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Bernard of Clairvaux

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Bernard of Clairvaux (* 1090 – † 20 Aug 1153)

1. Name variants: Bernardus, Bernhard

2. Places: Fontaines-lès-Dijon, Châtillon-sur-Seine, Cîteaux, Clairvaux

3. Biography: B. became one of the most influential figures in church and society in Western Europe during the second quarter of the twelfth century. He and five of his brothers joined the fledgling monastery of Cîteaux in Burgundy, from which B. was sent, in 1115, to found a daughter house at Clairvaux in Champagne. B. remained abbot of Clairvaux until his death in 1153 and refused several episcopal nominations. He used his powers of persuasion to influence the decisions of fellow abbots, bishops, and popes, as well as kings and princes. At an early date, he became involved in the affairs of the Cistercian Order, as in excoriating his fellow abbot of Morimond for planning to move his monastery to the Holy Land. B. should be seen as more of a monk than a political figure, even though his politics did influence the course of European history; he vocally endorsed the Second Crusade. He did his best to attract his friends to spend time with him at Clairvaux and sometimes even to join the monastery. His close friend was William of Saint Thierry. After B.'s death, there were attempts to have him canonized immediately, but by then he had made enemies at the papal court. His canonization did not come through until 1174. Clairvaux could have become a place of pilgrimage for those seeking B.'s tomb, but there is a story of how the abbot of Cîteaux, while visiting Clairvaux after B.'s death, appealed to him beyond the grave to cease from miracles. B. apparently obeyed.

4. Cultus:

a. Relics: A reliquary in the church of Ville-sous-la-Ferté; “Le grand reliquaire de saint Bernard” at the Musée d-art sacré, Dijon (<https://musees.dijon.fr/grand-reliquaire-de-saint-bernard-mai-2017>). B's head is claimed to be kept at the cathedral of Dijon (PL 185, 1663–1668). The parish of Châtillon-sur-Seine, where B. went to school, in 2017 gained some of his relics (<https://www.lechatillonnetlauxois.fr/actulaite-540-les-reliques>).

b. Liturgical commemoration: 20 Aug (Martyrologium Romanum)

c. Patronage: Patron saint of monastic vocations, preachers, bees, and beekeepers. The Saint Bernard breed of dogs has no special link with B.

d. Attributes: The barking dog, as seen by B.'s mother in her womb. See the work of J. FRANCE: The *Amplexus* (embrace) of B. by Jesus from the cross and the *Lactatio*, where Mary imparts milk to B.

5. Fontes: Vita Prima S. Bernardi; Epp. S. Bernardi as well as his other works, edited by J. LECLERCQ and H. ROCHAS, Opera Sancti Bernardi (1957–1977), vol. 1–8; Martyrologium Romanum, https://dli.institute/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Martyrologium-Romanum-deutsch_Vorlaeufige-Arbeitsuebersetzung_2016_Liturgiekommission-DBK-web.pdf.

6. Literature: E. VACANDARD, Vie de Saint Bernard, 2 vols. 1895–1897; A. H. BREDERO, Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History, 1996; B. P. MCGUIRE, Bernard of Clairvaux: An Inner Life, 2020.

7. Illustrations: J. FRANCE, Medieval Images of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Collegeville 2007, contains a compact disc with hundreds of illustrations showing B. from the 12th to 16th centuries.

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