

Faculty of Theology
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**BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX'S LETTERS AND
THE ANATOMY OF A CLOISTERED MAN**
GENDERED IMAGERY IN LETTERS FROM THE FIRST
DECADE AS AN ABBOT

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Deo omnis gloria.

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the structure and meaning of gendered imagery in Bernard of Clairvaux's letter collection through a selection of letters that have been dated to the first decade of his career as an abbot. The main question to be answered is how Bernard talks about the monastic man living in a monastic community, using gendered imagery in his letters to abbots and monks, and which meanings are given to manhood and womanhood in the context of the collection of letters. The time frame of Bernard's first years as an abbot leads one to ask how the imagery is used to shape a monastic ideal. During his first decade as an abbot, Bernard had a growing network of influence, which among other things was kept up and expanded through the writing of letters. These letters and their role as an instrument of constructing and promoting a monastic ideal are the point of interest of this dissertation.

The focus is on the gendered theology presented in the text and the cultural and historical context in which it was produced. Medieval reality was pronouncedly tied to images, especially in the realm of religion and spirituality. Faith and images were indistinguishable from each other, with salvation being directly linked to the symbolic system of iconography. Bernard exemplifies the blurred lines of image, material reality, text and thought in his works, including the letters. The texts were written in a way meant to provoke a visual experience in the mind's eye of the reader. These images are accessible through the text, even for a researcher reading it outside of its immediate cultural surroundings. Bernard crafts the gendered imagery of the letters in context: it is built around the situation that the letter concerns, not the other way round. In his usage of gendered imagery, he focuses on influencing the reader in a way that would result in the desired interior sensual experience, which then would convert the reader on the path desired by Bernard.

Bernard's letters represent a fresh take on the meaning of manhood and womanhood. While at points Bernard leans on the tradition of male perfection, he often shows the reader the insecure father or the weak man and at the same time strengthens womanhood's positive and transcendental connotations through goddess-like figures and the affirmation of the profoundly feminine position of the bridal Body of Christ. At times, Bernard transmits gendered theological views that seem undecided but have been chosen for him by the earlier authors he relies on. This results in self-contradicting views in the letters. Womanhood does not solely stand for worldliness or fleshliness in the negative sense and manhood does not signify only goodness of spiritual heights: womanhood and manhood frequently alternate places between these positions without any definite outcome or fixed position in the reversals of the gender binary.

In previous research on Bernard's other texts, it has been proposed that he envisions salvation as participation in divine masculinized transcendence.

Based on the gendered theology in the letters, this is only half of the picture. The road to salvation that the letters propose equally involves participation in the divinized feminine flesh of the incarnated Christ. Masculinized transcendence and divinized feminine flesh both need to be present simultaneously in the right order and without mixing in the ideal monk aiming at eternity with God.

Human gendered reality is inherently behind the rhetorical use of gendered imagery. Belief in the incarnation and the resurrection changes the meaning of imperfect and mutable corporality in relation to the supernatural and immutable perfect God into a redemptive affirmation of fleshliness and womanhood. This results in the figures used to express the monastic ideal simultaneously having both masculinity and femininity, forming a differentiated unity of the two. These figures make visible the mystery of the marital union of humanity and divinity in Christ, the unity of the Christ-head and Church-body, which the monk should realize in his life as a monastic man.

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My journey with Bernard of Clairvaux began over a decade ago when his texts were proposed to me as a topic for my bachelor's thesis. I continued studying his texts in my master's thesis with ever-increasing awareness of the richness of the writings and how little I knew of them and the world they were written in. I was left thirsting for more. This dissertation is a result of an attempt to quench that thirst.

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ABBREVIATIONS

D-R	Douay–Rheims Bible
Ep. I	Ad Robertus, nepotem suum, qui de Ordine Cisterciensi descenderat ad Cluniacensem
Ep. II	Fulconi puero, qui postea fuit Lingonis archidiaconus
Ep. IV	Ad Arnoldum abbatem Morimundi
Ep. VII	Ad Adam monachum
Ep. XI	Ad Cartusienses et Guigoni priori
Ep. LI	Ad Haimericum cancellarium, unde supra
Ep. LXXII	Ad Rainaldum Fusniacensem abbatem
Ep. LXXIII	Ad eundem
Ep. LXXI	Ad eundem
Ep. LXXXVII	Ad Ogerium canonicum regularem
Ep. CXLI	Ad Humbertum Abbatem Igniacensem
Ep. CCCXXIII	Ad Innocentium papam
Ep. CCCXXX	Ad Innocentium papam
Ep. CCCXXXI	Ad Stephanum cardinalem et episcopum Praenestinum
Ep. CCCXXXIII	Ad G. Cardinalem
Ep. CCCXXXIV	Ad Guidonem Pisanum
Ep. CCCLIX	Ad eundem Coelestinum
Ep. CCCLXIII	Ad Orientalis Franciae clerum et populum
IFA I	In festo annuntiationis Beatae Marie Virginis. Sermo I. Sancti Bernardi opera omnia.
James	The Letters of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, translated by Bruno Scott James
RB	Regula Sancti Benedicti
VG	Vulgata Sixto-Clementina

1 INTRODUCTION—SEARCHING FOR MEANINGS OF GENDERED MONASTICISM

1.1 WHY AND HOW—THE APPROACH TO BERNARD'S LETTERS IN THIS STUDY

And I have said this, my son, not to put you into shame, but to help you as a loving father because if you have many masters in Christ, yet you have few fathers. For, if you will allow me to say so, I begot you in Religion by word and by example. I nourished you with milk when, while yet a child, it was all you could take.¹

How much better would it have been for these young men to have become saintly under the rule of a saint rather than to have been perverted by a pervert!²

These excerpts are from Bernard of Clairvaux's letters to young men who had deserted their post in monastic life in one way or another. Using himself as a canvas, Bernard shows the reader of his letters what it is to be non-perverted, rightly ordered and, simply put, good in the monastic context. In the process he adorns himself and the recipient with layers of gendered figures that reveal the monastic ideal he wants to shape in the reader.

When Bernard entered monastic life, he did so with a group of followers. After a while, he was made abbot of a new house, which in turn became the source of many daughter houses.³ He is considered to have been a groundbreaking figure in the monastic movement he was part of, either as a spiritual leader that attracted the masses to follow his way of monastic life or as a catalyst for the formation of an officially structured religious order after his charismatic leadership moved on to eternity.⁴ However one may interpret the exact role that Bernard played in the development of the Cistercian order, his influential position is undeniable. During his first decade as an abbot, Bernard had a growing network of influence, which among other things was

¹ Ep. I:10. Et haec dico, fili, non ut te confundam, sed ut tanquam filium charissimum moneam: quia etsi multos habeas in Christo paedagogos, sed non multos patres. Nam si dignaris, et verbo, et exemplo meo in religionem ego te genui. Nutrivi deinde lacte, quod solum adhuc parvulus capere poteris; daturus et panem, si exspectares ut grandesceres. James 1:10.

² Ep. II:7. O quam ordinatius ipse cum sancto sanctus efficeretur, quam cum perverso sanctus perverteretur! James 2:7.

³ See, for example, McGuire, "Bernard's Life and Works," pp. 26–29.

⁴ See, for example, Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution*, pp. xvi–xvii; Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*.

maintained and expanded through writing letters. These letters and their function as an instrument of constructing and promoting a monastic ideal are the point of interest of this dissertation.

The aim of this study is to analyze the structure and meaning of gendered imagery in Bernard of Clairvaux's letter collection through a selection of letters that have been dated to the first decade of his career as an abbot.⁵ The main question to be answered is how Bernard talks about the monastic man living in a monastic community by using gendered imagery in his letters to abbots and monks, and which meanings are given to manhood and womanhood in the context of the collection of letters. The time frame of Bernard's first years as an abbot leads one to ask how the imagery is used to shape a male monastic ideal: what do womanhood and manhood signify when read in the context of Bernardian monastic life and spirituality?

There are a great number of earlier studies on Bernard's texts, including his letters, with many takes from a gender-historical perspective as well. However, his letter collection as an independent work has received relatively little attention from the viewpoint of gender history. The letters have been referred to in widely cited works, like Caroline Walker Bynum's *Jesus as Mother*, but only in passing, and a detailed analysis on gendered imagery in the letters is still lacking. In addition, most research has focused on the feminine and womanhood in Bernard's texts. In this dissertation, the gendered imagery is looked at more holistically, taking into account the masculine as well, and the interplay between the two—in short, the whole gender system at work in the letters. The term “gender system” refers to the cultural structures and norms that define and produce what is considered masculine or feminine in a culture.⁶ The focus of this study is in the system of meanings attached to manhood and womanhood.

Bernard of Clairvaux was one of the most central ecclesiastical figures of his time, and thus he had a broad influence on theological—and especially monastic—thought in the Western Church and the European intellectual atmosphere both before and after his death. As Brian McGuire states in his introduction to *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, “Bernard is everywhere, for his life and writings are at the very foundation of Western culture and spirituality.”⁷ McGuire's statement might sound exaggerated at first, yet it is still probably not very far from the truth. Bernard's heritage not only stems from the texts carrying his name and is based on his authorship; as has been shown many times over, Bernard's—and other medieval authors'—writings are condensation points of Scripture, other authoritative Christian

⁵ *Lettere*. Ferruccio Gastaldelli, Ettore Paratore and Jean Leclercq. Opere di san Bernardo, 6.1–2. The translations of quotes from the letters have been taken from James, *The Letters of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, with some alterations for a more precise translation when necessary.

⁶ For further explanation of the term from one of its key developers, see, for example, Hirdman, *Genus*.

⁷ McGuire, “Introduction,” p. 17.

texts and antique classics.⁸ The text of the letters provides continuity to the tradition that Bernard had been ruminating on since birth. Through factors like his arguably innovative spirituality and rhetorical style, the content that was put down in writing due to his influence received canonized status along with his person, and thus it has been immortalized as a part of Western ecclesiastical and spiritual heritage.⁹

The focus of this dissertation is on gendered theology presented in the text and on the cultural and historical context in which it was produced. Research from the field of literature studies will be referred to and used in the process of analyzing the language and literary structures that form the gendered imagery, but the analysis will not be constricted to rhetoric, genre or linguistic notions. In practice, this means that rhetorical devices and literary structures will be acknowledged and analyzed when relevant for the analysis of gendered imagery in the text but will not be at the center of the presentation of the results of the study.

Direct quotes from the letters will be presented as an English translation to keep the clarity of expression intact and the reading experience fluent. The translations are from Bruno Scott James with my own modifications where needed for precision of meaning. I chose from the beginning not to do the translations myself: not being a Latinist by training or having English as my native tongue, I deemed it most suitable for the purposes of this study to resort to the aid of an existing translation to present my results in an understandable way.¹⁰ As noted above, I have modified James' translation where it does not convey the meaning of Bernard's texts accurately enough: James tends to be quite vague, especially when it comes to gendered language and imagery. The original text of direct quotes is found in the footnotes and is taken from the critical edition of Bernard's letters by Ferruccio Gastaldelli and Jean Leclercq.

The concept of imagery has come up in several titles of previous studies focusing on gender in the medieval context.¹¹ This has been a result of the notion of the generally blurred lines between text, vision and image in the medieval mindset, and the visual nature of human thought processes in

⁸ On Bernard's texts transcending their immediate historical surroundings, see Bruun, *Parables*, p. 6. On the influence of classical rhetoric in Bernard, see, for example, Engh, "Divine Sensations," pp. 53–54. Direct quotations from the Bible are taken from the *Vulgata Sixto-Clementina*. The English text used in the body text is from the *Douay-Rheims Bible*, which is a translation of the *Vulgata Sixto-Clementina*.

⁹ The most recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), for example, directly refers to Bernard of Clairvaux's texts several times.

¹⁰ During research done for my Master's thesis, I translated parts of Bernard's sermons on the Virgin Mary into Finnish. See Hakala, "Neitsyt, äiti."

¹¹ See, for example, Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Szell, *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*; McLaughlin, "The Bishop as Bridegroom: Marital Imagery and Clerical Celibacy." On marital imagery and cognition, see Engh, *The Symbolism of Marriage in Early Christianity and the Latin Middle Ages*. On the image of bishop in Bernard's later letters to Pope Eugene III, see Chapman, "Ideal and Reality."

general.¹² Medieval reality was pronouncedly tied to images, especially in the realm of religion and spirituality. Faith and image were indistinguishable from each other, linking even salvation directly to the symbolic system of iconography. Thus, the whole content of medieval intellectual activity received visual and pictorial form, where the abstract and corporeal were part of the same system of symbols.¹³ Hence, it is suitable to talk about imagery when it comes to reading medieval texts, including the letters of Bernard of Clairvaux. In his works, Bernard exemplifies the blurred lines of image, material reality, text and thought: it has been shown that the illustrations of the manuscripts available to him directly affected the textual content of his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and sermons on the Virgin Mary.¹⁴ His theological or spiritual ideas are often visual in nature, as one would gather from the surrounding culture.

Among others, Barbara Newman has used the expression “the mind’s eye” when writing about the medieval perception of read content, specifically feminine figures and how they appear to the reader in a vision-like manner. It seems that the texts were written in a way that was meant to provoke a visual experience of the mind’s eye in the reader.¹⁵ In this, Bernard is no exception. In her book *Metamorphosis and Identity*, Bynum describes his sense of the world as “visual and dialogic, not narrative or historical.”¹⁶ This probably has to do with the centrality of experience in his view of the relationship with God, where the inner senses—including the mind’s eye but also touch, smell and taste—play an important role.¹⁷ The experience of God as tangible and the fragrant images that Bernard’s texts guide the reader to have through the inner senses can be seen as an orthopraxis, a whole of repetitive practices following a certain model that aims at an experience of God. Mary Carruthers cites monasticism in general as an example of this kind of orthopraxis: its spiritual program induces a shared experience through meditation on sacred texts. Carruthers describes this as craft of thought, a monastic rhetoric that uses images as tools.¹⁸

¹² See, for example, Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 24–33; Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 4–5. On the visual nature of the human mind, see Engh and Turner, “Introduction,” especially p. 16. Engh and Turner refer to Turner, *The Origin of Ideas*; Fauconnier, “The Way We Think”; Lakoff, “Metaphors We Live By”; Turner, “The Literary Mind.”

¹³ Isoaho, “Methodology of the Historical Image Research in the Study of Medieval Sources,” pp. 58–59.

¹⁴ Reilly, “Bernard of Clairvaux and Christian Art,” pp. 299–303.

¹⁵ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 27–29. The expression is used as the title in Hamburger and Bouché, *The Mind’s Eye*, which explores the connections of art and theology in the Middle Ages.

¹⁶ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 161–62.

¹⁷ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 185–90; Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,” pp. 175, 177, 190–93; Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, p. 103. See also Engh, “Divine Sensations.”

¹⁸ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 1–5.

These images are accessible through the text, and also for a researcher reading it outside of its immediate cultural surroundings. Research of the past unavoidably includes reconstruction of it in one's imagination, using the sources as an access point to the foreign time and culture. In this sense, a scholar takes part in her mind in the imagery and hermeneutic process contained in the text.¹⁹ This is a mental space where the researcher can put herself in the middle of the world of the text. When the reading of the imagery happens in a different culture than the one where they were recorded in text, it is necessary to first train the eyes of the mind through intellectual work to see from the viewpoint of foreign cultural surroundings (in the case of this study, 12th-century monasticism in the specifically Bernardian context).

The richness of the combination of the earlier tradition and creative thinking that Bernard's letters are constructed on makes it almost impossible to come to a point where one could claim that an exhaustive reading has been reached. There is an endless world of meanings hidden behind the words and the images they create. This world that is contained in the text will be approached by focusing on letters that contain gendered concepts, whose meaning relies on corporeal imagery that the text draws up in the readers mind.²⁰ The gendered imagery will be looked at as a part of the theological, spiritual, anthropological²¹ and historical context in which the letters were written. In Bernard's case, the ways that concepts relating to manhood and womanhood are used in the letters inherently contain monastic connotations and are tightly linked to the monastic life he was immersed in. For example, the concept of abbot by definition arises from the gendered concept of fatherhood,²² which, while being spiritualized, could not exist as an idea without the human reality of fathering. The letters written to other monastics are thus a promising place to look for ways in which manhood and womanhood might be intertwined in an ideal of monastic life, which Bernard's letters from their part sought to promote.²³

This study continues in the tracks of previous research that has looked at Bernard's texts from the viewpoint of gendered language and imagery.

¹⁹ Isoaho, "Methodology of the Historical Image Research in the Study of Medieval Sources," p. 57. While this study does not purely rely on the methodology of historical image research, the viewpoint it offers has been useful in reading Bernard's letters as gendered imagery.

²⁰ See, for example, Engh, "Divine Sensations," p. 56. On imagery formed in the mind, Engh refers to Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p. 85.

²¹ Here anthropology is used to refer to views on the nature of humanity in the context of philosophical and theological thought.

²² The second chapter of *Regula Sancti Benedicti* begins with a definition of the abbot as a father who reflects the fatherhood of God: *Christi enim agere vices in monasterio creditur, quando ipsius vocatur pronomine, dicente apostolo: Accepistis spiritum adoptionis filiorum, in quo clamamus: Abba, Pater. RB:2.*

²³ On Bernard's monastic aims, see, for example, Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 195; Casey, "Reading Saint Bernard," p. 91.

Bynum's *Jesus as Mother* was among the first to open an in-depth analysis of the maternal imagery and feminized language of 12th-century spirituality, especially among Cistercian authors. She presents Bernard as one of the most prominent examples of the emergence of feminine imagery in the monastic context. She sees the femininity in 12th-century writing as a cultural trait specific to the century, as an innovation rather than just a repetition of the previous use of feminine imagery by earlier Christian authors.²⁴ Bynum's widely read and cited view of Bernard as a representative of a new style of gendered thought has made him the object of intense interest among scholars looking at the Middle Ages from the viewpoint of gender.

Bynum has since been also challenged in her interpretation of the usage of feminine language and imagery by Bernard and other 12th-century monastic men, especially her elaboration on the connections of womanhood and Christ's body.²⁵ Bynum's non-erotic reading of gendered imagery has been questioned as well.²⁶ Despite the critique, when it comes to reading Bernard's letters, Bynum's interpretive position is apt and seems to grasp Bernard's mindset somewhat accurately, especially in the light of her more recent works *Christian Materiality* and *Metamorphosis and Identity*, where she delves into the medieval mindset more broadly, often considering Bernard and contextualizing him in the wider framework of 12th-century religious thought.²⁷ Judging from these later takes on medieval religion, Bynum's earlier work on womanhood and the gender reversals of the male-female binary were a pathway to reach a larger picture of medieval thought, including a more accurate view of Bernard.²⁸

Shawn M. Kraemer's article "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux" has paved the way for deeper dives into Bernard's bridal imagery and the gender reversals in his writings, especially in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.²⁹ Line Engh's *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* has taken the analysis of the gendered figure of the bride in the *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum* to a more broad-spectrum and detailed level. Engh proposes, along the lines of Kraemer, that the bride in Bernard's sermons is not a woman but a man, a monk, who through identifying as the bride of the Song of Songs is invited to simultaneously assume and negate femaleness. Proceeding in the tracks of Bynum and Kraemer, she finds a

²⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 110–69.

²⁵ See, for example, Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 36. Engh refers to Aers, "Figuring Forth the Body of Christ: Devotion and Politics." For a similar critique as that of Aers, see Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 50.

²⁶ See, for example, Lochrie, "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies."

²⁷ Bynum, *Christian Materiality*; Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*. On materiality, see also her article "The Sacrality of Things."

²⁸ See, for example, pt. I, ch. 3, "A Monstrous Life," and pt. II, ch. 1, "Worldly Vomit and the Sweetness of Christ."

²⁹ Kraemer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux."

gender hierarchy in Bernard's thought in the *Sermones super Cantica*, where the hierarchically higher maleness comes to swallow the lower femaleness, ultimately making it vanish in a truly holy person.³⁰

As seen in the examples above, the focus has been more on womanhood and female figures, like the abbot as mother or the monk as bride, in gender-historical research of Bernard's works. The field has been influenced by a common line of development in gender studies: it started as women's studies with an emancipatory goal and has moved toward a more theoretical approach to gender as a concept.³¹ What is still lacking are studies that go more profoundly into the hermeneutic implications that manhood and maleness carry in a monastic context. The militaristic imagery in texts written for non-militant monastics or the manly monk hiding behind a façade of a female figure have been treated more from the viewpoint of lived masculinity or masculine identity, but not as much as a signifier for larger units of thought, like womanhood and femininity have in previous studies.³² This study aims to contribute to the correction of this imbalance in the readings of medieval texts from the viewpoint of manhood and masculinity.

The reasons behind using masculine imagery are probably more complicated and hermeneutically inclined than has been fully acknowledged before. Especially in the case of Bernard's letters, manhood is connected to the larger message of the letter collection.³³ In light of the aims of monastic life, for example, strengthening a monastic's personal identity as a man does not seem like a sufficient goal for texts like Bernard's letters to other men of religion, written to promote a monastic ideal with supernatural goals. The relevance of an effort to get to the personal experience and identity of people behind the letters through historical-critical research can be questioned as much as looking at the letters as mere literary constructions that are detached from the people of the time. Wim Verbaal has proposed that the 12th-century letter collections were not meant to transmit a factual account of events, but a "spiritual truth as a textual reality." This meant that the people behind the letters surrendered their limited personal experience to give voice to a larger-than-life spiritual truth.³⁴

³⁰ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 396–97.

³¹ Morgan, *The Feminist History Reader*, p. 4; Clark, *History, Theory, Text*.

³² For studies on masculine identities and masculinities in different social groups, see, for example, Smith, "Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith"; Heinonen, "Henry Suso and the divine knighthood"; Holt, "Between Warrior and Priest"; Cullum and Lewis, *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*; Hadley, *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*.

³³ On the editing process of 12th-century letter collections and the collection as a message of its own, see, for example, Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice"; Høgel et al., *Medieval letters*; Perelman, "The Medieval Art of Letter Writing: Rhetoric as Institutional Expression"; Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*.

³⁴ Verbaal, "Epistolary Voices and the Fiction of History," pp. 30–31.

What is sought after in this study are meanings of womanhood and manhood in an all-male monastic context and in writings that are by nature attached to actual male monastics and their lived realities. The focus of this study still is not on masculine identity or lived manhood in the monastic community. This being said, it is part of the letter as a literary genre to attach it to a recipient and their social context, which makes the people behind the text a part of its fabric. From the viewpoint of the gendered imagery produced in that setting, the content of the letters was born and consciously crafted in dialogue with the intended audience, whether that audience, the recipients, actually got to read the letter in its present form or not. The people behind the letters, including Bernard himself and those who were involved in the process of letter writing, cannot be reduced to mere literary instruments in the form of a letter.³⁵ The letters will be read assuming that the relationships between Bernard and the recipients of his letters were real, even though the letters themselves cannot be taken as true or exact accounts of past events.

The presence of figures in Bernard's works in whom feminine features are applied to a man, such as the abbot as a mother or the monk as a bride, makes it tempting to envision a non-binary gender structure where there would be more options than two. The possibility of the existence of a third gender category in the medieval gender system, which would have included both men and women in the celibate state, has been proposed in previous research as an explanation for the fluidity between the feminine and masculine in texts. For example, Jacqueline Murray reflects on this idea by comparing the Aristotelian-based medical views on sexuality as a continuum with two ends with the Christian view of man and woman as one flesh, according to the creation narrative of the second chapter of the Book of Genesis. How Murray justifies the idea of a third gender in the medieval context is the oneness of flesh of Adam and Eve in the creation narrative of Genesis mixing with the binary gender system of the antique.³⁶

The idea has been contested in the same volume by Ruth Mazo Karras, who opposes the idea of the existence of a third gender for medieval celibates. In her view, the celibate way of being was another form of living out manhood (or womanhood), not a distinct gender category. She sees the third (or more) gender(s) as an unnecessary addition in the medieval context.³⁷ Murray seems to consider celibate men as non-masculine—and consequently as figures on whom feminine features could be applied—and thus has need of an extra

³⁵ Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, p. 16. Although Kleinberg's book is about forming sainthood in the Middle Ages, his argument about the danger of looking at accounts of medieval saints' lives as mere perceptions is valid also in the case of Bernard's letters and their analysis: the letters also seek to construct a certain impression of people and events.

³⁶ Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," pp. 34–51.

³⁷ Karras, "Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt," pp. 52–53. According to Karras, the gender fluidity can be seen as fluidity of meaning within the binary system of masculine and feminine, instead of fluidity from male to female per se (or vice versa).

category for them, whereas Karras states that the celibate represented their own model of masculinity, which among other things was defined by the lack of sexual activity that ordinarily signaled manliness.³⁸

What Murray (and to some extent also Karras) seems to be missing in her interpretation is the ecclesiastical and sacramental context in which Bernard and his contemporaries lived. The versatile use of gendered images in Bernard's letters and medieval texts in general needs a more profound explanation, which goes beyond the surface of gendered language and arises from the inside of the reality that medieval religious men lived in. To get to the bottom of the matter, one must look into the medieval church's ecclesiological self-understanding of itself as the Body of Christ, among other theological factors that defined both thought and practice in 12th-century monastic life.³⁹

In light of Bernard's letter collection, despite its emotive content that presupposes the existence of an "I" behind the text, it would not be realistic to think that through it we could get to a true, exact impression of Bernard as a man, or his thoughts or emotions as an individual person. Instead, this study proposes shifting the focus from gendered identity to the meaning of gendered concepts as they are expressed in texts, especially when looking at expressions of manhood. While focusing on gendered imagery created by the text of the letters, the letters are not looked at from a purely textual viewpoint either, in the sense that they would form a world of meanings of their own that sustains itself in a vacuum independently from living people. The letter as a literary genre forces one to incorporate the surroundings where the text was born as an elemental part of the reading process.

Mette Bruun, for example, has approached Bernard's *Parables* from a textual viewpoint, focusing on its interior spiritual topography, exclusively concentrating on its textual world and looking at Bernard as an authorial, not a historical, figure.⁴⁰ One could take a similar approach toward Bernard's letters, especially when trying to look at gendered imagery without aiming to get to lived masculinities or femininities. This would not do justice to the letters as a means of communication between people, in Bernard's case specifically as instruments of influence of a young abbot with a growing reputation. Also, when reading the letters as imagery and building on the foundation of gender studies that questions the objective observer, one cannot dismiss the role of the researcher in the reading process and the forming of

³⁸ Karras, "Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt," p. 53.

³⁹ On the patristic foundations of 12th-century ecclesiological thought, see, for example, Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*. About the importance of taking religious aspects into account in medieval gender history, see Bitel, *Introduction: Convent Ruins and Christian Profession: Toward a Methodology for the History of Religion and Gender*.

⁴⁰ See Bruun, *Parables*, pp. 5–6. Bruun insightfully discusses historical scholarship that seeks to get to Bernard as a person and a spiritual character, referring to Heller, "Schriftauslegung und geistliche Erfahrung bei Bernhard von Clairvaux"; Köpf, "Bernhard von Clairvaux – Ein Mystiker?"; Dintelbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux. Leben Und Werk Des Berühmtesten Zisterziensers*.

meanings during it; there is dialogue between the text of the letters and the people of the time, as well as between the text and the person reading it here and now. The researcher positions herself as a co-spectator of the gendered imagery that is still accessible through the text of Bernard's letters.

There are already theological studies on the gendered concepts in Scripture and early Christian authors that provide knowledge on this whole of ideas. In her work on sexuality and authority in the history of Catholic theology, Monica Migliorino Miller shows how authority, as a concept referring to headship and being a source of creation, is tightly connected to masculinity and fatherhood in the gender system arising from Scripture and other normative Christian texts that were the sources of Bernard's monastic thought. When making her case for the connection of manhood and headship in the Christian tradition, Miller looks especially to Paul and his rabbinical understanding of the creation narrative of Genesis. According to the line of thought represented by Paul, God is a father who generates the created world, including Adam as the firstborn of humankind, from whom Eve was formed. Christ, as the new Adam, is respectively the source of the Church, Christ's body, which is the new Eve. This male authority, which is based on the idea of being a source of something or someone else, is applied both to Christ as the head and source of the female church and to God as the father-creator. Seen in the light of the Pauline tradition described by Miller, it would seem that the Rule confirms this way of gendering authority by stating that the abbot holds the place of Christ and reflects the fatherhood of God.

Strictly speaking, Miller's book does not fall into the category of historical studies, but it is still insightful for this dissertation project as a theological study that goes into much-needed detail on the meanings of womanhood and manhood in the works of Christian authors who were the sources of Bernard's religious thought. It also analyzes the use and meaning of gender in Scripture and how it has been used in the history of Christian theology, which is very useful for the study of gendered imagery in Bernard's letters that often arises from biblical texts.⁴¹ Here it is good to note that while Miller's analysis of gender in Scripture and works by patristic authors is mostly apt, the generalizations of the theological and interpretive implications of her findings are not totally in line with medieval Christianity, especially Bernard. For example, Miller comes to the conclusion that on the basis of Scripture, God's authority cannot be gendered as female in a theologically sound way in Christian thought. As will be shown many times over in the chapters to come, Bernard—a master in speaking Bible, so to say—frequently shows God as a female figure, tying this carefully to the larger frame of monastic theology.⁴²

⁴¹ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 58–64, 76–115. The use of the term “gender system” is my own addition: Miller seems to have made a choice not to use terminology connected to gender studies, or she reconstructs it to better fit her theological framework, talking, for example, about sexual gender instead of gender. See RB:2.

⁴² See Miller, pp. 88–101.

In her introductory article in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, Lisa M. Bitel argues that medieval gender history has many times fallen into the trap of a certain type of secularism, which has led to neglecting the importance of religious thought and practice when looking at the Middle Ages in the context of gender studies. She argues that gender and religion are inseparably linked: gender systems and ideologies never existed separately from the sphere of religion. Religion was an elemental part of the lives of medieval people and it permeated their entire existence. As Bitel also notes, Bernard's works are a prime example of the interplay between religious thought and gendered concepts.⁴³ Without the tools offered by a close scrutiny of religious ideas, the results of this study would be shallow and reach too partial a picture of the workings of 12th-century monastic gendered thought.

In the field of gender-historical studies on Bernard's texts, Krahmer's and Engh's work on his bridal imagery also examine masculinity and manhood on a hermeneutic level that includes a deep awareness of the centrality of theological thought and practiced religion. In their analysis, both look into whether the feminine in Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* is to be taken as appreciation of womanhood and actual women or not. Since they both conclude the negative, they consequently give a glimpse of the man at the core of the not-so-female-after-all figure presented in Bernard's texts. The gendered imagery that can be found in Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* or treatises like *De laude novae militiae* is present also in the letters, with womanhood and manhood often side by side in the same context, which makes the letter collection promising material for attempting to understand manhood as well as womanhood and their meaning in the monastic context. Medieval letters in general are highly varied in theological content, which makes them ideal objects of research for a study that aims to go beyond the surface of 12th-century religious culture.⁴⁴

When it comes to Bernard's gendered thought, a realistic⁴⁵ reconstruction may look twofold and often self-contradictory. Bernard's way of thinking in general has been characterized as a dialogue of black and white, where two opposites form a unity, a dialogical hybrid. Bynum has argued that Bernard knows no metamorphosis, where one thing would become another, but he rather represents hybridity, where opposites exist side by side in a dialogue with each other.⁴⁶ This tendency is also shown in his way of treating gendered concepts. Engh has argued that a twofold gender system is essential for its function as a depiction of spiritual life and salvation in Bernard's thought. In her view, womanhood and manhood form a hermeneutical hierarchy through which a monk is depicted to become Christ-like precisely through movement

⁴³ Bitel, "Introduction," pp. 6–10.

⁴⁴ Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources," p. 36.

⁴⁵ I use the word 'realistic' as referring to the philosophical realism behind the medieval experiences of the interior vision. See B. Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 30–31.

⁴⁶ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–62.

between the dichotomous levels. The hierarchical difference between the two is essential for the dynamics of the gendered imagery in Bernard's works.⁴⁷

In addition to theological aspects seen against the background of Bynum and Engh's analysis that Bernard's thought is dichotomous to the extreme, it is not justified to read Bernard's gendered theology from a decidedly non-binary viewpoint. There is no place for mixtures or neutrals in his mental space, especially on a hermeneutic level. The discussion on the gender system in the Middle Ages and the debate over definitions of celibate men and the gendered figures in their texts largely have to do with the focus on masculinity as an identity or a lived reality. In this study, the focus will be on the meaning of the gendered imagery born in a male monastic context rather than its possible implications for lived gendered identities. Combined with a methodological principle of reading the texts from the inside of their web of meanings, this makes theoretical definitions of gender categories, which are ultimately connected to lived femininities and masculinities of medieval agents and which arise from the present interest in gender identities, non-central.

Reading the letters by following their inner hermeneutic implications makes the appliance of gender-theoretical terms like binary or non-binary unnecessary: they are not a part of the language used by Bernard or his contemporaries. What can nowadays be called gendered thought in Bernard's letters is in practice concepts like mother, father, bride, marriage and soldier, which are often expressed through descriptions of corporeal humanity, either directly or in contrast to it. This study seeks to not force these concepts into categories where they, in their fluidity that arises from their own cultural surroundings, do not necessarily fit. Thus, a conscious choice has been made to not cling to the jargon of any specific school of thought, in order to avoid frames of thought that would be constricting when answering the research questions posed by this study.⁴⁸

The close reading of the letters not only enables a broader view of the gendered imagery in Bernard's texts but also a methodology of placing the researcher's gaze on the inside of the religious tradition that defined his life and surroundings.⁴⁹ This study does not seek to find the interior life and emotions of Bernard of Clairvaux or the reality of daily life in the monastery,

⁴⁷ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 5, 396–97. See also Engh, "Embodying the Female Body Politic: Pro-Papal Reception of Ephesians 5 in the Later Middle Ages."

⁴⁸ See, for example, Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, pp. ix–x. Kleinberg aptly explains the methodological choice of avoiding jargon in his study on medieval sainthood: "...while I found many theoretical 'systems' useful, and have used them in my work, I have not become a devotee of any of them."

⁴⁹ Mette Bruun, for example, has read Bernard's *Parables* from within its spiritual topography. See Bruun, *Parables*, p. 4.

however;⁵⁰ the close reading will rather be a dive into religious thought that ultimately arises from lived reality but has taken on a life of its own, also taking on new flesh in the mind of the reader.⁵¹ Instead of purely looking at texts and the ideas contained in them from the outside as a presumably anonymous and neutral academic spectator, this study seeks to scrutinize the starting points and sources of Bernard's gendered thought, assuming a shared humanity, and thus also assuming the existence of similar workings of the mind in both the 12th and 21st centuries.⁵²

This does not mean negation or ignorance of the real cultural differences between different times and surroundings, however. A modern-day person cannot claim to be able to navigate 12th-century sources and thought like a native of that culture; a scholar cannot claim to know exactly what and how a medieval man like Bernard would think and act. From the perspective of a shared humanity, this also means that the people behind medieval sources were as complicated and unpredictable in their motivations as modern-day people.⁵³ As Kleinberg states in his book on sainthood in the Middle Ages, "modern interpretations are not necessarily so alien to the 'native.'" By this he means that it is often not justifiable to assume that the motivation of a medieval person would be the furthest possible from a modern interpretation.⁵⁴ In addition, cultural and temporal differences include the possibility of providing a distance that enables one to read the sources in a way that both respects the culture where they were made and challenges the most obvious interpretation suggested by the textual source itself.⁵⁵ Seeking a balance between claiming full understanding of 12th-century thought and not being able to understand at all, this study thus arrives at what could be termed an empathetic reading of the sources,⁵⁶ a reading that seeks to walk on the same path with the people behind the text without illusions of time travel or total assimilation. This kind of dive into medieval thought has been done before, albeit without terming it so, in many studies, especially in the field of theology.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ In her book *From Judgement to Passion*, Rachel Fulton Brown talks about making a hermeneutic leap as a researcher. Although this book has provided valuable points for reflection, the current study does not seek to make a leap like Fulton, who tries to get a hold of medieval historical agents' emotions and experiences. See Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, pp. 15–19.

⁵¹ On interior sense experiences, see, for example, Engh, "Divine Sensations," p. 53.

⁵² See, for example, Turner, *The Origin of Ideas*; Engh, "Divine Sensations"; Engh, *The Symbolism of Marriage in Early Christianity and the Latin Middle Ages*.

⁵³ Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, pp. 17–19.

⁵⁴ Kleinberg, p. 19.

⁵⁵ See the references to Kleinberg above.

⁵⁶ See also Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*; Cvetković, *Seeking the Face of God*.

An understanding can be attempted through a thorough knowledge of the religious tradition that the texts were written in. For example, Michael Casey—a Cistercian himself—argues that a fellow Cistercian has the surest access to an accurate reading of Bernard’s texts because he lives out the continuation of the same tradition.⁵⁸ While this statement is true to some extent, as discussed above, there are always cultural and temporal differences when reading medieval sources in the present: there is probably never a completely unbroken continuation of culture and way of life that would enable a full understanding. In addition, a thorough understanding of any medieval text requires readings from multiple different perspectives. A reading by a monastic will surely provide valuable insight, but it can miss details that are more clearly visible for an outsider, or it can lead the follower of the same monastic tradition to assume the centrality of similar issues both then and now, which may not necessarily be the case.

The focus of this dissertation is to come to an understanding of the meanings that gendered concepts and the imagery built around them took in Bernard’s letters.⁵⁹ When it comes to knowing how to differentiate between the mind of the researcher and the world of ideas of the sources, the queer viewpoint in gender-historical research has usually aimed at deconstructing the lenses through which one looks at texts produced centuries ago in a different cultural environment,⁶⁰ which partially flips the focus from the historical source or agent to the person reading the text at the moment. This has been a necessary move to reveal the layers of thought that prevent a scholar from looking at gendered ideas in medieval texts objectively or neutrally, and it has shown that total detachment from oneself as a reader is a sheer impossibility. Taking an intellectually empathetic approach, seeking to look from the inside, can bring a modern-day reader to a similar place as a queer reading would, where the reader pushes aside the cultural layers that have accumulated during the centuries between the 12th and the present.

In her book *The Boundaries of Charity*, an extensive study on the concept of charity in Cistercian monasticism during the ecclesiastical reform of the 12th century, Martha G. Newman argues that an analysis of the religious culture of a certain group can reveal what she terms “webs of significance.” These webs are shared meanings between individuals belonging to a group, like a monastery or a monastic tradition.⁶¹ Among other gendered imagery, marriage

⁵⁸ Casey, “Reading Saint Bernard,” p. 63.

⁵⁹ For mental imagery and monastic thought, see, for example, Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 1–5. Carruthers specifies that in her book she is not so much interested in hermeneutics, which she defines as finding valid interpretations, as in the cognitive work of meditation and monastic rhetoric. Carruthers’ perspective has still been a source of academic inspiration for this study. Pranger’s *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought* also approaches Bernard’s monasticism from an interiorly visual viewpoint.

⁶⁰ On queer reading, see, for example, Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies.”

⁶¹ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 7.

can be considered a web of significance with shared meanings among monastics. David D'Avray connects a similar idea of a web of meanings to the gendered concept of marriage and how it is used as a religious metaphor in medieval texts; he calls the union of man and woman in this context “a tight web of close logical reasoning.” According to D'Avray, marriage is not completely detached from lived marital lives when used to depict religious ideas, being firmly rooted in and connected to actual human reality in non-obvious and complex ways.⁶²

D'Avray and Leclercq's view that the use of marriage to describe religious life has a positive view of human marriage as its basis has been contested in a recent article by Philip L. Reynolds, who has written on marital symbolism in medieval Christianity and suggested that marriage as a pure analogy does not necessarily require similarity between the direct meaning of the text and its spiritual interpretation (also in the context of Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, for example). In this question, the current study tends more toward D'Avray and Leclercq. Even though it can be said, as Reynolds argues in defense of his position, that there was a cultural segregation between religious men and laypeople which enabled the use of marriage as a spiritual analogy in the context of monastic life, the religious man could never segregate himself from his nature as a corporeal human being.⁶³ While marriage is used analogically in Bernard's letters, its sense as a direct comparison to human reality is usually present in the imagery, and this also holds true in the case of other kinds of gendered imagery. This is highlighted by understanding letters as a genre: the letters were motivated by events such as a corporeal person moving physical location from one place to another (for example, from a cloistered environment to different surroundings with more sensual stimuli). Thus, the gendered imagery used in Bernard's letters cannot be divorced from the corporeal existence of a monastic man; the imagery is not just based on immaterial ideas but rooted in the flesh, also on a hermeneutic level.⁶⁴ The monk could reject real life marriage, but not existence in a male body.

Although terminologically unconventional, the gendered imagery in Bernard's letters can be thought to represent a hermeneutic bridge. Newman describes Cistercian biblical hermeneutics as an outcome of 12th-century textual culture, where writings served as a bridge between reality created by God and an individual's experience.⁶⁵ Similarly, gendered issues depicted in text are tangible bridges between the seen and the unseen, attached to the material world and concerning every human being on a personal level of experience. Gendered concepts like marriage seem to function as a bridge not

⁶² D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 10. D'Avray refers to Rincón, Saldon & Tejero, *El Matrimonio, misterio y signo*.

⁶³ Reynolds, “Conjugal and Nuptial Symbolism in Medieval Christian Thought,” pp. 63–64.

⁶⁴ This is also suggested in the introductory article of the same volume. See Eng and Turner, “Introduction,” pp. 17, 25–26.

⁶⁵ M. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 2.

only between the individual and the world, but also between the natural and supernatural. Wim Verbaal has described 12th-century textual culture as a means to form a bridge between (what in the present day would be called) factual reality and spiritual truth, an ideal reality that was considered more perfect and thus more real in medieval thought.⁶⁶ Through gendered concepts, things divine, hidden and intangible are made visible and tangible to the mind of the reader. Following Newman's idea of Cistercian biblical hermeneutics, it is possible that with a methodology aiming to look from the inside of the mental web of the text one may arrive on a bridge that stands between the researcher and the world of the object of research, which in the case of this study is the monastic world of gendered meanings expressed in writing in the form of letters.

Authoritative scholars on Bernard like Jean Leclercq have traditionally seen gender as a non-central factor in his texts. The feminized language has been attributed to linguistic reasons as well as similar expressions in the earlier tradition, like the feminine gender of the Latin words *anima* or *ecclesia*, with the femaleness itself remaining rather meaningless for the function of the symbol.⁶⁷ This claim has since been justifiably challenged, in a pioneering way by Caroline Walker Bynum and more recently by Line Engh, among others.⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that the gender of Latin words seems many times to be quite unrelated to their real-life meaning and application. The names of virtues are usually of feminine gender. For example, the word *fortitudo* (f., 'strength') is a third-declension feminine, as are all words that end in *-tudo*. Moreover, *virtus* (f., 'strength' or 'virtue'), a quality often connected to manhood in medieval thought, is also feminine. Following the logic of the grammatical argument, *virtus* could then be feminized and presented as a female figure in Bernard's texts similarly to *caritas*, *fortitudo* or *sapientia*, which are given in *Women and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* as examples of feminine descriptions of the mystery of God.⁶⁹

However, this kind of a figure of feminine *virtus* is not to be found in Bernard's works. As a word, *virtus* denotes manliness quite strictly, despite its grammatical gender. This has a long tradition behind it. In the language used in the time of the Roman Republic, the use of *virtus* was avoided when describing women. It would have sounded odd applied to a woman, because of its root *vir*. Instead, the pre-Classical Latin writers would resort to *fortitudo*,

⁶⁶ Verbaal, "Epistolary Voices and the Fiction of History," pp. 30–31.

⁶⁷ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 3. Engh refers specifically to Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France*. Engh points out that D'Avray also ends up in a similar stance as Leclercq on the issue; see D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 202. On the history of the linguistic argument and the absence of equivalent male personifications of gendered concepts, see Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*; Engh, "Embodying the Female Body Politic: Pro-Papal Reception of Ephesians 5 in the Later Middle Ages."

⁶⁹ Leclercq, *Women and St Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 111.

a word that was otherwise used only rarely, when wanting to describe a strong woman.⁷⁰ Fortitude, strength of character, or wisdom denote things of a manly nature almost as strongly as *virtus*, despite their being feminine in terms of grammar. Thus, it is likely that grammatical gender plays only a partial and quite minor role in gendered concepts and the personalized figures built around them. It is rather the nature of womanhood and manhood themselves that is central, making them vital to the meaning of these concepts. Against this background it is worthy to consider that concepts with a manly meaning, like *virtus*, do not appear at the level of simultaneous abstraction and personification like the more clearly feminine ones, like *caritas* or *sapientia*.⁷¹

As Engh states, when bypassing the profoundly gendered nature of figures like the bride or the mother—or the soldier, for that matter—one also misses the deeper meanings that gender holds in this imagery, which in the end are quite central for its dynamics. For example, Engh explains how the male-female binary functions as a way to depict the boundaries between Heaven and Earth, divine and human, and the crossing of those boundaries in Christ in the person following Him.⁷² Thus, on the level of meaning, womanhood and manhood are at the very core of Bernard’s view of spiritual life and progression in it; his monastic theology is by no means gender-neutral.

The importance of gendered concepts and the centrality of their significance in Bernard’s religious thought are due to their being born through living and observing human life. Gendered imagery is something that the 12th-century mind could grab onto, to understand the world of God who incarnated and lived a human life. The main reason behind the usage of marital imagery, for example, is the centrality of marriage as a symbol for the life of the Church as Christ’s body and the dynamics of the Holy Trinity in medieval thought. As D’Avray points out, marriage as a symbol for the union of Christ and the Church was not just a subjective spiritual parallel, but the two were connected “by a tight web of close logical reasoning” in the context of medieval theology. D’Avray notes that the positive view of human marriage was essential for the functionality of the religious marriage and family metaphors; otherwise it would have been impossible to describe an ideally devoted monk as the bride of Christ, because this image would not have held positive connotations in the first place. The marital imagery thus had its basis in actual human marriage and the thought and practices connected to it. Negativity toward marriage was not mainstream but the attitude of marginal groups, like the later Cathars,

⁷⁰ McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, p. 62.

⁷¹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 36–37. Newman calls the female figures she describes as goddesses as Platonic or Realistic, referring to their philosophical background.

⁷² Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 4–5. See also Damrosch, “Non Alia Sed Aliter.” Damrosch reads Bernard’s female bride as a mash-up of feminized metaphysics and politics, with womanhood standing for personal poverty and being left out of public society, which Bernard wants to relate to as a monastic.

whose teachings were eventually rejected by the Catholic orthodoxy.⁷³ The transference of bridal imagery to the supernatural level in Bernard's texts has its roots in earlier Christian writers' works, like Smaragdus of Saint Mihiel.⁷⁴ Leclercq brings up especially Fulgentius of Ruspe from the 6th century, who in his turn drew influence from Ambrose and Augustine. All these writers saw marriage as a symbol not only for the relationship of Christ and the Church, but also for God as Trinity.⁷⁵ Without a careful consideration of this doctrinal context of the religious gendered imagery, their interpretation will lack depth and miss the core meaning.

An aspect of lived experience that enabled the vivid use of gendered language in Bernard's time included the changes that occurred in society and affected the process of becoming a monk. By Bernard's time, the monastery school system had made way for the rise of cathedral and urban schools. This, combined with the dissolving of the practice of giving children to monasteries as oblates, contributed to the monks' minds being more receptive to understand imagery and symbolism taken from the world, like love between a man and a woman. New recruits for religious orders had to be at least 16 years old and schooled in a cathedral school before entering religious life, which meant that they had much more experience of the world outside of the monastery than their previous oblate counterparts. As was the case with Bernard himself, a growing number of men who were young adults had a conversion experience that led them to enter monasteries or found new communities after a life started in the world.⁷⁶ For them it was easier to understand the love of God through comparisons to human love.⁷⁷ As Engh points out, when used as depictions of spiritual life, the romantic experiences that many of the monks had had before entering monastic life served as a common basis for shared religious imagery. This resulted in an upsurge of marital and gendered language being used in a monastic spiritual context, of which Bernard's treatment of the bridal imagery of the Song of Songs and its being applied to an individual male person is a good example.⁷⁸

While this study draws inspiration and previous findings from the field that is often called gender *history*, the aim here is not to reconstruct a narrative process or track down change as the word 'history' implies;⁷⁹ the focus is on

⁷³ D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 10, 64–65, 72.

⁷⁴ See, for example, La Corte, "Ninth-Century Sources for Twelfth-Century Reformers," p. 280.

⁷⁵ Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage*, p. 80. Leclercq notes that marriage and family were central in Trinitarian theology until the 12th century, after which the scholastic theologians were not keen on using these metaphors, because, according to Leclercq, they tended to devalue the role of women in general.

⁷⁶ Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution*, p. 101.

⁷⁷ Bredero, *Between Cult and History*, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Engh, *Gendered Identities*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Wim Verbaal sees the change from the thematic disposition of the letter collection in the initial redaction B to the more chronological order of the later redaction L as a shift to narrative. I do not seek

the image of womanhood and manhood portrayed in the letters and which meanings it assumed in its historical and spiritual context. In this sense, the study does not produce a history of either but an analysis of the meaning of gendered concepts in Bernard's letters.⁸⁰ The meanings are not unrelated to histories, narrative processes and lived lives, but a letter collection like Bernard's is probably not able to give information on events, experiences or personal thoughts with the level of accuracy that a true account of history (in modern terms) would require.⁸¹

1.2 THE LETTERS

1.2.1 LETTERS AS A LITERARY GENRE AND BERNARD AS A LETTER ARTIST

One might have the impression that letters are not a literary work in the same sense as, for example, Bernard's collections of sermons are, but just separate pieces of correspondence bunched up together as a collection for safekeeping. For Bernard's letters and other 12th-century letter collections, however, this is not the case. They were consciously edited literary works that followed the pattern of previous examples in the genre and had a certain message to convey as an edited collection, as any other writings produced at the time.⁸² Even though the first version of Bernard's letter collection was only made after his first ten years as an abbot, the chosen time frame of this study, the edited collection and the multiple editing processes it has gone through, had a definite influence on the content of each individual letter under analysis here. The letters under closer inspection are looked at as cases of their own, but the literary genre of letter collections and its influence on their structure and content must be taken into account for an accurate reading of them.

That the letters are addressed to a recipient might lead a present-day reader to take them as private messages, but medieval letters were rarely meant only for the eyes of the named recipient.⁸³ Bernard's individual letters were initially written to be read by the group of people that the recipient represented and,

to necessarily follow that narrative. See Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice," p. 120. For the definition of history as an explanation of change, see Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ On not using texts as evidence for something else, see, for example, Bruun, *Parables*, 5.

⁸¹ For the nature of 12th-century letter collections as intentionally fictional accounts of a person's life, see Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice"; Verbaal, "Epistolary Voices and the Fiction of History."

⁸² Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 2; Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard," p. 128; Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice," pp. 103, 106. Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources," pp. 46–47. See also Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, pp. 41–71. Niskanen refers to Constable's staple work on medieval letters; see Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*.

⁸³ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 3.

when edited into a collection, further modified to better suit an even wider audience. Among other things, this entailed matching it to previously known and widely read letter collections. Verbaal has proposed that Bernard's letter collection was consciously constructed to serve as a response to the well-known, highly influential collection of Hildebert of Lavardin, the archbishop of Tours.⁸⁴

Due to the development of medieval societal structure, the letter became an increasingly public, rhetorically constructed and highly regarded form of communication.⁸⁵ Samu Niskanen has proposed that one of the reasons for the rising popularity of letters as a literary form in the 11th and 12th centuries was the intellectual interest in the individual. Spirituality that highlighted the role of personal experience combined with increasing interest in the concept of friendship, along with societal reasons, may have influenced the improved quality and greater quantity of letters.⁸⁶

An essential part of a letter was an oral message attached to it. While the written letter was rather public, the message delivered through the person bringing it to its destination was spoken privately, and it probably contained the substance of the issue that the letter was concerning. The content of the message being private, it could be rather direct and different from the missive that was easily accessed by anyone who got ahold of it. Thus, the messenger had a central role in the delivery of the whole message and had to be trustworthy, as well as physically resilient to be able to endure a potentially long trip. In Bernard's case, this was a trusted lay brother.⁸⁷ The spoken word was also the initial form of the written part of the message, for they were usually dictated to secretaries (*notarii*).⁸⁸ Consequently, the process of the letter being put into writing and delivered to the recipient included at least three people: the person the letter was from, the secretary and the messenger. All of these influenced the final content of the whole message. Especially the secretary, who wrote the missive, had a lot of influence on choice of words, structure and other factors of expression besides the named author of the letter, to the extent that it is impossible to define clearly what comes from

⁸⁴ Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice," pp. 109, 116–17.

⁸⁵ Perelman, "The Medieval Art of Letter Writing," pp. 98–100.

⁸⁶ Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, p. 42.

⁸⁷ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 3; Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard," pp. 130–31; Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, pp. 58–59. Niskanen adds that the concept of silent reading was not yet very popular in the 12th century, which made the role of the messenger even more central.

⁸⁸ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 4. Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard," p. 129. Leclercq notes on the basis of Letter 387 that Bernard probably had a whole team of secretaries in his service who were supervised by a head secretary, most prominently Geoffrey of Auxerre and Nicholas of Clairvaux in the later years of Bernard's abbacy in 1145–1151. For a critical edition of the letter collections of Nicholas, see Wahlgren-Smith, *The Letter Collections of Nicholas of Clairvaux*.

whom in a letter.⁸⁹ Following this, it can be said that 12th-century letters and letter collections were more of a group effort than a solo performance.

In addition, the scribes usually had in their use what one might call a card index of ready-written letter templates that could then be applied, according to the intended recipient.⁹⁰ These model letters were an outcome of the literary genre, which had become more and more established as a formal and public means of communication since the eleventh century. Bernard and his *notarii* were most probably learned in the *Ars Dictaminis*, a genre of rhetorical guidebooks of letter writing whose contents had their origin in the 11th century in the politically important Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino. The *Ars Dictaminis* literature was born for the needs of society at the time, for communication between people with different social statuses and separated by a great distance. While based on antique predecessors of rhetoric theory, the principles of the “art of letter writing” answered the altered, more bureaucratic needs that letters had in the 11th and 12th centuries.⁹¹ In the antique the main means of rhetorical influence was a speech given among equals, but medieval letters often were not sent between people of the same social rank. Thus, guidelines were needed on how to address a recipient from a lower or higher social class. This came to be a central feature of medieval letter writing. A lot of emphasis was put on the *salutatio*, the greeting in the beginning of the letter, where the status of the writer in relation to the recipient was expressed. The texts on letter writing divided letters into three categories on the basis of the social rank of the recipient: *sublimis*, *stilus altus* or *grandilocus* (exalted), *stilus medius* or *mediocris* (medium) and *stilus humilis*, *tenuis* or *exilis* (low, meager). The category guided the style, structure and content of the letter, especially the beginning *salutatio*.⁹²

The customary structure of 12th-century letters is also apparent in Bernard’s letter collection and will be analyzed when relevant as a factor behind the gendered imagery conveyed in the text. Some of the letters chosen for the focus of this study are constructed according to the letter-writing manuals and exemplary letters that Bernard and his secretary probably had in their use. Some seem to be more informal but still follow certain monastic patterns in content and the order of presenting different themes. While the aim of this dissertation is not to get into Bernard’s personal thoughts or experiences per se, the influence of a person or persons behind the contents of the text cannot be completely excluded. As always with medieval texts, the

⁸⁹ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 4; Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, p. 65.

⁹⁰ Leclercq, “Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard,” pp. 129–130.

⁹¹ Perelman, “The Medieval Art of Letter Writing: Rhetoric as Institutional Expression,” pp. 97–98, 102–103; Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, p. 49.

⁹² Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, p. 49; Perelman, “The Medieval Art of Letter Writing,” pp. 102–106; Ysebaert, “Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources,” p. 60.

final form that we have at hand today is a product of the interplay of the personal involvement of historical agents and other people involved in the writing and editing process, following the norms of literary conventions.

One of the literary conventions that affected the nature of 12th-century letter collections were new writing techniques enabled by awareness of the separateness of author and text. Verbaal has argued that the letter collections of the first half of the century were initial ripples preceding the rise of fictional literature in the second half. The aim of the letter collections was not to depict events in a historically accurate manner but to create a world of possible realities, things that could happen or exist. The potential world created in the text was meant to work as a didactic tool to draw the reader in the fictive reality, in order to reform him; the text is autonomous from factual events and people, for the sake of taking the reader to a state they could be in.⁹³ This possible reality was as real in the 12th-century mind as what now would be called factual events, and in a sense even more real than the imperfect actuality of the material world. Verbaal argues that the “modern obsession with individual and factual truth blinds us to the spirituality that makes up the medieval concept of truth.” Medieval authors constructed this spiritual truth into textual realities like the letter collections, through which the reader had access to the spiritual world of truth built into it.⁹⁴ The author surrendered the limited voice of his own experience to the spiritual truth he was trying to verbalize.⁹⁵ In the case of Bernard writing to other monastics in the beginning of his career as an abbot, the letter was a means of molding the world of religious men to his liking and thus laying foundations for his authority. The building blocks under special attention in this study are gendered concepts and the imagery built around them.

The intention of conveying spiritual truths rings true in the case of Bernard’s letter collection as well, including on the level of the individual letters taken under closer inspection in this study. The collection as a whole was determined by the previous examples in the genre and molded into a different shape and size with each new version of the collection. The first version was compiled during Bernard’s lifetime under his own supervision. Containing seventy letters, it is usually dated before 1145. The second version, consisting of a couple hundred letters, is estimated to have been made only a couple of years later in 1147. The third version, made after Bernard’s death, fattened the collection to contain around three hundred letters.⁹⁶ In later

⁹³ Verbaal, “Epistolary Voices and the Fiction of History,” pp. 9–12.

⁹⁴ Verbaal, p. 30. For a similar interpretation of the workings of 12th-century monastic thought, see Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought*, p. 5. Pranger states, “What happens in the tropology is that in the believer’s mind biblical facts and data are interiorised so as to create and recreate a world in which the mysteries of faith, lifted out of their original place in history, coincide with the mental state, or, for that matter, development of the believer.”

⁹⁵ Verbaal, p. 31.

⁹⁶ Verbaal, “Voicing Your Voice,” p. 116.

centuries, even more letters were found and added to the collection by scholars up until the 20th century; in its current form, the collection amounts to 547 letters.⁹⁷

With each redaction, Bernard's collection not only took on additional letters but also changed in terms of its overall organization. While the first version was almost anti-chronological, the later versions took a turn in the opposite direction. According to Verbaal, this was to create a sense of narrativity and further continue the appliance of Hildebert's literary artifices.⁹⁸ Since this study does not aim to reconstruct a history of Bernard's gendered thought or recount the supposed narrative contained in the later chronologically ordered collections,⁹⁹ the letters chosen for closer analysis will be presented in a decidedly random order, which better reveals the structure of the gendered monastic theology.

1.2.2 THE SELECTION OF LETTERS

This study focuses on letters written for other religious men, both Cistercian and non-Cistercian, that are dated to the beginning of Bernard's years as the abbot of Clairvaux. Letters from this time largely focus on monastic issues, since to a great extent he was not involved in matters concerning the world outside of his immediate network of influence, compared to his later life.¹⁰⁰ Since the larger part of letters having to do with monasticism are the ones dated to Bernard's earlier career as an abbot, they are a fruitful ground for the search of a monastic ideal. Intriguingly, these letters are also strongly defined by their gendered content, which already gives a clue of the centrality of gendered imagery in the translation of the monastic ideal into a text that was meant to be read by other monastics. In the beginning of the dissertation project, I read and analyzed almost all the letters in the collection that are addressed to abbots and monks. Not wanting to make a general review of the whole collection but a detailed analysis of key representatives of the kind of gendered imagery found in it, I decided to narrow down the selection of letters to the present handful from the first decade of Bernard's abbacy.¹⁰¹ The time frame suits the purpose of focusing on the monastic ideal that Bernard is

⁹⁷ Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard," p. 133.

⁹⁸ Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice," pp. 117–19.

⁹⁹ The Leclercq et al. and the Gastaldelli et al. editions used in this study are ordered according to the chronological structure of the posthumous (Pf) letter collection. See Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard."

¹⁰⁰ Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard," p. 134. For Bernard's later involvement in issues outside of his immediate monastic surroundings, see, for example, Mews, "The Council of Sens (1141)." Mews looks at Bernard's arguments against Abelard in the context of the Council of Sens through letters addressed to Pope Innocent II.

¹⁰¹ For a review of the whole collection from the viewpoint of spiritual direction, see Voigts, *Letters of Ascent*.

constructing through gendered imagery, since a large part of letters from this period are addressed to other monks and abbots. The situations that the letters from 1116 to 1127 are connected to are characterized by his growing, but not obvious, authority as a monastic head.

Bernard's other texts and corresponding works from the named recipients of the letters, like letters sent to Bernard or texts otherwise connected to the same situation as the letter under analysis, have been consciously left to play a supporting role in the analysis of the gendered imagery. The focus of this study is on the reality created by the letters themselves and the impact that it was intended to have on the readers. The intention here is not to engage in comparative analysis between the different texts connected to the situations that Bernard's letters concern, but to concentrate on the gendered theological and visual trip that the readers were invited to take through the text. It is useful to repeat here that the letters were tightly linked with their surroundings, and the people and happenings that they were connected to; this study does not seek to abandon the notion of historical agents being behind the texts. The chosen focus of the study will not be on finding out what really happened between Bernard and the monastic men he was writing to, however. If this were the case, a close reading of other sources in addition to the letters would be relevant and essential. Comparisons between letters in Bernard's collection itself will be made for the purpose of pointing out patterns of thought, topoi and similarities of expression when analyzing the gendered imagery and its meaning, to find out whether the meaning of gendered figures changes according to the situation.

There are not many letters that were included in the collection from Bernard's first years as an abbot: Jean Leclercq, for example, counts only four that can be certainly dated between 1115 and 1123. At that point in his life, Bernard was mostly staying in Clairvaux and did not have as active correspondence as he later did, due to his involvement in various issues outside of his own community.¹⁰² Dating of the letters always leaves some margin for error, since it is deduced from the recipient and the content of the text, and then matched from other sources to what is known to have happened at a certain moment. I follow the dating of the Gastaldelli et al. edition of the letter collection, which represents one of the latest takes on the dating of Bernard's letters. The dating is discussed further if relevant to the content of an individual letter and its analysis.

The study as a whole is structured into thematic chapters in which the letters are looked at in a chronological order. This order of presentation of the letters reflects the structure of the second (L) and third (Pf) versions of the collection as it was edited by Bernard and his secretaries during his lifetime and afterwards.¹⁰³ As Verbaal has argued, the first version of Bernard's letter

¹⁰² Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard (II)," p. 292.

¹⁰³ Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard," p. 135. See also Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice," p. 117.

collection (B) was intentionally ordered in an almost anti-chronological manner to serve rhetorical efficiency rather than historical accuracy. The point of the letter collection was not initially to give a timeline of the author's life and thought. The more chronological structure was introduced in the later, more extensive versions, in order to transcend the image of the progression of his life through the structure of the collection.¹⁰⁴ Consequently, the aim of this study is not to get to the beginnings or to track down the development of Bernard's monastic thought in a "what did he really think" type of a way, despite the choice to look at letters with early dates, but rather to get to the root of the theological framework that defines Bernard's gendered monastic thought and the situations in which he was constructing his authority as an abbot through the gendered imagery. These foundations of Bernard's monastic project are more visible in the earlier letters due to their domestic context, where Bernard was able to delve into the depths of his monastic ideal quite freely.

The first part, *The Abbot's Anatomy*, looks at three cases concerning other abbots. Letter 11, addressed to Guy I of Grande Chartreuse, is a rather long writing that was later used as a part of the treatise *De diligendo Deo*. It has been chosen as an object of closer reading for its rich content in gendered imagery, which is connected to its being an outline of the monasticism represented by Bernard. By its thematic structure, the analysis of the letter's gendered imagery serves as an introduction to the rest of the letters looked at in this dissertation: the themes, figures and concepts that are touched on in the letter to Guy come up in the others as well. Guy, coming from a different monastic mindset, is used as a surface on which to project the ideal monastic man.

The second case is that of Rainald, a newly appointed abbot of Foigny, a house founded from Clairvaux. Letters 72, 73 and 74 are connected to Rainald's troubles as an abbot and are thus quite clearly linked to each other. The correspondence to one of Bernard's own flock provides material on the abbot's fatherhood, his authority and the connections of these with manhood.

Finally, the chapter on abbots digs into Letter 78 to Suger, the abbot of the significant monastic house of St. Denis. The letter is seemingly connected to some changes in the life of St. Denis made by Suger, but in reality, it also comments on the political situation and characters surrounding the abbot. The letter revolves around an ideal man of the church who is described in highly militaristic terms. The selection of these letters allows one to see possible differences between the language and imagery used for Cistercian and two different kinds of non-Cistercian abbots, and gives a glimpse of Bernard's monastic ranking system, indicated through things as either womanly or manly.

Through analyzing Letter 2 addressed to Fulk and Letter 1 to Robert, the second chapter focuses on monks. Both letters have to do with a young monk

¹⁰⁴ Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice," pp. 116, 119.

who has left his community: Fulk left a Canon Regular house and Robert Bernard's own Clairvaux. A similar situation combined with a different monastic background draws out the ideal monk with his gendered composition. Even though both monks were related to Bernard, their relationship to him was different: on top of being a relative, Robert was one of his own monks, while Fulk was from a different branch of monastic life and not directly under Bernard's abbatial authority. Thus, in the letter to Robert the relationship between monk and abbot takes a more central place. The justification for Bernard's interference in Fulk's situation was probably due to their being related by blood. Both letters share the same theme of giving into worldliness and comfort and how these are related to things of the flesh.

The last main chapter delves into the monastic community as a family, examining the crisis of Morimond and two letters connected to the situation, Letter 4 to the abbot Arnold and Letter 7 to the monk Adam. Abbot Arnold had begun an uncalled-for pilgrimage to Jerusalem with a group of his monks, which was considered quite scandalous, if judging only from the amount of letters that deal with the issue in the letter collection: there are six letters addressed to the refugees, the local bishop and the pope.¹⁰⁵ Arnold's endeavor inspired Bernard to define, through references to Adam and Eve and the reality of human marriage, the limits of obedience and the abbot's position as a caretaker and representative of Christ. The question of monastic stability (*stabilitas loci*) comes up in a situation where a whole group of monks has seemingly violated it due to Arnold's pilgrimage project. The theme brings up an interplay of manhood and womanhood in the monastic ideal that Bernard defends in the context of the scandalous event.

¹⁰⁵ Ep. IV, V, VI, VII, CCCLIX.

2 PART I: THE ABBOT'S ANATOMY

2.1 CHAPTER 1: THE BRIDAL PATRIARCH—LETTER 11

2.1.1 GUY OF GRANDE CHARTREUSE

Bernard's Letter 11 to the prior Guy I has been dated to the year 1116,¹ making it possibly the earliest in the collection. Guy was the head of Grande Chartreuse, the main house of the then-forming Carthusian order. Bernard had become the abbot of Clairvaux a year before the writing of the letter.² It is a theological treatise and a tribute to the recipient, not a letter written as a reaction to an acute situation needing Bernard's attention. It was later, in the beginning of the 1130s, incorporated into a more extensive treatise known as *De diligendo Deo* (On Loving God).³ The letter is fairly long and rich in theological content, which reflects its treatise-like function. The central topic of the letter is charity and how it is rightly ordered. Especially as a part of *De Diligendo Deo*, Letter 11 significantly affected subsequent discussion on charity.

Bernard's letter has been interpreted as a response to Guy's *Meditationes*, which he had sent as a gift to Bernard. The *Meditationes* is one of Guy's main works. The Gastaldelli et al. edition places the early dating of the letter precisely in relation to its correspondence to the content of the *Meditationes*: Bernard seems to be referring directly to Guy's work by mentioning "burning meditations" in the beginning of the letter.⁴ The exchange of spiritual content through correspondence signals a need for the two monastic leaders to form a connection. The *Meditationes* considers monastic life in the form of short reflections. Because of the context of the letter as a response to a major spiritual work of Guy I, it is useful to begin by briefly looking at the spirituality of the Grande Chartreuse and its leader. This will help for an understanding of the case-specific way in which gendered imagery is used in the letter and how Bernard is aiming to influence the intended audience of the text.

The Carthusian order can be seen as a part of the same monastic wave of renewal as the Cîteaux movement.⁵ The Benedictine Rule defined both of these forms of monasticism, although the Carthusians to a lesser extent than the Cistercians. What bound Cistercians and Carthusians even closer together was taking distance from the Cluny style of monastic life and interpreting the

¹ This follows the dating of Gastaldelli et al. edition.

² See, for example, McGuire, "Bernard's Life and Works," pp. 28–29.

³ See, for example, McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 195–196.

⁴ Ep. XI:1. See also McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 356.

⁵ Un Chartreux, "Introduction," p. 10. The author of the introduction in the critical edition of Guigues I, *Les Méditations in Sources chrétiennes* is not identified in more detail.

Benedictine Rule. Bredero suggests that the founders of both Cîteaux and Grande Chartreuse— Stephen Harding and Bruno of Cologne—came from the same community of Molesme in Langres, which was founded in 1075 by Robert. He had been an abbot in a Cluniac house, but not approving of the interpretation of the Rule there, he started his own community with (or so it is told in the narrative of the Cistercian beginnings) a more strict and ascetic approach to Benedictine monasticism.⁶ The monastic forms that Bernard and Guy represent may share their prehistory, as they probably had the same spiritual grandfather, the ex-Cluniac abbot Robert.⁷

Prior Guy was an important figure in the development of the Carthusian order and the forming of its own rule. This is another interesting similarity between Bernard and Guy: the two were both key figures in the spread of Benedictine-based monasticisms that were increasing in size and importance at the same time. Although on a smaller scale than Bernard, Guy did the same to the community of Chartreuse and its way of life as Bernard did to Clairvaux. During his time as prior (1109–1136), the Grande Chartreuse became organized as an established way of religious life and expanded into new regions through daughter houses.⁸ It is good to note here that the heads of the Grande Chartreuse and its daughter houses were called priors, not abbots, and this was probably a conscious choice. In the letter, however, Bernard treats Guy as a head of a monastic house, equivalent to an abbot, as will be shown below.⁹

The Grande Chartreuse could be characterized as a search for a successful combination of eremitic and cenobitic life. Every monk in the community had their own living quarters, including a small garden. They prepared and ate their highly ascetic meals by themselves, except for on feast days and Sundays. Most of the daily prayers were also said alone in one's cell. The solitary way of life was made possible by reliance on *conversi*, lay brothers who took care of practical tasks in the monastic house.¹⁰

If Bernard considered his own way of monastic life to be at the stricter end on the ascetical spectrum, the Carthusians went even further in their pursuit of the desert (i.e. the abandonment of the world). Their food was simpler and less in amount, their isolation from other people more complete and their churches less decorated than those of the Cistercians.¹¹ This may provide insight into how Bernard outlines the specific identity of his own community and their way of being monastic as a particular kind of religious following the Benedictine Rule.

⁶ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 210.

⁷ It must be noted here that it has been suggested that Robert founded many other priories from Molesme than just Cîteaux. See Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution*, p. 14.

⁸ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, p. 355; Un Chartreux, "Introduction," pp. 8–14.

⁹ For more on a monastic head's position and its relationship to bishophood, see below in the chapter "The Monastic Micro-Church."

¹⁰ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 354–355.

¹¹ McGinn, pp. 354–355.

When comparing the general style of spirituality of Bernard and Guy, the differences in their monastic spirit also become visible. Guy's approach to spiritual life was marked by sobriety and a certain reserve in the face of the great mystery of God.¹² Concerning its content and style, the *Meditationes* was influenced by Stoic philosophy. The influence of Stoicism shows in certain features of the text: sobriety, pragmatism, stressing of the centrality of the will, and language that is moderate to the extreme.¹³

The right relationship to Divine Charity is surely central for both Guy and Bernard,¹⁴ with both authors relying on the tradition of the Pauline epistles and works of Augustine,¹⁵ but their approach is somewhat different. While Guy places himself before God with reverent reserve, Bernard becomes immersed in the image of the bridal bedchamber and its intimate leisure with the heavenly Bridegroom, as can be seen in the letter. Guy's approach to the process of growing in charity is more practical, being aimed at knowing oneself to be insufficient in the face of the truth of Christianity. He is almost pessimistic in tone when it comes to the world and corporality. This reflects an ideal of being properly detached from the world in order to be able to transcend it, and not being subject to it in the wrong way. The goal of Guy's spiritual program is to be subject only to God and serve him wholly. This rightly ordered attitude toward the world can be termed purity of heart, which enables one to grow in love for God.¹⁶

There is an ardent desire for God present in the *Meditationes*. This desire takes the form of longing and thirst, which, together with the certain voluntarist attitude of the Stoic tradition—according to “un Chartreux,” the unidentified author of the introduction to the *Meditationes* in the *Sources chrétiennes*—creates an “inner climate of obscure faith.” The author quotes a passage from the book of Isaiah as a representation of Guy's spirituality of obscurity: “My soul hath desired thee in the night: yea, and with my spirit within me in the morning early I will watch to thee.”¹⁷

The process of growing in charity was a common topic in the 12th-century discussion on contemplation and monastic life. Addressing this topic, the *Meditationes* and Letter 11 show a glimpse of the continuous negotiation on monastic ideals that was going on intensely in the 12th century and beyond. The main quest when looking at Letter 11 is to shed light on how this negotiation appears as gendered imagery in the communication of one monastic head to another and its meaning in this context.

¹² Un Chartreux, “Introduction,” pp. 22–23.

¹³ Un Chartreux, “Introduction,” pp. 45–46, 48.

¹⁴ Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, pp. 2–4.

¹⁵ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 355–356.

¹⁶ McGinn, p. 357.

¹⁷ Un Chartreux, “Introduction,” pp. 59, 61, 63; McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 356. D-R Isaias 26:9.

2.1.2 THE PATRIARCH—THE MAN

Bernard tends toward prolixity in the beginning of the letter to apologize for his daring in writing to Guy, whom he clearly wishes to situate as his superior. This manner serves as an affirmation of Bernard's relative monastic position: Bernard was slightly younger than Guy and had less monastic time behind him. According to the rules of *Ars Dictaminis*, the medieval rhetoric practice of correspondence, Bernard expresses his inferior position in the *salutatio*, which by his time had gained great importance in the rhetoric of letter writing. Bernard's letter to Guy is written following the formula of a letter addressed to a person of higher rank; this can be deduced both because of Guy's higher monastic age and through the elaborate appraisal Bernard gives the Carthusian prior at the beginning of the letter:¹⁸ "Your burning and kindling greeting seemed to me, I confess, to have come, not from man but from him who 'sent word to Jacob.'"¹⁹ Bernard quotes two different books from Scripture, Psalm 43:5 and Paul's Letter to the Galatians (1:12). In these passages, the psalmist talks to God and the Apostle refers to Jesus Christ; Bernard is giving Guy a compliment that is hard to surpass in the monastic context. In doing so, he is following the rules of an exalted letter, in which the writer is supposed to ascend to the level of the recipient by flattery. This was called *captatio benevolentiae* ("securing of good will") in the letter-writing manuals of Bernard's time. The securing of good will was instructed to be placed in the *salutatio*, of which Bernard gives here a fine example.²⁰

Jacob, who is mentioned in the quotation from Psalm 43, probably brought the Benedictine Rule to the mind of a monastic reader. He is the Old Testament patriarch who saw a dream where angels ascended and descended to Heaven and back on a ladder,²¹ which Benedict used to depict the steps of humility of the monk in the seventh chapter of the Rule. In the context of Psalm 43, the psalmist is praising God as king who sent the word to Jacob. Bernard is probably using this intentionally as a marker for monastic ideals: by referring to Jacob, he indirectly brings the seventh chapter of the Rule and its teaching on humility into the discussion.²²

Bernard calls himself Guy's son and expresses thanks for greeting him with a cordial blessing. Through taking the position of a son and thus setting Guy as his spiritual father, Bernard continues to the tracks of the ascending salutation to seek good will and starts the extensive analysis on charity, using Guy as a focal point for its outcomes: "It was no ordinary greeting such as one

¹⁸ Perelman, "The Medieval Art of Letter Writing," pp. 102–106.

¹⁹ Ep. XI:1. *Vestra illa succensa et succendens salutatio sic mihi, ut verum fatear, accepta fuit, et est, quasi non ab homine, sed certissime ab illo qui mandate salutem Iacob, descendere videretur.* James 12:1.

²⁰ Perelman, "The Medieval Art of Letter Writing," pp. 106, 111.

²¹ Gen. 1:12.

²² Later on, in 1120, Bernard wrote his own *De Gradibus Superbiae et Humilitatis*.

gives in passing on the road, or from habit; I could feel it came from the heart, produced by charity, a welcome and unexpected blessing.”²³

Continuing by positioning himself as a lesser of a monastic leader, Bernard expresses fear of only disturbing a great spiritual authority by his “uncalled-for scribbling.”²⁴ He compares authoritative Guy to a group of Old Testament patriarchs:

I feared lest by doing so I should be as one disturbing Moses on the mountain, or Elias in the desert, or Samuel watching in the temple. [...] I feared lest I should be as one troubling David when he was taking to himself the wings of a dove to fly away far off, and hear the angry words: “Let me be. I cannot hear you. I would sooner listen to what I can hear with greater pleasure: “I will hear what the Lord will speak in me; for he will speak peace onto his people and onto those whose hearts are turned toward him.”²⁵

The comparison follows from Guy's position as a prior in his community. As the head of his house he used authority given by God, in the context of 12th-century monastic thought of much in the same way as Moses, Elias, Samuel or David. Even though Guy is a prior, not an abbot, Bernard treats him as a head of a monastic house all the same. Thus, in the context of the letter, the fact that Guy is a prior is not as central as it might seem, since Bernard quite clearly wants to portray him as a head who is given a patriarchal position in Benedictine monastic tradition. According to the Benedictine Rule, the abbot is Christ to his community.²⁶ Christ is the culmination and fulfillment of the line of patriarchs who were considered to point to him in 12th-century exegesis. The second chapter of the Rule on abbots begins with a reflection on what the name *Abbas* refers to: “he is addressed by a title of Christ.”²⁷ The Rule highlights both the abbot's mission as a representative of Christ and the unity of Christ and God the Father, to whom the name *Abbas* essentially refers; like Christ, who united with the Father uses the power endowed by him, the abbot

²³ Ep. XI:1. Non me sane arbitror salutatum in via, non in transitu, non veluti ex occasione, ut assolet, consuetudinis; sed plane ex visceribus, ut sentio, caritatis prodiit haec tam grata et inopinata benedictio. James 12:1 with my modifications.

²⁴ Ep. XI:1. importunis scriptitationibus

²⁵ Ep. XI:1. Timebam omnino molestus fieri vel Moysi in monte, vel Eliae in deserto, aut certe excubanti in templo Samueli, si divinis intentissimos confabulationibus aliquatenus avocare tentassem. [...] Timebam, inquam, ne si et David elonganti se et fugienti, manentique in solitudine, importunus insisterem, indignans excusaret et diceret: Sine me, non audio te modo; audiam potius quod dulcius ausculto. Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus; quoniam loquetur pacem in plebem suam, et super sanctos suos, et in eos qui convertuntur ad cor. James 12:1.

²⁶ See, for example, Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 118.

²⁷ RB 2:2. See also Chapman, p. 100.

in turn uses this power of the Father through being united with Christ as his representation in the community. All of this is applied to Guy through the comparison to Moses, Elias, Samuel and David. The style of the salutation examined above strengthens the idea that Bernard positions himself as a younger monastic leader in relation to Guy, whom he considers not only his equal but clearly his superior.

The piety toward Christ's humanity is an important factor when considering Guy and his position as the head of his community. In Guy's *Meditationes*, the imitation of Christ as a man comes up as a rational consequence of the Incarnation. According to Guy, it is very hard for a human to imitate God. It is much more possible to imitate Jesus in his humanity, which is a path to his divinity as well. Since Bernard's letter is a response to Guy's *Meditationes*, the concept of Christ as a man is present in the background of the text. Bernard and Guy lived at a time when imitating and following Christ in his humanity was becoming more and more prominent in Western spirituality. Personally experiencing Christ's passions was one of the ways to follow the human-Christ. In Bernard's works as well, there is the idea of mentally living through Christ's agony by means of compassionate meditation. In subsequent centuries, the tendency to assimilate oneself with the passion of Christ in his human body took the form of physical ascetic practices to a greater extent.²⁸ Bernard's texts reflect an earlier stage of the spiritual culture of imitating Christ as a suffering man.

Regarding the degree of the asceticism of monastic everyday life, Bernard always tended to lean toward the harder option. The physically demanding life—explained as a spiritual battle where the monks were brave knights—drew the attention of young upper-class men very effectively.²⁹ Bernard's spirituality succeeded in making traditional signs of manhood like strength and physical struggle into a transcendental reality that enabled a distinctively masculine identity for the religious.³⁰ Thus, the physicality of ascetic practices took on manly connotations and manifested the suffering body of Christ that is imitated by asceticism as a manly body. This connection to the suffering Christ is not self-evident in the letter to Guy, but it can be read as the background when comparing the prior to Moses on the mountain or Elias in the desert. The connection of being a patriarchal head, asceticism, suffering Christ and manliness is also looked at in the other letters in this chapter: they reveal this hermeneutic unit as connected to the monastic head in more detail.

Considering Bernard's general principle regarding religious life, the more ascetical and demanding the way of life the better, it is possible that he regarded the ascetic practices of Carthusians to be superior or more perfect than those of his own order. The Benedictine Rule clearly presents hermits,

²⁸ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ*, pp. 98–99.

²⁹ Casey, "Reading Saint Bernard," pp. 97–99.

³⁰ Smith, "Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith," p. 87.

which the Carthusians bore resemblance to, as matured cenobites (monks living in a community) who are more evolved in their spiritual life:

...Anchorets or Hermits, who, not in the first fervor of devotion, but after long probation in the monastic life, have learnt to fight against the devil, and after being aided by the comfort and encouragement of others, are now able by God's assistance to strive hand to hand against the flesh and evil thoughts, and so go forth from the army of the Brotherhood, to the single combat of the wilderness.³¹

The principle of the more ascetic being better is the pattern Bernard applies to the cases of monks who wanted to change houses (*transitus*), for example, from a Cluniac house to a Cistercian one. Even though the Rule does not permit an abbot to permanently take in a monk from a known monastery,³² Bernard was willing to bend the rule when the change was, in his opinion, from easier (Cluny) to harder (Cistercian), and hence toward the better.

As the patriarchal head of the house who lives ascetically and uses divine authority, Guy is shown emphatically as a male figure in the beginning of the letter. This image reflects the influence of the Pauline letters on Scripture, where the nature of salvation is described as a marriage in which the man, Christ, and the woman, the Church, are united with each other.³³ In his community, Guy is the man, as he is the representative of Christ. On the other hand, the position of the abbot or prior as a father in communities that followed the Benedictine Rule reflects Paul's thinking on spiritual fatherhood: that it is a reflection of the fatherhood of God.³⁴ In the very beginning of the letter, Bernard calls Guy the most reverend of fathers, and later on he calls himself Guy's child.³⁵ The comparison of Guy to the Old Testament patriarchs highlights the manly side of things, in terms of both Guy's leadership and essentially God reflected in humanity. Guy's position as a prior refers to Christ the Bridegroom and his spiritual fatherhood to God as Father.

³¹ RB I:4–5. Anachoretarum, id est, Eremitarum, horum qui non conversionis fervore novitio, sed monasterii probatione diuturna, didicerunt contra diabolum, multorum solation iam docti, pugnare; et bene instructi fraterna ex acie ad singularem pugnam eremi securi iam sine consolatione alterius, sola manu vel brachio, contra vitia carnis vel cogitationum, Deo auxiliante, sufficiunt pugnare.

³² RB 61.

³³ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 69, 72.

³⁴ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, p. 101. While the Carthusians eventually had their own rule, which was developed by Guy, it was highly influenced by the Benedictine Rule. On this, see, for example, McGinn, *The Growing of Mysticism*.

³⁵ Ep. XI:1.

2.1.3 THE BRIDE—THE WOMAN

Right after the comparison to the patriarchs and Jesus, using wording from the Song of Songs, Bernard asks:

What? Should I be rash enough to wake the bride sleeping gently in the embraces of the Bridegroom for so long as she wishes? I think I would thereupon hear from her the words, “Do not trouble me. ‘My beloved to me and I to him who feedeth among the lilies.’”³⁶

The patriarch and the bride share the same longing, but the bride’s longing is the more intense desire of a lover, because the object of the longing has already come into visible existence; the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets were seen as antecedents to Christ in medieval interpretations of Scripture.³⁷ The Old Testament was used as an allegory for the New Covenant that Christ made, with the Christian Church replacing the Old Testament covenants that God had made with the prophets and patriarchs.³⁸ In this tradition, in which Bernard as a thinker was situated, salvation and the life of the Church are maritally ordered: in this union, the Church is the Bride, the body, and Christ is the Groom, the head.³⁹ Bernard’s main sources of inspiration for the marital vision of the Church were the Pauline epistles and, in Paul’s footsteps, Augustine.⁴⁰ What makes Bernard’s treatment of the bridal union of God and His people distinctive is that he usually does not make a clear difference between the Church as the bride and the individual soul as the bride. This reflects the idea of the Church’s growth in charity toward God being connected with the individual members’ inner process, which marked the Cistercian view of the Church as the body of Christ.⁴¹

In the 12th-century monastic context, the image of the bride sleeping in the arms of the Bridegroom carried implications of celibate life withdrawn from the world: the sleeping bride signified the contemplative life that the monks led, with their affections directed only toward God.⁴² For Bernard the monasteries were the marriage beds of the Church, where it was possible to immerse oneself in contemplation of Christ and where one’s soul could rest in

³⁶ Ep. XI:1. Quid enim? egone tam temerarius essem, ut inter sponsi brachia suaviter quiescentem auderem suscitare dilectam, quousque vellet ipsa? Putarem illico auditurum me ab illa: Noli mihi molestus esse: Ego dilecto meo, et dilectus meus mihi, qui pascitur inter lilia. James 12:1. Cant. 2:16.

³⁷ Damrosch, “Non alia sed aliter,” p. 187. For a thorough analysis of the medieval interpretation of Scripture, see, for example, *Medieval Exegesis* by Henri de Lubac.

³⁸ D’Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 61.

³⁹ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 28–47.

⁴⁰ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 171. On Augustine’s influence on Bernard, see also Engh, *Gendered Identities*, pp. 353–354.

⁴¹ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 108.

⁴² Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 129–130.

His arms.⁴³ Bernard tended to differentiate between contemplative repose and passive inactivity. He was critical of the latter, and he came to accuse the Cluniac way of living out the Rule as guilty of that.⁴⁴

Bernard's idea of the Cluniac monks being contemplative in the wrong way serves as a contrast with how he treats Guy and his monastic house. By bringing forth the image of the Bride, he shows Guy as an exemplary contemplative whose contemplation is filled with *caritas*, not laziness. This view was held despite the absence of manual labor (a form of corporeal asceticism so highly valued by Bernard in his interpretation of the Rule) in Carthusian daily routine (similarly absent from that of Cluny).⁴⁵ This setting might be the outcome of Bernard admiring the highly ascetic ways of Grande Chartreuse: the combination of silence and fleeing from physical comfort resulted in the ideal kind of contemplation, which seemed inactive from the outside but was interiorly active. Physical labor could thus be thought to be present in the Carthusian life through the ascetic lifestyle of simple food and silent solitude.

The 12th-century trend of emphasizing charity as the most important Christian virtue and the affective spirituality of the Augustinian tradition affected Bernard greatly. He defined ideal contemplation as *caritas* lived in the right order, *ordinatio caritatis*, using Augustine's terminology. The right order of charity means that God is to be loved before everything else and that this love has to bear fruit in the form of serving others; the contemplative soul overflows with *caritas*, from which others can then benefit. This was considered to be a gradual process of growing in virtue, through which the person is little by little oriented toward God and finally loves everything only because of God, not because of the thing itself.⁴⁶ Thus, Guy's contemplative repose as the Bride can be seen as an image of active charity lived in the right way.

Another probable influence behind Bernard's take on charity as contemplation could be the writings on the Benedictine Rule and monastic life by Smaragdus of Saint Mihiel. The Carolingian 9th-century works, being widely copied and spread in Bernard's time, were commonly included in the libraries of Cistercian monasteries, including Clairvaux.⁴⁷ Consequently, Bernard's

⁴³ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 205. McGinn refers to *Sermon 46 on The Song of Songs* concerning sexual intercourse as a symbol for the mystical union with God and the significance of monasteries in the structure of the Church.

⁴⁴ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 129.

⁴⁵ Lawrence, *Medieval monasticism*, pp. 161–162. Lawrence points out that the manual labor that the Carthusians were encouraged to practice in their private cells and gardens was “therapeutic rather than economic.” Lawrence's book is a general overview of medieval monasticism, but it is used here because of the accuracy of his analysis on the Carthusian way of life.

⁴⁶ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 118–223. Engh, *Gendered Identities*, pp. 63–81. Casey, “Reading Saint Bernard,” pp. 99–100.

⁴⁷ La Corte, “Ninth-Century Sources for Twelfth-Century Reformers,” pp. 275–276.

treatment of charity in the letter has similar features to Smaragdus' texts, and the marital imagery is one. For example, Bernard brings up the marriage bed as the place where he finds Guy in loving contemplation; Smaragdus uses the same image when discussing the importance of fasting, vigils and labor in reaching intimate union with God: the place in Christ's bed belongs to those who have not been physically and spiritually idle.⁴⁸ It is thus presumable that this principle of achieving *ordinatio caritatis* and the contemplative state through bodily actions is a backdrop for the treatment of charity in the letter.⁴⁹

Typically, Bernard used feminine—and especially maternal—imagery to depict the action of serving others and sharing what has been gained in one's personal relationship with Christ. The bride has to become a mother, who nurtures and cares for her children. The maternal imagery is particularly prominent when writing to or about abbots. Bernard describes them (and himself) as mothers with lactating breasts and pregnant wombs. The abbot's mission was to feed the monks, who were his spiritual children.⁵⁰

The image of Guy lying as the bride in Christ the bridegroom's arms shows a central feature of Bernard's view of the aim of monastic life: desiring God and seeking to fulfill that desire, and eventually having an experience of union with Him. With his take on the relationship with Christ, Bernard partly revealed a continuation of Augustine's heritage. According to Augustine, the innate desire for union that every human person has is the result of their experience of the absence of God. For Bernard, this desire (*affectus*) is not a feature of the intellect but will: desire is thus in the will, not in the intellect.⁵¹ The desire of God is also eschatological in the sense that it will find its fulfillment only in the eternal life of Heaven.⁵² As mentioned above, Guy's *Meditationes* focuses on longing and thirst in the emptiness of not having yet reached union with God. By depicting Guy as the Bride, Bernard shows a glimpse of the next level in loving God: the contemplative oneness with Christ.

Bernard's view that the desire for the presence of God takes place in the will and not the intellect may be one of the reasons behind the need to use feminine imagery when describing Guy's close relationship with Christ. It has to be acknowledged, though, that the will was also considered to be kept better under control by men than by women, and the intellect was a feature of the

⁴⁸ La Corte, "Ninth-Century Sources for Twelfth-Century Reformers," pp. 279–280.

⁴⁹ On the roots of the term *ordinatio caritatis* in Bernard, see Cvetković, *Seeking the Face of God*, p. 87.

⁵⁰ This topic has been famously brought up by Caroline Walker Bynum. See *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. See also Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* and McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, p. 223. The theme of motherhood comes up in more detail in later letters.

⁵¹ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 55. For a more extensive study on Augustine's effect on Bernard's theology of charity, see Cvetković, *Seeking the Face of God*, pp. 59–119.

⁵² Casey, "Reading Saint Bernard: The Man, the Medium, the Message," pp. 94–95; Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 239.

human person that was most clearly gendered as masculine.⁵³ The male will was defined by its subordination to the intellect. The will of women was thought to be weaker and more easily distracted; women were seen as lacking sufficient self-control. This view can also be found in Bernard's works. In one of his sermons on the Feast of the Annunciation that is usually dated to the early years of his abbacy, he states that the character of Eve was defined by curiosity, pleasure-seeking and vanity.⁵⁴ All of these are signs of a disoriented will and distorted *affecti*, which in the first place are oriented toward transient material goods and created reality instead of God, the creator of all things material.⁵⁵

While Eve's affects were ordered in the wrong way, those of the bride are all concentrated on Christ the Bridegroom, as they should be. It might be that in the mindset of the 12th century, backed up by the centuries-old tradition of gendering the people of God and the Church as a woman, in order to convey an image of a person who clings to Christ, completely abandoning oneself and submitting to His will, Bernard had to present Guy as a female in the context of contemplative life. Manhood, defined by the intellect, self-control and arduous battle, was perhaps not considered suitable for describing the fulfillment of desires and the unrestricted self-abandonment that one was to experience in the union with Christ. The will, being subject to the intellect, is here like the woman, subject to the man, and more easily persuaded by Christ to surrender to union with Him. The Bride is a woman, like Eve, but persuaded by God, not by the Devil.

Another aspect that lies behind the feminine bridal imagery is the physicality of the scene. Bodily existence was generally marked as female in 12th-century thinking. Following earlier tradition in this, it was logical to refer to the Church, Christ's body, as a female, the Bride.⁵⁶ The bride is a reference to the reality of Heaven, which in the Christian tradition is described as a great wedding feast. Guy is a bride analogically, as a member of the Body of Christ. In the image that Bernard portrays by quoting the Song, Guy represents the Church, which is Christ's bride and body in the ecclesiology of Bernard's time.

⁵³ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ*, p. 80.

⁵⁴ IFA I col. 2098B. Another example of Eve's weakness and greater fault in the Fall can be found in Bernard's contemporary Petrus Capuanus' *Summa Vetustissima Veterum*; see Pioppi, "Il Peccato Originale e Il Sinus Abrahae Nella Summa 'Vetustissima Veterum' Di Pietro Capuano," pp. 401–402. *Respondeo. Magis peccavit Eva, quamvis etiam Adam habuit maiorem scientiam, quia et, si hec circumstantia gravaret Adam, maior circumstantia gravabat Evam, scilicet maior contemptus et maior appetitus peccandi, quem forte habebat in decupla proportione maiorem; et ideo huiusmodi illationes, ubi sunt circumstantie ex utraque parte, non valent.*

⁵⁵ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 55.

⁵⁶ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights*, pp. 80–81; Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p.18.

After referring to Guy as the bride and then explaining how one gets to know God first in the flesh and then, through it, in the spirit, Bernard defines bodily existence in the eternal life:

Then each of Christ's members will be able to say for himself what St. Paul said of their head: "We have known Christ according to the flesh, but now we know him so no longer." For no one will know himself there according to the flesh because "flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God." I do not say that the substance of the flesh will not be there, but that every carnal need will be absent, that the love of the flesh will be absorbed in the love of the spirit, and what are now weak human affections will be transformed into divine powers.⁵⁷

Throughout the letter, Bernard follows the threefold division of love (*amor*) originally formulated by Origen: *amor carnalis*, *amor rationalis* and *amor spiritualis*. The state of loving in heaven is *amor spiritualis*; the flesh that is in heaven, as Bernard states, is not similar to the flesh that a person has in earthly life. Bernard is referring here to the physical reality of the resurrection of the body. The thirst for God that both the patriarch and the bride experience is fully quenched only after the resurrection.⁵⁸ The repose of the bride in the letter is essentially a description of eternal life with Christ, and both the soul and the body in its heavenly state are depicted as female. Femaleness stands here for corporality, subjection and self-surrender.

Bernard's notion of physical existence in the eternity of heaven reflects the embracing attitude toward the body in his time: it was considered to be an inseparable part of the human person, which had been created by God in His image. Elsewhere in his later works, Bernard even states that it is the body that looks toward Heaven, while the soul affected by original sin is dragging it down and misusing it. The problem here is not the body but the disoriented will. In Bernard's view, the body is essential to a person's salvation, because it is the only channel through which one can get information about reality and thus learn how to love.⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that in the *Confessiones* (Book 7:1–9) Augustine proposes a contradictory view, stating that it is the body that drags down the soul. Bernard seems to have taken an opposing view in this matter

⁵⁷ Ep. XI:9. Tunc pro certo singula Christi membra dicere poterunt de se, quod Paulus aiebat de capite: Etsi cognovimus secundum carnem Christum, sed nunc iam non novimus. Nemo ibi se cognoscit secundum carnem, quia caro et sanguis regnum Dei non possidebunt. Non quod carnis substantia illic futura non sit; sed quod carnalis omnis necessitudo sit defutura, carnisque amor amore spiritus absorbendus, et infirmae quae nunc sunt humanae affectiones in divinas quasdam potentias habeant commutari.

⁵⁸ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 197, 212.

⁵⁹ LaCorte, "Flawed Portrayals of Bernard of Clairvaux's View on Art," pp. 457–458; Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 58. Newman refers to SC 5.1.

vis-à-vis one of the greatest sources of 12th-century theological thought. In addition, the 12th century was not familiar with the Cartesian body-soul division. Instead, a person was seen as an undivided entity. Not only was the body a necessary part of humanity, but it was created by God as inherently good. The belief in the resurrection of the body emphasized the unity of body and soul, which was broken by death only temporarily due to original sin and would be restored again in the resurrection.⁶⁰

The expanding piety in the 12th century toward Christ's humanity and the imitation of his agonies through ascetic practices—offering back to God the good given by him—are a clear indication of medieval body positivity, along with the later growth of Eucharistic piety, which essentially comprised adoration of Christ's body in the sacred host. Engh has pointed out that Bernard played a pivotal role in the growth of theological emphasis on the human body of Christ and the human senses as a way to know God.⁶¹ As Caroline Walker Bynum notes in her article on divine materiality in the Christian Middle Ages, even though Eucharistic piety does not always frequently appear in texts before the 13th century, it does not mean that it was non-existent before that. She argues that it is probable that belief in the transubstantiation—that is, the bread and wine really being physically transformed into Christ's flesh and blood in the celebration of the Mass—became established as a carefully defined theological doctrine because of the previous widespread devotion implying this, not the other way round. Historians have been relying on the appearance of the recounts of Eucharistic miracles and theological definitions in texts when presuming a sudden upsurge of devotion. As Bynum notes, however, not everything was recorded in writing: texts were probably written when there was a widespread practice already, which gave a reason to produce written accounts of experiences as well as theological formulations.⁶²

Following Bynum's thinking, it can be presumed that Bernard and his contemporaries in the 12th century were to some extent already centered on Christ's humanity in the Eucharist in their spirituality, even though it is almost never mentioned in the texts—which, in the case of this study, means Bernard's letters.⁶³ Theologically it is not very far-fetched to think that the physical union of the Bride and the Groom that Bernard brings up in the letter went hand in hand with the physical union experienced with Christ in the

⁶⁰ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ*, pp. 82, 149–150; LaCorte, "Flawed Portrayals of Bernard of Clairvaux's View on Art," p. 457.

⁶¹ See Engh, "Divine Sensations," pp. 57–58.

⁶² Bynum, "The Sacrality of Things," pp. 15–16. The view that there was a sudden surge of Eucharistic piety in the 12th century can be found, for example, in Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period*, pp. 86–93.

⁶³ The Eucharist and its celebration are mentioned clearly only once in the collection of Bernard's letters, in Letter 69 (unknown date) to the abbot Guy. The recipient had asked Bernard to give advice on a mistake that he had made with the wine and water when celebrating the Mass.

Eucharist in the 12th-century mindset. The bridal imagery is a part of the spiritual phenomenon of focusing on the physical aspects of Christianity, the source of which was the humanity of Christ. Bernard's sensory descriptions of encountering God tell of the underlying liturgical life that he and other monastic men were living, where they not only commemorated but reenacted the life events of Christ as God-man.⁶⁴

The way in which Bernard directly treats bodily life in Heaven in the same letter where he applies bridal imagery to a male monastic head is telling of the undercurrents of piety and theological thought that would later surface as Eucharistic devotion and practices. The combination of the two topics also points to the connection between the bride and the body; the topic of the resurrected body seems to demand bringing up of the bride as a prelude, together with the consideration of Guy's patriarchal headship.

2.1.4 GUY AND CARITAS

Against the marital background one would almost expect Bernard to next address Guy—the charitable bride in the bridegroom's embrace—as a mother, but he does not do so directly. Instead, a mother-like figure of Charity is introduced. Answering the question he posed earlier about whether he dares to wake up the bride or not, Bernard states:

But what I do not dare, charity does. She knocks confidently on the door of a friend, knowing that she is the mother of friendships and will not be repulsed. Sweet as your leisure is, she does not fear to disturb it a little in her business. It is she who, whenever she wishes, can draw you away from your contemplation of God for her own sake; and it was she who, when she wished, made you attentive to me, so that you have not thought it at all beneath you, not only to bear with me when I am speaking, but moreover to kindly encourage me to speak when I am silent.⁶⁵

Bernard may have seen Guy as an authority in the sense that his community had realized an ideal that Bernard's community perhaps had not, or at least not to the same extent; it is possible that he considered the Carthusians to be

⁶⁴ Engh, "Divine Sensations," p. 59. Engh does not specifically mention the Eucharistic celebration as an example in her article, but she does refer in general to liturgical acts that involve sensory aspects as markers of the centrality of Christ as a corporal human being. Without mention even, the Mass logically falls into the category of sensory liturgical experience.

⁶⁵ Ep. XI:2. Verum quod non audeo ego, audet caritas, et cum omni fiducia pulsata ad ostium amici, nequaquam putans pati se debere repulsam, quae amicitiarum matrem se novit; nec veretur vestrum, etsi gratissimum, paulisper inquietare otium, propter suum negotium. Ipsa profecto, ipsa cum vult, facit vos excedere Deo; ipsa et cum voluit, fecit sobrios nobis: adeo ut minime duceretis indignum, non modo sustinere loquentem, sed tacentem insuper benigne provocare. James 12:2.

more advanced in asceticism, as shown above. On the other hand, there is a noticeable tone of suspicion in the way Caritas is presented as a distinct personalized character, who has to knock on the door of Guy's bridal chamber of contemplative leisure. Guy is not described as a mother, a symbol of self-giving and service, but as a bride that has to be woken up. For Bernard, the highest contemplative vision was the restored image of God in the human person, which he called *caritas*.⁶⁶ In Bernard's eyes, Guy had achieved this state to some extent, but he still needed to be pulled out of himself by a personified figure of Caritas.

Only after Caritas *qua* mother has knocked on the door and disturbed Guy in her business does Bernard say:

In few words you have shown me for certain of what spirit you are. I rejoice on my own account and on yours; I congratulate you on your charity, and myself on the profit my soul has derived from it. For that is a true and sincere charity, to be attributed entirely to a pure heart and unfeigned faith, with which leads us to love our neighbours' good as well as your own.⁶⁷

Bernard is surely presenting Guy as a charitable man, but with a bit of reservation. Reflecting on the differences between Carthusian and Cistercian life, one can see why. Active service that flows from charity was important in Bernard's interpretation of monastic life, so important that he considered it acceptable even to omit attending or celebrating Holy Mass if there was someone in need of being taken care of. For Bernard, a true contemplative knew when to leave the delights of the embrace of the bridegroom for the good of others—when to be the mother and answer the call of Caritas. As Bernard explains in the letter, in his experience it is not possible to remain in perfect contemplation for long periods of time in this life; it must give way to the necessities of earthly life and active service.⁶⁸ For Bernard, an absolutely necessary part of living out charity was to be concerned for the salvation of others.⁶⁹

After rejoicing over Guy's charity, Bernard defines the mental state where ideal love is possible. The effect that Caritas' knock on the door causes in the soul is the love of a son toward God:

⁶⁶ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 211.

⁶⁷ Ep. XI:2–3. *Paucis pro certo aperuistis, cuius spiritus estis. Gaudeo proinde mihi, gaudeo et vobis; meae utilitati, et vestrae sinceritati. Illa siquidem vera et sincera est caritas, et omnino de corde puro, et conscientia bona, et fide non ficta iudicanda procedere, qua proximi bonum aequae ut nostrum diligimus.* James 12:2–3.

⁶⁸ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 219–222.

⁶⁹ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 10.

There are those who praise the Lord because he is powerful, and these are those who praise him because he is Goodness itself, and these are sons doing homage to their father. Both those who fear for themselves and those who seek themselves are acting only for themselves; only the love of a son seeks not itself.⁷⁰

Bernard seems to highlight here a different aspect of love: loving God like a child. Here being a son does not refer to a particularly masculine way of being but to the relationship between a child and his father, namely, being God's child. God being called a father has even more significance from the viewpoint of gendered meaning. It tells of the image of God in Bernard's thought: God is both father and mother, as seen above in the figure of Caritas. The fluctuation between the two is characteristic of Bernard's way of using manhood and womanhood as coexisting opposites in his texts.⁷¹ The way of being a son that "seeks not itself" leads him to consider charity as a law under which the loving son acts:

Let fear itself be the law of a slave; by it he is bound. Let greed be for the hireling his law; by it he also is confined when by it he is led off and enticed away. Neither of these two laws is unspotted neither can turn the soul to God. Only charity can do this, because she alone can render the soul disinterested. [...] Therefore, the unspotted law of God is charity, which seeks not what may benefit itself but what may benefit many.⁷²

Bernard goes on to specify that the law of Charity is the law by which God himself lives, for it enables the unity of the triune God: "What else but charity preserves that supreme and unspeakable unity in the blessed Trinity?"⁷³ To assure the reader that he does not think God has any accidental qualities that are not a part of His substance, Bernard states: "...I say that charity is the

⁷⁰ Ep. XI:3,9–15. Est qui confitetur Domino, quoniam potens est; et est qui confitetur, quoniam sibi bonus est: et item qui confitetur, quoniam simpliciter bonus est. Primus servus est, et timet sibi; secundus mercenarius, et cupit sibi; tertius filius, et defert patri. Itaque et qui timet, et qui cupit, uterque pro se agunt: sola quae in filio est caritas, non quaerit quae sua sunt. James 12:3.

⁷¹ For more on this, see the chapter "A Monstrous Life." On Bernard's dichotomous thought, see Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*.

⁷² Ep. XI:3,24–28; 4,3–5. Sit itaque servo sua lex timor ipse, quo constringitur; sit mercenario sua cupiditas, qua et ipse arctatur, quando ab ipsa tentatur abstractus et illectus. Sed harum nulla aut sine macula est, aut animas convertere potest. Caritas vero convertit animas, quas facit et voluntarias. [...] Lex ergo Domini immaculata, caritas est, quae non quod sibi utile est quaerit, sed quod multis. James 12:3,4.

⁷³ Ep. XI:4,8–9. Quid vero in summa et beata illa Trinitate summam et ineffabilem illam conservat unitatem, nisi caritas? James 12:4.

divine substance itself. And there is nothing new or strange about this, for St. John himself said, 'God is charity.'⁷⁴

Thus, the motherly Caritas knocking at the door is God, representing the features that appear to be feminine in Bernard's mind.⁷⁵ In fact, almost all the words that Bernard uses in his works when referring to the mystery of God are feminine: in addition to *caritas*, for example, *sapientia* and *fortitudo*.⁷⁶ Describing God in feminine terms has a strong Old Testamental foundation, which probably affected Bernard's description of Caritas.⁷⁷ From the viewpoint of gendered imagery, it is significant that in Letter 11, the access point to participation in the inner life of God, the life of the Holy Trinity, is feminine Caritas. Not only is Caritas presented as the means of human participation in God, but as "the eternal law" she is "the creator and ruler [literally creatress and directress] of the Universe, since through it [her] all things were made in weight, measure and number."⁷⁸ Giving here a fine example of referring to God in feminine terms, Bernard seems to be using femininity as a marker for God as omnipotent creator. This *creatrix et gubernatrix* is presented as a personified feminine figure, who urges Guy to wake up and give attention to Bernard; the unfathomable omnipotence of God is made visible and tangible through the figure of Caritas, a life-creating mother.

I am making here a consciously positive interpretation of the personified figure of feminine Caritas. It is also possible to see her as an instrument to make Guy appear less of a man, as Elizabeth Clark shows in her article "The Lady Vanishes," where she uses the example of Gregory of Nyssa and his usage of his sister Macrina in his works. While on the surface it seems that Macrina as a woman is being praised for her wisdom and theological skill, he is actually using her as an instrument to show his own thoughts and to reveal his theological opponents as weaker Christian men, who have to be told off by a weak woman.⁷⁹ It would be tempting to apply this pattern of interpretation to the figure of Caritas in the letter to Guy, especially against the backdrop of the male bride, and the fact that we are looking at a monastic leader writing to another who represents a different—and one could say competing—interpretation of monastic life.

There is a negotiation of monastic ideals going on in the letter, and with the aid of the figure of Caritas, Bernard is without a doubt aiming for a win. However, when considering the feminine names given to God as creator and

⁷⁴ Ep. XI:4,11–15. Nemo tamen me existimet hic caritatem accipere qualitatem, vel aliquod accidens – alioquin in Deo dicerem, quod absit, esse aliquid quod Deus non est [...], sed substantiam illam divinam: quod utique nec novum nec insolitum est, dicente Joanne, Deus caritas est.

⁷⁵ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ*, p. 183.

⁷⁶ Leclercq, *Women and St Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 111.

⁷⁷ In Wisdom of Solomon (7:22–8:1), for example, God is depicted as female Sapientia.

⁷⁸ Ep. XI:4:17–19. Haec est lex aeterna, creatrix et gubernatrix universitatis. Siquidem in pondere, et mensura, et numero per eam facta sunt universa [...] James 12:4.

⁷⁹ Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," p. 30.

governor of reality, Caritas is not left as a mere instrument of male-shaming borrowed from the antiquity; instead, she takes on an actual positive meaning as a representation of unity in and with God. It is probable that the reason Bernard can use a personified female figure as a literary instrument in the first place lies in the gendered imagery used by previous Christian writers.⁸⁰ Combined with the characteristics of Bernard as a writer and the spirituality of the 12th century, the female figure is turned from a reflection of manhood into an active part of the meaning of womanhood in the theological framework of Bernard's surroundings.

When the focus of the letter shifts to man and his inability to follow the law of charity in his stubbornness to keep his autonomy, Bernard brings Adam into the picture:

Anyone can make a law for himself, but he cannot withdraw it from the immutable order of the eternal law. But anyone who thus makes a law for himself is perversely trying to imitate his Creator by ruling himself, and making his own self-will a law for himself, just as God is his own law and subject only to himself. Alas! What a heavy and insupportable burden is this on the children of Adam; we are bowed down and bent under it, so that our lives are dragged down nigh to hell.⁸¹

It seems that when talking about being distant from God, Bernard changes to masculine language and imagery. The previous *Creatrix* is addressed now as masculine *Creator*, and the human race is called Adam's children. Bernard uses the expression Adam's sons or children quite frequently in his letters, and many times with the same meaning as in the letter in question: to express disobedience and stubborn self-will toward God.⁸² In the context of the letter to Guy, feminine imagery and language convey the reality of motherly Caritas and the bride lost in the embraces of the bridegroom, "that which benefits many," in contrast to the perverse children of Adam, who cast themselves into hell in their self-sufficiency.

Bernard goes on to further explain that however a person directs oneself toward God—like a slave, hireling or a son—he is still bound by the law of charity. He brings forward the will as the aspect that binds the man to this law:

⁸⁰ One is led to think of Boethius' female Philosophy, for example. For more on female figures and reflection of them in light of Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, see the chapter "Mother Wisdom and the Prodigal Son."

⁸¹ Ep. XI:5 p.106, 27–32. Tunc autem dixerim quemque sibi suam fecisse legem, quando communi et aeternae legi propriam praetulit voluntatem, perverse utique volens suum imitari Creatorem: ut sicut ipse sibi lex, sui iuris est, ita is quoque se ipsum regeret, et legem sibi suam faceret voluntatem: grave utique et importabile jugum super omnes filios Adam, heu! inclinans et incurvans cervices nostras, adeo ut vita nostra inferno appropinquaverit. James 12:5.

⁸² See, for example, letters XVIII:1, LI and LXXXVII:6.

It is the property of the eternal law of God that he who will not be ruled sweetly by him shall be ruled as a punishment by himself; that he who, of his own will, throws off the sweet and light yoke of charity shall unwillingly suffer the insupportable burden of his own self-will. [...] He remains subject to the power of God and yet far removed from happiness.⁸³

As said above, for Bernard the desire (*affectus*) for God, the longing to be ruled by God—who is the law of charity—is situated in the will. In Bernard's pattern of thought, it is thus very fitting in the letter to bring up the will; it is where the growth toward Caritas and away from self-centeredness takes place in practice. Addressing the role of the will in the process of self-surrender to God may also be a reaction to the contents of Guy's *Meditationes*. As noted in the introduction, the will is central in the spirituality portrayed in Guy's work.

In the letter, Adam is connected to the "insupportable burden of self-will," while the previously presented bride has yielded under the sweet rule of mother charity. As Bynum argues in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, the topos of the weak woman had a positive meaning in the spirituality of Bernard's time: a womanly will in the relationship with God was an ideal to be pursued.⁸⁴ This way of using femininity to express ideal weakness in relation to God appears in Letter 11 in the switch from the image of the bride to that of Adam, and in the way the treatment of the will is connected to these. Adam's masculine will is too strong and self-sufficient, while the bride's feminine will yields and unifies itself with her Creator/-tress.

In her study on sexuality and authority in Catholic theology throughout the history of the Church, Monica Migliorino Miller reveals a pattern concerning femininity and masculinity in both Scripture and early Christian authors' works that seems to be present also in the letter to Guy: femininity and motherhood are used to depict unity and attachment, and masculinity respectively stands for distance and detachment. This is based on mothers being intrinsically and physically attached to their children, but fathers not necessarily. The twofold understanding of human sexuality has been employed to depict the relationship between God and His people.⁸⁵ This tradition of applying gendered imagery is visible also in Letter 11: as soon as Bernard starts to talk about separation from God, he switches to masculine tones. Femininity stands for profound unity, not only of God and people but the inner unity of the Trinity.

Bernard continues to elaborate on charity as law by lamenting the attachment to self-will in the first person:

⁸³ Ep. XI:5 p.108, 8–12; 6:16. Hoc quippe ad aeternam justamque legem Dei pertinuit, ut qui a Deo noluit suaviter regi, poenaliter a se ipso regetur; quique sponte jugum suave et onus leve caritatis abjecit, propriae voluntatis onus importabile pateretur invitus. [...] subjectus potestati, et submotus felicitate. James 12:5.

⁸⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 282, 286.

⁸⁵ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority*, pp. 109–110.

Why am I not led by thy spirit, the spirit of liberty, the spirit which leads thy sons, and which bears witness to my spirit that while thy law is also mine, I, too, am one of your sons, and as thou art, so also may I be in this world. For it is certain that those who fulfill the words of the Apostle and “owe no man anything except to love him” are in this world even as God, not hirelings nor yet slaves but sons.⁸⁶

Bernard uses his own person to channel a psalm-like sentiment of remorse about being unable to act like a son of charity. The personified Charity is moved out of sight and replaced by the spirit, probably referring to the Holy Spirit. The quote from Scripture is from Letter to the Romans (13:8), where Paul affirms that the one who loves the other like he loves himself has fulfilled the commandments. With the support of numerous other quotes from the Pauline epistles, Bernard shows the role of free will in the acceptance of the law, stating that God does not impose it on anyone against their will.⁸⁷ This is probably a further response to Guy’s treatment of the will in the *Meditationes*, but there is a distinctively Cistercian taste in Bernard’s way of emphasizing the importance of free acceptance of the law of charity: the free will in relation to God’s law points to the individual’s search for salvation. As Martha Newman notes in her work on the Cistercian concept of charity, the Cistercian vision of the Church was based on a personal interior search for God. Combined with communal care for others, this search constituted the model of society that defined the Cistercian worldview: a unified Christian society.⁸⁸ In Letter 11, this unity is shown from the viewpoint of an individual soul and is brought forth with the aid of connotations of the intrinsic unity that arises from womanhood.

Bernard explains that when the law of charity “is fully effected in the soul by the grace of God, the body and all created good are only loved for the sake of the soul, and the soul only for the sake of God, and God for his own sake.”⁸⁹ He goes on to specify that *cupiditas* or *amor* (Bernard gives both in the text) necessarily start from the flesh, receiving its fulfillment in the spirit when properly directed toward God:

Because we are flesh and blood and born of the desire of the flesh, our desire or love must start in the flesh, and it will then,

⁸⁶ Ep. XI:6, 20–26. ...agar spiritu tuo, spiritu libertatis, quo aguntur filii tui: qui testimonium reddat spiritui meo, quod et ego sim unus ex filiis, dum eadem mihi lex fuerit quae et tibi; et sicut tu es, ita et ipse sim in hoc mundo? Hi siquidem qui hoc faciunt, quod ait Apostolus, Nemini quidquam debeatis, nisi ut invicem diligatis, procul dubio sicut Deus est, et ipsi sunt in hoc mundo; nec servi aut mercenarii sunt, sed filii. James 12:6.

⁸⁷ Ep. XI:6.

⁸⁸ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 237–239.

⁸⁹ Ep. XI:7, 25–27. Quod cum plene per Dei gratiam assecutum fuerit, diligitur corpus, et universa corporis bona tantum propter animam, anima propter Deum, Deus autem propter se ipsum. James 12:7.

if properly directed, progress under grace by certain stages until it is fulfilled in the spirit.⁹⁰

The flesh that is perfected in the spirit when appreciated through its nature as God's creation has to do with the bridal imagery looked at above. *Cupiditas* usually refers to disordered desire, but Bernard uses it in both negative and positive meanings in the letter: since love of self and the created reality in the flesh, *cupiditas*, is always the starting point on the road toward *caritas* when it is rightly ordered, it is good, and it can be used in a positive sense like Bernard does. Human flesh and loving in it was central in Cistercian theology, especially in the form of bridal imagery taken from the Song of Songs. Bernard and his brothers saw a profound connection between human and divine love, which was realized in the Incarnation: God's grace flows to humanity through Christ's human flesh.⁹¹ The love of the flesh perfected in the spirit thus refers to redeemed humanity: the Church that is the bridal body of Christ.

Bernard describes the highest stage of charity, "wherein a man loves himself only for God's sake," as a state where the person is "wholly lost in God as one inebriated and henceforth cleave[s] to Him as if one with him, forgetful, in a wonderful manner, of himself and, as it were, completely out of himself."⁹² But, according to Bernard, this spiritual marriage can only be experienced momentarily before the eternity of Heaven.⁹³ For Bernard, *caritas* signifies this state of being completely out of oneself, where the mystery of human contact with the divine and ideal relations between people meet and melt into one reality. Thus, Caritas as a virtue is so abstract that it exists apart from the human agent and can be presented as a personified figure, as Bernard does in the letter.⁹⁴ As seen above, Caritas is in fact God, the Creatress with whom a person is supposed to freely unite himself.

Perhaps Bernard thought that the Carthusians were taking too long in the Bridegroom's embrace when they should have been acting more like a mother, like the Cistercians. Thus, Guy needs the personified figure of Charity to come and remind him to hware what he has gained in his relationship with Christ. As Martha Newman notes, the definition that Bernard and his monastic brothers gave to the virtue of charity was in many cases the initial cause of their being

⁹⁰ Ep. XI:8, 28–2. Verumtamen quia carnales sumus, et de carnis concupiscentia nascimur, necesse est cupiditas vel amor noster a carne incipiat: quae si recto ordine dirigitur, quibusdam suis gradibus duce gratia proficiens, spiritu tandem consummabitur:

⁹¹ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 87.

⁹² Ep. XI:8,12–17. ...ut se scilicet homo diligit tantum propter Deum. Asserant hoc, si qui experti sunt; mihi, fateor, impossibile videtur. Erit autem procul dubio cum introductus fuerit servus bonus et fidelis in gaudium Domini sui, et inebriatus ab ubertate domus Dei. Quasi enim ebrius, miro quodam modo oblitus sui, et a se penitus velut deficiens, totus perget in Deum, et deinceps adhaerens ei unus spiritus erit. James 12:8.

⁹³ Ep. XI:8. Casey, "Reading Saint Bernard," p. 105.

⁹⁴ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 17.

criticized by other monastics. Cistercian *caritas* included reordering the material, human reality along with the spiritual sphere of one's own soul. For other religious orders, this came off as a contradiction to the monastic aim of retreating from the world.⁹⁵ The door-knocking Caritas in the letter represents this difference in defining the meaning of growing in love for God. She is also a symbol for the unity that was perhaps in Bernard's mind lacking from Carthusian life.

The reason behind Bernard not addressing Guy as a mother thus has to do with Guy not being a Cistercian abbot.⁹⁶ For Bernard, the combination of active motherhood and bridal contemplation was a characteristic of Cistercian identity among the other religious orders.⁹⁷ Cistercian life was marked by a constant dialogue between withdrawing from the world and directing oneself to God through action.⁹⁸ In his letters to other Cistercian abbots, Bernard used maternal imagery frequently, for the abbot was supposed to be available to serve his community like a mother, or in the case of Bernard himself and many other Cistercians, the whole Church and society. Carthusians did not have such a tightly communal lifestyle, which would have required this type of action by the leader of the house. They could stay in the position of the bride more intensely than the Cistercians. That is why Bernard uses the personified figure of Charity to show the interdependent structure of contemplation and action when charity is lived in the right order. Bernard's way of pointing out the balance between the contemplation and action of the Carthusians is an indication of the continuous struggle over who was living the purest form of monasticism. In the case of Letter 11, the point of negotiation is ideal contemplative life.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 13.

⁹⁶ According to my findings, the physical features of a mother's body, specifically lactating breasts (*ubera*), are applied directly to an abbot or the monastic house, mostly in letters to other Cistercians (see, for example, Ep. I and CCXXXIII). Otherwise it is the Church that has breasts and lactates consolation, forgiveness, charity or dialectics (see, for example, Ep. LXXVIII, CCCXXXIII, CCCXXX, CCCXXXI, CCCXXXIII, CCCXXXIV, CCCLXIII; among these, many concern the case of Abelard).

⁹⁷ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 148. See also Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*.

⁹⁸ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 4.

⁹⁹ The critical edition of Bernard's letters by Gastaldelli et al. gives an insight into this issue in the background explanation for Letter 11. Bernard's *Vita Prima* tells about an incident that is said to have occurred when Bernard was visiting the Grande Chartreuse later in life. Guy came to wonder about the fanciness of the trappings of his horse, which appeared in apparent contradiction to the spirit of poverty that he was supposed to be living. It turned out that the horse had been donated for Bernard's use by a Cluniac uncle. *Le lettere di San Bernardo*, Parte prima, p. 99, footnote 1.

2.1.5 THE MONASTIC MICRO-CHURCH

Without a direct reference to Guy as a mother, he is presented as more of a patriarchal figure. Instead, charity is the mother who “knocks confidently on the door” of the bedchamber and enables Bernard to enter and interrupt Guy’s ascetic contemplative state with his “uncalled-for scribbling.” One cannot draw direct conclusions about femininity being present in Guy from the bridal imagery applied to him either. Recent research on the figure of the bride in Bernard’s texts has shown that this figure, although being feminine on the surface, actually points toward the masculine: the Bride is a male who has both humbly renounced his maleness and, on the other hand, overcome his feminine weakness by becoming a virile soul. It is precisely the action of giving up manliness that makes one ideally humble in front of God, and it is only possible to give up something that one already has.¹⁰⁰ Deducing male connotations inversely drawn through the female imagery, it seems that in the letter Guy is presented as a manly man, and a rather manlier monk than Bernard presents himself to be. This is probably intentional: it seems that Bernard saw features that were marked as female, like motherhood, as an ideal in spiritual life since they referred to unity with God and between people. In Bernard’s mind, the ideal was better fulfilled in the Cistercian context.

The comparison of Guy to the key figures of the Old Testament covenants points toward the marital structure of antique and medieval interpretations of salvation. The desire of the bride for the groom and that of the patriarchs for the coming Christ is one and the same: the patriarch is like the bride. On the other hand, as shown above, the patriarchs also symbolize the divine authority of God the Father that the abbot uses. Through the comparison of Guy to Moses and others, Bernard shows him both as a male spiritual authority and as a longing lover that precedes the bride.

Guy is an equivalent of a patriarch, which in the mental space of medieval interpretation of the Bible leads one to think of the Groom, Christ, whom Guy represents for his monks. For Benedictine monasticism, the monastery formed a miniature version of the Church that consisted of the Head (Christ the Bridegroom) and the Body (the Church as Bride), which in the context of a monastic house was comprised by the choir of monks. A monastic house was a church within the Church, reflecting the dynamics of the whole. In line with the idea of the monastery as an ecclesiological microcosmos, Bernard generally tends to place the abbots in the same group as bishops, with all holding a similar ecclesiastical office in the hierarchy of the Church as representatives of Christ the Head.¹⁰¹

The structure and content of the letter to Guy reflects this ecclesiological framework, which also defines the collection of Bernard’s letters as a whole.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*; Krahmer, “The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux.”

¹⁰¹ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 108.

Through it, Bernard makes visible the hierarchy of the Church and the Church's supernatural meaning as the Bride of Christ.¹⁰² Thus, the introduction in the letter of the patriarchs before the bride was probably a conscious choice. Structuring the letter the way he did (or someone else involved in the writing process), he was following the order of salvation history as commonly interpreted from Scripture in his time: the Old Testament patriarchs and the covenants that God formed through them with His chosen people preceded and reflected the coming of Christ and His final salvific union with the Church, the new people of God.

It seems that Guy's patriarchal manliness comes at the price of his being less feminine, less motherly, and less united with others, including God. But although Guy is not called a mother directly, being portrayed as a bride already carries notions of motherhood, according to the economy of charity that Bernard outlines in the letter. Bernard refers to the Old Testamental figures to make clear that he treats Guy as an abbot in the sense it is defined in the Benedictine Rule. Guy was Christ for his community, whose very salvation was in his hands; indeed, the Rule states that in the Last Judgement the abbot will be held responsible for the souls of his monks.¹⁰³ He is presented as a mediator of salvation for his community, like the patriarchs were for God's people in the Old Testament. The monks were supposed to seek holiness and union with God through obedience to the abbot.¹⁰⁴

Although the Carthusians cannot be said to have followed the precepts of Benedictine monasticism to the same extent as the Cistercians, their life and their own rule established by Guy later on were highly influenced by the Benedictine Rule.¹⁰⁵ It is possible that the Carthusians chose not to call their superiors abbots to avoid the heaviness of the position in the form it is outlined in the Benedictine Rule. In the letter, it is clear that Bernard wants to treat Guy as an abbot, though not as a Cistercian one. The references to the Old Testament patriarchs make this clear; these biblical figures represented the hierarchy of the Church, which in the medieval monastic mind included the abbots.¹⁰⁶

Hierarchically, Guy was a monk in addition to being a prior, and thus he was part of the bridal Body; his headship as a superior was in addition to his initial position as a religious.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, Bernard presents Guy not only as the Groom but also as the Bride. The changes between masculine and feminine imagery in the letter reflect the mission of the abbot as a mediator

¹⁰² Leclercq, "Introduction to the Letters of Saint Bernard (II)," p. 305.

¹⁰³ RB ch. II.

¹⁰⁴ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁶ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power*, p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ The question of the abbot's double status after having become a monastic head comes up in several letters addressed to abbots who had left or were planning to leave their office. See, for example, Ep. IV.

who crosses boundaries between Heaven and earth. The binary gender division is central for the effectiveness of the gendered images as portrayals of the growth of the person toward the Divine, with the human being raised through Christ to the level of the supernatural.¹⁰⁸ The marital vision of the Church, as presented in the Pauline epistles and the works of Augustine, is first and foremost based on the idea of the human being created in the image of God.¹⁰⁹ The image of God in the Pauline texts is seen as the communion of man and woman. This idea holds that manhood and womanhood reflect God and His qualities together, and their communion as a unity of two resulting in the birth of other persons is the image of God as creator and the giver of life.¹¹⁰ Following the interpretation of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the marital union of man and woman is seen as reflecting the union between Christ and His Church,¹¹¹ of which the traditional Christian interpretation of the Song of Songs as a depiction of the relationship between Christ and the Church—or in the case of Bernard, the individual soul—is a good example.¹¹²

Guy being presented as both the Head and the Body reflects a common development in the interpretation of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and its application to the structure of the Church—or, in the case of the letter to Guy, the monastic micro-church. As Line Engh shows in her article about chapter five of the Letter to the Ephesians¹¹³ in the discussion on the papacy in Bernard's time, the Pope came to represent both the Head and the Body, much in the same way as Bernard presents Guy in his letter. The Pope, and respectively the bishop for his diocese, was seen as an earthly manifestation of Christ, in whom the feminine flesh/humanity/body and masculine spirit/God/head are combined in the salvific Incarnation, which is described as a marriage of the body/bride and the head/groom, following Paul's ecclesiology.¹¹⁴ As the pope was considered an earthly manifestation of Christ for the whole Church and the bishop for his diocese, so the abbot was an

¹⁰⁸ Engh, *Gendered Identities*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, p. 171. McGinn describes the influence of Paul's and Augustine's texts on Bernard by calling them "his masters in his teaching." On Augustine's influence on Bernard, see also Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 353–354.

¹¹⁰ O'Callaghan, *Figli di Dio nel mondo. Trattato di antropologia teologica*, p. 663.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*.

¹¹² Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 127. In his extensive collection of *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, where he analyzes more fully the same passage that he quotes in the letter to Guy, Bernard calls the monasteries "the beds of the Church," where it is possible to contemplate Christ the Bridegroom in intimate, quiet repose in the confines of the marital bedchamber.

¹¹³ Eph. 5:21–32.

¹¹⁴ Engh, "Embodying the Female Body Politic: Pro-Papal Reception of Ephesians 5 in the Later Middle Ages," pp. 185–189; McLaughlin, "The Bishop as Bridegroom," pp. 209, 214, 223, 229.

earthly Christ for his monastic community, and Bernard seems to have applied this principle to Guy in Letter 11.

Bernard probably found grounds for presenting the monastic leader as both the Bride and the Groom in Augustine's writings in particular. When working on Pauline ecclesiology, Augustine used the term *Totus Christus*, or the whole Christ, meaning the one entity formed by the marital union of the Church Body and its Head, Christ, through the Incarnation. Augustine developed the *Totus Christus* concept from an exegetical method used by a contemporary Christian thinker Tyconius, who read the Psalms as Christ's prayer. Sometimes he was praying as the Church Body, toiling and suffering on earth, sometimes as both the Body and the Head. According to this line of thought, the Church Body and the Christ Head can use the same voice through their union in the incarnation.¹¹⁵ The influence of Augustine's *Totus Christus* concept explains how Bernard can present Guy through both male and female imagery as a patriarch and then a bride, who is a future mother.

Letter 11 first and foremost considers charity and how it is best lived out, especially in the monastic context. The gendered imagery examined above is prominent in the text but by no means the most central aspect. Rather, the imagery serves as a tool to depict loving the other, ultimately God. The way Bernard uses these tools implies an affirmation of the completeness of Cistercian monasticism; the ideal motherhood that lacks in Guy is very present in letters addressed to members of his own order. As a whole, the letter has more of a feminine aftertaste: both Guy and God are depicted as women. As masculine *creator*, Patriarchs, Adam and God only visit the scene, representing separation in relation to feminine unity and fecundity. The references to carnal existence, the incarnation and the resurrection of the body go along with the strong presence of the feminine and show how the monastic family reflects the Church as the body of Christ, where salvation flows through the head. *Caritas* is the ideal unity of the head and the body, which reflects the unity of triune God.

¹¹⁵ Baker, "Augustine's Doctrine of the *Totus Christus*," pp. 10–12.

2.2 CHAPTER 2: LONELY MAN, DEPENDENT CHILD— LETTERS 72, 73 AND 74

2.2.1 RAINALD OF FOIGNY

Rainald was a monk in Bernard's community who was chosen and sent to be the head of a new Cistercian house in Foigny, which was founded in 1121 from Clairvaux. Letters 72, 73 and 74 are part of a series of correspondence that Bernard exchanged with Rainald in the first years of his abbacy. Rainald ceased to be an abbot and returned to Clairvaux in 1131. As one of Bernard's closest brothers, Rainald went with him on two of his later journeys: in 1135 to Milan and in 1140 to Paris.¹¹⁶

Letter 72 was probably written shortly after the foundation of the house, and letters 73 and 74 during the next couple of years, from 1122 to 1125.¹¹⁷ The letters were penned when the first daughter houses were founded from Clairvaux to new regions under Bernard's leadership; Foigny was the third.¹¹⁸ Bernard was still exercising influence mainly inside his order, which the letters from this time reflect by dealing mostly with internal issues. Moreover, the letters date to a time right before a silent period in Bernard's correspondence (1125–1127) due to his continuous health problems getting much worse in the mid-1120s.¹¹⁹

The three letters to Rainald are apparently a response to Rainald's expressions of difficulties in his position as an abbot. Letter 72 is the longest of the three and most loyally follows the typical structure of a 12th-century letter. Letters 73 and 74 are shorter and less formulated; they seem more like quick messages sent to a friend than carefully constructed letters with well-considered references to Scripture. The letters to Rainald deal with the role of the abbot and his relationship to other monks, as well as the relationship between abbots. I will look into how Bernard describes Rainald as an abbot in relation to his monks and to himself as another abbot, and how gendered imagery is used to express the abbot's position.

2.2.2 NOT A FATHER

Bernard begins Letter 72 with the *salutatio*, where he positions himself as Rainald's brother:

¹¹⁶ Gastaldelli, lettera 72, footnote 1.

¹¹⁷ Gastaldelli gives Letter 74 a rather long timeframe: 1125–1131. Content-wise, it is logical to assume that it was written closer to Letters 72 and 73, well within the 1120s. Bernard's bad state of health between 1125 and 1127 also supports the earlier dating of Letter 74.

¹¹⁸ Gastaldelli, lettera 72, footnote 1.

¹¹⁹ McGuire, "Bernard's Life and Works," pp. 36–38.

To his dearest Rainald, all that one devoted brother and faithful fellow servant could wish for another, from Bernard, his brother and fellow servant, not his father and lord.¹²⁰

Following the principles of *ars dictaminis*, Bernard expresses his social rank in comparison to the recipient in the *salutatio*: he is a brother and thus on the same level, not a father, which would mean a higher position than Rainald.¹²¹ Bernard's emphasized denunciation of the hierarchically higher position of a monastic father is probably a reaction to the supposedly exalting letter that Rainald had sent him earlier. Bernard continues the message of the *salutatio* with the aid of scriptural references:

Do not be surprised if I am frightened at the titles of honor you give me when I do not feel worthy of the honors themselves. [...] And if you believe that you must observe that command of the Rule which bids juniors honor their seniors, there immediately occur to me certain other sayings from the rule of Truth: "They shall be first who were last, and they shall be last who were first"; "No difference is to be made, among you, between the greatest and youngest of all, between him who commands and him who serves"; "The greater thou art, the more in all things abase thyself"; "Not that we would domineer over your faith; rather, we would help you to achieve happiness"; "You are not to claim the title of Rabbi... nor are you to call any man on earth your father."¹²²

He sets the rule of Truth, meaning Scripture, above the Benedictine Rule, and justifies the refusal of hierarchical fatherhood in relation to Rainald with it. The quoted Gospel passages describe differences that are the basis of a hierarchy, the existence of which Bernard does not question per se but shows them in the light of the principle of the first being last in the kingdom of God. In this sense, Bernard is not denying the fact that he is greater and the one who commands, but rather questions Rainald's view of how the hierarchy is to be understood, as well as the way Rainald supposedly positioned himself in the hierarchy in his previous letter to Bernard.

¹²⁰ Ep. LXXII:1:9–10. Dilectissimo suo Rainaldus, Bernardus eius, non pater aut dominus, sed frater et conservus, quod fratri charissimo et fideli conservo. James 75:1.

¹²¹ For the different types of letters, see, for example, Perelman, "The Medieval Art of Letter Writing."

¹²² Ep. LXXII:1:11–12, 16–7. Primo ne mireris si terrear dignitatis nominibus, cum me ipsis rebus sentiam indignum. [...] Quod si cogitas tibi illam Regulae sententiam observandam, "Juniore priore suos honorent, mihi e regione in mentem venit ex regula Veritatis: Erunt primi novissimi, et novissimi primi; et: Qui major est vestrum, fiat sicut junior; et: Quanto major es, tanto humilia te in omnibus; et: Principem te constituerunt? esto inter illos quasi unus ex illis; et: Non quia dominamur fidei vestrae, sed adjutores sumus gaudii vestri; et: Nolite vocari ab hominibus rabbi; et: Patrem nolite vocare vobis super terram. James 75:1

Bernard compares the burden of fatherhood's authority to the Virgin Mary carrying Christ:

It is pleasant to admire the lightness of the burden of Truth. And it is indeed really light, for not only is it no burden for the man who carries it, but it even carries him! And what can be lighter than a burden which not only does not burden, but even carries him on whom it is laid? This is the burden which the Virgin bore and by which she was borne and not burdened.¹²³

This reference to the Virgin Mary seems like a passing remark but holds the key to understanding Bernard's "fellow servant" argument that the letter as a whole seeks to support. Bynum suggests that the maternal imagery so often applied to abbots in the writings of Cistercians is based on male authority being deemed too harsh for the abbot's position. According to her, maternal images are thus a sign of unstable authority; the maternal imagery was a way for the abbot to deal with his insecurity as a male leader. Consequently, the abbot was supposed to be motherly as well as fatherly, to have both female and male authority, which also reflected his position as a representative of God in the community. Even though the supposed aim of the use of maternal images was to soften the authority of a father, in the end the requirement of motherly authority may have made it even harder to fulfill the expectations laid on an abbot.¹²⁴ From this point of view, in the context of Letter 72, the reference to the Virgin Mary and the burden of fatherhood, resembling the burden of carrying Christ, can be seen as a marker of instability in Bernard's leadership as a monastic father.

Bernard also compares "the burden of Truth" to a bird's wings:

When I look for an example among created things to illustrate this disburdening burden, nothing occurs to me more apt than the wings of a bird, for they, in an extraordinary way, render the body both greater and yet more nimble. What a wonderful achievement of nature that a body should be rendered lighter by its very increase in size, so that the more it increases in bulk the more it decreases in weight. Here certainly we have a clear illustration of the sweet burden of Christ which carries those who carry it.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ep. LXXII:2. Libet admirari quam leve sit onus Veritatis. Num vere leve est, quod portantem non gravat, sed levat? Quid eo levius onere, quod non solum non onerat, sed et portat omnem, cui portandum imponitur? Hoc onus potuit uterum gravidare virgineum, gravare non potuit. James 75:2.

¹²⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 154–158.

¹²⁵ Ep. LXXII:2:27–33. Quaero in rebus si quid forte huic exoneranti oneri simile inveniam, et occurrit mihi de pennis avium, quod ei utcumque coaptem; quae, quodam videlicet singulari modo, et corpulentiolem reddunt substantiam et agiliorem. Mirum opus naturae! Unde grossescit materia, inde

The wings are a loose reference to Psalm 40, where the Psalmist says how “they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”¹²⁶ At first glance, this image of the burden of Christ as wings seems like an odd detour from the actual topic of the letter. Bernard himself strengthens this impression by stating that he is “wandering from the point.”¹²⁷ However, it is plausible that this statement is a rhetorical device meant to give a sense of the presence of the author as an actual eyewitness of events described in the text. These kinds of phrases were used in the *vitae* of saints to affirm that the stories were being told by eyewitnesses of the saints’ lives and to thus strengthen their credibility as a true account.¹²⁸ In the case of the letter to Rainald, the “wandering” is there to give a point of contact for the reader with the author of the letter: Bernard is presented as an eyewitness for his own thoughts.¹²⁹

A reference to Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians that precedes the wing image hints that a greater depth of meaning was meant to be conveyed through it. Referring to the burden, Bernard writes: “And this is what snatched Paul up to the third heaven, even when he was weighed down by the corruptible body.”¹³⁰ In light of this phrase, the bird image probably refers to bodily life, life in flesh and in the world, and ultimately to the resurrection of the body: the fleshly body elevated and transformed through Christ’s burden. As the body was usually considered female, Mary being brought up laid the ground for the discreet inclusion of corporality in the letter. Mary stands for human life in the flesh, represented by the bird, elevated by her burden, Christ, who is depicted as wings that transform the burden of the body into a means of moving with more ease toward eternal life in Heaven, in and through the body.

After the wing sidetrack, Bernard reminds Rainald how he is only causing him harm with his praise,¹³¹ and then keeps insisting that he is a brother to Rainald, not a father:

sarcina levigatur; et quantum crescit in massa, tantum decrescit in pondere. Hoc plane in pennis, Christi oneris exprimit similitudinem, quod et ipsae ferunt a quibus feruntur. James 75:2.

¹²⁶ VG ...qui autem sperant in Domino mutabunt fortitudinem, assument pennas sicut aquilae, current et non laborabunt, ambulabunt et non deficient.

¹²⁷ Ep. LXXII:2:7–8. *Sed longe nimis digredior.* James 75:2.

¹²⁸ Clark, “The Lady Vanishes,” p. 18.

¹²⁹ The wing metaphor is probably from Augustine (Sermon 11:6), who uses a very similar image to depict the light, lifting burden of the daily cross of a Christian.

¹³⁰ Ep. LXXII:2:26–27. *Hoc etiam Paulum, in gravi licet et corruptibili corpore positum, rapiebat usque ad tertium coelum.* James 75:2. Bernard refers to 2 Cor. 12:2. D-R I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven. VG *Scio hominem in Christo ante annos quatuordecim, sive in corpore nescio, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit, raptum hujusmodi usque ad tertium caelum.*

¹³¹ Ep. LXXII:3.

As I ought, after the example of the Apostle, not to dominate over you but only to rejoice with you, and as, according to the words of our Lord, we are all brothers having one father in heaven, it is not improper for me to turn off from myself with the shield of truth the high names of lord and father with which you think to honor and not burden me, and more appropriately call myself brother and fellow servant as we share the same Father and the same condition. [...] That I have a father's affection for you, I do not deny, but I refuse the authority of a father; nor, I think, is the affection with which I embrace you less than the affection of a father for a son.¹³²

Despite rejecting authority, Bernard accepts the affective bond of a spiritual father. Interestingly, he does not want Rainald to burden him with lordship or fatherhood in spite of the positive outlook he displayed before in regard to being burdened. The refusal of fatherly authority in this context is noteworthy from the viewpoint of the general definition of the abbot's position in Bernard's works. In her study on sacred authority and temporal power in Bernard's writings, Alice Chapman suggests that Bernard attributed *auctoritas*, or divine authority, to both the Rule and the abbot. She notes that in the Benedictine Rule, *auctoritas* is not used for the abbot but applied only to Scripture and the Rule itself; the abbot instead holds *potestas*, or operational power.¹³³ This highlights Bernard's refusal of abbothood in relation to Rainald: *auctoritas* belongs to the position of the abbot elsewhere in Bernard's writings.

Considering that the letter was written in the earlier years of Bernard's career as an abbot and before he started to largely participate in matters outside his own order, it is possible to conclude that in the letter to Rainald, Bernard is following the Rule's definition of *auctoritas* belonging to Scripture and the Rule, not to the abbot. In the 12th century, there was a growing theological trend of emphasizing that the prelates represented Christ as the head of the church.¹³⁴ Seeing that elsewhere in his work Bernard tended to see abbots at the same rank of prelates or bishops, the rejection of the authority of a father in relation to Rainald stands out even further. Perhaps Bernard later

¹³² Ep. LXXII:4:1–7, 9–11. Cum ergo, ut ad te revertar, exemplo Apostoli tuae religiositati non dominari, sed congratulari tantum debeam, et juxta verbum Domini unus sit pater noster in coelis, nos autem omnes fratres simus, non immerito domini patrisque celsa nomina, quibus me honorandum, sed non onerandum putasti, scuto a me veritatis repuli, congruentius pro his me fratrem nominans et conservum, tum propter eandem haereditatem, tum propter aequam conditionem, [...] Et patris quidem habere me erga te affectum non nego, sed auctoritatem renuo. Nec enim te minore, ut existimo, quam paterno complector affectu. James 75:4.

¹³³ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 95.

¹³⁴ See Engh, "Embodying the Female Body Politic: Pro-Papal Reception of Ephesians 5 in the Later Middle Ages."

became influenced more by the theological current of applying headship and *auktoritas* to prelates, while in the 1120s he was mostly enclosed in the monastic life defined by the Rule and could thus refuse to think of himself having *auktoritas*. The word *auktoritas* is not used for the abbot in the Rule, as noted by Chapman.¹³⁵ This may have given Bernard grounds for not accepting the authority of a father in the letter.

In Bernard's later works, the office of a bishop is brought up as a male burden and contrasted with the female softness of those (monks) who in his opinion could not bear such weight.¹³⁶ Compared to the background of gendering God's male authority, it is presumable that in Letter 72 the burden of fatherhood is this kind of a manly burden, with the abbot being in a similar position as a bishop in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It seems that it is this male burden that Bernard is refusing, while accepting and embracing with delight the light burden of Mary, the burden of a woman. The female burden does not come with a ruling or dominating position but affection, albeit Bernard calls it "a father's affection". Such fatherly affection seems to remain a feminine emotion despite being connected to fatherhood. For Bernard, affection was strongly connected to corporality and the principle of all human love starting from the body as a part of human nature.¹³⁷ Hence, even though Bernard writes of a father's affection, the outcome in its affective corporality refers to womanhood, especially when keeping in mind the previous mention of the Virgin Mary. Bernard is layering male and female tones in a quite varied manner, creating a multifaceted image of himself as an abbot.

As in the case of Letter 11, femininity can be seen as a way to depict unity.¹³⁸ Bernard wants to affirm that he and Rainald "share the same condition" and have "the same Father," and bringing up the Virgin Mary while rejecting the manly burden of fatherhood serves this purpose well. Hierarchical fatherhood would necessarily mean separation and being on different levels. In Letter 72, Bernard shows Rainald through the rejection of authoritative fatherhood that his place is not above Rainald, but on the same level since he was also made an abbot; thus, he should be a support to Bernard, not a dependent child anymore. The monk learned to be a dependent child of God through dependence on his abbot,¹³⁹ and Rainald had supposedly taken the role of a child in his letter to Bernard. The Cistercians used motherhood to express the dependence between abbot and monk, the idea being that one's own salvation is attached to the spiritual development of others, especially in the case of an abbot.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 100, 108, 118.

¹³⁶ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 169.

¹³⁷ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, p. 417.

¹³⁸ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 109–110.

¹³⁹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁰ See Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*.

Bernard calling Rainald a fellow servant and mentioning the Virgin Mary are connected to each other through the profound connection of Mary and Jesus in 12th-century piety and theology: it was thought that Mary went through the same agonies as Christ on the Cross, but in her heart. In practice, therefore, imitation of Mary was a part of imitating Christ.¹⁴¹ From this viewpoint, the abbot's comparison to the Virgin Mary is logical, for the abbot represents Christ. Both Jesus and Mary probably invited connotations of a servant of God in the minds of 12th-century monastics. In medieval exegesis, the Old Testament suffering servant of God was interpreted to mean Jesus Christ; Mary calls herself *ancilla Domini* (servant of the Lord) in the Gospel of Luke.¹⁴² The term "fellow servant" is probably also a reference to the principle of leaders as servants, which arises from the Gospels; this is more clearly visible in Letter 73.

In Letter 73, Bernard continues on the topic of being burdened by Rainald. As a response to Rainald communicating his troubles, Bernard scolds him for telling too much:

When you wring your hands, dearest Rainald, over your many troubles, I, too, am moved to tears by your affectionate complaints. When you are sorrowful, I cannot but be sorry; nor can I hear of your worries and troubles without being myself worried and troubled. [...] And so, when on the top of all this you who should be a staff to support me use your faintheartedness as a staff with which to belabor me; you are piling sadness upon sadness, one cross upon another. Although it is a mark of your affection for me that you hide none of your troubles from me, it is nevertheless unfeeling of you not to spare me, who feel as I do toward you, any details of your sufferings. Why should you make me, who am anxious enough about you, even more anxious? Why should my heart, already torn by the absence of my son, be wounded still more by having to hear every detail of the trials he is enduring? I have shared my burdens with you, as with a son and an indispensable and faithful helper. See how you must carry the fatherly burden.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights*, pp. 118, 121–122.

¹⁴² VG Lk 1:38. Dixit autem Maria: Ecce ancilla Domini: fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.

¹⁴³ Ep. LXXIII:1:26–29, 5–14. Plangis, dilectissime fili Rainalduse, super multis tribulationibus tuis, piisque querimoniis me quoque excitas ad plangendum. Nec enim te dolente possum dolere, nec nisi molestus et anxius tuas molestias et anxietates audire. [...] Cum ergo super hoc etiam velut quodam tuae pusillanimitatis baculo me percellis, qui mihi debueras esse baculus sustentationis; tristitiam super tristitiam ingeris et cruciatum cruciatibus addis: et si mihi pium est nullas tuas angustias dissimulare, tibi tamen durum est sic affecto cunctas indicare. Quid enim necesse est satis sollicitum amplius sollicitare, et absentia filii saucia patris viscera gravioribus torquere doloribus? Onus meum tibi partitus

The burden of Mary that Bernard identifies with the burden of monastic fatherhood has to do with the increasing spiritual trend of compassion, ultimately toward suffering Christ, but here appearing as the abbot's compassion toward his spiritual son. As Sarah McNamer shows in her work on affective meditation in the Middle Ages, compassion as an emotion was in general gendered as female; to feel compassion was to feel like a woman. This is one of the factors behind Bernard referring to the Virgin Mary when describing the abbot's burden as a father.¹⁴⁴

When bringing up the theme of being supported and being carried, Bernard accuses Rainald for being a burden, a sadness and a cross, instead of being someone on whom to lean. As in Letter 72, the probable aim of comparing Rainald to a cross is to pull him up from his misery to be at the same level as himself. Being an abbot like Bernard, Rainald was supposed to be a supportive staff instead of another burden for his former abbot. Seen from this angle, Bernard's emotional language is a means of spiritual direction. Statements like "I, too, am moved to tears" can be seen as so-called emotives, as literary instruments that function as tools to awaken a certain emotion in the reader. McNamer compares these first-person emotion claims to the psalmic "I," whose purpose is to serve as a space for the reader to place themselves in and feel like the narrator of the psalm.¹⁴⁵ In his article about Bernard as a writer, Pranger states that the usage of the first person in this way is characteristic to Bernard's style: he tends to unite what Pranger calls the persona of the text into himself, absorbing the "we," "you" and "they" into the "I," using McNamer's wording.¹⁴⁶ Bernard uses his person similarly in the letter, harnessing the "I" as an instrument of directing Rainald to rise to the level of his new position.

The advice and the definition of the abbot's position that follow the moaning over Rainald's burdening complaint strengthens the image that the beginning of the letter is not about Bernard's anguish, as it may seem on the surface, but about Rainald's inability to take his place as a monastic leader:

This is the burden of souls which are sick, for those which are well do not need to be carried and so are no burden. You must understand that you are especially an abbot of the sad, faint-hearted and discontented among your flock. It is by consoling, encouraging and admonishing that you do your duty and carry your burden and, by carrying your burden, heal those you carry. If there is anyone so spiritually healthy that he rather helps you than is helped by you, you are not so much his father as his equal, not so much his abbot as his fellow. Why then do you complain that you find the company of some of

sum ut filio, ut necessario, ut fideli coadiutori meo. Vide quomodo te oporteat paternam portare sarcinam. James 76:1.

¹⁴⁴ McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 3, 7.

¹⁴⁵ McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 12, 17, 70. On emotives, see Boddice, *The History of Emotions*, pp. 62–70.

¹⁴⁶ Pranger, "Bernard the Writer," p. 226.

those who are with you more of a burden than a comfort? You were given to them as abbot not to be comforted but to comfort, because you were the strongest of them all without needing to be comforted by any. [...] You should know that you have been sent not to be helped but to help, and realize that you hold the place of him who came not to be served but to serve.¹⁴⁷

Him who came not to be served is a reference to the gospel of Matthew, where Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man who came to die for others.¹⁴⁸ This phrase that Bernard quotes is a part of the incident where there is a quarrel among the disciples about places of power next to Jesus in his kingdom. Bernard's quote is a part of Jesus' answer to them:

But Jesus called them to him, and said: You know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them; and they that are the greater, exercise power upon them. It shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister. And he that will be first among you, shall be your servant. Even as the Son of Man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a redemption for many.¹⁴⁹

Drawing from the Rule and the Gospel of Matthew, Bernard portrays Rainald's position as abbot as a Christ-like servant, who is ready even for death for the others' benefit. Rainald is supposed to hold the place of Christ for his monks, which meant limitless servitude for their needs, "without needing to be comforted by any." This further dissolves the authoritative, hierarchically superior position of the abbot as a father.

2.2.3 THE CHALLENGE OF AUTHORITY

Being a Cistercian abbot was probably as tough as it sounds. It was a fairly common phenomenon in the 12th century for abbots to leave their office.¹⁵⁰ This is clearly shown in the collection of letters of Bernard, as many address a situation where the abbot is not stable in his position. The letters dealing with

¹⁴⁷ Ep. XVIII:2:17–27, 2–4. Nam quae sanae sunt, portari non indigent, ac, per hoc, nec onus sunt. Quoscumque igitur de tuis inveneris tristes, pusillanimes, murmurosos, ipsorum te patrem, ipsorum te noveris esse abbatem. Consolando, exhortando, increpando agis opus tuum, portas onus tuum, et portando sanas quos sanando portas. Si quis vero ita sanus est ut magis juvet te quam juvetur a te, hujus te non patrem, sed parem, comitem, non abbatem agnoscas. Quid igitur causaris te aliquorum qui tecum sunt magis gravari consortio quam frui solatio, cum solus omnium omnibus datus sis solatium, tanquam omnibus sanior, omnibus fortior, qui omnibus sufficias per Dei gratiam solatiari, et a nemine omnium indigeas confortari? [...] Sciens ergo te missum iuvare, non iuvari, illius te agnosce vicarium qui venit ministrare, non ministrari. James 76:2.

¹⁴⁸ Mt 20:28 D-R: Even as the Son of Man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a redemption for many. VlgC: *Sicut Filius hominis non venit ministrari, sed ministrare, et dare animam suam redemptionem pro multis.*

¹⁴⁹ Mt 20:25–27.

¹⁵⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 156.

the case of Rainald represent one of these troubled abbots who ended up returning to life as a mere monk.¹⁵¹

The fluctuation between male and female—the burden of Christ and Mary—may be an indication of what Engh sees as a gendered hierarchy, where the male–female duality is used to express the breaking of boundaries between the world and Heaven when seeking to imitate Christ by both assuming and negating femininity. This has to do with the gendering of flesh and the created world as female: when moving between femininity and masculinity, the text reconstructs and mimics the incarnation of God, with the masculine spirit assuming the feminine flesh and becoming one with it in the person of Christ.¹⁵² As Bynum shows in the context of shedding light on the groundwork of later women’s devotion to the Virgin Mary, Christ’s flesh was emphatically gendered as female in 12th-century thought, since it came only from Mary. The belief in Jesus’ lack of a human father and Mary as the only source of his humanity was highlighted by the long-standing tradition of seeing the mother as the source of the physical nature and the father as the source of the soul or form of a child.¹⁵³ When applied to an abbot, the burden of Mary can thus be read as an indirect expression of *imitatio Christi* and a sign of the point of negotiation of the letters: that abbothood means holding the place of Christ.

In the case of the letters to Rainald, Bernard seems to be assuming and negating both womanhood and manhood. He negates the burden of fatherhood and assumes affection and the sweet burden of Mary. On the other hand, he clearly wants to make Rainald see himself as a father and carry the fatherly burden. The burden of Mary points toward the fatherly burden of Christ in the image of the abbot that Bernard creates, and it takes its significance from the larger theological frame of the incarnation and the resurrection of the body, as evidenced by the contemplation of the wings of a bird. In a sense, the life of Mary, the handmaiden of the Lord (*ancilla Domini*), is presented as the model for the abbot, even though he represents Christ and carries the manly burden. The female burden is nested in the manly burden through the connection of Mary and Jesus.

The level of responsibility for others that the 12th-century abbot had regarding his monks is to some extent comparable to that of a parish priest or a bishop of that time. The abbot, the priest and the bishop were supposed to

¹⁵¹ Rainald’s subsequent resignation and return to Clairvaux is known from other sources than the letters themselves.

¹⁵² Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 5.

¹⁵³ On woman as physicality or humanity in 12th century and later medieval female writers, see Bynum, “...And Woman His Humanity,” pp. 171, 175–79. On Jesus’ motherhood and its application on abbots in Bernard, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 115–117; see also *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: on flesh as female in the works of both male and female religious*, see p. 260; on woman as the source of the body, see pp. 261–262; on Bernard’s use of Mary’s body in reference to Christ’s body in the Eucharist and identifying the priest as Mary when celebrating Mass in the 12th century, see pp. 268–269. For more discussion on human physicality as female, see Conclusions.

be spiritual fathers for their flock, similar to the father of a family. Spiritual maturity of a male head was expected of them. Like priesthood or bishophood, abbothood required social adulthood to a higher extent than being a monk (or, in the context of a priest or bishop, a parishioner).¹⁵⁴ In Bernard's works, the office of bishop falls in the same category of spiritual fatherhood as abbothood or priesthood: a bishop's family is his diocese, a parish priest's his parish, and an abbot's his community of monks.¹⁵⁵ From the viewpoint of monastic life and the vow of obedience that it included, the abbot's power—and, consequently, responsibility—over his family was even greater than a bishop's or parish priest's: following the Rule, the salvation of the monks of his community was directly and to a larger extent in his hands. It is this burden that Bernard rejects in relation to Rainald. Following Engh's suggestion of the male-female duality being a hierarchy,¹⁵⁶ Bernard is thus refusing to assume a hierarchically higher position than his former monk, who is now an abbot. Instead, he holds on to the female burden of Mary, which can be read as striving for the unity that femininity usually stands for, as Miller suggests in her analysis on Scripture and Christian classics.¹⁵⁷ What the rejection of hierarchical fatherhood aims to express, then, is unity between fellow servants, who are defined by carrying a burden that requires manly strength and, on the other hand, the feminine motherhood of Mary. These both imply self-giving for the benefit of the community's salvation.

Considering the abbot's position as a representative of Christ, the Head and Bridegroom in the Rule, the idea of *auctoritas* as a manly burden rises from the Rule itself. Being in a similar position as a bishop or parish priest, the abbot held ecclesiastical power, that is, power given by God. Following the precepts of the Rule, Bernard expresses in many of his texts that the abbot should be obeyed as God Himself in a monastic community.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, as Chapman has noted, Bernard does attribute *auctoritas* to the abbot in his later work.¹⁵⁹ In the immediate context of the letters to Rainald, the idea of the abbot's *auctoritas* is indirect, like in the Rule, which might have to do with Bernard being so keen to reject what can be defined as male authority and adopt affectivity and the corporeal, female burden of Mary instead.

The abbot's *auctoritas*, which Bernard acknowledges in his later works, is connected to his position as a spiritual father, the head of the family. This probably has its roots in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (3:14–15), where all

¹⁵⁴ Smith, "Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith," pp. 143–144.

¹⁵⁵ On marriage symbolism and the idea of all people being married in one way or another, see Engh, *The Symbolism of Marriage in Early Christianity and the Latin Middle Ages*.

¹⁵⁶ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 109–110.

¹⁵⁸ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 100, 118.

¹⁵⁹ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 95.

fatherhood is essentially seen as a reflection of the fatherhood of God.¹⁶⁰ This connection is made somewhat directly in the Rule, as it states that the abbot's name refers to God as father.¹⁶¹ As stated above, the monastic community was a microcosmic version of the Church, where the abbot holds the place of Christ as the head, and the monks respectively the church body. Since the abbot as father was based on authority given by God the Father, he was the male head in his community, while the choir of monks was considered female in the marital dynamics of the salvation of 12th-century ecclesiology. This headship implied by the theological framework of Bernard's monastic context is what he denies in relation to Rainald, though he still takes it on himself through the Virgin Mary. What Bernard denies, he lays as a charge on Rainald, whom he is trying to instruct to take his place as the servant head. Bernard's denial of the fatherly burden is an instrument of spiritual direction and does not necessarily tell us anything of his actual thoughts concerning his own abbothood. Using his persona as a space for the reader, as in Letter 11, he shows Rainald the full spectrum of the abbot's position that reflects Christ's two natures as the incarnated person of the Trinity.

From the point of view of the male burden, the abbot's emphasized maleness that is built in the marital ecclesiology set him apart from his brothers; he was a man surrounded by an analogically female community, which he was supposed to carry by himself, like Christ. Both abbots seem to be struggling with their authority being based on self-giving and servitude, which sets them apart from the rest, like Christ on the Cross, as defined by the Rule and Pauline letters.¹⁶² Another possibility in interpreting the evocation of Mary and the denial of hierarchical fatherhood is that Bernard is hesitant to attribute true *auctoritas*, male headship that reflects the fatherhood of God the Creator, to an ecclesiastical leader; instead, he goes along with the nuances given by the Rule, preserving *auctoritas* for God and Scripture only.¹⁶³

What seems to be central in the 12th-century mindset is the connection of Mary and Jesus through the idea that they share the same burden. The inclusion of Mary in the attempt to make Rainald rise up to Bernard's level as an abbot has to do with the Cistercian ideal of being motherly, as brought up also in the letter to Guy. In the letters looked at here, Bernard shows the abbot to be a motherly father, like Mary, who carries a manly burden, like Christ. Essentially, these both point to the abbot's headship and being a representative of God. As such, he is the bridge to salvation for his community and, in Engh's wording, breaks the boundaries between heaven and earth.

¹⁶⁰ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority*, p. 101.

¹⁶¹ RB ch. II.

¹⁶² Miller, *Sexuality and Authority*, p. 74.

¹⁶³ See also Engh, "Embodying the Female Body Politic: Pro-Papal Reception of Ephesians 5 in the Later Middle Ages." The argument of Bernard's reserved attitude toward the trend of positioning ecclesiastical leaders as the bridegroom has been developed in dialogue with Line Engh.

2.3 CHAPTER 3: THE MANLY MAN STRENGTHENED BY SWEET MILK—LETTER 78

2.3.1 SUGER OF ST. DENIS

Letter 78 to Suger, the abbot of St. Denis, dated to the year 1127 has to do with Suger's efforts to renew the monastic practices of his historically significant Benedictine house and voicing of disapproval toward Stephen of Garland, a seneschal of King Louis VI who also held ecclesiastical positions of power. Suger was a friend and advisor of Louis VI as well and was highly involved in matters of governing the kingdom.¹⁶⁴ In the letter, Bernard describes the reality of the community of St. Denis before the time of Suger's reform as a "workshop of Vulcan" and "synagogue of Satan."¹⁶⁵ By these strong expressions of dislike, he refers to the non-monastic atmosphere that the house had supposedly had during the abbacy of the previous abbot, Adam. Bernard gives the impression that before Suger set things on the right path again, the monastery was a place of politics and earthly concerns more than a religious community. The message of the letter is that Suger has done well by cleansing his monastic community of worldly political activity, thus making way for the spirituality appreciated by Bernard and following the reform efforts to separate earthly power from the Church. It has been speculated whether the reform that the letter refers to actually took place or whether the letter was just a means of political maneuvering on Bernard's part, but it seems likely that Suger had really taken a different approach as head of the monastery than his predecessor Adam. For example, renovations and remodelings done in the premises of St. Denis during the abbacy of Suger suggest a conscious effort to have the monks live in a more cloistered and communal way, just as Bernard leads the reader to imagine in the letter.¹⁶⁶

The letter is rather long, but less treatise-like than the letter to Guy, for example. It begins with the customary *captatio benevolentiae* with seemingly laudatory content. From the viewpoint of gendered imagery, the thematic structure seems to follow the same pattern as the letter to Guy: first the man/head, then the woman in the form of bride or mother and lastly a depiction of a whole, formed by man and woman. The structure reflects an ecclesiology and method of interpreting Scripture intertwined with marital theology, as seen above. In the letter to Suger, the unity of woman and man is shown through a distortion of the marital order. Thus, the letter offers an interesting contrast to the much more positive undertones present in the letter to Guy. The shadow of a monster lurking behind the corner is cast on Suger, rather than the affirmative light of a well-ordered, ideal monastic life.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Grant, *Abbot Suger of St-Denis*.

¹⁶⁵ Ep. LXXVIII:4, 21, 22. *industria Vulcani [...] synagoga Satanae*. James 80:4.

¹⁶⁶ Grant, *Abbot Suger of St-Denis*, p. 186.

The monster that Bernard describes has been suggested to be the actual reason behind writing the letter: it represents Stephen of Garland, simultaneously an archdeacon and the closest advisor of the king—and supposedly a friend of Suger. Stephen was considered worldly, wealth-seeking and power-hungry to the extreme by Bernard and other ecclesiastical heads who aimed to realize the reform of the Church that would separate ecclesiastical and worldly power clearly. In the eyes of many, Stephen of Garland stood for the opposite, and this is expressed with graphic imagery in the letter. There are very complex political motivations behind the letter having to do with church reform and Stephen of Garland’s criticized position, which define its content significantly.¹⁶⁷ Knowledge of the political and social complexities behind the letter highlights the need to scrutinize its content carefully from a hermeneutic point of view. Bernard’s gendered theology was not disconnected from actual events and people, but crafted in dialogue with them—and often to mold the world around Bernard to match the reality that was created in the text. In the case of the letter to Suger, an ideal is presented for men of God, either monastic or clerical. The main focus of the analysis of the letter will not be on how well the ideal that Bernard describes matches the goals of the reform movement, nor will it offer on a detailed account of the politico-religious tensions behind the letter. The aim here is to look at how Bernard forms his ideal man of God and anti-Stephen arguments through gendered language and imagery.

The letter to Suger is prominent in its presentation of the man: the text moves from war to patriarchal headship and ascetic practices, all bearing a manly meaning. A factor behind the highlighted manliness in the letter may be the period when the letter was written. It seems that military things were coming up frequently in Bernard’s works in the late 1120s; for instance, *De laude novae militiae* was written in 1129. One cannot be certain whether the letter has been modified in the process of forming the collection of letters to better fit the spirit of the time or whether the militaristic content reflects Bernard’s genuine patterns of thought at the time. What is for sure is that the theological thought revolving around manly soldiers is intentionally presented in the letter for various reasons, one of them being the masculine connotations connected to the headship of Suger and another the need to show Suger in a deliberately non-monastic light.

2.3.2 TANQUAM CAPUT UNITUM MEMBRIS—SACRIFICIAL HEADSHIP OF THE WAR HERO

In the *captatio benevolentiae*, Bernard praises the “sudden change of the right arm of the Most High,”¹⁶⁸ with which he refers to Suger’s position as a close

¹⁶⁷ Grant, pp. 55, 125–127.

¹⁶⁸ Ep. LXXVIII:1. *tam subita mutatione dexterarum Excelsi*. James 80:1. The *dexterarum Excelsi* refers to Suger’s position as the king’s close advisor.

advisor to the king. He depicts Suger's role as an abbot by describing a highly militaristic image of a battlefield:

In this you have acted like a resolute soldier, or rather like a devoted and strong captain who, when he sees his men in flight and slaughtered on all sides by the swords of the enemy, would be ashamed to survive them and scorn to save his own life by flight, even if he could. He stands fast in battle, he fights stoutly, and he runs hither and thither between the lines amongst the blood-stained swords trying with sword and voice to dishearten the enemy and encourage his own men. He is always on the spot where he discovers the enemy are breaking through and his men being hewn down. Where anyone is being hard-pressed and overcome he is always there to assist him, being all the more ready to die for each one in that he despairs of saving all. And, while he is trying little by little to stem and stop the advance of the enemy, it often happens that by his valor he snatches a victory for his own men from the confusion of the enemy, all the more welcome for being unexpected. They in their turn now put to flight those from whom they fled, and overcome those whom hitherto they have barely been able to stave off from vanquishing them, so that those who were lately all but victims now exult as victors. But why should I compare such a religious and mighty achievement with secular things, as if religion itself did not provide many examples?¹⁶⁹

The question is a rhetorical one: Bernard continues the letter by describing Moses' actions as the head of his people, not necessarily answering it directly. Essentially, the question is connected to the theme of worldliness versus the right kind of monasticism. The prominent manliness of the military imagery used here provokes a search for another kind of an answer and inspires a rephrasing of the question: why all the worldly manliness?

¹⁶⁹ Ep. LXXVIII:1. Sic strenuus in bello miles, imo sic pius ac fortis militum dux, ubi suos forte conspexerit in fugam versos, jamque hostili passim gladio trucidari, etsi se vel solum videat evadere posse, libet tamen mori magis cum illis, sine quibus vivere pudet. Proinde stat in praelio, fortiter dimicat, et inter cruentos gladios per medias acies hac illacque discurrens, voce et ense terret quantum valet adversarios, animat suos. Ubi acrius insistere hostem, sociisque gravius comperit imminere periculum, ibi adest. Occurrit ferienti, pereunti succurrit, eo quippe mori paratus pro singulis, quo desperatus de universis. At vero, dum paulisper retentare et retardare nititur insequentes, suos vero quos valet, erigit corruentes, revocat fugientes; fit plerumque ut in manu forti tam gratam quam inopinatam obtineat salutem suis, hostibus confusionem. Fugant tandem quos fugiebant, superant quos pene sustinebant victores; et qui prius periclitabantur de vita, postmodum exsultant de victoria. Sed quid nos tam religiosum, tam forte factum saecularibus comparamus, quasi exempla nobis de ipsa desint de religione? James 80:1–2.

Military activity was considered a manly thing to do in the 12th century. As Katherine Allen Smith has argued, 12th-century spirituality succeeded in making these traditional signs of manhood, like strength and physical struggle, into a transcendental reality that enabled a distinctively masculine identity for the religious, in large part due to Bernard's influence.¹⁷⁰ In the image of Suger as a war hero there is a contradiction that begs attention: a religious person was not supposed to carry or use weapons, let alone participate in a battle.¹⁷¹ Yet, it does not seem to be insuperably problematic to make Suger swing his bloody sword in the text. Bernard's account of Suger as a captain of an army in an intense battle is a vivid example of the transcending of earthly warfare in the name of maintaining a manly identity in the monastic context that Smith refers to. One could leave the analysis at that and move on. However, the multiple layers of the military imagery call for closer attention when trying to get to the core of the prominent masculinity of the scene.

The placement of military imagery and the immediate questioning of the use of such imagery in the beginning of the letter are probably intentional. They set the tone of the whole letter to highlight the incompatibility of monastic life and active participation in worldly affairs. Bernard questioning the justifiability of the militant abbot he has just before visualized serves to support that point: why even bother with secular examples when religious life is so much better? This same divisive setting has been at work in gender-historical studies on masculinity, as pointed out by Derek Neal in his introductory article in *Negotiating Clerical Identities*. In the modern mind, and apparently also in Bernard's mind as it is portrayed in the letter, with its common attributes masculinity contains religious aspects only with difficulty. It seems that masculinity is secular almost by its nature, due to being defined by the very things that were not permitted for 12th-century religious men or clergy: sexual activity and impulsive, violent behavior.¹⁷² Bernard recognizes this same feature in the militaristic image he creates of Suger, and thus he makes masculine military activity a marker for the things of the world; the war hero Suger offers a reproach in the guise of a laudatory description of his reform efforts.

The reference to Moses that follows the quote above gives a sign of what the abbot shown as a fierce military leader is pointing at: again, the abbot is the head, a representative of Christ. The manliness of war is the worldly, human aspect in the interpretation of the imagery applied to Suger. This is just the first layer; at the center of presenting Suger as a captain of an army is Christ's position as the man of the family in the marital interpretation of salvation through the Church. When Suger is presented as a manly war hero, his position as an abbot who takes part in the headship of Christ is highlighted. The manly imagery serves as a sign of the headship of Christ in relation to the female

¹⁷⁰ Smith, "Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith," p. 87.

¹⁷¹ Smith, "Spiritual Warriors in Citadels of Faith," p. 93.

¹⁷² Neal, "What Can Historians Do with Clerical Masculinity?," pp. 19–24.

Church body, but on the other hand it is a purposely mundane depiction of a once-worldly monastic.

Bernard continues the letter by elaborating on his comparison of Suger to Moses and then also remembering King David:

In the end he offered himself in satisfaction for their defection, praying God to pardon them or else blot out his own name from his record. He was a faithful advocate who easily obtained what he asked for, because he was not seeking his own interests. He was also a devoted leader united by love to his people, as the head is united with the body [members], so that he would rather perish with them than be saved without them. [...] But I must add someone else whom I had almost forgotten. I mean the holy King David, who when he saw the slaughter of his people, was sad and made haste to stand before the angel who was smiting them and implore that the punishment might be transferred unto himself and his father's house.¹⁷³

The military imagery is a prelude for a pattern of Old Testament references already seen in the letter to Guy, where Moses and David are also used to show the recipient's position as the head. Another common feature between these two letters is that they are addressed to a non-Cistercian leader of a community. References to Old Testament patriarchs and the ecclesiological head-body interpretation of the structure of the monastic community seem to also be important when writing to a leader who is not from the same immediate monastic family. In the case of Suger, the connection between the Old Testament figures and their role as head is made more explicitly than in the letter to Guy, where Bernard merely mentions the patriarchs without elaborating much more on their role as the head. With Suger, Bernard concentrates precisely on the head, implying his role as a cornerstone that makes or breaks the community.

In the letter to Suger, headship is equated with an attitude of sacrificing oneself for the people or the members of the body. Bernard refers to Exodus, where Moses prays to God after the people have made themselves a golden calf to worship as a god, and then makes an offering: "And returning to the Lord, he said: I beseech thee: this people hath sinned a heinous sin, and they have made to themselves gods of gold: either forgive them this trespass, or if thou

¹⁷³ Ep. LXXVIII:2. Denique et se obiciens pro delinquentibus ait: Si dimittis, dimitte; sin autem, dele me de libro tuo quem scripsisti. Fidelis advocatus, qui, quoniam non quaerit quae sua sunt, facile obtinet omne quod quaerit. Plane benignus, qui tanquam caput unitum membris, genti suae firma charitatis cohaerens, aut illam salvabit secum, aut non potest nisi idem cum illis subire periculum. [...] Sed addo adhuc – quem pene praetermiseram –, et sanctum David, qui, cernens dolensque populi stragem, angelo percutienti festinus occurrit, et in se potius domumque patris sui divinam transferri flagitat ultionem. James 80:2.

do not, strike me out of the book that thou hast written.”¹⁷⁴ Before this prayer, Moses had called for those among the people who are “on the Lord’s side” to join him: “And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.” He then commands them in God’s name to go through the camp and slay “brother, and friend, and neighbor”: “and there were slain that day about three and twenty thousand men.”¹⁷⁵ The whole chain of events is rather gory, but in the text of the letter Bernard concentrates on Moses’ role as a leader who is willing to suffer with the people. Considering the dramatic events behind the passage that Bernard refers to, he is not merely comparing Suger to Moses, but also reminding him of the danger of worshiping false gods, which was still hovering over the community of St. Denis.

The figure of David, whom Bernard “had almost forgotten,” brings yet another accusing tone with it. In the passage that Bernard refers to (2 Reg. 24),¹⁷⁶ David is pleading with God to save the people and punish him instead, like Moses in the previous comparison. But David himself had been the one that had inflicted a plague upon his people by ordering a census to be taken in his kingdom, in order to find out how many fighting men he had at his disposal. In the context of the Old Testament, this is a sign of distrust toward God. Unlike in the case of Moses, David is willing to suffer for his own mistake as the head of the people, not making up for his flock’s sins. It is probable that the context of the David reference is an indirect reminder—despite Bernard’s apparent forgetfulness—of Suger’s past sins as a religious political figure.

The phrase *tanquam caput unitum membris* opens up an interpretational pathway that takes one quite deep into the mental web¹⁷⁷ of medieval Christianity. It is a reference to Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, albeit not a word-to-word quote. Bernard summarizes the rather extensive analysis in the Pauline epistle in one short phrase. In Ephesians 5, Paul explains:

Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church. He is the savior of his body. [...] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it [...] So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth

¹⁷⁴ VG Ex. XXXII:31–32. Reversusque ad Dominum, ait: Obsecro, peccavit populus iste peccatum maximum, feceruntque sibi deos aureo: aut dimitte eis hanc noxam, aut si non facis, dele me de libro tuo quem scripsisti.

¹⁷⁵ VG Ex. XXXII:26–28. Si quis est Domini, jungatur mihi. Congregatique sunt ad eum omnes filii Levi. [...] Ponat vir gladium super femur suum: ite, et redite de porta usque ad portam per medium castrorum, et occidat unusquisque fratrem, et amicum, et proximum suum. Feceruntque filii iuxta sermonem Moysi, cecideruntque in die illa quasi viginti tria millia hominum.

¹⁷⁶ In more modern translations, this would be 2 Samuel 24.

¹⁷⁷ See Turner, *The Origin of Ideas*. I am using the term to indicate that medieval ecclesiology can be thought of in relation to what Turner calls a vast, non-human-scale mental web, which can be tapped into through what he calls blending, creating new ideas by combining things from different mental frames.

himself. [...] Because we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.¹⁷⁸

Bernard mentions Moses in comparison to Suger: "He was also a devoted leader united by love to his people, as the head is united with the body [members], so that he would rather perish with them than be saved without them." In this way, he brings the entire ecclesiology of the Letter to the Ephesians into the picture, as well as the tradition of reading the old covenant through the new.

Through Paul another scriptural doorway is opened, taking the reader into yet another level of meaning. The members, here flesh and bones, are a reference to the creation of the woman:

And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam. And Adam said: This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Virago, because she was taken out of man.¹⁷⁹

As is visible from these references, the head and body with its members link Bernard's letter to Paul and his ecclesiology, and then Paul takes us right to the first couple through the flesh and bones. In a subtle way, Bernard manages to merge the vast mental web of salvation through the Church in the image he creates of Suger's leadership. The equation of Christ and Adam is made directly by Paul in the Letter to the Romans (5:12–21),¹⁸⁰ thus making it an easily accessible hermeneutic model to be applied in a monastic context, like Bernard does in the letter. Suger is Christ/head/Adam as the head of the monastic community, while the community, the soldiers fighting under the captain's leadership, is the Church/body/Eve.

A closer look at the text of Genesis in the Vulgate reveals an essential feature of the meaning of manhood and womanhood which defines the shape of gendered theology that Bernard was saturated with when ruminating Scripture and Christian authoritative texts for years on end. Jerome, when translating the text from Hebrew, wanted to keep intact the original word play in the creation of man and woman, and decided to use the Latin word *virago*. Similarly to the Hebrew *ish* ('man') and *ishah* ('woman'), *virago* implies that the woman is taken out of the man.¹⁸¹ The addition of the feminine suffix *-ago*

¹⁷⁸ Eph. 5:23, 28, 30. VG quoniam vir caput est mulieris, sicut Christus caput est Ecclesiae : ipse, salvator corporis ejus.[...] Viri, diligite uxores vestras, sicut et Christus dilexit Ecclesiam, et seipsum tradidit pro ea [...] Ita et viri debent diligere uxores suas ut corpora sua. Qui suam uxorem diligit, seipsum diligit. [...] quia membra sumus corporis ejus, de carne ejus et de ossibus ejus.

¹⁷⁹ Gen. 2:22–23. VG Et aedificavit Dominus Deus costam, quam tulerat de Adam, in mulierem : et adduxit eam ad Adam. Dixitque Adam : Hoc nunc os ex ossibus meis, et caro de carne mea : haec vocabitur Virago, quoniam de viro sumpta est.

¹⁸⁰ See also Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, p. 60.

¹⁸¹ Kraus, *Jerome and the Latin Vulgate*, pp. 88–90.

to *vir* forms a word that could be translated as “man-like” or “strong woman,” as *vir* is also the root for *virtus* (‘strength’).

In previous research, the head-body ecclesiology and the mentality that the word *virago* reflects have been interpreted as signs of the Platonic preference for male as the original, undivided human. In this interpretation, figures like the abbot-mother or the monk-bride are enabled and sustained by a gender system where the man is the primary image of God because he was created first and the woman taken out of him; that is why he can assume femaleness. In this system, applying femaleness to a man becomes an almost violent appropriation through which the celibate man is able to play all of the roles in the Church and the woman can become holy only by becoming manly (*virago*).¹⁸² This interpretation of the medieval gender system has its strong points: the Platonic heritage of early Christian authors, for example, is quite unquestionable. What seems to be lacking from this explanation is the key role of the Virgin Mary as a woman in the Incarnation, one of the most central parts of Christian dogma. The same patristic heritage that can be seen as androcentric has an equally presented side that sets Mary and her free choice as the enabler of the emergence of the new Adam, Christ, who then raises humanity to the position of children of God. The first woman was taken out of the first man, but the second Adam, Jesus, was taken out of the second Eve, Mary.¹⁸³ The process appears reciprocal rather than appropriative and male-centered when seen in light of the active role of the woman, which is an essential part of the ecclesiological and eschatological whole that the head-body theme represents.

The Pauline tradition that Bernard taps into in the letter supports a reciprocal interpretation of the gender system at work in the 12th century. As shown above, Paul connects the head-body marital ecclesiology to the creation of man and woman in Genesis. Paul also brings up the role of Mary as a woman who gives birth to Christ and sees the fundamental meaning of the roles of man and woman as complementary rather than repressively hierarchical.¹⁸⁴ In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul states: “But yet neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, so also is the man by the woman: but all things are of God.”¹⁸⁵ The Letter to the Galatians refers to Mary as the woman who enables the deliverance of humanity: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that he might redeem

¹⁸² See, for example, Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 43–47. Engh refers to McNamara, “The Herrenfrage,” p. 22.

¹⁸³ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 115–118.

¹⁸⁴ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, p. 116.

¹⁸⁵ 1 Cor. 11:11–12. VG Verumtamen neque vir sine muliere: neque mulier sine viro in Domino. Nam sicut mulier de viro, ita et vir per mulierem: omnia autem ex Deo.

them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”¹⁸⁶ In Pauline thought used in the Bernardian context, it is the feminine ability to give birth and the concept of motherhood—intrinsically connected to the thought of Mary as an actual woman with a female body—that enable the idea of the Church as a marriage and a family.

Suger is emphatically shown as the manly head, not in the position of the bride, like Guy, for example. With the militaristic beginning, the whole community is shown in a masculine light. While in the case of Guy the contemplative spirit of the Grande Chartreuse inspired Bernard to depict the monastic head as a bride in the arms of her man, with Suger and St. Denis the focus is on the asceticization of their monastic practices. Bernard writes on the renewed atmosphere of Suger's house:

Now the vaults of the great abbey that once resounded with the hubbub of secular business echo only to spiritual canticles. Now breasts are bruised by the hands that beat upon them, and knees on the stones on which they kneel, and from the altars ascend vows and devout prayers. Now one can see cheeks furrowed with tears of repentance and hear the murmur of weeping and sighs. What can better please the citizens of Heaven than this, what sight can be more welcome to the King of heaven than this sacrifice of praise with which he is now honored here?¹⁸⁷

The way this description of physical asceticism is placed after the head-body theme suggests a connection between manliness and ascetic practices. The connection is not made explicitly but hinted at through the order of the topics in the text. After the consideration of Suger's headship, Bernard continues to marvel at the beauty of the change in the life of the community, lamenting the previous state of affairs. He calls the monks of St. Denis in their present state “children or sons of Christ” (*pueris Christi*).¹⁸⁸ With *pueri*, Bernard refers to a passage of the Book of Isaiah (8:18), which talks about Isaiah's disciples as sons. Right after comes the bit quoted above, with Isaiah as a patriarchal figure probably paving the way for the manly physical acts of repentance. The narrative of the letter moves from manly maturity to a flashback from the frivolous past, then returns to the better state of childhood. The phrase “knees on the stones” marks a return back to the sphere of

¹⁸⁶ Gal 4:4–5. VG At ubi venit plenitudo temporis, misit Deus Filium suum factum ex muliere, factum sub lege, ut eos, qui sub lege erant, redimeret, ut adoptionem filiorum reciperemus.

¹⁸⁷ Ep. LXXVIII:6, 12–16. Dum manibus pectora, genibus pavimenta tunduntur, votis et devotis precibus altaria cumulantur, sordent genae lacrimis, gemitibus atque suspiriis mugiant diversoria, et pro forensibus causis, canticis spiritualibus sacra tecta resultant, nil supernis civibus magis spectare libet, nil Regi summo jucundius exhibetur. James 80:6.

¹⁸⁸ Ep. LXXVIII :5, 3–7.

manliness, which has its source in the manly actions of reform of the war captain Suger.

The letter shows a tendency to equate manliness and asceticism that would become more prominent over a century after Bernard's time. Meri Heinonen has looked into texts about Heinrich Suso, a male ascetic from the 14th century, in which the connection between manliness and ascetic practices is made directly. Heinonen describes how Suso saw rough asceticism as knightly and manly, to the extent of not recommending for women the harshest forms of corporeal asceticism he was practicing himself.¹⁸⁹ There is a gendered aspect of spiritual life at its earlier phase to be found in Bernard's letters. It connects manliness to Christ's suffering on the cross, thus making physical ascetic practices a form of imitating Christ that denotes masculinity.¹⁹⁰

In his book on Bernard's theology of the cross, Lane proposes *De laude novae militiae* as one of the main texts on the topic.¹⁹¹ This notion helps reveal the connection between imitating Christ's suffering and manliness. As seen above, being at war has highly masculine connotations in 12th-century thought, especially in Bernard's texts, like the letter to Suger or the slightly later *De laude novae militiae*. Holt shows in his article on the masculine identity of the Crusaders how Bernard equates an ascetic take on life with masculinity, and decorative and comfortable ways of being with femininity, in *De laude*.¹⁹² Later, Suso would represent a further masculinized model of imitating Christ by corporeal ascesis, where Jesus suffering on the cross was set as the highest masculine ideal, to the point that Suso avoided identifying with the Virgin Mary, thinking that she is a way to participate in the suffering of Christ that pertains exclusively to women.¹⁹³

Bernard seems to have been a bit more fluid in taking on the feminine than 14th-century Suso. It is difficult to make more extensive conclusions about a shift to a more strictly masculine model of being a male religious based on only two examples, but considering other changes in theology in the later Middle Ages, it is possible to see a less feminine-centered undertone in the general theological atmosphere. Leclercq notes in *Monks on Marriage* that marriage and family were central concepts in Trinitarian theology until the 12th century. The scholastic theologians were not keen on using these metaphors, because (according to Leclercq) they tended to devalue the role of women and womanhood in every aspect.¹⁹⁴ In the letter to Suger, the masculine side of

¹⁸⁹ Heinonen, "Henry Suso and the divine knighthood," pp. 83–84, 88; Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁰ Heinonen, "Henry Suso and the divine knighthood," p. 84.

¹⁹¹ Lane, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Theologian of the Cross*, p. 86.

¹⁹² Holt, "Between Warrior and Priest," p. 185. This particular notion made in Holt's article is valid, even though the article as a whole does not represent the most profound of academic studies on medieval masculinity.

¹⁹³ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ*, pp. 123, 132.

¹⁹⁴ Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage*, p. 80

things is very prominent, but the mother is a large part of the picture as well, albeit not applied directly to the person of Suger. This is probably to express that Suger is not a Cistercian. He is not directly presented as female, but only as a soldier and a head, both representing manhood. Neither is he the mother. Suger is left to the position of a nursling, as will be shown below. It might be as with the case of Guy, such that Bernard reserves feminine attributes only for the best of monastics. Cistercians deserve the highest position of a mother; Guy as a Carthusian is granted a place as the contemplative bride, but Suger as a Cluniac is not allowed to directly share in the feminine at all. This highlights the position of the feminine as a culmination point of salvation history in the figures of both Eve and Mary in 12th-century theology.

As D'Avray discusses in his book on medieval marriage, the idea of Christ and his Church as a marriage—in the letter to Suger represented by the captain and his troops—is not a mere symbol or metaphor, but more complex in its connections to the actual reality of human marriage. D'Avray refers to Rincón's canonical and theological study on medieval marriage, where he uses the Spanish word *significación* ('meaning') to describe the use of the concept of marriage. D'Avray further describes the connection of marriage and the union of Christ and the Church as "a tight web of close logical reasoning."¹⁹⁵ D'Avray's description is very close to the wording used by Mark Turner in *The Origin of Ideas*. The head-body/Christ-Church/man-woman/Adam-Eve is an example of what Turner calls blending: taking one thing and something else and making a new thing out of them, drawing from a larger source that is not reachable by human reason per se, but only through these new ideas, which can be called "tight webs of close logical reasoning" or blends. In the Cistercian context, Martha Newman comes to use a very similar expression when describing the centrality of the concept of *caritas* in Cistercian religious culture. She talks about "webs of significance," which are shared meanings between individual minds in the members of a group.¹⁹⁶ In a sense, the concept of *caritas*, or God as love, is the foundation and source of the marriage blend, which then forms its own web of significance.

2.3.3 THE SWEET BREAST MILK OF WISDOM

Toward the end of the letter, Bernard turns to motherly imagery, this time accompanied by references to the Song of Songs in a rather sensual manner, evoking sensations of the spiritual palate when drinking breast milk:

Blessed is he who can say: "In love some just man will chastise me, reprove me; never shall the sinner sleek this head with the oil of his flattery." By rejecting the sinners' flattery you have proved yourself worthy of the oil and milk of holy men. Let

¹⁹⁵ D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 10; D'Avray refers to Rincón, *El Matrimonio, misterio y signo*.

¹⁹⁶ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 7.

these charming but savage mothers seek among the children of Babylon those whom they can feed with the milk of death, whom they may caress with their alluring favors, and nourish with everlasting fires. But the nursling of the Church has fed from the breasts of wisdom and has tasted the sweetness of a better milk. Already growing in grace, already satisfied with what he has received, he will say from the bottom of the heart: “For thy breasts are better than wine, the fragrance of rare perfumes cannot match it for delight.” This is what he says to his mother the Church. But when he has in a like manner tasted and seen how sweet is the Lord he addresses him as the sweetest father and says: “What treasures of loving kindness, Lord, dost thou store up for the men who fear thee.” Now my desires for you are satisfied. When in the past I sadly watched you greedily suck from the lips of flatterers the food of death, the fuel of sin, I used to say to myself, sighing: “Would that you were my brother nursed at my own mother’s breasts.”¹⁹⁷

The savage mothers who offer the milk of death are the flattering sinners—the people connected to the politically important role of Suger and his community—who, according to Bernard, used to fill the hallways of the monastic house of St. Denis.

The tasting of God that Bernard so vividly describes probably has a Eucharistic background. This assumption is supported by the previous content of the letter: Old Testament patriarchs, Suger’s headship and the head’s attachment to the body are pathways that lead to covenantal ecclesiology and the marriage of the Church and Christ, of which the Eucharist is a sign. As Ann Astell suggests, the reception of the Eucharist was seen as a space for the amalgamation of the experiences of the spiritual and physical senses, reflecting the incarnation, spirit assuming flesh, and the recipient’s partaking

¹⁹⁷ Ep. LXXVIII:8, 35–9, 16. *Beatus qui dicere potest: Corripiet me justus in misericordia, et increpabit me; oleum autem peccatoris non impinguet caput meum; quod ubi longe fecisti a te, dignum te probasti oleo et lacte sanctorum. Quaerant sibi jam in parvulis Babylonis dulces, sed truces matres, quibus lac mortis emulgeant, quos blandis mulceant favoribus ac flammis nutriant sempiternis. Nam Ecclesiae alumnus ex uberibus sapientiae, lactis melioris expertus dulcedinem, jam in eo coepit crescere in salutem; jam et ex eo satiatus eructat, dicens: Meliora sunt ubera tua vino, fragrantia unguentis optimis. Et hoc ad matrem. Verum item gustato, ac probato quam suavis est Dominus, ut vere patrem dulcissimum, ait ad ipsum: Quam magna multitudo dulcedinis tuae, Domine, quam abscondisti timentibus te! Impletum est profecto desiderium nostrum. Olim enim, cum dolens cernerem tanta te aviditate de labiis adulantium, mortis escam, peccati sugere fomitem, optans tibi et gemens, intra me aiebam: Quis mihi det te fratrem meum sugentem ubera matris meae? James 80:8–9. It is noteworthy that this passage of the letter greatly resembles Ep. LXXVII:9 to Hugh of St. Victor, which as a treatise has taken on a separate life from the letter collection. This is perhaps an indication of the usage of ready-made templates or a stylistic unification of letters addressed to heads of other monastic groups done when editing the letters into a collection. The imagery also resembles Ep. CCCXXII:1 to the novice Hugh, where Bernard urges him to suck on the breasts of the Crucified.*

in the resurrection of Christ. Even though Eucharistic piety is not directly prominent in Bernard's texts, Astell sees a connection to the Eucharist in his descriptions of ruminating on the Word of God.¹⁹⁸ As noted earlier, as Bynum has suggested, widespread devotion does not initially show up in written accounts. The texts are composed rather on the basis of an existing practice of devotion.¹⁹⁹ From the viewpoint of Astell's analysis, Bernard's thought would thus represent the theological foundations on which the later written out devotion would be built. The eschatological idea of the resurrection of the body and the consideration of Christ's resurrected body in the Eucharist might inform the background of the letter and its sensory descriptions.

Bernard is not directly mentioning the Eucharistic bread as the source of the sweet taste of God but instead talks about mother's milk. Here it is useful to take a closer look at the reference to the Song of Songs (1:1–2): "For thy breasts are better than wine, the fragrance of rare perfumes cannot match it for delight." It is actually the woman talking to the man in these verses of the Song, for the bridegroom has breasts.²⁰⁰ Bynum has explained how the Vulgate text inspired writers to think of Christ as a breastfeeding mother: the wound in Christ's side was interpreted as a lactating breast. The identification of Christ's blood with breast milk was supported by the medieval understanding that breast milk was really blood in an altered form. Thus, breast milk and nursing, especially in light of ecclesiological readings of the Song of Songs, had Eucharistic connotations when applied to Christ, or to the Virgin Mary in a broader sense: the Virgin Mary enabled the Incarnation and, following this, Christ in the Eucharist.²⁰¹ It seems to be the blood of Christ in the form of milk that tastes sweet in the letter.

The structure of the letter follows the marital image of the Church and the monastic community: the mother's milk follows the description of Suger as the head joined to the body as a representative of Christ. The incarnation itself is given a marital character through gendering the body/Church as female and the head as male. The fruit of the marriage is the Eucharist—or breast milk, as it is portrayed in the letter. The one who is producing the milk is the female Church, the mother. Suger, much like Guy, is not presented as taking part in this motherhood, but only receiving the milk as a child of the mother. Suger is

¹⁹⁸ Astell, *Eating Beauty*, pp. 4, 21.

¹⁹⁹ Bynum, "The Sacrality of Things," pp. 15–16.

²⁰⁰ The Vulgate translates the passage in a way that gives breasts to the bridegroom, but more modern translations use the word love instead of breasts, for example in RSVCE: "For your love is better than wine, your anointing oils are fragrant." See also Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 343.

²⁰¹ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 103, 108; *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 270–271; Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 344–355. Engh explains that the bodily fluids were all interchangeable with each other, even across gender boundaries in medieval medical theory. Engh also notes that Bernard makes the connection between the bridegroom's breasts and Christ's side wound in Letter 322 to Hugh from 1138.

a heroic captain, a head, but not a mother. This is a pattern that Bernard seems to be applying to abbots who are not Cistercian. As noted above in the case of Guy, the lack of motherhood (and breast milk) of non-Cistercian abbots implies the superiority of Cistercian monasticism in Bernard's ideological framework. Suger and Guy do not get the privilege of representing Christ to the extent of reflecting the femininity-embracing incarnation and the production of breast milk, the transformed sacrificial blood.

The degree of sensory description Bernard uses to bring the message home is almost intoxicating: caresses, sucking food from someone's lips, tasting sweet or deadly milk, remembering the taste of wine and the smell of fragrant perfumes. These are experiences of the spiritual senses that were often an important element in the experience of God in medieval texts, especially in Bernard's works.²⁰² In her article about the flavor associated with God in the monastic West, Rachel Fulton Brown accredits particularly to Bernard's influence the centrality of the spiritual senses and describing Christ and His sacrifice as sweet.²⁰³ Fulton goes into depth on how a medieval mind would have thought of verse 9 of Psalm 33, which Bernard is loosely quoting: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." According to Fulton, the ideas of tasting God and God's sweet flavor were connected to the Eucharist and eating Christ in the communion bread. Sweetness was an indication of a food being good to eat and nourishing for a human: sweetness meant goodness. God being goodness itself, it was only appropriate to think that God would have a sweet flavor. The communion wafer that became the body of Christ in the celebration of the Mass was usually prepared from the finest and purest wheat, which would have added a physical experience of sweetness to complement the idea of God's sweetness.²⁰⁴

In her article, Fulton also sheds light on medieval medical views of the human body and how food was seen to affect its health: the general principle was that you are what you eat. Eating God, experiencing His sweetness, in the Eucharist meant becoming more like God.²⁰⁵ The nursing imagery also carries a concept from Antiquity of the effects of breast milk on a person's growth. Through milk, the child would grow into his family's likeness, both physically and spiritually.²⁰⁶ The idea of becoming what you eat further enhances the tight-knit connection between the Eucharist and breast milk. It also puts into a clearer view Bernard's wish, quoted from the Song, of him and Suger sucking from the breasts of the same mother. After the changes made in the life at St. Denis, they are being fed from the same source of a monastic ideal and will grow into the likeness of the same mother: Benedictine monasticism in a form favored by Bernard. As Engh shows in her work on Bernard's *Sermons on the*

²⁰² McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 185–190.

²⁰³ Fulton, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet," pp. 175, 177, 190–193.

²⁰⁴ Fulton, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet," pp. 182, 190–193, 203.

²⁰⁵ Fulton, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet," pp. 195, 202–203.

²⁰⁶ Penniman, "Fed to Perfection."

Song, the discussion on the passage where the bridegroom has breasts usually refers to a hierarchy of different groups in the Church, or like in the letter in question, in the sphere of monasticism, those who receive milk from Christ's breasts and those who just follow the sweet fragrance of the Bridegroom, without physically getting to taste the milk. The milk is strongly connected to the Eucharistic blood of Christ in the form of wine. According to Engh, the hierarchy of believers built in the image of a lactating Christ also reflects the liturgical practice of laypeople receiving the communion in the form of bread, while the blood was consumed only by clergy and choir monks.²⁰⁷

What further strengthens the possibility of the Eucharistic interpretation of the whole scenery of the letter are the rapid changes between female and male in the text. The sweetness of Mother Wisdom's milk is directly followed by the sweetness of the Lord, who is identified as the sweetest father (*patrem dulcissimum*). Both sweetness-oozing figures refer to God, whose sweetness, or goodness, is experienced in the incarnated Christ and the physical union with him in the celebration and consumption of the Eucharist. As Astell shows in her study on the medieval Eucharist, the reciprocal, mutual consumption of the head and the body in the communion was excised in the Fourth Lateran council in 1215, half a century after Bernard's time. Still, Astell goes as far as to connect Bernard's way of ruminating on Scripture to the world of the spiritual senses and receiving Christ in the Eucharist.²⁰⁸ As can be seen in the letter to Suger, Bernard's texts represent an earlier take on what would a little later become full-blown and outspoken Eucharist-centered piety.

2.3.4 A MONSTROUS LIFE

Toward the end of the letter, Bernard laments the sorry state of those in the clerical profession who try to be two things at once:

I ask you, what sort of monster is this that being a cleric wishes to be thought a soldier as well, and succeeds in being neither? It is an abuse of both conditions that a deacon should serve the table of a king and that a servant of the king should minister at the holy mysteries of the altar. Who would not be astonished, or rather disgusted, that one and the same person should, arrayed in armor, lead soldiers into battle and, clothed in alb and stole, pronounce the Gospel in the church, should at one time give the signal for battle on the bugle and at another inform the people of the commands of the bishop. [...] What a novel and odious perversity it is that a man should think it more becoming to be known as a retainer of another man than a servant of God and consider it more dignified to

²⁰⁷ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 347–348.

²⁰⁸ Astell, *Eating Beauty*, pp. 19, 21.

be called an official of a king of this world than of the King of heaven. A man that puts the army before his clerical state, secular business before the Church, certainly proves that he prefers human things to divine and earthly to heavenly things.²⁰⁹

Bernard's message is clear. A man of God who is involved in things of worldly power or warfare is acting in a monstrous and perverted way. Bernard is referring to a specific person and his pursuit of an elevated position both in the Church and at the side of the king. In critical editions of the letter collection and earlier research, the monster is identified as Stephen of Garland, a clerical social climber who ended up holding a high office both as a seneschal of the king and as an archdeacon in the hierarchy of the Church. His place as a member of the household of the king meant that he was a head of the army while also being an ecclesiastical head in his office as archdeacon.²¹⁰ The perversity that Bernard sees in this situation is the result of the same fault he writes about in the letter to Guy: putting something worldly before God. In the letter to Guy, Bernard stays on a more general level of analysis, writing on the human tendency to make laws instead of allowing himself to be ruled by God.²¹¹ Here he is more concrete and applies the perversity of the wrong order of priority directly to Suger's community's former lifestyle in the figure of the archdeacon-seneschal. This is probably intended as a warning against falling back to the old ways of St. Denis, as is hinted already in the beginning of the letter through the figure of Suger the captain; at the end of the letter the warning disguised as praising takes on flesh and becomes a monstrous figure of a religious person or cleric who has become lost.

Along with the perverse monster who distorts the right order of things, the Eucharistic undertones of the previous parts of the letter are also given a visible form in the list of examples. Bernard refers to the "mysteries of the altar," which undoubtedly means the celebration of the Eucharist. Before that, Bernard also uses the phrase "chalice of the Lord," which he contrasts with the "chalice of demons" that represents all of the monstrosities previously mentioned. Bernard seems to be smoothly putting religious like Suger and clerics like Stephen into the same category. According to Bernard, both Suger

²⁰⁹ Ep. LXXVIII:11, 11–17, 5–8. Rogo quid hoc est monstri, ut, cum et clericus et miles simul videri velit, neutrum sit? Par satis utrobique abusio, sive quod diaconus mensae regiae deputetur ministerio, sive quod Regis dapifer mysteriis altaris inserviat. Quis sane non miretur, imo et detestetur, unius esse personae et armatum armatam ducere militiam, et, alba stolaque indutum, in medio ecclesiae pronuntiare Evangelium; tuba indicere bellum militibus, et iussa episcopi populis intimare? [...] O nova et exosa perversitas! itane plus decet hominis quam Dei famulum nominari? ac terreni, quam coelestis Regis dici officialem, altioris ducitur dignitatis? Qui clero militiam, forum anteponit Ecclesiae; divinis profecto humana, coelestibus praeferre terrena convincitur. James 80:11.

²¹⁰ See the commentary on Letter 78:11, footnote I, pp. 390–391. See also Grant and Bates, *Abbot Suger of St-Denis*, pp. 125–27.

²¹¹ See Part I, Ch. 1, Guy and Caritas.

and Stephen are (or previously were) cases of “unheard-of and detestable improprieties” in the life of the Church.²¹² In addition to probably referring to Suger’s and Stephen’s friendship, this could be easily seen as an indication of Bernard voicing the goals of the ongoing reform of the clergy in the Church, which in research has been portrayed precisely as a movement seeking to assimilate the secular clergy within religious life, thus imposing features of monastic life, celibacy and poverty, among others, on the non-monastic clergymen.²¹³

Jo Ann McNamara has famously analyzed the changes of the gender system of the 11th and early 12th centuries in her article “The Herrenfrage” as a shift to an all-male system, where men held all the power and played all the roles in the Church, while women were excluded not only from the company of clerical men as dangerous seducers to sin, but also from higher stages of learning and spiritual insight. McNamara’s observations are mostly apt, but what seems to be lacking from her analysis is the inclusion of theological factors that played a role in the process that Bernard’s letter is reflecting. She concentrates on giving arguments for a development by means of which the male dominion was kept intact through a period of experimental syneisactic (male and female) communities that threatened to raise women to the level of virility. Male dominion was maintained by means of strict separation of men and women and by imposing celibacy on all the clergymen. The intention that McNamara sees behind the changes made during the course of the reform of the 11th and 12th centuries was to keep men in the place of dominion over women and celibate men over married men.²¹⁴

McNamara cites Bernard as an example of what she calls a masculinist mentality and as one of the greatest advocates for the separation of men and women.²¹⁵ Seen from McNamara’s viewpoint, the letter to Suger seems to sport both highly brutal masculinity (in the form of battle) and separation—not separation of men and women per se, but of clerics and laymen. These two dichotomies are connected in McNamara’s analysis of the clerical reform and its societal context. The masculinist ideology that she presents as the driving force of the restructuring of the gender system defined womanhood in terms of corporeality and worldliness, and manhood as the higher levels of being, reason and spirit. According to McNamara, women came to represent worldliness, unruly flesh and the object of uncontrollable male lust, all of which were to be avoided by a man striving for true manliness: spiritual

²¹² Ep. LXXVIII:11, 24–35. calici Domini calicem daemoniorum [...] novae et exsecrandae praesumptiones. James 80:10.

²¹³ See, for example, Parish et al., “Celibacy, Marriage and the Gregorian Reform.”

²¹⁴ McNamara, “The Herrenfrage.” McNamara’s article is often referred to in later research on the Gregorian reform and its consequences, as well as in gender-historical research; see, for example, Parish et al., *Clerical Celibacy in the West*, and Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*.

²¹⁵ McNamara, “The Herrenfrage,” pp. 16, 17–18, 19, 21.

perfection. This put celibate men above the married. Married women could not strive for manliness of spirit while being tied to their bodily nature through childbearing.²¹⁶

McNamara mentions the increased devotion to the Virgin Mary, together with Christ's incarnation and humanity, but only in a couple of sentences without analyzing the matter any further.²¹⁷ The theme of fleshliness of women and the incarnation of Christ deserve more attention, however, as they offer a hermeneutic pathway into a deeper understanding of the separation of clerics and religious persons from the world, lamented by McNamara and called out by Bernard. While there were misogynous arguments and downgradings of marriage given in the process of reforming the clergy and the concept of marriage in the 12th century, as McNamara quite convincingly shows, that is not the whole picture but only a detail. What can be called *contemptus mundi* needs to be seen as a part of the whole frame of gendered theology; otherwise one ends up with only the top layer of the gender system's web of meaning. Manhood, womanhood and their separation in the form of keeping distance from the things of the world has much deeper and more profound meanings than a power struggle solely based on the maintenance of male superiority.

The separation of feminine and masculine hints at the male as a marker for separation and female for unity,²¹⁸ a pattern of thought also seen in the letters to Guy and Rainald. In these letters the intrinsic differentiation conveyed by manhood is applied to the dynamics of the monastic community. In the letter to Suger, the different functions of male and female are shown on the larger scale of the whole Church and society. Unlike McNamara suggests, the identification of womanhood and flesh or the world does not necessarily result in a complete devaluation and exclusion of women in the gendered reality of the 12th-century Church. As seen above in the cases of Guy and Rainald, the simultaneous theological development of clerical celibacy and marriage tells more of the reciprocity of masculine and feminine in this web of gendered meanings than of a political, misogynous anti-marriage program maneuvered by the male hierarchy of the Church.²¹⁹

"The Herrenfrage" and some later articles on the execution of clerical celibacy in the 12th century give an impression that the Church was engaged in a cosmic war between spirit and flesh, and thus tried to separate professionally spiritual priests from women of the flesh.²²⁰ While this supposition supports the argument that the reformists were anti-woman and anti-marriage, from the viewpoint of mainstream theological thought of the time, that war hardly sounds like Christianity. As D'Avray has shown, marriage as a union of man

²¹⁶ McNamara, "The Herrenfrage," pp. 20–21.

²¹⁷ McNamara, "The Herrenfrage," p. 21.

²¹⁸ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority*, pp. 109–110.

²¹⁹ See Part I, ch 1, The Monastic Micro-Church, and ch 2, Not a Father.

²²⁰ See, for example, Parish et al., "Celibacy, Marriage and the Gregorian Reform," p. 92; and Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 99–200.

and woman, seen to reflect the inner life of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ, had a positive meaning in medieval theology and spirituality. Otherwise it could not have functioned as a living symbol of the things considered the holiest.²²¹ Flesh was not to be fought against, but to be embraced as an essential element of humanity elevated to divinity in the Incarnation in the person of Christ—through a woman, the Virgin Mary.

The simultaneous theological trends of marriage, clerical celibacy and the focus on the Incarnation all have to do with *ordinatio caritatis*, the right order of charity.²²² In the monastic context of Bernard's letters, the discussion on the justified order of charity takes the form of bridal, maternal and marital imagery, and closely connected to these on the level of meaning, the difference between things of the world and things of God. As Engh explains in *Gendered Identities*, the binary division between feminine and masculine is central for the functionality of the gendered imagery in Bernard's texts. It enables the hierarchical ascent and descent between manhood and womanhood, the breaking of boundaries between the divine and the mundane.²²³ The hierarchy that Engh observes, where masculine is higher and feminine lower, is rooted in the idea of the right order of love: God first, then the world, following the order of being and creation. It is the reversal of this order that Bernard calls perverse in the letter to Suger. A cleric or monastic should not have put the king's favor or earthly battle before his religious profession, which, according to the just *ordinatio caritatis*, must always come in first place since it is considered a commitment to prioritize God to the extent of not taking part in business of the world. To summarize, it is not the things of the world per se that Bernard considers bad, but the faulty priorities of a certain archdeacon—and perhaps also Suger—that disrupt the right order of love. According to Bernard's *ordinatio caritatis*, a cleric or monk dedicated to God already has everything he needs to attain his central goal in life: eternity in the full presence of God. To have earthly glory is just a distraction from his path, since it means putting creation over the Creator.

Martha Newman has noted that the masculine and militaristic imagery is a part of the concept of *caritas* in the Cistercian treatment of its rightful order. While sexual and military activity were outwardly rejected, they were used to depict the interior ordering and controlling of the material world that would lead to an ideal Christian society that was embedded in the Cistercian understanding of charity.²²⁴ Newman's notion affirms that the letter to Suger can be justifiably read through the lenses of much larger webs of significance than would first appear appropriate. *Caritas* does not jump at the reader from the text as she does in the letter to Guy, for example, but is still strongly present in various themes brought up in it, the military imagery included. As

²²¹ D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 17, 66–67.

²²² For more on *ordinatio caritatis*, see Part I, Ch. 1, Guy and Caritas.

²²³ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 5.

²²⁴ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 8–9.

Newman's analysis of Cistercian religious culture shows, overtly erotic or militaristic language calls for a deeper dive into the meaning of the imagery for the very reason that it was contradictory to the lived reality of monastic life. These counterintuitive elements in texts written by a monastic to another serve as cues for the presence of central principles of how the world is supposed to work from a monastic point of view.

At this point it is useful to take a second look at the need to separate masculine and feminine, spirit and flesh, and God and the world from the viewpoint of the significance of manhood as a marker for difference and separation.²²⁵ In "The Herrenfrage," McNamara sees the attack on clerical marriages and other involvement with women and the world as a countermove against the rising number of mixed communities where men and women lived a religious life together, inspired by the example of the apostles who had women in their company. McNamara describes these communities as places of gender equality, which had its source in the idea of some early Christian authors that the soul does not have a sex. This enabled monastic women to be seen as spiritually equal to men. As celibates they did not take part in the physical, worldly and more animal-like nature of woman but could strive for spiritual perfection, together with men as their equals.²²⁶

A vision of the dissolution of gender differences as an ideal that would overcome misogyny is an idea quite commonly held in theological and historical research rising from the field of feminism-oriented scholarship. In her study *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, Miller explores the theological implications of the feminist interpretations of Christianity and its dogmatic history. She shows how the elimination of the significance of sexual difference as a source of inequality when reading texts like Scripture and the early Christian authors ultimately results in a Platonic worldview, where the ideal human is intrinsically male in his undivided oneness, reflecting the sameness of all reality: spirit, matter and God forming a single entity. According to Miller, this way of interpreting Christian texts both devalues the intended meaning of human sexuality and erases the essential difference between God and creation, which is fundamental for the functionality of the classical Christian view of the structure of reality. Especially the idea of salvation through Christ, which is portrayed to be maritally ordered, is dependent on the differentiated view of reality.²²⁷ In short, Miller's argument seems to be that if all is the same, without structure, hierarchy or differentiation, then what difference does it make if God becomes flesh?

Miller's explanation helps illustrate another reason why perhaps Bernard so aggressively refutes meddling with worldly power and the warfare of those men dedicated to God in one way or another, and why the syneisactic communities of the 11th and 12th centuries were deemed suspicious by nature:

²²⁵ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 109–110.

²²⁶ McNamara, "The Herrenfrage," pp. 6–7.

²²⁷ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 15, 24–27.

ideas that leaned toward dissolving differences between woman and man, or flesh and spirit (or the created world and God, which these represent), threatened the idea of Christ as an incarnated, divine savior of humankind, which has been central (albeit at times disputed) in Christian theology from its first centuries. In quasi-formal clerical marriages, mixed communities in which femininity was fading and seneschal clerics, more was seen to be at stake than the powerful position of a handful of celibate men of the Church. These situations signaled a reversal of the order of charity, ultimately questioning God's transcendence and superiority in relation to the created material reality, which in turn is central to the concept of salvation through a man-God. The idea of salvation through the incarnation of God is dependent on God's transcendence—and the creation's respective materiality; without this difference, the descent of one of the persons of Triune God would lose its significance. As Miller shows, a reading of Christian sources that seeks to erase the difference between God and creation, reflected in the difference of womanhood and manhood in the gendered structure of 12th-century Christian thought, will end up also erasing the unique position of the person of Christ as the Son of God and, consequently, the worship of his flesh in the Eucharist, along with the role of Mary as *mediatrix*.²²⁸

The monster that Bernard depicts is thus a symbol of disorder and rebellion against God. Even though the rebellion of Adam and Eve is not directly brought up, it is lurking in the background of the letter in the preference of non-God over God Himself. The monster that blurs the essential lines of hierarchical dichotomies in the web of reasoning of Bernard does not reflect the marital reality of salvation embedded in the theological waves of the 12th century: it is non-Eucharistic, non-bridal and anti-mother. The flesh of the monster is not recoded by the incarnation and nourished by the Eucharist to prepare for the resurrection but instead left to image the savage mother on whose milk it has been brought up.²²⁹

Caroline Walker Bynum takes the letter to Suger as an example of Bernard's fear of hybridity in her book *Metamorphosis and Identity*, where she analyzes at length the concept of monster in Bernard's texts. She identifies the figure of the monstrous archdeacon-seneschal Stephen as an embodiment of Bernard's clearly categorized and hierarchical thought, where the crossing of boundaries of social roles produces a monster which has lost something elemental from its original state.²³⁰ Bynum notes that while the monster in the letter to Suger greatly resembles a Knight Templar as envisioned in *De laude* a few years after the letter, the Templars are not a monstrous *mixtio* for him, but a *pura* union of differentiated opposites, which ultimately reflects the role confusion in the Divine.²³¹ Bernard's black and white ideals are not realized in Stephen or the

²²⁸ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 11, 15.

²²⁹ On the imageness of a human being in Bernard, see Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, p. 128.

²³⁰ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 116–120.

²³¹ Bynum, pp. 124–125.

community of St. Denis in its previous state; instead they represent a fearsome grey *mixtio*.²³² The Templar manages to reflect the pure union of transcendence and humanity of the Incarnation in Bernard's world of monastic thought.

* * *

The final phrase of the letter is a useful lens through which to look back at the whole text:

By the grace of God you have received a robe of many colors. See that it covers you, for it is no use beginning a work if you do not persevere to the end. Let my letter end with this warning to you to make a good end of what you have begun.²³³

The letter is to be read as a warning. Bernard refers to Joseph in the Old Testament story (Gen. 37:23), where he receives a multicolored garment from his father as a sign of the position of a favorite son. This is to express that Suger's change was a favor granted by God. Bernard's wording specifically refers to the part of the story where Joseph's jealous brothers are about to kill him, but one of them protests and suggests casting him in a well instead, with the intention of later returning the favorite son back to the father. As the well-known Old Testament story continues, Joseph ends up not being killed but sold as a slave. This threatening narrative is the final thought intended to be left to linger in the reader's mind. Who was once a favorite gets thrown into a pit, most probably representing the old monstrously worldly ways of St. Denis, and becomes enslaved by strangers.

²³² Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–162.

²³³ Ep. LXXVIII: 13, 13–15. ac tunicam, Dei gratia iam polymitam, cura facere et talarem; quoniam coepisse nil proderit, si (quod absit!) non perseverare contigerit. James 80:13.

3 PART II: THE MONK'S ANATOMY

3.1 CHAPTER 1: NOT MAN ENOUGH?—LETTER 2

3.1.1 FULK

Letter 2 is addressed to Fulk, a young man who had become a Regular Canon but then had returned to the world at the request of his uncle, leaving behind religious life in a community to serve as a secular priest instead. Written in 1120, it contains various themes that seem to be central in Bernard's letters: the reader gets to meet the mother, the soldier and the embodied spiritual man. Fulk was Bernard's cousin, which was probably one of the main motivators behind the letter. Fulk later became the archdeacon of Langres, which indicates that he did not return to live as a religious as Bernard wishes in the letter.¹

In the beginning Bernard positions himself as “a sinner,” “a rustic and a monk,” which he contrasts with Fulk, whom he calls a “youth of great promise,” “a citizen of towns and a student.”² Bernard is shown as a sort of countryside simpleton, who is out of his place in writing to the learned city dweller Fulk, but has to do so out of duty: “I am indeed bound in charity to exhort you who are in charity to be grieved for although you do not grieve.”³ The need to distinguish oneself from a town dweller was likely a way to highlight the Cistercian way of religious life when writing to a person attached to another monastic group. Cistercian houses were usually founded on the outskirts of populated areas. This was to promote life in poverty, separated from the business of the world. While the Cistercian houses were located in already inhabited places and were economically productive, the image of living poorly in a remote wilderness was kept alive in the Cistercian narrative. It reflects a larger ideal of living out the order of charity; like the human will, the material chaotic wilderness could be reordered and elevated through God's love.⁴ Bernard himself had received his education in a monastic environment early on, and so he had not attended an urban school like Fulk apparently had.⁵ Throughout his works, Bernard expresses strong suspicion toward what the urban school system represented: the developing scholastic theology.⁶

¹ See the commentary in Leclercq et al., *Lettres 1–41*, 425:92–93 n. 1.

² Ep. II:1. Bonae indolis adolescent [...] peccator [...] civem rusticus, scholasticum monachus. James 2:1.

³ Ep II:1. Charitas enim ad te objurgandum me compulit, quae tibi condolet, quamvis non dolenti: James 2:1.

⁴ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 67–69.

⁵ Cvetković, *Seeking the Face of God*, pp. 18–19.

⁶ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 15–16.

Bernard taking the position of an uncivilized monk in contrast to Fulk thus sets the undertone of the whole letter as a defense of monastic life and thought.

Where Bernard does not differentiate between himself and Fulk is in the commitment to monastic life through vows. This is not an obvious choice, for the 12th-century Regular Canons have been seen as an in-between form of the clerical state and monastic life. Whether the life of Regular Canons represented a new, more extroverted and service-oriented form of religious life, however, has been a matter of dispute among researchers. Some have taken the assumed living out of the pastoral duties of priests while being in a monastic community as a sign of the uprising of the spirit of service that later resulted in the founding of the mendicant orders.⁷ Yet, Bernard does not seem to make any profound difference between himself and Fulk when it comes to the meaning of monastic vows as a commitment to poverty and one's own community. Fulk's priesthood does come up when discussing his life as a secular priest, but this has no effect on the way Bernard treats him as a monk.

Bernard presents his position as a rustic monk as a disqualification to instruct Fulk, and he justifies sending the letter in the first place by invoking the power of charity that motivated him to try and persuade Fulk back to religious life: "But what have I to do with deans? They are our instructors and they hold a high place in the Church."⁸ Bernard writes to strengthen the image of himself as a lowly, unlearned monk and thus distances himself from the characters behind Fulk's change of plans. Bernard explains himself: "It was my zeal for the love of God that moved me to pity for your error, to compassion for your unhappy state, so that I interfered beyond my accustomed measure and manner in order to save you, although you are not a monk of mine."⁹ As an abbot Bernard had no official authority over a monk who was not from Clairvaux, not even from the monastic family connected to Cîteaux. Therefore, the letter is packed with references to Scripture and authoritative figures like Charity and Wisdom. Bernard needs to borrow their voice to be able to tell Fulk what to do.

3.1.2 MOTHER WISDOM AND THE PRODIGAL SON

As Charity is brought up in the very beginning of the letter, it is effortless for Bernard to start talking about it as a female person directly thereafter. Mother Charity is brought forth to bring Fulk back to his senses:

⁷ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 22–36, 57–58.

⁸ Ep. II:8. Sed quid ad me de decanis magistris nostris, qui principatum meruerunt in ecclesiis? James 2:8.

⁹ Ep. II:8. Eius zelo tantum tui erroris misertus, tantum tuae miseriae compassus sum, quatenus supra modum et morem meum de te non meo me intromiserim. Grauis lapsus tuus ac miserabilis casus prouocauit me ut hoc praesumpserim. James 2:8.

Our good mother Charity loves us all and shows herself differently to each one of us, cherishing the weak, scolding the restive, exhorting the advanced. But when she scolds she is meek, when she consoles she is sincere. She rages lovingly, her caresses are without guile. She knows how to be angry without losing patience, how to be indignant without being proud. It is she, the mother of angels and men, who brings peace not only on earth, but even in heaven. It is she who brings God to men and reconciles men with God. It is she, my dear Fulco, who makes those brethren with whom you once “broke sweet bread” to live together in concert. And it is this mother whom you have wounded, whom you have affronted.¹⁰

The inspiration for Mother Caritas in this passage is drawn from *Ecclesiasticus* (14:22–15:10), where the feminine figure of Wisdom and the benefits of following her are described at length. The reference is made explicit by a direct quote as Bernard continues:

Yet although you have affronted her, she does not contend with you. Spurned by you she calls you back, showing by this how truly it has been written of her “Charity is patient; charity is kind.” Although wounded and affronted by you yet, should you return to her, she will meet you as an honored mother. She will forget how you repudiated her and throw herself into your arms, rejoicing that her son who was lost is found, who was dead has come to life again.¹¹

The mother Wisdom of *Ecclesiasticus*, who “will meet him as an honorable mother, and will receive him as a wife married of a virgin,”¹² is presented as Caritas and then combined with a reference to the Gospel story of the prodigal son and his forgiving father (Lk 15:20–24)—except that here the father is turned into a mother.

¹⁰ Ep. II:1. O bona mater charitas, quae sive foveat infirmos, sive exerceat provecos, sive arguat inquietos; diversis diversa exhibens, sicut filios diligit universos! Cum te arguit, mitis est; cum blanditur simplex est. Pie solet saevire, sine dolo mulcere: patienter novit irasci, humiliter indignari. Ipsa est quae hominum mater et Angelorum, non solum quae in terris, sed etiam quae in coelo sunt, pacificavit. Ipsa est quae Deum homini placans, hominem Deo reconciliavit. Ipsa est, mi Fulco, quae fratres illos, cum quibus olim dulces capiebas cibos, habitare facit unius moris in domo. Haec talis tamque honorabilis mater a te se queritur offensam, expostulat laesam. James 2:1.

¹¹ Ep. II:1. Laesa tamen non provocat: sed spreta te revocat, ostendens tibi in te de se veraciter scriptum esse, Charitas patiens est, benigna est. Licet laesa, licet offensa, si conversus fueris ad illam, obviabit tibi quasi mater honorificata. Contemptus oblita sui, ruet in amplexum tui; gaudens quem perdidit, esse inventum; qui mortuus fuerat, vivum. James 2:1.

¹² VG Eccli. 15:2 et obviabit illi quasi mater honorificata, et quasi mulier a virginitate suscipiet illum. Transl. D-R.

The reference to the story of the prodigal son reveals the true identity of the woman who is Wisdom, Charity, a mother and apparently also a virgin bride: she is God. Only with difficulty can the father of the prodigal son be read as someone else than God. This is why Bernard can use the figures of Wisdom and Charity in a very similar way, to the extent that they are interchangeable. They are the same entity.¹³ Another possibility is to see the mother of the repentant son as the Church, or the monastic community representing the Church, which is more commonly presented as a woman, as seen also in Bernard's other letters. This would not be the first time that Bernard addresses God as a woman, however. In the letter to Guy, Charity is presented as God who is the *creatrix et gubernatrix*, the female creator and ruler of the universe.¹⁴ This is not unusual in Bernard's works: he frequently uses feminine words when referring to the mystery of God, *caritas* being a prime example. Also, the mother of the prodigal son comes up in various texts. For Bernard, God's sentiments are feminine at least as much as masculine, as well as His/Her actions as a ruler of reality.¹⁵ The feminine holds connotations of unity within a whole,¹⁶ as seen in the case of Guy.¹⁷ In the letter to Fulc, motherhood's function as a source of growth into union takes on its full meaning on the human level because of the crisis of unity that is at hand. Whereas Mother Caritas is shown as an image of the inner unity of the Holy Trinity in the letter to Guy, in Fulc's case she is revealing the unity that a monastic community is supposed to have, reflecting the unity of triune God. A mother represents the incarnated God who has taken on flesh and human form.

Thus, it is probably more accurate to read Caritas as God than as the Church. She could be specifically Jesus presented as a mother, as in the case of Suger. What comes next certainly makes this interpretation possible. Bernard continues on the motherly path and turns next to breastfeeding imagery:

But, you will ask, how have I wounded and affronted charity? Listen. You have done so by tearing yourself from her when she was feeding you with the milk of her breasts, when suddenly and frivolously you spewed her sweet nourishment from your mouth, the sweet milk of charity on which you

¹³ See ch. "Guy and Caritas."

¹⁴ See ch. "Guy and Caritas."

¹⁵ Leclercq, *Women and St Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 111–113.

¹⁶ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 109–110.

¹⁷ The references to other letters do not imply that the recipient of the letter himself would have had access to Bernard's other letters. Comparisons are made merely to show repeating patterns in the use of gendered imagery in different letters in order to better get to their meaning.

might have grown strong in virtue. Foolish child! A child more by folly than your years.¹⁸

Sweetness in the form of milk has a connection to the Eucharist, as seen above in the letter to Suger. In Fulk's case, it is not as clear whether the sweetness of the breast milk is referring to God as sweetness and goodness in general or more specifically to Christ in the Eucharist.¹⁹

In her book *God and Goddesses*, Barbara Newman brings up the maternal figure in the letter to Fulk as an example of the tendency of medieval Christianity to create goddess-like personifications of virtues like wisdom and charity.²⁰ She describes these figures as tools to think with, as mediators that enable participation with the divine through an imaginative, visual process.²¹ In the same instance, Newman brings up another letter as a parallel, Letter 88 to Oger, also a Regular Canon and unstable in his monastic position, like Fulk. As Newman shows, the personified figures of Caritas in these letters are almost identical.²² In both cases, Caritas is shown as a female figure and as God, first addressed in feminine terms as mother or lady, then as father or lord.²³ There is something in a Regular Canon who has left his place among his brethren—in Oger's case, headship of a house—that made it appropriate to use what Newman terms a goddess. It is possible that the letters have been edited in the process of forming the letter collection to be similar according to the similar recipients. In terms of Bernard's position toward the recipient and its effect on the gendered imagery, the need to use a personified figure of a mother probably arises from the fact that Fulk (like Oger) is not under Bernard's monastic care; he cannot present himself as the mediating mother figure because he does not have abbatial authority over someone who is not from his house. Motherhood needs to be outsourced to a personified figure that refers directly to God's authority.

The foundation for the sweet breast milk of the goddess has already been laid in the beginning of the letter, when Bernard quotes Psalm 54, lamenting the broken communion of Fulk with his religious brethren, with whom he "once 'broke sweet bread' to live together in concert."²⁴ He creates a graphic image of a child who is at his mother's breast, tears himself away and spits her

¹⁸ Ep. II:2. Sed in quo, inquis, laesi? In quo contempsi? Audi: In eo procul dubio, quod te, quem sinu suo lacte nutriendum materno susceperat, ante tempus ablactasti; quod expertam lactis dulcedinem, in quo posses crescere in salutem tam leviter, tam celeriter exsufflasti. O puer insensate! O puer magis sensu quam aetate! James 2:2.

¹⁹ See Fulton, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet." More on this theme below.

²⁰ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 145.

²¹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 29, 37–38, 43.

²² Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p. 146.

²³ See Ep. LXXXVIII:2. The letters were probably written around the same time, with Oger's being dated between 1120 and 1125.

²⁴ VG Ps. 54:15 qui simul mecum dulces capiebas cibos

milk out. The milk represents growth into union with God, which for Fulc was supposed to happen through his monastic community. He thus spits out the unity and his path to union with God. Here, unlike in the letter to Robert, for example, it is not Bernard himself who is the breastfeeding mother, but the personified Caritas. This is probably because Bernard is not officially Fulc's spiritual parent—father or mother—but more of an outside commentator. He has to resort to using a maternal figure that is not projected onto his person but presented as a separate entity whose sentiments he is voicing out. It is also important for the function of the figure that she is God Him-/Herself. The message is that it is God's will and desire that Fulc would go back to religious life, not Bernard's personal vision of how things should be.

The more fundamental reason for resorting to a personified female figure that is not dependent on who he is talking to might in Bernard's case have to do with his mode of thought, which can be described as visual and dialogic.²⁵ One way to give a tangible form to discursive reasoning is to have a conversation with a "goddess." Prudence Allen has noted in *The Concept of Woman* that Plato's Diotima is essentially a personification of wisdom,²⁶ like the medieval examples that Barbara Newman looks into. If not directly Plato, Bernard was surely familiar with the works of Boethius and his use of the figure of Sophia, a female figure inspired by Plato's example. Bernard is thus following an existing tradition, but in a way that aids and strengthens the specifically Bernardian way of portraying thought and communication in the context of persuading someone back to the monastery.

Having an imaginary dialogue with Fulc, Bernard continues: "You say it was your uncle. Thus, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, making excuses in sin. Yet their excuses did not save either one of them from a punishment they deserved."²⁷ Bringing in the first couple shows the mother in context; Fulc's life is connected to God's marital plan of salvation for humanity. The letter visualizes the connection of marriage—a hyperlinked and densely packed metaphor for God as Trinity and His/Her relationship with humanity—and the figure of Caritas. As seen above in the letter to Guy and in the present letter to Fulc, Bernard tends to equate Caritas directly with God. According to McGinn, God as Caritas is central for humanity's likelihood to God in Bernard's thought: "For Bernard the highest contemplative vision was the restored image of God in the human person, which he called *caritas*."²⁸

Bernard's way of verbalizing different forms of love affirms McGinn's notion of Charity as the restored image of God. Martha G. Newman shows in *Boundaries of Charity* how *caritas* marks both transcendent and ethical

²⁵ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–162.

²⁶ Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, p. 69.

²⁷ Ep. II:2. Avunculus, inquires. Sic Adam quondam uxorem, uxor serpentem ad excusandas excusationes in peccatis, praetendebant, uterque tamen suae culpa dignam excepit sententiam. James 2:2.

²⁸ McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, p. 211.

aspects of Christianity in Cistercian, especially Bernardian use. Thus, it links the relationship between human and divine and ideal relations between people. The connection between the two shows in the way Bernard tends to use the words *diligere* and *amare*, which describe *caritas* in action. When Augustine, for example, reserves *diligere* for love that is under the control of free will and uses *amare* as a morally neutral word for love, Bernard uses them both similarly, using *amare* for both divine and human love. When *diligere* and *amare* are used like this, the outcome is that human desire gets identified with divine love.²⁹ For Bernard, the figure of Caritas is God depicted from the viewpoint of His/Her active involvement with people and the world; from the human point of view, she reflects the image of God in human nature. When Fulk is described as rejecting the action of Mother Caritas, he is essentially seen as denying the divine in himself.

It seems that the womanhood of Caritas is significant for the meaning of the figure. As noted above, femininity acts as a marker for unity in most of the cases where it is applied to men in Bernard's letters. Caritas as a figure, used to concretize the relationship of human and divine, takes on flesh as a breastfeeding mother, whose milk and body tell of God in the flesh, the incarnated Son of God. It is thus not coincidental that flesh and corporeality are so strongly present in the letter. Bernard is applying the whole history of salvation to Fulk's situation, and flesh has an elemental role in it. The fleshly undertone has to do with the situation; Fulk has chosen to leave religious life for a life in the world, thus placing the world as the primary object of his desire. This flips the correct order of priority, for God should come first in a definitive manner for a person who has taken religious vows. The faulty order prevents the image of God from appearing in Fulk, who has strayed from the path. He has abandoned the reality of the Incarnation and has attached himself to the unredeemed flesh instead.

3.1.3 THE (DIS)ORDER OF FLESH AND SPIRIT

Bernard contrasts Fulk's uncle with God, who is addressed as the "spiritual father," by calling him the "fleshly uncle."³⁰ Trying to put himself in the place of God, the uncle becomes an opponent of the heavenly father:

"The bread you fed on was mine not yours, but my blood not yours redeemed them," says Christ. Thus, their uncle after the flesh fights with their heavenly father for his nephews in order

²⁹ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 17.

³⁰ Ep. II:4. carnalis avunculus contra Patrem spirituum James 2:4.

to disinherit them of heavenly joys and burden them with earthly gifts.³¹

Elaborating on the topic through references to Paul, Bernard writes:

“Because the sensual man perceiveth not the things that are of God for it is foolishness for him.” Had the spirit of Christ been in him he would not have grieved so much in the flesh as he would have rejoiced in the spirit. Because he was wise rather according to the world than according to heaven...³²

The way flesh and spirit, and earth and heaven, are set against each other might seem at first glance like the outcome of a dualistic view of reality and human nature. A closer look into the references to the Pauline epistles deepens the probable intention behind the dichotomous uncle of flesh versus God of spirit. First, Bernard uses a direct quote from the First Letter to the Corinthians (2:14): “But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is spiritually examined.”³³ In the Pauline epistle this passage is preceded by a comparison between human reasoning and God’s wisdom. Paul writes about the wisdom of God as the Spirit. Hence, God is called a spiritual father by Bernard.

Next, Bernard refers less directly to the Letter to the Romans (8:9), which also talks about flesh and spirit: “But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”³⁴ Keeping in mind the figure of Mother Wisdom, who in the letter to Fulk seems to be identified with the spirit of God, the flesh in its negative meaning as worldliness is not brought forth as feminine as clearly as one would presume on the basis of normative readings of the antique sources of Bernard’s theological thought. For example, Barbara Newman sees an equation of flesh, weakness and womanhood in medieval religious texts. She notes that the Church Fathers tended to make this connection in their works and medieval authors continued the tradition, repeating the view of woman being more fleshly than man.³⁵ As the letter to Fulk shows, this is not

³¹ Ep. II:4. Tu quidem, ait Christus, illos nutristi, sed pane meo, non tuo; ego vero redemi non sanguine tuo, sed meo. Sic carnalis avunculus contra Patrem spirituum pro nepotibus certat, quos dum bonis cupit onerare terrenis, coelestibus exhaeredat. James 2:4.

³² Ep. II:5. Quia animalis homo non percipit ea quae sunt spiritus Dei. Stultitia enim illi videtur. Nam si spiritum Christi haberet, non tam de carne doleret, quam gauderet de spiritu. Sed quia terrena, non quae sursum sunt [...] James 2:5.

³³ VG Animalis autem homo non percipit ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei: stultitia enim est illi, et non potest intelligere : quia spiritualiter examinatur.

³⁴ VG Vos autem in carne non estis, sed in spiritu: si tamen Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis. Siquis autem Spiritum Christi non habet, hic non est ejus.

³⁵ Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ*, p. 22.

always the case: the uncle is not directly called weak or feminine, but only fleshly; womanhood is rather a feature of the spirit of wisdom. The fleshly uncle has taken the place of the spirit of wisdom, God, who is marked by both motherhood and fatherhood when seen in light of the scriptural references that Bernard uses.

Being in or of the flesh is the term for the wrong order of priority that, in Bernard's view, Fulc practiced when he left his life as a religious and returned to the material comforts offered by the fleshly uncle. Flesh is not portrayed as bad per se, but as lesser in the twofold nature of reality. Thus, there is a duality and an order between the two, but where both flesh and spirit are in themselves good despite being in a certain order. As Leclercq has noted, there has been a persistent tendency to claim that the 12th century was anti-flesh, but based on mainstream authors like Bernard, this interpretation is not correct.³⁶ The question of the status of flesh has to do closely with the supposed devaluation of womanhood because of her fleshliness and the line of interpretation of earlier Christian authors that follows from the supposition. When looking at Augustine, for example, one of the foundations of the thought of any 12th-century religious person, to say that he equates womanhood and flesh or that woman is seen as lower because of this is to cut corners. As Prudence Allen shows in *The Concept of Woman*, Augustine was not that consistent in his treatment of the meaning of bodily sex: three different and conflicting theories of sexual identity based on the sexed body can be found in his works. Also, he does not directly link womanhood with the body or flesh, but with the lower part of the human mind. This is why, according to him, womanhood is closer to the material world and the body than manhood.³⁷ If Bernard is following Augustine's thought to any extent on the matter, one will probably find conclusions as conflicting as his when it comes to the meaning and connection of flesh and womanhood.

The essence of flesh is introduced through a reference to the Letter to the Philippians (3:19): "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things..."³⁸ The center of the flesh is the belly, which will come up in the letter several times after this indirect introduction to the concept of the stomach. The reference from the Letter to the Philippians brings the reader also to the core of the problem that Bernard sees in Fulc's life: he has put his "belly," or material created things, as his primary object of desire. "Let your flesh be nailed to the fear of God lest carnal affection deceive you,"³⁹ Bernard warns Fulc, and continues to show how the material world is a perishing good that will not last for eternity:

³⁶ Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage*, p. 86.

³⁷ Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, p. 222.

³⁸ VG quorum finis interitus : quorum Deus venter est : et gloria in confusione ipsorum, qui terrena sapiunt.

³⁹ Ep. II:6. *Configat carnes tuas divinus timor, ne te decipiat carnalis amor*. James 2:6. This is a reference to Ps. 118:120. VG *Confige timore tuo carnes meas; a iudiciis enim tuis timui*. D-R. "Pierce

I tell you, my son, take heed lest you consent to flesh and blood, for my sword is sharp and shall devour all flesh. Despise his flattery, spurn his promises. He promises great things; I promise greater. He offers many things; I offer more. Will you throw away heaven for earth, eternity for time?⁴⁰

Consent to flesh and blood is taken from Paul's Letter to the Galatians (1:16): "To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles, immediately I condescended not to flesh and blood."⁴¹ The abilities to receive the revelation of God and to live according to the flesh are contrasted.

Bernard also uses the voice of God to get his point across. The sword is a reference to Deuteronomy (32:42), where God speaks through Moses and describes the ways in which He will punish His enemies, namely, people who have served other gods. This Old Testament reference neatly combines the wrath of God toward those who serve false gods (in Fulk's case the comfortable life offered by his uncle) and the fleeting nature of flesh, the material world that the idols represent: "I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh, of the blood of the slain and of the captivity, of the bare head of the enemies."⁴² The image of God's bloody arrows and His sword sinking into flesh brings yet another layer of corporeality to the mental image created by the text. In his freestyling way, Bernard combines the Old Testament depiction of the wrath of God with a New Testament text and thus brings the whole history of salvation into the present, applying it to the person of Fulk.

The letter continues with a lamentation that reflects and in part directly quotes the Psalms:

How much better would it have been for these young men to have become saintly under the rule of a saint rather than to have been perverted by a pervert! How much more beautiful if the religious boy had persuaded the worldly man so that

thou my flesh with thy fear: for I am afraid of thy judgements." I have modified James' translation of this passage of the letter to better match the Psalm reference. James translates: "Let the love of God quicken your heart lest carnal affection deceive you."

⁴⁰ Ep. II:6. Cave, inquam, fili mi, ne acquiescas carni et sanguini, nam gladius meus devorabit carnes. Sperne blandimenta, contemne promissiones. Promittit magna, sed ego maiora; offert plure, sed ego plurima. Dimittes ergo pro terrenis caelestia, pro temporalibus aeterna? James 2:6.

⁴¹ VG ut revelaret Filium suum in me, ut evangelizarem illum in gentibus : continuo non acquievi carni et sanguine.

⁴² VG Inebriabo sagittas meas sanguine, et gladius meus devorabit carnes; de cruore occisorum, de captivitate, nudati inimicorum capitis.

both should conquer, than that the worldly man should have led astray the religious boy so that both were overcome!⁴³

Here Bernard includes in the scenery another case of a young man lured out of monastic life by a relative in Lyons, thus talking of young men in plural. The word 'perverted' is quoted from Psalms (17:26–27): "With the holy, thou wilt be holy; and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent. And with the elect thou wilt be elect: and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted."⁴⁴ Psalm 17 is a variation of a song found also in 2 Samuel (22:2–51), where David prays to the Lord after escaping Saul who was trying to kill him. The text is like a cosmic vision: "Then the fountains of waters appeared, and the foundations of the world were discovered, at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the spirit of thy wrath. He sent from on high, and took me, and received me out of many waters."⁴⁵ Again, Bernard uses the voice of Scripture, here the person of David in particular, to support his point of view. Conscious or not, this choice of text and Old Testament patriarch further emphasize how Bernard is applying the revelation of God and the salvation of humanity to Fulk's person and situation. The Psalms and the figure of David are closely connected to Christ in 12th-century interpretation of Scripture; the voice of Christ continues to ring in the background.

The 'perverted' that Bernard borrows from the Psalm refers to the disorder of flesh and spirit that is a central theme in the letter. The word is used in the same way as in the letter to Suger.⁴⁶ A pervert is someone who reverses the order of charity and puts things of the material world as the primary goal to be attained instead of closeness with God. According to Bernard, this is exactly what the fleshly uncle represents. Fulk has failed to resist the temptation and has been perverted by a pervert, when he should have stuck to Christ's better offer of religious life and persuaded the uncle to cast away the non-relevant earthly attachments.

Later on in the letter, Bernard explains what this reversal of the just order of charity means concretely for Fulk:

No matter how quietly and honorably you may live, no matter how chastely, soberly and even piously you may conduct yourself, yet would God be less pleased with this than he would be angered at you breaking your vows. Therefore,

⁴³ Ep. II:7. O quam ordinatius ipse cum sancto sanctus efficeretur, quam cum perverso sanctus perverteretur! o quam pulchrius senem saecularem puer religiosus ad se traheret, et sic vinceret uterque, quam religiosum saecularis ad se retraheret, in quo victus est uterque! James 2:7.

⁴⁴ VG Cum sancto sanctus eris, et cum viro innocente innocens eris, et cum electo electus eris, et cum perverso perverteris.

⁴⁵ VG Ps. 17:16–17. Et apparuerunt fontes aquarum, et revelata sunt fundamenta orbis terrarum, ab increpatione tua, Domine, ab inspiratione spiritus irae tuae. Misit de summo, et accepit me; et assumpsit me de aquis multis.

⁴⁶ See chapter A Monstrous Life.

beloved, you must not compare yourself with these men of the world, for you are separated from them by your religious profession. They are not, as you are, bound by vows. Nor must you flatter yourself on account of your, perhaps, stricter self-control, for the Lord says to you, "Would that I had found you either hot or cold."⁴⁷

Bernard's critique is not directed toward life in the world or things of the world themselves, but to Fulk breaking his religious vows that separate him from them. The message seems to be that there is no "one size fits all" model for an optimal life that is pleasing to God, but that it depends on the circumstances and commitments of each person. The letter seems to support Caroline Walker Bynum's argument in *Jesus as Mother* that the 12th century did not discover the individual per se, but rather a self that is related to and shaped according to a model offered by a certain group, like a monastic community.⁴⁸ She states: "Thus the twelfth century is *not* (as is sometimes pictured) the beginning of a march toward a more and more private and individualistic piety which increasingly bypasses ecclesiastical structures."⁴⁹ It is the commitment to a group that defines Fulk as an individual for Bernard, which is why he cannot please God by breaking apart from his model of life defined by the Regular Canons. There is a separation not only between people's commitments to different ways of piety, but also between God and the material world. Here, Fulk stands for both of these differences: he is his own case as an individual who has committed himself to a community and separate from "the men of the world," attached to God due to his religious vows. Bernard takes this as an immutable reality that cannot be reversed by choice once the vows have been professed. Now Fulk is in a limbo state, neither hot nor cold, between the men of the world and religious life.

Toward the end of the letter, Bernard lays out how Fulk should use material goods as "a servant of the altar":

It is fitting that he who serves at the altar should live by the altar. And I grant you that if you serve the altar well, you can live by the altar, but not in luxury, not in pride. You cannot provide yourself with from the altar with golden trappings for your horse, inlaid chairs, silvered spurs and every sort of multicolored furs for your gloves and collars. In fact, what you

⁴⁷ Ep. II:9. Tu vero, quantumlibet modeste et honeste vivas, si caste, si sobrie, si omnino religiose te habeas, Deo tamen minus est accepta tua religio, quam deturpat voti praevaricatio. Idcirco, carissime, ne tuis coaetaneis compares, a quibus professio separat, nec respectu seacularium de tua tibi forte paulo graviori continentia blandiaris, cum tibi Dominus dicat: Utinam te calidum aut frigidum invenissem! James 2:9.

⁴⁸ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 106–109.

⁴⁹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 108.

take from the altar in excess of your bare needs in not yours,
and it is sacrilege and robbery.⁵⁰

There is a clear call to an ascetic lifestyle for the clergy in this advice to Fulk. Nothing in proud excess, no colorful luxury at the expense of the office of the altar, for this would be sacrilegious, like the perverse ways of the uncle. This passage of the letter is no doubt a wider commentary on the clerical state, not just a warning directed to Fulk. As is well known from the efforts of the so-called reform movement that can be seen from the decisions made in the Lateran Councils, asceticization of the clergy was very strong on the agenda. This was to avoid situations exactly like the one that is portrayed, rightfully or not, in the letter to Fulk: the clerical state and ecclesiastical positions being used as a means to centralize power and money in the hands of certain families. Even though Bernard writes only about the uncle's emotional and social attachment to his nephew, the material wealth of the uncle is implied through the description of Fulk's temptation. The uncle is said to "offer many things" and "burden them with earthly gifts." The situation that Fulk is presented as being in embodies the confusion and perverted order of flesh and spirit that was at work among the clergy in the eyes of the ecclesiastical authorities wanting to asceticize the secular clergy.⁵¹ Bernard represents here the voice of the efforts to make a clear difference between the business of the world and the men in the clerical state, on top of condemning the breaking of monastic vows.

Bernard's treatment of corporeality in the letter is twofold: on one hand there is God as the breastfeeding mother, on the other there is the uncle of flesh with material comforts. These could simply be taken as separate realities, unrelated to each other or the gendered nature of Mother Wisdom/Caritas, simply looking at flesh unrelated to the feminine connotations of bodiliness. What reveals the hidden femininity of the fleshly uncle, however, is his being compared to Eve earlier in the letter. The uncle indirectly takes the form of the bad mother, whose flesh is not the sweet, nourishing body of Caritas that points to the Eucharist, but the distorted flesh of Eve. Both types of flesh seem to be connected to a mother in the final analysis.

There is a shift between male and female in the language used about God that can be detected from the Scripture references camouflaged by the text of Bernard's letter itself. First, the reader is introduced to the feminine figure of Mother Wisdom, then to the Pauline wisdom of God who is the Spirit, and

⁵⁰ Ep. II:11. *Dignum est ut qui altario deservit, de altario vivat. Conceditur ergo tibi, ut si bene deservis, de altario vivas; non autem ut de altario luxurieris, ut de altario superbias, ut inde compares tibi frena aurea, sellas depictas, calcaria deargentata, varia griseaque pellicea a collo et manibus ornata purpureo diversificata. Denique quidquid praeter necessarium victum ac simplicem vestitum de altario retines, tuum non est; rapina est, sacrilegium est.* James 2:11.

⁵¹ See, for example, Frassetto, "Introduction," pp. x, xiv, and Beaudette, "In the World but not of It," pp. 31–32.

whom Bernard names spiritual father. The feminine is connected to the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of God, unlike one would expect from a dualistic viewpoint that the contents of the letter might initially bring to mind. This probably has to do with Bernard's mode of thinking, which can be called dialogic and visual. In her book *Metamorphosis and Identity*, Bynum argues that Bernard's view of reality is marked by a profound doubleness, a black and whiteness, where two opposing counterparts are in dialogue and exist side by side as a hybrid. For Bernard, there is no narrative or historical processes; "his fundamental category is a *unitas* forever encompassing two."⁵² This seems to apply to Bernard's image of God: He/She is Father and Mother, and thus God as Wisdom is the spiritual father and the breastfeeding mother. God is perfect *unitas* yet encompasses both womanhood and manhood.

Line Engh has seen Bernard's dual gendered thinking as hierarchical in the context of the *Sermones super Cantica*, where a monk is invited to assume the lower femininity as the bride but simultaneously refutes it and then rises to superior manhood. Manhood comes to absorb womanhood, making it fade away altogether from a perfected person.⁵³ Womanhood's closer connection to the world in the negative sense is not to be found in the letter to Fulk, however. Flesh for Bernard seems to be the way to Heaven. He writes to the Carthusian prior: "Because we are flesh and blood and born of the desire of the flesh, our desire or love must start in the flesh, and it will then, if properly directed, progress under grace by certain stages until it is fulfilled in the spirit."⁵⁴ In light of the treatment of spirit in the letter to Fulk, it is not necessarily associated exclusively with manhood on a hermeneutic level, but it can actually take on feminine connotations, like in the figure of Wisdom. The "fulfilling in the spirit"⁵⁵ of flesh, as far as the letters are concerned, does not directly imply disappearance of the womanly flesh but perfecting it without changing its being flesh. Bernard's gendered thought seems to vary between his writings. The inconsistency results in conflicting ideas when looking at his whole heritage, much like in Augustine's works.⁵⁶

3.1.4 WORLDLY VOMIT AND THE SWEETNESS OF CHRIST

The relationship between the feminized figure of God and the presence of flesh, both good and bad, becomes more intelligible through looking at images of food, eating and digestion in the letter. To better understand the critique of

⁵² Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–162.

⁵³ See Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 5. Engh lays out this pattern of interpretation already in the introduction to her book.

⁵⁴ Ep. XI:8, 28–2. Verumtamen quia carnales sumus, et de carnis concupiscentia nascimur, necesse est cupiditas vel amor noster a carne incipiat: quae si recto ordine dirigitur, quibusdam suis gradibus duce gratia proficiens, spiritu tandem consummabitur.

⁵⁵ The verb *consummare* used in the text can mean to perfect or to fulfill, as James has translated.

⁵⁶ Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, p. 222.

the negative rule of flesh and what it means, it is useful to take a closer look at the bits where Bernard writes about the stomach and its contents.

The topic of the belly and eating are first introduced discreetly through references to the Pauline epistles. In the part of the letter that is presented as Christ's speech to Fulk, Bernard writes: "You, religious, do not follow the secular; if you do so, you follow against me whom you injure. To you, the uncle, I say if you lead astray a soul for whom I have died, you set yourself up as an enemy of the cross."⁵⁷ By the text alone, one would not immediately notice the presence of the concept of flesh. However, Bernard uses wording first from the Letter to the Romans, where Paul writes about meat-eating and cleanliness (14:15): "For if, because of thy meat, thy brother be grieved, thou walkest not now according to charity. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."⁵⁸ Paul's main message that Bernard probably wants to tap into by the reference is that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."⁵⁹

In one short phrase, Bernard manages to refer also to Paul's Letter to the Philippians (3:18): "For many walk, of whom I have told you often (and now tell you weeping), that they are enemies of the cross of Christ." This passage is followed by the definition of these enemies that Bernard refers to earlier in the letter: they are those "whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."⁶⁰ The reader is taken from meat to the belly again. The fleshliness that the belly represents is contrasted with Christ's death on the cross. The uncle is fleshly in the wrong manner, not in the way that Christ was fleshly on the cross, which makes him an enemy of the cross. The uncle is worshipping the flesh of his stomach instead of the flesh of Christ on the cross, which is a perversion of the classical definition of the order of charity that Bernard represents.⁶¹

The hidden presence of the stomach is just a prelude to what surfaces very graphically later in the letter. Bernard elaborates on eating and other functions of the belly at great length throughout the rest of the text; for example, vomiting comes up in two places. The first time it is connected to the perverting effect of the uncle on Fulk: "It perverted the converted, and the dog

⁵⁷ Ep. II:6. Tu, regularis, saecularem ne sequaris; quia si illum sequeris, me persequeris, cui de te ipso injuriam facis. Tu si seduxeris animam pro qua mortuus sum, crucis meae te constituis inimicum. James 2:6.

⁵⁸ VG Si enim propter cibum frater tuus contristatur, jam non secundum caritatem ambulas. Noli cibo tuo illum perdere, pro quo Christus mortuus est.

⁵⁹ VG Rom. 14:17. Non est enim regnum Dei esca et potus : sed justitia, et pax, et gaudium in Spiritu Sancto.

⁶⁰ VG Phil. 3:18–19. Multi enim ambulant, quos saepe dicebam vobis (nunc autem et flens dico) inimicos crucis Christi; quorum finis interitus : quorum Deus venter est : et gloria in confusione ipsorum, qui terrena sapiunt.

⁶¹ See, for example, Cvetković, *Seeking the Face of God*; McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 192–224; Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*.

returned to its vomit.”⁶² The dog’s vomit is a saying borrowed from 2 Peter (2:22), which gets the expression from the Book of Proverbs (26:11). The message of the saying is that a sinner once saved can easily be drawn back to his old ways. Thus, it suits well to be used as a critical commentary for Fulk’s choice to leave his monastic life.

The second time Bernard brings up vomiting, he draws imagery from the Book of Revelation (3:15–16), where God wants to spit out the lukewarm church of Laodicea. Applying to Fulk the idea of lukewarmness and it being displeasing to God, Bernard writes: “‘And because I have found you,’ he says, ‘neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth,’ and deservedly, because you have rejected his grace and returned to your vomit.”⁶³ God’s vomit is a parallel to Fulk’s, represented by the dog’s vomit. Both have vomited out sin or tepidity: for Fulk it is his life before religious vows, the life that he is now returning to, and for God the lukewarm Fulk that had turned tepid by returning to his old life.

The image from Revelation paves the way for a familiar topic that stays with food and eating: the sweetness of Christ. The reader is next taken to experience the mouth of God as sweetness after the vomiting out of tepid Fulk. In the words of the Song of Songs, Bernard asks:

Alas! How soon you tired of Christ, of whom it is written, “Honey and milk are under thy tongue.” I wonder that you should have turned against the taste of this sweet nourishment unless perhaps you have never tasted and seen how sweet is the Lord. Either you have never tasted the sweetness of Christ and so do not miss what you have never known or else, if you have tasted and yet not found sweet, your palate is sick.⁶⁴

Christ described as sweet food probably has a Eucharistic background with its feminine connotations: Christ’s incarnation through Mary and her flesh as a fundamentally feminine concept.⁶⁵ The sweetness of the Lord stands for the good kind of food, flesh that nourishes instead of perverting. Bernard equates the inability to recognize the sweetness of Christ to a sickness in the sense of taste. This is because sweet food was thought to be best for a person’s health: if one cannot even recognize sweetness, one must be sick.⁶⁶ Here the corporeal

⁶² Ep. II:7. *Subvertit perversus conversum: revertitur canis ad vomitum.* James 2:7.

⁶³ Ep. II:9. *Et quia tepidum te inveni, incipiam, inquit, te evomere ex ore meo. Et merito, quia tu ad tuum vomitum redisti, quia tu ejus gratiam evomuisti.* James 2:9.

⁶⁴ Ep. II:10. *Heu! quomodo Christum tam cito fastidis de quo scriptum est: Mel et lac sub lingua ejus? Miror, quod ad gustum cibi dulcissimi nausearis; si tamen gustasti quam dulcis est Dominus. Aut certe nondum gustasti, et nescis quid sapit Christus; ideoque non appetis inexpertum: aut si gustasti, et dulce non sapuit, sanum non habes palatum.* James 2:10.

⁶⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 269–276.

⁶⁶ Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,” pp. 190–193.

and the spiritual realities are fused through the spiritual senses that are able to experience the corporeal as it is after being redeemed by God become man, Christ in flesh.⁶⁷

While continuing with the theme of eating, Bernard brings the figure of Wisdom back into the picture:

Indeed it is wisdom of God Him-/Herself who says, "They that eat me shall yet hunger; and they that drink me shall thirst again." But how can anyone hunger or thirst for Christ who is filled every day with the husks of swine? You cannot drink from both the cup of Christ and the cup of devils. The cup of devils is pride; the cup of devils is slander and envy; the cup of devils is debauchery and drunkenness; and these fill the mind and belly there is no room for Christ.⁶⁸

The female wisdom of God seems to be the sweet Christ. The passage on eating and drinking is another quote from *Ecclesiasticus* (24:29), where Wisdom talks about herself as food and drink. This brings to the reader's mind how Jesus talks about himself in the Gospels when admonishing people to eat his body and drink his blood. In the Gospel of John (6:35), for example, Jesus says to the crowd: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger: and he that believeth in me shall never thirst."⁶⁹ The wording between the Old and New Testament texts is very similar, although the food and drink of Wisdom is said to leave one wanting for more while Jesus promises to satiate.

The content of *Ecclesiasticus* surrounding the phrase Bernard quotes further supports a link of meaning between Wisdom as food and Christ as food. In *Ecclesiasticus* 24:5, Wisdom says of herself, "I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the firstborn before all creatures."⁷⁰ This reminds the beginning of the Gospel of John, where the Word of God is described to have been "in the

⁶⁷ Bynum, *Christian materiality*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ Ep. II:10. Ipse quippe Dei est sapientia, quae ait: Qui comedit me, adhuc esuriet; et qui bibit me, adhuc sitiet (Eccli. XXIV, 29). Sed quomodo potest esurire vel sitire Christum, plenus quotidie siliquis porcorum? Non potes bibere simul calicem Christi, et calicem daemoniorum. Calix daemoniorum superbia est, calix daemoniorum detractio et invidia est, calix daemoniorum crapula et ebrietas est; quae cum impleverint vel mentem vel ventrem tuum, Christus in te non invenit locum. James 2:10. Although Wisdom is referred to with masculine *ipse*, it does not erase the more profound femininity of the figure. It is specifically Christ whom Bernard is referring to, who is identified as Wisdom here, so it is logical to use *ipse* and not *ipsa*. Translating *ipse ... Dei est sapientia* as "wisdom herself" thus captures the femininity of the figure of Wisdom. For more on the relationship between gendered figures and grammatical gender, see Introduction.

⁶⁹ VG Dixit autem eis Jesus: Ego sum panis vitae: qui venit ad me, non esuriet, et qui credit in me, non sitiet umquam.

⁷⁰ VG Ego ex ore Altissimi prodivi, primogenita ante omnem creaturam.

beginning.”⁷¹ In the 12th-century context, both Wisdom and the Word would have been read as the figure of Christ. Bernard does this, and not only in the letter to Fulk. Aside from the scriptural connections, Bernard plays on the similarities of the words *sapere* (‘taste’) and *sapientia* (‘wisdom’). In Sermon 85, *Super Cantica*, he takes also *experientia* in the mix, expressing that to know the sweetness of Christ is to experience Him as sweet wisdom through the inner sense of taste, which for him is a prerequisite for seeing the Lord; in terms of the interior senses, this is connected to knowing God intellectually.⁷² The same thought is clearly behind the treatment of tasting wisdom in the letter: Fulk’s interior sense of taste is sick, so he cannot taste or experience the sweetness of honey-sweet Christ.

“The husks of swine” are from the parable of the prodigal son, which takes the reader back to the arms of the father-turned-into-mother Wisdom that Bernard presented earlier in the letter. God is shown in a feminine light, both as mother and human Christ, and they are both food and flesh to be eaten. The husks further strengthen the presence of eating and the bodily functions related to it: the husks are the food that the prodigal son would have liked to eat in his miserable poverty after having wasted his inheritance. Now Fulk is put in the place of the prodigal son, with the difference that he did eat the food of the swine, which means that he did not return to father/mother God. His stomach is full of this faulty food; he cannot eat the sweet food of wisdom, who is Christ. The whole food theme in the letter to Fulk resonates well with Bynum’s argument in her article on divine materiality in the Middle Ages, that the Eucharist was probably central in medieval thought and piety long before it started to appear in doctrinal texts in the later Middle Ages, and that Christ in the Eucharist truly was a revelation of God in the form of food for medieval Christians.⁷³ The centrality of an edible God is behind the talk on the body, belly and food that Bernard applies to Fulk’s life.

Fulk’s mind and belly, which are full of the devil’s drunkenness, seem to be profoundly connected, as are wisdom (a spiritual capacity) and food (a material substance). Mother Wisdom is described as food; being equated with Christ, this brings up Christ’s body as food, which Fulk’s belly could digest and turn into spiritual nourishment if he had not already filled himself with the bitter food of the swine. There is no room for dessert in Bernard’s interpretation of Fulk’s state of life. Strengthening this line of thought and returning to the good versus bad food theme, he continues:

You must not wonder at what I am going to say. In the house
of your uncle you cannot taste the plenty of the house of God.

⁷¹ Jh 1:1–2. D-R. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. VG In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum. Hoc erat in principio apud Deum.

⁷² Fulton, “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,” pp. 191–192. Fulton refers to SSC 85:8.

⁷³ Bynum, “The Sacrality of Things,” pp. 15–16, 18.

You ask why? I answer because the house of your uncle is a house of delicate living and as water cannot mix with fire, so the delights of the flesh and the joys of the spirit cannot go together. Christ does not deign to pour out his wine, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, for one whom Christ discovers among cups belching and hung over. The bread of heaven is not tasted amid a delicate variety of foods and napery of every color, so that both eyes and belly are filled.⁷⁴

It becomes quite clear that it is the same belly that is being filled, either by the fleshly variety of foods of the uncle's house or by Christ's spiritual honeycomb-sweet wine. It is as if Bernard is simultaneously strengthening and dissolving the dichotomy of spirit and flesh that he has just presented. This seems to be a general tendency in Bernard's texts, as Bynum has noted: he makes opposites live side by side in dialogue, being united but still always separate.⁷⁵ In this sense it can be said that the vomit and the sweet milk exist side by side, living off the contrast and strengthening both the rhetorical and spiritual power of each counterpart. Here it is noteworthy that the sweetness is feminine, while the sphere of the flesh that makes one vomit is not gendered as clearly.

Despite the probable reality of nutritional well-being at the side of the uncle, the text stays at the level of the spiritual senses. However, the interior stomach is not only a spiritual capacity detached from the physical body, but it has its basis in the existence of an actual corporeal belly that consumes food. This is emphasized by the visual description of the food, which was an important factor in medieval thought on how a certain food would affect its recipient. The senses of taste and vision were not separate; both were thought to transmit the nature of the food in question. A "napery of every color" that fills "both the eyes and belly" that Bernard writes about shows the holistic approach of 12th-century ideas on the human senses, both exterior and interior. This is backed up by biblical examples like the "taste and see" that Bernard quotes. The colorful food offered by the uncle is contrasted with the "heavenly bread," which probably refers to Christ as nourishment, and specifically Christ as Eucharistic bread. Fulton suggests that the bread used in the Eucharist was seen as perfect food, both by its color and by its taste, which then referred to Christ as a perfectly balanced human being. It was white and tasted sweet, having been made of fine, pure wheat flour.⁷⁶ Bernard's vision of

⁷⁴ Ep. II:10. Non mireris quod dico. In domo avunculi tui non potes inebriari ab ubertate domus Dei. Cur, inquis? Quia domus deliciarum est. Quomodo ignis et aqua simul esse non possunt, sic spirituales et carnales deliciae in eodem se non patiuntur. Ubi crapulam ructantis inter pocula senserit Christus, vina sua, dulciora super mel et favum, menti propinare non dignatur. Ubi curiosa ciborum diversitas, ubi divitis supellectilis discolor varietas oculos pariter pascit et ventrem, coelestis panis ieiunam deserit mentem. James 2:10.

⁷⁵ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–162.

⁷⁶ Fulton, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet," pp. 198–200.

the food of the fleshly uncle as colorful is thus probably intentional. Perfect Christ is set as a contradiction to the worldly uncle, who offers colors and sensual fulfillment but not perfect sweetness.

The belly of the spiritual body has the capacity to block or enable a life close to Christ, and it is tightly attached to the belly of the body of flesh. Bernard calls Fulk to re-asceticize his life back to monastic standards, which requires concrete physical actions that become transformed into experiences of the spiritual senses in the embrace of Mother Wisdom. The overall message of the language of features of the food-consuming body is that the interior is not unrelated to or detached from the exterior. The vows that Fulk had made encompass his whole being, both flesh and spirit. This inseparability of flesh and spirit in the medieval view of the human person is covered at length by Bynum in her *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, where she delves into the connections of corporality, food and womanhood. She notes that medieval male authors tended to see woman as a contrast to what was considered man or manly, and thus they saw God as a mother only when it came to His/Her feminine features as a source of nourishment or being a gentle and loving caretaker, not when thinking about Him/Her as the Creator, like some female authors did.⁷⁷ This seems not to apply to Bernard's letters, however. As has been shown above in the case of the letter to Guy, Bernard presents God as Caritas who is *creatrix*, and in the letter to Fulk, God as feminine Wisdom replaces the father of the prodigal son of the Gospel narrative. God as a feminine figure is clearly presented as a head of the household, be it the family in the parable or the created universe. Bernard's concept of woman is not limited to a mere contrast to the strong *vir*, but takes on features that elsewhere have been reserved to manhood and God as Father. In Bernard's view, as it is presented in the letters, womanhood also includes the power to give and create life and rule a household.

Womanhood is part of the sweetness of the Lord, the goodness of the food that She offers. The distorted flesh that leads into a malfunctioning body and produces vomit seems not to be particularly feminine, while the sweet food of God is portrayed as breast milk. The feminine, Eucharistic and edible flesh of the incarnated Christ changes the hierarchy of spirit and flesh and how they are gendered: Mother Caritas with her lactating breasts is the spiritual Father. The flesh assumed from a woman, the Virgin Mary, includes womanhood in its fleshliness as part of the Divine in the person of Christ. This inclusion presupposes the Neoplatonic idea of womanhood being closer to the unstable, non-permanent material reality and manhood respectively being closer to the eternal, permanent spirit.⁷⁸

Without this hierarchical duality, the assumption of human flesh would not have the same meaning as a sign of life in Heaven, eternal existence in the reality of the resurrection of the body, as Line Engh has shown in her book on

⁷⁷ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 267.

⁷⁸ Bynum, *Christian materiality*, pp. 49–50.

the bridal imagery in *Sermones super Cantica*. In Engh's analysis, this hierarchical relationship between manhood and womanhood means that the man who emulates the reality of the incarnation and resurrection by performing the role of the bride of Christ is a sign of womanhood (flesh), being absorbed into manhood (spirit), thus dissolving altogether.⁷⁹ This might be the case in the collection of *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, which is rather heavily based on Origen's Neoplatonic work as one of the main sources of inspiration.⁸⁰

In Bernard's letter collection, the gender hierarchy does not function in the same way as Engh observes in the *Sermons*, but takes the resurrection of the incarnated God as a catalyst for a reversal in the order of things, instead of absorbing the female to the point of disappearance. The last become first; this paraphrasing of the principle of the order of the Kingdom of God as portrayed in the Gospels summarizes the argument of David Damrosch in his article "Non alia sed aliter: The hermeneutics of gender in Bernard of Clairvaux." He interprets the figure of the female bride of the Song applied to a male monk as recognition of the lower position of women in the society of Bernard's time. The message is that the monk is supposed to be like the woman in the eyes of society, an unappreciated outsider, and that a human is always in the position of a woman in relation to the transcendent God. In Damrosch's reading of Bernard's feminine imagery, a human is a material Eve who needs to surpass the exile she is living in her body.⁸¹ Damrosch's argument seems fitting to some extent when reading the letter to Fulk. The contrast created between the uncle of flesh and the spiritual Father combined with the sweet food of Caritas or Christ versus vomit and a dysfunctional palate certainly suggests the presence of a duality. The replacement of the father of the prodigal son with a mother signals exaltation of the feminine according to Damrosch's hermeneutics of gender.

Exalting the female in order to take on her lowly position is not the only level of meaning of the feminine imagery in the letter, however, especially when the one feminized is God the Father. Assuming that the imagery and talk of Christ as sweetness points to Eucharistic piety not yet surfaced as official dogmatic documents, the one that gets consumed in the end is God Himself.⁸² The act of eating and the somewhat vulgar descriptions of the functions of the stomach are not there in the letter just to show the meaning of mother and woman as flesh, but to show the Creator as food and becoming absorbed by a creature. Taking on a female position to imitate Christ as human-God surely can mean that womanhood as the body is consumed and absorbed by the male

⁷⁹ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 5, 396–397.

⁸⁰ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 27–29. On Origen, see Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, p. 32.

⁸¹ Damrosch, "Non Alia Sed Aliter."

⁸² Bynum, "The Sacrality of Things," pp. 15–16, 18.

spirit, but the Eucharist hidden in the gendered imagery of the letter suggests a simultaneous reversed order as well: Christ the bridegroom, the head, being absorbed by the human flesh of the bride, the body.⁸³ The act of eating God flips the gendered hierarchy of spirit and flesh and results in the woman becoming the eater, becoming the first, and the spiritual male-gendered God becoming the last, as weak human flesh. In the consumption of the Eucharist, man is eaten by woman, woman is eaten by man, and woman is eaten by woman at the same time. The only option that is missing from the equation is an unambiguous man being eaten by another man; flesh and humanity make female presence unavoidable.

As shown above when looking at the letter to Guy, the figure of the mother has the bride included in her. Mother Wisdom in the letter to Fulk is the lady of Ecclesiastes who “will meet him as an honorable mother, and will receive him as a wife married off a virgin.”⁸⁴ Thus, the bride of the Song is also present in the gendered mindset of the letter. This woman in her fleshliness is presented in all the fullness of qualities that arise from the text of the Song of Songs, and these qualities are used to prepare the reader to take in the manly content that comes up in the text as well. On the side of motherly qualities like nurturing, the bride also holds connotations of warfare: she is “terrible as an army set in array,”⁸⁵ and she describes herself as “a wall” and her “breasts are as a tower.”⁸⁶ Presentations of manliness are sandwiched with glimpses of the woman being in charge in the letter. Womanhood takes on the manly elements of leadership and war, anticipating the analysis of Fulk’s manliness.

3.1.5 “*SUME ARMA, RESUME VIRES*”—HOW NOT TO BE EFFEMINATE

In an effort to convince the reader how well off Fulk was before his change of mind, Bernard compares him to an unknown individual named Guarike:

How then was he able to win you over who could not win Guarike? How did it happen that he was able to overcome you who was overcome by him? Is Guarike stronger or more prudent than you? Certainly anyone who had formerly known you both would have put Fulk first. But when it came to the fight the result proved the judgement of men wrong. He who

⁸³ See also Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 383–384. Engh focuses on Bernard’s descriptions on being eaten by God while consuming Him in the Eucharist in the *Sermones super Cantica*.

⁸⁴ VG Eccli. 15:2 et obviabit illi quasi mater honorificata, et quasi mulier a virginitate suscipiet illum. Transl. D-R.

⁸⁵ Song 6:9.

⁸⁶ Song 8:10.

had been thought the stronger flies—for shame! And he who had been considered the weaker conquers.⁸⁷

Apparently this Guarike had faced the same temptation as Fulk but managed not to succumb to it, despite being considered not as strong by Bernard. Although Scripture is not directly quoted in this passage, it echoes the principle of the last becoming first and vice versa in the Kingdom of God, which seems to be woven into the text in a non-obvious way throughout the letter. As seen above, Bernard refers to the part of the Letter to the Romans where Paul says “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”⁸⁸ Despite being weaker, Guarike has become first in “the judgement of men,” following the order of Christ’s reign instead. Using Damrosch’s view of the feminine imagery in Bernard, Guarike is presented as the weak woman who becomes first. She is thus an ideal to be strived for and not womanly in a negative sense. The mention of Guarike points to a discussion on the nature of the good kind of womanhood, which is part of the letter’s main message.

Later on in the letter, Bernard compares Fulk’s uncle to a lion because of his possessive behavior:

And so consenting to these counsels of the flesh, the uncle forgot all law and reason. Fearing nothing sacred he raged and roared like a lion prepared for its prey or a lioness robbed of its cub. He burst into the dwelling of these holy men where Christ had hidden his raw recruit to protect him from the strife of tongues, that he might afterwards consort with angels.⁸⁹

The lion is borrowed from Psalm 16 (16:12), where the lion-like enemies of the Psalmist have taken him for their prey. What makes this description of the uncle interesting from the viewpoint of gendered imagery is that Bernard adds a mother lion into the comparison. The lioness can also be a reference to Proverbs 26:13, a passage that is located very near the saying of the dog and its vomit (26:11), which Bernard uses through a reference to Paul, as seen

⁸⁷ Ep. II:3. Quomodo te vicit qui illum vincere non potuit? Aut quomodo qui te vicit ab illo superatus est? Numquid te fortior ille? Numquid prudentior? Certe qui antea utrumque noverant, Guerrico Fulconem praeferabant. At postquam ventum est ad bellum, exitus indicat hominum errasse iudicium. Ibi, pro pudor, turpiter fugit qui praeferebatur, ubi fortiter vicit qui inferior credebatur. James 2:3.

⁸⁸ VG Rom. 14:17. Non est enim regnum Dei esca et potus : sed justitia, et pax, et gaudium in Spiritu Sancto.

⁸⁹ Ep. II:6. Acquiescens itaque consilio carnis, rationis oblitus et legis, tanquam leo paratus ad praedam, et sicut leaena raptu catulo rapiens et rugiens, sacra non veritus, sanctorum irrupit habitaculum, in quo tirunculum suum Christus absconderat a contradictione linguarum, postmodum admisturus consortio Angelorum. James 2:6.

above.⁹⁰ Bernard chooses to describe the uncle both as a hunting (presumably male) lion from the Psalm and as a lioness from Proverbs. Bernard's personal touch is the lioness as a mother, whose cub has been stolen from her. Only the mentioning of a female lion makes the maleness of the first mentioned hunting lion visible. This is very telling of how manhood is presented in the letter to Fulk and in the letter collection in general: manhood is revealed through womanhood and in relation to it, and it is almost never directly addressed. The female lion is an example of how not to be a mother. She comes up right after the presentation of Caritas or Wisdom as a mother and her role as the forgiving head of the house of the prodigal son. Later, Bernard uses Lot's wife as another example of how not to be a woman:

Think of Lot's wife. She was saved from Sodom because she believed in God. But she was turned to a pillar of salt on the way because she looked back. Learn from the Gospels that no one who has put his hand on the plough may look back.⁹¹

If the lioness is Fulk's uncle, who failed to be a good mother, Lot's wife is Fulk himself. Fulk's life in the world gets compared to the infamous city of Sodom, and later, as we have seen above, to a dog's vomit. This is the only time that Bernard shows Fulk through a clear female character in the letter. Elsewhere he is a son, a dog, a student or a soldier. In this case, the female figure acts as a warning, and thus has negative connotations. The negativity of the figure of Lot's wife serves as a prelude to the treatment of womanhood later in the letter, where Bernard warns Fulk not to be like a woman:

Wisdom prays to be given only what is necessary for life, not what is superfluous, and the Apostle says that he is content with food and clothing, not with food and ornaments. And another saint has said, "If God shall give me bread to eat and raiment wherewith to be covered." Note you, he says "raiment wherewith to be covered," not "wherewith to be adorned." So let us then be content just with clothes for covering ourselves, not for wantonness, neither for simulating nor pleasing women.⁹²

⁹⁰ Prov. 26:13. The slothful man saith: There is a lion in the way, and a lioness in the roads. Dicit piger: Leo est in via, et leaena in itineribus.

⁹¹ Ep. II:6. Memento uxoris Loth de Sodoma quidem creptae, quia Deo credidit; sed in via mutatae, quia retro aspexit. Disce in Evangelio quod non liceat retro aspicere ei, qui semel manum ad aratrum misit. James 2:6.

⁹² Ep. II:10. Orabat quidem sapiens tantum victui suo tribui necessaria non superflua. Habentes, ait Apostolus, victum et vestitum; non, Victum et ornatum. Et quidam alius sanctus: Si dederit, inquit, mihi Dominus panem ad manducandum, et vestimentum quo operiar. Nota, quo operiar. Sic ergo et nos

First there is the personified female Wisdom, who is content to what is necessary, then the contrasting vain women. The word *muliercula*, a diminutive of *mulier*, holds connotations of being inappropriately flirtatious and attention-seeking. Bernard thus implies that Fulk is in danger of becoming womanly in the negative sense of the word. The passage of Genesis that Bernard refers to (28:20) is attached to the idea of returning to the father's—or in Fulk's case, Mother Wisdom's—house. Genesis 28:21 reads, “And I shall return prosperously to my father's house: the Lord shall be my God.”⁹³ The whole discussion on feminine vanity in dress thus arises from the prodigal son theme: being tempted by prosperous living outside of the mother's house and its rules. Like Lot's wife, the prodigal son turned his gaze away from their real home. The wife's temptation was sensual Sodom, the son's the world away from the father/mother's house, and Fulk's the comfortable life with the uncle outside of the monastery.

Bernard refers also to the First Letter to Timothy (6:8), seemingly to quote the statement on having clothes to be covered with. The passage of the Letter to Timothy is connected to a wider discussion on material possessions, however, and this is probably the content that is actually being sought after. Right before the sentence Bernard paraphrases, Paul writes, “For we brought nothing into this world, and certainly we can carry nothing out.”⁹⁴ Bernard is calling for detachment from material things like fancy clothes, adding an extra layer of non-desirable femininity on the Pauline pattern of thought. Manliness is again implied indirectly through the negatively feminine counterpart. The bad man seems in most cases to take the form of a *muliercula*, a petty, vain and weak woman. However, she is not the same thing as the true *mulier*, represented by the mother figure that is applied to abbots, virtues and God. The *muliercula* type of womanhood to be avoided is vanity marked by a distorted relationship to materiality, where worldly flesh becomes the center of attention. Masculinity that can be read as a silent counterpart is asceticism, manifest through plain clothes and moderate cuisine. Manliness surfaces properly in its usual militaristic form toward the end of the letter. Bernard asks Fulk a series of questions:

What business have you in towns, delicate soldier? Your brother soldiers, whom you have deserted by running away, are fighting and conquering. They are knocking on the gates of heaven and it is being opened to them. They take the kingdom of heaven by force and are kings, while you trot around the streets and marketplaces on your horse, clothed in scarlet and fine linen. But these are not the accoutrements of war! Or are you one of those who say, “Peace, peace and there

contenti simus vestimentis quibus operiamur, non quibus lasciviamus, non quibus superbiamus, non quibus mulierculis vel simulari, vel placere studeamus. James 2:11.

⁹³ Gen. 28:21 reversusque fuero prospere ad domum patris mei : erit mihi Dominus in Deum

⁹⁴ 1 Tim. 6:7.

is no peace?” Sumptuous clothes are no protection against lust and pride. They do not keep avarice at bay, nor quench any other fiery darts of the enemy. Nor do they help against the fever you fear even more, and they cannot keep death away. Where, then, are your arms of war? Where is your shield of faith, your helmet of salvation, your corselet of patience? What do you fear?⁹⁵

Bernard begins by hinting at the contrast of an urban environment and the idea of a monastic house as a rustic, non-central location. He addresses Fulk as a soldier, a familiar theme in many of his letters.⁹⁶ Fulk is not the right kind of a soldier in Bernard’s eyes, however; he is like a *muliercula*, delicate, attention-seeking, and luxuriously and comfortably clothed.

Clothing is treated as a means of protection in the war that Fulk is supposed to be fighting by the side of his religious brothers. The phrase on peace is a quote from the Book of Ezekiel (13:10), being part of a description of a brittle wall made of dirt offering only a false sense of security. Following the idea of Ezekiel, Bernard states that sumptuous (literally, of purple color) clothes do not really protect him from the worst enemies of a monk: lust and pride, and “the fever you fear even more.” The bringing up of lust, fever and the fiery darts of the enemy bring into context the earlier reference to Lot’s wife. She escaped from Sodom, the biblical hothouse of the sins of lust. Bernard is warning Fulk that his vain ways might lead him to “please women.” Interestingly, effeminate behavior becomes a means of attracting women. The combination of the mention of Sodom and lust also brings the use of the Psalmic pervert’ to call the actions of the uncle into a clearer view. While the word primarily means to put things in the wrong order, the modern-day connotations of it are also present in the core meaning of the letter to Fulk. Lot’s wife who looked back at Sodom, the figure of Fulk as a fancy soldier and the uncle as a jealous lioness are essentially outcomes of prioritizing material things over God and His will.

Urging Fulk to return back to real warfare, Bernard continues:

There are more with us than against us. Take up arms, take up again strength while the fight is still in progress. We have angels for witnesses and allies. The Lord himself is at hand to sustain us, to teach our hands to make war and the fingers of our hands to fight. Let us set out to help our brothers, lest they

⁹⁵ Ep. II:12. Quid agis in urbe, delicate miles? Commilitones tui quos fugiens deseruisti, pugnant et vincunt; pulsant et intrant; coelum rapiunt et regnant – et tu sedens super ambulatorem tuum, indutus purpura et bysso, circuis plateas, vicos perambulas? Haec sunt pacis ornamenta, non belli munimenta. An dicis, Pax et non est pax? Purpura non propulsat libidinem, non superbiam, non avaritiam repellit; et si qua sunt alia ignea inimici iacula, non exstinguit. Denique, quod magis metuis, febrem non prohibet, mortem non arceat. Ubi sunt arma bellica? ubi scutum fidei? ubi galea salutis? ubi patientiae lorica? Quid trepidas? James 2:12.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Ep. I to Robert below.

should fight and conquer, and enter the kingdom without us. It will be too late to knock when the doors are closed. We would receive the answer, "Verily I know you not." Make yourself known, I pray you, first in the battle. Show yourself in the fight, lest on that last day you be known only to the devils in hell and to Christ in glory. If Christ recognizes you in battle, he will recognize you then and, as he promised, reveal himself to you.⁹⁷

The first sentence is a direct quote from the Fourth Book of Kings (6:16), where the prophet Elisha is surrounded by troops of the king of Syria and makes the remark when showing the heavenly forces of chariots of fire to his servant. The last sentence about Christ revealing himself to Fulk has to do with this scenery. Taking the role of the Old Testament prophet, Bernard asks God to open Fulk's eyes to see the power of the Lord in the monastic life of combat, like Eliseus asked God to make his servant see by what forces they were protected. Psalm 17 (3, 35) is referred to again: "The Lord himself is at hand to sustain us, to teach our hands to make war and the fingers of our hands to fight." In this part of the letter, it is connected to the atmosphere of threat, which is also present in the other Old Testament references. The content of the Psalm is visionary, as described above, and it is well suited to accompany the supernatural defense force of the prophet Elisha.

The call to take up arms is a quote from Genesis (27:3), which is directed to Isaac's eldest son Esau in its original context. Isaac asks Esau, who is his favorite, to go and hunt an animal for him to eat before his soon-approaching moment of death, and he promises to give him a special blessing if he does so. As the well-known Old Testament story goes, it is the younger son—Rebecca's favorite, Jacob—who ends up deceiving his father and getting the blessing with its hereditary benefits by following his mother's instructions and pretending to be his older brother. A whole host of connotations is brought to the letter by this short reference to the story of Esau and Jacob, but what is interesting in light of the military imagery and the rejection of femininity is how Esau is portrayed in the Bible text. The hairy man who hunts, he is told to serve his brother with the sword after losing the blessing of the firstborn. Jacob is described as the opposite, a hairless *vir simplex*⁹⁸ who spends his time in the tents. Bernard calls Fulk to be an Esau, which probably is also to say that he has lost his rights of the stronger firstborn to a Jacob, the weaker Guarike.

⁹⁷ Ep.II:12. Plures sunt nobiscum, quam cum illis. Sume arma, resume vires, dum adhuc praelium durat. Adsunt Angeli spectatores et protectores: adest ipse Dominus adiutor et susceptor, qui doceat manus tuas ad praelium, et digitos tuos ad bellum. Procedamus in adiutorium fratrum, ne si forte sine nobis pugnent, sine nobis vincant, sine nobis ingrediantur; novissime cum clausa fuerit ianua, sero pulsantibus, nobis de intus respondeatur: Amen dico vobis, nescio vos. Fac, quaeso, te prius sciri, fac te prius videri: ne tunc nesciaris ad gloriam, sciaris autem ad poenam. Si te Christus agnoscit in bello, recognoscet in coelo; et sicut promisit, manifestabit tibi se ipsum. James 2:12.

⁹⁸ Gen. 25:27.

The *muliercula* is brought up again through a reference to the Gospel of Matthew (25:10-11), where Jesus tells the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. The foolish virgins who did not have enough oil to keep their lamps burning get the answer “Amen dico vobis, nescio vos” upon trying to enter the wedding feast late after running to buy more oil. The virgin excluded from the wedding is a parallel of Lot’s wife; both are distracted from what is actually important and thus get to play the role of the *muliercula*. The reference to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is indirect but probably meant to be noticed by the reader. It brings into view the usual contrast of the strong manly soldier and the easily distracted weak woman, thereby serving to strengthen the manliness of the position of the Esau-like soldier of Christ that Bernard is calling Fulk to be, without losing the position of the firstborn son.

In the letter to Fulk, manhood seems to be connected to outward signs and actions, such as taking up arms, fighting, hunting and wearing appropriately non-feminine clothing while doing so. This kind of manliness is also shown as a proper protection against sin, especially lust and pride, like a wall that is properly built. Manhood, unlike womanhood, is not shown as personalized figures that appear almost like cosmic powers, but as a contrast to weak womanhood represented by vanity and being hairless. Also, God is not shown as an unambiguous father, but as a mother. Barbara Newman has made similar findings in her sources in *God and the Goddesses*. She notes that despite the masculine *animus* being considered the higher part of the human soul in medieval thought, only the lower feminine *anima* that gives life to the body is turned into a personified figure. This figure is an abstraction of womanhood rather than an actual person and can thus be seen as not fully human.⁹⁹

The only manly figure in the letter is the soldier, be it in the form of Fulk or Esau. The *muliercula*, the weak woman who is not ideal, is attached to the concrete textual examples of Lot’s wife and a foolish virgin. It is as if the manly soldier and the little woman are on the same level of applicability to a person, but the ideal womanhood of Mother Wisdom is not. Manhood at a similar level of abstraction is missing altogether. In this sense, manhood in the context of the letter to Fulk does not represent spirit and higher levels of humanity, as one might presume, but only manliness as a human feature that seems to make a good monk. The hairy Esau does not take on the divinized glory of Mother Wisdom, however. He is weak because of his manly flesh.

⁹⁹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 36–37.

3.2 CHAPTER 2: THE BOY IN THE NEED OF MOTHER'S MILK—LETTER 1

3.2.1 ROBERT

The recipient of the letter, Robert, was a relative of Bernard who had begun life as a monk under his guidance in Clairvaux. As Bernard describes in the letter, Robert ended up leaving Clairvaux and joining the community of Cluny. This decision had as its background a promise made by his parents to give him as an oblate to Cluny. The letter to Robert is written in 1125, a little before a treatise that is known as the *Apologia*, a text addressed to Peter the Venerable, the abbot of Cluny at the time, which criticized the way the Rule is lived in the branch of Benedictine monasticism.¹⁰⁰ In the letter, Bernard questions the validity of the parents' decision against the weight of Robert's own promise that he himself made freely in Clairvaux. The letter describes through Bernard's person how he as an abbot was cunningly robbed of one of his monks through unjust plots, like a papal permission for the transition to another house, which was obtained over his and the local bishop's authority. Robert did not return to Clairvaux due to the immediate effect of Bernard's request, but only years later.

The letter seems to have been considered important already in Bernard's lifetime, for it was included in all three versions of the collection.¹⁰¹ There are probably several reasons why the letter to Robert is situated as the first in the collection, but one that has especially placed the letter on a pedestal is that its writing is accompanied by a miraculous occurrence in one of Bernard's *Vitae*: it is told that when Bernard was dictating the letter outdoors, it started raining heavily, soaking everything but the letter.¹⁰² Another reason is surely the content of the letter itself, as it includes themes that are very typically Bernardian and outlines the monasticism he represents very clearly. Thus, it makes a great introduction to the collection of letters, a literary work that is meant to reflect the monastic worldview of Bernard.

A lot was going on both in the Church and in the community of Cluny at the time Robert moved there, which was already before 1122, when Peter the Venerable was elected as abbot and when Robert is known to have been part of the community.¹⁰³ The reasons behind the sending of the letter in the first

¹⁰⁰ Gastaldelli et al., *Lettere*, p. 4., footnote 1. On the *Apologia* and Peter the Venerable's Letter 28, which is a defense of the Cluniac ways, see Knight, *The Correspondence between Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux*. Letter 28 will not be taken into closer inspection here since it is not a direct response to the letter to Robert, although it considers much of the same theme and has probably been written around the same time as Letter 1 and *Apologia*. The relationship and exact chronological order of these works have been highly disputed; see Knight.

¹⁰¹ Leclercq et al., *Lettres 1–41*, 58.

¹⁰² Gastaldelli et al., *Lettere*, p. 4., footnote 1; Leclercq et al., *Lettres 1–41*, p. 52.

¹⁰³ Leclercq et al., *Lettres 1–41*, p. 52.

place may be much more complex than the text itself reveals. There could have been financial factors that motivated the move, and perhaps pressure from the parents who had promised financial support for Cluny along with the dedication of their son's life. As an older, more dispersed and influential monastic group, Cluny was involved in matters of ecclesiastical politics on a wide scale. This is evidenced in the letter itself with Bernard's claim that the pope had been invoked to give permission for Robert's move. This must have required good contacts, to say the least.¹⁰⁴ Also, as seen above in the context of the letter to Guy, an anti-Cluniac attitude was present at the beginning of Cîteaux.¹⁰⁵ What is most central when looking at the letter from the viewpoint of gendered monastic theology is that the letter to Robert is a part of the discussion on the right way of living the Rule. The figure of Robert provides a platform to defend the ways of Clairvaux on a more personal level, allowing Bernard to use the voice of an abbot toward his monk in the context of the negotiation of the position of the relatively new monastic spirit of the Cistercians.¹⁰⁶

The letter is packed with emotive content right from the beginning, which partly reflects an actual close personal relationship between an abbot and his monk, who also happened to be a close relative. This content cannot be taken simply as an outburst of Bernard's emotional life; like all medieval letter writing, the letter to Robert is guided by rhetorical principles. The structure and content, being ways of expressing thoughts, are there to affect a certain reaction in the reader and get him on the same side. Emotives make the letter more persuasive and rhetorically effective to the recipient, as well as the larger audience intended as readers or listeners of the text.¹⁰⁷ In the case of Robert, these would include the abbot of Cluny and the whole community, without forgetting the named recipient Robert, whose return to Clairvaux seems to be the aim of the letter alongside the pointing out of the superiority of the life of Clairvaux as a monastic practice.

Thematically speaking, the letter to Robert is very similar to the one to Fulk. The biggest difference between the two is Bernard's relationship to the recipient: albeit also being related to Bernard, Fulk was from a different house and monastic way and thus not officially under his authority. One is left to question what the true motive behind the writing of the letter to Fulk was, while the reason behind the letter to Robert seems to be clearer. The fact that the letters are so similar and are placed one after the other in the collection puts the more authentic feel of the letter to Robert in a realistic light, however.

¹⁰⁴ For the far-reaching nature of Cluny's financial and political connections, see, for example, Fletcher, *The Episcopate in the Kingdom of León in the Twelfth Century*, pp. 9–11.

¹⁰⁵ See ch. Guy of Grande Chartreuse.

¹⁰⁶ In fact, the Leclercq et al. edition's introduction to Ep. I even subtly questions whether the letter was originally addressed to Robert or not, since it seems he did not react in a reasonable time. See *Lettres 1–41*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁷ McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, pp. 12, 17, 70.

The close relationship between the writer and the recipient, which is made apparent in the letter through affectionate and emotional expression, is part of the rhetorical aim of convincing the reader, whether or not the affection and emotion were really felt in Bernard's heart and soul at the moment of crafting the text. In addition, the letter to Fulk was written a few years earlier in 1120. It is not that a more authentic letter to a member of his own community would have been used as a model for the more distant Fulk, but timewise it seems to be the other way round. Moreover, the letters to these two monks were probably edited into an even more similar thematic structure when Bernard's letters were first made into a collection. In essence, the letters have a similar aim: to get a monk back to the ideally ascetic life they had once committed to. The letter begins by a wish for a change of mind:

Long enough, perhaps too long, have I waited, dearest Robert, for the Lord that he might deign to touch your soul and mine through yours, moving you to salutary regrets for your error and me to joy for your deliverance.¹⁰⁸

Bernard had apparently waited several years to send a carefully crafted, more public statement like the letter, for the papal permission for Robert's move (mentioned in the letter) had been asked for already in 1120.¹⁰⁹ The timing of the letter may have been based on the large-scale monastic rivalry between Cistercians and Cluny, with the *Apologia* and Peter the Venerable's response being perhaps written the same year.¹¹⁰ It is thus possible that the letter to Robert was a conscious instrument in the negotiation on Benedictine monasticism. In spite of the ongoing discussion on monastic life in the background, the reality of the situation was that the monk had been living in Cluny for a while, which at least partly explains the intensity of emotive persuasion that the letter offers the reader throughout. One of the aims of the letter is surely to get Robert back.

Bernard laments in the *captatio benevolentiae* of the letter:

Unhappy man that I am who have not you by me, who cannot see you, who am obliged to live without you for whom to die would be to live, and to live without whom is no better than death! So I do not ask why you left me, I only grieve that you do not return; I do not blame your going away, I only blame your not coming back. Only come and there will be peace;

¹⁰⁸ Ep. I:1. Satis et plusquam satis sustinui, dilectissime fili Roberte, si forte Dei pietas, et tuam per se, et meam per te animam dignaretur invisere: tibi scilicet inspirando salutarem compunctionem, mihique de tua salute laetitiam. James 1:1.

¹⁰⁹ Gastaldelli et al., *Lettere*, p. 4, footnote 1.

¹¹⁰ See Knight, *The Correspondence between Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux*. As Knight shows, it has been speculated whether the *Apologia* and Peter's Letter 28 had been written consciously in sync, considering both content and time.

return and there will be satisfaction. Return, I say, return, and I shall sing in my heart, “He who was dead has come to life again, was lost and is found.”¹¹¹

The reference to the Gospel narrative about the prodigal son (Lk 15:32) sets the scene for the whole letter. First, Bernard places himself in the character of the father, in which position he will stay throughout the letter in one form or another. Secondly, the reference shows how Bernard sees Robert’s move to Cluny: it is an escape to a comfortable, sensually satiating life that will eventually bring him to ruin if he does not return.

The Gospel reference is one of the close similarities with the letter to Fulk, which at first glance seems only reasonable, since both recipients were monks, but at closer inspection reveals the intentionally serious accusation contained in the Gospel reference when applied to the specific situation of Robert. Unlike Fulk, Robert had not returned to the world; he had not decided to give up his monastic profession and become a secular priest but had merely changed into another house that also followed the Benedictine Rule. Despite this, Bernard is writing as if Robert had in fact decided to leave religious life altogether. This is telling of the aim of the letter as a reproach toward the Cluny way of monastic life in general.

3.2.2 FATHER, MOTHER AND JESUS ON THE CROSS

In *Jesus as Mother*, Caroline Bynum uses the letter to Robert as an example of the maternal imagery that characterizes 12th-century Cistercian language, noting that fatherhood and motherhood are interwoven in the text.¹¹² The layering of fatherhood with motherhood is indeed very clear and prominent in the letter to Robert, which sets it apart from other similar letters, like the letter to Fulk, where it is mostly motherhood that comes up. Unambiguous fatherhood, in a form that is not disguised with womanhood, is much rarer than clear motherhood in the letters. As is customary of medieval manhood as a concept, it is grasped with difficulty in comparison to the rich selection of examples of abstracted womanhood that are available.¹¹³

Having begun the letter by putting himself in the position of the father of the prodigal son, Bernard continues in the tracks of the connotations attributed to fatherhood:

¹¹¹ Ep. I:1. Solum quod mihi magis est cordi loquor. Me miserum, quod te careo, quod te non video, quod sine te vivo, pro quo mori mihi vivere est, sine quo vivere mori. Non igitur quaero cur abieris, sed quod jam non redieris queror; non causas discessionis, sed moras causor regressionis. Veni tantum, et pax erit: revertere, et satisfactum est. Redi, inquam, redi, et laetus cantabo: Mortuus fuerat, et revixit; perierat, et inventus est. James 1:1.

¹¹² Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 116.

¹¹³ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 36–37.

No doubt it may have been my fault that you left. I was too severe with a sensitive youth. I was too hard on a tender stripling. [...] I could quote Scripture to support me, saying “Smite thy son with a rod and thou shalt deliver his soul from hell” and “It is where he loves that the Lord bestows correction” and “the wounds of a friend are better than the deceitful kisses of an enemy.”¹¹⁴

Bernard is portraying himself as a father and, as an abbot, he uses the voice of the Lord. He refers to the Book of Proverbs (23:14), to a passage also found in the Benedictine Rule (2:29) in the chapter on abbots and their position in the community. This must have been an obvious link to the source of the authority with which Bernard was approaching Robert and his situation: he is Christ for Robert, as the Rule defines the abbot's meaning for his house. By resorting to the Rule and its definition of the abbot, Bernard lays the foundations for the argument that Robert rightfully belongs to the community of Clairvaux where he freely gave his vows, a point which he elaborates later in the letter.

The Proverbs reference also has another layer. Shortly before the passage quoted in the Rule in verses 1 to 8, which is brought along as part of the biblical fabric of the letter, the text of Proverbs talks about eating and vomiting the meats of a prince (23:1) and an envious man (23:6). This is probably to show the community of Cluny and the accomplices in Robert's move there as undesirable company, who are rich but whose “mind is not with thee” (23:7). Bernard is portrayed as the father who actually cares and loves Robert enough to smite him with a rod. In contrast, Cluny is shown as a place of the rich, who offer comfort and praise but do so out of their own motives instead of out of concern for Robert's real wellbeing. The intention is to put the caring father into the center of attention. Through a reference to the Letter to Hebrews (12:6), Bernard defends his stern approach as a father who uses the authority of Christ, who bestows correction where he loves.

Next Bernard turns his attention to the fatherhood of God:

See, my son, how I long to lead you not any more in the spirit of slavery to govern you in fear, but in the spirit of adoption whereby we cry ‘Abba, Father’; you who have been the cause

¹¹⁴ Ep. 1:2. *Fuerit certe meae culpae quod discessisti. Delicato quippe adolescentulo austerus exstiteram, et tenerum durus nimis inhumane tractavi. [...] Scriptura attestante, quae ait; Percute filium tuum virga, et liberabis animam eius a morte, et rursum: Quos enim diligit quem recipit Dominus, corripit; flagellat autem omnem filium quem recipit, et illud: Utiliora sunt verbera amici quam oscula inimici. James 1:2.*

of so much grief to me, I shall lead not with threats but with encouragements, not by menacing but by entreating.¹¹⁵

Bernard is adapting a passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:15): "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father)."¹¹⁶ Through the Pauline reference, he shows himself as an instrument of the spirit of adoption, thus pointing out the source of his fatherhood as an abbot. Bernard also puts himself in the position of a fellow child of God, who calls God Father, together with Robert. This is an outcome of the repentant content of this part of the letter. The shift from the description of Bernard as too stern of a father to him crying to God the Father, together with Robert, highlights the self-accusing tone: the aim is to express that he admits to acting according to "the spirit of slavery" before Robert's departure. This is probably part of the *captatio benevolentiae* rhetoric, where the writer seeks to get the reader on their side in the matter at hand. What is noteworthy is that the reference to the Letter to the Romans is the only Scripture reference for the next several sentences, which for a letter like the one to Robert is quite unusual. In longer letters with a well-thought-out structure, there are usually scriptural references and direct quotes in at least every other sentence. The lack of them in the goodwill-seeking part of the letter to Robert might tell of an intention to give an impression of personal intimacy and the expression of true emotion behind the text. Bernard seems to be using his own voice to apologize for his stern behavior toward Robert.

The emotional claims in the beginning of the letter are still rhetorical in nature, meaning that the emotion is expressed in the first person for the purpose of invoking a certain effect or reaction in the reader, like in the letters to Rainald looked at above.¹¹⁷ The emotional landscape proposed for the reader is defined by grief and contrition. Bernard seems to be making these kinds of first-person emotional claims especially when he writes to members of his own flock: both Robert and Rainald were or used to be monks directly under his leadership as an abbot. This probably allowed him to use emotion-invoking language quite liberally, even though one needs to take into account that the letter was meant to be read by a wider audience than the named recipient. The recipient still had a lot to do with choices of expression. Deciding on the recipient was one of the rhetorical tools used in letter writing, since it largely

¹¹⁵ Ep. I:3. Vide, fili, quam te cupiam dusi, non spirite servitutis iterum in timore, sed spiritu adoptionis filiorum, in quo clamare et tu non confundaris: Abba, Pater; causam utique tanti doloris mei non minis apud te, sed blandimentis, precibus, non terroribus agens. James 1:3.

¹¹⁶ VG Non enim accepistis spiritum servitutis iterum in timore, sed accepistis spiritum adoptionis filiorum, in quo clamamus : Abba (Pater).

¹¹⁷ McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, pp. 12, 17, 70.

defined the style of expression and content of the rest of the letter.¹¹⁸ Here the person of Robert as the named recipient opens up the possibility of applying first-person emotional claims.

Right after this, Bernard moves from contrition to accusation. He first lists all the things that he could accuse Robert of but will not out of charity, knowing the monk's character that is "lead more easily by love than driven by fear."¹¹⁹ Bernard compliments Robert on his natural timidity, because of which he does not feel the need to scare him any more with the listed accusations, and then moves on to ironically comment:

And if it seems wonderful to anyone that a shy and timid boy should dare to desert both his vow and his monastery against the will of his brethren, the authority of his superior, the injunctions of the rule, let him wonder also that the sanctity of David was defrauded, the wisdom of Solomon deceived, the strength of Samson destroyed. What wonder if the Evil One should have been able to deceive a youth in a place of horror and a great wilderness who could deceive the first man when he was in the paradise of Eden.¹²⁰

In a manner that has a mocking feel to it, Bernard first calls Robert a timid and simple boy and then lists the main Old Testament patriarchs, including Adam, who were all deceived and fell. A closer look into the Old Testament references reveals that in all the cases brought up, the male figure is lured into oblivion about proper conduct by a woman. David lusted after bathing Bathsheba and fell into sin (2 Kings 11), Salomon loved and joined himself with pagan women of foreign nations "with a most ardent love," making his heart impure and forming attachment to false gods (3 Kings 11), and Samson gave in to Delilah's demand to know the reason for his power and lost his hair, the source of his superior strength (Judges 16). Finally, the *protoplastum* Adam, whose fall into sin was aided by a woman is mirrored, in all the other Old Testament figures.

On one hand, Robert is shown as a contrast to these strong men of God, who fell despite their status as God's chosen; on the other, he is equated to

¹¹⁸ Ysebaert, "Medieval Letters and Letter Collections as Historical Sources," pp. 53, 56. Ysebaert mentions that in some letter collections the recipient has even been changed for rhetorical purposes in different versions of the collection.

¹¹⁹ Ep. I:3. Sed ego novi animum tuum, qui facilius possit amore flecti, quam timore compelli. James 1:3.

¹²⁰ Ep. I:3. Quod si cui mirum videtur, quomodo puer verecundus, simplex timoratus, ausus fuerit contra voluntatem fratrum, magistri imperium, regulare decretum, suum deserere et votum, et locum: miretur etiam quod et David sanctitati subreptum sit (II Reg. XI), quod sapientiae Salomonis illustum (III Reg. XI), quod Samson fortitudini obviatum (Judic. XVI). Qui protoplastum dolo captum expulit de patria felicitatis, quid mirum si tenero subripuit adolescentulo in loco horroris et vastae solitudinis? James 1:3.

them. Bernard seems to be saying, no wonder that you, a weak boy, would not be able to surpass all obstacles that might stop you from losing the way, if these strong men could not. Still, the figures of the Old Testament all bear a resemblance to Robert in some way: David was chosen by God as a young boy, Salomon as David's heir likewise and Samson was chosen to be a Nazarite of God already in the womb. Robert is thus shown as a strong man chosen by God from youth, who is able to want a woman like a man but who in the present state has become like a weak boy through his poor choices. Robert shares the fate of the fallen patriarchal figures, who lost their status of manly strength before God through falling for the wrong woman in the wrong way. The bathing Bathsheba for Robert was the community of Cluny.

The manly but weakened patriarchs serve as a frame for the presentation of Bernard's position as a father and pave the way for later manly imagery in the letter. The "place of horror" at the end of the quote above is a reference to Deuteronomy (32:10): "He found him in a desert land, in a place of horror, and of vast wilderness; he led him about, and taught him, and he kept him as the apple of his eye."¹²¹ This chapter of Deuteronomy talks about God and His chosen people and how He as a faithful Father is willing to retrieve his mutinous chosen people once again. Bernard is presented as a reflection of God's faithful fatherhood and Robert as the rebellious people ending up in "a place of horror and a great wilderness," needing to be taught by the father. The fallen patriarchs, in which group Robert seems to be included, form a contrasting frame to the loyal care of God the Father, whose nature Bernard is shown to reflect by the very action of writing to Robert.

Bernard as a faithful father is a backdrop to what is about to surface later in the letter: graphic motherhood:

And I have said this, my son, not to put you into shame, but to help you as a loving father because if you have many masters in Christ, yet you have few fathers. For, if you will allow me to say so, I begot you in religion by word and by example. I nourished you with milk when, while yet a child, it was all you could take. And I would have given you bread if you had waited until you grew up. But alas! How soon and how early were you weaned. Now I fear that all I had cherished with kindness, strengthened with encouragement, and confirmed with prayers is even now fading and wasting away. [...] You, too, were torn from my breast and cut from my womb.¹²²

¹²¹ VG *Invenit eum in terra deserta, in loco horrois, et vastae solitudinis : circumduxit eum, et docuit : et custodivit quasi pupillam oculi sui.*

¹²² Ep. I:10. *Et haec dico, fili, non ut te confundam, sed ut tanquam filium charissimum moneam: quia etsi multos habeas in Christo paedagogos, sed non multos patres. Nam si dignaris, et verbo, et exemplo meo in religionem ego te genui. Nutrivi deinde lacte, quod solum adhuc parvulus capere poteris; daturus et panem, si exspectares ut grandesceres. Sed heu! quam praepropere et intempestive*

In this passage of the letter, Bernard is applying Paul's description of himself as both spiritual father and mother.¹²³ He quotes the First Letter to the Corinthians (4:14, 3:2), but changing Paul's order of presenting fatherhood and motherhood to the reader. The reverse order, introducing motherhood after fatherhood, seems to make the mother linger on the reader's mind in a more long-lasting and vivid way. The graphic corporality of the description of mothering adds to the effect.

Bernard's depiction of himself as a lactating mother in the letter to Robert has been quite famously addressed by Caroline Walker Bynum in *Jesus as Mother*. She points out that Bernard not only shows himself as a breastfeeding mother in the letters, but also Christ.¹²⁴ In Letter 322, which is dated to the year 1138, he tells the novice Hugh to suck on Christ's breasts rather than his wounds, stating that "he will be your mother, and you will be his son."¹²⁵ The biblical source for Christ with breasts in the letter to Hugh is the Song of Songs.¹²⁶ The abbot as a representative of Christ is able to adopt the same maternal qualities as the source of his authority. As Bynum explains in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, the side wound of Christ as a lactating breast has partly to do with the connection of breast milk and blood in medieval thought. The milk was thought to be blood in an altered form. Thus, lactating mother-Christ always has bleeding wounds, especially the side wound.¹²⁷ The intensity of the bodily maternal imagery in the letter to Robert is increased by the mention of the womb, *uterus*. It is noteworthy, though, that Bernard's choice of word for breast is *sinus*, not *uber*, like in the later letter to Hugh that Bynum brings up. *Sinus* has many possible meanings and could thus be translated in a way that does not have such strong feminine connotations, like heart or bosom. *Uber* means female breast much more clearly. The combination with the explicitly female *uterus* makes the meaning of the image as a whole unambiguously motherly, however.

ablactatus es! Et vereor ne totum quod foveram blandimentis, roboraveram adhortationibus, orationibus solidaveram; jamjamque evanescat, deficiat, pereat; [...] Tu quoque de sinu mihi, et utero abscissus es. James 1:10. The translation of the last sentence is Bynum's.

¹²³ On Paul's spiritual fatherhood in 1. Cor., see Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, p. 101.

¹²⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 116–17.

¹²⁵ Ep. CCCXXII:1. *et suge non tam vulnera quam ubera Crucifixi. Ipse erit tibi in matrem, et tu eris ei in filium*. James 378:1. James translates the text rather vaguely and imprecisely, probably out of prudence that was not known to Bernard and his contemporaries: "Draw life from the wounds of Christ." James' translation ends up communicating the opposite of the actual content of the text. See also Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 345 n. 76.

¹²⁶ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 343–45. See ch. Sweet Breast Milk of Wisdom.

¹²⁷ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 270–71; Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 344–45. Engh explains in detail the sources of 12th-century medical theory.

In the context of lamenting how Robert was taken from him, Bernard portrays himself as a mother whose life is disordered even before losing the child:

Sadly I weep, not for my lost labor, but the unhappy state of my lost child. Do you prefer that another should rejoice in you who has not labored for you? My case is the same as the harlot Solomon judged, whose child was stealthily taken by another who had overlain and killed her own.¹²⁸

Bernard compares himself to the prostitute whose child was taken from her and the Cluniacs to the other harlot who had accidentally killed her own baby. This adds to the heavy criticism toward the community. He continues on the tracks of thought laid out earlier in the form of the women who made the patriarchs diverge from their path as God's chosen men. While these women were not lewd women per se, they did act as a catalyst for the downfall of the Old Testament figures and thus led the mind easily to a woman whose role is to embody sins of lust.

As an isolated image, Bernard portraying himself as a mother who is a harlot might seem a bit off the topic. What comes up next explains the adoption of a prostituted female body, however:

But your friends who have tried to do this thing, whose sword has pierced my soul, whose hands are full of blood, whose teeth are spears and arrows and whose tongue is a sharp sword, for what advantage have they done it, for what necessity?¹²⁹

Christ's body reflected in the figure of the breastfeeding abbot retains its feminine nature of flesh through the simultaneous incorporation of the body of the harlot and the soul that is pierced into Bernard's persona. Bernard refers to the Gospel of Luke (2:35), where Simeon prophesies to Mary that she shall take part in the fall to ruin of her son through the piercing of her soul by a sword. Thus, Christ's body is again present through a mother's body, this time directly through the source of his human flesh, the Virgin Mary. Jesus'

¹²⁸ Ep. I:10. et lugeam miser, non tam cassi laboris damnum, quam damnatae sobolis miserabilem casum. Placetne tibi quod alius nunc gloriatur de te, qui nihil utique laboravit in te? Simile mihi contigit, quod et illi meretrici apud Salomonem: cui videlicet parvulus suus ab altera, quae suum a se oppressum exstinxerat, furtim sublatu est (III Reg. III, 20). James 1:10.

¹²⁹ Ep. I:11. Verumtamen quo tuo commodo, qua tui necessitate hoc nobis moliti sunt amici nostri? quorum manus sanguine plenae sunt (Isai. I, 15; LIX, 3), quorum animam meam pertransivit gladius (Luc. II, 35), quorum dentes arma et sagittae, et lingua eorum gladius acutus (Psal. LVI, 5). James 1:11. I have modified the translation of James for the sake of accuracy. James has made an interpretive leap to Jesus' side in his translation, which is essentially a correct line of thought but not very accurate and loses the clear presence of Mary in the text.

motherly body of flesh on the cross is shamefully and violently penetrated, like a harlot's body.¹³⁰ Bernard brings both connotations forth through the incorporation of motherhood into himself as an abbot. The mother's body is broken, with the child being torn out of her womb prematurely and her heart pierced with the agony that mirrors Christ's suffering and his pierced side. Here Bernard gives another example of his tendency to rhetorically melt separate entities into his literary persona.¹³¹

The bloody hands are an indirect reference to the beginning of the Book of Isaiah (1:15). The text around the words that Bernard quotes speaks with the voice of God about His disappointment toward his children, the chosen people of Judah and Jerusalem. The parental authority of God is easily applied to a disappointed abbot. What makes the reference even more significant for the image that Bernard presents is the passage that precedes the one he quotes: "From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores, they are not bound up, nor dressed, nor fomented with oil."¹³² In context, this is a description of the sinful nation of God, which is in a state of physical ruin because of their blasphemous ways. Read through the 12th-century tradition of interpreting the Old Testament, the people of God signify the Church, which is Christ's body. Thus, in Bernard's mind the immolated people of God in the Book of Isaiah turn into Jesus' suffering body on the cross. This is the body he relates to himself as an abbot who represents Jesus. The letter taps into the realm of thought that is behind Jesus' multiple encounters in the Gospels with prostitutes or otherwise morally frowned-upon women. According to Bernard's logic, in these lewd women Jesus encounters his own suffering and disgraced body.¹³³

The abbot/Christ-mother-harlot is probably a reflection of Augustine's concept of *Totus Christus*, as seen above in the letter to Guy, where the Carthusian leader is shown as both bridegroom-head and bride-body.¹³⁴ A

¹³⁰ Christ's feminized body and the meaning of the side wound have been analyzed in more detail, for example, in Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 345, n. 77. Engh notes that while the side wound as feminine *vulva* has been interpreted from the viewpoint of physical sexuality in the context of queer readings of medieval sources, Bynum has had similar notions of the connection of the side wound, breast and womb in Christ's body but without seeing its sexual interpretation. Engh refers to Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," p. 87. Since Bernard does not directly bring up Christ's side wound but only refers to it on the level of connotation, I will not be analyzing the meaning of the side wound further here.

¹³¹ McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, pp. 12, 17, 70; Pranger, "Bernard the Writer," p. 226.

¹³² VG Is. 1:6. A planta pedis usque ad verticem, non est in eo sanitas; vulnus, et livor, et plaga tumens, non est circumligata, nec curata medicamine, neque fota oleo.

¹³³ On Christ's relationship to his body on the cross and the side wound as a source of the Church, see also Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, p. 75.

¹³⁴ Baker, "Augustine's Doctrine of the *Totus Christus*," pp. 10–12. See ch. The Monastic Micro-Church.

monastic leader can reflect the marital head-body union of Christ, in whom humanity in its fleshliness and divinity are in the same person. In the letter to Robert, the abbot is not the bride, however, but a violated woman who has lost her child. The marriage is distorted and broken. Thus, Bernard is not the bride about to become a mother, but a harlot whose child is torn from her. When looking at Augustine's thought on Christ on the cross a bit closer, it becomes clearer why Christ's body is presented in feminine terms and the head-body union in equally marital terms. In one of his sermons commenting on the Annunciation, Augustine writes:¹³⁵

Without delay the announcement is turned around and Christ enters the wedding bed. [...] Divinity betrothed to man, he receives the reward of flesh. Like a bridegroom Christ went forth from his nuptial chamber. [...] He came even to the marriage-bed of the cross, and there, ascending it, he consummated a marriage. And when he sensed the creature sighing in her breath, he surrendered himself to torment for his bride in communication of affection.¹³⁶

This idea of both the womb of Mary and the cross as a marriage-bed can be presumed as a theological backdrop for Bernard's gendered thought on Christ and his body. The novelty of the 12th century and Bernard's thought is the pronounced way the feminine side of things is brought forth. In the marital union of divinity and humanity, Bernard tends to focus on "the reward of flesh" in his letter collection, which in practice means the motherly flesh of Jesus that has the feminine flesh of the Virgin Mary as its source.

Bynum has argued that the feminized expression of Bernard and his contemporaries was not just repetition of the preceding antique Christian authors but was innovative and unique in how it took the old theme to a new level.¹³⁷ Daniel LaCorte has partially challenged Bynum's view of the uniqueness of the maternal imagery in Bernard and other Cistercian sources. He shows how Smaragdus of St. Mihiel used similar language as the abbot as mother, almost word to word, already in the 9th century. Smaragdus had even earlier sources of inspiration with maternal imagery applied to an abbot in the *Regula Pastoralis* of Gregory the Great. LaCorte supports his argument by the fact that Smaragdus' texts were widely available in the libraries of Cistercian

¹³⁵ See also Pitre, *Jesus the Bridegroom*, p. 93. Pitre's book is targeted toward a wider audience and partly falls into the category of spiritual literature, but it has served as a useful source of this Augustine reference.

¹³⁶ Sermo suppositus 120. In *Natali Domini IV:8*. PL, col. 1986–87. Nec mora, revertitur nuntius, et nuptialem thorum ingreditur Christus. [...] Divinitati sponsatur homo, praemium accipit caro. Proccedit Christus quasi sponsus de thalamo suo; [...] pervenit usque ad crucis thorum, et ibi firmavit, ascendendo, conjugium; ubi cum sentiret anhelantem in suspiriis creaturam, commercio pietatis se pro conjugate dedit ad poenam. Translation by Pitre and myself.

¹³⁷ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 128–29.

monasteries, including Clairvaux.¹³⁸ LaCorte's findings show the profoundly monastic nature of Bernard's texts. The themes and imagery he used had been in circulation in monastic theology for centuries before his time. While there is surely some uniqueness to his gendered monastic theology, it is still highly defined by imagery that had its origins somewhere deep in the history of Christianity—and even Judaism when it comes to the Old Testament. The female-bodied mother Christ or abbot might be a loaded symbol that serves as a point of access for a larger unit of meanings, a “form [that] can help us think about a vast web of connected ideas that might otherwise be mentally intractable to us,” as Turner puts it in *The Origin of Ideas*.¹³⁹

The femaleness of Christ's flesh is contrasted by the fatherhood of God presented first in the letter. God as Father is further highlighted by the manhood of the Old Testament patriarchs, which is made visible through their desire for women. Compared to the letter to Fulk, the treatment of God is more specific: God is father, and it is incarnated Christ who is a mother. Bernard as an abbot is used as a canvas on which all of these are painted for the reader to see. This is possible because Robert was one of Bernard's monks, unlike Fulk, who on top of not being officially under Bernard's leadership is presented as a priest. Bynum has noted that Bernard tends to separate monks and priests by calling the first women and the second men. The monks possess the ideal feminine weakness and humility that is not possible to the same extent for priests, who are hierarchically above monks.¹⁴⁰ The pronounced manliness of priests might be why Fulk runs into the arms of God as mother and Robert is encouraged to cry to God as father, and return to Jesus' motherly flesh in the person of Bernard. The motherhood of Bernard supports the merciful tone of the beginning of the letter: in his mind a mother always forgives and forgets the errors of his children. As a mother, he embodies the mercy of God, reflecting the Incarnation.¹⁴¹

3.2.3 “SURGE, MILES CHRISTI”—PROBING MANLINESS

The ideal level of strictness in ascetic practices comes up several times in the letter. Asceticism serves as a stepping stone to the discussion on manliness as the letter progresses and culminates in the presentation of the soldier of Christ. Describing his view of the lobbying actions of Cluny toward Robert, Bernard writes:

What happened then? This wolf in sheep's clothing fascinated, allured and flattered. He preached a new gospel. He commended feasting and condemned fasting. He called

¹³⁸ La Corte, “Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel,” pp. 276, 288–89.

¹³⁹ Turner, *The Origin of Ideas*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 128.

¹⁴¹ Bynum, p. 160.

voluntary poverty wretched and poured scorn upon fasts, vigils, silence and manual labor. On the other hand he called sloth contemplation, gluttony, talkativeness, curiosity and all intemperance he commended as discretion. “When,” he asked, “was God pleased with our sufferings? Where do the Scriptures say that we should kill ourselves? What sort of religion is it to dig the soil, clear forests and cart muck? Does not truth itself say, “It is mercy that wins favor with me and not sacrifice”; and “I do not wish the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn from his ways and live”; and “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy”? Why did God give us bodies if we may not look after them? In fact, “Whose friend is he that is his own enemy and leaves his own cheer untasted?” “What healthy and sane man has ever hated his own flesh?”¹⁴²

The imaginary agitator from Cluny whose voice Bernard adopts mocks the ways of Clairvaux as unbiblical and religiously irrelevant. Bernard communicates that he is aware of the arguments given against his own community, which gives the impression that he is on top of the situation. “I know what they told you, my boy,” he seems to be saying to Robert.

The series of questions that he makes in the process of taking the role of the accuser is saturated with scriptural references. *Misericordiam volo et non sacrificium* is a direct quote from the Gospel of Matthew (either 9:13 or 12:7). Together with the preceding *cruciatibus nostris* and *sese interficere*, the sacrifice of the ascetic life and hard labor of digging, clearing and carting take on connotations of the crucifixion. The gospel quote is thus probably from the ninth chapter; there both fasting and Jesus as the bridegroom are brought up, which suits the context of the topic of asceticism and ties the discussion to the previously mentioned Old Testament patriarchs who precede Christ the Bridegroom.

Bernard’s description of the “new gospel” of the representative of Cluniac life is very similar to how he defines Eve’s vices in one of his sermons on the Feast of Annunciation: “The threefold cord of curiosity, pleasure-seeking and

¹⁴² Ep. I:4. Quid plura? attrahit, allicit, blanditur, novi evangelii praedicator commendat crapulam, parcimoniam damnat; voluntariam paupertatem, miseriam dicit; jejunia, vigiliis, silentium, manuumque laborem, vocat insaniam: e contrario otiositatem, contemplationem nuncupat; edacitatem, loquacitatem, curiositatem, cunctam denique intemperantiam nominat discretionem. Quando, inquit, delectatur Deus cruciatibus nostris? ubi praecipit Scriptura quempiam sese interficere? Qualis vero religio est fodere terram, silvam excidere, stercorea comportare? Nunquid non sententia Veritatis est, Misericordiam volo, et non sacrificium? et, Nolo mortem peccatoris, sed magis ut convertatur et vivat? et, Beati misericordes, quoniam ipsi misericordiam consequentur? Utquid vero Deus cibos creavit, si non liceat manducare? utquid nobis corpora dedit, si prohibeat sustentare? Denique, qui sibi nequam, cui bonus? Quis unquam sanum sapiens, carnem suam odio habuit? James 1:4.

vanity is broken with difficulty,” he comments on Eve’s pernicious traits.¹⁴³ The possible hidden presence of Eve’s fall combined with the references to the Pauline epistles reveals the theological frame of the incarnation and salvation through God in flesh that is behind the discussion on asceticism in the letter. Bernard refers to the First Letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:3), where Paul comments on false doctrines taught by those who have departed from the true faith, “Forbidding to marry, to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by the faithful, and by them that have known the truth.”¹⁴⁴ The second Pauline reference is to the Letter to the Ephesians (5:29), to Paul’s classic commentary on marriage dynamics: “So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the Church.”¹⁴⁵

As seen above, Augustine’s view of Christ’s suffering on the cross as a marital act toward his Church, his body, is in the background of the theological fabric of the letter. The figure of the representative of Cluny is suggesting that Robert take the position of the man that looks after his body, and defines taking care of the body as not causing it undue discomfort: a true man of God does not kill himself with the ascetic life style of Clairvaux. Bernard uses the voice of the opponent so convincingly that the reader is almost led to believe that the Cistercian way of living is against Paul’s principle of enjoying bodily life in the proper way. Even Jesus’ beatifications in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:7) are invoked: asceticism is shown to be against the mercifulness called out by Christ himself. Bernard’s aim is to show through the straw man opponent he creates that in Robert’s case the move to the laxer ways of Cluny is to deny entering the wedding bed of the cross, to use Augustine’s wording, to be a real man that reflects Christ the Bridegroom. He is supposed to kill himself in the long run to be able to assimilate to Christ.

Even though the soldier of Christ is let loose only toward the end of the letter, he peeks around the corner already midway, strengthening the impression that manliness is under negotiation in the letter. Supposedly describing the deceitfully good treatment received by Robert upon arriving at Cluny, Bernard writes: “He was favored beyond his contemporaries; a sinner in the desires of his heart, he was praised as if he were a conquering hero returned from battle.”¹⁴⁶ Bernard is referring to the Letter to the Galatians, where Paul recounts his past as a fervent opponent of Christ and how he “made

¹⁴³ IFA I col. 2098B. *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur, curiositatis, voluptatis, et vanitatis.*

¹⁴⁴ VG prohibentium nubere, abstinere a cibis, quod Deus creavit ad percipiendum cum gratiarum actione fidelibus, et iis qui cognoverunt veritatem.

¹⁴⁵ VG Eph. 5:28–29. *Ita et viri debent diligere uxores suas ut corpora sua. Qui suam uxorem diligit, seipsum diligit. Nemo enim unquam carnem suam odio habuit: sed nutrit et fovet eam, sicut et Christus Ecclesiam.*

¹⁴⁶ Ep. I:5. *Defertur ei super omnes coetaneos suos, et tanquam victor rediens a pugna, sic laudatur peccator in desideriis animae suae. James 1:5.*

progress in the Jews' religion above many of [his] equals" through his zealous defense of his father's traditions.¹⁴⁷ The war hero returning from battle is accompanied with a reference to Psalm 9: "For the sinner is praised in the desires of his soul, and the unjust man is blessed."¹⁴⁸ The Psalm's central theme is poverty and how God is on the side of the poor. The message is that Bernard and the life at Clairvaux are the poor, and Robert is like Paul in his old life as a persecutor of Christians who got promoted beyond his years. Like Paul, Robert is shown to be thinking that he is doing the right thing when he is really acting against the true followers of God, the poor of Clairvaux. In Bernard's view, Robert is treated as a victorious soldier when he has not actually ascended on the cross to suffer like Christ as his true warrior. The theme of poverty continues with the ascetic tracks of the previous part of the letter and brings the staple topic of monastic poverty as part of the discussion on ascetic practices.

Borrowing the sentiments of Paul toward the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:29), Bernard laments the torment that he has suffered for Robert and then continues, "And now, I fear, it has all been in vain. I believe that, so far as I know, for a youth already hot-blooded and insolent enough such fomenters were of little use to the body and such trials of glory of little to avail the mind."¹⁴⁹ The description of Robert as *ferventis* reveals the manly undertones of the discussion on physical asceticism. Heat was tightly linked to the physical make-up of a man in the medieval view of the human body. A man's body was perceived to be hot and dry, the opposite of the moist and cold body of women.¹⁵⁰ Against the background of the medical views of the time, it seems that Bernard considers Robert to be too manly to handle the ways of Cluny that are presented as heat-fomenting. This fits well with the image of the Old Testament patriarchs defined by emphatically manly desires earlier in the letter.

With a warning tone Bernard specifies the areas of asceticism which in his opinion might bring Robert to ruin:

You must pardon my saying this: whatever you permit yourself in food, unnecessary clothes, idle words, and vain and curious travel in excess of what you promised when you were

¹⁴⁷ VG Gal. 1:14. et proficiebam in Iudaismo supra multos coetaneos meos.

¹⁴⁸ VG Ps. 9:24. Quoniam laudatur peccator in desideriis animae suae, et iniquus benedicitur.

¹⁴⁹ Ep I:7. Et nunc timeo ne frustra. Puto enim, quantum expertus sum, adolescentis per se satis ferventis et insolescentis nec corpori talia expedire fomenta, nec menti illa gloriae tentamenta. James 1:7.

¹⁵⁰ Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," p. 39.

with us, is without any doubt to look back, to equivocate, to apostasize.¹⁵¹

By looking back, Bernard refers to the Gospel according to Luke (9:62), where Jesus talks about who is fit for the Kingdom of God and states, "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."¹⁵² In Bernard's view, loosening the original commitment to ascetic practices equals abandoning the cause of Christ altogether. Bernard is mirroring the spirit of the Gospel text but applying it rather strictly by adding apostatizing to the description: to look back from the demands of one's original level of corporeal ascesis is to turn one's back on God. The fomenting of the manly heat takes on very dangerous connotations. On the other hand, the vices reminiscent of Eve are brought up again. As seen above, Bernard elsewhere mentions *curiositas* and *vanitas* as vices belonging especially to Eve.

This amalgamation of sinister manly flesh and womanly vice, along with the bad kind of female fleshliness, is made clearer later in the letter when Bernard gives detailed examples of the areas of asceticism specified before:

Does salvation rest rather in soft raiment and high living than in frugal fare and moderate clothing? If warm and comfortable furs, if fine and precious cloth, if long sleeves and ample hoods, if dainty coverlets and soft woolen shirts make a saint, why do I delay and not follow you at once? But these things are comfort for the weak, not the arms of fighting men. Behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings. Wine and white bread, honey-wine and pittance benefit the body, not the soul. The soul is not fattened out of frying pans! Many monks in Egypt served God for a long time without fish. Pepper, ginger, cumin, sage and all the thousand other spices may please the palate, but they inflame lust.¹⁵³

This passage from the letter to Robert has been used several times as an example of the connection of softness, especially of clothing, and the wrong

¹⁵¹ Ep. I:9. quoniam, ut cum venia tui dixerim, quidquid tibi amplius indulges in victu, vestituque superfluo, in verbis otiosis, in vagatione licentiosa et curiosa, quam videlicet promisisti, quam apud nos tenuisti; hoc procul o76A dubio retro aspicere est, praevaricari est, apostatare est. James 1:9.

¹⁵² VG Lk 9:62. Nemo mittens manum suam ad aratrum, et respiciens retro, aptus est regno Dei.

¹⁵³ Ep. 1:11. Salus ergo magis in cultu vestium, et ciborum est opulentia, quam in sobrio victu vestituque moderato? Si pelliciae lenes calidae, si panni subtiles et pretiosi, si longae manicae et amplum caputium, opertorium silvestre et molle stamineum sanctum faciunt, quid moror et ego quod te non sequor? Sed haec infirmantium sunt fomenta, non arma pignantium. Ecce enim qui mollibus vestiuntur, in domibus regum sunt (Matth. XI, 8). Vinum et similia, mulsum et pingua corpori militant, non spiritui. Frixuris non anima saginatur, sed caro. Multi in Aegypto fratres, multo tempore Deo sine piscibus servierunt. Piper, gingiber, cuminum, salvia, et mille hujusmodi species salsamentorum, palatum quidem delectant, sed libidinem accendunt. James 1:11.

kind of femininity. The feminine softness is contrasted with the manly roughness of Cistercian clothes and ascetic practices.¹⁵⁴ The manliness of Cistercian living is shown through military imagery, as exemplified also here by the *arma pugnantium*.¹⁵⁵ The soft-clothed dwellers of kings' houses is a reference to Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew, where he is talking about John the Baptist, a model for the ascetic struggle sought after by Bernard. The mentioning of John the Baptist is a prelude to the monks in Egypt, the forefathers of monasticism in Bernard's mind.

The manliness under negotiation in the text becomes yet more visible through the list of spices that the monks of Egypt—and Robert—could do without. In the medieval theory of nutrition, spices like pepper were thought to do exactly what Bernard suggests, especially in a man's body. A man's body was considered to be defined by heat, and this heat was connected to a man's sexual behavior.¹⁵⁶ Bernard describes Robert as a pronouncedly manly man, who should not have spicy foods to inflame his already heated nature, which, when provoked, easily turns into lust. It seems that Robert was prone to be manly in the wrong way, at least for a monk. Bernard's mention of spicy food looked at in the light of the medieval perception of the human body, together with the comparison of Robert to the Old Testament patriarchs whose desire for women was their ruin, shows the monk as manly to the extreme.

But this sort of manliness is not the ideal manliness of John the Baptist or monks of Egypt, who wore coarse clothes and lived in the desert. Robert's hot manliness is that of the earthly flesh, and thus it does not reflect Christ's body on the cross, the ultimate source of physical ascetic practices like coarse clothes and meager food that Bernard presents as the ideal life for a monastic man. Both feminine softness and masculine heat are presented as forms of being that are attached to the worldly flesh and are thus to be avoided. Cluny represents the wrong kind of corporeal manliness, driven by lust, as well as the wrong kind of womanliness, which seeks comfort and is curious. Between the lines it is possible to see the ideally manly and ideally womanly Clairvaux in his ascetic corporality and her bridal fecundity.

Next Bernard gives practical advice on how to move toward the desired manliness of John the Baptist:

¹⁵⁴ See Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 38; Krahmer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux," p. 314. It has been suggested that *mulier* is etymologically connected to *mollior*, derivative of *mollis* ('soft'), which would in itself explain the meaning of womanhood as softness. The etymology is not unambiguous, however: also *mellior* ('better') has been discussed as the root for *mulier*. See Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*, p. 393.

¹⁵⁵ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 29. See also Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁶ Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," pp. 39, 43–45; Fulton, "'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet,'" pp. 188, 197–98. Fulton refers to the letter to Robert.

I know you are delicate, that you would now find it difficult to support a harder way of life. But what if you can act so as to make yourself able to do so? I will tell you how it could be done. Arouse yourself, gird your loins, put aside idleness, bring forth strength, move your arms, make your hands snap and do some work. If you act thus you will soon find that you only need to eat what will satisfy your hunger, not what will make your mouth water. Hard exercise will restore the flavor to food that idleness has taken away. Much that you would refuse to eat when you had nothing to do, you will be glad of after hard work. Idleness makes one dainty; hard work makes one hungry. It is wonderful how work can make food taste sweet which idleness finds insipid. Vegetables, beans, roots and bread and water may be poor fare for one living at his ease, but hard work soon makes them taste delicious.¹⁵⁷

Bernard calls Robert *delicatus*, which has connotations of fragility and softness, and contrasts it with the dormant strength that can be awakened by physical work. One could easily interpret the description of Robert as delicate to mean that Bernard sees his monk as a representative of feminine softness, which would then take on a strictly negative meaning as the opposite of the hardworking, strong version of Robert. Seen in the context of the whole letter, however, Robert seems not to be so much effeminate as a man attached to his manly flesh. Compared to the letter to Fulk, a *muliercula* type of figure is missing altogether. Robert's wrong kind of manliness is marked by manly heat that has been aroused by the seductive heat-inducing bodily life in Cluny. Robert has become more manly, but in the wrong way; he is a male version of the *muliercula* in the letter to Fulk. Bernard presents physical work as the antidote that can turn Robert into the ideal John the Baptist, who does not need spicy food to remain a man but strives to exceed his body to become a man who is strong in a real way.

To end the manly theme of the letter with a bang, Bernard brings forth one of the most prominent examples of militaristic monasticism and exhorts:

Arise, soldier of Christ, I say, arise! Shake off the dust and return to the battle. You will fight more valiantly after your flight, and you will conquer more gloriously. There are many soldiers of Christ who have begun valiantly, stood their ground well, and after they had fled, thrown themselves once

¹⁵⁷ Ep. I:12. Scio quia delicatus es, et quod his assuetus modo, duriora non possis. Sed quid, si potes facere ut possis? Quaeris quomodo? Surge, praecingere, tolle otium, exsere vires, move brachia, complas explica manus, exercitare in aliquo; et statim senties sola te appetere quae famem tollant, non fauces demulceant. Reddet quippe sapes rebus exercitium, quos tulit inertia. Multa quae respuis otiosus, post laborem sumes cum desiderio. Siquidem otium parit fastidium, exercitium famem; fames autem miro modo dulcia reddit, quae fastidium facit insipida. Olus, faba, pultes, panisque cibarius cum aqua, quiescenti quidem fastidio sunt, sed exercitato magnae videntur deliciae. James 1:12.

more into the thick of the danger from which they had escaped, and put to flight the foe from whom they had run. [...] Get up, arm yourself, and fly to your fellow soldiers whom you have forsaken by running away. Let the fear that drove you away also bring you back. Is it the weight and discomfort of arms that you shun, feeble soldier?¹⁵⁸

The first sentence is an amalgamation of two biblical references. The soldier of Christ comes from Paul, who in the Second Letter to Timothy (2:3–4) writes: “Labor as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No man, being a soldier to God, entangleth himself with secular businesses that he may please him to whom he hath engaged himself.”¹⁵⁹ Paul’s words conveniently combine labor and being a soldier of Christ, thus highlighting the manual labor brought up earlier.

Bernard also paraphrases the Book of Isaiah (52:1–2):

Arise, arise, put on thy strength, O Zion. Put on the garments of thy glory, O Jerusalem, the city of the Holy One, for henceforth the uncircumcised and unclean shall no more pass through thee. Shake thyself from the dust, arise, sit up, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from off thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.¹⁶⁰

A little after, Bernard urges Robert to take up arms by referring to the same passage from Genesis (27:3) as he does in the letter to Fulk. “Take thy arms, thy quiver, and bow, and go abroad,” Isaac tells his hairy son Esau in the Genesis narrative.¹⁶¹ Unlike in the letter to Fulk, the militaristic manly monk who resembles the physically masculine Esau or ascetic John the Baptist is not contrasted directly by a weak woman, a foolish *muliercula* type of a figure, but a *delicate miles* who is weakened by his over-heated manliness and is reciprocally accompanied by the glorious daughter of Zion, Jerusalem. In the 12th-century mindset, Jerusalem can naturally be equated to the Church as the

¹⁵⁸ Ep. I:13. Surge, miles Christi, surge, excutere de pulvere, revertere ad praelium unde fugisti, fortius post fugam praeliaturus, gloriosius triumphaturus. Habet quidem Christus multos milites qui fortissime coeperunt, steterunt, vicerunt: paucos autem qui de fuga conversi, rursus se periculo ingesserint quod declinaverant; rursus fugarint hostes quos fugiebant. [...] Expergiscere, sume arma, et fuge ad commilitones tuos, quos fugiens deserueras; ut qui te ab eis disjunxerat, ipse te denuo timor jungat. Quid armorum refugis pondus et asperitatem, delicate miles? James 1:13.

¹⁵⁹ VG 2. Tim. 2:3–4. Labora sicut bonus miles Christi Jesu. Nemo militans Deo implicat se negotiis saecularibus: ut ei placeat, cui se probavit.

¹⁶⁰ VG Is. 52:1–2. Consurge, consurge, induere fortitudini tuae, Zion! induere vestimentis gloriae tuae, Jerusalem, civitas Sancti, quia non adjiciet ultra ut pertranseat per te incircumciscus et immundus. Excute de pulvere, consurge; sede, Jerusalem! Solve vincula colli tui, captiva filia Zion...

¹⁶¹ VG Gen. 27:3. Sume arma tua, pharetram, et arcum, et egredere foras.

bride of Christ. From the viewpoint of this interpretive tradition, the bride and the soldier of Christ are made from the same block of wood.

Although the Bride of the Song of Songs is not directly brought up in the letter to Robert, she hovers in the background in the form of Jerusalem. She is the contrast to the figure of the harlot brought up earlier in the letter. Jerusalem is the whole, sanctified body of Christ, *quia non adiiciet ultra ut pertranseat per te incircumcisis et immundus* (Is. 52:2), who is free and strong. This view of Jerusalem-Bride is also present in the biblical fabric of the letter through the description of the figure of the Bride in the Song of Songs. She is shown as a fierce woman with militaristic qualities, like being “terrible as an army set in array.”¹⁶² The woman also describes herself as “a wall” and her “breasts are as a tower.”¹⁶³

The militant bride of the Song of Songs reveals one of the reasons why the Virgin Mary as bride, mother or image of the Church is not seen almost at all in the letter collection. For a medieval reader, Mary's presence was probably so obvious through biblical figures such as Jerusalem or the daughter of Zion and militant bride that mentioning her name was unnecessary. The connections between Mary and the Old Testament city of David, Jerusalem, are made already in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of Luke, where Mary is addressed by the angel in very similar wording to how the daughter of Zion/Jerusalem is addressed in the Book of Zephaniah.¹⁶⁴ A medieval monastic reader would probably also have been aware of the connections of Elizabeth's greeting to Mary in the Gospel of Luke and its Old Testamental antecedents. “Blessed are you among women” (Lk 1:42) is a reference to a greeting received by two Old Testament women, Yael and Judith, who both killed commanders of Israel's enemy by hitting them on the head.¹⁶⁵ The Virgin Mary thus has inherently militaristic undertones in the 12th-century context and can be seen as a component in the monastic *miles Christi*.

At the core of the hairy and manly soldier of Christ, we find the strong and militant Daughter of Zion. This structure of an ideal monk that is a soldier on the outside but bride on the inside differentiates the image from the one Bernard envisions for Fulk. While Fulk's fleshly weakness is directly feminine, Robert's is the weakness of a hot-blooded corporeal man. Fulk's strength is also marked by Esau to a greater extent; for Robert, Esau is referred to in a similar way as in Fulk's case, but in the final analysis he becomes a marker of the strong but easily persuaded hot manhood that is to be avoided. The one who is called to rise and take up arms is a militant daughter of Zion, a reflection of Mary who smashes the head of the enemy like her Old Testament parallels.

¹⁶² Song 6:9.

¹⁶³ Song 8:10.

¹⁶⁴ Ducay, *La prediletta di Dio*, pp. 26–31.

¹⁶⁵ For references, see, for example, Mitch, *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible* Lk 42:1 commentary. For the narrative on Yael, see Judges 5:24–27; on Judith, see Judges 13:18.

The letter to Robert makes clearer the absence of a masculine idealized figure. John the Baptist seems to be presented as one, but even he shrinks into a model of corporeal asceticism. He is only the forerunner of Christ and the true *miles Christi*, who is Jerusalem, daughter of Zion, hidden by Esau's bodily hair and John's coarse clothing.

In her article on Bernard's bridal imagery, Shawn M. Kraemer has brought up an interesting point of comparison with the daughter of Zion from Bernard's *Sermon on the Feast of Epiphany*. In the sermon, the daughter of Zion is shown as a weak woman who needs to grow into spiritual strength of manliness due to her undue love of the flesh. Bernard talks about multiple daughters of Zion, who are weak because they are not sons but daughters.¹⁶⁶ While it would be tempting to conclude that Bernard is using the figure of Jerusalem in the same way as in the sermon Kraemer refers to, this interpretation would not take into account the specific context of the letter and the imagery woven into it. Even though Bernard calls Robert *delicate miles* almost in the same breath as he refers to the Bible passage about Jerusalem, he does not directly encourage Robert to become a man instead of being a daughter of Zion. The daughter has been in the dust, but as a captive of the manly flesh of the hot-blooded patriarchs; hairy Esau got fooled by his little brother Jacob and in his hunger was more willing to have food immediately than to hold on to the final prize of the firstborn's blessing from his father.¹⁶⁷ The weak woman is not directly brought up, even though she exists in the background as the counterpart of the weak and fleshly man.

David Damrosch proposes in his article on the hermeneutics of gender in Bernard's works that womanhood is something that one should grow out of in Bernardian thought in the final analysis. He refers especially to the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, where Bernard surely says that a soul is supposed to grow from womanhood to mature manhood.¹⁶⁸ In the letter to Robert this is not a given, however, as seen above: the weak fleshliness that one is supposed to surpass can take on connotations of physical manly strength, which is a weakness when poor choices are made. The connection of womanhood and flesh as weakness is unquestionable in Bernard's pattern of thought, but it is not the whole picture. There is truly manly fleshliness as well, which is conquered by the figure of the militant and strong daughter of Zion, who seems to be growing from superficially strong manly flesh to the glorious womanhood of the bride.

Considering the theology of the Incarnation that defines Bernard's treatment of womanhood and flesh, it is not logically possible to completely grow out of womanhood: God made female flesh his own in the Incarnation and kept it as his own through the resurrection. The idea of Christ existing in

¹⁶⁶ Kraemer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux," pp. 314–15. The sermon Kraemer analyzes is *Sermo in epiphania domini*, 2.2.

¹⁶⁷ See Gen. 25:30–33.

¹⁶⁸ Damrosch, "Non Alia Sed Aliter," p. 186.

His flesh in the eternity of heaven extends to the Church, His body, in the form of the general resurrection of the body in the theological frame of Bernard's works. The end of bodily life was not thought to be permanent, but only a temporary state caused by original sin. The person would be whole again after bodies would be remade and reunited with their souls in the resurrection at the end of time.¹⁶⁹ The belief in the physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist was part of the idea of the permanence of flesh. Christ in the Eucharist realized not only the reality of the Incarnation, but also allowed the recipient of the body of Christ to partake already in the resurrection.¹⁷⁰ Through eating the incarnated resurrected Christ, the person receiving communion was participating in the perfect unity of God and man in Jesus, and the restored unity of spirit and flesh in humanity that was broken by sin.

Prudence Allen has argued that Augustine, one of the main foundations of Bernard's gendered theology, was innovative in his treatment of the female body as perfect in itself while also complementary to the male body. This was a result of the belief in the resurrection of the body and the idea that God created man and woman as separate but equal before the fall into sin. In Augustine's view, women and men were to be resurrected as women and men and would be eternally distinguished by their sex, neither being better or more perfect than the other by nature.¹⁷¹ Augustine's complementary view on the level of the resurrection of the body supports the possibility of reading woman and her fleshly nature as a permanent state of the perfected human in Bernard's thought, and for the male monk analogically as a member of Christ's bridal Church-body. The simultaneous connotations of both manly and womanly flesh as weak in the letter to Robert seem to be pointing toward an Augustinian understanding of human bodily life after death; there is no need of leaving womanhood behind.

As stated above in the context of the letter to Fulk, self-conflicting views of womanhood and flesh come up in Augustine's as well as Bernard's works, and also in the letters.¹⁷² The militant and strong, non-delicate daughter of Zion that Bernard applies to Robert is another example of this complexity of gendered thought. What is almost always present is simultaneous twoness and unity in the imagery that uses manhood and womanhood, following Bynum's analysis of Bernard in *Metamorphosis and Identity*. The hairy Jerusalem seems to be exactly the kind of "unitas forever encompassing two" that Bynum finds in Bernard's texts.¹⁷³ She has manly and womanly features, but they stay separate entities in the gendered figure they form.

¹⁶⁹ Heinonen, *Brides and Knights of Christ*, pp. 82, 149–150; LaCorte, "Flawed Portrayals of Bernard of Clairvaux's View on Art," p. 457.

¹⁷⁰ Astell, *Eating Beauty*, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, pp. 218–219.

¹⁷² See pt. II, ch. 1, The (dis)Order of Flesh and Spirit.

¹⁷³ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–162.

Bynum's view that there is no space for *mixtio* in Bernard's mental landscape¹⁷⁴ casts a shade on Line Engh's convincingly sharp analysis of the figure of Christ and a christomimetic religious man in her book on the *Sermones super cantica*. Engh describes Christ whose body has feminine features in Bernard's Sermons as androgynous and the figure of the bride, a christomimetic monk, as a *virago*, who is a male who has become a weak woman for the sake of being humble before God but who then overcomes the feminine weakness and becomes ideally manly, finally uniting himself with the masculinized transcendence. Womanhood thus gets absorbed into the all-encompassing manhood and vanishes in a Christ-like holy person. Engh works this process out also as superseding gender, which in the person of Christ is realized in the androgynous nature of man-God Jesus. Engh does see the path leading up to the absorption of womanhood as an oscillation between hierarchically ordered binary manhood and womanhood, but this seems to be a passing stage before the vanishing of all true flesh and womanhood.¹⁷⁵

Engh might be right when it comes to the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and is realistic in seeing the *virago* and the androgyne Jesus as men in disguise. This tends to be the case for all gender-neutral figures; it is usually womanhood that is seen as having something extra, since womanhood in the *virago* mode of thought is interpreted as a rupture in the perfect humanity of the first man, which the androgyne seeks to reestablish.¹⁷⁶ In the light of the letter collection, however, Bynum's view that Bernard knows no *mixtio*, a category into which the woman-absorbing androgyne easily slips, seems more fitting. It might be that the sermon collection that Engh looks at is more tightly linked to the tradition of Platonized theology that she recognizes behind the gendered figure of the male-bride. As Engh quite convincingly shows, the controversial Origen of Alexandria's widely known and read commentary on the Song was probably in the background of Bernard's gendered theology.¹⁷⁷ Miller, for example, describes Origen as extremely Platonic.¹⁷⁸ Origen would then have been the source for Bernard's feminine-absorbing, platonically whole man-woman of God in the *Sermones super cantica*.¹⁷⁹

In the letter to Robert, nothing seems to get dissolved in the perfectly christomimetic monk. Womanhood continues to exist in the perfected religious man because he is still flesh and continues to be so forever after the resurrection, like Christ. Manhood and womanhood form a *unitas* of two, where both of the opposites forming it get to play the hero and the sinner one

¹⁷⁴ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–162.

¹⁷⁵ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 43, 52, 401.

¹⁷⁶ Engh, pp. 17–19.

¹⁷⁷ Engh, pp. 18, 27–28.

¹⁷⁸ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁹ Engh, p. 86.

after the other.¹⁸⁰ The oscillation between the levels of the hierarchy is eternally present in the figure of perfected Robert. The order of the hierarchy does not stay the same, however, but oscillates as well: it takes on the new order of the Kingdom of God, where the last become first and the first become last, only to become the first again and vice versa.

¹⁸⁰ Engh, p. 19. Engh also affirms the complexity of the spirit-male and flesh-female division: "The hierarchy of gender linked all Christians both to the spirit and to the flesh."

4 PART III: THE ANATOMY OF THE COMMUNITY

4.1 THE FUGITIVE FATHER AND HIS OBEDIENT SON—LETTERS 4 AND 7

4.1.1 ARNOLD AND ADAM

Letters 4 and 7 reflect a crisis of stability that occurred in the Cistercian community in the mid-1120s. Abbot Arnold of Morimond, the recipient of Letter 4, decided to leave his flock and go found a new community in Jerusalem with a group of his monks. He did this without asking permission from Cîteaux, whence his house had been founded in 1115. Letter 4 is written in December of 1124 as a reaction to the departure of Arnold and company.¹

Bernard refers to the case of Arnold in a later letter from 1137 (Letter 141) addressed to another troubled abbot, where he gives his view on why Arnold fled. He writes to abbot Humbertus:

I wonder that you were not scared by the example to Abbot Arnold. His audacity was not unlike yours, and it met with a speedy but fearful retribution. Yet he, as I know well, had some excuse, while you have none at all. You have no disobedient monks, none of your lay brothers are slothful in their work, you have no neighbors laying violent hands on your property, you do not suffer from scanty or insufficient means of support, so that you might feel obliged to leave those whom you can neither feed nor rule.²

Based on this retrospective account, it seems that Arnold really did not have it easy as the abbot of Morimond, which had several daughter houses and had suffered from a failed harvest followed by a shortage of food. In addition to the pressures created by the crisis of material resources, it has been suggested as a reason behind the departure that Abbot Arnold found it difficult to accept that he, a head of a house that had been founded at the same time as Clairvaux and had as many daughter houses, did not have the same rights as

¹ Gastaldelli et al., *Lettere*, pp. 48–49.

² Ep. CXLI:1. *Miror quod te non terruit Arnoldi abbatibus exemplum: cuius similis praesumptio digno, sed pavendo fine, ut bene meministi, in brevi est vindicata. Et quidem ille qualemcunque, ut bene novi ego, habuit causam, tu nullam. Numquid enim aut monachi tuis erant inobedientes imperiis, aut conversi segnes in operibus, aut vicini forte tibi tuisve rebus infesti, aut certe modica et non sufficiens substantia mundi, quatenus relinquere cogereris, quos vel regere, vel pascere non sufficeres?* James 150:1.

Bernard in relation to Cîteaux. If this was the case, Bernard's intervention over Abbot Stephen Harding must have been grudgingly received.³ However, while this set up of personal rivalry is possible, I will not presume the assumption of Bernard's superior virtue in monastic leadership skills or the competitive attitude of Arnold as factual starting points for the interpretation of the letter.⁴

Letter 7 is addressed to a monk named Adam, who was one of Arnold's company. It was written shortly after Letter 4, in the beginning of 1125.⁵ At that moment, Abbot Arnold had suddenly died. Deeming Adam to then be the leader of the group, Bernard appealed to him to abandon the idea of making the journey to Jerusalem and to return to their monastery, which he eventually did. The letter is more of a treatise in the form of a letter, and it circulated also as a treatise with the name *De Discretione Obedientiae*.⁶

There are several letters connected to Arnold's scandalous pilgrimage, including more letters addressed to him and Adam, to the local bishop and to the pope.⁷ Letters 4 and 7 have been chosen as objects of closer inspection because of their content on abbothood and monkhood and how these relate to each other. I will look into the dynamics of this monastic relationship, focusing on gendered imagery and the meanings that it takes in the context of Arnold's endeavor.

4.1.2 REVERSING THE FRUITS OF THE CROSS—BREAKING UNITY

Bernard begins Letter 4 to Arnold by calling him "lord abbot" and himself "brother," first informing him that the "lord of Cîteaux"⁸ (meaning the abbot of Cîteaux) had not yet received the news of Arnold's flight. After this short *salutatio*, where he gives an indication of the levels of monastic hierarchy at play, Bernard continues by invoking Arnold's conscience. He expresses grief over the illicit pilgrimage in first person:

"Nothing is beyond my power thanks to the strength God gives me." Although I know something of the obstinacy of your stony heart, yet I wish I were by you to persuade you even if I could achieve nothing. Whether it would be of any avail I do not know, but I would lay before you the great reasons that compel me to oppose you. I would plead with you not only by

³ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 216–17. See also note 1 above.

⁴ Gastaldelli et al., *Lettere*, pp. 48–49. The background explanation of the Gastaldelli edition presents the two as rivals, Arnold trying to reach Bernard's level of influence and charisma with "frenetic activism."

⁵ Gastaldelli et al., *Lettere*, p. 60.

⁶ Casey, "Bernard and the crisis at Morimond," p. 124. See also Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 111.

⁷ See letters IV, V, VI, VII, CCCLIX. James 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

⁸ Ep. IV:1, 15, 1. *domnum Cisterciensem*. James 4:1.

my words but also by my tears and sorrow. I would throw myself at your feet, embrace your knees, hang upon your neck and kiss your dear head, that head which has been bowed with mine in a like purpose under the sweet yoke of Christ for so many years. I would beg you and implore you with tears, with all my might, in the name of the Lord Jesus first that you should spare his cross, the cross which redeemed those whom you are doing your utmost to destroy, the cross which gathered together those whom you are scattering.⁹

By first quoting Paul's Letter to the Philippians, Bernard shows by whose authority he is imploring the other abbot to return: God's. This turns the first-person expressions of emotion from a description of a subjective experience into a channel for a message of divine origin. The messenger wants to be physically present to try and change Arnold's stony heart, to embrace and to kiss; the imaginary meeting is affectionate in its intensely physical and emotional scenery. These are probably emotive instruments, not meant to express Bernard's personal movements of heart per se, but to invoke a certain emotional response in Arnold and his company of monks.¹⁰ It would be most enticing to read the text as a window on Bernard's inner life, but that would not give an accurate reading of the emotional picture that Bernard is painting. The mentioned position as a messenger of God that Bernard takes and the theological implications given by the physicality of the scene would be missed if the text were read rather superficially as a simple outburst of affection in a situation of crisis in the community. Bernard is certainly using his voice, but using it intentionally as a conveyer of multiple layers of theological and spiritual content.¹¹

Here the sweet yoke of Christ comes into the picture again, accompanied by references to bodily life as seen also in earlier letters, like the yoke of charity in Letter 11 and the sweet burden of Christ in Letter 72. There seems to be a connection between the body, the sweet yoke of Christ and Christ's cross in the framework of thought in which the letters are written. In the passage above, the cross is presented from the viewpoint of redemption and as an instrument of unity, which Arnold is breaking by not repenting and returning to his rightful place. The idea of the cross as a means of reconciliation that enables

⁹ Ep. IV:1, 14–27. *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* (Philipp. IV, 13): *quamvis in magna parte lapidei cordis tui obstinationem et ipse non ignorem, utinam nunc tamen, sive fructuose, sive frustra, tuo lateri adhaererem. Quanta quae me movent adversum te, frustra nescio an fructuose, jacerem tibi in faciem; non solum verbis, sed et vultu et oculis. Tuis deinde provolutus vestigiis, tenerem pedes; amplecterer genua; totusque a collo pendens, illud mihi dulcissimum caput deoscularer, quod sub uno mecum proposito, suavi jugo Christi jam pluribus annis attritum est. Flerem quoque, quantum valerem, rogarem et obsecrarem per Dominum Jesum, quatenus parceres, primo quidem ejus cruci, qua utique redemit quos tu quantum in te est, perimis; collegit quos tu dispergis.* James 4:1.

¹⁰ McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, pp. 12, 17, 70.

¹¹ See also Verbaal, "Voicing Your Voice."

unity in the Church is also implied elsewhere in Bernard's later work. While it can be said that Bernard had a significant role in the development of the intense piety toward suffering Christ on the cross, the cross itself was not as central for him as its fruits.¹² This tendency is shown in the letter in question: Bernard urges Arnold to spare the cross due to which the monastic flock is drawn together.

With all the affection and physical closeness, one would expect motherly imagery to come up, but instead Bernard brings up the cross and the redemptive unity it connotes. He seems to be describing the manly burden of the cross of an ecclesiastical head,¹³ not the female burden of God become flesh, the burden of Mary, as in the letter to Rainald, for example. The unity that is brought up is not the unity of mother and child, the human and divine nature of Christ, the Trinity or the bride and the bridegroom, but the unity of the church itself, the body of Christ that is brought together by the cross. The masculine body on the cross is the source of the feminine body, the Church.¹⁴ Through the cross, Bernard and Arnold are under the same sweet yoke of Christ, which in their case, both being abbots, is especially the manly burden of being the representative of Christ. When Arnold left his post, he compromised the redemptive unity of the body of Christ achieved on the cross, which he was supposed to carry alongside Christ.

Bernard continues with a series of conscience-probing questions:

How can you suppose yourself to stand when you are causing the fall of so many? You were placed in a position of authority not for your own sake, but for the sake of others; not to promote your own interests, but to promote the interests of Jesus Christ. How, I ask, can you possibly set forth with security when by so doing you deprive of all security the flock which has been entrusted to your care? Who will be there to keep away the prowling wolves? Who will be there to console the afflicted and counsel the tempted? Who will hold at bay the raging and roaring lion that goes about seeking whom it may devour? They will all be exposed, without any doubt, to the teeth of the evildoer who devours the children of God as if they were bread for the eating. Alas! What will happen to those new plantations of Christ set by your own hand in "the wilderness and fearful desert places"? Who will be there to dig them about and dung them? Who will build a hedge round about them and prune away their untoward growth? Either these still tender saplings will be easily uprooted by the first

¹² Lane, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Theologian of the Cross*, pp. 84–85, 88–89.

¹³ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 169.

¹⁴ Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 58–64, 76–115. For a more detailed explanation of the connection of masculinity and its being a source, see ch. "Rainald—Not a Father."

storms of trouble, or else for lack of anyone to clean the ground about them, so that they will bear no fruit.¹⁵

The questions are mostly modified passages from Scripture. This no doubt increased the impact of the text in the recipients: Bernard is again speaking as a messenger of God, borrowing authority from biblical authors. How and who if not you? Bernard asks, pointing out Arnold's responsible position as a promoter of the interests of Jesus Christ. Among the many scriptural references, the quote from Psalm 13, "who devours the children of God as if they were bread for the eating," stands out especially when looking at the content of the whole psalm. It laments men who have no fear of God and describes them as poisonously deceitful, eating God's people as they eat bread.¹⁶ Bernard gives the abbot's role a very physical, homey, everyday tone with his choice of imagery: planting, building, pruning, digging dirt. Arnold has exposed his monks to evil forces by his departure, making them prey for the wolves, who are about to eat them like bread, an image that also reflects the corporality of the letter. Arnold had under his care not only Morimond but also several other houses he had started; these are the new plantations that are mentioned. Seeing that Arnold was a key figure with a lot of authority in the Cistercian monastic movement, it is understandable that Bernard used Arnold as a warning example even thirteen years after, as seen above.

Next Bernard shifts from depicting the Christ-like position of Arnold the gardener to family imagery:

Perhaps you will say that you have divided rightly because you have consulted the good of your own soul. But can you say this while knowing that you have deprived of a father's care those sons whom you have left behind and left orphans? Unhappy

¹⁵ Ep. IV:2, 9–24. *Qua ratione ergo multorum faciendo ruinam, te ruere non praesumis: qui in hoc videlicet positus eras, ut non quod tibi est utile, sed magis quod aliis; nec quae tua, sed quae Jesu Christi sunt, quaerere debeas? Quomodo, inquam, securus abis, qui gregi tibi commisso omnem de se securitatem in perpetuum aufers? Quis occurret lupis incursantibus? quis consolabitur in tribulationibus? quis providebit in tentationibus? quis denique leoni resistet rugienti, et quaerenti quem devoret? Patebunt sine dubio morsibus malignantium, qui devorant plebem Christi sicut escam panis. Heu! quid facient novellae plantationes Christi, quae per manus tuas consitae fuerant diversis in locis, et locis horrois, et vastae solitudinis? Quis circumfodiet? quis impinguabit fimo? quis sepe circumdabit? quis succrescentes sollicitus erit rescindere surculos? Aut flante profecto tentationum vento, tenerrimae adhuc, heu facile eradicabuntur: aut inter fruteta certe simul exorientia, cum non erit qui purget, suffocatae nullum afferent fructum. James 4:2.*

¹⁶ VG Ps. 13:3–4. *Omnes declinaverunt, simul inutiles facti sunt. Non est qui faciat bonum, non est usque ad unum. Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum; linguis suis dolose agebant. Venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum. Quorum os maledictione et amaritudine plenum est; veloces pedes eorum ad effundendum sanguinem. Contritio et infelicitas in viis eorum, et viam pacis non cognoverunt; non est timor Dei ante oculos eorum.*

and wretched are they, and all the more so for being deprived of their father while he is still alive!¹⁷

Arnold is presented as a father who has deserted his children. This strengthens the manly connotations given by the burden of Christ and the cross; motherhood is still not present. The description of the monks traveling with Arnold that follows further shows that it is manhood that is the central point of discussion:

What upsets many is that you should have taken with you only weak boys and inexperienced youths. Either they are strong and experienced men, in which case they would be necessary for their orphaned house, or else they are, as I have said, weak and inexperienced, and therefore not fit for the long and tedious journey.¹⁸

The main argument here is that no matter whom Arnold talked into taking the journey with him, he would have crippled the community of Morimond and thus acted wrongly. But when looking more closely at the words used to describe the monks, one notices the negotiation on manliness being held among the arguments against the legitimacy of Arnold's venture. The translation by James used here is a good example of how easily the text raises masculine tones to the reader's mind, and it was probably the case also in the 12th century. Bernard contrasts *pueros imbecilles et delicatos* and monks who are *boni et robusti*. James has translated these as weak boys and inexperienced youths against strong and experienced men. The addition of the men in the translation is especially telling of the tracks of thought that the Latin words *boni et robusti* inspire.

The weak and soft (another option to translate *delicatos*) boys bring to mind the theme of weak women so often brought up in research on 12th-century gendered imagery.¹⁹ When addressing his monks, Bernard tended to use manliness as a marker for spiritual maturity, while weak womanhood stands for the opposite.²⁰ Womanhood is indirectly present in the form of weak boys as a contrast to mature and robust monks, who are still imperfect men. This can be seen as a sign of the influence of antique Christian thinkers, whose worldview was to some extent constructed on the Aristotelian model, where

¹⁷ Ep. IV:3, 29–32. Rectene forte dividere esse dices, soli animae tuae consulere; et filios tuos quos orphanos relinquis, consilio paterno destituere? O miseros et miserabiles, et eo miserabiliores, quo vivo se conspiciunt orbari patre! James 4:3.

¹⁸ Ep. IV:3, 1–4. Illud etiam multos permaxime movet, quod pueros imbecilles et delicatos iuvenes tecum ducis. Alioquin si boni et robusti sunt, desolatae domui fuerant necessarii: si delicate, ut dixi, et imbecilles, durae ac laboriosae peregrinationi non erunt idonei. James 4:3.

¹⁹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 128; Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ*, pp. 22, 25–26.

²⁰ Leclercq, *Women and St Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 24–25.

the man is considered a more perfect human being.²¹ It is also interesting from the viewpoint of manly strength how Bernard describes the journey to Jerusalem: it is hard and arduous—or long and tedious, as James translates. That kind of a journey calls for manly monks, not weak boys. The journey itself seems to be presented as a manly thing to do; what Bernard is questioning is the motivation behind the journey, as well as its effects.

Bernard draws the letter to its conclusion by expressing that Arnold cannot continue as an abbot: “But I do not think you can still wish to rule over them as their superior, since I know you to be minded to lay down your pastoral charge and henceforth to care only for your own soul.”²² Arnold’s actions and apparently his own reluctance to be a monastic leader result in losing the responsibility over others. Essentially, he loses his fatherhood, which makes him a simple monk, responsible only for himself. As seen above in the context of the letters to Rainald, abbothood is closely related to headship and is thus comparable to Christ the Bridegroom, which makes the abbot emphatically male in the monastic community. Thus, when Arnold ceases to be an abbot, he becomes less manly as one of the members of the bridal, feminine body.

4.1.3 VIOLATING MOTHER CARITAS

Letter 7 to the monk Adam does not have a clear *salutatio* in the beginning but starts directly with a reproach of his actions. It might be that the customary salutation has been taken out in the process of editing the letter into its treatise-like form.²³

Bernard brings Mother Caritas to the scene as the one who suffers because of Adam:

Charity would not offend charity nor scorn when she is offended; she cannot be divided against herself, or deny her own nature. Rather it is her nature to unite again what has been divided. If, as I have said, she abided in you and you in her, she would not be keeping silent. She would be on fire within you and clamoring, “Who is scandalized and I am not on fire.” For she is kind, loves peace and rejoices in unity. It is she alone who begets unity, confirms it, binds it up and preserves it in the bonds of peace. Wherever charity is, there, too, is peace. So, I ask you, how can you, when you have thus

²¹ Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?,” pp. 34–51; Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ*, p. 22. On the perfect human as male in Bernard’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, see Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 353–355.

²² Ep. IV:3, 5–7. Sed et regendis animabus eorum nequaquam te ultra credimus velle praeesse: quippe cuius cognovimus esse propositum, pastoralement abiicere sarcinam duntaxat tuorum, et soli deinceps vivere tibi. James 4:3.

²³ The Gastaldelli et al. edition, for example, does not comment on the lack of a formal beginning in any way.

wounded the mother of unity and peace, dare to hope that your offering will be acceptable to God? The Apostle himself believes that even martyrdom without charity “availeth nothing.” How can you believe that you have not offended her whose very bowels and dear pledges you have lacerated by your brutal treatment of her? You have not spared her in the past, nor do you spare her now, but you rend unity and break the bonds of peace.²⁴

Backed up by several references to Pauline epistles, Bernard depicts how Adam violates the “very bowels” (*viscera*, which could also be translated as ‘womb’ or ‘heart’) of Mother Caritas. In this passage of the letter, we have a fine example of Bernard’s style as a writer to meld multiple agents, including the reader, into his persona and use it as a platform for the reader’s reaction.²⁵ Bernard especially unites his voice with that of Paul. He quotes the Second Letter to the Corinthians, where Paul recounts the sufferings he has had to endure for the Church: “Besides those things which are without: my daily instance, the solicitude for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not on fire?” Paul depicts his profound connection to the state of the local churches in 2 Cor. 11:28–29.²⁶ Bernard goes on to quote the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:3–4), where Paul states: “And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up.”²⁷ Paul’s statement on the connection of the martyred body and charity further strengthens the physicality of the image: the violence done by Adam is corporeal. The suffering body belongs to the said persona of the text, which is an amalgamation of Mother Caritas, Paul, Adam and Bernard himself.

²⁴ Ep. VII:1, 1–15. Nec enim caritas caritatem offenderet aut contemneret, cum sentiret offensam. Nam se ipsam non potest negare, nec enim in se divisa est. Novit potius in se divisa coniungere: conjuncta dividere nescit. Proinde, ut dixi, si maneret in te, non sileret, non quiesceret, non dissimularet, gemens et aestuans, et intra pium pectus tuum procul dubio submurmurans illud: Quis scandalizatur, et ego non uror? Siquidem benigna est, pacem diligit, congaudet unitati. Sola quippe est quae illam generat, colligat, solidat, et conservat ubicunque servari cognoscitur in vinculo pacis. Infensa ergo vobis hac tam honorabili matre unitatis et pacis, quo pacto, quaeso, vestrum quodcunque sacrificium Deo fore acceptum praesumitis, cum absque illa nec martyrium quidem aliquid esse putet Apostolus? Aut qua ratione vobis forte infensam non esse confiditis, cuius castis visceribus, cuius charis pignoribus tam inhumane agendo non pepercistis nec parcitis, scindentes unitatem, rumpentes vinculum pacis? James 8:1.

²⁵ Pranger, “Bernard the Writer,” p. 226.

²⁶ VG praeter illa quae extrinsecus sunt, instantia mea quotidiana, sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum. Quis infirmatur, et ego non infirmor? quis scandalizatur, et ego non uror?

²⁷ VG Et si distribuero in cibos pauperum omnes facultates meas, et si tradidero corpus meum ita ut ardeam, caritatem autem non habuero, nihil mihi prodest. Caritas patiens est, benigna est. Caritas non aemulatur, non agit perperam, non inflator.

Adam is presented almost like an unborn child ripping away at his mother's insides, extracting himself from the state of unity with the body of Mother Caritas. Bernard explains how Caritas begets (*generat*) unity, and what follows then sounds like nurturing a baby: she confirms (*colligat*), binds up (*solidat*) and preserves (*conservet*). On the other hand, Bernard states that Caritas should live in Adam's bosom, where she would scandalize his insides in the face of the flight from the community of Morimond. This shared, two-way bodily inhabitation is probably a reflection of what the fused suffering body of the persona of the text already represents: the body of the monastic community, in which Caritas is the mother of unity. Adam has been breaking the key principle of *stabilitas loci*, staying in the same monastic house where one has entered religious life, which rises from the Rule.²⁸ As Chapman notes, a monk who left his community for another was seen to harm the unity of his community, like someone leaving his family and joining another one.²⁹

Not surprisingly, following a pattern already seen in Letter 11, Bernard includes the bride in the image of the suffering community:

Lay down your offering by the altar and go first to be reconciled, not with just one brother, but with the whole multitude of brethren who have this against you and those few who are with you, that, as with a sword, you have wounded their peace and unity by your desertion. They lament with the bride in the canticle crying, "The sons of my mother have fought against me." And rightly so, because being no longer joined in unity with them you are against them. And do you think that charity, their loving mother, can hear without grief this just complaint of her children? She joins her tears with theirs and says of you: "My own sons, whom I have reared and brought to manhood, think to defy me." Charity is God himself. Our peace is Christ, "who hath made two nations one." In the Trinity itself, unity is honored.³⁰

²⁸ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between History and Cult*, p. 213.

²⁹ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 121.

³⁰ Ep. VII:1, 15–26. Ponendum ergo est munus quodcumque offerre paratis, et prius habenti adversum vos, non fratri, sed fratrum multitudini reconciliandum. Ecce nimirum universae fraternitatis unitas adversum vestram paucitatem, quodam veluti vestri discessus gladio sauciata conqueritur, quasi quae plangens miserabiliter dicat: Filii matris meae pugnaverunt contra me. Et merito: qui enim non est cum illa, contra illam est. Putas sine gemitu tam justum filiae gemitum pia possit mater caritas audire? Ideo et ipsa nostris lacrimis iungens suas, ait de vobis: Filios enutrivit et exaltavi, ipsi autem spreverunt me. Caritas ipse Deus est. Pax nostra Christus, qui fecit utraque unum. In trinitate unitas maxime commendatur. James 8:1. Here it is good to note that while God as *caritas* is referred to with masculine *ipse* in this passage of the letter, Caritas as a personalized figure is clearly presented as a woman and a mother, as shown above on the previous page. It is probably the word *deus* that calls for the usage of

Mother Caritas, God, is crying with the bride of the Song of Songs. The identification of Caritas as God Her-/Himself follows a quote from the very beginning of the Book of Isaiah, which speaks with the voice of God, who is lamenting Israel's indifference in their position as His children.³¹ Bernard also quotes Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2:14): "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh."³² In the larger context of the chapter of the epistle, Paul is writing about how Christ has made the non-Jews and Jews one in his flesh and by his blood. This reference can be read as an example of the 12th-century theological tendency to concentrate on the Incarnation, God in human flesh hanging on the cross. The emphasis on the Incarnation and the maternal imagery were part of the phenomenon of talking about God in more feminine terms than before.³³ The conjoined appearance of maternal imagery and Jesus as God and corporeal man supports the assumption of the feminine meaning of flesh as a general line of interpretation. Womanhood as a sign of unity is connected to this pattern of thought: both Mother Caritas and Christ on the cross are brought up as the locus of unity, and these both take part in the unity of the Trinity. The cross in this context does not come off as a manly burden but is instead connected to the unity represented by the motherhood of Caritas and feminine flesh.

The presence of Caritas as a mother in Letter 7 is acknowledged also by Bynum in *Jesus as Mother*.³⁴ The way Bernard presents Caritas and Christ on the cross in the letter seems to support Bynum's notions on how motherhood was applied not only to God the Father, as seen in the figure of Caritas, but also to Christ in 12th-century Cistercian writings. This is essentially behind the habit of Cistercian authors to refer to abbots as mothers: the abbot's authority comes from God and he is the representative of Christ. According to Bynum, the motherhood of God, Christ and the abbot reflect the idea of the monastery community as a dependent family with an affectionate mother, independent and separate from the world. The monastic house was a place of true dependence on God through the community, in contrast to being dependent on the things of the world for their own sake.³⁵ Bynum does not mention Letter 7 as an example of this dependent family image, but as can be seen from the flow from motherhood to unity, from unity to Christ on the cross and from the cross to the Trinity, Christ as mother with all of her connotations is present in

ipse, similarly to places where Christ is shown as wisdom. God as Father or Son seem to be referred to with *ipse*, which is logical. This does not diminish the more profound femininity of the figure of Caritas. For more on the relationship between female figures and grammatical gender, see Introduction.

³¹ Is. 1:2.

³² VG *Ipsē enim est pax nostra, qui fecit utraque unum, et medium parietem maceriae solvens, inimicitias in carne sua*

³³ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 134–135.

³⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 115.

³⁵ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 160, 164–166.

the treatment of unity and peace in the text. Adam was raising an open mutiny against the ideal of independence from the world represented by the maternal imagery.

4.1.4 MONASTIC OBEDIENCE AND MARRIAGE

Following the maternal imagery, Bernard continues with the family theme and compares the relationship between a monk and his abbot to marriage:

You would allow, surely, that the bond which links abbots with their disciples is not stronger than the bond which God has tied with an inviolable sacrament between husband and wife, according to the words of our Savior himself: "What God has joined together let no man put asunder"? Yet on the authority of the Apostle a woman is no longer tied to her husband when he is dead. Do you then believe yourself still bound by the command of your abbot, now that he is dead, against an even holier law, the law of charity?³⁶

In this analogical comparison, the monk is the wife and the abbot is the husband. The roles follow from the ecclesiological understanding of the monastic community that Bernard seems to be applying here as in Letter 11, for example, where the abbot represents Christ the Bridegroom and the choir of monks, respectively, the Body of Christ, the Bride. Along the lines of marital comparison, Adam's illicit departure is compared to adultery later in the letter: "Go ahead then, Brother Adam, and say: 'I have touched pitch and yet I am not black; I have held fire to the bosom, and yet I am not burned.' Say that you have taken your portion with adulterers, and yet it is no business of yours."³⁷ The message is clear: in Bernard's opinion, Adam has taken his portion with adulterers but is living in denial. He has harmed the marriage-like union of his monastic community.

Bernard is loosely quoting Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans (7:2) on how the marital bond between husband and wife ends in death. In the larger context of the epistle, Paul talks about the freedom of Christians from the Mosaic law. In light of the beginning of the letter looked at above, it is interesting that the body and the cross come up in the Pauline epistle right after the passage Bernard quotes. In the Letter to the Romans, Paul writes:

³⁶ Ep. VII:2, 17–23. Sed arbitrator quod nequaquam firmitus seu tenacius esse dices vinculum abbatum ad subditos quam coniugium ad seipsos, quorum quippe Deus copulam, et non homo, inviolabili ligavit sacramento, loquente Salvatore: Quod Deus coniuxit, homo non separet. Apostolo autem asserente solutam esse mulierem a lege viri, mortuo illo, tu te abbatis existimas defuncti lege teneri, et hoc contra legem quae sanctior est, legem videlicet caritatis? James 8:2.

³⁷ Ep. VII:13, 26–29. Tange picem, et dic: Non sum inquinatus ab ea. Absconde ignem in sinu tuo, et te jactato non aduri. Pone denique portionem tuam cum adulteris, nihilque tua interesse putato. James 8:13.

Therefore, whilst her husband liveth, she shall be called an adulteress if she be with another man; but if her husband be dead, she is delivered from the law of her husband, so that she is not an adulteress if she be with another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also are become dead to the law, by the body of Christ, that you may belong to another, who is risen again from the dead, that we may bring forth fruit to God.³⁸

In Paul's marriage allegory, the flesh that dies is the old law, represented by the husband, who in Bernard's letter is equated to Abbot Arnold. The new law, the new husband, is "the law of charity" against whom Adam is acting. The mother now takes the position of the widow-Adam's new husband. The mindset of the Pauline epistle is similar to Letter 4 to Abbot Arnold and the letter to Adam: Christ's body, the cross and marriage seem to form a hermeneutic whole in Bernard's theology on the monastic community, as seen above in the letter to Robert as well.

The theme of marriage also comes up in the letter when Bernard describes the law of obedience from the viewpoint of middling things, whose goodness or evilness depends on the circumstances. He leads the reader to think of the prelapsarian Paradise: "It is in this sphere [of middling things] that the law of obedience obtains as in the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was in the midst of Paradise." According to Bernard, obedience in middling things can never go wrong, but when obeying in a thing that is wholly evil, it will remain so even if done out of obedience, which makes the law of obedience invalid in the case of things that are objectively wrong.³⁹ Giving an example of how "middle things can often become either wholly good or wholly evil," Bernard goes deeper into the comparison between the monastic vows and marriage and states: "Thus, marriage is neither enjoined nor forbidden, but once contracted it cannot be dissolved. What, therefore, before the nuptials was clearly a middling thing after them becomes, for the persons married, a thing wholly good." Bernard does not further compare the monastic vows to a marriage directly or in more length but brings up owning material goods as another example of a "middling thing," which is good for a layman, but evil for a monk.⁴⁰

In both passages of the letter looked at here, Bernard seems to be avoiding a direct equation of marriage and monastic vows; they are presented to have points of contact but not total similarity. Still, the theme comes up several times, and even the primordial state of man and woman in Paradise with the

³⁸ VG Rom. 7:3–4. Igitur, vivente viro, vocabitur adultera si fuerit cum alio viro : si autem mortuus fuerit vir ejus, liberata est a lege viri, ut non sit adultera si fuerit cum alio viro. Itaque fratres mei, et vos mortificati estis legi per corpus Christi : ut sitis alterius, qui ex mortuis resurrexit, ut fructificemus Deo.

³⁹ Ep. VII:4, 14–17. [...] et in his lex posita est obedientiae, tanquam in ligno scientiae boni et mali, quod erat in medio paradisi. James 8:4.

⁴⁰ Ep. VII:4, 32–6. Sciendum vero quia media quaedam in purorum plerumque bonorum seu malorum transeunt rationem. Nam coniugium, cum et fieri liceat, et non fieri, factum iam solvi non licet. Quod ergo ante nuptias medium esse licebat, in iam coniugatis puri boni vim obtinet. James 8:4.

Tree of Knowledge is brought into the picture. This notion is strengthened when Adam the first man is used as a warning example in the process of persuading monk Adam to repent:

For this the Lord rebukes the Pharisees in the Gospels, saying: “Why do you transgress the commandments of God for the sake of your own traditions?” and by the prophet Isaiah he says: “In vain they worship me, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men”; and again to the first man: “Because thou hast harkened to the voice of thy wife rather than to mine, the earth is accursed in thy work.”⁴¹

These situations from Scripture are examples of listening to men rather than God. “Therefore, to do evil—command it who may—is to disobey rather than obey,” Bernard concludes his analysis of Adam’s willingness to follow his abbot against better judgement.⁴² Here Abbot Arnold is likened to Eve, the wife, whose voice is contrasted with the will of God.

The changes in the gendering of the abbot and the monk are swift. Karras talks about fluidity of meaning in these kinds of cases, which seems like an accurate definition for the changes occurring in the imagery of the letter.⁴³ The changes from male to female also have to do with Bernard’s views on the scandalous situation. When talking about the monk as wife or widow, he is looking at the monastic community as a hierarchy. In the example above, where the monk and the abbot seem to switch roles, the abbot being portrayed as Eve and the monk Adam as the husband of Eve, Bernard is concentrating on the responsibility to prioritize God over people. In relation to his abbot, Adam is bridal, but when transferring the responsibility for his actions to his abbot by appealing to the law of obedience, he is comparable to the first man, who was persuaded by Eve. The use of gendered imagery is rather functional and dependent on the argument of which it forms a part, and not necessarily attached to the physical bodies of the people involved.⁴⁴ In this situation, detaching the meaning of marriage serves the purpose of marriage used as an

⁴¹ Ep. VII:3, 4–9. Hinc Dominus in Evangelio Pharisaeos increpans: Quare ei vos, inquit, transgredimini mandatum Dei propter traditiones vestras? Et per Isaiam: Sine causa autem, ait, colunt me, mandata et doctrinas hominum tenentes. Et item ad Protoplastum: Pro eo quod oboedisti voci uxoris tuae plus quam meae, maledicta terra in opere tuo. James 8:3.

⁴² Ep. VII:3. For an analysis on Ep. VII from the viewpoint of the concept of authority, see Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 111–14.

⁴³ Karras, “Thomas Aquinas’s Chastity Belt,” p. 53.

⁴⁴ Engh gives Origen as an earlier example of symbolic gender fluctuation “without reference to bodily gender.” Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux’s Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 23.

analogy to bring out the seriousness of the commitment of a monk and showing Adam's misconception of its nature.⁴⁵

Bernard also compares the monk Adam to the first man when downplaying the significance of the papal permission that was obtained for the journey to Jerusalem: "What a futile expedient! It is like the first man trying to cloak his shame with fig leaves, as if they were a remedy and not just a cover."⁴⁶ Adam is again presented as the first man, who blamed his wife for his own mistake and is then trying to cover his fault with leaves, that is, the papal permission that was sought over the authority of the abbot of Cîteaux and the local bishop. With the image of Adam hiding behind fig leaves, Bernard accuses the monk Adam of deceitful use of a tactic to get his own way.

The comparisons between the monk Adam and the first man Adam reflect the depth of the imbalance that Arnold and company had caused in the monastic community, or at least the depth that Bernard wants to portray in the letter. Adam and Eve's relationship in Paradise can be read as the prelapsarian nucleus and root of human life as positive communion, or more negatively as a prerequisite for the Fall, in which case the creation of the woman is seen as a breakage in the unity of the prelapsarian *imago Dei* in the first man Adam. Both these traditions of interpretation are found in Christian writings of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, creating a rather conflicting whole when looking at womanhood and marriage in the texts that Bernard read and was influenced by.⁴⁷

The way Bernard writes about Paradise and the first man and woman in the letter arises from this twofold tradition. Marriage is clearly in the same sphere of thought as Adam and Eve in the text, which reflects the idea of the first couple as the first marriage, which again is applied to the Church and the monastic community as part of the marital dynamics of the Body of Christ. From this viewpoint, Adam and Eve and the rupture between them being used in Abbot Arnold and the monk Adam's situation are based on Adam and Eve as the first human community, which is created as good but distorted after the Fall; in the case of Arnold and Adam, their Fall was their unauthorized journey. On the other hand, when the role of the wife is transferred to Abbot Arnold (when comparing him to Eve, who seduces Adam into disobedience that looks like obedience), the tone cast on man's communion with woman is more negative, following the tradition of seeing Eve as a potential threat to the first man Adam's unity rather than as a companion for a fruitful communion of two. The comparisons to marriage and the first couple are telling in regard

⁴⁵ On the detachment of analogy from human reality, see Reynolds, "Conjugal and Nuptial Symbolism in Medieval Christian Thought," pp. 63–64.

⁴⁶ Ep. VII:9, 30–31. O frivolum satis remedium, quod non est aliud, nisi, more Protoplastorum, cauteriatis conscientiis texere perizomata, videlicet ad velamentum, non ad medicamentum! James 8:9.

⁴⁷ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 43–45, 48–50, 354–355; Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 28–31; O'Callaghan, *Figli di Dio nel mondo. Trattato di antropologia teologica*, pp. 659–664.

to the profound meaning of the ideal of a stable community, which maintains integrity in following the Rule and its hierarchical model. Violating the principles of *stabilitas loci* and obedience is seen to be as serious as the Fall itself. The actions of Arnold and Adam draw malicious strength from the drama of original sin, which resulted in the first couple turning against each other, breaking their communion.

Leclercq brings up the connection of the appreciation of womanhood and marriage when explaining the tradition behind Bernard's way of metaphorically transferring human marriage to the supernatural level. According to Leclercq, Christian authors from Ambrose and Augustine onwards, all the way to Bernard, used marriage and family imagery in their Trinitarian theology, thus further embracing human marriage's positive meaning. However, along with the rise of scholasticism after the 12th century, the marriage metaphor became erased from theology on the Trinity for centuries "due principally to the devaluation, if we may say so, of the role of womankind," as Leclercq states.⁴⁸

Leclercq may be right in the case of scholastic Trinitarian thought, but human marriage as a reflection of the relationship between God and humanity was widely used in the preaching of the later mendicant orders, as D'Avray shows in *Medieval Marriage*. D'Avray aims to show that there has been a positive attitude toward human marriage throughout the Middle Ages, and that this positive outlook is the fundamental reason for usage of the marriage metaphor. As an earlier example of this, D'Avray cites Gregory the Great's *Regula Pastoralis*, where marital sex, when aimed at procreation, is seen as an aspect that puts the married at the same level with the celibate; even when done just for pleasure, the conjugal act is portrayed as a way to salvation. This, according to D'Avray, was probably transferred to later medieval preaching.⁴⁹ The attitude toward marriage that D'Avray describes can surely be seen in the letter to Adam. Albeit in an indirect and contrasting way, Bernard compares monastic life to a marriage and comes to declare it as wholly good in the process.

As Reynolds points out in his article on nuptial and conjugal symbolism in medieval Christianity, in the *Sermones super cantica* Bernard does not refer to a literal marriage, but stays on a symbolic level that cannot be applied to actual married laypeople.⁵⁰ He does this in the letter to Adam, as seen above, contrasting a monk and a married layperson by means of an analogical comparison. Bernard stays on a practical level by sorting out the meaning of binding vows, not resorting to the kind of bridal imagery seen in other letters or in the Sermons on the Song; still he does show the monk holding a bridal position in relation to the abbot: Adam the widower is grounded in the figure

⁴⁸ Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 17, 66–67.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, "Conjugal and Nuptial Symbolism in Medieval Christian Thought," p. 63.

of the monk as bride and the abbot as a representative of Christ the bridegroom.

The marital depiction of the abbot's relationship to his community has to do with his similar status to a bishop in Bernard's monastic ecclesiology.⁵¹ There is a theological tradition that goes as far back as the 4th century of seeing the bishop's relationship to his diocese as that of a marriage. Then, and later in the 9th and 10th centuries, the marital rhetoric served to argue for the stability of the episcopate against the tendency of bishops to move from diocese to diocese for reasons that were seen as secular. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the marital imagery became more prominent as the reformists used it in their battle against simony and laypeople's involvement in elections of bishops in general.⁵² The marital imagery in the letter is thus connected to a larger theological trend of seeing ecclesiastical authorities as having the position of Christ the Bridegroom in relation to their communities.⁵³ In Bernard's letters, however, the equation of abbots to Christ as Bridegroom is ambiguous to say the least, especially in the letter to Adam. The abbot and the monk take the position of the man of the family one after the other, the abbot first being portrayed as a husband who passed away and next as Adam's wife Eve. The fluctuation of meaning is due to Bernard forcefully trying to drive his message home and applying the meaning that is most convenient for his purpose. It is suitable to have the monk in the position of the wife when explaining his place in relation to his abbot, but then more suitable to give him the role of the first man when trying to show how he has followed his unstable abbot over the will of God.

4.1.5 *STABILITAS LOCI* AND MANLY MONASTIC LIFE

"It is extremely perverse to profess to be obedient by disobeying the higher for the sake of the lower, or in other words by disobeying the commandments of God for the sake of the commandments of a man,"⁵⁴ Bernard states toward the beginning of the letter when condemning Adam's willingness to follow his abbot. Adam's actions have been perverse, against what is good and natural. Yet, the perversion of the hierarchy between men and God is only the first level of twistedness in Bernard's analysis. The second level is monastic hierarchy, on one hand between abbots, and between abbot and monk on the other:

⁵¹ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 100, 108, 118.

⁵² McLaughlin, "The Bishop as Bridegroom: Marital Imagery and Clerical Celibacy," pp. 209–214, 218, 229.

⁵³ Eng, "Embodying the Female Body Politic: Pro-Papal Reception of Ephesians 5 in the Later Middle Ages."

⁵⁴ Ep. VII:3, 34–1. Valde autem perversum est profiteri te oboedientem, in quo nosceris superiorem propter inferiorem, id est divinam propter humanam solvere oboedientiam. James 8:3.

I might indeed bring forward the abbot of Cîteaux as complaining that you have ignored him in the favor of your own abbot. And he would have every right to complain, for he is as much the superior of your abbot as a father is of his son, or the master of his disciple, or in fact an abbot of his monks.⁵⁵

The order of authority begins with God, by whose power the abbot is the representative of Christ. Thus, the confusion of this order that Bernard sees in Adam's false obedience touches on the very order of reality, at least in the monastic context. This is the core reason for the comparisons with the Fall looked at above, and it serves as a basis for Bernard's strong rhetoric when he says: "According to the judgement, not of myself, but of truth, your obedience has been worse than murder."⁵⁶ Seen in light of the theme of marriage and the first couple in Paradise, the hierarchy that Adam is twisting carries the ecclesiastical gendered hierarchy, the corporeal bride and the spiritual head, with the male being above the female in the hierarchy according to the unchanging, eternal nature of the spirit.⁵⁷ When Abbot Arnold is leading Adam away from righteous ways, he is presented as the fleshly Eve, whose voice Adam prioritizes over God's, confusing the hierarchy both between himself and God and metaphorically between husband and wife.

In the latter part of the letter, Bernard extends the discussion on monastic obedience and hierarchy to the other main principle of Benedictine monasticism, *stabilitas loci*: "Not to mention anything else there are two things handed down to us who dwell in monasteries for special observance. One is submission to the abbot, the other is stability in our monastery."⁵⁸ The monk was supposed to stay in the same house, under the care of the same abbot, or else he would have broken the family dynamics of the community.⁵⁹ According to Bernard, Adam has done precisely that; he is shown to have broken both central principles, obedience and stability.

As the father and head of the community, the abbot has a fundamental role in the following of *stabilitas loci*, as Bernard explains later in the letter:

We make our professions solemnly and according to the Rule
in the presence of the abbot, but only in his presence, not at

⁵⁵ Ep. VII:7, 19–22. Possem quidem abbatem Cisterciensem ad medium deducere, qui utique superior illo, quantum pater filio, quantum magister discipulo, quantum denique abbas sibi commisso monacho, merito se a vobis propter ipsum queritur fuisse contemptum. James 8:7.

⁵⁶ Ep. VII:12, 14–15, p.78. Quippe cuius obedientia non meo, sed Veritatis iudicio, peior inventa est homicidio. James 8:12.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 18.

⁵⁸ Ep. VII: 15, 29–31, p. 82. Siquidem, ut caetera taceam, duo praecipua nobis in monasterio conversantibus observanda traduntur; subjectio abbati, et stabilitas in loco [...] James 8:15.

⁵⁹ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 121.

his pleasure. The abbot witnesses but does not dictate the profession. He is there to help, not to hinder, its fulfillment. He is there to punish, not instigate, infringement.⁶⁰

The abbot is presented as an aid for the realization of the monk's calling to monastic life. This partly reflects the ceasing of the habit of giving children as oblates to monasteries, and how Bernard values the call to religious life as a personal choice, when the monk freely subjects himself to be guided by the abbot.⁶¹ Freely choosing the monastic way of life can be seen as a manly trait in the medieval context: women were usually much more dependent on their families and protectors when it came to decisions like becoming a religious. This tendency is seen in the *vitae* of male saints, who are often said to have had a sudden conversion followed by a firm decision to go to a monastery, while women's religious vocations are depicted as gradual processes that began already in childhood.⁶² Bernard himself is a good example of this kind of manly monastic conversion. In the letter he says in first person: "And I have so determined to follow my abbot always and everywhere, providing that he never by his teaching departs from the Rule which, in his presence, I have vowed and determined to keep."⁶³ Bernard sets the authority of the Rule above the abbot and, importantly from the viewpoint of free choice, his own willingness to follow the call from God above mere human obedience.

Bernard brings his own person into the discussion not just to show the quality of his own obedience, but to address the issue of monks that wanted to leave their own monasteries to join Clairvaux's community:

It seems at first that by receiving and keeping monks that come to me from another monasteries I act contrary to my own teaching. It could be asked why I receive monks who break their vow of stability and ignore the commands of their seniors by coming to me when I condemn those who leave their monasteries not only with permission of their abbot but even by his order.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ep. VII:17, 19–31, p. 84. *Idem notum est solemniter ac regulariter profiteri quemque in praesentia abbatis. In praesentia ergo tantum, non etiam ad nutum ipsius fit cuiusque professio. Testis proinde adhibetur abbas, non dictator professionis; adiutor, non fraudator adimpletionis; vindex, non auctor praevaricationis.* James 8:17.

⁶¹ The theme of oblates and Bernard's views on it are considered in more detail in the context of the letter to Robert. On the freedom to stay or to leave during the period of oblation, see RB LVIII.

⁶² Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 24, 286.

⁶³ Ep. VII:17, 15–17, p. 86. *Ego sic ipsum sequi decrevi semper et ubique magistrum, ut nequaquam a Regulae, quam teste ipso juravi et statui custodire, deviem magisterio.* James 8:17.

⁶⁴ Ep. VII:18, 19–24, p. 86. *Videor nempe contraria loqui rei quam facio. Quaeri etenim a me potest, si hos damno, qui abbatis sui non solum consensu, sed et iussu suum monasterium deseruerunt, quo*

Bernard admits that taking in *transitus* could raise questions about his own obedience to the Rule, which quite clearly states that an abbot should not take in a monk from another monastery known to him without a recommendation from his superior.⁶⁵ Again highlighting the authority of the Rule, Bernard explains:

Therefore I will say that I received them for the reason that I did not think they were wrong in leaving their monasteries, if they could not observe there the vows their lips have uttered, and coming to where they may be better able to render them to God who is everywhere, repairing the harm they have done by breaking their vow of stability by an exact observance of the others.⁶⁶

Bernard seems to be putting the personal aspect of monastic vows over the commitment to the community where they were said. In his interpretation, the Rule has an authority that in itself binds the conscience of a monk, to the extent that he is almost obliged to seek a house where he can follow it more fully. As seen above, Bernard tended to consider the Rule having *auctoritas*, authority that comes directly from God; this is a view which comes from the Rule itself.⁶⁷ It is the Rule and a person's vocation to seek God and eternal life by following it that are most important in Bernard's interpretation of monastic life; the community and its abbot are there only to support the fulfilling of this vocation.

In light of the letter to Adam, the claim that the 12th century was elemental for the growth of the importance of the individual in the subsequent centuries seems accurate. However, Bynum's view that the 12th century did not find the individual in the same isolated sense as we understand the concept nowadays but always in relation to a group identity⁶⁸ is challenged to some extent by Bernard's thoughts on *stabilitas loci* in the letter. According to the idea transmitted through the text, it is not a certain community per se that defines a monk's life, but his commitment to the call from God to follow the Rule. For Bernard, the Rule itself sets an ideal that is not necessarily existing yet and thus has to be actively sought after to be actually realized. It is not enough that one has committed himself to a monastic community. To be able to provide a seed bed for a monk's growth, the monastic house needs to realize the

pacto illos et recipiam, et retineam, qui de aliis monasteriis, fracto stabilitatis voto, et contempto seniorum imperio, ad nostrum Ordinem veniunt? James 8:18.

⁶⁵ About *transitus*, see RB LXI.

⁶⁶ Ep. VII:18, 28–33, p. 86. Hac ergo illos ratione suscepimus, quoniam non putamus esse malum, si vota labiorum suorum, quae in locis suis potuerunt quidem promittere, sed nequaquam persolvere; Deo qui ubique est, ubicumque poterunt, reddant; et solius ruptae stabilitatis damna reliquorum regularium praeceptorum integra observatione compensent. James 8:18.

⁶⁷ Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 95.

⁶⁸ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 106–109.

monastic ideal set by the Rule. If not, Bernard encourages one to find a house that does.

The letter reflects the central role of an individual's search for salvation through interior reform in the Cistercian vision of the Church, where the communal growth toward God starts from each person's heart.⁶⁹ This is why Bernard goes somewhat boldly against the more traditional definition of the *stabilitas loci* of a monk staying permanently in the house where he first entered religious life. While the Rule might leave some room for interpretation on the question of monks moving houses, it is quite clear already from the way Bernard has to defend himself in the letter that he was probably considered to be going against the normative reading of the precept on *transitus* by his contemporary monastics. Throughout the letter collection, Bernard's understanding of changing monasteries is similar to what is seen in the letter to Adam and, as seen in the case of Robert, for example, to want to go back to a more lax way of religious life considering giving up the fight.⁷⁰ In several points of other letters looked at above as well, for Bernard the Cistercian way was the most ideal for following the Rule. In fact, it was so ideal that a monk who comes to Bernard at Clairvaux under shady circumstances is considered to repair the harm they have done by breaking their vow of stability just by continuing to live their vocation in this healthier environment.

Bernard further states that "if there should be any who wish to change to the purity of the Rule but dare not for fear of scandal, or cannot on the account of some bodily weakness, I think they do not sin providing they live where they are soberly, honestly, and piously."⁷¹ What Bernard probably means by purity of the Rule is his own monastic tradition. Thus, he implies that a monk does not necessarily have to be a Cistercian to be a good monk, although that seems to be presented as the ideal.

The fact that he mentions bodily weakness as a potential reason for not leaving one's not-so-ideal community indicates awareness of the more austere level of asceticism that was supposedly lived in Clairvaux. In previous research it has been discussed whether the Cistercians were trying in their ascetic fervor to follow the Rule to the letter or just followed it in their own way, but what is central here is the ascetic undertone brought up by the mentioning of bodily weakness.⁷² Engh cites the letter to Robert as an example of the Cistercians' identity as non-effeminate and how the austerity of their asceticism is presented as manly as a contrast to the feminine softness of other groups of

⁶⁹ Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 108, 237–238.

⁷⁰ Holdsworth, "Bernard as a Father Abbot," p. 188.

⁷¹ Ep. VII:19. Quibus exceptis, si quis caeterorum ad Regulae cupiat transire puritatem, sed propter scandalum non audeat, aut certe etiam ob certam corporis infirmitatem; puto quia non peccat, dum tamen o104D in suo studeat loco sobrie, et juste, et pie conversari. James 8:19.

⁷² Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 44–45; Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 97.

men, like the Cluniacs.⁷³ The same discussion on weakness, usually called feminine softness, seems to be in the background of the consideration of the *transitus* question in the letter to Adam. This leads one to consider whether Bernard is guiding the reader to see the Cistercian way, the Benedictine ideal to pursue, as pronouncedly manly.

When it comes to ascetic practices, they are quite clearly presented as manly elsewhere in the letters (for example, in the letter to Robert looked at above). On the surface, Bernard seems to be painting the monastic life at Clairvaux as manly, but this is the same level of meaning as the weakness of the flesh, and as has been demonstrated in the cases of Fulk and Robert, the hairy manliness of Esau or the austere life of John the Baptist can be weak in a masculine way. In fact, the monk Adam is also shown as the first man Adam, who gets persuaded by Eve/Abbot Arnold, like Robert who gets compared to the *protoplastum* and a whole host of manly Old Testament patriarchs who fell for a woman in the wrong way.

The content in the letter to Adam regarding *stabilitas loci* and *transitus* reveals another level of meaning in the fabric of gendered thought. There are feeble ones, for whom it is better to follow the *stabilitas loci* in its classical meaning and stay in their community. Bodily weakness has feminine connotations, but so does the instability caused by the decision of a monk to go to a house where the Rule is lived in an ascetic and militant manly pureness. As Bynum suggests in *Jesus as Mother*, motherhood being applied to an abbot was an outcome of the anxiety caused by the multifaceted responsibility that the abbot had for his monks. Femaleness thus becomes a marker for the unstable and shaky authority of the anxious father.⁷⁴ In the letter to Adam, the following of *stabilitas loci* is both manly for the sake of being unswerving and womanly if followed because of bodily weakness. The unstableness caused by a monk following his conscience in staying faithful to his vows and breaking the rule of stability also takes on an undertone of femininity, not as fleshly weakness but as obedience to the authority of the Rule that has God as its author.⁷⁵ What one could be looking at here is the blurred figure of the bridal monk, who is strong as a man and freely unstable as a woman at the same time. The monk who wants to follow the Rule purely according to Bernardian standards is like the bride who is searching for her loved one and an ascetic *miles Christi*.

Adam's actions are perverted and his obedience worse than murder because the fine balance of the layers of the image of the bridal soldier of Christ is shuffled and reordered. Adam does not reflect the meaning of the gendered

⁷³ Eng, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 154–158. The symbolic meaning of womanhood in terms of instability and unpredictability has been brought up in the field of psychology, especially in the Jungian reading of human mythologies. See, for example, Peterson, *Maps of Meaning*, pp. 148–164.

⁷⁵ On the authority of the Rule, see, for example, Chapman, *Sacred Authority and Temporal Power in the Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux*.

structure of the Church and the monastic community anymore. He has broken the marriage of the first man and Eve, which is brought up right before the accusation of perverse obedience. Thus, the whole discussion on Adam's obedience toward Abbot Arnold is filtered through the first breakage of the human community and the emergence of dysfunctional family ties in the first marital feud between a man and a woman.⁷⁶ Adam has perverted the *ordinatio caritatis*, the fundamentally rightful order of things: God first, then man. By obeying a man before God, Adam has renounced the marriage of humanity and divinity in Christ that he is supposed to reflect and turned into a perverse monster; this is not fully illuminated as in the letter to Suger but hinted at through the choice of the word *perversus*. The monastic ideal that Bernard presents for the runaway monk is thus not so much manly as it is manly and womanly in the right order; the right order fluctuates between manly stability and the new, seemingly unstable order of the Kingdom of God, where the Bride becomes the first.

⁷⁶ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 18. Engh discusses how the theme of Adam and Eve carries connotations of a hierarchical gender binary.

5 WHAT ARE MONASTIC MEN MADE OF? CONCLUSIONS ON THE ANATOMY OF A CLOISTERED MAN

It will be perhaps most convenient to look back at the gendered imagery discussed in this study first from the viewpoint of the figure of the abbot and the monk, following the presentation of analysis in the main chapters. I will first discuss the kind of gendered imagery applied to abbots and monks in the letters and then evaluate the overall significance of Bernard's gendered imagery in the wider context of 12th-century thought and the light of earlier research on his works.

While many gendered concepts and figures are applied to both abbots and monks, headship, fatherhood and the authority connected to these are mostly used for an abbot. Fatherhood gives the abbot pronouncedly manly undertones, especially when read in the light of interpreting headship as fathering, that is, generating new beings. This might seem as a given, since the abbot by definition is a representative of Christ, who carries connotations of maleness in relation to his bridal Church-body and uses His title and the authority given by God the Father as defined in the second chapter of the Rule. However, in the final analysis Bernard's abbot is more of a mother, as stated by many a previous study. It is good to remember here that in general Bernard was cautious in applying the position of bridegroom to ecclesiastical heads, as seen above.¹ In the letters looked at in this study, the headship of a monastic leader is brought up through comparisons to Old Testament patriarchs and military leaders. Still, presenting the abbot as a father is not done as unreservedly as it is with a mother. The fatherhood of the abbot is often accompanied by a refusal or negation, like in the letter to Rainald, which is then followed by a shift to motherhood, like in the letter to Robert. The abbot is thus not unambiguously the father or man of the family as the head but overall resembles more the figure of the mother of the prodigal son (as seen in the letter to Fulk). For Bernard, the abbot does hold Christ's place in the community, but since Christ—especially seen from the viewpoint of the concept of *Totus Christus*—is a female-mother as well as the male-head, so is the abbot as Christ's representative.

A figure specifically connected to manhood is the Old Testament patriarch. The patriarchs are used both for abbots and monks, but in different ways. The abbot is shown as a patriarch when he is depicted as the head of his monks; for example, in the letter to Guy, Moses faces God while representing his people. Headship and authority as manhood are highlighted in the image of the abbot as a patriarch. In the case of monks, the patriarchs are used as

¹ See pt. I, ch. 2, "The Challenge of Authority."

examples of chosen men of God who stumble on their own manliness. Applied to a monk, the patriarch takes on connotations of weak manliness, which is depicted as a lack of self control in matters of food and wanting women. In the monk-patriarch, we meet a man who is weak because of his manliness. This manliness seems to be on another level than the fatherly headship of the abbot-patriarch. It exists on the level of corporeal manliness and a man's body, while the manhood of the patriarchal head is more on the same level of meaning as the motherhood of the abbot; thus, it is abstracted to reveal an ideal that does not necessarily become materialized as someone who would fulfill it in his person.

Closely connected to the patriarchs are the soldier and the bride, who go hand in hand in the web of meanings of the letters. It might seem at first that the bride and the soldier are each other's opposites. They form the ideal presented for a monk together, however. This is because of the inclinations of the fabric of gendered meanings that are present in Scripture and further strengthened by Bernard. This is shown most clearly in the letter to Robert, where Bernard uses the figure of Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion, in the context of addressing the monk as a *miles Christi*. The figure of the soldier is the reverse of the ideal monk, with the bride being on the more obvious side, representing intimate union with Christ the Bridegroom. On the surface the monk is an Esau, a hairy soldier of Christ, but under the surface-layer of the comparatively shallow manliness of flesh one finds the fierce daughter of Zion, the bride of the Song of Songs, who is like a wall and as fearsome as an army arrayed for battle. The fleshliness of the soldier, markedly manly, is conquered by the figure of the militant and strong daughter of Zion, who seems to be growing from superficially strong manly flesh into the glorious womanhood of the bride, but in whom neither side is erased by the other. She seems to be the Virgin Mary in disguise, the woman who received the same greeting as the Old Testament women Judith and Yael, who killed their enemy with a blow to the head.²

The bride is tightly connected to flesh, the Body of Christ and the Incarnation, and following these, the resurrection of the body and the perfect state of human corporality. The figure of the bride is seen most visibly in the letter to Guy, the prior of Grande Chartreuse. A scene from the Song is quoted to portray Guy's closeness to Christ as a contemplative religious. He is shown to represent both the Head and the Body, probably reflecting an understanding of Augustine's concept of *totus Christus*, because he is a monastic head as well as a monk. The connection of flesh and womanhood in the ecclesiological understanding of the monastic community thus becomes clearer when it is paired with the patriarchal headship of a monastic leader.

Having flesh means having a body. In the case of the bride, this means a female body that can become pregnant, and has breasts and can lactate. A member of the Body of Christ as the bride is a reflection of the mother; she has

² See pt. II, ch. 2, "Surge *miles Christi*—Probing Manliness."

the potential to be one but is not yet. The mother herself is Caritas, Wisdom, and, for Bernard, Christ whose human nature is marked feminine and has woman as its source. She is the mother who provides sweet breast milk that refers to the Eucharist, if not directly then inevitably so through the centrality of Christ's flesh and humanity in Bernard's thought in the letters. The mother turns her children into her likeness through the nourishment that flows from her body, as seen in the letter to Suger. From a modern viewpoint, the idea of a breastfeeding mother-Christ or the abbot-mother using His authority quite counterintuitively refers to blood and sacrifice, in a word, the cross of Christ, which for Bernard is at the center of the image of *caritas*. The sacrifice of the cross is connected to Christ the bridegroom as the head of his body, the Church-bride, and thus it also holds connotations of manhood and fleshliness in a manly meaning. Therefore, Suger is depicted as a self-sacrificing military captain and lauded for his newly recovered manly asceticism, which is not unambiguously risk-free from the viewpoint of Suger's weak, worldly manliness: the soldier with his manly mortified flesh is easily turned into a monster.

The mother—whether in the form of Caritas, Wisdom, Christ or the abbot—is a sign of intrinsic unity, ultimately the unity of the Holy Trinity that is reflected in the marriage of the bride-body-Church and bridegroom-head-Christ. This unity is supposed to be lived in monastic houses, where Mother Caritas is ideally received as a rightly ordered and lived virtue of charity. Concretely, the unity that Bernard envisions through the figure of a mother is obedience—not the false obedience of the monk Adam, but the true obedience to the Rule that a monastic has vowed before God to follow. If a monk leaves his community for the wrong reason, like Bernard describes the situation of Abbot Arnold and his entourage of monks, he leaves the mother, wounds her and refuses her unity-fortifying nourishment. However, if a monk leaves for the right reason, out of obedience to his vows and the authority of the Rule, he paradoxically strengthens his relationship with the mother of unity, even if at first glance the monk would appear to be breaking *stabilitas loci*. A correctly unstable monk seems to be more of a bride, who is unstable in a feminine way, while a monk who stays in his not-so-ideal community for the sake of bodily weakness shares in the manhood of Esau, whose hairy flesh was weak when it was put under the test of self-restraint. Esau chose to satiate his hunger rather than hold on to his status as firstborn and yield to physical comfort despite being strong and manly. The ideal monk is instead a bridal soldier who is manly in his womanly instability.

While the ideal monk of Bernard might seem like a mixture of man and woman on a hermeneutic level, what we are probably looking at is a figure that contains manly and womanly on separate layers and in a certain order that is not mixed. As a contrast to this rightly ordered figure there is the perverted monster, in which things are either mixed or in the wrong order. The monster is worldly, effeminate and manly in the wrong ways, a mixture that turns into an indeterminate grey. The figure of the monster is applied to Fulk's uncle, the

clerical seneschal Stephen and the monk Adam. What unites them all is their perverted order of priority in relation to God: they would rather put man first than God. They make the rules for themselves and seek fulfillment in material goods and conforming to other people. The monster lies belching in its cups, vomits and wears soft and colorful clothes. It is the anti-bride and eventually the anti-mother, a *muliercula* instead of a true woman. While Bernard otherwise manages to contrast and isolate the monster from the ideal monk, a hole is left between the bridal soldier and his/her counterpart in the figure of the man of weak flesh, like Esau, David or Solomon. He is not the same thing as the bride's flesh that is recoded into the reality of Christ's incarnated and resurrected flesh. The monster's body has reverted to ownership of the world and has thus become worldly. It does not want to transform into the likeness of the Body of Christ through the nourishment He offers but is left to reflect the distorted order of the fallen world.

* * *

In light of earlier research on Bernard's gendered thought and the currents in 12th-century theology, what does all the above mean? Line Engh states in her study on Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*: "Salvation is envisioned as participation in divine masculinized transcendence."³ Based on the gendered theology in the letters, this is only half of the picture. The road to salvation that the letters propose is equally participation in the divinized feminine flesh of the incarnated Christ. Masculinized transcendence and divinized feminine flesh both need to be present simultaneously in the right order and without mixing in the ideal monk aiming at eternity with God. The reason behind Engh's argument on womanhood eventually getting absorbed and vanishing in a perfected person in the Bernardian mindset, by adopting and performing womanhood and then rejecting it for good, is probably her focus on the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. In the letter collection, however, the feminine seems to remain, and quite essentially so: female flesh is adopted and will be kept forever in the reality of the resurrection that is enabled by the Incarnation of Christ.

The letters show a slightly clearer connection between womanhood and human corporality as a neutral aspect of human nature than Caroline Walker Bynum has found in Bernard's and other male authors' works. It seems that in the letters Bernard comes closer to what Bynum has considered to be the stance of religious women rather than men in her article *And Woman His Humanity*: womanhood marks more physical human nature than weakness or inferiority and the use of gendered expressions is more fluid than dichotomous.⁴ Bernard is dichotomous in his treatment of the gender binary

³ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 401.

⁴ Bynum, "...And Woman His Humanity," p. 175.

and thus fits Bynum's analysis of him and other male authors but is not fixed to this way of presenting womanhood in relation to manhood. The best example of this is the figure of the bride, especially seen in the light of the numerous variants of womanhood found in the letters.

One reason why the gendered composition of the plan of salvation for the monastic man seems to differ between the letters and the *Sermons of the Song of Songs* for example, at least in light of Engh's analysis, may be that possibly different textual and theological traditions influenced the works. The *Sermons on the Song of Songs* had Origen's widely read commentary as one of its main sources of influence. As Engh shows, Bernard even directly paraphrases Origen's commentary in the *Sermons*. This is not surprising, considering that the Cistercians seem to have had a special interest in Origen's work despite his unorthodox status; they placed his texts among the most important in their libraries, right next to Scripture and the works of Augustine.⁵ When it comes to the relationship between womanhood and manhood, Origen leaned quite heavily on the Platonic view of womanhood being a sign of the imperfect division of humanity.⁶

Also, the influence of Aristotle's views on gender as a continuum where the woman is on the worse end of the spectrum cannot be completely ruled out. Aristotle most likely had an influence on Origen's thought, even though direct quotations (especially on the matter of gendered humanity) are hardly to be found in Origen.⁷ As seen at many other points, a lack of direct references to a particular author or tradition does not necessarily mean absence of influence. Compared to Engh's findings on the Origen-inspired *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, the letter collection seems to be influenced more by a strand of Augustine's thought, where corporeal womanhood is not seen as a flaw in humanity on the level of salvation and resurrection, but created as equal to manhood before the Fall and thus remaining in the eternity of Heaven through the resurrection of the body.⁸ It needs to be clarified here that, as stated already above, Bernard seems to be influenced by this specific strand of Augustine's thought on the human body; in other points on the body's meaning, however, Bernard takes even contrary positions to Augustine.⁹

In his textual imagery, Bernard often goes with the flow of previous Christian authors who were relevant for the content and situation under

⁵ Cvetković, *Seeking the Face of God*, pp. 35, 37.

⁶ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 18, 27–28. See pt. II, ch. 2, “*Surge miles Christi*—Probing Manliness.”

⁷ Limone, “Origen's Explicit References to Aristotle and the Peripateticians,” pp. 309–404.

⁸ Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, p. 218. On Augustine's influence in Bernard, see Cvetković, *Seeking the Face of God*, pp. 38, 117. On p. 117, Cvetković states: “The direct quotations deriving from Augustine are scarce indeed, but this does not mean that Bernard was not directly acquainted with the works of his predecessor either through solidary study or through aural exposure to his texts during the liturgical office.”

⁹ See ch I, pt 1, “The Bride—The Woman.”

consideration, which results in multiple gendered structures of meaning existing simultaneously in his letters and his textual heritage in general. Bernard rarely aims to consciously construct a certain system of gendered meanings in the letters, in the sense that he primarily gives a definition to the meaning of manhood or womanhood as intended for a specific instance. He may do this in the process of trying to create an impact on the reader and while using gendered topoi of Christian heritage. In his usage of gendered imagery, he focuses on influencing the readers' interior world in a way that would result in an intended visual or sensual experience, which then would direct the reader to the path desired by Bernard. On the surface this can be read as the use of rhetorical devices, but the real influence of the gendered imagery lies deeper, in its hermeneutic meaning. On this profound level, Bernard does not seem to have an aim of erasing the hermeneutic significance of womanhood in his view of salvation, for example. In other words, he crafts the gendered imagery of the letters in context; it is built around the situation that the letter concerns, not the other way round. The context of the letters, the context around which the gendered imagery is coiled, is the ideal monastic life that Bernard tries to create through them.

Thus, while not having a project of shifting gendered meanings first in mind, at times Bernard ends up transmitting gendered theological views that seem undecided but have been chosen for him by the previous authors he relies on. At times, this results in self-contradicting views within the letter collection itself, not even to mention between his different works. As shown above, Augustine and Origen, for example, have conflicting views on the sexed body and its meaning, and most probably Bernard had carefully studied and was highly influenced by both. Adding in other factors that influenced Bernardian thought, one ends up with quite an ideological mix. Consequently, Bernard introduces the reader to the ideal figures of the mother and the bride but also to women of worldly flesh who are likely based on the idea of woman as an inferior human. Similarly, there is the transcendental, spiritual father figure, but also the soldier and the patriarch shown to be weak because of their manliness and having a man's body. Womanhood does not solely stand for worldliness or fleshliness in the negative sense, and manhood does not signify only the goodness of spiritual heights: womanhood and manhood change places frequently between these positions in the letters without a definite outcome or a fixed position in the reversals of the gender binary.

The influence of Augustine on Bernard's thought is likely one of the reasons for the conflicting and indecisive meanings for man and woman that one finds in the letters. As Prudence Allen shows in her analysis on the concept of woman in Augustine, he has at least three theories, or what Allen calls 'sex identities' in his works. These are complementary explanations, and each have their purpose in context but are still the outcome of conflicting traditions of thought simultaneously at work in Augustine. In *City of God* (book 12, ch.17), he states that a woman's sex is not a blemish but part of her nature, because man and woman have been created equal; elsewhere he explains how woman

does not reflect the image of God like man, because she stands for the lower parts of the mind. He also elaborates on how both men and women have to transcend the physical aspects of their manhood or womanhood to achieve perfection, thus approaching the Platonic view that Allen calls “sex unity,” which results in an androgyne ideal for the human person. Thus, in Augustine, on the level of eternal bodily existence in Heaven, man and woman are equal and complementary, but in the world they are either to be transcended as superior spiritual manliness, the androgyne, or stuck in a polarized position.¹⁰

The traces of Augustinian diversity are visible in Bernard’s letters in the highly mutable roles that man and woman take in the making of an ideal monastic man. There seems to be complementarity on the level of the resurrected body in the new reality of the Kingdom of God, but womanhood is also addressed as profoundly weak and undesirable in the softness, vanity and sensuality of the *muliercula*. This is perhaps what Line Engh has observed in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, where it seems that womanhood is assumed and performed only to be finally rejected for good. From this point of view, even the Bride cannot get rid of the weak woman in the final analysis. Then again, in the letters there seems to be a similar level of weak man’s flesh that is not shown to be the weak fleshliness of Eve, but the weakness of Adam, a failed father or soldier. Also, woman is shown as an equivalent of the spiritual Father in the figure of Caritas or the mother of the prodigal son, namely, a mother who is *creatrix et gubernatrix* (as articulated in the letter to Guy).

This is where Bernard takes a clear distance from Augustine’s theological heritage, either decidedly or more subconsciously guided by creative rumination on Scripture and the Christian tradition. Augustine consciously avoided attributing any femaleness to God for fear of resemblance with pagan deities and in the process losing God’s transcendent oneness, which is so essential to Christian dogma. The rejection of all female in God, combined with the tendency to polarize the relationship between man and woman on the level of the temporal world, results in what can be observed also in Bernard as calling men who are acting in a non-ideal manner effeminate.¹¹ Despite being theologically more flesh-embracing and giving more significance to womanhood in his theological anthropology than Origen, for example, Augustine and many other Christian authors were unable to see divine perfection in womanhood. The influence of Platonic monism on Christian thought made it very difficult to include womanhood in the image of God, which in practice led to the absorption of woman and truly feminine flesh observed by Engh in *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. Platonic thought pushed Christian thinkers to see the creation of woman as a split in the perfect oneness of Adam, and thus a fracture in the image of God, which would have to be repaired in a perfected person. Consequently, equality of man and woman could only be shown as the *virago* type of androgyne figures. On the other

¹⁰ Allen, pp. 218–22.

¹¹ Allen, pp. 223, 225.

hand, belief in the Incarnation of God through a woman challenged the perfect unity of maleness of the Platonic philosophical tradition. Augustine thus came to also highlight the goodness of flesh and the woman's meaning as the source of the flesh, creating the self-contradictory whole of gendered thought observed by Allen.¹²

Against this background, Bernard's letters represent a fresh take on the meaning of manhood and womanhood. Rather than only following the femininity-fading theological thought of authoritative authors like Origen (and, to some extent, also Augustine), he grabs onto the flesh-positive notes of the Christian tradition and develops them by going with the flow of the feminine that marked 12th-century religious thought, being in dialogue with the situation at hand. As shown above in the case of the letter to Fulk, the letters have feminine figures in them that are defined as "goddesses" by Barbara Newman, who sees the religious culture of the Middle Ages as an inclusive monotheism, which is manifested exactly in the female figures that are likened to God.¹³ While at points Bernard leans more on the tradition of male perfection, he quite often also shows the reader the insecure father or the weak manly man and at the same time strengthens womanhood's positive and transcendental connotations through goddess-like figures and affirmation of the profoundly feminine position of the Bride.

In the letters, Bernard seems not to be consciously constructing a certain system of significance through the gendered imagery he uses, one that would aim at erasing womanhood and creating a world without women, as, for example, Engh suggests with good reason based on the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.¹⁴ As Engh states, it is difficult to affirm or disclaim Bernard as a practical misogynist on the basis of analysis of the gendered imagery in his texts.¹⁵ From a historical point of view, Berman has suggested that Bernard's reputation as a misogynist is a creation of his successors at Clairvaux in an effort to present a certain image of Clairvaux's relationship with women's communities, making the view that Bernard disapproved of women's presence unfounded on a more practical level.¹⁶ As Engh explains, the female as a trope for the male is "a rhetorical signifier appropriated by a man" and is thus "devoid of implications of real women," due to which he can take on femaleness the way he does also in the letters. While this is true, woman cannot be taken solely as a relational marker that is "not an ontological or universal category" and that ends up vanishing while becoming an androgyne, essentially a man, who is connected to an ontology unlike woman, as Engh suggests.¹⁷ As with marital imagery and marriage as a religious allegory in

¹² Miller, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church*, pp. 29, 32, 39.

¹³ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 317–28.

¹⁴ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, pp. 399–408.

¹⁵ Engh, p. 406.

¹⁶ Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution*, pp. 126–27.

¹⁷ Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, p. 406.

medieval thought, human gendered reality is necessarily behind the rhetorical use of gendered imagery;¹⁸ woman as a trope for the monk has its roots in the existence and the essence of actual women.

In addition to the reasons noted by Bynum, Krahmer, B. Newman and Engh, what can be seen to peek through Bernard's way of applying womanhood to an ideal monk and using female imagery for God is the possible influence of a contemporary view of the relationship between womanhood and manhood, which Prudence Allen has termed "sex complementarity." She argues that Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th-century female visionary and a contemporary of Bernard, was the first to introduce a genuinely complementary and equal view of womanhood and manhood in the intellectual framework of Christianity. Allen defines the gender system she finds in Hildegard's works: "Sex complementarity considers the opposition of male and female as a positive dynamic of equals in interaction, rather than as a relation of superior to inferior. The male and female components of the interaction are differentiated, but have equal value and worth." Hildegard's sex complementarity is rooted in her views of manhood and womanhood that rose from observations of the human body and its functions. According to Hildegard, an ideal person with a good character has both male and female features in a balanced manner, reflecting an understanding of the Aristotelian medical view of the human body being made up of the four elements marked as male or female in different proportions, but changed to fit her equal and complementary view of the sexes. Likewise, on the level of the soul, a man was supposed to develop female characteristics and a woman male characteristics to perfect themselves. This was based on Hildegard's notion of womanhood and manhood reflecting God equally. Summarizing her interpretation of Hildegard's view of the relationship of womanhood and manhood, Allen concludes: "A wholly integrated woman or man would have both aspects of their nature developed."¹⁹

Allen contextualizes Hildegard's views as being inspired and developed in the twin monastery where she spent the first part of her monastic life and where men and women shared the premises.²⁰ The same cannot be said of Bernard, for in his case the experience of women can be supposed to have come from his years before entering the monastery. Still, a common experience of the world that enabled the use of marital imagery in monastic spirituality could have served as a basis for a complementary view of manhood and womanhood rooted in real-life observations and formed into a spiritual model for becoming a holy man in a monastery. Theologically, the 12th-century emphasis on the Incarnation and humanity of Christ is an ideal setting for incorporating spiritual meanings into the gendered human body that

¹⁸ D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 10, 64–65, 72.

¹⁹ Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, pp. 79, 294–298. On complementarity in Hildegard's thought, see also Bynum, ". . . And Woman His Humanity," p. 172.

²⁰ Allen, p. 292.

transcend their immediate implications. In the letters, Christ with His human body serves as a point of access—sometimes hidden from view—to the meaning of human corporality and its gendered aspects in the monastic man.

While Bernard's gendered thought in the letter collection cannot be directly equated to Allen's view of Hildegard of Bingen, it is valid to suppose some similarity in thought between the two 12th century religious, taking into account that to a large degree Bernard and Hildegard shared the same intellectual and spiritual surroundings, both temporally and theologically.²¹ Allen calls the 12th century the time before what she names "the Aristotelian revolution," meaning that Hildegard—and Bernard—lived before the works of Aristotle were reintroduced and became widely used in European intellectual life. Allen defines Aristotle as a representative of the "sex polarity" view, where man and woman are contrary to each other, with woman being the negative counterpart, an imperfect man.²² The Aristotelian model certainly had an indirect influence on 12th-century views of the male and female human body and its functions, but what Allen calls a revolution had not yet made Aristotle the philosophical touchstone he would be in the decades to come. Thus, when it comes to a lack of direct access to Aristotelian views, in theory Bernard was as free as Hildegard to explore the possibilities of a complementary view of manhood and womanhood. He probably just did not do so as consciously as she did, at least according to Allen's analysis of Hildegard's gendered views being quite decidedly constructed.

Still, there are indications of a complementary understanding of womanhood and manhood also manifesting itself elsewhere than the letters in Bernard's texts dated to the beginning of his abbacy. Brian Patrick McGuire has noted that Bernard was among the first to give any personal or affective role to Joseph as Jesus' foster father. In the second homily in the *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary*, dated to 1119 or 1120 by Christopher Holdsworth, Bernard describes Joseph hugging and kissing the child Jesus. Bringing up Joseph as a father was not the norm in the 12th century—quite the contrary, as McGuire points out.²³ It could be argued that the affective presence of Joseph in Bernard's mindset indicates an understanding of the complementary role of a father together with the Virgin Mary in parenting Jesus, reflecting a similar view of the meaning of gendered humanity in relation to God as Hildegard's, which is connected to lived and corporeal manhood and womanhood.

Even though Joseph is a biblical figure, he is a concrete male literary character, not an abstracted figure that could be read symbolically: he was supposed in 12th-century thought to have actually existed during Jesus' early

²¹ Later in life, Bernard was possibly directly familiar with Hildegard's works to some extent; he has been portrayed to have been part of the process that led to the ecclesiastical approval of her visionary status. See, for example, Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, pp. 5–9; Bowies and Davies, *Hildegard of Bingen*, pp. 8, 11.

²² Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, pp. 89–94, 315.

²³ McGuire, "Bernard's Life and Works," pp. 32–33. McGuire refers to SBO 4, p. 34.

life. Mentioning Joseph as a loving father to Jesus shows that Bernard was able to—and did—bring his gendered imagery to the level of an unabstracted relationship in a human family with a history. Reynolds has argued that when it comes to the symbolic use of marital life in the context of medieval monastic texts, it is often analogical to the extent that it is disconnected from the plain sense of the text, meaning actual lived married life.²⁴ This may be the case with bridal imagery, as in the letter to Guy or the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, but not with all gendered imagery that is connected to the idea of a marital union. This is shown in the letters (in the description of monastic obedience in the case of Arnold and Adam, for example), where Bernard gives a narrative description of the process of committing oneself to an actual marriage when making an analogical comparison to a monastic life of obedience.

Bynum's analysis of Bernard's mental space as a coexistence of differentiated opposites that do not melt into a one-colored *mixtio* but remain black and white, side by side, both challenges and affirms interpreting Bernard as a representative of sex complementarity.²⁵ On one hand, Bernard seems to polarize any given dichotomy, and in this sense is comparable to Aristotle's view of man and woman; on the other, there is a coexistence of opposites, making a dialogue where either side of the dichotomy keeps the other alive. These features, combined with Bernard's non-systematic and almost anti-scholastic style as a thinker, results in the multifaceted meanings given to man and woman in the letters.²⁶ Much like his use of terms concerning love, he does not use gendered figures or concepts in a systematic or consistent way, where he would restrict himself to one meaning per concept. *Amor* could mean human or divine love and *cupiditas* is used in the same breath to refer to human desire in a positive meaning as a pathway to loving God.²⁷ Similarly, manhood can mean both hardness of heart and weakness, as well as strength and ideal asceticism; respectively, womanhood can stand for fleshliness and vanity, but also all-encompassing *caritas* and ideal obedience. These meanings, which seem opposite, do not negate each other's existence in the gendered fabric of thought in Bernard's letters.

Manhood is usually not abstracted to the same deifying extent as womanhood in Bernard's or other medieval authors' texts.²⁸ This seems to also be the case in the letters, as seen in the figures of Caritas and Wisdom. Manhood appears to be more attached to actions and qualities that are

²⁴ Reynolds, "Conjugal and Nuptial Symbolism in Medieval Christian Thought," pp. 63–64. It is important to note that Reynolds differentiates between conjugal and nuptial symbolism in his article. Here it is called marital imagery as a form of gendered imagery.

²⁵ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 161–62.

²⁶ On Bernard's style of thought, see, for example, Bruun, *Parables*, p. 1. Bruun suggests that in the Parables, Bernard's thought both follows certain patterns set by previous authors and evades systemization.

²⁷ M. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 17.

²⁸ B. Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, pp. 36–37. See pt. II, ch. 1, *Sume arma, resume vires*.

considered manly, and thus it remains on the level of human flesh in a different way than the female figures applied to the ideal monk. The abstracted woman is connected to the flesh, not in the same sense as the male figure of the soldier or the patriarch, but through the Incarnation of Christ. The core meaning of womanhood can be abstracted because of what the incarnated and resurrected Body of Christ represents: bodily life for eternity after the resurrection. This mode of being is the ideal presented for the religious man. It is abstracted to the extent that it is almost unattainable but attached to flesh through manliness.

There is a track of thought in the letter collection that leads to a monastic ideal that adopts and holds on to womanhood as well as manhood. The weak, negative womanhood that surfaces at points is the distorted femininity of the *muliercula*. She has a male counterpart: the hairy soldier whose actions are dictated by his stomach and heated lust. The true woman, who constitutes part of the ideal set before the monastic man, is connected to the Incarnation and to woman as the source of flesh of the God-man Christ. The flesh and blood of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the reorganized reality of human flesh are handed to the choir of monks through a woman's body. This logic is behind the figure of the bridal monk, invited to feminine surrender and obedience. On the manly side of things, the monk is a soldier of Christ, strong, resilient and hardworking. But the soldier is also the link between an ideal monk and the monstrous hybrid; the soldier needs to fight to be a man in the positive sense. The bridal side of the monk, while taking part in the militaristic side the same way the soldier takes part in the bride, quite peacefully enjoys Christ's embrace and carries the mother's light burden like Mary.²⁹ While being abstracted, unlike manhood that seems to live on the energy from the struggle to be a man, womanhood is also connected to a real woman, the mother of the incarnated Christ. Thus, while manhood as a spiritual concept is more dependent on men in the world and consequently has to be struggled for in a concrete manner more than womanhood, the abstracted goddess could not exist without the idea of Christ being concretely born out of a woman.

The monastic ideal that Bernard visualizes in gendered imagery in the letters is the figure of Caritas. Martha G. Newman has read the Cistercian concept of *caritas* as containing both transcendent and ethical aspects of Christianity, including both human contact with the divine and ideal relations between people; it is abstracted and personified to the extent that it exists separately from a human agent.³⁰ In the letter to Guy, for example, Bernard identifies Caritas as God, the inner unity of the Trinity.³¹ The ideal for the monastic man is to become God-like, and this striving toward likeness with God is depicted more frequently through womanhood than manhood. This is because of the strong feminine connotations of human flesh in Bernard's

²⁹ See pt. I, ch. 2, Not a Father.

³⁰ M. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, p. 17.

³¹ See pt. I, ch. 1, Guy and Caritas.

mentality: Christ became flesh through a woman—in other words, He was born like any other person—and Christ in His human flesh is the path to salvation for a monk.

Like *caritas*, the monastic ideal is personified yet abstract and not necessarily perfectly realized in anyone. The figure of the ideal monastic man visualizes the reality of the resurrection of the body, which in Bernard's thought is depicted through anything else than womanhood only with difficulty. This is partly because of the patristic theological and philosophical tradition that considers mundane, fleshly and corporeal humanity as female. Belief in the Incarnation and the resurrection change the meaning of imperfect and changing corporality in relation to the supernatural and immutable, perfect God into a redemptive affirmation of fleshliness and womanhood, as Allen has shown. In the letters, Bernard catches on to the Incarnation-through-woman side of the theological tradition he was familiar with and does not especially highlight the meaning of manhood as transcendence and separation from the world. This results in the figures used to express the monastic ideal having manliness and femininity simultaneously, forming a differentiated unity of two. These figures enable the mystery of the marital union of humanity and divinity in Christ to be made visible, the unity of Christ-head and Church-body, for the monk to realize it in his life as a monastic man.

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