother into a front-line army camp, he spoke frankly to uncle and brothers and friends alike. He would be well prepared and knowledgeable when he later offered advice and direction to kings and princes, bishops and clerics, knights and scholars. And he could identify with the poor.

The man who wrote the *Steps of Humility* was not humble by origin, nature or temperament. It was a virtue, he knew from experience, that had to be cultivated—and at a price. The aspirant of twenty-three (we must remember that twenty-three in those days represented a good bit more maturity than its parallel today) must have also been spiritually maturing. Otherwise it would hardly have been possible for him to have reached so rapidly that spiritual maturity which would have allowed the Abbot of Cîteaux, St Stephen Harding, to send him forth as the spiritual father of Cîteaux's third daughter house.

When Bernard wrote the *Steps of Humility* he had been abbot for about ten years. He had known the rigor of a Cistercian novitiate, made more rigorous by his own zeal, a couple of years of community life as a simple monk, and then years of ever more weighty responsibility as the abbot of a rapidly growing community. He was plagued by serious ill health. He had to travel much—much for an ordinary Cistercian abbot though not much in comparison to what the future would demand of him—seeing bishops and nobles to get the permission, backing and finances for Clairvaux's initial foundations—the first in what would be a steadily growing stream. His life had been enriched by sharing it with some wonderful friends: William of Champeaux, his bishop, William of St Thierry, who convalesced with him in the little hut in the garden, Guerric of Igny, who came to Clairvaux around 1123, a saintly scholar

with years of learning and prayerful solitude behind him, and Bernard's own remarkable brothers and uncle. Though still young, only thirty-five, the Abbot of Clairvaux had a lot to draw on when he set about responding to the Abbot of Fontenay.

THE STEPS OF HUMILITY

What Bernard dictated to his secretary was not wholly new. Godfrey in making his request had in mind some conferences which he himself had heard from the lips of the abbot when he sat at his right in the chapter house at Clairvaux. Now Godfrey found himself in a center chair and he wanted to provide equally good food for the community that had been entrusted to his care.

Bernard opens with a somewhat stylized exordium. Yet it has its truth. It undoubtedly was a great act of charity for a very busy abbot to take time out to prepare these many pages for Godfrey.

THREE STEPS OF TRUTH

Bernard is a good teacher. Before constructing his steps of humility he arouses his reader's interest by showing him the heights to which they can lead. After all, who is interested in a ladder except the man who wants to climb up to something. And that something is truth, but truth taken in a very large and full sense; not just a moral habit or a quality of the mind, but the Incarnate Word, God himself known and contemplated, and that truth which in man operates by charity.

In speaking of his goal Bernard the teacher seeks a paradigm, and finds it again in steps. For him there are three steps or degrees of truth. Threefold divisions are a constant in this treatise, they occur again and again.²⁶

Even before going into the three degrees of truth, Bernard

26. Eg: way, truth, life (1) [The numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraphs in the treatise] humility, charity, contemplation (3-5), truth, mercy, illumination (13-19), humility of the Son, love of the Spirit, light of the Father (20-1). Even the 12 steps are divided into 3 groups: despising one's brethren, one's superiors, one's God. See below note 36, p. 11.

pauses to speak of the three fruits to be gained by mounting these steps of humility: humility itself, love and contemplation. These correspond to the three degrees of truth, or more accurately as Bernard notes, the three degrees of perception of truth; the truth in oneself, the truth in one's neighbor and the Truth in itself. Bernard asserts there is a precise order here and establishes this both by intrinsic reasons and by an appeal to authority. His authority is Christ Jesus teaching on the Mount, it is the Beatitudes.

Just as under the guidance of the Spirit the inspired writer or redactor gathered in summary form the full teaching of Christ into the three chapters of Matthew's Gospel that form the Sermon on the Mount,²⁷ so the essence of that whole sermon is distilled in the Beatitudes that stand at the head of it. The Cistercian Fathers clearly perceived this and used this text to trace out a Cistercian way to holiness.²⁸ Bernard would do this later in his First Sermon for the Feast of All Saints.²⁹ But here in this first treatise he already makes use of the Beatitudes as a sure guide for the ascent in truth. First the poor, meek, sinner humbles himself with tears and thirsts for justice.³⁰ He sees himself as he truly is, with all his sin and misery. Such a heart that knows misery, knows mercy. Thus he can readily identify with his brother. Bernard demonstrates his understanding of human psychology here as he declares: "A brother who does not live in harmony with his brothers . . . has no sympathy with them because their feelings do not affect him, he can never really see the truth in others. . . . a brother's miseries are truly experienced only by one who has misery in his own heart." (6) The second degree of truth, a real understanding of others, is only attained by the merciful, and one is merciful only when he first perceives his own misery³¹. But

27. Mt 5-7.

28. See M. B. Pennington, "A Cistercian Way to Holiness," *Cistercian Studies* 6 (1971): 269-281.

29. OB 5:327-341; CF 34.

30. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."—Mt 5:3-6.

31. Below, 6, p. 34.

once he is merciful, he will obtain mercy, as is said in the fifth Beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."³² That mercy will purify him. Then as one clean of heart he will see God.³³ He will have reached the third degree of truth, he will know Truth in itself and go out of himself (*excessus*) in contemplation of it.

Bernard teaches all of this quite concisely but his illustrations greatly amplify the text. Christ is always his prime exemplar. It is when showing Christ becoming acquainted with infirmity that he might be merciful that Bernard goes off on his longest digression, exploring the knowledge of Christ. It is here where his memory fails him, modifying a Scripture text, with the results that the argumentation flowing from it is unfounded. The point is not central and Bernard had already given other bases for his opinion. In actual fact it is a question still debated by theologians today—the question of the growth of Christ the man through the acquisition of new knowledge. As the question is a bit off the point here, which Bernard himself admits in the text,³⁴ he does not have difficulty later when he must retract it. When it is merely a question of theological speculation Bernard has little difficulty in ceding a point.³⁵

Besides the example of Christ he offers two others. The Psalmist also shows the humble man how to act (16), while the Pharisee shows exactly what not to do (17).

But Bernard, the contemplative, the mystic, the theologian, soars aloft to find even more lofty exemplars as he reaches into the Trinity itself and directs the reader's gaze to the op-

32. Mt 5:7.

33. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."—Mt 5:8.

34. No. 13, p. 41.

35. This is evident in many passages in his sermons, eg: "Whether I am right in assigning it to such a source, I leave it to you to judge. It is also for you to consider and decide whether I have correctly attributed the same kind of humility to the Savior. . . . Another question awaiting your determination is whether I am right in supposing. . . ."—SC 42:8; OB 2:38; CF 7; "Nevertheless, if you still insist. . . I shall not quarrel with your conviction. . . ."—SC 50:2; OB 2:79; CF 31; "The Fathers seem to have held divergent views on the problem. . . . But I am of the opinion that knowledge of these matters would not contribute greatly to your spiritual progress."—SC 5:7; OB 1:24; CF 4:29.

erations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son, by word and example, teaches humility. The Spirit pours out his compassionate love into the hearts of the humble. And the Father beatifies them through Truth. They progress from disciples to friends to sons. The Son who is Truth works in the mind, the Spirit who is love in the will, but the Father draws men out of themselves into ecstatic contemplation, to the third heaven, to the attainment of the third and highest degree of truth.³⁶

TWELVE STEPS OF HUMILITY

It is the ladder of humility that gets a man up to the first step of truth. And Bernard now finally turns his attention to this ladder. It is not an unknown climb, for the way of humility and the way of pride are the very same. The way we have descended by pride we must ascend by humility.

It is a good pedagogical principle that one should go from the known to the unknown. Bernard does this using the opportunity to give further evidence of his own humility. Instead of describing the steps of humility in themselves, he exemplifies them by their opposites, saying this is the way he knows them best—not by climbing up the ladder, but by sliding down it through pride.

His paradigm here is Benedict's twelve degrees or steps of humility as they are sketched out in the seventh chapter of his *Rule for Monasteries*, something that would be very well-

36. What has been said here might be summed up in schematic fashion something like this:

Person	operates in	to make	producing in them	corresponding Beatitudes
Son	intellect	disciples	humility—knowledge of self	1-4
Holy Spirit	will	friends	love, mercy—of neighbor	
Father	rapture	sons	contemplation—of God, Truth	6

known and familiar to his monastic audience. This is the Rule that was so dear to the early Cistercians, the observance of which they saw to be the very living of the Gospel.³⁷ It was the desire to live this Rule more perfectly that animated the Founders of Cîteaux,³⁸ the men who inspired and formed Bernard as a monk. Chapter seven has always been considered the heart and center of the Rule, the essence of Benedictine asceticism, the Benedictine way to perfect love.³⁹ It perhaps says something for the sureness of Bernard's insight into the meaning of his Cistercian vocation and the Cistercian way of life that his first treatise is concerned with the very center of the Rule. And the way he goes about it indicates something of the specific emphasis of the Cistercian spirit. For, as we have seen Bernard clearly sees, the whole value of the ladder, of Benedictine asceticism, lies in its ability to bring us to the way of truth with its culmination in ecstatic contemplation. The Cistercians are Benedictine contemplatives.

If the reading has sometimes been heavy, even laborious, in the first part of this treatise, especially when Bernard struggled with the problem of the knowledge of Christ, it now takes a

37. Thurston of York, speaking of the founders of Fountains, speaks of: "... thirteen men who were determined to correct their way of life according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, or rather, according to the truth of the Gospel." And he goes on to put these words into the mouth of the leader, Robert of Fountains: "We must undertake with all our strength to observe by God's grace the true and age-old service of our blessed Father Benedict, or rather, the more ancient Gospel of Christ. . . ." And Thurston goes on to comment: "We ought to recall what happened in the affair of the Molesme monks which is quite similar. The Cistercians went forth to establish and found a most perfect way of life. . . . They faithfully undertook a renewal of the Holy Rule and a total living of it. . . . Indeed, it is clearer than light that in their wonderful way of life the truth of the whole Gospel shines forth."—nos. 3, 4, 22; PL 182:697-704; tr. M. B. Pennington, "Three Early Documents," *Cistercian Studies* 4 (1969): 149-158.

38. This is evident throughout the *Exordium Parvum*: eg, "These men, while still living in Molesme and inspired by divine grace often spoke, complained and lamented among themselves over the transgression of the Rule of St Benedict, the Father of Monks. . . . That was the reason why they came into this solitude, namely to fulfill their vows through the observation of the Holy Rule."—c. 3, *Nomasticon Cisterciense*, ed. M. Séjalon (Solesmes: S. Pierre, 1892), p. 55; tr. R. Larkin in L. Lekai, *The White Monks* (Okauchee: Cistercians, 1953), p. 253.

39. See my article "Discerning the Spirit and Aims of the Founders of the Order of Cîteaux" in *The Cistercian Spirit: A Symposium*, CS 3:1-26, especially pp. 23ff.

lighter turn—though certainly not frivolous. It is undoubtedly this latter part with its delightful vignettes that made the treatise so popular.

The order of Bernard's treatment then is wholly determined by that of his master, Benedict. At the end of the first part he indicates precisely how his twelve descending steps of pride correspond to Benedict's twelve ascending steps of humility. Actually this is more fully presented at the head of the whole treatise where the two ladders or rather the two directions of the same ladder are presented in summary form. Whether this is the work of Bernard or a very early redactor we do not know but it is certainly part of the manuscript tradition.⁴⁰

However even in his treatment of the twelve steps St Bernard reverts to his much favored tripartite division and shows, as an appendix to the tenth step of pride, how the first six steps show contempt for the brethren, the next four for the superiors and the last two for God. Conversely the first two steps of humility are in relation to God and it is only when a man has attained this humility will he want a superior over him and enter a monastery. Thus St Bernard argues that the last two steps of pride will be found only outside the monastery—some consolation for monks!

The reader immediately notices that Bernard's treatment of the first step of pride is as long as his treatment of the other eleven put together. This might have been forced on Bernard by external circumstances. He might have wanted to treat them all more fully, drawing abundantly on Scripture for illustrations as he does with the first, but the pressure of time or a waiting messenger or an impatient Godfrey may have forced him to hastily conclude his work.⁴¹ But we have no evidence that this was actually the case. His reason might have been that

40. There is no basis for asserting they are actually Bernard's work, yet they are contemporary to him. See OB 3:9f.

41. We have an example of this occurring in the case of the *Apologia* where Bernard says: "I am prevented from going on by the burdens of my office, and by your imminent departure, dear brother Oger. You will not agree to stay any longer, and you refuse to go without this latest little book."—*Apologia* 30; OB 3: 106f; CF 1:67.

he thought this was where most of his monastic hearers were or were in the greatest danger of being. Or it may have been simply that his charismatic freedom was spurred on by the abundance of relevant Scriptural passages that sprang to mind. Certainly his long excursus on the apostate Seraph has much to do with the length. It parallels in some ways his long excursus on the knowledge of Christ found in the first part. Perhaps in this balance we have a bit of subtle artistry which we do not readily perceive or appreciate. We could also note another parallel here, certainly one unintended by the author. Of the two points treated in the *Retractatio* one is found in each of these sections. When Bernard launches out into speculation he is not only less interesting and lively but also more apt to err as he ventures to set forth his own opinions.

Since the text itself offers a summary schema of the twelve steps down and up⁴² there is no need to summarize them here. After studying the schema one will want to enter simply into the reading and thoroughly enjoy the delightful illustrations with which Bernard colors his presentation. Bernard brings out clearly enough in the text how one step leads to another and how each step of pride corresponds to its relative step of humility. As we have already noted, after the tenth step he offers a brief three-part summary which is also helpful.⁴³

At the conclusion of the twelfth step Bernard launches into another, perhaps more interesting, excursus, struggling with an exegetical problem. John the Evangelist has written—Bernard applies the text to the habitual sinner of the twelfth step—“For such a one I would not that anyone should pray.”⁴⁴ This is a hard saying, especially for the loving heart of the abbot. He subtly undermines the text by reducing its application to expressed petition. Modern exegetes come at the problem from another approach, but Bernard has the authority of Augustine for his.⁴⁵ And it is a satisfying answer he gives, one that cor-

42. Below, pp. 26-27.

43. Below, pp. 75-76.

44. 1 Jn 5:16.

45. See below, p. 78, note 357.

responds to lived experience. The heart does not need words, nor can words and precepts obliterate the longings of a loving heart which God cannot fail to see.

As we finish reading the steps of pride we are inclined to expect our teacher to begin now the ascent. But a bit of reflection will make us realize that not only has he related the steps of pride to the corresponding steps of humility but in so doing he has fully instructed us in the latter. Nonetheless it is with a certain amount of disappointment that we bump into a conclusion.⁴⁶ Bernard sensed this reaction and most of the brief concluding paragraph is devoted to showing how one knowing the descending steps of pride knows at the same time the ascending steps of humility. In spite of these concluding remarks there were readers who yet felt they had been deceived in their expectation (and so might we) This is evident from the fact that Bernard had to touch again on the matter in his *Retractatio*.⁴⁷

It might be useful to offer the reader here a schematic outline of the treatise:

Preface

A. The Goal of the Steps of Humility—Truth (doctrinal presentation)

1. The Sources

- a. Scriptural: the teaching of Christ (1)⁴⁸
- b. Patristic: Augustine's definition of humility (2)

2. The Goal in general—the three fruits: humility charity, contemplation (3-5)

46. I am aware that Leclercq has indicated this treatise as one where Bernard achieved a beautiful ending (J. Leclercq, "L'Art de la composition dans les traités de s. Bernard," *Recueil*, vol. 3 [1969], p. 117. This article is reprinted from *Revue bénédictine* 76 [1966]: 87-115.). I am not disagreeing with this. My "bump" is something more psychological. The treatise, even in its ending, is a beautiful masterpiece of literature.

47. "Some have objected to the title: 'The Steps of Humility,' on the grounds that I have described the steps not of humility but of pride. They must not have understood or have not noticed my note at the end where I briefly explain the title."—below, p. 25.

48. The numbers in parenthesis refer to the paragraphs in the text.

3. The Goal in detail

a The three Steps of Truth (6-21)

(1) True self-knowledge in humility (6-17)

(a) The example of Christ (7-12)

Excursus on the knowledge of Christ

(b) The teaching of St Paul (13-15)

(c) Further examples
of such humility: the Psalmist (16)
of the opposite: the Pharisee (17)

(2) Knowledge of one's neighbor through compassion (18)

(3) Knowledge of Truth itself through contemplation (19)

b Corresponding operations of the Trinity (20-21)

c The way

(1) To the highest Truth—rapture (22)
example of St Paul (23)(2) To the first degree of truth—Jacob's ladder (24-27)
(transition to the second part of the treatise)

B. The Steps of Pride (and Humility) (practical illustrations)

1. Curiosity (28-30)

Excursus on the Apostate Seraph (31-38)

2. Levity (39)

3. Giddiness (40)

4. Boasting (41)

5. Singularity (42)

6. Self-conceit (43)

7. Presumption (44)

8. Self-justification (45)

9. Hypocritical confession (46-47)

10. Revolt (48)

Summary (49)

11. Freedom to sin (50)

12. Habit of sinning (51)

Excursus on Prayer (52-56)

Conclusion (57)

SOURCES

One of the first things that usually strikes one when he first reads St Bernard is the copious use of Scripture. Texts flow from Bernard's pen without cease. When he is not actually quoting a text he is frequently using Biblical words and phrases to express his own ideas.

We have already mentioned the freedom Bernard takes when using Scriptural texts. He is always more intent on content. Sometimes he does argue his point from a Biblical text employing the type of tight argumentation which we are inclined to associate with the scholastic method. We find some examples of this in the opening paragraph of this treatise. Although the "last of the Fathers" spoke disparagingly of the philosophers of the schools⁴⁹ he knew the new methods and made some use of them.⁵⁰ But it is evident that it is the Fathers who have more fully informed his mind and shaped his method and style. He usually employs Scripture in the more contemplative and existential way of the patristic tradition.

In this treatise his dependence on the Fathers is extensive right from the beginning where he employs Augustine's definition of humility (2). He weaves into his fabric themes and interpretations common to the Fathers, such as the interpretation of Isaiah 14:13 and Ezekiel 28:12 (31, 35) or the theme of Eve, mother of the dying (30).

49. Eg, Pent 3:5 (however it is interesting to note that even in this very sermon Bernard examines his matter through what the philosophers would call the four causes, and does it in excellent philosophical form), OB 5:173, CF 25, IV 3 p.3, OB 5:203, CF 25; SC 22:10, OB 1:136, CF 7.

50. In fact we can find in the second paragraph of this treatise a perfect syllogism with its major, minor (*Sed*) and conclusion (*ergo*). See OB 3:18. This has been somewhat lost in the translation.

The Fathers who seem to have the greatest influence on him in this treatise are men of the West, Augustine and Gregory the Great, but Origin is not absent. There are also evidences of Justin, Cyprian, Tertullian, Ambrose and Anselm.⁵¹ The works of all these Fathers, with the possible exception of Justine, were to be found in the amarium at Clairvaux.⁵²

There are also quotations coming from pagan authors such as Terence (6) and Persius (40). Bernard may have remembered these from his school days, though there is greater likelihood that they came to him through the Fathers.

Obviously the primary source here is Benedict of Nursia who is responsible for the whole structure of the second part and even at times provides the very words Bernard uses.

The liturgy also provides Bernard with inspiration and content. As we have already indicated, his Scriptural texts come to him often through the liturgy. In paragraph twenty-two he employs a phrase that comes from the *Sanctus* of the Mass or the *Te Deum*, a phrase inspired by Isaiah: "The heavens and the earth are filled with your glory."⁵³ And one of his final arguments in the treatise rests on liturgical practice, on the way the Church prays in the prayers of the faithful on Good Friday (56).

THE STYLE OF THE TREATISE

Very much could be written about the style of St Bernard, even if one limited himself to the consideration of this initial treatise. I will touch on only a few points.⁵⁴

One thing that is very evident is the order in the treatise. It is carefully planned and well executed. The outline offered above⁵⁵ makes this quite clear. Yet another facet of Bernard

51. The notes of the text should be consulted.

52. See A. Wilmart, "L'Ancienne bibliothèque de Clairvaux," *Collectanea OCR* 11 (1949): 101-127, 301-319.

53. Is 6:3.

54. A fuller treatment of this matter can be found in J. Leclercq, "L'Art de la composition dans les traités de S. Bernard," *Recueil*, vol. 3 (1969), 105-162, reprinted from *Revue bénédictine* 76 (1966): 87-115.

55. Pp. 26-27.

is equally in evidence: his freedom even when working within a structure. Besides the three main excursions which we have already indicated (7-12, 31-38, 52-56), there are a number of other instances where he has rambled down a side road. It is something of which he is frankly aware: "But to come back to our subject." (13) "I am afraid I am 'speaking in my excess' now myself and have wandered away from my subject. . . . Well let us come back to the point." (17-18) "How did we get on to this matter . . . ? I wandered off into this by-path. . . ." (38).

Basically though, even with his vagaries, the author of this treatise is a good teacher. The use of the twelve steps and the very frequent use of the tripartite division are good memory aids. The interrelationship of the different parts and aspects are clearly brought out.⁵⁶ Principal terms such as humility and pride are clearly defined,⁵⁷ distinctions are neatly made.⁵⁸ Argumentation, flowing in good theological fashion from Scripture texts, is clearly pursued and brought to a conclusion.⁵⁹ Even very deep theological questions such as the properties of the three divine Persons, concomitance and attribution are handled with a simplicity and clarity that is readily intelligible to the average lay reader.⁶⁰

However, Bernard's pedagogical style, order and clarity detract not at all from the literary value of his treatise.⁶¹ Unfortunately much of the beauty of Bernard's Latin is not and probably can never be captured in translation. The emphasis and alliteration of *Carnalis videlicet populi sententiam de carne inquirens, nomen carnis posuit* (11) is not found in "When he was enquiring what a carnal people thought about the human

56. See above, note 36.

57. "Humility is a virtue by which a man has a low opinion of himself because he knows himself well." (2) "For what else is pride but, as a saint [Augustine] has defined it, the love of one's own excellence." (14)

58. Eg. in relation to the two kinds of excess (16-17).

59. Eg. in no. 1. See Leclercq, "L'Art. . . ." p. 114.

60. See nos. 20-22.

61. Leclercq concludes his consideration of the treatise by saying: "One finds in this treatise of Bernard *junior* a doctrinal synthesis which will lose none of its value in the face of his more mature works. But also in regards to composition this first work is already a masterpiece."—"L'Art. . . ." p. 117.

body that they saw before them he used the title that referred directly to the human nature. . . ."⁶² Alliteration abounds in the Latin.⁶³ The constant balancing of words, again often with alliteration, delights both ear and mind:

. . . sicut prius misericordes quam mundicordes, sic prius mites quam misericordes. . . . (14)

Si non accessisset, non attraxisset; si non attraxisset, non extraxisset. (12)

. . . se solum decipit, quem solum excipit. . . . (17)

. . . vel de virtute confidam, vel pro labore diffidam. (22)

. . . ideoque nascimur morituri, quia prius morimur nascituri. (30)

But even in translation Bernard's skill as a writer stands out in the delightful character sketches in the second part—delightful to the reader but one suspects that they might have caused more than one monk to squirm when they were first sketched out in the chapter house at Clairvaux. Not only are they full of humor, but paint their subject with such vividness that we can immediately see and hear the loquacious eccentric braggart:

his eyes are wandering, his glance darts right and left, his ears are cocked (28) . . . he simply cannot stop laughing. . . . He is like a well-filled bladder that has been pricked and squeezed. The air, not finding a free vent, whistles out through the little hole with squeak after squeak . . . In embarrassment he buries his face in his hands, tightens his lips, clenches his teeth. It is no use. The laughter must explode and if his hand holds it in his mouth, it bursts out through his nose. (40)

While he is at his meal, he casts his eyes around the tables and if he sees anyone eating less than himself he is mortified. . . . He would rather starve. . . . He wonders what others think about the appearance of his face and as he

62. Below, p. 39.

63. Eg: *Hauris virus peritura, et perituros paritura.* (30) . . . *ut scire sciatur quod scit.* (41) . . . *miserabilis mirisque clamoribus miram misericordiam meruit.* . . . (54) *Sapere enim malum, sapere non est, sed desipere.* (30)

cannot see it he can only guess whether it is rosy or wan by looking at his hands and arms, poking at his ribs, and feeling his shoulders and loins to see how skinny or fleshy they are. . . . He will stay awake in bed and sleep in choir. After sleeping through the night office while the others were singing psalms, he stays on to pray alone. . . . He makes sure that those sitting outside know he is there, modestly hidden in his corner, clearing his throat and coughing and groaning and sighing. (42)

He must have the first place in gatherings, be the first to speak in council. He comes without being called. He interferes without being asked. He must rearrange everything, re-do whatever has been done. (44)

. . . when they⁶⁴ are caught out . . . their eyes are cast down, they humble themselves to the very dust, they will wring out some tears if they can, sighs and groans interrupt their words. . . . They accuse themselves of things so great, so incredible, that you begin to doubt the charges you were certain of before. (46)

The force of the satire is heightened by the realism of the descriptions.

The same mastery of description is to be found at work when Biblical scenes or personalities are brought in to illustrate a point.⁶⁵

Through all this Bernard shows his depth of psychological insight. We have already noted this in the first part.⁶⁶ We see it again in the last sentence just quoted above and again as he speaks of the community's reaction when the proud hypocrite is unmasked: "Now everyone knows what he is, everyone condemns him, and they are all the more vexed because of the good opinion his fraud fooled them into holding for so long." (47)

B. R. V. Mills tells us that we have in Bernard a thinker, a theologian, a monk, a mystic and a moralist.⁶⁷ I think quite a few additional adjectives could be added to even this impressive array.

64. Bernard switches back and forth from the singular to the plural in his illustrations.

65. Eg. *Dinah* (29), *Eve* (30).

66. See above, p. 11.

67. *Select Treatises of S. Bernard*, pp. xvff.

THE SUBTITLES

The translation presented here is based on the critical Latin text prepared by Jean Leclercq and Henri Rochais and published in 1963 by Editiones Cistercienses in volume three of the *Sancti Bernardi opera*. In the translation the subtitles or chapter headings to be found in that edition are retained. Actually they go back to the twelfth century and probably are contemporaneous with Bernard himself.⁶⁸ They are found in most of the ancient manuscripts, the one common set with few variations; though there are some later manuscripts where they do not appear. Sometimes they are listed at the head of the whole treatise rather than inserted in the text. And in some manuscripts they are both listed and inserted in the text.⁶⁹

Whoever inserted the titles, and he quite possibly had Bernard's approval in the matter, was more concerned with utility and clarity than with symmetry. They are far more numerous in the second part, where each step commands its own title, and also the excursus on the apostate Angel. In the first part there are, besides the heading of the Preface, only two subtitles and these are drawn from the text itself.

CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

Perhaps one of the clearest and most concrete indications of the perduring value of this treatise is the fact that there has been sufficient demand for it to warrant constant republication in many languages. In English alone in the last fifty years there has been Barton Mills' translation, based on his own edition, published by SPCK in 1929; G. Bosworth Burch's, with its long introductory study on Bernard's epistemology, published by Harvard in 1940 and 1942 and republished by Notre Dame in 1963, and G. Webb and A. Walker's version appearing in Mowbray's *Fleur de Lys* Series in 1957.⁷⁰ The present is the first based on the critical edition.

68. See Leclercq, "Pour l'histoire des traités de s. Bernard," *Recueil* 2:116ff. The article is a reprint from *Analecta SOC* 15 (1959): 56-78.

69. See OB 3:5ff.

70. See the Bibliography, pp. 133-135.

The reason for this popularity is within the treatise itself. As we have seen, it is rich in humor; everyone can enjoy a bit of satire. It is perhaps the work of Bernard that is easiest to read. Again every man can find himself within it. It stoops down to the lowest sinner. But it not only stoops down, it points him toward the most sublime heights. There is hope for all.

Its attractiveness for many though, most fundamentally, lies in the fact that the author truly exemplifies what he teaches and with extraordinary literary skill conveys this effectively to the reader. The reader senses that Bernard has looked deeply into himself, knows himself and approaches the reader, his fellow man, with deep understanding and true compassion. The young Bernard has already come to love all men and in the sublime vision of man which he has seen in God he has a deeper respect and a greater appreciation for the greatness of each than most men have for themselves. As Bernard meets each on the rung of misery and pride on which he is presently lodged he does not fail to assure the poor wretch that he is not alone and that he has every reason to hope for great things. Every degree of pride has its corresponding degree of humility. If Bernard's satire is at times a bit stinging, and here we perhaps perceive some of the yet unmellowed zeal of youth, there is such good humor in it that we can enjoy it, just as the Black Monks of his time so enjoyed the *Apologia*.⁷¹ Although he may not naturally use Bernard's terminology every man finds within himself some of the experiences Bernard so graphically depicts. What is more, he quickly identifies his own deepest longings in Bernard's description of the goal: the freedom of truth, universal love, the experience of the Transcendent God. Bernard's straight forward assurance, his calm witness that God really cares, is personally involved in man's strivings and fulfillment

71. See CF 1:21 and note 51 there. Surviving mss of the *Apologia* seem to indicate it was perhaps even more widely circulated among the Black Monks than among the White (or Grey as they were then called). This should not be too surprising since Bernard's reprimands of the Black, though stinging, were delightfully satirical; his reproofs for his own brothers were more straight from the shoulder.

is like a cool mountain breeze wafted across a placid lake into a city of feverish activity. It is immensely refreshing and offers one life and hope; it lifts eyes to the mountains and draws one out beyond the hustle to serene heights where he can perceive deeper meanings and experience true hope. Bernard very effectively communicates to his reader the invitation to glory in his infirmities for therein lies true strength and the hope of unending glory, meaning, fulfillment.

Enough has been said by way of introduction. Let the reader now proceed to the text and enjoy it to the full. For it offers him not only passing enjoyment, but, if he would have it, a way to a fuller—the fullest possible life and happiness.

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RECONSIDERATION

(*Retractatio*)

IN THE COURSE OF THIS LITTLE WORK I referred in support of one of my opinions to that passage of the Gospels where our Lord says that he does not know the day of the Last Judgement.¹ I quoted, as I thought, the text and then found that it was not in the Gospel at all. I had no intention of falsifying the text but I was depending on my memory of the general sense of the passage and made a slip in the words.² The true text simply says: "Not even the Son knows."³ I wrote: "Not even the Son *of Man* knows." I built my whole argument on this phrase, resting a true opinion on a false foundation. I discovered the mistake only long after I had published the book and many copies had been made.⁴ There is no chance of tracing all these copies and correcting the error so I suppose the only remedy is herewith to make my confession.

In another place⁵ I put forward an opinion about the Seraphim which I admit I never heard or read of anywhere. The reader, however, will take notice that I was cautious enough to use the words "I think." I simply expressed an opinion and made no claim to support it from the Scriptures.

Some have objected to the title: "The Steps of Humility," on the ground that I have described the steps not of humility but of pride. They must not have understood, or have not noticed my note at the end where I briefly explain the title.⁶

1. See below, no. 11, p. 39.

2. We have here an explicit admission on the part of Bernard that he did in practice quote Scripture from memory and that his quotations were not always precise. This should be kept in mind when one is trying to identify his Scriptural sources.

3. Mk 13:32.

4. We are not able to date the *Retractatio* but this sentence does indicate that Bernard's writings, even this first one, received rather immediate wide distribution.

5. See below, no. 35, p. 63.

6. See below, no. 57, p. 82.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF HUMILITY

12. Always to show the humility in one's heart, in one's bearing, keeping the eyes lowered.
11. That a monk should speak few and reasonable words and with a moderate voice.
10. Not to be over-ready to laugh.
9. To keep silent till one is questioned.
8. To keep to the common rule of the monastery.
7. To believe and admit that one is less than others.
6. To confess and to believe that one is unworthy and useless for anything.
5. To confess one's sins.
4. To hold fast to patience amidst hard and rough things for the sake of obedience.
3. To submit to superiors in all obedience.
2. Not to love one's own will.
1. In the fear of God to be constantly on the watch against sin.¹

The first two steps of humility are mounted outside the monastic life. This begins at the third step with submission to a superior.

1. These are essentially the twelve degrees of humility laid down by St Benedict in the seventh chapter of his Rule, but in inverse order as the numbers indicate. See *Sancti Benedicti Regula Monasteriorum*, ed. E. Manning (Westmalle: Typis Ordinis Cisterciensiorum, 1962), pp. 27-37; tr. L. J. Doyle, *St Benedict's Rule for Monasteries* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1962), pp. 21-29 (Hereafter referred to as RB, with an indication of the chapter and verse. The verse numbers are taken from Manning who follows the standard established by Lentini and followed by Hanslik. There is as of yet no English version giving the verse numbers.).

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PREFACE

YOU ASKED ME, BROTHER GODFREY,¹ to write out at greater length the sermons I gave to the brethren on the steps of humility. I should very much like to have given a worthy response such as was due to your request, but I felt some doubts about my powers so, as the Gospel advises,² I first sat down and reckoned up my assets to see if they were enough to bring me through the work. Charity overcame this fear.³ Then immediately a new wave of terror swept over me from the other side. I began to fear more the terrible danger of pride if I did well than the disgrace if I did badly. There I was at a crossroad between fear and charity, not knowing which way was safe to take. If I spoke to any profit about humility I feared to be found lacking in it; if humility kept me silent I would be good for nothing. Neither course was safe; I had to take one or the other. Finally I decided it was better to send you this cargo of words than to seek safety by lying snug in the harbor of silence, feeling confident that if you find anything worth-while in what I write, you will pray that I may be saved from pride. If, on the other hand, you find nothing worth reading—which is what I expect—well, then I will have nothing about which to be proud.

1. Godfrey is a relative of St Bernard who accompanied him to Cîteaux and Clairvaux. At the time this was written he was probably the Abbot of Clairvaux's second daughter house, Fontenay. He was to return to Clairvaux as prior and later to be elected Bishop of Langres. See above, Introduction, p. 5. This first work as most of Bernard's was written in response to a particular request.

2. Lk 14:28.

3. 1 Jn 4:18.

THE GOAL OF THE STEPS OF HUMILITY

BEFORE I SPEAK of the different steps of humility—which indeed St Benedict does not ask us to count but to climb¹—I will first try to show what we may expect to find at the top. The toil will be easier if we have the profit before our eyes. Our Lord shows us plainly both the difficulty and the reward of the work. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”² The way is humility, the goal is truth. The first is the labor, the second the reward. But you may ask: “How do I know that he is speaking of humility? He only uses a general word, ‘I am the Way’ ”? Well, I will give you a clearer test. “Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart.”³ He points to himself as an example of humility, a model of meekness. Imitate him and you will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.⁴ What is the light of life but truth that enlightens every man that comes into this world⁵ and shows us where the true life is to be found? So, when he says: “I am the Way and the Truth,” he adds, “and the Life.” It is as if he said: “I am the Way, I lead to Truth; I am the Truth, I promise Life; and I myself am the very Life I give you.” “For this is eternal life, that they may know you the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”⁶ Supposing, then, that you go on to object: “I see the way—humility; I long for the goal to which it leads—truth; but what if the way is so difficult that I can never reach the goal?” The answer comes promptly: “I am

1. RB 7. Cf. Mor IX, 36.

3. Mt 11:29.

5. Jn 1:9.

2. Jn 14:6.

4. Jn 8:12.

6. Jn 17:3.

the life," that is, I am the food, the viaticum,⁷ to sustain you on your journey.

There are some who go astray and cannot find the road. He cries to them: "I am the Way." Some doubt and waver in their faith. His word to them is: "I am the Truth." To those who grow weary with the climbing his cry is: "I am the Life." I think now I have dwelt long enough on this passage of the Gospel to show you that the knowledge of truth is the fruit of humility. Let us turn to another text. "I confess to you, Father of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things (he means, of course, the secrets of truth) from the wise and prudent (meaning the proud) and revealed them to the little ones (the humble)."⁸ This shows us that truth is hidden from the proud and made known to the humble.

2. To define humility: Humility is a virtue by which a man has a low opinion of himself because he knows himself well.⁹ This is the virtue that belongs to those who have set their hearts to the climb and have gone from virtue to virtue, from step to step, until they reached the highest peak of humility¹⁰ and gazed upon truth from the watch-tower of Zion.¹¹ "For the Lawgiver will give a blessing."¹² This means that he who gives the law is the same who gives the blessing; he who commands humility will lead safely to the truth. Who is this law-giver? Who but the good and sweet Lord who gives a law to those who wander from the way?¹³ They wander from the way

7. Bernard in using the word *viaticum* here probably intends it to be taken in its Biblical sense only (Deut 15:14, Josh 9:5), as food for the journey, and is not making an allusion to Viaticum, Communion brought to the dying, even though this was a common meaning of the word at his time.

8. Mt 11:25. Cf. Jas 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5.

9. Cf. Augustine, *In Johannem*, Tract 25:16; [tr J. H. Newman] *Homilies on the Gospel according to St John*, 2 vols, Library of the Fathers (Oxford: Parker, 1848), 1:393. For Bernard, humility is truth, the low opinion of self must be based on fact: "Humility is not praiseworthy when it is not in accordance with the facts."—Ep 201, to Abbot Baldwin, no. 2; LSB 259, p. 339.

10. RB 7:5. Cf. SC 34:3; CF 7.

11. Ps 83:6 (The Vulgate enumeration of the Psalms is used throughout as being that which was familiar to St Bernard.) Cf. Origin, *Selecta in Psalmos* X, 2:586; PG 12:1187ff.

12. Ps 83:8.

13. Ps 24:8.

because they have gone astray from the truth. Will they then be deserted by our sweet Lord? No, the law that this good and kind Lord gives them is the way of humility by which they can return to the knowledge of the truth. The Lord is kind but also just. Because he is kind he gives them a chance of regaining safety; but because he is also just he vindicates the law. His kindness will not let them perish; his justice will not omit to impose some punishment.¹⁴

II. 3. This law which points the way back to truth St Benedict sums up in twelve steps¹⁵. Just as the ten commandments of the Law¹⁶ and the twofold circumcision¹⁷—which add up to twelve—lead to Christ, so do these twelve steps which we have to climb to come to the possession of the truth. This was the ladder which was shown to Jacob¹⁸—a figure of humility. Leaning on the top of the ladder the Lord looks on the sons of men with eyes of truth that deceive not and cannot be deceived to see if there is any who understands and seeks God.¹⁹ His place at the ladder's top²⁰ shows us that the knowledge of truth is to be found only at the summit of humility.²¹ Can you not hear him calling from his lofty station and crying to those who seek him, for he knows who are his own:²² "Come to me all you who desire me and eat your fill of my fruits?"²³ "Come to me all you who labor and I will refresh you."²⁴ He says: "Come!" Where? "To me, the Truth." How? "By humility."

14. Cf. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1:12; tr. S. N. Deane, *St Anselm*, Religion of Science Library 54 (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1939), p. 203.

15. RB 7:10-66.

16. Ex 34:28.

17. Gen 17:26, Deut 30:6, Josh 5:2, Jer 4:4, Col 2:11. Cf. St Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*; St Cyprian: "... the first circumcision of the flesh is made void, and the second circumcision of the spirit is promised instead."—*Treatise XII: Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews* 1:8; tr. E. Wallis, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Scribners, 1903), 5:510.

18. Gen 28:12; RB 7:6.

19. Ps 13:2.

20. Gen 28:13.

21. RB 7:5.

22. 2 Tim 2:19; Jn 10:14.

23. Sir 24:26.

24. Mt 11:28.

For what? "And I will refresh you." What is this refreshment which Truth promises to those who climb and gives when they gain the top? Is it perhaps love itself?²⁵ To this, St Benedict says, the monk will quickly come when he has climbed all the steps of humility.²⁶ Love is indeed a sweet and pleasant food. It refreshes the weary, strengthens the weak,²⁷ cheers the depressed, makes sweet Truth's yoke and light its burden.²⁸

4. Love is the excellent food. Its place is in the middle of the dish of Solomon,²⁹ the dish which diffuses the mingled odor of the virtues, fragrant as all the powders of the perfumer.³⁰ It fills the hungry, and gives joy to those being filled. On this dish we find peace and patience and longanimity³¹ and joy in the Holy Spirit,³² and any other kind of virtue, any other fruit of wisdom you can think of. Humility has its own contribution to the banquet and graces the dish with the bread of sorrow³³ and the wine of compunction.³⁴ Truth offers these first to beginners, saying: "Rise up after you have been seated, you who eat the bread of sorrow."³⁵ Contemplation then brings its offering—the solid bread³⁶ of wisdom made of

25. "Love" in this translation generally stands for *caritas*, which denotes more a habit, a willed choice, rather than *amor*, with its more affective connotations. Where *amor* is meant this will be indicated in the notes.

26. RB 7:67.

27. Is 35:3.

28. Mt 11:30.

29. Song 3:9f. "The word *ferculum* occurs only once in the Vulgate, and means a thing on which something is carried. Thus it is taken as either 'a litter' or 'a platter.' Bernard takes it in its second meaning, and on this he bases his exhortation for us to partake in the feast of charity, whereas Gilbert of Hoyland [or Gilbert of Swineshead, *On the Song of Songs* 17:1-3; PL 184:87-89; tr. T. Berkeley, CF 13] who continued Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs, takes it as meaning litter." —G. Webb and A. Walker, Introduction, in St Bernard, *Steps of Humility* (London: Mowbray, 1957), p. 9. They perhaps are following B. R. V. Mills, *Select Treatises of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, "De Gradibus Humilitatis et Superbiae," (Cambridge University Press, 1926), p. 83, note.

30. Song 3:6.

31. Gal 5:22.

32. Rom 14:17.

33. Ps 126:2.

34. Ps 59:5.

35. Ps 126:2.

36. Heb 5:14.

the finest wheat³⁷ and the wine which gladdens the heart of man,³⁸ to which Truth calls the perfect with the words: "Eat, my friends, and drink; be inebriated, my dearest ones."³⁹ Truth does not fail to make provision for the less perfect. "Love is placed in the middle for the daughters of Jerusalem."⁴⁰ These are the ones not yet able to take solid food, so Truth gives them love's milk instead of bread, and oil instead of wine. This portion is "in the middle," because beginners could not yet relish it, being too much afraid; the perfect find it insufficient now that they have plenty of the sweet food of contemplation. Beginners are not able to enjoy the sweetness of milk until they have been purged by the bitter draught of fear. It must cleanse them of the infection of carnal pleasures. The perfect now turn from milk since they have had a glorious foretaste of the feast of glory. Only those in the middle, those who are growing, who are still delicate, are content with the sweet milkfoods of charity.⁴¹

5. The first food, then, is humility: bitter but medicinal; the second is charity: sweet and soothing; the third is contemplation: solid and strength-giving. Lord God of Hosts, how long will you be angry with the prayer of your servant? How long will you feed me with the bread of weeping and give me tears for my drink?⁴² Who will invite me to the middle banquet of the sweet food of charity where the just rejoice in the presence of God and exult for joy?⁴³ Then no longer will I speak

37. Ps 147:14.

38. Ps 103:15.

39. Song 5:1. Bernard explains this text more fully, outlining the three degrees of contemplation indicated by eating, drinking and inebriation in Div 87:4; OB 6-1:331f.

40. Song 3:10.

41. Bernard here introduces the classical three stages of spiritual growth: beginners, proficients and the perfect. It is in common use among the early Cistercians, forming the basic framework for William of St Thierry's *Golden Epistle* (CF 12). See J. M. Déchanet, Introduction in William of St Thierry, *Exposition on the Song of Songs*, CF 6, pp. xxxi ff and the notes there, Exp 13ff, CF 6:11ff; J. Morson and H. Costello, Introduction in Guerric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, vol 1, CF 8 pp. xlix ff; M. B. Pennington, "Three Stages of Spiritual Growth according to St Bernard," *Studia Monastica* 11 (1969): 315-326.

42. Ps 79:5f.

43. Ps 67:4.

in the bitterness of my soul, saying to God: "Do not condemn me,"⁴⁴ but feasting on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth⁴⁵ I will sing a glad song as I go in the ways of the Lord, for great is his glory.⁴⁶ Yes the path of humility is a good path.⁴⁷ It seeks for truth; it wins charity; it shares the fruits of wisdom. Just as the end of the Law is Christ,⁴⁸ so the perfection of humility is the knowledge of truth. When Christ came he brought grace; when truth is known it brings love. It is to the humble it is known. "He gives his grace to the humble."⁴⁹

III. 6. I have now shown to the best of my powers what fruits we win by climbing the steps of humility. Now let us see if I can show how they lead to the promised reward of truth.

HOW THE STEPS OF HUMILITY LEAD TO THE PROMISED REWARD OF TRUTH

There are three degrees in the perception of truth. I will first explain these as well as I can and then we will be able to see how the twelve degrees of humility lead to these three degrees of truth. We must look for truth in ourselves; in our neighbors; in itself. We look for truth in ourselves when we judge ourselves;⁵⁰ in our neighbors when we have sympathy for their sufferings;⁵¹ in itself when we contemplate it with a clean heart.⁵² It is important to observe the order of these degrees as well as their number. First of all, truth teaches us that we must look for it in our neighbors before we seek it in itself. You will then see easily why you must seek it in yourself before you seek it in your neighbors. In the list of the beatitudes the merciful are spoken of before the clean of heart.⁵³ The merciful quickly grasp the truth in their neighbors when their heart goes out to them with a love that unites them so closely that they feel the neighbors' good and ill as if it were their own. With the weak they are weak, with the scandalized they

44. Job 10:1f.

45. 1 Cor 5:8.

46. Ps 137:5.

47. Ps 118:71.

48. Rom 10:4.

49. 1 Pet 5:5.

50. 1 Cor 11:31.

51. 1 Cor 12:26.

52. Mt 5:8.

53. Mt 5:7-8.

are on fire.⁵⁴ They "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those weep."⁵⁵ Their hearts are made more clear-sighted by love⁵⁶ and they experience the delight of contemplating truth, not now in others but in itself, and for love of it they bear their neighbors' sorrows. A man who does not live in harmony with his brothers, who mocks at those who weep and sneers at those who are glad, has no sympathy with them because their feelings do not affect him, he can never really see the truth in others. The proverb fits him well: the sound man feels not the sick man's pains, nor the well-fed man the pangs of the hungry.⁵⁷ It is fellow-sufferers that readily feel compassion for the sick and the hungry. For just as pure truth is seen only by the pure of heart, so also a brother's miseries are truly experienced only by one who has misery in his own heart. You will never have real mercy for the failings of another until you know and realize that you have the same failings in your soul. Our Savior has given us the example. He willed to suffer so that he might know compassion;⁵⁸ to learn mercy he shared our misery. It is written: "He learned obedience from the things he suffered;"⁵⁹ and he learned mercy in the same way. I do not mean that he did not know how to be merciful before; his mercy is from eternity to eternity;⁶⁰ but what in his divine nature he knows from all eternity he learned by experience in time.

7. You may not be ready to agree with me when I say that Christ the Wisdom of God⁶¹ *learned* mercy, as if he through whom all things were made⁶² could ever have been ignorant of anything that exists. This especially so since the text I quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews can reasonably be

54. 2 Cor 11:29.

55. Rom 12:15.

56. Cf. Conv 30; OB 4:106; CF 43.

57. The first part of this proverb can be found in Terence, *Andria*, 309; otherwise its source has not been identified.

58. Heb 2:17.

59. Heb 5:8.

60. Ps 102:17.

61. 1 Cor 1:24. Bernard goes off here into an excursus (7-12) on the knowledge of Christ. He presents the alternate views held by the Fathers (See, eg., St Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1:9; *tr. cit.*, p. 194), opts strongly for a particular one and offers a substantiating argument employing a faulty Scripture text (11) which he later has to retract (see above, p. 25).

62. Jn 1:3.

taken in another sense. It could be taken that the subject of "learned" is our Head, not in person but in his body, the Church.⁶³ "He learned obedience from the things he suffered" would then mean that the body learned obedience from the things our Head suffered. The death, the cross, the insults, spitting and scourging suffered by Christ give a perfect example of obedience to us his body.

St Paul says: "Christ became obedient to the Father even unto death."⁶⁴ Why had he to do that? St Peter tell us: "Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps,"⁶⁵ by imitating his obedience. From those things which he suffered we mere men may learn how much we should be ready to suffer for obedience since for it he who himself is God did not hesitate to die. You argue then that if we take this meaning there is no difficulty about saying that Christ learned obedience or learned anything else so long as this is confined to his body, holding firmly that in his own person he could never have been ignorant of anything that happened in time; still, as Head and Body are one Christ, it is correct to say that Christ both taught and learned.

8. I will not say that you are wrong in this, but there is another text in the same Epistle which seems rather to bear out the first interpretation: "He did not lay hold on the angels, but on the seed of Abraham he laid hold; whence it was fitting that he should become like to his brothers in all things, that he might become merciful."⁶⁶ It seems to me that these words refer to the Head and could not possibly apply to the body. It is certainly about the Word of God that it is said: "He did not lay hold of the angels," meaning that he never assumed an angelic nature, but that of the seed of Abraham. We do not read that the Word was made angel, but that "the Word was made flesh."⁶⁷ and that flesh was the flesh of Abraham according to the promise made beforehand.⁶⁸ In the assuming of our nature "it behoved him in all things to be made like his brethren;" it was right and even necessary that he should be like us, subject to suffering, and experience all our miseries,

63. Col 1:24.

64. Phil 2:8; RB 7:34.

65. 1 Pet 2:21.

66. Heb 2:16-17.

67. Jn 1:14.

68. Gen 17:7; Gal 3:29.

except sin.⁶⁹ If you ask: "Why should it be necessary?" I answer: "So that he might become merciful." You object that this could apply quite well to his body. But notice the words that follow: "Because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted."⁷⁰ I do not see what better meaning you can draw from these words than that being like his brethren in all things means that he willed to suffer and be tempted and share in all human miseries except sin so that having thus suffered and been tempted he might learn by experience the lesson of sympathy and mercy.

9. I do not say that he became wiser by such experience, but he was seen as closer to men. And the frail sons of Adam, to whom he was willing to give the title and the reality of being brothers,⁷¹ would have less hesitation about laying their weaknesses before him, who as God could heal them, as one close would heal them, and as one who had suffered the same would understand. For this reason Isaiah calls him "a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity,"⁷² and the Apostle tells us: "We have not a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness."⁷³ Then to show from where this arises, he adds: "One who in every respect has been tempted as we are but without sinning."⁷⁴ The blessed God, the blessed Son of God, in that form in which he did not think it robbery to be equal with the Father,⁷⁵ was without doubt impassible before he emptied himself taking on the form of a slave.⁷⁶ Thus he had no experience of misery and subjection, he did not know by experience mercy and obedience. He knew by the knowledge natural to him, but not by experience. He assumed a state that was not only less than what is his by right, but even a little less than that of the angels;⁷⁷ for they too are impassible, but by grace, not by nature.⁷⁸ Lower still he came to take our form in which he could do what he could not do before, suffer and

69. Heb 2:16.

70. Heb 2:18.

71. Heb 2:11.

72. Is 53:3.

73. Heb 4:15.

74. *Ibid.*

75. Phil 2:6.

76. Phil 2:7.

77. Heb 2:9; Ps 8:6.

78. Bernard expresses the same opinion in Csi 5:7; OB 3:471; CF 37.

be subject to authority and learn by experience the mercy of a fellow-sufferer and the obedience of a fellow-subject. As I said already, he did not increase his personal knowledge but he deepened our trust in him when we see him from whom we strayed draw near to us to know our misery by a shared experience.⁷⁹ Hardly could we have dared to approach him in his eternal tranquility but now the Apostle can urge us to go with confidence to the throne of grace⁸⁰ because, as he tells us in another place, he has borne our weakness and our sorrows⁸¹ and will have compassion on us since he has borne the like.⁸²

10. Therefore it ought not seem absurd if it is said not that Christ began to know for the first time something which he did not know before, but that there is no contradiction in saying that something he knew from all eternity by his divine knowledge he now began in time to learn by human experience.⁸³ I think you will find our Lord, speaking in a similar vein when, in answer to a question of his disciples, he said that he did not know the time of the last judgment.⁸⁴ He could not be ignorant of it because in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.⁸⁵ Why did he deny knowledge he must have had? It is out of the question that he could have told a lie, even to conceal from them something they had no need to know. He is wisdom and could not be ignorant; he is truth and cannot lie; he wished to stop the idle curiosity of his disciples. He replied that he did not know the thing about which they asked. He did not say absolutely that he was ignorant of it. His words allowed for a certain degree or kind of ignorance which made it true in one sense to say that he did not know. His divine gaze was upon all things, past, present and future, and saw that day clearly; but he could not experience it by any of his bodily senses. If it did come before

79. Cf. Eph 2:13.

80. Heb 4:16.

81. Is 53:4.

82. Heb 2:18; 4:15.

83. Cf. Miss 2:10; OB 4:28; CF 43.

84. Mk 18:32.

85. Col 2:3.

his bodily senses we should have to conclude that he already slew Antichrist with the breath of his mouth,⁸⁶ his bodily ears heard the sound of the trumpet-blast of the Archangel calling the dead to rise, and his bodily eyes already distinguished the sheep from the goats.⁸⁷

11. To make it quite clear that his denial of knowledge of the last day concerned only what he knew by his bodily senses, he used carefully chosen words. He did not simply say: "I do not know;" but: "Not even the Son of Man knows."⁸⁸ The term "Son of Man" refers to the assumed human nature. When he says that there is something he does not know and uses this expression, he indicates that he is speaking as man, not as God. When he is referring to his divinity he does not say "Son" or "Son of Man," but "I" or "Me." We have several instances of this. For example, he said: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, before Abraham was made I am."⁸⁹ Note: "I am;" not: "The Son of Man is." He is clearly speaking here of his divine nature which is before Abraham and knows no beginning, not of his human nature which was born of Abraham and came into being after him. On another occasion he asked his disciples what men thought about him. "Whom do men say that the Son of Man is?"⁹⁰ In this case he did not say "I" but "the Son of Man." He changed the phrase when he was asking them about their own opinion. "Whom do you say that I am?"⁹¹ When he was enquiring what a carnal people thought about the human body that they saw before them he used the title that referred directly to the human nature: "Son of Man." When he questioned his disciples, spiritually minded men, about his Divine Person he did not say, "Son of Man," but pointedly said "I." St Peter understood the question as we can see from his answer: "You are Christ, the Son of God."⁹² If he had said:

86. 2 Thess 2:8.

87. Mt 25:32.

88. Mk 13:32. See above, *Retraction*, p. 25, where Bernard withdraws this misquotation and the argument following it.

89. Jn 8:58.

90. Mt 16:13.

91. Mt 16:15.

92. Mt 16:16.

"You are Jesus, the Son of the Virgin," he would, of course, have spoken correctly, but he was quick to notice the significance of the changed form of the question, so he aptly and properly answered: "You are Christ, the Son of God."

12. You see, then, that Christ in his one Person has two natures, one eternal, the other beginning in time.⁹³ According to one he knows all things eternally; according to the other there are many things he first experienced in course of time. There need then be no hesitation in admitting that, as his human nature had its beginning in time,⁹⁴ his humanly acquired knowledge of the miseries of this life had its beginning in the experience of the limitations of human nature. Our first parent, and future, and saw that day clearly; but he could not of knowledge which they could gain only by folly and woe. But their Creator,⁹⁶ seeking what was lost, followed the work of his hands and came down in mercy to where they lay in misery.⁹⁷ He would experience for himself what they rightly suffered for their disobedience. He was not led by curiosity as they were, but by a wondrous charity. It was not his intention to remain with them in misery, but to raise them from it by his mercy.

When I say he became merciful I am not speaking of the mercy that was his in the happiness of eternity; but of the mercy that sprang from sharing in our misery. The work of his tender love had its beginning in his eternal mercy, its completion in the mercy shown in his humanity. All could have been done by the eternal mercy but it would have failed somewhat in satisfying us. Both kinds of mercy were needed but the latter is more in harmony with our condition. It was conceived

93. Bernard treats of the unity of Christ more fully and formally in Csi 5:20; OB 3:483f; CF 19.

94. Rom 1:3.

95. *Protoplasti*: This word is not a biblical term but is from the Patristic tradition (eg, Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis* 2; PL 2:916; tr. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [New York: Scribners, 1899], 4:51; St Cyprian, *De habitu virginis* 4; PL 4:444; tr. W. LeSaint, *Ancient Christian Writers* 13 [Westminster: Newman, 1951], p. 44).

96. *Plasmator*: the corresponding term to *protoplasti*, found also in Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos* 2; PL 2:599.

97. Ezek 34:16.

with the delicacy of supreme tenderness. Could we have even imagined the infinite mercy if we had not seen it springing from one who shared our misery? In the impassibility of eternity he had an infinite compassion for us but we could never have fully realized it except for the Passion we saw him suffering. All the same if he had not first that mercy, which knows nothing of misery, he would not have come by that to which misery gives birth. If he had not that, he would not have attracted us to himself; and if he had not attracted us he would not have extracted us from the morass of misery and the slough of sin.⁹⁸ He did not lose anything of his eternal mercy but he added a new note to it; he did not change it but he multiplied it; as the Scripture says: "Men and beasts you will save O Lord: how you have multiplied your mercy O God."⁹⁹

IV. 13. But, to come back to our subject: if he submitted himself to human misery so that he might not simply know of it, but experience it as well, how much more ought you not make any change in your condition, but pay attention to what you are, because you are truly full of misery. This is the only way, if you are to learn to be merciful. If you have eyes for the shortcomings of your neighbor and not for your own, no feeling of mercy will arise in you but rather indignation. You will be more ready to judge than to help, to crush in the spirit of anger than to instruct in the spirit of gentleness. "You who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of gentleness," says the Apostle.¹⁰⁰ His counsel, or better, his precept, is that you should treat an ailing brother with the spirit of gentleness with which you would like to be treated yourself in your weakness. He shows then how to find out the right way to apply this spirit of gentleness: "Considering yourself lest you also be tempted."¹⁰¹

14. It is worth noticing how closely the Disciple of Truth follows the order of his Master's thoughts. In the Beatitudes, just as the merciful, as I have said,¹⁰² come before the clean

98. Ps 39:3.

99. Ps 35:7f.

100. Gal 6:1.

101. *Ibid.*

102. Above, no. 6, p. 34.

of heart, so the meek are spoken of before the merciful.¹⁰³ When the Apostle tells the spiritually minded to instruct the earthly minded he adds: "In the spirit of meekness."¹⁰⁴ The only ones who can instruct the brethren are those who are merciful, those who are meek or humble. In other words, one cannot really be merciful if he is not humble. Thus the Apostle clearly shows what I promised to prove to you, namely that we must look for truth first in ourselves, and afterwards in our neighbor. "Considering yourself," he says, that is, considering how easily you are tempted and how prone to sin, you will become meek and ready to help others in the "spirit of gentleness." If the words of the Disciple do not impress you enough, perhaps you will take warning from the stern words of the Master: "Hypocrite, first cast the beam from your own eye and then you will see better to cast the mote from you brother's."¹⁰⁵ The heavy, thick beam in the eye is pride of heart. It is big but not strong, swollen, not solid. It blinds the eye of the mind and blots out the truth. While it is there you cannot see yourself as you really are, or even the ideal of what you could be, but what you would like to be, this you think you are or hope to be. For what else is pride but, as a saint has defined it, the love of one's own excellence.¹⁰⁶ We may define humility as the opposite: contempt of one's own excellence. Neither love nor hate will give an impartial judgment. Truth will judge thus: "As I hear so I judge,"¹⁰⁷ not: "as I hate," nor "as I love," nor "as I fear." Hate gave its judgment: "We have a Law and according to the Law he ought to die."¹⁰⁸ Fear spoke: "If we let him alone, the Romans will come and take away our place and nation."¹⁰⁹ And we have an example of judgment swayed

103. Mt 5:4-8.

104. Gal 6:1.

105. Mt 7:5.

106. St Augustine, *Sermon* 354:6; PL 36:1565; *De Genesi ad litteram* XI, xiv, 18; PL 34:436. Bernard gives the same definition in *Mor* 19 (PL 182:821), adding further distinctions. In *Div* 47 (OB 6-1:267; CF 46) he gives a similar definition, distinguishing pride in the heart from pride in speech, pride in actions and pride in clothing.

107. Jn 5:30.

109. Jn 11:48.

108. Jn 19:7.

by love when David said of his parricide son: "Spare the boy Absalom."¹¹⁰ I understand that it is the practice in both ecclesiastical and civil courts, in accord with the law, to forbid special friends of litigants to try their cases, lest love of their friends blind the judges or tempt them to act unfairly.¹¹¹ If love can make you blind or too lenient in regard to the faults of a friend, what will your self-love do when you consider your own faults?

15. If a man wants to know the full truth about himself he will have to get rid of the beam of pride which blocks out the light from his eye,¹¹² and then set up in his heart a ladder of humility so that he can search into himself. When he has climbed its twelve rungs he will then stand on the first step of truth. When he has seen the truth about himself, or better, when he has seen himself in truth, he will be able to say: "I believed, therefore I have spoken; but I have been exceedingly humbled."¹¹³ Such a man has come to a deep heart¹¹⁴ and truth is exalted. When he reaches the second step he will say in ecstasy: "Every man is a liar."¹¹⁵ This must have been the course that David trod. He experienced what was experienced by our Lord and by the Apostle, what we experience ourselves by their help and example. "I believed" he says; that means that he believed the words of Truth: "He who follows me will not walk in darkness;"¹¹⁶ "I believed (and followed him) and therefore have I spoken"—to confess. To confess the truth which has been believed. After believing unto justice and speaking unto salvation "I have been humbled exceedingly,"¹¹⁷—that is perfectly. It is as if he said: Because I have not been ashamed to confess the known truth about myself, I have attained to the perfection of humility. We can take *exceed-*

110. 2 Sam 18:5.

111. This provision found in all juridical codes is retained in present Church Law, *Codex Iuris Canonici*, canon 1613. Bernard would have been familiar with it in the *Codex* (AD 529) and *Digest* (AD 534) of Justinian.

112. Mt 7:5.

113. Ps 115:10.

114. Ps 63:7.

115. Ps 115:11.

116. Jn 8:12.

117. Jas 2:23.

ingly (*nimis*) here to mean *perfectly* as in that other text: "In his commands he takes delight exceedingly."¹¹⁸ Some commentators would have it that "exceedingly" does not here mean "perfectly" but simply "very much."¹¹⁹ Even so, this fits the meaning of the Prophet well enough. We can think of him as saying: When as yet I did not fully know the truth, I thought myself something, whereas I was nothing.¹²⁰ But when I had come to know Christ, to imitate his humility, I saw the truth and exalted it in me by my confession, but "I myself was humbled exceedingly,"¹²¹ in my own eyes, I fell very low.

V. 16. The Psalmist has been humbled and now stands on the first step of truth. As he says in another psalm: "In your truth you have humbled me."¹²² Up to this he has been examining himself. Now he looks out from himself to others and thus passes to the second step of truth, exclaiming in his excess: "Every man is a liar." What is meant by "in his excess?"¹²³ It means that he was carried away by feelings of mercy and compassion. What did he mean? He meant that every man is unreliable because too weak, helpless, and infirm to save either himself or others. It is in the same sense that the Psalmist says that "the horse is a deceptive hope of safety."¹²⁴ The horse does not deceive anyone, but a man deceives himself when he trusts too much to the horse's strength. That is what is meant by saying that "every man is a liar." He is fragile and fickle and hope in him is deceptive either for himself or for others. Indeed, there is a "curse on the man who puts his trust in man."¹²⁵ So the humble Prophet is led along his way by truth. He grieved at what he found in himself. He now sees the like in others. Sorrow and truth mount

118. Ps 111:1.

119. One such commentator would be St Anselm, *Commentary on Psalm 111*; PL 116:584. See also Bede, *De Orthographia*, PL 90:139.

120. Gal 6:3.

121. Ps 115:10.

122. Ps 118:75.

123. Ps 115:10. Bernard indicates another sense in which "excess" can be taken in the next par. when he speaks of the "excesses" of the Pharisees.

124. Ps 32:17.

125. Jer 17:5.

up together in him¹²⁶ and he burst out into the sweeping but true statement: "Every man is a liar."

17. This is very different from the conceit of the proud Pharisee. You remember the words he spoke "in his excess": "I give you thanks, O God, that I am not like the rest of men."¹²⁷ He had admiration for himself alone, for others only insults. That was not how David spoke. His words were: "Every man is a liar." He excepted no man. He did not try to deceive anyone, because he knew that "all have sinned and need the glory of God."¹²⁸ The Pharisee damned all others, excepting only himself, and fooling only himself. The Prophet shared the common mercy because he included himself in the common misery. The Pharisee waved aside mercy when he denied his misery. The Prophet said of everyone, including himself: "Every man is a liar." The Pharisee spoke of everyone except himself: "I am not like the rest of men." He gave thanks, not that he was good but that he was peerless. His gratitude was inspired not by any good he saw in himself but by the evil he saw in others. He has not yet taken the beam from his own eye but is busy counting the motes in his brothers' eyes¹²⁹—"unjust, robbers."¹³⁰ I am afraid I am "speaking in my excess" now myself and have wandered away from my subject. Still, no harm is done if I have conveyed to you the difference between the two kinds of "excess."

18. Well! let us come back to the point. When in the light of Truth men know themselves and so thin! less of themselves it will certainly follow that what they loved before will now become bitter to them. They are brought face to face with themselves and blush at what they see. Their present state is no pleasure to them. They aspire to something better and at the same time realize how little they can rely on themselves to achieve it. It hurts them and they find some relief in judging themselves severely. Love of truth makes them hunger and

126. Eccles 1:18.

127. Lk 18:11. Cf. Ann 3:10; OB 5:41f; CF 22.

128. Rom 3:23.

129. Mt 7:5.

130. Lk 18:11.

thirst after justice¹³¹ and conceive a deep contempt for themselves. They are anxious to exact from themselves full satisfaction and real amendment. They admit that to make satisfaction is beyond their own powers—when they have done all that is commanded them they acknowledge that they are still unprofitable servants.¹³² They fly from justice to mercy, by the road Truth shows them: “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”¹³³ They look beyond their own needs to the needs of their neighbors and from the things they themselves have suffered they learn compassion: they have come to the second degree of truth.

VI. 19. If they persevere in these things: sorrow of repentance, desire for justice and works of mercy, they will cleanse their hearts from the three impediments of ignorance, weakness and jealousy and will come through contemplation to the third degree of truth. There are ways that seem good to men,¹³⁴ to the kind of men, I mean, who rejoice when they do ill and exult in evil things, and make excuses for their sins.¹³⁵ They try to hide behind the plea of weakness and ignorance.¹³⁶ They had better not flatter themselves. The excuse of ignorance and weakness will not avail if they remain deliberately weak and ignorant so as to sin more freely. It did not do much good for the first man to plead that he was not acting with full freedom because he was led astray by his wife, that is, through the weakness of the flesh.¹³⁷ Were those who stoned the first martyr, because they stopped their ears, excused by their ignorance?¹³⁸ When men realize how far they have fallen away from truth by a strong love for sin their remedy is to put that strength into their repentance and turn that love of sin into contrition. They have been weighed down by weak-

131. Mt 5:6.

132. Lk 17:10.

133. Mt 5:7. Cf. Conv 29; OB 4:104f; CF 43.

134. Prov 14:12; 16:25.

135. Prov 2:14.

136. Ps 140:4.

137. Gen 3:12ff.

138. Acts 7:57.

ness and ignorance, but weakness can be consumed in a burning desire for justice and ignorance can be dispelled by generosity. If they now ignore Truth, needy, naked and unimpressive, all too late they will blush to see Truth come in might and power with terror and reproach.¹³⁹ It will then be in vain for them to say trembling: "When did we see you in need and did not help you?"¹⁴⁰ Then indeed they will know the Lord when he comes to do judgment,¹⁴¹ though now they choose to ignore him when he pleads for mercy. Then they will look on him whom they have pierced¹⁴² and whom they have spurned in their greed. Now is the time to clear the eyes of the heart of every speck of weakness, ignorance and jealousy by weeping, zeal for justice¹⁴³ and perseverance in works of mercy and then to those purified eyes the promise of Truth will be fulfilled: "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God."¹⁴⁴ These are the three steps of truth. We climb to the first by the toil of humility, to the second by a deep feeling of compassion, and to the third by the ecstasy of contemplation. On the first step we experience the severity of truth, on the second its tenderness, on the third its purity. Reason brings us to the first as we judge ourselves; compassion brings us to the second when we have mercy on others; on the third the purity of truth sweeps us up to the sight of things invisible.

VII. 20. It occurs to me here that it is possible to allot each of these three works to one of the Persons of the Undivided Trinity, that is, in so far as a man still sitting in darkness¹⁴⁵ can make distinction in the work of the Three Persons who always work as One. There would seem to be something characteristic of the Son in the first stage, of the Holy Spirit in the second, of the Father in the third. What is the work of the Son? "If I, your Lord and Master have washed your

139. Lk 21:27; Mt 24:30.

140. Mt 25:44.

141. Ps 9:17.

142. Jn 19:37.

143. Mt 5:6.

144. Mt 5:8.

145. Lk 1:79.

feet, how much more ought you also to wash another's feet."¹⁴⁶ The Master of truth gave his disciples an example¹⁴⁷ of humility and opened to them the first stage of truth. Then the work of the Holy Spirit: "Charity is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us."¹⁴⁸ Charity is a gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁹ By it those who, under the instruction of the Son were led to the first step of truth through humility, now under the guidance of the Holy Spirit reach the second stage through compassion for their neighbor. Finally, listen to what is said of the Father: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jona, for flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven."¹⁵⁰ Again: "The Father will make known the truth to the sons;"¹⁵¹ and, "I confess to you Father, for you have hidden these things from the wise and made them known to little ones."¹⁵² You see: by word and example the Son first teaches men humility; then the Spirit pours out his charity upon those whom the Father receives finally into glory. The Son makes them his disciples; the Spirit consoles them as friends; the Father bestows on them the glory of sons. However, Truth is the proper title, not of the Son alone but of the Spirit and the Father too, so that it must be made quite clear, while giving full acknowledgment to the properties¹⁵³ of Persons that it is the one Truth who works at all these stages: in the first teaching as a Master, in the second consoling as a Friend and Brother, in the third embracing as a Father.

21. The Son of God, the Word and Wisdom of the Father,

146. Jn 13:14. Bernard adds "how much more" (*quanto magis*), perhaps in this following Ambrose, *The Mysteries* 6:33; PL 16:417, tr. R. Deferrari, in St Ambrose, *Theological and Dogmatic Works*, Fathers of the Church 44 (Washington: Catholic University, 1963), p. 17; *On Virginity*, 10:57; PL 16:294.

147. Jn 13:15.

148. Rom 5:5.

149. Acts 2:38.

150. Mt 16:17.

151. Is 38:19.

152. Mt 11:25.

153. *Proprietas*: the usual word employed by the Fathers to note those characteristics which are proper to each of the three Divine Persons; cf. Csi 5:18; OB 3:482; CF 19.

mercifully assumed to himself human reason, the first of our powers. He found it oppressed by the flesh,¹⁵⁴ held captive by sin, blinded by ignorance, distracted by outward things.¹⁵⁵ He raised it by his might, taught it by his wisdom, drew it to things interior. More wonderfully still, he delegated to it his own power of Judge. To judge is the proper act of Truth and in this it shared when out of reverence for the Word to which it is joined it became accuser, witness and judge against itself. Humility had been born from the union of the Word with human reason. Then the Holy Spirit lovingly visited the second power, the will; he found it rotten with the infection of the flesh, but already judged by reason. Gently he cleansed it, made it burn with affection, made it merciful until, like a skin made pliable with oil it would spread abroad the heavenly oil of love even to its enemies. The union of the Holy Spirit with the human will give birth to charity. See now this perfect soul, its two powers, the reason and the will, without spot or wrinkle, the reason instructed by the Word of Truth,¹⁵⁶ the will inflamed by Truth's Spirit,¹⁵⁷ sprinkled with the hyssop of humility,¹⁵⁸ fired with the flame of charity; cleansed from spot by humility, smoothed of wrinkle by charity;¹⁵⁹ the reason never shrinking from the truth, the will never striving against reason;¹⁶⁰ and this blessed soul the Father binds¹⁶¹ to himself as his own glorious bride. Now the reason is no longer preoccupied with itself and the will is no longer concerned with other men; for this blessed soul all is lost in one delight: "The King has led me into his chamber."¹⁶² She had become

154. Wis 9:15. See Pre 59; OB 3:292; CF 1:148; Asc 3:1; OB 5:131; CF 25.

155. Cf. Div 45:2; OB 6-1:263; CF 46.

156. 2 Cor 6:7.

157. 1 Jn 4:6.

158. Ps 50:9.

159. Eph 5:27.

160. Reason and will are meant to work freely together: Gra 4; OB 3:148; CF 19.

161. *Conglutinat*: a biblical word expressing the bond of love, both divine (Deut 10:15) and human, pure (David and Jonathan, 1 Sam 18:1) and impure (Shechem and Dinah, Gen 34:3).

162. Song 1:3, 3:4. The Vulgate has "cellars." Bernard may be following the Old Italic version, which has "chambers," but perhaps it is just a slip for in Div 92:1 he contrasts the "cellar" of Song 1:3 with the "chamber" of Song 3:4 (OB 6-1:346; CF 49).

worthy of this when she learned humility in the school of the Son, listening to his warning: "If you do not know yourself, go forth and pasture your herds."¹⁶³ She is twice worthy since she was led by the Holy Spirit from the school of humility to the storehouse of charity,¹⁶⁴ for this is what is meant by guarding the flocks of the neighbors. She was brought there by love, once there she is cushioned by flowers, stayed up with apples,¹⁶⁵ that is by good morals and holy virtues, and finally led into the chamber of the King for whose love she languishes. There for a short time, just one half-hour, while there is silence in heaven,¹⁶⁶ she sleeps in that desired embrace. She sleeps but her heart watches¹⁶⁷ and is fed with the secrets of truth on which later, when she comes to herself, her memory can dwell. There she sees things invisible and hears things unspeakable which it is not given man to utter.¹⁶⁸ They are beyond the knowledge which night can pass on to night for this is the word that day utters to day.¹⁶⁹ Wise men speak wisdom to the wise and spiritual things are made known to the spiritual.¹⁷⁰

VIII. 22. Paul must have passed through these three degrees when, as he tells us, he was rapt up to the third heaven.¹⁷¹ Why does he use the word *rapt*, not *led*? It is a lesson for me. If the great Apostle had to be transported to that place which he could not know by his own learning or climb to by his own strength even with a guide, then I, so tiny compared to Paul, must never presume that I can climb to the third heaven by my own strength and effort. I must not presume, but on the other hand I need not be daunted by the difficulty of the journey. He whose way is pointed out to him or who is as-

163. Song 1:7.

164. Song 1:3.

165. Song 2:5. For an alternate and fuller interpretation of this text see Dil 7; OB 3:124f; below, p. 98.

166. Rev 8:1. Concerning the brevity and rarity of this experience see Dil 27; OB 3:142; below, p. 119.

167. Song 5:2.

168. 2 Cor 12:4.

169. Ps 18:3.

170. 1 Cor 2:13.

171. 2 Cor 12:2.

sisted, contributes something by his own efforts to unravel the problem or go step by step to the goal. He will say: "Not I, but the grace of God working in me."¹⁷² One who is carried up, he knows not where, by another's power, contributing not the slightest effort by his own strength to the action of his helper, has nothing of which to boast, either in whole or part. The Apostle could climb to the lowest and the middle heaven by the help and guidance given him, but to the third he had to be lifted up. We read that the Son came to help men to climb to the first heaven,¹⁷³ the Holy Spirit was sent¹⁷⁴ to guide them to the second, but we never read of the Father that he was sent or came to earth. We must, of course, bear in mind that he was working with the Son and the Holy Spirit in all these things. What we do read is: "The earth is filled with the mercy of the Lord;"¹⁷⁵ "The heavens and the earth are filled with your glory,"¹⁷⁶ and much more to the same effect. I read about the Son: "When the fullness of time had come God sent his Son;"¹⁷⁷ and the Son himself says: "The Spirit of the Lord has sent me;"¹⁷⁸ and, "And now the Lord and his Spirit sent me," as we find in the same Prophet.¹⁷⁹ About the Holy Spirit I read: "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name;"¹⁸⁰ and: "When I have been lifted up I will send him to you,"¹⁸¹ speaking of course about the Holy Spirit. The Father is everywhere in Person, but I never remember him to have been spoken of except as being in heaven, as in the Gospel: "My Father who is in heaven."¹⁸² and in the prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven."¹⁸³

172. I Cor 15:10.

173. Eph 4:9f.

174. Jn 15:26.

175. Ps 32:5.

176. This is found in the acclamation which is sung at the conclusion of the preface of the canon of the mass. Cf. Is 6:3. Cf. also the sixth verse of the *Te Deum*.

177. Gal 4:4.

178. Lk 4:18; Is 61:1.

179. Is 48:16.

180. Jn 14:26.

181. Jn 16:7.

182. Mt 16:17.

183. Mt 6:9.

23. My conclusion from all this is that, because the Father did not come down, Paul could not climb up to the third heaven to have sight of him, but he does remember that he was rapt up there.¹⁸⁴ There is, however, another about whom we can speak in a different fashion. "No man has gone up into heaven but the one who came down from heaven."¹⁸⁵ It is not a question here of the first or second heaven for David expressly says to you: "His going forth is from the highest heavens."¹⁸⁶ He was not suddenly snatched up, he was not secretly stolen away, but before the very eyes of the disciples, while they looked on he ascended.¹⁸⁷ Elijah had only one witness.¹⁸⁸ Paul had none since he can hardly be counted witness or judge of the event himself as his own words show: "I know not—God knows."¹⁸⁹ But Christ, having all things in his own power, descended when he willed and ascended when he willed.¹⁹⁰ He decided for himself the place and the time, the day and the hour, and gathered the witnesses he had himself chosen to see this great vision, and in their sight he ascended.¹⁹¹ Paul was rapt up, Elijah likewise, Enoch was transported.¹⁹² But our Redeemer, as we read, rose by his own power, receiving no help. He was carried by no chariot,¹⁹³ assisted by no angel, but through his own power alone, "A cloud received him from their sight."¹⁹⁴ It did not come to help him because he was tired, nor to speed his ascent because he was too slow, not to support him because he was in danger of falling. No! it came to hide him from the carnal eyes of his disciples. Hitherto they knew Christ according to the flesh but they would know him so no more.¹⁹⁵ Those whom the

184. 2 Cor 12:2. Cf. Csi 5:3; OB 468f; CF 19.

185. Jn 3:13.

186. Ps 18:7.

187. Acts 1:9.

188. 2 Kings 2:1.

189. 2 Cor 12:2.

190. Cf. Augustine, *Sermon ad catech.* 8: Christ "was born when he willed and died when he willed."

191. Acts 1:9.

192. Gen 5:24; cf. Heb 11:5.

193. 2 Kings 2:11.

194. Acts 1:9. Cf. Asc 2:6; OB 5:130f; CF 25.

195. 2 Cor 5:16.

Son beckoned to the first heaven by his humiliation, the Spirit brought to the second by charity and the Father raised to the third in contemplation. First they are humiliated in truth and say: "In your truth you have humbled me."¹⁹⁶ Then they rejoice in the truth, singing: "How good and how pleasant it is, brothers dwelling in unity;"¹⁹⁷ for we read that "charity . . . rejoices in truth."¹⁹⁸ Finally, they are carried up to the hidden home of truth itself¹⁹⁹ and there they say: "My secret to myself, my secret to myself!"²⁰⁰

IX. 24. What business has a poor wretch like me to do prowling about the two higher heavens, and that not in spirit but only with a flow of empty talk? I have quite work enough for my hands and feet beneath the lowest heaven. Thanks to the help of him who called me I have built a ladder to take me to it. This is my road to God's salvation.²⁰¹ Already I see God, resting on the top of the ladder;²⁰² already I have the joy of hearing the voice of Truth. He calls to me and I reply to him: "Stretch out your right hand to the work of your hands."²⁰³ You have numbered my steps, O Lord,²⁰⁴ but I am a slow climber, a weary traveller, and I need a resting place. Woe is me if the darkness should overtake me,²⁰⁵ or if my flight should be in winter or on the Sabbath²⁰⁶ seeing that now, in an acceptable time, on the day of salvation,²⁰⁷ I can hardly grope my way to the light. Why am I so slow? O, if any is to me a son, a brother in the Lord, a comrade, one who shares my journey, let him pray for me! Let him pray to the Almighty that he may strengthen the weary foot and not let the foot of pride come nigh to me.²⁰⁸ The weary foot is a poor help in climbing to the truth, but the other cannot even stand on the place it has gained: "They are cast out, they cannot stand."²⁰⁹

196. Ps 118:75.

197. Ps 132:1.

198. 1 Cor 13:6.

199. 2 Cor 12:4.

200. Is 24:16.

201. Ps 49:23.

202. Gen 28:12-13.

203. Job 14:15.

204. Job 14:15.

205. Jn 12:35.

206. Mt 24:20.

207. 2 Cor 6:2.

208. Ps 35:12.

209. Ps 35:13.

25. This is said about any of the proud. What is said about their Head, the "King of all the sons of pride"?²¹⁰ "He stood not in the truth,"²¹¹ and "I saw Satan falling from heaven."²¹² He fell through nothing but pride. What will be my fate if he perceives haughtiness from afar,²¹³ sees me to be proud? A terrible voice will sound for me: "You were a son of the Most High but like a man you shali die and like one of the princes fall."²¹⁴ Who would not shudder at the thunder of that voice?²¹⁵ Jacob was better off when at the stroke of the Angel the sinew of his thigh shrunk²¹⁶ than if under the influence of the angel of pride it swelled, collapsed and fell. I wish the Angel would strike my sinew and make it shrink that by this affliction I might begin to advance²¹⁷ instead of letting my own strength hurry me on to inevitable ruin. "The weakness of God is stronger than men."²¹⁸ The Apostle's sinew was struck by an angel, not of the Lord but of Satan. When he complained the answer was: "My grace is sufficient for you, for virtue²¹⁹ is made perfect in infirmity." What virtue? He tells us: "Gladly will I glory in my infirmities that the virtue of Christ may dwell in me."²²⁰ But Christ possesses all virtues; which is he speaking of in particular here? Of all his virtues, and he possessed them all, Christ specially commends one to us, humility. "Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart."²²¹

26. How glad I too should be, Lord Jesus, to glory, if I could, in my infirmity, in the shrinking of my sinew, that your virtue, your humility, might be made perfect in me.

210. Job 41:25.

211. Jn 8:44.

212. Lk 10:18.

213. Ps 137:6.

214. Ps 81:6f.

215. Ps 103:7.

216. Gen 32:25; cf. 2 Cor 12:9; see also SC 29:7; OB 1:208; CF 7.

217. 2 Cor 12:9.

218. 1 Cor 1:25.

219. The *virtus* of the Vulgate should be more properly translated "power" to be true to the thought of St Paul. However, as is evident from the following sentences St Bernard takes it to mean "virtue."

220. 2 Cor 12:7ff.

221. Mt 11:29.

Your grace is sufficient for me when my own virtue fails. With the foot of grace firmly planted on the ladder of humility, painfully dragging the foot of my own weakness behind me, I should safely mount upward, until, holding fast to the truth, I attained the broad plain of charity. There I shall sing my song of thanksgiving: "You have set my feet on a broad plain."²²² Thus I warily enter on the narrow way,²²³ step by step safely ascend the steep ladder, and by a kind of miracle climb to the truth, behind the time perhaps, and limping, but still with confidence. "Woe is me that my exile is prolonged!"²²⁴ O that I had wings like a dove, that I might fly away" to truth "and be at rest" in charity!²²⁵ But since I have no wings, "lead me in your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth"²²⁶ and the truth will make me free.²²⁷ Why did I ever desert the truth! If I had not been so lightheaded and stupid as to come down from truth I would not now be faced with this slow and hard climb back to it. Did I say, "come down"? "Crash down" would be more like it; though in a certain sense the milder expression is more suitable because one does not plunge to the depths of evil in one sudden fall, no more than one springs to the heights of virtue at one bound, but has to climb step by step. So the descent too is spread out little by little,²²⁸ according to the picture given to us: "The wicked man is proud all the days of his life;"²²⁹ and, "There are ways that seem to a man right, but their end leads to evil."²³⁰

27. You see now there is a way down and a way up, a way to evil and a way to good. Avoid evil and do good. If you are not able to do it by your own power—pray! Say with the Prophet: "Put false ways far from me."²³¹ How is that to be done? "Show me the mercy of your law."²³² This law is the law given to direct those who have wandered from the road,²³³ strayed from the truth. I am among them; I have fallen from

222. Ps 30:9.

223. Mt 7:14.

224. Ps 119:5.

225. Ps 54:7.

226. Ps 85:11.

227. Jn 8:32.

228. Sir 19:1.

229. Job 15:20.

230. Prov 14:12; 16:25.

231. Ps 118:29.

232. *Ibid*.

233. Ps 24:8. See above no. 2, p. 30.

the truth. But "if a man falls will he not rise again?"²³⁴ Yes, and it is in that hope that I have chosen the path of truth,²³⁵ to climb by it, now that I am humbled, to the place from which I fell in my pride. Yes, I will climb back and I will sing: "It is good for me, Lord, that you have humbled me; the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of silver and gold pieces."²³⁶ David seems to speak of two ways.²³⁷ In fact, there is only one, but there is a distinction and a reason for the two names. The same ladder is for those who come down, the way of iniquity, for those who go up, the way of truth. By the same steps one goes up to the throne and one comes down from it; by the same road one goes to the city and one departs from it; by the same gate one enters and one leaves the house. Indeed, it was by the one same ladder that Jacob saw the angels ascending and descending.²³⁸ What is the bearing of all this? It is that when you wish to return to the truth there is no need to seek an unknown road; it is the same as that by which you came down. On your ascent you will be able to follow the track of the footprints you made in your descent. Now that you are humbled you will climb by the self same steps you trod on as you came down in your pride. The twelfth and lowest step to which your pride brought you is the first step upward of humility and so on in due order: the eleventh is the second; the tenth the third; the ninth the fourth; the eighth the fifth; the seventh the sixth; the sixth the seventh; the fifth the eighth; the fourth the ninth; the third the tenth; the second the eleventh; the first the twelfth. If your conscience has noted these steps of your pride you will recognize them and will have no trouble in finding the way of humility.

234. Jer 8:4; Amos 5:1.

235. Ps 118:30.

236. Ps 118:71f.

237. Ps 1:1,6.

238. Gen 28:12.

239. In classical literature curiosity (*curiositas*) is not taken as a vice. However, the one time it is found in the Vulgate, Num 4:20, it does refer to an inordinate tendency. It is in this biblical sense that Bernard always takes it. See Div 14:2; OB 6-1:135; CF 46; QH 8:5; OB 4:429; CF 43. This would be common among the Fathers also, see e.g., Tertulian, *On Prescription Against Heretics*, 14, tr. C. Dodgson in *Apologetic and Practical Treatises*, 2 ed. (Oxford: Parker, 1854) pp. 463-5.

THE FIRST STEP OF PRIDE: CURIOSITY

X. 28. The first step of pride is curiosity.²³⁹ How does it show itself? You see one who up to this time had every appearance of being an excellent monk. Now you begin to notice that wherever he is, standing, walking or sitting, his eyes are wandering, his glance darts right and left, his ears are cocked. Some change has taken place in him; every movement shows it. "The perverse man winks with his eye, nudges with his foot, points with his finger."²⁴⁰ These symptoms show his soul has caught some disease. He used to watch over his own conduct; now all his watchfulness is for others. "He does not know himself so he must go forth to pasture his goats."²⁴¹ Goats are a symbol of sin and I am applying the word to his eyes and ears. They are the windows through which death creeps into the soul,²⁴² as death came into the world by sin.²⁴³ These are the flocks the curious man tends, while he lets his soul starve. My man! if you gave yourself the attention you ought, I do not think you would have much time to look after others. Listen, busybody, to Solomon, listen to the words of the Wise Man for a fool: "Guard your heart with all care."²⁴⁴ Your senses will have quite enough to do to guard the source of life. You wander away from yourself? Whom have you left in charge? Your eyes sweep the heavens.²⁴⁵ How do you dare, you who have sinned against heaven? Look over the earth, that you might know yourself.²⁴⁶ It speaks to you of yourself because, "Dust you are and unto dust you shall return."²⁴⁷

240. Prov 6:12f.

241. Song 1:7.

242. Jer 9:21. Cf. Conv 10; OB 4:83; CF 43.

243. Rom 5:12.

244. Prov 4:23.

245. In contrast to the publican, Lk 18:13. Bernard places this in contrast to the twelfth step of humility in the *Rule of St Benedict*: "... that is to say that whether he is at the work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields or anywhere else and whether sitting, walking or standing he should always have his head bowed and his eyes toward the ground..." —RB 7:63.

246. *Ut cognascat teipsum*—Bernard might possibly have been familiar with the Delphic Oracle, however, it is probable that he is rather influenced by the passage from the Song of Songs which he so frequently quotes. Cf. SC 36:7; OB 2:8; CF 7.

247. Gen 3:19.

29. Are the eyes never to be raised at all? Yes, but only for two reasons: to look for help, or to help others. David raised his eyes to the mountains to see if help would come to him.²⁴⁸ Our Lord looked out over the crowd to see if they needed his help.²⁴⁹ One raised his eyes in misery, the other in mercy—two excellent reasons. If, when time, place and circumstances call for it, you raise your eyes for your own need or your brother's, I certainly will not blame you; I will think all the better of you. Misery is a good excuse; mercy is a very commendable reason. If it is for some motive other than these two that you raise your eyes I am afraid you imitate neither the Prophet nor our Lord but Dinah, Eve, or Satan himself. Dinah was leading her goats to pasture when she was snatched away from her father and despoiled of her virginity.²⁵⁰ Ah! Dinah! you were anxious to see the foreign woman?²⁵¹ What need was there for that? What good did it do you? Was it just idle curiosity? Yes, you were idle, but someone who saw you did not stay idle. You were looking about curiously, but someone eyed you still more curiously. Who would have then believed that your curious idleness or idle curiosity would be fruitful. But it did bear terrible fruit for you and for your family and for your enemies, too.²⁵²

30. What about you, Eve? You were in Paradise, charged along with your husband to tend it and care for it.²⁵³ If you had kept the command given you, you would have gone in due time to a better place where there is no labor and no care. You were permitted to eat the fruit of every tree except the tree of knowledge of good and evil.²⁵⁴ The other trees were good and their fruit tasted well.²⁵⁵ Why did you want the fruit that tasted evil as well? "Be not wiser than it behoves one to be

248. Ps 120:1.

249. Jn 6:5.

250. Song 1:7.

251. Gen 34:1.

252. Gen 34:25ff. Dinah was raped, her brothers acted treacherously, and her lover and all his people were slain or enslaved.

253. Gen 2:15.

254. Gen 2:16.

255. Gen 2:9.

wise.”²⁵⁶ To be wise in evil is not wisdom but foolishness. Keep what is entrusted to you; wait for what is promised to you. Avoid what is forbidden or you will lose what you already have. Why are you so ready to look on death? What do those glances mean? You are forbidden to eat that fruit, why do you look at it? “Oh!” you answer, “I am only looking. I have not so much as put a hand to it. My eyes are under no restriction; I was forbidden only to eat. What did God give me eyes for if I cannot look at whatever I want?” Have you never read; “All things are lawful for me but not all expedient?”²⁵⁷ The look may not have been a sin itself but there was a sin somewhere in the background. You cannot have been watching very carefully over yourself or you would not have had time for this curiosity. It may not itself be a sin but it is leading you on to sin. You are already guilty of some fault in the matter and more will follow. While your attention was taken up with this the serpent quietly slipped into your heart and his soft words are being spoken, gentle persuasive words, lies to lull fear to sleep. “No, you will not die,” he says.²⁵⁸ He strengthens your attention, he rouses your appetite, he whets your curiosity, he stirs up your greed. While he presents you with a forbidden fruit he steals the gift you have been given. He gave you an apple and stole Paradise. You drink the poison. You will die and be the mother of the dying. Before the first child was born salvation was gone. We are born and we die. We are born dying men, for the doom of death is laid upon us before ever we are born. This is the heavy burden you have laid upon all your sons even to this day.

BERNARD'S OWN OPINION CONCERNING THE APOSTATE SERAPH

31. And you, Satan! made in the likeness of God, placed not in Eden but in the delights of the Paradise of God,²⁵⁹ what

256. Rom 12:3.

257. 1 Cor 6:12.

258. Gen 3:4.

259. Ezek 28:12. In its literal sense the text has reference to the King of Tyre but the Fathers commonly found in him a type of Satan, e.g., Origen, *Hom. XIII in Ezechielem* 2; PG 13:760.

more did you want? Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty "seek not what is too high for you, peer not into what is too mighty."²⁶⁰ Stay in your own place lest you fall if you walk in great and wonderful things above you.²⁶¹ Why are you casting those glances towards the North? I see you musing very earnestly on something. I do not know what it is but it is something beyond your reach. You say: "I will place my throne in the North."²⁶² All else in heaven's courts are standing: you alone presume to sit. You disturb the concord of your brethren, the peace of the heavenly country, and if it were possible, even the peace of the Blessed Trinity. Wretch! to this your curiosity has led you. With reckless insolence you shock your fellow-citizens and insult your King. "Thousands of thousands minister to him, ten times a hundred thousand stand before him."²⁶³ In that court none has a right to sit save him who sits above the Cherubim,²⁶⁴ waited on by all. In an unheard-of way you would distinguish yourself from others, you pry with insatiable curiosity, push yourself forward without respect, and would place your throne in heaven and make yourself the equal of the Most High.²⁶⁵ What strength are you depending on? On what course are you embarking? You fool! Will you think of the measure of your strength and think of the goal to which you are rushing and how you are going to get there. Answer plainly: does the Most High know what you are planning or does he not; and is he willing to let you do it, or not? His knowledge is unclouded,²⁶⁵ his will is perfect in goodness: do you think he can be ignorant of your evil plots, or that he can approve of them? Or do you think he knows and opposes them but cannot stop them? I can hardly

260. Sir 3:22.

261. Ps 130:1.

262. Is 14:13 (Old Latin or Italic version). Bernard uses this same version below, no. 36, p. 64 and also in I Nov 2:5; OB 5:310; CF 34. However he was aware of the Vulgate version for he used it in QH 11:4; OB 4.451; CF 43.

263. Dan 7:10.

264. Ps 79:2.

265. Is 14:4. Cf. Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* 29:18; tr.

J. Newman, *Library of the Fathers*, vol. 3, part 1 (London: Parker, 1847), p. 314.

266. Job 36:4.

267. Mt 20:15.

believe that even you could doubt the infinite knowledge, power and perfection of your Creator; unless, indeed, you think you needed no Creator. But indeed you did; you came from nothingness and exist entirely by his power. Such as you are he knew you and such as you are he made you. How then can you expect God to consent to what he does not want done and can easily prevent? I wonder have we in you an instance of the common proverb: "Familiarity breeds contempt"? Perhaps indeed it was you who began it, for your like continue. Is your eye evil because he is good?²⁶⁷ If you draw your confidence from his very goodness, try to remember before whose eyes you flaunt your impudence, before whose might you display your rashness.

32. I expect these are the lines on which your thoughts are running, the evil you plan on your bed:²⁶⁸ "There is no fear the Creator will destroy the work of his hands. I know that nothing I think is hidden from God, else he would not be God. I know that what I plan does not please him, else he would not be good. I know that if in fact he wills, I cannot escape his hand because he is mighty. But still I have nothing to fear. My designs cannot please him because he is good and I am acting badly. I admit that. But, tell me, would he be willing to act badly himself? I am wrong in going against his will; he would do wrong if he were vindictive. No matter how bad my crime he cannot punish it because he does not wish to lose nor can he lose his quality of goodness." You deceive yourself, you wretch, you deceive yourself, not God.²⁶⁹ Yes, I repeat you deceive yourself; iniquity deceives itself, not God. You are acting deceitfully, but right before his eyes;²⁷⁰ and deceiving yourself, not God. You are using his very kindness as an excuse for sinning the more, and thereby making your sin the more hateful.²⁷¹ What could be more vile than to turn to the contempt of your Creator the very thing that should make you love him more? Could a worse sin be imagined? You know without any doubt the power of God to destroy you as easily as he created you, and yet trusting in his great kindness

268. Ps 35:5.

269. Ps 26:12.

270. Ps 35:3.

271. *Ibid.*

you hope to escape punishment! This is surely returning evil for good, hatred for love.²⁷²

33. Your sin deserves, not one swift stroke of punishment, but an eternal reprobation. He is your kindest and most exalted Lord. Yet you want and hope to force yourself on him as an equal, to afflict him constantly with your hateful sight, to have you as an unwanted companion, not destroying you even when he could. He would rather suffer himself than let you perish; he could destroy you if he wished, but, because of his kindness, you think he could not want it. Certainly, if this is what you believe, you are even more evil if you do not love him. If he lets himself suffer rather than have you suffer, how evil it is that you do not spare him who does not spare himself to spare you. But this is nonsense! The divine perfection does not require that kindness hinder justice, as if God could not be both kind and just at the same time.²⁷³ In fact, it is a greater kindness when it is accompanied by justice; kindness too weak to enforce justice would not be a virtue at all. God, in the goodness and freedom of his will made you, and you return no thanks for it; he has spared you the chastisements of his justice and your only return is to cast aside fear and sin more boldly, presuming on continued impunity.

You pay lip-service to the goodness of God; you have yet to feel his justice. You will be entangled in the very coils you placed to trip your Maker. Your cleverness argues that while you planned harm for him and he could avoid it if he wished, you think he will not so wish, for fear he should lose goodness, which you allow him only because you have never seen him inflicting punishment. The grief will come back on your own head. God is infinitely just and so he cannot, must not, allow an offence against his goodness to go unpunished. Still, his goodness tempers your doom. He will not refuse pardon if you are willing to repent. But the hardness of your impenitent heart will not let you repent.²⁷⁴ You must suffer.

34. Where has Satan gone wrong? God says: "Heaven is my throne, earth my footstool."²⁷⁵ He does not say "the"

272. Ps 108:5.

273. Ps 24:8.

274. Rom 2:5. Cf. Gra 29; CF 19.

275. Is 66:1; Acts 7:49.

east or "the" west or any other particular region of heaven, but "the whole heaven is my footstool." Therefore, Satan, you cannot enthrone yourself in the heavens²⁷⁶ for God claims all. Neither have you a place on earth; for that is his footstool.²⁷⁷ Indeed it is on the firm earth where the Church sits, founded on solid rock.²⁷⁸ What will you do? You are thrown out of heaven and there is no place for you on earth. Only the air remains for you, to hover there, not to sit.²⁷⁹ You tried to unsettle the stability of eternity and your doom is an eternal restlessness. You must be tossed about between heaven and earth while the Lord sits on his high and exalted throne and the whole earth is filled with his glory;²⁸⁰ and you have no place except the air.

35. Some of the Seraphim use the wings of their contemplation to fly from the throne to the footstool, from the footstool back to the throne; others veil with their wings the face and feet of the Lord.²⁸¹ We can learn from this, I think,²⁸² that, as the Cherubim were posted at the gate of Paradise to bar it to sinful man,²⁸³ so the Seraphim check your impudent and imprudent curiosity that you might not be allowed to pierce the mysteries either of heaven or of the Church on earth. You must be content with the hearts of the proud, who will not stoop to live like the rest of men on earth and may not soar to heaven like the angels. Although the Head who is in heaven and the "feet" on earth are hidden from you, nevertheless you are allowed to see something of what is in between so that you might be envious. While suspended in air you will see the angels descending and ascending²⁸⁴ as they pass you in their flight, but what they hear in heaven and what they announce on earth are hidden from you.

276. Rev 12:8.

277. Mt 5:35.

278. Mt 7:25.

279. Eph 2:2.

280. Is 6:1ff.

281. Is 6:2.

282. See above, *Retraction*, p. 25.

283. Gen 3:24. Bernard describes the role of each of the ranks of the angels in Csi 5:8 (OB 3:472f; CF 19) and more fully in SC 19:2-6 (OB 1:109-12; CF 4:141-4).

284. Gen 28:12.

36. Lucifer, you who rise in the morning²⁸⁵—no, not Lucifer the Lightbearer, but Nightbearer and Deathbearer—your true course was from East to South, why did you swerve to the North? The higher you would climb the swifter your fall. Nevertheless I am curious, O Envious One, to know more about the course of your curiosity.²⁸⁶ You say: “I will place my throne in the North.”²⁸⁷ I know of course that you are a spirit and there is no question here of the North Pole of this earth. The North stands for the reprobate and your throne is your kingdom over them. Now, you were once very close to God and in his foreknowledge²⁸⁸ you might have seen the future more clearly than could others. You foresaw these reprobate men shining with no ray of wisdom, burning with no flame of love and of this empty wasteland you chose to be lord, to infuse into them the light of your own cunning, to inflame them with your own evil desires. The Most High God rules over the children of obedience²⁸⁹ in his love and goodness; and you would be king of the sons of pride²⁹⁰ in your clever malice and your malicious cleverness and so be like the Most High.²⁹¹ But tell me, for it is this which makes me wonder: if in the foreknowledge of God you saw your lordship, did you not also foresee your downfall? And if you did foresee it, what madness made you choose such wretched dignity, preferring to rule in misery rather than be subject in happiness? Would it not have been better to share with the sons of light than to be the leader of the sons of darkness?²⁹² I find it easier to believe that you did not foresee it. Or perhaps, as I suggested already, you looked to the goodness of God and

285. Is 14:12. Cf. with the passage in I Nov 5:7-8. According to its literal sense the text of Is does not refer to Satan but rather to the King of Babylon. However the Fathers commonly see here a type of the evil angel, finding some basis in Lk 10:18.

286. Typical Bernardine alliteration: *Velim tamen curiosius, curiose, intentionem tuae curiositatis inquirere.*

287. See above, note 262.

288. 1 Pet 1:2.

289. 1 Pet 1:14.

290. Job 41:25.

291. Is 14:14.

292. Eph 6:12.

said to yourself: "He will not take notice."²⁹³ Or it may be that the vision of your coveted principdom was a beam of pride²⁹⁴ blinding your eye so that it could not see the fall.

37. It is quite possible that one could really foresee the future in a spirit of prophecy and yet be ignorant of some details. These gaps in his knowledge need not make us conclude that the whole prophecy was a delusion. We have a case of this in Joseph. He foresaw his own future greatness²⁹⁵ but did not foresee his sale as a slave,²⁹⁶ though that came before his triumph. I do not think the great Patriarch was guilty of pride. I am only using him as an example. Still, if anyone would hold that he was guilty of vanity when he spoke about his dreams in his young days when their mystery was still unknown I would think it was less vanity than the greatness of the mystery, or a boy's simplicity. However, if he was guilty of any vanity he was able to make up for it by all he suffered. Some have pleasant things foretold to them at times and it would not be human if there was not some touch of vanity either at the fact of the revelation or at the things promised.²⁹⁷ That would not prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled though there could be some punishment for the vanity. Our heavenly Physician does not always treat our moral sores with ointment. They may be too infected for that. He will at need cauterize or lance them, sending temptations and afflictions to the chosen soul to crush and humiliate it so that its joy is turned into sorrow²⁹⁸ and its revelation now seems a delusion. It is preserved from vanity; but the revelation still stands true. St Paul's pride was kept down by a sting of the flesh but he was lifted up by his many revelations.²⁹⁹ Zachary was punished by dumbness for his unbelief³⁰⁰ but the angel's prophecy did not fail.³⁰¹ The saints always go forward, in honor or dishonor.³⁰² If they are ever led to think too much of themselves by their gifts and fall into the human weakness of vanity, they will very quickly be reminded of what they really are.

293. Ps 9:34.

294. Mt 7:3.

295. Gen 37:5-10.

296. Gen 37:28.

297. Cf 2 Cor 12:7.

298. Bar 4:34; Jas 4:9.

299. 2 Cor 12:7.

300. Lk 1:20.

301. Lk 1:57ff.

302. 2 Cor 6:8.

38. How did we get on to this matter of revelations while we were talking of curiosity? I wandered off into this by-path when I was trying to show that the reprobate angel could have foreseen the dominion he was later to have over fallen men and still not foresee his own damnation. In the meantime we have opened up a good many minor questions and have not answered them. However, the sum total is: he fell from truth by curiosity³⁰³ when he turned his attention to something he coveted unlawfully and had the presumption to believe he could gain. Curiosity was the beginning of all sin³⁰⁴ and so is rightly considered the first step of pride. Unless it is checked promptly it leads to the second step: levity.

THE SECOND STEP: LEVITY OF MIND

XI. 39. The monk who observes others instead of attending to himself will begin before long to see some as his superiors and others as his inferiors; in some he will see things to envy, in others, things to despise. The eyes have wandered and the mind soon follows. It is no longer steadily fixed on its real concerns and is now carried up on the crest of the waves of pride, now down in the trough of envy. One minute the man is full of envious sadness, the next childishly glad about some excellence he sees in himself. The former is evil, the latter, vain; both bespeak pride because it is love of one's own excellence³⁰⁵ that makes one weep when he is surpassed and rejoice in surpassing others. His conversation will show how his mind is tossed up and down. One moment he is sulky and silent except for some bitter remarks; the next sees a full spate of silly chatter. Now he is laughing, now doleful; all without rhyme or reason.

If now you care to compare these two steps of pride with the last two of humility you will find that they correspond;

303. Cf. Div 14:2; OB 6:1:135; CF 46.

304. Sir 10:15.

305. See above, note 106, p. 42.

curiosity with the last³⁰⁶ and levity with the second last;³⁰⁷ and the same will hold for all others, if they are compared one with the other. We will proceed now to the third step of pride—to teach it, not I hope, to practise it.

THE THIRD STEP: GIDDINESS³⁰⁸

XII. 40. The proud always seek what is pleasant and try to avoid what is troublesome. In the words of Scripture: "Where there is gladness, there is the heart of the fool."³⁰⁹ The monk that has come down the two steps of curiosity and levity of mind will find much to upset him. He is saddened every time he sees the goodness of others, impatient with humiliation. He finds an escape in false consolations. His eyes are closed to anything that shows his own vileness or the excellence of others, wide open to what flatters himself. He is largely saved now from his moody exaltation and depression; he has retired into a happy cloud-land. This is the third step. There are indications by which you can know when you yourself or another have reached this point. Watch such a man and you will never notice anything like a tear or a sigh. His appearance is that of

306. "The twelfth degree of humility is that a monk not only have humility in his heart but also by his very appearance make it always manifest to those who see him. That is to say that whether he is at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields or anywhere else, and whether sitting, walking or standing, he should always have his head bowed and his eyes toward the ground. Feeling the guilt of his sins at every moment, he should consider himself already present at the dread Judgment and constantly say in his heart what the publican in the Gospel said with his eyes fixed on the earth: "Lord, I am a sinner and not worthy to lift up my eyes to heaven." and again with the Prophet: "I am bowed down and humbled everywhere."—RB 7:62-66.

307. "The eleventh degree of humility is that when a monk speaks he do so gently and without laughter, humbly and seriously, in few and sensible words, and that he be not noisy in his speech. It is written, 'A wise man is known by the fewness of his words.'"—RB 7:60-61. Bernard's descriptive *semper vero irrationabilia . . . verba* is in contrast to Benedict's *pauca verba et rationabilia*.

308. In Gra 14 Bernard brings out how truly miserable is this giddiness or false joy: *Nulla autem verior miseria, quam falsa laetitia*. (OB 3:176; CF 19). More important he points out the source of true joy: hope in the Lord rather than in self—SC 37:3; OB 2:10; CF 7.

309. Eccles 7:5.

a man who is forgetful of what he is or at least is now purified of all trace of sin. He is scurrilous³¹⁰ in sign-making,³¹¹ over-cheerful in appearance, swaggering in his bearing, always ready for a joke, any little thing quickly gets a laugh.³¹² He is careful not to remember anything he has done which could hurt his self-esteem; but all his good points will be remembered, and added up, and if need be, touched up by imagination. He thinks only of what he wants and never of what is permitted. At times he simply cannot stop laughing or hide his empty-headed merriment. He is like a well-filled bladder that has been pricked and squeezed. The air, not finding a free vent, whistles out through the little hole with squeak after squeak. The rule of silence³¹³ will not let a monk relieve himself of his vain thoughts and silly jokes. They gather pressure inside until they burst out in giggles.³¹⁴ In embarrassment he buries his face in his hands, tightens his lips, clenches his teeth. It is no use! The laughter must explode and if his hand holds it in his mouth, it bursts out through his nose.

THE FOURTH STEP: BOASTING

XIII. 41. When vanity has swelled the bladder to its limits a bigger vent must be made or the bladder will burst. As the monk's silly merriment grows, laughing and signs are not

310. Scurrility is quite strongly reprobated by the Benedictine Rule: "But as for scurrility and idle words or words that move to laughter, these we condemn everywhere with a perpetual ban, and for such conversation we do not permit a disciple to open his mouth."—RB 6:8.

311. Not only the Cistercians but many of the Black Monks of this time shared a common sign language whose origins are lost in obscurity. It is still employed in some monasteries. See R. Barakat, *The Cistercian Sign Language: A Study in Non-verbal Communication*, Cistercian Studies Series 11 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1972).

312. *Facilius ac promptus in risu*—RB 7:59, where Benedict uses it to describe the tenth step of humility by negation.

313. This is found especially in RB 6, the chapter immediately preceeding the steps of humility. For a thorough study of the provisions in RB for silence see Ambrose Wathen, OSB, *Silence: The Meaning of Silence in the Rule of St Benedict*, Cistercian Studies Series 22 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1972).

314. Bernard might have had in mind here Persius, *Satires* 3:8: *ingeminant tremulos naso crispante cachinnos*, especially in view of his use of *cachinnos* on the way he ends the paragraph. See *The Satires of A. Persius Flaccus*, tr. J. Covington, ed. H. Nettleship, 3 ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1893), pp. 66-7.

enough outlet, and he says like Elihu: "Behold, my heart is like new wine that has no vent; like new wineskins it is ready to burst."³¹⁵ Yes, speak or burst! He is full of words and the swelling spirit strains within him.³¹⁶ His hunger and thirst are for listeners, someone to listen to his boasting, on whom he can pour out all his thoughts, someone he can show what a big man he is. At last the chance to speak comes. The discussion turns on literature. He brings forth from his treasury old things and new.³¹⁷ He is not shy about producing his opinions; words are bubbling over. He does not wait to be asked. His information comes before any question. He asks the questions; gives the answers; cuts off anyone who tries to speak.³¹⁸ When the bell rings and it is necessary to interrupt the conversation, hour-long though it be, he seeks a minute more. He must get special permission to resume his talk, not to edify the listeners, but to show off his learning.³¹⁹ He may have the capacity to help others but that is the least of his concerns. His aim is not to teach you nor to be taught by you, but to show how much he knows. If the conversation brings up the subject of religion, he is quite ready to talk of visions and dreams. He warmly recommends fasting, urges watching and exalts prayer above all. He will give a long discourse on patience and humility and each of the other virtues—all words, all bragging. He trusts that you will draw the conclusion: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks;"³²⁰ or, "A good man from a good treasure brings forth good things."³²¹ The talk takes a lighter turn. He is more in his element here and becomes really eloquent. If you hear him, you will say his mouth has become a fountain of wit, a river of smart talk. He can set the most grave and

315. Job 32:19.

316. Job 32:18.

317. Mt 13:52.

318. Mills has this note: Contrast St Basil's standard for the true monk (Ep 11, tr. Newman, *Church of the Fathers*, Basil and Gregory, 5): "To interrogate without overearnestness; to answer without desire of display; not to interrupt a profitable speaker, nor to answer ambitiously to put in a word of one's own."

319. Cf. 1 Cor 8:1.

320. Mt 12:34.

321. Mt 12:35.

serious laughing heartily.³²² To say it briefly, when words are many, boasting is not lacking.³²³ There is the fourth step described and identified. Flee the reality, but remember the name. The same warning goes with the next, which I name singularity.

THE FIFTH STEP: SINGULARITY

XIV. 42. When a man has been bragging that he is better than others he would feel ashamed of himself if he did not live up to his boast and show how much better than others he is. The common rule of the monastery and the example of the seniors are no longer enough for him.³²⁴ He does not so much want to be better as to be seen to be better. He is not so much concerned about leading a better life as appearing to others to do so. He can then say "I am not like the rest of men."³²⁵ He is more complacent about fasting for one day when the others are feasting than about fasting seven days with all the rest. He prefers some petty private devotion to the whole night office of psalms.³²⁶ While he is at his meals he casts his eyes around the tables and if he sees anyone eating less than himself he is mortified at being outdone and promptly and cruelly deprives himself of even necessary food. He would rather starve his body than his pride. If he sees anyone more thin, anyone more pallid, he despises himself. He is never at rest. He wonders what others think about the appearance of his face and as he cannot see it³²⁷ he must only guess whether

322. Cf. Csi 2:22; OB 3:430; CF 19.

323. Cf. Prov 10:19; RB 7:56-58: "The ninth degree of humility is that a monk restrain his tongue and keep silence, not speaking until he is questioned. For the Scripture shows that "in much speaking there is no escape from sin" and that "the talkative man is not stable on the earth."

324. RB 7:55: "The eighth degree of humility is that a monk do nothing except what is commended by the common Rule of the monastery and the example of the elders." Cf. SC 19:7, OB 1:112f, CF 4:145; SC 64:5; 2:168, CF 31.

325. Lk 18:11.

326. According to the RB, which the Cistercians strictly followed, fourteen psalms were recited or sung at the night office early in the morning: RB 9. Guerric of Igny, a close disciple of Bernard, who follows him in many things, emphasizes this same point in his Fifth Advent Sermon, 5:2; CF 8:32-33.

327. Needless to say there were no mirrors in the early Cistercian monasteries, indeed they were only commonly introduced in the middle of this century when the monks began to shave themselves.

it is rosy or wan by looking at his hands and arms, poking at his ribs, and feeling his shoulders and loins to see how skinny or fleshy they are. He is very exact about his own particular doings and slack about the common exercises. He will stay awake in bed and sleep in choir. After sleeping through the night office while the others were singing psalms, he stays to pray alone in the oratory while they are resting in the cloister.³²⁸ He makes sure that those sitting outside know he is there modestly hidden in his corner, clearing his throat and coughing and groaning and sighing.³²⁹ Some of the more simple-minded are misled by his worthless singularities and, judging by his actions which they see and not seeing the hidden intentions, they canonize the unfortunate man and confirm him in his self-delusion.

THE SIXTH STEP: SELF-CONCEIT

XV. 43. He swallows all the praise others give him. He is quite complacent about his conduct and he never examines his motives now; the good opinion of others is all he needs. About everything else he thinks he knows more than anybody, but when they say something favorable about him he believes them against his own conscience. So now not only in words and affected conduct does he display his piety but he believes in his inmost heart that he is holier than others.³³⁰ It never occurs to him that the praise given to him comes from

328. RB 8:3. Cf. Gilbert of Swineshead, SC 23:3, PL 184-120, CF 14.

329. This is the exact opposite of what St Benedict prescribes: "When the Work of God is ended, let all go out in perfect silence and let reverence for God be observed, so that any brother who may wish to pray privately will not be hindered by another's misconduct. At other times also, if anyone should want to pray by himself, let him go in simply and pray, not in a loud voice but with tears and fervor of heart. He who does not say his prayers this way, therefore, shall not be permitted to remain in the oratory when the Work of God is ended, lest another be hindered, as we have said."—RB 52:2-5.

330. Bernard uses Benedict's own expression to bring out the contrast: "The seventh degree of humility is that he consider himself lower and of less account than anyone else, and this not only in verbal protestation but also *with the most heartfelt inner conviction*, humbling himself and saying with the Prophet, 'But I am a worm and no man, the scorn of men and the outcast of the people. After being exalted, I have been humbled and covered with confusion.' And again, 'It is good for me that you have humbled me, that I may learn your commandments.' " —RB 7:51-54. [Italics mine].

ignorance or kindness; his pride thinks it only his due. So, after singularity, self-conceit comes sixth, and the seventh is presumption.

THE SEVENTH STEP: PRESUMPTION³³¹

XVI. 44. When a man thinks he is better than others will he not put himself before others? He must have the first place in gatherings, be the first to speak in council. He comes without being called. He interferes without being asked. He must rearrange everything, re-do whatever has been done. What he himself did not do or arrange is not rightly done or properly arranged. He is the judge of all judges and decides every case beforehand. If he is not made Prior³³² when a vacancy occurs he knows that the Abbot is jealous of him, or has been deceived! If obedience calls him to some ordinary tasks he refuses disdainfully.³³³ A man fitted for higher positions could not be occupied with lesser things. Since he is so liberal, even reckless, in offering his services, sooner or later he will make some blunders. Then a superior may have to correct him. Will he admit his fault? He could hardly believe that he could be wrong and certainly will not let anybody else believe it. Thus his fault is made worse instead of being set right. If therefore, when he is corrected, you see him making excuses in his sin³³⁴ you will know he has dropped another step—the eighth, which is named self-justification.

331. Cf. with the treatment of presumption in QH 11:4; OB 4:451; CF 43.

332. Benedict provides in RB 65 that the abbot might choose a *praepositus*, a claustral prior, as a second in command. This was the common practice in Cistercian monasteries.

333. This is just the opposite of the sixth step of humility: "The sixth step of humility is that a monk be content with the poorest and worst of everything, and that in every occupation assigned he consider himself a bad and worthless workman, saying with the Prophet, "I am brought to nothing and I am without understanding; I have become as a beast of burden before you, and I am always with you."—RB 7:49-50.

334. Ps 140:4. Bernard uses this verse as it is found in the Vulgate as his bridge between this and the following step: "Incline not my heart to evil words; to make excuses in sins."

EIGHTH STEP: SELF-JUSTIFICATION

XVII. 45. There are many ways of excusing sins.³³⁵ One will say: "I didn't do it." Another; "I did it, but I was perfectly right in doing it." If it was wrong he may say: "It isn't all that bad." If it was decidedly harmful, he can fall back on: "I meant well." If the bad intention is too evident he will take refuge in the excuses of Adam and Eve and say someone else led him into it.³³⁶ If a man defends his obvious sins like that, he is hardly likely to fulfill the fifth degree of humility in St Benedict's Rule and "make known to his Abbot by humble confession the evil thoughts of his heart and the sins he has committed in secret."³³⁷

THE NINTH STEP: HYPOCRITICAL CONFESSION

XVIII. 46. Excuses of this kind are bad enough for the Psalmist to call them "words of malice," but there is something even more dangerous than this stubborn and obstinate self-defence, and that is hypocritical confession springing from pride.³³⁸ There are some who, when they are caught out in wrong-doing and know that if they defend themselves they will not be believed, find a subtle way out of the difficulty in deceitful self-accusation. This is the kind of man "who humbles himself deceitfully while his mind is full of evil."³³⁹ Their

335. See previous note.

336. Gen 3:12-13. See Pre 27 where Bernard, citing the same Ps text (140:4) develops his comment on Adam and Eve, finding the greater sin in this excuse-making (OB 3:272f; CF 1:126).

337. RB 7:44. The early *Consuetudines* of the Cistercians following RB 46, provided for two kinds of confession: open public confession in chapter and private secret confession to the prior at the end of chapter or at other suitable times. See *Consuetudines Ordinis Cisterciensis* III, c. 70 in *Nomasticon Cisterciense*, ed H. Séjalon (Solesmes: St Peter's, 1892), pp. 145ff; also *Usus Conversorum* 11, *ibid.*, p. 239.

338. Bernard speaks of the properties of confession in Div 40:6, the first of which is that it be "true." It is also to be complete and personal, not involving others—*vera, nuda et propria* (OB 6-1:239f; CF 46). The seven steps in the ways of obedience and confession developed by St Bernard in that Sermon might be fruitfully compared with these steps of humility.

339. Sir 19:23.

eyes are cast down, they humble themselves to the very dust, they wring out some tears if they can, sighs and groans interrupt their words. They will not merely admit what has happened but will exaggerate their guilt. They accuse themselves of things so great, so incredible, that you begin to doubt the charges you were certain of before. The things they say about themselves now can surely not be true, perhaps the other things are not so certain either. They are making statements they do not want you to believe, they defend the fault by confessing and hide it by false openness. The confession sounds very well but evil is hidden in the heart. The hearer is led to think that the accusation is not really true, it is only humility. After all, the Scripture says: "The just man is his own first accuser."³⁴⁰ Such men are willing that you think they are telling lies about themselves, so long as you do not think they are failing in humility. They will not get much credit from God for either truth or humility. If their guilt is too great for any defence they will assume the attitude of penitents hoping that their fault will be forgotten in admiration of their candid confession; but the candor of their confession is all in outward show. It does not come from the heart and cancels no sin.

47. Pride is certainly paying a compliment to humility if it uses it as a disguise when it would escape punishment. The superior will see through this fraud quickly enough if instead of taking notice of this proud humiliation he refuses to overlook the offense or remit the punishment. An earthen vessel is tested by fire³⁴¹ and the true penitent by tribulation. A real penitent is not afraid of the difficulties of penance.³⁴² Whatever is enjoined upon him for the fault which he hates, he patiently embraces with a quiet mind. If obedience should expose him to hard and mortifying things and even undeserved reproaches he will bear it unflinchingly. He has possession of the fourth degree of humility.³⁴³ The man whose penitence

340. Prov 18:17 (Old Latin or Italic version).

341. Sir 27:6.

342. Cf. Conv 6; OB 4:77f; CF 43.

343. "The fourth degree of humility is that he hold fast to patience with a silent mind when in this obedience he meets with difficulties and contradictions and even any kind of injustice, enduring all without growing weary or running away."
—RB 7:35-36.

is fraudulent will show soon enough that it was a sham humility if he is given the slightest reproach or penance. He murmurs and growls and gets vexed. No, he is not in the fourth degree of humility but the ninth of pride which we have called hypocritical confession. You can judge for yourself what is now the state of this proud man's mind. His fraud has failed him, his peace of mind is gone, his reputation has been lowered, and his sin is unforgiven. Now everybody knows what he is,³⁴⁴ everyone condemns him, and they are all the more vexed because of the good opinion his fraud fooled them into holding for so long. In the end the superior will find himself forced to be unsparing so as to avoid general scandal.

THE TENTH STEP: REVOLT

XIX. 48. The divine mercy may yet rescue such a man and inspire him to submit to the judgment of the community;³⁴⁵ but such a character finds this a very hard thing to do, and instead, he may take an attitude of brazen insolence and in desperation take the fatal plunge as far as the tenth step of pride. He has already shown his contempt for his brethren by insolence, and now his contempt for superiors flashes out in open revolt.

49. We may pause here to take notice that I have divided the descent of pride into twelve steps and these again may be grouped into three classes; in the first six contempt is

344. It would seem from this that Bernard, in this step, has in mind the public confession made in chapter. See note 337 above.

345. Bernard has undoubtedly in mind here RB 28: "If a brother who has been frequently corrected for some fault, and even excommunicated, does not amend, let a harsher correction be applied, that is, let the punishment of the rod be administered to him. But if he still does not reform or perhaps (which God forbid) even rises up in pride and wants to defend his conduct, then let the abbot do what a wise physician would do. Having used applications, the ointments of exhortation, the medicines of the Holy Scriptures, finally the cautery of excommunication and of the strokes of the rod, if he sees that his efforts are of no avail, let him apply a still greater remedy, his own prayers and those of all the brethren, that the Lord, who can do all things, may restore health to the sick brother. But if he is not healed even in this way, then let the abbot use the knife of amputation, according to the Apostle's words, 'Expel the evil one from your midst,' and again, 'If the faithless one departs, let him depart,' lest one diseased sheep contaminate the whole flock."

shown for the brethren, in the next four for the superior, in the last two, on which I have not yet touched, contempt for God. We may note too, that the first two steps of humility will have been climbed before entering the community, and, correspondingly, the last two steps of pride will not be reached while one still remains a member. The reason why the first two steps of humility must be climbed before entering is found in the Rule which says: "The third step is that a monk submit himself to a superior in all obedience for the love of God."³⁴⁶ This submission to a superior takes place when the novice enters the monastery, so he must already have climbed the first two steps. But if a monk refuses to live in harmony with his brethren or to obey his superior, what is he doing in the monastery except causing scandal?

THE ELEVENTH STEP: FREEDOM TO SIN

XX. 50. The man in revolt has reached the tenth step of pride and will leave or be expelled from the monastery. Without delay he goes down to the eleventh step. He then sets his feet on ways that seem to a man right³⁴⁷ but which will lead him, if God does not block his way,³⁴⁸ to the depths of hell, to contempt of God. "When wicked man reaches the depths of evil, he is full of contempt."³⁴⁹ We may style this eleventh step freedom in sinning. The monk has no longer a superior to fear nor brethren to respect, so with fewer qualms he happily gives himself up to his sinful desires which in the monastery fear and shame held in check. He has no abbot or fellow-religious to fear now, but he still keeps some scant fear of God. His conscience still gives some murmurs, however faint; he makes a few half-hearted resolutions, still hesitates a little in his first steps in evil. He does not plunge headlong into the torrent of vice but feels his way step by step like one trying a ford.

³⁴⁶ RB 7:34.

³⁴⁷ Prov 14:12, 16:25. See above, no. 19, p. 46.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Hos 2:6.

³⁴⁹ Prov 18:3 (Old Latin or Italic). Cf. Conv 23; OB 4:95; CF 43; Pre 40; OB 3:280; CF 1:135.

THE TWELFTH STEP: THE HABIT OF SINNING

XXI. 51. The first steps in sin are taken apprehensively and no blow falls from the dreaded judgment of God.³⁵⁰ Pleasure in sin has been experienced. Sin is repeated and the pleasure grows. Old desires revive, conscience is dulled,³⁵¹ habit tightens its grasp. The unfortunate man sinks into the evil depths,³⁵² is tangled in his vices and is swept into the whirlpool of sinful longings while his reason and the fear of God are forgotten and "the fool says in his heart: There is no God."³⁵³ Good or evil means nothing to him now.³⁵⁴ He is ready to serve sin heart, hand, and foot with thoughts, acts, and plans unchecked. He seeks new ways of sinning. The plans of his heart, the ready words of his mouth, the works of his hands, are at the service of every impulse. He has become malevolent, evil-speaking, vile.

The just man who has climbed all the steps of humility runs on to life with a ready heart and with the ease of good habit;³⁵⁵ the evil man who has dropped down to the bottom is ruled by evil habit, and unchecked by fear he runs boldly on to death. Those in mid-course, whether going up or down, are weary with the strain, torn now by the fear of hell and now by the attraction of old habits. Only at the top and at the bottom is there a free and effortless course, upward to life or downward to death; bounding on in the effortless energy of love, or hurried, unresisting, by the downward pull of cupidity. In one case love, in the other apathy ignores the

350. Heb 10:27.

351. Cf. Conv 5; OB 4:76; CF 43.

352. Prov 18:3.

353. Ps 13:1.

354. Cf. Pre 39; OB 3:280; CF 1:134.

355. Cf. RB 7:67ff: "Having climbed all these steps of humility, therefore, the monk will presently come to that perfect love of God which casts out fear. And all those precepts which formerly he had not observed without fear, he will now begin to keep by reason of that love, without any effort, as though naturally and by habit. No longer will his motive be the fear of hell, but rather the love of Christ, good habit and delight in the virtues which the Lord will deign to show forth by the Holy Spirit in his servant now cleansed from vice and sin." See also, RB Prol 49.

labor of life. Perfect love or complete malice cast out fear.³⁵⁶ Security is found in truth or in blindness. So we can call the twelfth step the habit of sinning, by which the fear of God has been lost, replaced by contempt.

XXII. 52. "For such a one," says St John the Apostle, "I would not that anyone should pray."³⁵⁷ What then, O Blessed Apostle, is he to despair? One who really loves him will still weep. Let him not dare to pray, nor cease to wail. I am not suggesting that hope is entirely gone when prayer is forbidden. I can give you an example of one who believed and hoped even when the case seemed to be beyond prayer. "Lord," she said, "If you had been here my brother would not have died."³⁵⁸ She must have had faith, strong faith, if she believed that our Lord's presence could have saved her brother's life. Her next words leave us no room for thinking that there was a limit to her faith or that she thought that while our Lord could have saved her brother's life he could not raise him from the dead. She added: "But even now I know that whatever you ask from God he will give to you."³⁵⁹ When Jesus asked where they had laid him she answered: "Come and see."³⁶⁰ Why did she stop at that? Martha, you have given us a wonderful example of faith, surely you do not begin to doubt now? When you said: "Come and see," was your hope not strong enough to add: "and raise him up?" If you had no hope you would not have troubled the Master with a useless visit. It is rather that faith will sometimes gain what prayer hardly dares ask. As he approached the grave you stopped him and said: "Lord, by this time there will be an odor for he has been now four days dead."³⁶¹ Was it despair made you say that? I rather think you

356. 1 Jn 4:18; RB 7:67.

357. 1 Jn 5:16. See Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 21:24, tr. G. Walsh and D. Honan, *Works of St Augustine* 8, Fathers of the Church 24 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1954) pp. 387ff.

358. Jn 11:21. The reference is to Martha speaking of Lazarus' death.

359. Jn 11:22.

360. Jn 11:34. These words however are attributed in the text to the crowd.

361. Jn 11:39.

were making a timid suggestion; just as our Lord after his resurrection feigned to be going further when he really wanted to remain with his disciples.³⁶² O you two holy sisters,³⁶³ friends of Christ, if you really love your brother why do you not ask for him the mercy of One whose power you cannot doubt, about whose love you can have no hesitation?³⁶⁴ But their answer comes: "We are praying, praying all the better when we voice no prayer. We trust all the more strongly when we seem to doubt. We show our faith, we show our love; and he who needs no telling knows what we desire."³⁶⁵ We know that he can do all things; even this great unheard-of miracle is well within his power; but it is far beyond all the merits of our lowliness. It is enough for us to have brought him, to have set the stage for this great wonder, to have given love its opportunity. We would rather wait patiently on his will than ask impudently for something he may not will to give. Perhaps our modesty will supply for our unworthiness." I think of the case of Peter, too, weeping after his great fall, with no express words of prayer, and leaving me no doubt about his pardon.³⁶⁶

53. Learn from the Mother of our Lord herself a lesson of how great faith in his wonderful powers can be expressed with modesty. She shows us how modesty, avoiding all presumption, is an ornament to faith. "They have no wine," she said.³⁶⁷ How briefly and modestly she suggested a request her kindness had so much at heart! And thus you learn that in such circumstances it is better to make a gentle complaint than to insist on a right, better to give modest and gentle expression to the impetuosity of kindly anxiety than to speak in the tone of one who takes it for granted that the request must be heard. She did not speak out unhesitatingly and boldly before everyone: "Listen, Son, they have no wine. The guests are disappointed, the bridegroom is upset; show what you can do." This would not have been too strong an expres-

362. Lk 24: 28.

363. Martha and her sister, Mary. Jn 11: 1.

364. Jn 11: 3: "Lord, he whom you love is sick."

365. Wis 7: 27, Mt 6: 8.

366. Mt 26: 75; Mk 14: 72; Lk 22: 61-62.

367. Jn 2: 3.

sion, certainly, for her affection for those concerned. But this loving mother went privately to her Son, not testing his power but enquiring about what he wished to do. "They have no wine," she said. Could it be expressed more modestly and more trustfully? Her love was sure, her words earnest, her desires prevailing.³⁶⁸ If then his mother would not presume on her motherhood to ask in so many words for the miracle of the wine, could a lowly slave like myself, honored enough by being the slave of Mother and Son, dare to ask for such a thing as the life of one four days dead?

54. We read in the Gospel of two blind men who were cured. One had lost his sight,³⁶⁹ and other was born blind.³⁷⁰ To one sight was restored, to the other given for the first time. The one who lost his sight pleaded pitifully and merited marvelous mercy; but the mercy shown to the other appears more marvelous for he had never asked before receiving the gift of light from his Lord. Finally the former heard the words: "Your faith has made you whole;" but not the latter. We read of two recently deceased³⁷¹ and one four days dead being raised to life.³⁷² For one only, while she still lay in the house, was a plea made by her father, to the others it was the unasked-for gift of love.

55. So, if a similar case should arise—which God forbid—that one of our brethren should die the death, not of the body but of the soul, I, sinner though I be, would plead for him³⁷³ with my Savior with my own most earnest prayers and with the prayers of the brethren. If he returns to life³⁷⁴ we will have gained our brother.³⁷⁵ If we should not merit to be heard and he is borne out from among us—because, being dead, he cannot bear the company of the living, or because they cannot

368. Cf. O Asspt 10; OB 5:270; CF 26.

369. Mk 10:46-52; Lk 18:35-43.

370. Jn 9.

371. Jairus' daughter (Mt 9: 18-26; Mk 5: 22-43; LK 8:41-56) and the son of the widow of Naim (Lk 7:11-17).

372. Jn 11:1-44.

373. Bernard has "*pulsabo . . . Salvatorem*, literally "knock on my Savior," suggested by Mt 7:7.

374. Cf. Lk 15:24.

375. Mt 18:15.

bear his company—I will still do my duty as a mourner though I cannot now pray with the same confidence. I do not dare to say: “Lord come, and raise up our dead brother,” but to my fearful and anxious heart I continually repeat: “Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps, the Lord will listen to the desires of the poor and his ears will hear the preparation of their heart!”³⁷⁷ With special reference to one who is four days dead I will say: “Is your steadfast love declared in the grave or your faithfulness in perdition?”³⁷⁸ If he will, our Savior may, without warning and in an un hoped for way, meet us and, moved by the tears if not the prayers of the mourners, he may restore the dead man to the living³⁷⁹ or recall him from the very sepulchre,³⁸⁰ I count a man dead when, defending his sins, he slips down to the eighth step. “From the dead, as from one who does not exist, confession ceases.”³⁸¹ When he has passed the tenth step, the second after this, he is being carried away on the bier of reckless sin, he is expelled from the fellowship of the monastery. When he reaches the fourth of these last steps he is rightly said to be four days dead. Then a fifth step finds him hardened in sin, the grave closed over him.

56. God forbid that we should ever cease to pray for such men in our hearts even if we do not offer public prayers for them. St Paul prayed even for those whom he knew died impenitent.³⁸² For although they exclude themselves from the prayers of the faithful,³⁸³ they can by no means exclude themselves from our affections. If only they would be warned of their terrible danger when they realize that the Church does not pray for them in her liturgy when she prays confidently even for Jews, heretics and pagans. For on Good Friday when

376. Ps 9bis: 17.

377. Ps 87: 11.

378. Ps 87: 12.

379. Reference to the young man from Naim. See above, note 371.

380. An allusion to Lazarus.

381. Sir 17: 26.

382. 2 Cor 12: 21.

383. The “common prayer” or the prayers of the faithful are offered at the Eucharistic liturgy after the proclamation of the Gospel, the homily and the confession of faith, at the beginning of the part called the “mass of the faithful.”

she prays for each class of sinners by name, she makes no mention of the excommunicated.³⁸⁴

A CONCLUDING NOTE TO THE RECIPIENT

57. Well, Brother Godfrey, you will, perhaps complain that I have not given you exactly what you asked and what I promised. It looks as if I had described the steps of pride rather than those of humility.³⁸⁵ All I can say is that I can teach only what I know myself. I could not very well describe the way up because I am more used to falling down than to climbing. St Benedict describes the steps of humility to you because he had them in his heart; I can only tell you what I know myself, the downward path. However, if you study this carefully you will find the way up. If you are going to Rome who can tell you the way better than one you meet coming from there? He will describe the towns, villages, cities, rivers and mountains he has passed and as you go along you will meet and recognize them in the reverse order. So, we have described the stages of the downward road and you will see them as you climb up and down them better from your own experience than from the description of our book.

384. On Good Friday, when the central part of the mass, the re-presentation of Christ's saving death in the consecration of the bread and wine through the narration of the Lord's words from the Last Supper, is omitted, the other parts are more fully developed, especially the prayers of the faithful.

385. See above, *Retractation*, p. 25.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Note: For references to Sacred Scripture the abbreviations found in the Revised Standard Version are employed. Abbreviated references for the Works of Bernard of Clairvaux are listed separately below.

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| CF | Cistercian Fathers Series (Spencer, Massachusetts—Washington, D.C.: Cistercian Publications, 1970—) |
| EXP | William of St Thierry, <i>Exposition on the Song of Songs</i> . CF 6 (1970) |
| LSB | B. S. James, <i>The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux</i> (London: Burns & Oates, 1953) |
| OB | <i>Sancti Bernardi opera</i> . Ed. Jean Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957—) |
| PL | <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> (Paris, 1878—) |
| RB | <i>Sancti Benedicti Regula Monasteriorum</i> . Ed. E. Manning (Westmalle, 1962). English version, L. J. Doyle, <i>St Benedict's Rule for Monasteries</i> (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1948). |

ABBREVIATIONS FOR THE WORKS OF BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

- | | |
|-------|------------------------------|
| Abael | Ep de erroribus P. Abaelardi |
| Adv | S. in adventu domini |

Ann	S. in annuntiatione dominica
Asc	S. in ascensione domini
Conv	S. de conversione ad clericos
Csi	De consideratione libri V
Dil	L. de diligendo Deo
Div	S. de diversis
Ep	Epistola(e)
Gra	L. de gratia et de libero arbitrio
Hum	L. de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae
L	Liber
Miss	Homiliae super missus est in laudibus virginis matris
Mor	Ep de moribus et officibus episcoporum
I Nov	S. in domonica I novembris
O Asspt	S. in dominica infra octavam assumptionis beatae Mariae virginis
OS	S. in festivitate omnium sanctorum
Pent	S. in die sancto pentecostes
Pre	L. de precepto et dispensatione
QH	S. super psalmum Qui habitat
Quad	S. in quadragesima
S	Sermo (nes)
SC	S. super cantica canticorum
Tpl	L. ad milites templi (De laude novae militiae)
V Mal	Vita S. Malachiae

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