The Contribution of Certain Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Churchmen to Latin Hymnody *

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"The holiest monk that ever lived"[1] was born at Fontaines, two miles from Dijon, probably about the year 1090 (some scholars place the date of his birth at 1091). He was of a noble family; the father being a gentle and brave knight making militarism his profession, while the mother followed a saintly pattern of life. The strong personality of Bernard, exhibiting distinct powers of persuasion, found release in monastic adventure. At the age of twenty-two, in the year 1112, Bernard determined to become a monk. His personality acted like a magnet drawing to him thirty young noblemen including his own brothers, and all darkened the door of the "most austere monastery of Europe, the famous Citeaux."[2] The monastery was governed by Stephen Harding of Sherborne.

Bernard's presence made Citeaux famous, and soon the monastery became over-crowded. A new monastic home must now be built. The man for the task was he who outran his fellows in ascetic practices. So it was that the year 1115 saw Bernard elected by Stephen as Abbot of a third colony of twelve to be sent out from Citeaux to found a new home. Herein lies the roots of what was to become the mighty Cistercian order.

The little company of devotees followed Bernard to the general region of the Plateau of Laugres in Champagne. They arrived in a wide valley named Wormwood, June 25, 1115. Here they constructed a rude wooden building, including a chapel, dormitory, and refectory. Soon the monastery came to be known as Clairvaux or Clear Valley. The asceticism here was of the strictest nature. So severe was this discipline that Bernard's health was impaired for a time.

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1. Lawrence Schoenhals, Series of Lectures, Seattle Pacific College, 1947. (He is referring to Luther's statement here.)
2. James Hastings, Ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribners, 1908), Vol. II, p. 530.

The contemporary ecclesiastical world saw the man, who was later known as the "Doctor Melifluus," of Clear Valley rise to sudden and decided fame. The monastery which he had founded was developing readily into an outstanding institution. His writings and sermons now became widespread. Miracles were assigned to him, especially the gift of prophecy. The death of Honorious II, February 14, 1130, marks the beginning of Bernard's European fame. In the schism which followed, Bernard's voice at the council of Etampes (1130) secured for Innocent II the support of the French clergy. Later he secured the support of Henry I of England, in spite of the contrary leanings of the English clergy. In consequence Innocent took Bernard with him to Italy in 1132, thereby spreading his fame in new regions. In 1137 the situation in Italy was yet in a condition of unrest, the schism still being rampant. Norman Roger, who Anacletus had crowned the first king of Sicily, could do nothing to bring this "condition of unrest" to a point of termination. Bernard journeyed to this region of conflict. It is important to note at this juncture that the death of Anacletus (January 25, 1138) and Innocent's recognition from Rome made Bernard a virtual pope of Christendom! With the election of Eugenius III as Pope, February 15, 1145, a Cistercian monk and pupil of Bernard, "the ideas of Clairvaux became supreme."[3]

At this point it is well to note certain observations in regard to Bernard's power as a churchman. E. J. E. Raby points out that "from Clairvaux Bernard ruled the fortunes of Christendom until his death in 1153."[4] Raby continues by saying that "no ecclesiastic, before or after him, wielded an authority so unquestioned, an authority based on his personal charm, his powerful eloquence, and his angelic saintliness."[5] Ferm observes, "From his solitude Bernard went forth to become the most powerful churchman of twelfth century Europe."[6] Trench says that "Probably no man during his life-time ever exercised a personal influence in Christendom equal to his; the stayer of popular commotions; the queller of heresies; the umpire between princes and kings; the counsellor of popes."[7]

The final years of Bernard's life were colored with disappointment and suffering. The misfortunes of the Second Crusade seemed to be "laid at his door." He was saddened by the death of his friends, Abbot Suger (January 13, 1152), and Eugenius III (August

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3. *Loc. cit.*
4. F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 327.
5. *Loc. cit.*
6. Vergilius Ferm, Ed., *An Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 67.
7. Schoenhals, *op. cit.*

20, 1153). Bernard died in the year 1153. On his death bed he said the following: "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, but the love of my children urgeth me to remain."[8]

From this rich background of experience came some of the greatest poetry of the Middle Ages. His writings, including epistles, devotional and hortatory works, analyses in the area of mysticism, as well as poetical literature, portray keen insight into the principles of literary thought. It is said that Abelard's pupil, Berengar, observed that Bernard of Clairvaux "cultivated poetic composition from his youth."[9] "He had a great taste for literature and devoted himself for some time to poetry."[10] His poetry centers around the one great theme of Jesus. This is clearly seen in such a hymn as "Jesus, the very thought of thee," which shall be discussed later. The sufferings of Christ and the sweet memory of His name are uppermost. In this investigation we shall be primarily concerned with the study and analysis of two great poems from the pen of Bernard. The first shall be "Jesu, dulcis memoria," which centers largely around the name of Christ. The second shall be the immortal "Salve mundi salutare" describing the sufferings of the Savior.

From the poem "Jesu, dulcis memoria" which Philip Schaff terms "the sweetest and most evangelical (as the "Dies Irae" is the grandest, and the "Stabat Mater" the most pathetic) hymn of the middle ages,"[11] we get three well-known hymns. The first is "Jesus, the very thought of thee," which takes its title from the original Latin for the whole poem, "Jesu, dulcis memoria." Edward Caswall, a pioneer in the art of translation, presented a translation of this poem in his *Lyra Catholica,* in 1849. His translation vies with Dr. Ray Palmer's for popular use. Prior to any English translation, David R. Breed suggests that Count Zinzendorf translated it into German. This hymn may be the favorite of Bernard's hymnological contributions. Breed continues with certain other important observations. It has been sung while knights kept guard over the holy sepulchre. "Duffield says of this, 'It is supremely fine in spirit and expression.' "[12] Hezekiah Butterworth introduces us to a nodding acquaintance of a very literal translation:

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8. C. L. Goodenough, *High Lights on Hymnists* (Rochester, Mass.: Pub. by the author, 1931), p. 24.
9. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribners, 1914), Vol. V, Pt. I, p. 863.
10. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Gilmary Society, 1907), Vol. II, p. 498.
11. Philip Schaff, *Christ in Song* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1869), p. 465.
12. David R. Breed, *The History and Use of Hymns and Hymn-Tunes* (New York: Revell, 1903), p. 33.

Jesus! a sweet memory
Giving true joys to the heart,
But sweet above honey and all things
His presence (is).[13]

Caswall's translation is well worth presentation at this point:

Jesu! the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.

Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find,
A sweeter sound than Thy blest name,
O Saviour of mankind.

O Hope of every contrite heart,
O Joy of all the meek!
To those who fall, how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!

But what to those who find? Ah! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show;
The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but His loved ones know.

Jesu! our only joy be Thou,
As Thou our prize shalt be;
Jesu! be Thou our glory now
And through eternity.[14]

The second of the three outstanding hymns taken from the "Jubilee Rhythm of the Name of Jesus" is "O Jesus, King most wonderful." In the Roman Breviary the title is given in the Latin as "Jesu Rex admirabilis." Edward Caswall is again the outstanding translator of this hymn. It is to be observed that "The translator wrote verse four, lines one, two, and three:

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13. Hezekiah Butterworth and Theron Brown, *The Story of the Hymns and Tunes* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1906), pp. 100, 101.
14. Schaff, *Christ in Song, op. cit.*, pp. 405, 406.

'May every heart confess thy name,
And ever Thee adore;
And seeking Thee itself inflame.' "[15]

He has also supplied line one of verse five, "Thee may our tongues forever bless."[16] The hymn consists of but five verses:

O Jesus, King most wonderful,
Thou Conqueror renowned,
Thou sweetness most ineffable,
In whom all joys are found!

When once thou visitest the heart,
Then truth begins to shine,
Then earthly vanities depart,
Then kindles love divine.

O Jesus, Light of all below,
Thou Fount of living fire,
Surpassing all the joys we know,
And all we can desire!

Jesus, may all confess thy name,
Thy wondrous love adore,
And, seeking thee, themselves inflame
To seek thee more and more.

Thee, Jesus, may our voices bless;
Thee may we love alone;
And ever in our lives express
The image of thine own![17]

The third hymn from the "Jubilee Rhythm of the Name of Jesus" is "O Jesus, thou the beauty art." In the Roman Breviary it is known as "Jesu decus angelicum." Charles S. Nutter has given

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15. Charles S. Nutter, *Hymn Studies* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1897), p. 273.
16. *Loc. cit.* (Note: quotes 15 and 16 represent the original form of the poetry, while the translation as quoted below represents Caswall's adaptation.)
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 272, 273.

descriptive titles to this and other of Bernard's poems. "The King in his beauty," is his title for "O Jesus, thou the beauty art," while he calls "Jesus, the very thought of thee," "The sweetest name," and "O Jesus, King most wonderful," "The Conqueror renowned."[18] Caswall has also translated this hymn and has varied slightly from the original. In verse one, line four, the original reads, "Enchanting it with love." Verses two, three, and four vary some:

O my sweet Jesus hear the sighs
Which unto Thee I send;
To thee mine inmost spirit cries
My being's hope and end.

Stay with us, Lord, and with thy light
Illume the souls abyss;
Scatter the darkness of our night,
And fill the world with bliss.

O Jesus! spotless Virgin flower!
Our life and joy, to Thee
Be praise, beatitude, and power
Through all eternity.[19]

The present form, appearing in many hymn books, is as follows:

O Jesus, thou the beauty art
Of angel-worlds above;
Thy name is music to the heart,
Inflaming it with love.

O Jesus, Saviour, hear the sighs
Which unto thee we send;
To thee our inmost spirit cries,
To thee our prayers ascend.

Abide with us, and let thy light
Shine, Lord, on every heart;
Dispel the darkness of our night,
And joy to all impart.

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18. *Loc. cit.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Jesus, our love and joy! to thee
The Virgin's holy Son,
All might, and praise, and glory be,
While endless ages run![20]

Robert Guy McCutchan points out that the extensive use of "Jesu dulcis memoria" is unique to hymnody. There are fewer hymns which have been translated more often into English. The great poem has been used in one form or another by the Methodists in America since the days of Bishop Asbury. Moreover, of these hymns R. S. Storrs says:

> "I do not overestimate these hymns; but they show his profound evangelical spirit, how the meek and sovereign majesty of the Lord continually attuned and governed his thoughts, and how the same hand which wrote letters, treatises, notes of sermons, exhortations to pontiffs, reproofs of kings, could turn itself at pleasure to the praises of Him in whose grace was his hope, in whose love was his life. If these hymns had not remained after he was gone, we should have missed, I think, a lovely luster of his work and his fame."[21]

The second of the major poems from the hand of Saint Bernard speaks in terms of utter reality about the wounds of the suffering Savior. "Rhythmica oratio ad unum quodlibet membrorum Christi patientis" is the Latin title frequently used. The title often employed in the English is taken from the latter Latin heading, and is translated, "The poem to the members of Christ's body on the cross." The scheme of this poem is one of the most interesting in Latin literature. The entire work is composed of three hundred and fifty lines. There are seven passion divisions, fifty lines being devoted to each. These sections comprise a series of devotional poems to the crucified Savior's feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart, and face. In these hymns Bernard has vividly portrayed the suffering Christ hanging on the cross.

The following version was translated by the Reverend Dr. E. A. Washburn, of New York (1868):

Heart of Christ my King! I greet Thee:
Gladly goes my heart to meet Thee;
To embrace Thee now it burneth,
And with eager thirst it yearneth,
Spirit blest, to talk with Thee.

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20. *Loc. cit.*
21. Robert Guy McCutchan, *Our Hymnody* (New York: Abingdon, 1937), p. 236.

Oh! what love divine compelling!
With what grief Thy breast was swelling!
All Thy soul for us o'erflowing,
All Thy life on us bestowing,
Sinful men from death to free![22]

The third of the major poems is by far the most popular and for all practical purposes the most important. It is "Salve caput cruentatum," translated into the German by Paul Gerhardt in 1656, and later faithfully reproduced by Dr. James W. Alexander into English in the year 1849. In the German this moving hymn to the Face of the Christ is entitled "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden," while the English renders it "O sacred head, now wounded." In the Latin there are five stanzas of ten lines each beginning "Ad faciem Christi in cruce pendentis."

Though many have endeavored to translate this poem, Paul Gerhardt's work stands as the finest ever done. He was the first to attempt this task of translation. Schaff brings into clear view the precision and beauty with which Gerhardt performed his work:

> This classical hymn has shown an imperishable vitality in passing from the Latin into the German, and from the German into the English, and proclaiming in three tongues, and in the name of three confessions,—the Catholic, the Lutheran, and the Reformed,—with equal effect, the dying love of our Saviour, and our boundless indebtness to him.[23]

It may also be observed that Schaff speaks well of the one who translated the work from German into English. Indeed, Foote says that J. W. Alexander has made the "most beautiful and moving of all the English translations of Paul Gerhardt's hymn...."[24]

Schaff aptly comments the following concerning the German translator and the mighty Saint:

> Both the Latin of the Catholic monk and the German of the Lutheran pastor are conceived in the spirit of deep repentance, and glowing gratitude to Christ, who "was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities."[25]

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22. Schaff, *Christ in Song*, pp. 410, 411.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
24. Henry Wilder Foote, *Three Centuries of American Hymnody* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), p. 204; Nutter, *op. cit.*, p. 91 characterizes Alexander as follows: "The Rev. James Waddell Alexander was a Presbyterian clergyman, born in 1804; was graduated at Princeton in 1820; a pastor for several years, then editor, and then professor at Princeton. He died in 1859."
25. Schaff, *Christ in Song, loc. cit.*

Adolph Harnack comments with no small degree of force about the influence of Bernard's thought movements. He brings his statement to a dynamic point of climax by reference to "Salve caput cruentatum".

> Piety was quickened by the most vivid view of the suffering and dying Redeemer; He must be followed through all the stages of His path of sorrow! Negative asceticism thus obtained a positive form, and a new and more certain aim. The notes of the Christ-Mysticism, which Augustine had struck only singly and with uncertainty, became a ravishing melody. Beside the sacramental Christ the image of the historical took its place—majesty in humility, innocence in penal suffering, life in death. That dialectic of piety without dialectic, that combined spectacle of suffering and of glory, that living picture of the true communicatio idiomatum (communication of attributes) developed itself, before which mankind stood worshiping, adoring with equal reverence the sublimity and the abasement. The sensuous and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly, shame and honour, renunciation and fulness of life were no longer tumultuously intermingled: they were united in serene majesty in the "Ecce homo." And so this piety broke forth into the solemn hymn: "Salve caput cruentatum" ("O Lamb of God once wounded").[26]

Though Schaff records ten stanzas of "O sacred head, now wounded," it appears in more popular form in four stanzas as seen, for example, in Nutter's collection:

O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, thine only crown;
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss, till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call thee mine.

What thou, my Lord, has suffered
Was all for sinners' gain:
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But thine the deadly pain:
Lo, here I fall, my Saviour!
"Tis I deserve thy place;
Look on me with thy favor,
Vouchsafe to my thy grace.

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26. Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1901), Vol. VI, p. 9.

What language shall I borrow
To thank thee, dearest Friend,
For this, thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever;
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to thee.

Be near me when I'm dying,
O show thy cross to me;
And, for my succor flying,
Come, Lord, and set me free:
These eyes, new faith receiving,
From Jesus shall not move;
For he who dies believing,
Dies safely, through thy love.[27]

So it is that the man whose hymns are called "a river of Paradise,"[28] gave to the world some of its most expressive poetry of the name and sufferings of Jesus. Philip Schaff has left a fitting tribute to Bernard the hymn writer: "Much as Bernard influenced his own age in other ways, he continues to influence our own effectively and chiefly by his hymns."[29]

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27. Nutter, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
28. Goodenough, *loc. cit.*
29. *Loc. cit.*