

(Dis)obedience in the Cistercian Order

Some Reflections on Bernard of Clairvaux's Letter to Brother Adam

Marko Jerković*
mjerkovic@hrstud.hr

<https://doi.org/10.31192/np.17.3.6>
UDK / UDC: 27-789.25:27-423.77
27-36BER

Izvorni znanstveni rad / Original scientific paper
Primljeno / Received: 24. travnja 2019. / 24 Apr, 2019
Prihvaćeno / Accepted: 31. srpnja 2019. / 31 Jul, 2019

In 1124 a group of monks abandoned their Cistercian community of Morimond and set off for the Holy Land (the venture was unsuccessful). Since the Order's authorities had not approved this departure, it was considered a great scandal, severely damaging the spiritual life of the community. Bernard of Clairvaux, a great Cistercian theologian, compiled several letters in which he tried to convince the »fugitive« monks to return. In the longest letter, addressed to monk Adam (who assumed the leadership of the »fugitive« monks), Bernard explains that the misdeed of the Morimond monks was committed because of their wrong understanding of authority. Hence, Bernard offers a rather complex account of obedience, explicating its spiritual and functional implications. The article analyses how Bernard of Clairvaux understood true obedience, and how he related it to the Order's highest spiritual values. Additionally, it studies the role of conscience in the monastic life, the implications of disobedience, and the concept of the abbot's and monk's responsibility for observance. Finally, it discusses Bernard's views on how obedience should function when juxtaposed with the Order's structures of authority and the authority of ecclesiastical dignitaries.

Keywords: obedience and love, Bernard of Clairvaux, responsibility, conscience, Cistercian common observance.

* Marko Jerković, PhD, Assist. Prof., University of Zagreb, University Department of Croatian Studies; Address: Kampus Borongaj, Borongajska c. 83d, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia.

Introduction

»Were you still abiding in the charity which at one time I knew or thought abided in you, you could not but feel the condemnation of charity for the scandal you have caused to the weak.«¹ With these powerful and reprimanding words, famous Cistercian spiritual writer Bernard of Clairvaux opens his discussion on obedience in a letter addressed to monk Adam, member of the renegade party which departed from Morimond Abbey without the approval of the Order's authorities, thus causing a major scandal to the entire community. Headed by the abbot (named Arnold) himself, this group left their monastery around 1124, and set off for the Holy Land,² the venture which eventually failed.³ In the period of re-establishment of the order, Bernard of Clairvaux was heavily engaged in the case, trying to convince the monks, through his letters, to return and correct their error. Among the five letters concerning those events, two of them were addressed to brother Adam, who took over the leadership of the group after abbot Arnold died not long after the departure.⁴ In the shorter letter, brother Adam was severely rebuked for »the pilgrimage, or rather vagabondage, suggested by abbot Arnold«, and asked to attend a meeting with Bernard so they could find a remedy for the ill behaviour of the fugitives.⁵ In the second letter, however, Bernard goes further and offers not only a simple admonition but also a shorter tract addressing some of the fundamental monastic values, in the first place the role of obedience in a monastic community. Wishing to make a strong impact on the renegade-monks, and to convince them to return to their monastery, Bernard states that their decision was based on a false understanding of authority. Within that context, Bernard creates a complex conceptual system of obedience, connects it with love, and explicates how structural relations between a monk and a superior (the Abbot) should function. Bernard's views expressed in this letter were not merely reflections on one specific case of breaking the norms of the monastic profession; rather, they were addressing the essential features of the Cistercian Order and the very

¹ Bruno Scott JAMES, *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, Collegeville, Cistercian publications, 1998, 26 (the whole letter pp. 26-38). Latin edition: Bernardus CLARAEVALLENSIS ABBAS, *Epistola VII*, in: Joannes MABILLON (ed.), *Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-Vallensis Opera omnia*, tom. I, Paris, Bibliopolas, 1839, the entire letter col. 128-143. Above citation on col. 128: »Si maneres in charitate, quam in te olim aut novimus aut putavimus, charitatis profecto damna sentires, quae utique sunt scandala pusillorum.« In James' edition this letter is numbered as Letter 8 (not 7 as in previous editions) since the editor convincingly argued that another letter (by Pope Calixtus II) concerns the case, pre-dating the one addressed to monk Adam.

² See: Michael CASEY, Bernard and the Crisis at Morimond: Did the Order Exist in 1124?, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 38 (2003) 2, 119-175.

³ See more about the failure at the end of section 2 of the present article: Order and profession.

⁴ Apart from writing to brother Adam, Bernard addressed his letters to Abbot Arnold (prior to his death), as well as to Pope Calixtus II, and the Bishop of Cologne Bruno, asking for their intervention. See: Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 123-143. James, *The Letters...*, 19-38.

⁵ James, *The Letters...*, 24-25 (Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 125-126).

nature of interpersonal relations in a monastic community. Furthermore, when dealing with the question of how monks should respond to various precepts of their superiors, Bernard introduces his views on the importance of conscience and personal responsibility of each monk for both the spiritual welfare and institutional cohesion of the Order. Exactly in this context, Bernard's concepts have additional spiritual and pragmatic value. More specifically, since the Cistercian community was evolving into an alliance of monasteries built on the idea of equality and unity of usage, the standardisation of responses to norms was crucial for the sustainability of their idea of the *ordo*. With that in mind, the misbehaviour of one part of the community implied direct conceptual and functional consequences not only for one monastery but also for the Order as a whole. The conceptual consequence refers to the break with the idea of unity out of which the distinct monastic identity of the Cistercians was evolving, while the functional one means the break with the discipline norms of the monastic law. At the institutional level, the transgression could also imply the incapability of the Order's governing mechanisms to impose strict and uniform discipline. Finally, at the level of a single community, the very purpose of its members' lives becomes endangered when a break of norms occurs. For at the very core of the coenobitic life is the idea that submission to strict rules and life under the guidance of a superior leads to salvation and gets a person closer to Christ. Consequently, to step out of the prescribed norms implies a failure to achieve the ultimate goal of the monastic life. Thus, the issue of authority and submission to abbatial precepts, with which Bernard deals in this letter, concerns the fundamental spiritual values of coenobitism. With that in mind, this paper aims to study how Bernard of Clairvaux understood obedience, how he related it to the Order's highest spiritual values (especially love), what the implications of disobedience were for the monastic life and the profession, and how he defined the hierarchy of authorities in the monastic life. Apart from that, it discusses Bernard's views on how obedience should function when juxtaposed with both the internal (Order's) structures of authority and the authority of ecclesiastical dignitaries. The issue of conscience and mutual responsibility in the relations between the abbot and the monks is especially addressed.

1. *True obedience*

1.1. *Love*

The second letter to monk Adam can be considered more as a tract about monastic obedience and crucial monastic values than as a simple admonition framed in an epistolary form. Bernard chooses this form of communication as a tool for both convincing the renegade monks to give up their intention and

explaining his views on the proper place and meaning of obedience in the life of a professed monk. The letter itself is thus important for two reasons. Firstly, it provides the Cistercian (and other) monks with a structured view on obedience (and disobedience), as well as on its correlation with other crucial values, love in the first place. Secondly, it creates a method of explicating obedience, i.e. it offers a discourse on obedience, with its inner logic of argumentation. The internal structure of the letter is thus complex but well-organised – Bernard first discusses the ultimate spiritual connotations of obedience, presenting his understanding of the authority of love and the Divine Law, which determine the value of obedience. The second part relates to various issues concerning the more functional connotations of obedience, for it is a precondition for the stability of the Order. The very end of his narration offers views on the monastic vows, where broader Cistercian concepts are well mirrored. Bernard's letter aims to be all-inclusive, encompassing all the spheres in which the effects of obedience can be manifested. More precisely, by demonstrating how obedience enables the application of the Divine Law, Bernard's method of explicating obedience provides his narration structure with firmer spiritual pillars. The integration of institutional obedience (i.e. obedience to the government of the Order) into the narration will serve to accomplish terrestrial order in a religious society. In this way, Bernard will create a logical and understandable discourse of obedience, with a bipartite structure, properly correlating the spiritual value of obedience with its functional connotations. The letter (or this tract) of Bernard is carefully compiled, using the rhetoric which should reach out to his audience in a most profound way. For that purpose, Bernard is not mild in discourse, rather the opposite; he is extremely strict and inexorable. It has already been suggested in historiography that Bernard uses this kind of harsh tone, very often exaggerating.⁶ This kind of discourse was his method by which he aimed not only to leave an impression on his readers but also to affect their actions in a concrete way. He chooses this kind of communication because he is – obviously – absolutely convinced that it will be fully understood and comprehended by his addressees. For that purpose, Bernard decided to be direct and strict, expressing disappointment with brother Adam and explaining why the whole action is completely unreasonable. The goal was clear: to convince the monks to return to the monastery by a severe rebuke. However, with his letter, he was not only aiming to change the decision of the renegade monks to leave the monastery; Bernard was gradually building his rhetoric on obedience. Even though the discourse is often full of amplificatory additions, a spiritual conceptualisation of obedience can be well deduced from his letter, and a reader can primarily recognise Bernard's concern for the spiritual well-being of an individual monk and the whole Order. In other words, the importance of the letter clearly lies in the fact that Bernard uses one specific case to

⁶ Casey, *Bernard and the Crisis...*, 128.

develop his general system of obedience, which should have its effect on the entire community. The discourse, or the way of communication Bernard chooses, was – naturally – coming out of the author's personality and style. However, it was a deliberately chosen rhetoric tool which, as Bernard estimated, fitted best in a concrete situation. More precisely, the authoritative tone, full of strict admonitions, leaving no space for any debate on the issue, was in accordance with Bernard's understanding of true and pure obedience itself (which will be discussed later). True obedience »with no delay« knows no compromise,⁷ so to explicate the absolute nature of obedience, Bernard chooses a proper discourse, excluding any concession or further discussion. This was an intelligent way of using rhetoric not only as a device for transmitting information but also as a tool for radically affecting the inner self of a religious devoted completely to the transcendental.

Thus, Bernard begins his treatment of obedience with an extremely powerful discourse concerning the consequences of the departure. Bernard elaborates that by departing, the monks have committed the most severe error since they offended and wounded love, which should be considered the mother of unity and peace.⁸ Not only that – reminds Bernard – love is God himself!⁹ It is clear that Bernard sees the departure from the monastery as a most serious error, the one committed against God himself and against the fundamental principles which should be observed in the life of every religious. An error of this kind leads to a spiritual disaster and complete failure of an individual, who becomes an enemy of love (i.e. of God). The desertion of the monastery is presented not only as a physical departure from the place where vows were professed but also as a spiritual departure from the Heavenly Kingdom.¹⁰ The departure has repercussions on the whole community since by leaving the monastery the abbot had wounded the bonds of peace and unity, thus causing damage to the monks who were left without abbatial guidance.¹¹ Even more – Bernard warns that by abandoning their brothers, the renegade monks turned against them.¹² By building his narration on the argument that the departure from the monastery is a transgression against both love and the community, Bernard aims not only to restore peace in one monastery but also to protect and support the very essence of the Cistercian identity, which was at the time still a work in progress. Specifically, the *caritas* played a crucial role in concep-

⁷ Cf. *Benedicti Regula*, in: Rudolph HANSLIK (ed.), *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Wien, Hoelder-Pilchler-Tempsky, 1977, c. V, l. 1, 38: *Primus humilitatis gradus est oboedientia sine mora*.

⁸ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 129; James, *The Letters...*, 26.

⁹ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 129; James, *The Letters...*, 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ This thought is repeated on several occasions in Bernard's letter. Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 128-143; James, *The Letters...*, 26-38.

¹² Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 129; James, *The Letters...*, 26.

tualising early Cistercian observance.¹³ This was clearly demonstrated by the *Carta Caritatis*, the fundamental constitutional document of the Cistercians, in which the bonds of love were put at the forefront as a key concept which should regulate interpersonal relations, enable internal cohesion in the Order and provide institutional stability.¹⁴ A heavy accent on the bonds of love was supposed not only to reprimand the departed brothers but also to serve a functional purpose of promoting a new understanding of the Order. The Cistercians abandoned the principles of cohesion enforcement used by other Benedictine congregations, especially the Cluniacs. The Cluniac congregation functioned monarchically within the terms of property law.¹⁵ All the monasteries within a congregation were directly subjected to Cluny, and the Cluniac Abbot was recognised as the sole abbot of each community, as a *dominus* in a governing and spiritual sense.¹⁶ In the Cistercian Order, centralised government was replaced with the idea of equality, forbidding senior abbeys to impose any kind of material burden on newly-founded abbeys.¹⁷ The idea of equality among the Cistercian abbeys was most clearly articulated through the invention of the General Chapter, the collective body of all abbots, which represented the highest (institutional) authority within the Order.¹⁸ Apart from the institutional promotion of the bonds of love, the Cistercian authors also accentuate the necessity to interiorise the *caritas* for the purpose of personal growth. This will be clearly presented in the »classical« Cistercian treatises on love, *De diligendo Deo* by Bernard of Clairvaux,¹⁹ or *Speculum caritatis* by Aelred of Rievaulx,²⁰ to mention just the most important of them. Even though each of the Cistercian

¹³ Cf. Mirko BREITENSTEIN, Is there a Cistercian Love? Some Considerations on the Virtue of Charity, in: Gert MELVILLE (ed.), *Aspects of Charity. Concern for One' Neighbour in Medieval Vita Religiosa*, Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2011, 55-98; Gert MELVILLE, *The World of Medieval Monasticism – Its History and Forms of Life*, Collegeville, Cistercian Publications, 2016, 147.

¹⁴ Cf. *Carta Caritatis prior*, in: Chrysogonus WADDELL (ed.), *Narrative and legislative texts from early Cîteaux (latin text in dual edition with english translation and notes)*, Cîteaux, Commentarii Cistercienses, 1999 [hereafter: *Narrative and legislative texts*], c. I-XI, 274-282.

¹⁵ Melville, *The World...*, 63-72, 151.

¹⁶ Cf. Giles CONSTABLE, *The Abbey of Cluny – A Collection of Essays to Mark the Eleven-Hundredth Anniversary of its Foundation*, Berlin-Münster, LIT Verlag, 2010, 268-269.

¹⁷ *Carta Caritatis prior...*, c. I, l. 1-4, 275.

¹⁸ Cf. Florent CYGLER, *Das Generalkapitel im hohen Mittelalter. Cisterzienser, Prämonstratenser, Kartäuser und Cluniazenser*, Münster-Hamburg-London, LIT Verlag, 2002, 23-118.

¹⁹ Bernardus CLARAEVALLENSIS ABBAS, *De diligendo Deo liber seu tractatus*, in: J.-P. MIGNÉ, *Patrologia Latina* [hereafter: PL], vol. 182 (here *S. Bernardi Opera omnia*), Paris, 1852, I-XV, 1-39, col. 973-1000. Also, in modern editions: Bernardus CLARAEVALLENSIS, *De diligendo Deo*, in: Jean LECLERCQ et al. (ed.), *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. III, Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963, 109-54; Bernard of CLAIRVAUX, *On Loving God / De Diligendo Deo*, Eremitical Press, 2010, c. I-XV, 11-96.

²⁰ Aelredus RIEVALLENSIS, *Speculum charitatis*, in: PL, vol. 195, Paris, 1855, lib. I-III, col. 505-620. See modern critical edition: Aelredus RIEVALLENSIS, *Liber de speculo caritatis*, in: C. H. TALBOT (ed.), *Aelredus Rievallensis Opera Omnia*, vol. I, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1971, 1-161. And in edition: Aelred of RIEVAULX, *The Mirror of Charity*, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications, 1990, book I-III, 87-303.

authors provides us with his own intimate experience of love based on contemplative training, it is clear that the motif of love (understood in the Augustinian sense that pure love can be devoted only to God)²¹ as the perfect state in which God's will is fulfilled²² became strongly integrated into the Cistercian body collective. In that way, Cistercian authors were gradually formulating a firm spiritual background for the constitutional principles expressed in the *Carta Caritatis*. By emphasising love in both the institutional and spiritual sense, the Cistercians created a system in which the progress and stability of all features of the Order – its organisation, relations between the brothers, and individual spiritual growth – depended on the willingness to obey the law of love.

The departure from Morimond Abbey occurred in the still sensitive period of the Order's development, before the complex theology of love was fully created. One should bear in mind that the first redaction of the *Carta Caritatis* itself had been produced less than a decade ago (1113/1115),²³ and confirmed by the Pope only a few years prior to the departure (1119).²⁴ The misbehaviour of the fugitive monks obviously contradicted directly the principles of the not-long-ago-produced *Carta Caritatis*, the document from which the Order's substance, identity, and constitution were becoming to evolve.²⁵ Thus, Bernard's strict admonitions should be understood as the author's effort to influence the fugitives by evoking the necessity to obey the terms which were recently defined at the constitutional level. However, by presenting the departure as offending God, Bernard places his argumentation at a higher, spiritual level, indicating that to disobey the contract of unity within the Order implies disobeying the natural order of things. In that way, Bernard creates a highly functional conceptual system, in which the Divine order corresponds to the monastic life, leading to the inevitable conclusion that disobedience to one law implies breaking the other one. By formulating a conceptual background of this kind, Bernard provides his monks with a perfect explanation for the necessity to obey not only St Benedict's *Rule* but also the contract of the *Carta Caritatis*. Consequently – the logic is clear – every deviation from the essential principles of the Order contradicts God's will too, and, therefore, prevents the monks from fulfilling their profession. More specifically, as Bernard will formulate later in *De diligendo Deo*, the purpose of the monk's profession is to overcome

²¹ Aurelius AUGUSTINUS, *De doctrina Christiana*, in: PL, vol. 34, lib. I, col. 19-36. And in: Aurelius AUGUSTINUS, *De doctrina Christiana*, in: William GREEN (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 80, lib. I, Wien, Hoelder-Pichter-Tempsky, 1963, 8-33, esp. 19.

²² Bernardus, *De diligendo...*, 973-1000 (Migne) and 109-54 (Leclercq).

²³ Chrysogonus WADDELL, Introduction to the *Carta Caritatis Prior*, in: *Narrative and legislative texts...*, 261-273.

²⁴ CALLISTUS II, *Ad hoc in apostolice*, in: *Narrative and legislative texts...*, 294-297.

²⁵ Cf.: Jörg OBERSTE, Constitution in progress. Der Zisterzienserorden und das System der »Carta Caritatis«, in: Georg MÖLICH et al. (ed.), *Die Zisterzienser im Mittelalter*, Köln – Weimar – Wien, Böhlau Ver., 2017, 31-43.

the self and to live only in God.²⁶ Disobedience to love is, thus, the most serious deviation since it prevents a monk from successfully finishing his spiritual process (which ends in the mystical union with God).

After expressing the necessity to obey the law of love, Bernard continues his letter with a discussion about obedience to the abbot's commands. Bernard clearly states that the fugitive monks should not have followed their abbot when he decided to leave the monastery, claiming that such yielding cannot even be called obedience. However, Bernard warns brother Adam that, even if the brothers followed their abbot because of the false sense of obedience, they are not bound by the commands of the superior after his death.²⁷ Bernard's letter now opens a sensitive question of limitations of abbatial authority and the circumstances under which one is allowed to disobey. This question has a special meaning if we have in mind the *Rule of St Benedict*, which was supposed to be followed literally in the Cistercian community.²⁸ In the *Rule*, the abbot occupies a central role in all the spheres of the monastic life – he is in charge of spiritual guidance, governance, and discipline. The monks are obliged to completely obey the abbot; they should not be guided by their wishes and will, but follow their superior's commands, because obedience to him is obedience to God.²⁹ In other words, the abbot is to be obeyed unconditionally since he represents Christ himself.³⁰ All the more, the *Rule* gives enormous power to the abbot in governing the community – indeed, he should listen to the counsel of the monks, but he makes the final decision by himself and is not required to rule with the consent of the brothers.³¹ Scholars have already pointed out that, basing their governance on the *Rule*, early medieval Benedictine abbots ruled their communities almost monarchically.³²

Bernard, however, points out that no one should be obeyed if they command evil,³³ and he sees the departure from the monastery as completely evil.³⁴ And

²⁶ Bernardus, *De diligendo...*, X-XI, 27-33, col. 990-995.

²⁷ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 129-130; James, *The Letters...*, 27.

²⁸ Melville, *The World...*, 141-145. Cf. Oberste, *Constitution in progress...*, 36. The idea of the strict following of the *Rule* as opposed to laxer observance in non-Cistercian houses was elaborated in Bernard's *Apologia: Cistercians and Cluniacs: St Bernard's Apologia to Abbot William*, trans. Michael CASEY, in: *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. I, Treatises I, Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970, VII, 51.

²⁹ *Benedicti Regula...*, c. V, l. 1-19, 38-41. Cf. Giles CONSTABLE, *The Authority of Superiors in Religious Communities*, in: George MAKDISI et al. (ed.), *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1982, 189-210, esp. 191-192.

³⁰ *Benedicti Regula...*, c. II, l. 2, 21: »Christi enim agere uices in monasterio creditur...«.

³¹ *Ibid.*, c. III, l. 1-13, 29-31.

³² Joachim JASSMEIER, *Das Mitbestimmungsrecht der Untergebenen in den älteren Männerordensverbänden*, München, Karl Zink Verlag, 1954, 6-42; Thomas M. KRÜGER, *Leitungsgewalt und Kollegialität vom benediktinischen Beratungsrecht zum Konstitutionalismus deutscher Domkapitel und des Kardinalkollegs (ca. 500-1500)*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2013, 47-64.

³³ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 130; James, *The Letters...*, 27.

³⁴ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 131-132; James, *The Letters...*, 29.

since God has forbidden all evil, no one is bound by an evil command.³⁵ It is evident that – apart from the moral component – Bernard introduces the issue of the hierarchy of authorities into the discussion, to explain what true obedience is. By evoking the principles from the Scripture, Bernard reminds that »We must obey God rather than any human authority« (Acts 5,29).³⁶ Accordingly – it is implied here – true obedience consists of submission to His will, which is in accordance with the example of Christ who was obedient to the Father until death (Phil 2,8).³⁷ Therefore, the human position in the hierarchy of authorities – including that of the abbot – can be evaluated appropriately only when juxtaposed with the precepts of God. In other words, true obedience is submission to God and to those men who act in full accordance with God's will. If the abbot goes astray, that is if he fails to represent the law above him, he is not to be followed. Furthermore, Bernard complements his exposition of the limitations of the abbot's power with a reference to common observance. Bernard states that a command must not be followed if it conflicts common observance since this has been defined by the *Rule of St. Benedict*.³⁸ At this point, c. 63 of the *Rule* should be taken into account, stating that the abbot will not make unfair decisions, as if he would hold unlimited power; for he must always keep in mind that he will answer to God for his actions.³⁹ Bernard puts at the forefront the necessity to maintain obedience not only to the ordinances of God but also of St Benedict. As it has been demonstrated, Bernard pointed out the law of love in order to explain the gravity of the error that the fugitive monks had committed and to remind them of the natural order. The reference to common observance is interpolated with another purpose: to conclude the issue of the hierarchy of authorities by indicating that no man is above the law, or – more specifically – no professed monk (including the abbot) is above the *Rule*. Bernard dealt with this issue more extensively in his *De praecepto et dispensatione*, where he explicitly stated that the abbot is not above the *Rule*, for he is subjected to the monastic law just as other professed monks are.⁴⁰ In the letter to monk Adam, Bernard introduces the argument of obedience to common observance in order to explain more elaborately why the command of Abbot Arnold did not have a binding force. More specifically, by leaving his community the abbot had betrayed his monks and scattered them instead of uniting them.⁴¹ Common observance – based on the *Rule* – anticipates for the

³⁵ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 130; James, *The Letters...*, 27.

³⁶ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 130; James, *The Letters...*, 28.

³⁷ This can be found in Bernard's other tracts. See e.g.: *Liber de praecepto et dispensatione*. Cf.: *Monastic obligations and abbatial authority: St Bernard's book on precept and dispensation*, trans. Conrad GREENIA, in: *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux...*, VI, 114.

³⁸ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 133; James, *The Letters...*, 30.

³⁹ *Benedicti Regula...*, c. LXIII, l. 2-3, 159-160.

⁴⁰ *Monastic obligations...*, IV, 111.

⁴¹ Cf. Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 132; James, *The Letters...*, 29.

abbot the role of a strict but just father, and – as noted – of Christ's vicar. The righteous father and Christ are there to gather and not to scatter, so Bernard's argument is based on the presumption that Abbot Arnold directly contradicted the supposed order prescribed by the rules of common observance.

1.2. Responsibility

Separation from the community contradicts the very idea of the coenobitic life, i.e. observance practiced commonly. The growth (and salvation) of every individual within the community depends on common discipline, i.e. on the effectiveness of observance practised commonly. Thus, Bernard's concept accentuates the idea of the binding force of common observance, for it enables individual perfection within the community. With that in mind, Bernard wanted to make the firmest background for the uneasy endeavour of explaining when it is possible to disobey. And by doing so, he emphasises not the abbot's right to rule, but the need for abbatial responsibility. Responsibility is crucial within his system; it is the source of authority and only if responsibility has been firmly integrated into an abbatial office, can obedience be fully exercised in accordance with the *Rule*. Responsibility was, however, not demanded only from the abbot. It was the hallmark of the interpersonal relations within the community, and the basis on which the structural relations between the monks and the superiors were supposed to be built. Apart from the abbatial responsibility to guide the community, Bernard implies – and this is crucial! – the individual responsibility of every monk for proper observance. Bernard makes it clear that brothers are obliged to intervene when a deviation occurs and to lead the professed life not only by following the commands but also by according with their conscience. The concept of mutual responsibility possessed an enormous integrative potential for the nascent Cistercian Order since it advocated horizontal instead of vertical (monarchical) bonds within the community.⁴² However, Bernard did not want to diminish the abbot's role; he added another value to obedience, which was now based on shared responsibility instead of on simple unilateral submissiveness. The latter can be clearly seen in his words:

»I do not say that subjects should question the orders of their superiors when it is clear that they do not conflict with the divine ordinances, but I say that prudence is necessary in order to understand whether they do conflict, and freedom too in order candidly to ignore them if they do.«⁴³

⁴² Cf. Gert MELVILLE, Warum waren die Zisterzienser so erfolgreich? Eine Analyse der Anfänge, in: *Die Zisterzienser im Mittelalter...*, 23.

⁴³ James, *The Letters...*, 33. Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 137: »Nec dico a subditis mandata praepositorum esse dijudicanda, ubi nil juberi reprehenditur divinis contrarium institutis: sed necessariam assero et prudentiam, qua advertatur si quid adversatur; et libertatem, qua et ingenuae contemnatur.«

Bernard's vision of interpersonal relations in a community includes the necessity to apply the monk's own judgment concerning the superior's commands and the freedom to act in accordance with conscience. Relied on conscience, the monk should disobey if he recognises the precepts as false, for, as it was pointed out, this cannot even be considered true obedience. Elaborating his concept, Bernard explains how to distinguish those who – under the pretext of obedience – are in fact disobedient, from those who have the potential to interiorise the proper form of submissiveness. For that purpose, Bernard makes a clear distinction between those who deliberately obeyed the false command and those who obeyed unwillingly. If a person chooses to act against the (natural) order and the profession, then such an individual is not truly obedient. However, if obedience to a false command occurred unwillingly, it is obvious that the renegade monks were doubtful regarding the precept of the abbot, and – according to Bernard – an inquiry into conscience should be done.⁴⁴ Bernard advocates the necessity of making an individual quest for the value of orders, for it is a way of becoming obedient to true authorities. The proper use of conscience thus implies the possibility (and necessity!) to »weigh« the command of the abbot and to decide whether it contradicts not only the Divine Law but also observance. All the more, this »inquiry« is fully legitimised by the Scripture, which precedes all earthly authorities. Bernard legitimises his arguments by pointing out the instructions of a higher authority: »Prove all things; hold fast that which is good« (1 Th 5,21), and reminds that it was Christ who instructed his disciples to use wisdom in their actions,⁴⁵ indicating that the inquiry into conscience derives not from a human institution but the Saviour himself.

The references to personal prudence and conscience indicate a broader paradigm shift concerning obedience, occurring in the 12th century. Well-known historian Giles Constable succinctly summarised this change saying that the abbots were now

»obeyed in a different spirit, since the early doctrine of obedience, which stressed complete subservience and abnegation of will by the individual monk, was progressively replaced (...) by a view that emphasised individual responsibility and independence of judgement«.⁴⁶

Indeed, Bernard's conceptualisation of obedience – built on the idea that individual judgment should be firmly anchored in common observance – stemmed from the broader processes affecting monasticism, concerning the structural relations between *authority* and *responsibility*, the process in which the Cistercians were crucial protagonists. More specifically, the concept of mutual responsibility for the welfare of the community has its historical back-

⁴⁴ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 136; James, *The Letters...*, 32.

⁴⁵ Bernard interpolates another line from the Scripture: »be wise as serpents and innocent as doves« (Mt 10,16). Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 137; James, *The Letters...*, 33.

⁴⁶ Constable, *The Authority...*, 203.

ground and support in early medieval monastic evolution. The monarchical rule of the abbots was a question of dispute in many of the early medieval Benedictine communities, which tried to participate in the governance of monasteries by stressing the necessity to give counsel to superiors.⁴⁷ However, advice and consent in the governance of a monastery, being methods of limiting abbatial powers, were fully affirmed only in the 11th–12th century. Then, the communities managed to exercise their right to regulate the issues of property, liturgy, discipline and receiving novices together with the abbots.⁴⁸ More than in early medieval monastic foundations, the abbatial position started to be viewed as a governing office highly dependent on the community. The process was irreversible, and even more accentuated in the 13th century, when the Canon Law and the Papal Curia, as well as the re-invention of the principles of Roman Law in various spheres of the secular and ecclesiastical life, promoted corporate decision making and communal responsibility as the basic *modus operandi* in the governance of any collegiate bodies, congregations, or orders.⁴⁹ The affirmation of consent in decision making had direct consequences for the understanding of authority. This can be seen clearly in the Cistercian community, which fully accepted collegiality instead of hierarchy,⁵⁰ and introduced a collective government based on the General Chapter. Shared responsibility within the collective government in the Cistercian order implied a fully affirmed authority of the *communal*, standing vis-à-vis the abbot's individual and unlimited authority. This new view of the position of the abbot was supported by the General Chapter, which accentuated the responsibility of superiors by insisting on their role in preserving peace, love and proper observance.⁵¹ The Cistercian spiritual tracts also supported changes of authority concepts by placing a bigger emphasis on the personal value of submission. A direct link between an individual and God and personal responsibility were important for one's salvation, accomplished through absolute obedience to the Divine Law, or the law of love.⁵² By doing so, Cistercian authors, like other monastic authors of the

⁴⁷ See: Franz J. FELTEN, *Herrschaft des Abtes*, in: Friedrich PRINZ (ed.), *Herrschaft und Kirche. Beiträge zur Entstehung und Wirkungsweise episkopaler und monastischer Organisationsformen*, Stuttgart, Hiersemann, 1988, 147-296; Franz J. FELTEN, *Auctoritas – consilium – consensus*. Zur Einschränkung der Macht des Abtes im Mittelalter, in: Jean-François COTTIER et al. (ed.), *Les personnes d'autorité en milieu régulier. Des origines de la vie régulière au XVIII^e siècle*, Saint-Etienne, Publications de l'Université de Saint-étienne, 2013, 27-46.

⁴⁸ Cf. Constable, *The Authority...*, 200-202.

⁴⁹ In this regard, see crucial study: Yves CONGAR, *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet*, in: Heinz RAUSCH (ed.), *Die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der modernen Volksvertretung. Die Entwicklung von den mittelalterlichen Korporationen zu den modernen Parlamenten*, Bd. I, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980, 115-182. Also: Krüger, *Leitungsgewalt und Kollegialität...*, 65-161.

⁵⁰ Melville, *The World...*, 136.

⁵¹ *Carta Caritatis prior...*, c. VII, l. 2, 278.

⁵² Extensive discussion on this topic is provided in e.g. Aelredus, *Speculum charitatis...*, col. 505-620; Aelredus, *Liber de speculo caritatis...*, 1-161; Aelred, *The Mirror...*, 87-303.

time, were invoking more progressively the sense of *self* in practising spirituality and demanding an extremely high level of personal involvement, built on conscience, in individual spiritual growth.⁵³ Communal governance promoting responsibility and self-awareness instead of full abnegation of will on behalf of the abbot had created a background for instigating conscience whenever the salvation process was endangered by an irresponsible act of the superiors.

Within this context, it was necessary to stabilise the conceptual tension between the abbatial and communal authority. Bernard's letter suggests that this tension should be resolved by creating a complex network of individual responsibilities of both the monks and the abbot.⁵⁴ The consequent implication was that it was not only the abbot but the whole community – each in a different way – that had to work on achieving the common goal of salvation. As it was shown, the abbot's conscience was to be manifested in his responsibility to act in accordance with the Divine Law and common observance.⁵⁵ In other words, a bigger emphasis was placed on him being a true *vicarius Christi* instead of a ruler. By stressing that members of the community needed to obey their abbot as long as he acted in accordance with the Divine Law and common observance, Bernard implicated a larger share of responsibility of individuals for their spiritual growth, which also leads to communal welfare. For, in a coenobitic community, highly dependent on unity, individual responsibility for the *self* implicated that a person contributed to the common good too. It is thus clear that responsibility was the *conditio sine qua non* for both the spiritual progress of an individual and communal prosperity. In that way, Bernard's letter shows that his preoccupation was not only with the individual but also with an adequate balance between the *personal* and the *communal*. A personal inquiry into conscience is there to protect the monks from the unbearable state of disunity.⁵⁶ Thus, by conceptually empowering an individual with the tools of conscience, the community was strengthened too, and as Gert Melville pointed out, it was only the perfect organisation of the whole and the best formation of the individual, that guaranteed a successful path towards God in a system of the highest spiritual fruitfulness.⁵⁷

⁵³ Extensive writing on conscience in the spiritual life of a religious within the process of deeper interiorisation of faith is available in: Mirko BREITENSTEIN, Das »Haus des Gewissens«. Zur Konstruktion und Bedeutung innerer Räume im Religiosentum des hohen Mittelalters, in: Jörg SONNTAG et al. (ed.), *Geist und Gestalt. Monastische Raumkonzepte als Ausdrucksformen religiöser Leitideen im Mittelalter*, Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2016, 19-55.

⁵⁴ Giles Constable emphasised that in early medieval monasticism the »network of individual subordinations to an abbot was the essence of a cenobitical community« (Constable, *The Authority...*, 191). It seems that in the 12th century this network of »individual subordinations« was indeed replaced by the »network of individual responsibilities«, as was pointed out in the text of the present paper.

⁵⁵ See chapter 1.1. Love.

⁵⁶ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 128-129, 131-132, 136-140; James, *The Letters...*, 26, 29, 32-33, 35.

⁵⁷ Gert MELVILLE, Einleitende Aspekte zur Aporie von Eigenem und Ganzem im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum, in: Gert MELVILLE–Markus SCHÜRER (eds.), *Das Eigene und das Gan-*

However, Bernard is aware of the fact that in the form of communal life under the *Rule of St Benedict*, one could say that monks are not there to contradict the superiors.⁵⁸ The note is logical, for it is the abbot who is the master in the »school of the Lord's service«,⁵⁹ fully in charge of his disciples. In a school of such kind, which is – above all – a preparatory institution for transcending into the heavenly kingdom,⁶⁰ a disciple cannot ever be above his master.⁶¹ By anticipating counter-arguments of this kind, Bernard adds polemical value to his tract. However, he does that only to show how futile these arguments are when juxtaposed with the principles of true obedience, which is perfect only when shown to virtuous masters. To prove his point, Bernard uses a typical medieval narrative method of presenting a literal *exemplum*. Not without irony, Bernard compares all those men who followed the bad command and now excuse themselves as of being only disciples following the master to the »simple Paul«. ⁶² This Paul is *Paulus abbas*, who was a disciple of St Anthony the Great, the father of monasticism. Paul's life is presented in the *Vitae patrum*, which describes his simplicity, unconditional obedience and willingness to commit to futile tasks if commanded.⁶³ Bernard uses his example to effectively point out the two-fold relation in practising true obedience. He states:

»If only your abbot had been another Anthony, so that there would have been no need for you to inquire into anything he said, but simply to obey without question the slightest word that fell from his lips«. ⁶⁴

Clearly, simplicity and unconditional obedience should be practised only if the abbot acts exemplary. In such a case, the monk's obedience is that obedience which is without delay,⁶⁵ completely in accordance with the *Rule*.⁶⁶

Bernard's choice of the *exemplum* is not random – he introduced the story of the desert fathers since it fitted into the Cistercian conceptualisation of the

ze. *Zum Individuellen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2002, XLI.

⁵⁸ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 137; James, *The Letters...*, 33.

⁵⁹ This is how the *Rule of St Benedict* defines the monastery. *Benedicti Regula...*, Prolog, l. 45, 9: *Constituenda est ergo nobis dominici scola seruitii*.

⁶⁰ Cf. Gert MELVILLE, Formale Verfahren als Steuerungsmechanismen mittelalterlicher Orden. Aufriss eines Forschungsfeldes, in: André BRODOCZ et al. (ed.), *Die Verfassung des Politischen. Festschrift für Hans Vorländer*, Wiesbaden, Springer, 2014, 25; Melville, *The World...*, 318.

⁶¹ Cf. Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 137; James, *The Letters...*, 33.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ See: *Vitae Patrum*, in: PL, vol. 73, Paris, 1849, c. XXVII, col. 1126-1130. For occurrences of the *Paulus Simplex exemplum* in literature see: Frederic C. TUBACH, *Index exemplorum – Handbook of medieval Religious Tales*, Helsinki, Akademia Scientiarum Fennica, 1969, 329.

⁶⁴ This is an adjusted translation from: James, *The Letters...*, 33. Latin: »si tamen et ille alterum se tibi exhibuisset Antonium, ut quidquid vel leviter de labiis ejus procederet, necesse non haberes discutere, sed sine cunctatione ad omnia nihil haesitans obedires!« (Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 137).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Benedicti Regula...*, c. V, l. 1, 38. Cf. also note 7.

monastic life. The Cistercians integrated firmly into their observance the idea of the renewal of early desert monasticism. The idea will be very clearly formulated in early Cistercian narratives, the *Exordium Cistercii* (the early 1130s) and *Exordium parvum* (mid-1140s), which promoted the Cistercians as followers of the desert fathers.⁶⁷ The same concept will be perpetuated throughout the next decades, culminating with the *Exordium magnum*, the most complex Cistercian narrative of the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century. There, the White Monks were presented as direct descendants of desert monasticism.⁶⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux himself had promoted the idea of close attachment to the ideals of the desert fathers, especially in his *Apologia*. In it he criticises the misbehaviour of the Benedictines, presenting their deviations as departures from the ideals of the early fathers.⁶⁹ In Bernard's letter, Anthony the Great and Paul the Simple were introduced in order to prove Bernard's point concerning abbatial responsibility – if the abbot imitates the ultimate role model, he acts responsibly and stands in direct relation to the forbearers of core Cistercian ideals. Obedience practised completely – or, as the *Rule* defines, »without delay«⁷⁰ – to such an abbot is absolutely justified. Otherwise, an inquiry into conscience must be instigated, and the monk's individual responsibility for observance fully applied.

Thus, Bernard's discourse had a purpose to generically combine authentic spirituality of the desert fathers with the Cistercian observance standards. This implication of Bernard's letter must not be underestimated since it was protecting the fundamental principles of coenobitism in the Cistercian Order, which originated in very complex circumstances. More precisely, the Cistercians evolved in a broader context of the various ascetic movements of the day.⁷¹ Many of those movements abandoned the coenobitic structures, considering them unnecessary in the salvation history. Their accent was on the individualisation of faith, and the interiorisation of the apostolic ideals practised in loosely organised communities.⁷² Because of that, ascetic movements were often considered to be living according to their »own law«.⁷³ The Cistercians

⁶⁷ Both narratives are available in: *Narrative and legislative texts... Exordium Cistercii*, c. I, l. 8, 179; *Exordium parvum*, c. III, l. 1-7, 238.

⁶⁸ *Exordium magnum Cisterciense oder Bericht vom Anfang des Zisterzienserordens*, Heinz PIESIK (trans.), vol. I, Dist. I, c. 1-13, 8-58. Cf. Emilia JAMROZIAK, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe 1090-1500*, London – New York, Routledge, 2013, 23.

⁶⁹ *Cistercians and Cluniacs: St Bernard's Apologia...*, IX, 54-55, 58.

⁷⁰ See notes 66 and 7.

⁷¹ Cf. Bede K. LACKNER, *The Eleventh-Century Background of Cîteaux*, Spencer, MA, Cistercian Publ., 1972.

⁷² Cf. Melville, *The World...*, 89-124.

⁷³ Meaning not following the standard version of religious life in a monastic community under the strict discipline of the rule. Cf. Gert MELVILLE, *Die Zisterzienser und der Umbruch des Mönchtums im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert*, in: Franz J. FELTEN-Werner RÖSENER (eds.), *Norm und Realität. Kontinuität und Wandel der Zisterzienser im Mittelalter*, Berlin, LIT Verlag, 2009, 39.

managed to combine the ascetic ideals of the individual approach to spirituality with classical coenobitism (manifested primarily in their insistence on following the *Rule of St Benedict* literally), which gained them popularity and rapid expansion.⁷⁴ As demonstrated, Bernard claimed that absolute obedience to a role model such as St Anthony was, in fact, that obedience which was practised »with no delay«. The latter notion is extremely important since it relates to the *Rule*, implying that to obey the desert fathers (or to obey like the desert fathers) is actually to act in accordance with St Benedict's precepts. This conceptual loop is the clearest evidence of the efforts to promote well-balanced observance, wherein authentic desert monasticism is in accordance, and not in any contradiction, with the coenobitic forms of life organised by Benedict's *Rule*. Poverty and simplicity, on which the Cistercians placed heavy emphasis in their observance,⁷⁵ were completely in agreement with the eremitic movements of the day, which were searching for a proper way of practising the *vita apostolica* outside the standardised Benedictine structures. However, the Cistercians considered that the true *vita apostolica*, as well as the perfect life in extreme poverty and solitude, was possible only through strict attachment to the *Rule*.⁷⁶ Likewise, obedience guided by conscience was a clear manifestation of this new approach to monastic observance, since it implied the concordance of individual introspection evolving from ascetic practise and absolute submissiveness demanded by the *Rule* prescribed for the coenobitic communities.

2. Order and profession

In order to fully comprehend Bernard's vision of obedience, attention must be paid to other two crucial issues: the relational structures among the abbeys of the Order, and the meaning of obedience for the profession. Regarding the first issue, Bernard explicitly states that he does not direct his admonitions to those who committed the mistake believing that their abbot had obtained the necessary permission.⁷⁷ Bernard thus invokes the question of »institutional« obedience, i.e. the issue of the order within the Order. As it was demonstrated, the abbot's and the monk's departure is an evil deed since it breaks the unity and endangers souls.⁷⁸ However, the abbot committed another error by failing to ask for the permission of his immediate superior, the Abbot of Cîteaux (the mother abbey out of which the Order evolved), or the local ordinary (Bishop

⁷⁴ More in: Melville, *Warum waren die Zisterzienser...*, 15-30.

⁷⁵ Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order...*, 17.

⁷⁶ See in: *Exordium Parvum...*, c. XV, l. 2-3, 253; cf. Melville, *Warum waren die Zisterzienser...*, 20-22.

⁷⁷ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 132; James, *The Letters...*, 29.

⁷⁸ See earlier, chapter 1.1. Love.

of Langres).⁷⁹ It was already noted in historiography that Bernard's most important judgment on the Morimond monks concerns the illegality of the endeavour.⁸⁰ Bernard sees Morimond Abbey as not »fully autonomous so that an abbot could lead a select band of monks wherever he pleased«, implying »a constitutional limitation to abbatial jurisdiction«. ⁸¹ Even though Bernard refers to the necessity to acquire the permission of the head of the Order, he did not treat the authority of Cîteaux Abbot in monarchical terms. Rather, in the background of Bernard's argumentation lies – again – the author's aim to preserve the specificities of the Cistercian organisation, which is essentially non-monarchical. Bernard claims that the abbot of Cîteaux is as much the abbot of the Morimond monks as their own abbot but in »parental« terms: »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«. ⁸² This is the essence of Bernard's thought here, and it is the essence of Cistercian understanding of their organisation system, which found the clearest expression in the *Carta Caritatis*. The Cistercians would organise their network of abbeys according to the lines of filiation, meaning that the abbeys that had begotten new monasteries were considered as »mothers« and their foundations as »daughters«. ⁸³ The internal relations were organised by implying not the rule of one abbey over another, but paternal care; hence Bernard's reference to the fatherly role of the Abbot of Cîteaux. ⁸⁴ The symbolism of this kind – promoted by the *Carta Caritatis* – was a key principle for keeping the sense of unity and equality within the Order. The abbeys, being parts of this system, remained autonomous to some degree while at the same time they were integrated into the big structure of the Order. The system in which autonomy and integration coexisted was that innovative structure which enabled the Cistercian version to eventually become a trans-regional network of monasteries. ⁸⁵ However, it was exactly the co-existence of these two principles which was demanding constant harmonisation in the inter-abbatial relations, if stability was to be preserved. ⁸⁶ The concept of an abbey independent from the rule of another abbey was indeed a feature of the

⁷⁹ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 132; James, *The Letters...*, 29.

⁸⁰ Casey, Bernard and the Crisis..., 137.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² This is James' adjusted translation: James, *The Letters...*, 30. See Latin text in: Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 133: »qui utique superior illo, quantum pater filio, quantum magister discipulo, quantum denique abbas commisso sibi monacho...«.

⁸³ *Carta Caritatis prior...*, c. I, 275; cf. also: *Exordium Cistercii...*, c. II, l. 11, 181.

⁸⁴ See note 82.

⁸⁵ More on the expansion of the Cistercians: Jamrozak, *The Cistercian Order...*, 43-91. On the organisational aspects which enabled the Cistercians' success: Melville, *Warum waren die Zisterzienser...*, 23-26.

⁸⁶ The Cistercians also introduced regular visitations, with the purpose of preserving stability and »harmonising« inter-abbatial relations. Cf. Jörg OBERSTE, *Visitation und Ordensorganisation. Formen sozialer Normierung, Kontrolle und Kommunikation bei Zisterziensern, Prämonstratensern und Cluniazensern (12.-frühes 14. Jahrhundert)*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 1996, 57-159.

Cistercian organisation, but – as noted – concerning the property rights.⁸⁷ In terms of observance and organisation, however, unanimity was obligatory, and here the Abbey of Cîteaux had a crucial role in unifying the usages.⁸⁸ The imposition of the unanimity obligation increased the sense of collective responsibility in the Order. Thus, Bernard's invocation of the authority of Cîteaux Abbot becomes clearer. He implies that decision making, especially concerning the fundamental profession obligation (such as obedience), must take into account the established lines of organisation, which functioned based on close bonds presented in terms of paternal symbolism. At the same time, the special status of the Abbot of Cîteaux had to be taken into account, in terms of respect, honour, exemplary usages, as well as in terms of governance, in which, however, the superior must not pose a threat to equality. In that system, the immediate superior – the mother abbey – must be included in the supervision of its daughter. Furthermore, Morimond Abbey (founded c. 1117) was one of the four earliest begotten daughters of Cîteaux together with La Ferté (1113), Pontigny (1114), and Clairvaux (1115).⁸⁹ If the stability of the nascent organisation was to be preserved, it was necessary to demand harmony in the relations between Cîteaux Abbey and the first begotten abbeys, the relational structure which was supposed to be exemplary in the organisational sense. This harmony – it is clear from Bernard's text – derives from acting legally, and from accepting the vital role of the mother-abbeys in the life of the daughter-abbeys at the level of the whole organisation. The Cistercians added new value to the sense of obedience and *belonging* for both the abbots and the community. As demonstrated, especially on the *exemplum* of St Paul and St Anthony, Bernard saw obedience in traditional terms but empowered it with the demand for the responsibility of the superior as well as with the invocation of conscience among the brethren. By accentuating the parental relation between Cîteaux and Morimond, obedience to common observance was additionally strengthened conceptually. The obedience of monks to the abbot was demanded within a broader structure of the *ordo* comprising ever-more newly integrated religious houses. Consequently, obedience to the (responsible and exemplary) abbot implies a strong organisational and emotional link with the father-abbot. In that way, Bernard makes a perfectly logical conceptual system in which »common observance« is protected by both the spiritual and organisational structure of responsibility, not only in one monastery but alongside the lines of filiation. Thus, Bernard's letter proves to be more than a proposal for overcoming the crises; it is a sketch of the programme for the stability of the whole Order.

⁸⁷ See chapter 1.1. *Love*, and notes 14–16.

⁸⁸ *Carta Caritatis prior...*, c. II, l. 2, 276.

⁸⁹ Oberste, *Constitution in progress...*, 37. These four abbeys were considered the »primary abbeys«.

Bernard imposes the argument of legality not only concerning the inter-abbatial relations, but also the relations between the abbeys and ecclesiastical dignitaries. He states that the Bishop of Langres could also complain that the renegade brothers demonstrated contempt because they had not gained his permission for the venture.⁹⁰ In the background of Bernard's thought is a concern for the undisturbed relationships with the Bishops, whose favour was of high importance for the initial spread of the Cistercian network.⁹¹ At the inception of the Order, close cooperation with local ordinaries was strongly emphasised in the process of founding monasteries.⁹² Even though the Papacy formally recognised the new observance in 1119,⁹³ thus giving it the best possible support for further expansion, close cooperation with the Bishops remained crucial for founding new houses.⁹⁴ It undoubtedly contributed to stability in creating the monastic network and ensured integration into the local structures. Within this context, one can understand Bernard's concern for the Bishop's possible complaint about not being consulted. However, Bernard does not imply that the Bishop's permission would have secured legality to their action, or that Bishop would have ever given them the permission for such an act. By addressing the issue of bypassing both Cîteaux Abbot and the Bishop, Bernard accentuates that the renegade monks denied the proper order. Bernard's views on the »legalisation« of the action by permission are more thoroughly explained in the passages concerning the Papacy. The letter indicates that Bernard had information and believed that the renegade monks had asked for and obtained the licence for their endeavour from the Pope himself. However, Bernard is sure that the Pope would never have given his consent, had the proper consultations taken part.⁹⁵ Bernard's legalistic views are clear, however; the very act – even though supposedly »legalised« by the Papal licence – is not lawful, but essentially evil.⁹⁶ Here Bernard remains loyal to the earlier expressed notion that to break with the profession norms is to act unlawfully. He again points out that the act of leaving the monastery resulted in a scandal, which had direct consequences for the monks, who were left without spiritual guidance, and no licence could change that.⁹⁷ Thus, when speaking about the licence(s) for the departure, we can point out several conclusions. Firstly, the act of departure is unlawful since it was done without any consultations with the Abbot of Cîteaux and the local Bishop. It is never implied that any of these instances would

⁹⁰ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 133; James, *The Letters...*, 30.

⁹¹ Cf. Guido CARIBONI, The Relationship Between Abbots and Bishops and the Origins of the Cistercian *Carta Caritatis*, in: Krijn PANSTERS et al. (ed.), *Shaping Stability. The Normation and Formation of Religious Life in the Middle Ages*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2016, 224-225.

⁹² *Carta Caritatis prior...*, Prolog, l. II, 274.

⁹³ With the Papal bull *Ad hoc in apostolice*. See note 24.

⁹⁴ Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order...*, 51.

⁹⁵ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 135; James, *The Letters...*, 31.

⁹⁶ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 134; James, *The Letters...*, 31.

⁹⁷ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 134-135; James, *The Letters...*, 31.

have consented to this act, but the very act of ignorance of their authority is unacceptable since it breaks the unity of the Order, and endangers its position within the local structures. Secondly, Bernard makes efforts to remain loyal to his concept of legality, and – while not diminishing papal authority – he recalls the argument that what is naturally unlawful cannot be legalised. Papal authority is not in question – not at any time – but there was a need to find a balance between the naturally unlawful things and the Pope's right to »legalise«. Bernard found a perfect solution by separating the authority to »legalise« from unlawful actions, which can be licensed but not changed in nature.⁹⁸ Furthermore, by indicating that the licence was gained in an inappropriate way (by the means of importunity),⁹⁹ Bernard additionally empowers his accusations against the actions of the monks in question. At the same time, he addresses the Pope's righteousness and proper concern for the monastic agenda, for if the Pope had not been misinformed, he would never have agreed to issue the licence for that scandal.¹⁰⁰ In that way, Bernard accomplished his purpose: he defended the concordance between the monastic and natural law, protected the authority of the Pope (even when the formal validation made by the Pope was not in accordance with the Order's call for obedience), and established additional anti-propaganda concerning the monks in case.

Bernard also addressed the issue of the relation between stability (*stabilitas loci*) and obedience, which are part of the monastic profession formula, together with the conversion of life.¹⁰¹ When practising the profession, the monks were making a life-long commitment not only in terms of (true) obedience but also regarding the immutability of the residing monastery. Between these two vows, there were no conflicts, as Bernard ascertains, pointing out that all the monks promising obedience, promise stability as well.¹⁰² Bernard explains that by leaving their place, the monks did not only commit an immoral act (as noted earlier), but they also disregarded their vows. A break with stability cannot be validated by obedience to the abbot – Bernard continues – because the *stabilitas loci* is established according to the *Rule* only in the presence of an abbot, and the vow itself is not subjected to the will of the abbot.¹⁰³ In other

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 135; James, *The Letters...*, 31. The argument is, however, not so solid if we have in mind the level of professionalism at the Papal Curia.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Benedicti Regula...*, c. LVIII, l. 17, pp. 148. Cf. *Monastic obligations...* c. XVI, 138-139. On the vows in the 12th-century monasticism: *Tractatus de professione monachorum*, in: Edmund MARTENE, *De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus*, tom. II, Antuerpiae, 1736, col. 469-496. Cf. Giles CONSTABLE (ed.), *Three Treatises from Bec on the Nature of Monastic Life*, trans. Bernard S. SMITH, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008, 29-106.

¹⁰² Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 139; James, *The Letters...*, 35.

¹⁰³ Cf. James, *The Letters...*, 35. In the Latin text: »Idem notum est solemniter ac regulariter profiteri quemque in presentia abbatis. In presentia ergo tantum, non etiam ad nutum ipsius fit cuiusque professio. Testis proinde adhibetur abbas, non dictator professionis; adjutor, non

words, the abbot is to be obeyed in accordance with the profession, meaning that he is there to help the monks to fulfil their vows.¹⁰⁴ This is an extremely important notion, with which Bernard encloses his repertoire of arguments concerning the misdeeds of the Morimond monks: they had injured the Divine law of love (thus damaging the basic spiritual principles of the Order); they had acted contrary to the monastic life; they had bypassed the legal instances and led astray the Pope himself; and, finally, they contradicted their vows. This final rebuke is extremely powerful since it touches the monks' inner self profoundly, and directs itself towards the personal identity and essence of every professed monk. In that way, Bernard made the final impression on its readers, wanting them to become fully aware of the gravity of their actions.

In the end, Bernard explicates under which circumstances the change of location does not imply a break with the vows. He ascertains that it is possible to practise a profession in one place and to live elsewhere, but only if the dislocation occurred without any scandal. As long as the monk keeps peace with others and preserves concord and unity, stability is being kept wherever he is.¹⁰⁵ Bernard clearly perceives the vows as something not just formally made, but as directions for a specific way of life. That means, of course, keeping in accordance with the principles of common observance.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the relocation must be based on the peace of conscience.¹⁰⁷ Only if a monk begins to live under some other rules, namely if he goes outside the unity of his order, is he breaking the vow of stability.¹⁰⁸ Bernard's views do not show »flexibility« in understanding the vows (as it might seem); quite oppositely, they indicate a stronger rigour of the profession. He namely addresses the more profound, spiritual value of the *stabilitas loci*, which must be firmly integrated into a monk's own conscience. It was not enough to make the vows; rather, they must be kept all the time, and always in accordance with conscience. The commitment to the place, contained in the *stabilitas loci* vow, is not only a physical attachment but primarily a spiritual commitment. This practice of the vows implies even more self-discipline and constant (re)examination of the self. Obedience has a vital role in connecting the two spheres: the material (the physical location of the monastery) with the spiritual (the value of the vow) one. Bernard here gives his personal example by stating that even when he is away from the monastery

fraudator adimpletionis; vindex, non auctor praevaricationis« (Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 140).

¹⁰⁴ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 140; James, *The Letters...*, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 139-140; James, *The Letters...*, 35. Here Bernard puts at the fore front the »stability of profession«, which belongs to a much broader context concerning 12th-century monasticism. Read more on this in *Constable, Authority...*, 203 (here the author uses the term »stability of profession«).

¹⁰⁶ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 140; James, *The Letters...*, 35.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 139-140; James, *The Letters...*, 35-36.

where the vows were promised, he is always there in his spirit.¹⁰⁹ The logic is clear: if true obedience is practised, unity is preserved and the *stabilitas loci* keeps its purity even if a monk is dislocated from his monastery.

The question of changing the monastery contains another important connotation. The Cistercian practice was appealing to many already professed monks from non-Cistercian communities. They were then leaving their monasteries to join the Cistercian houses.¹¹⁰ Bernard was fully aware of this trend, and as Abbot of Clairvaux, he was actively involved in admitting newcomers. This raised the question of the validity of the action since those new monks obviously broke their stability obligation with the previous monastery. Bernard raises this issue by inserting a hypothetical objection (which could be imposed by the Morimond monks) to his own attitudes, as he could be accused of acting contrary to his own words when receiving monks from other monasteries.¹¹¹ Both the physical and spiritual *stabilitas* (anchored in true obedience) are integrated into Bernard's understanding of the vow. Then how is it possible to understand Bernard's actions in the process of receiving monks who had already professed their vows elsewhere? In order to give a plausible explanation, Bernard states that the break with the stability norm can be legitimised by the impulses to pursue a more virtuous life and to realise fully the monastic obligation.¹¹² If a person realises that the vows could be fulfilled only at another place, the change of location is not a mistake.¹¹³ Bernard deals with this issue in his *De praecepto et dispensatione*, where he explicitly claims that a change of location should not be judged or disapproved of as long as it is grounded in conscience.¹¹⁴ Conscience is again invoked as a crucial feature in a monk's efforts to live fully in accordance with his vows. This Bernard's concept is not, however, related just to the problem of newcomers entering the Cistercian monasteries. It rather derives from a much larger context concerning the Cistercian beginnings. The Cistercian order was conceived exactly when a group of monks from Molesme Abbey became aware of the impossibility to lead the life of austerity in accordance with the vows they had professed. Early Cistercian narratives inform us that it was only after these monks had contemplated about poverty, that they decided to lead a more spiritual life, and to observe the *Rule* they had professed properly, but at another place.¹¹⁵ Driven by the compulsion to pursue only the heavenly affairs, and not to be entangled in the earthly business

¹⁰⁹ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 140; James, *The Letters...*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Cf. on the transfer from Benedictine to Cistercian communities, and also on the cases of transfer in the opposite direction, namely Cistercian monks leaving their communities to enter Benedictine houses in: Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order...*, 26.

¹¹¹ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 141; James, *The Letters...*, 36.

¹¹² Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 141-142; James, *The Letters...*, 37.

¹¹³ Bernardus, *Epistola...*, col. 142; James, *The Letters...*, 37.

¹¹⁴ *Monastic obligations...*, XVI, 142-143.

¹¹⁵ *Exordium Cistercii...*, c. I, l. 4-7, 179; *Exordium parvum...*, c. I-IV, 235-240.

of their monastery (i.e. the land ownership), the monks abandoned Molesme Abbey (1098) and founded the new Abbey of Cîteaux.¹¹⁶ Their departure was clearly a break with the *stabilitas loci* vow. However, according to early Cistercian sources, this departure was not seen as a break with the profession obligation, but as complete fulfilment of it, and a way of leading a more perfect life.¹¹⁷ Only by abandoning the monastery where observance was corrupted by material wealth (so the narratives explicate) was it possible to fulfil the »vows, those that my lips [have] uttered« (Psalm 66,13-14).¹¹⁸ Conscience was crucial for establishing a new community. Conscience was behind the uneasy decision to leave the community, where they were expected to live until death, and conscience was the generator of that inner desire to lead a more perfect life, at any cost. The creation of the conceptual system which was supposed to explain under which circumstances the break of the vows is tolerable, presented in Bernard's letter, is clearly an expression of the Cistercian view of the relation between the conscience and the vows. It can be assumed that by explicating his views concerning this issue, Bernard confirmed the highest spiritual utility of the departure undertaken by the first Cistercians, thus additionally legitimising the actions of the Cîteaux founders. At the same time, the break with the stability obligation of the Morimond monks was a deviation, since it was contradicting the more perfect life, which the Cîteaux founders were promoting (also by the means of departure).

*

Finally, it must be emphasised that the venture of the renegade monks failed, not long after their departure. First of all, their leader, Abbot Arnold, died at the very beginning of 1125, the event which directed the course of events, and left the renegade monks without guidance. Furthermore, one must have in mind that the authorities of the Cistercian Order reacted drastically to the Morimond crisis, and the General Chapter excommunicated those who remained unwilling to return to their monastery.¹¹⁹ The lack of abbatial leadership and the excommunication sentence, together with the involvement of a charismatic figure such as Bernard of Clairvaux, undoubtedly influenced the monks in case (or at least a part of them) to give up their plans. Michael Casey points out that »of those whom we know to have retracted their steps, most seem to have re-

¹¹⁶ *Exordium Cistercii...*, c. I, l. 4, 179; c. II, l. 2-3, 180.

¹¹⁷ Cf. also Melville, *Die Zisterzienser und der Umbruch...*, 39.

¹¹⁸ *Exordium Cistercii...*, c. I, l. 1-6, 179 (Latin), and 400 (English). The reference to the Psalm 66,13-14 in this narrative: l. 6.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Casey, Bernard and the Crisis..., 125. For the excommunication sentence see: Josephus Maria CANIVEZ (ed.), *Statuta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, tomus I, Louvain, Bureaux de la revue, 1933, 4-5.

accommodated themselves to the life in Morimond and to have prospered in their later monastic life.«¹²⁰ Thus, Bernard's method of admonition in the letter to brother Adam must be seen in the proper context of his efforts not only to explicate to the renegade monks how they misunderstood basic monastic values but also to protect their souls, which were sentenced to a complete wrack if they failed to recede. It can be speculated that Bernard's argumentation and logic played an important role in convincing the Morimond monks to return to their house, exactly because the strong admonition was concerning their spiritual benefit, i.e. the sphere of life that could affect the religious brothers most efficiently. Thus, it can be presumed that the successful reintegration came as a joint result of the austere institutional strategy employed by the Order's authorities and Bernard's involvement based on a strict admonition, aiming at both restoring internal order and providing spiritual advancement to the brothers.

Conclusion

Faced with the unauthorised departure of a group of Cistercians from Morimond Abbey, Bernard of Clairvaux engaged himself in the case by trying to persuade the monks to return to their community and restore peace. It was exactly peace and unity that were put at the forefront of the most extensive of Bernard's several letters in which he reprimanded the renegade monks. Bernard sees in their action a most severe fault, for the Morimond community was left without proper spiritual guidance. Even though his tone is often filled with non-diplomatic irony, it is clear that he tried to restore unity by evoking essential Cistercian and monastic values. First of all, Bernard understood obedience in the »traditional« monastic terms; however, he extended it with some new connotations, in accordance with Cistercian specificities. Following the traditional views, Bernard perpetuated the idea that obedience is a perfect way of reaching unity with God, and therefore obedience must be pure and absolute. Following the *Rule of St Benedict* literally, obedience is owed to the abbot who represents Christ himself. Bernard complemented the view with his idea of true obedience, which implies obeying the law of love, for it is love which keeps peace and unity of the monks. Hence, obedience to any human who does not act in accordance with the law of love is, in fact, disobedience. Since the abbot broke unity, he was disobeying the law of love (love that unites), and his command did not have a binding force. The emphasis on obedience to the Divine Law, i.e. on the obedience which will instigate the rule of love, results from Bernard's efforts to promote the fundamental principles governing his Order, which were defined at the constitutional level by the *Carta Caritatis*. More precisely, love

¹²⁰ Casey, *Bernard and the Crisis...*, 125.

and unity were the essential features which were supposed to determine the inter-abbatial and interpersonal relations in the nascent Order. In this context, the monks were obliged to re-evaluate the abbot's precepts if they found them contrary to common observance. Bernard, thus, emphasised the responsibility of the monks for their own spiritual progress, as well as for common welfare and the purity of the profession. However, the monks were supposed to obey the abbot unconditionally so long as he was acting in accordance with the rules of common observance. Apart from putting forward the spiritual connotations, Bernard also emphasises the illegality of the action, since no licence had been obtained from the mother-Abbey of Cîteux. In that way, they disregarded the organisational and institutional fundamentals of the Order, in which the mutual bonds of love and strong links between mother-abbeyes and daughter-abbeyes were a crucial point in the evolving identity. Furthermore, ignoring the Bishop was a serious offense, since it endangered the Order's relationship with the diocesan authorities, who were crucial in creating the network of Cistercian monasteries. In addition, Bernard emphasises that not even the Papal licence can change the nature of the error (all the more, Bernard presupposes that the licence was obtained only by the means of importunity).

The crucial element of Bernard's concept was the emphasis on the conscience of every individual, and the monk's own judgment concerning a superior's actions. Conscience (and not just simple subjugation) was needed for evaluating the abbot's commands, i.e. for determining whether they contradicted common observance. Bernard's letter shows that conscience was also an acceptable means of determining whether the community provided the necessary conditions for salvation. In that way, conscience did not limit or reduce the value of obedience; rather it became a tool by which perfection could be indeed reached, not only by surrendering the monk's body and will to the full power of the abbot but also by stronger individual involvement in the salvation process. In that way, conscience was supposed to instigate a special spiritual dynamic within every individual – it was placing an *individual* at the forefront, but only with the purpose of ultimate abnegation of that same *individual* (the abnegation which is the result of perfect obedience!). And every time the path to perfection by the means of obedience is disrupted, conscience is there to invoke personal responsibility and to make the necessary corrections, but again, only in order to allow the individual complete subordination (in accordance with the *Rule*). Thus, Bernard's letter reflects perfectly the concept of the highest functionality in which responsibility for the self, responsibility for the community, conscience, and true obedience (in the traditional sense of full subordination) fully coexist and fruitfully complement one another.¹²¹

¹²¹ Lektura engleskoga teksta / Proofreading of the English text: Jasenka Kuček, magistra engl. jezika i knjiž. i mag. soc. / Master in English Language and Literature and Master in Sociology.

Marko Jerković*

(Ne)posluš u cistercitskome redu

Neka razmišljanja o pismu Bernarda od Clairvauxa bratu Adamu

Sažetak

Godine 1124. jedna je skupina redovnika napustila svoju cistercitsku zajednicu u Morimondu i zaputila se u Svetu Zemlju (pothvat koji je završio neuspješno). Budući da za taj put nisu dobili odobrenje redovničkih autoriteta, čin je smatran velikim skandalom koji je uvelike naštetio duhovnome životu zajednice. Veliki cistercitski teolog Bernard od Clairvauxa svojim je pismima nastojao utjecati na povratak »odbjeglih« redovnika. U najopsežnijem pismu, upućenom bratu Adamu, Bernard pojašnjava kako je »nedjelo« redovnika iz Morimonda učinjeno uslijed njihova krivoga shvaćanja autoriteta. Članak analizira na koji je način Bernard poimao istinsku poslušnost i kako je poslušnost korelirao s najvišim duhovnim vrijednostima cistercitskoga reda. Također, istražuju se implikacije poslušnosti i uloga savjesti u redovničkom životu te Bernardova konceptualizacija opatove i redovnikove odgovornosti za zajedničko opsluživanje (Pravila). U konačnici, razmatraju se Bernardovi pogledi na poslušnost u odnosu na unutarnje strukture autoriteta u cistercitskome redu, kao i u odnosu na autoritet biskupa i pape.

Ključne riječi: Bernard od Clairvauxa, cistercitsko opsluživanje, odgovornost, poslušnost i ljubav, savjest.

* Doc. dr. sc. Marko Jerković, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Hrvatski studiji; Kampus Borongaj, Borongajska c. 83d, HR-10000 Zagreb; e-mail: mjerkovic@hrstud.hr.