

Lecture 25- On Loving God: Medieval Monasticism

You can say anything you like about world history, anything that might enter the head of a man with the most disordered imagination. One thing, though, you cannot possibly say about it: you cannot say that it is sensible.

Dostoevsky, Notes from the Underground

Life has an orientation, a final end toward which everything moves. I realize, however, that I can say this only because I am a Christian...If I step outside this faith, the human adventure has no orientation of its own. It is not true that history as such has meaning...Human history is in fact a tale told by an idiot.

Jacques Ellul, What I Believe

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself.

Luke 10:27

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity—Chapters 26, (pp. 238-242) 29, (pp. 277-286) and 31 (pp. 301-307)

Key Terms

Benedictines, Cluniac order, Cistercian order, Franciscans, Dominicans

Objectives

- Identify the monastic orders of the period and outline the differences between each
- Sketch the major events in the lives of Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Francis of Assisi

Class Prayer

“O Lord, come quickly and reign on Thy throne, for now often something rises up within me, and tries to take possession of Thy throne; pride, covetousness, uncleanness, and sloth want to be my kings; and then evil-speaking, anger, hatred, and the whole train of vices join with me in warring against myself, and try to reign over me. I resist them, I cry out against them, and say, ‘I have no other king than Christ.’ O King of Peace, come and reign in me, for I will have no king but Thee! Amen.”

Bernard of Clairvaux

On Loving God: Medieval Monasticism**I. The Benedictines****A. “The Benedictine centuries”: 7th through 10th**

1. Each monastery a self-governing unit under the direction of its own abbot
2. Centralized orders arose in the west (but not in the east) during the 10th and 11th centuries
3. Shift (in the west) from groups of laymen (and women) to colleges of priests (with second and third orders for women and laymen)

B. The three main duties

1. Prayer and _____ (3 to 4 hours)
2. _____ reading (4 to 5 hours)
3. _____ (6 to 7 hours)

Brother Cadfael. Who is Brother Cadfael? To most of us, he’s a Benedictine monk of the Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul; gardener, apothecary, and sleuth. He was born in

1080, participated in the First Crusade, and retired to a medieval town on the Welsh border to grow herbs and to solve mysteries. And he's the fictional creation of Ellis Peters, a historian born in Shrewsbury in 1913, whose medieval whodunits, *The Brother Cadfael Chronicles*, have sold ten million copies worldwide.

II. The Cluniac Order

- A. Cluniac order (10th century)
- B. Bernard of Cluny (12th century)—*De Contemptu Mundi* (“Jerusalem the Golden”)
- C. Abbey of Cluny—“The first great eruption of ecclesiastical splendour was unashamedly extravagant.” (Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation*, 36)

III. The Cistercian order

- A. Bernard of Clairvaux (1093-1153)
 - 1. Reformer—*On Consideration* (“Lordship is forbidden; ministry is bidden.”)

Bernard on the Cluniac style: “I will not dwell upon the vast height of their churches, their unconscionable length, their preposterous breadth, their richly polished panelling, all of which distracts the eyes of the worshipper and hinders his devotion... Your candlesticks as tall as trees, great masses of bronze of exquisite workmanship, and as dazzling with their precious stones as the lights that surmount them, what, think you, is the purpose of all this? Will it melt a sinner’s heart and not rather keep him gazing in wonder? O vanity of vanities—no, insanity rather than vanity!”
 - 2. Preacher (“Doctor Mellifluous”)—“*Pasce verbo, pasce vita*”
 - 3. Mystic—*On Loving God*
 - 4. Theologian—*On Grace and Free Choice*

John Calvin: “For the teaching of the Schoolmen, that love is prior to faith and hope, is mere madness; for it is faith alone that first engenders love in us. How much more rightly Bernard states: ‘I believe that the testimony of the conscience, which Paul calls “the glory of the pious,” consists of three things. First of all, it is necessary to believe that you cannot have forgiveness of sins apart from God’s mercy. Second, you can have no good work at all unless he gives it. Finally, you cannot merit eternal life by any works unless that is also given free’ (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3, 2, 41).
 - 5. Hymn Writer—“Jesu, Thou joy of loving hearts”; “Jesus, the very thought of Thee”

B. The Cistercian order

IV. The Franciscans

- A. Giovanni Bernardone or St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)—*The Testament; The Little Flowers* including stories of Francis preaching to the birds and converting the “very fierce wolf at Gubbio.” (“...holy folk-tales, which, after all, may not be completely untrue.” Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation*, 79)
- B. Poverty and _____

The prayer of Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”
- C. Praise—“The Canticle of Brother Sun” (“All Creatures of our God and King”)
- D. The order
 - 1. Order of the Lesser Brothers (OFM)

The Rule of Francis: “The brothers shall not acquire anything as their own, neither a horse nor a place nor anything else. Instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world

who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go begging for alms with full trust.”

2. Second order for women, founded by Clara Favorino
3. Third order for laypeople

On one occasion Brother Masseo, looking earnestly at Francis, began to say: “Why thee? Why thee?” He repeated it again and again as if to mock him.

“What are you saying?” cried Francis at last.

“I am saying that everybody follows thee, everyone desires to see thee, hear thee, obey thee, and yet for all that, thou art neither beautiful, nor learned, nor of noble family. Whence comes it that it should be thee whom the world desires to follow?”

When Francis heard these words, he was filled with joy, raised his eyes to heaven and, after remaining a long time absorbed in contemplation, knelt praising and blessing God with extraordinary fervor.

Then he turned to Brother Masseo: “Thou wishest to know? It is because the eyes of the Most High willed it so. He continually watches the good and the wicked, and as his most holy eyes have not found among sinners any smaller man, nor any more insufficient and sinful, therefore He has chosen me to accomplish the marvelous work which God hath undertaken; He chose me because He could find none more worthless, and He wished to confound the nobility and grandeur, the strength, the beauty and the learning of the world.”

IV. The Dominicans

- A. Dominic (1171-1221)
- B. Order of Preachers (OP)
- C. Scholars (Thomas Aquinas) and mystics (Meister Eckhart)
- D. Inquisitors—“watchdogs of the Lord” (*domini canis*)

V. Conclusion

Southern Presbyterian Robert L. Dabney: “Monastic life, with all its perversions, produced not a little of the moral heroism in the Middle Ages...” *Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, p. 334

Question for Consideration

Why did the Dominicans become the Inquisitors?

For Further Study

Chesterton, G.K. *St. Francis of Assisi*

A great admirer of Francis retells with great insights (and some, perhaps pardonable, extravagances) the story of “the poor little man” to whom religion was “not a thing like a theory but a thing like a love-affair.” (p. 16)

Reid, W. Stanford. “Bernard of Clairvaux in the Thought of John Calvin,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 41, (1978) 127-45.

Calvin referred to Bernard favorably more often than to any other medieval author. While rejecting his monasticism and qualifying his mysticism, Calvin agreed enthusiastically with Bernard’s Augustinianism and his “Puritanism.”

Bernard preached 86 sermons on the first two chapters of Song of Solomon, in which he commented on the spiritual life of a monk but also ranged widely over many other topics. In the two excerpts (“The Needle of Sin”) he discusses “original sin.” What is Bernard’s view? Do you agree with him? Discuss your answers with your mentors.

Bernard’s “On Loving God” is one of the greatest devotional classics of all times. Read it prayerfully. Read “Snapshots of a Saint” to see how St. Francis’s first followers saw him. What is your impression of Francis?