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Although it would be difficult to identify any other religious person from the Middle Ages who enjoyed more authority and respect, love and admiration, fear and fascination than Bernard of Clairvaux, and although our libraries are filled with studies about this man, his life, his thoughts, and writings, his influence and impact on monasticism, the Cistercian order, Gothic architecture, on intellectuals of his time, etc., it proves to be a never-ending task to reconsider who this man really was, what we know about him and how to evaluate him from our modern perspective, keeping in mind the historical and religious context.

The well-known Austrian medievalist Peter Dinzelbacher -- an expert in many disciplines (see his recent study on "Angst" or 'Fear' in the Middle Ages, reviewed in *The Medieval Review* 4 Sept. 1998) -- has produced such a new biography which is both the result of his exhaustive investigation of primary and secondary resources specifically for this book, and the result of his editorial work on the first volume of Bernard's collected works critically reproduced in Latin and German (ed. G. Winkler, 1990ff.). He openly admits in his conclusion that it would be virtually impossible to claim radically new discoveries about Bernard as historical research today can look back on a long line of excellent, highly detailed, and profoundly knowledgeable Bernard biographies, beginning with A. Neander's German publication from 1889 and Abbe Vacandard's book from 1895. W. Williams's English Bernard biography from 1935, the French collection of critical articles on Bernard from 1953 (Bernard de Clairvaux), I. Vallery-Radot's French biography from 1963, Jean Leclercq's critical edition of Bernard's works from 1957ff., G. Wendelborn's German biographical study from 1993, among many other published studies on the Saint, especially those which have appeared in print since Bernard's anniversary in 1990, have vastly expanded our knowledge. Dinzelbacher justifies his new approach by pointing out that his efforts were focused on outlining Bernard's life from a mental-historical point of view, to contextualize it as much as possible, to incorporate the most recent findings about the Cistercian monk, and yet to make his text readable also for the general audience. In particular, he distances himself from traditional biographers who painted primarily a hagiographic picture of Bernard's life, and not an objective biography. Moreover, Dinzelbacher's approach is strictly chronological, although he often provides additional information about historical events, religious movements, contemporary medieval literature, and social, political, and anthropological aspects. Some of these pertain to medieval belief in miracles produced by saints -- Bernard was famous for his power to create such miracles and allegedly was able to heal many people -- medieval architecture and the visual arts, the relationship between Christians and Jews, and also the
Although this new Bernard biography is written in German, hence is primarily targeting a German reading audience, Dinzelbacher's critical intentions are to provide a comprehensive and cutting-edge overview of this monumental twelfth-century theologian and his role in mysticism, the development of the Cistercian order, crusades, and other historical events of his time.

The book is divided into five chapters which deal with the following topics: 1. Bernard's childhood and youth; 2. his life in Citeaux and Clairvaux until 1130; 3. Bernard's political and clerical life since 1130 when a schism threatened the harmony and unity of the Catholic Church; 4. Bernard's efforts against heretics such as the Cathars and opponents within the church such as Abelard, Arnold of Brescia, and Henry of Lausanne; and 5. the last decade of Bernard's life which were filled with his involvement in the crusades, pogroms against the Jews, Bernard's personal interactions with mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen, Bernard's recommendation to the French King Louis to expel and divorce his wife Eleonore because of her alleged disloyalty, concluding with a discussion of the abbot's death. Although Bernard always strove to withdraw from the world and tried to close the convent's gates to the outside, the outside forced itself increasingly upon this remarkable personality because of his immense popularity and steady growth of worldly fame both as a saint and as an advisor with the highest authority in secular and clerical matters.

Dinzelbacher follows in great detail the many different steps and events in Bernard's life and successfully portrays this extraordinary man in a very lively fashion without ever falling in the trap of turning into a hagiographer. Undoubtedly, the author admires Bernard and shows great respect for his work, literary production, and personality, but he always maintains a critical distance and strives to incorporate contemporary voices both opposed to and full of worship for this man. The discussion of Bernard's bitter and harsh exchanges with Abelard results in clear criticism of Bernard's intolerance, vindictiveness, and political machinations to guarantee his opponent's condemnation and isolation. But Dinzelbacher also observes the curious phenomenon that Bernard and Abelard shared many beliefs and were quite similar in their intellectual orientation, except that Abelard took those radical steps which Bernard felt inclined to take as well but did not dare to because of his traditional, clerical ideology; Bernard and Abelard were, in other words, "Feindbrueder," hostile brothers (227).

This new biography draws from a wealth of primary and secondary sources and discusses the man from many different perspectives. The original sources are always translated into German, and almost every facet of Bernard's biography is illuminated with the help of original documents and the observations of Bernard scholarship. The actual text comprises 370 pages, and the annotations, bibliography, and index comprise 126 pages. Undoubtedly, Dinzelbacher must be credited for an outstanding new scholarly contribution which leaves little to be desired.