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## Cistercians vs. Cluniacs: Trouble or Progress?

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CISTERCIANS VS. CLUNIACS: TROUBLE OR PROGRESS?

BY

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A GRADUATE PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL  
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Western Europe, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, experienced the zenith of well-being in the history of monasticism. Monasteries were filled, in many instances, to capacity with people of great intellectual and spiritual gifts. However, during this great period of western monasticism, a controversy arose between two well known orders, the Cluniacs (the Black Monks) and the Cistercians (the White Monks). This controversy stemmed from disagreements on how a monastery should be organized and how best to follow the Rule of Saint Benedict. These two orders became antagonistic toward each other in the sight of the laity, hence giving poor example of Christian charity. However, this disagreement brought forth a celebrated correspondence between two great abbots, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, abbot of the Cistercians, and Peter the Venerable, spiritual leader of the Cluniacs. Because of this dialogue between these great men, historians of western monasticism during this period are given an understanding of the basic disagreements between the Cistercians and the Cluniacs. In addition, the sense of the personal power and magnetism of Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter the Venerable is easily felt during the course of the dialogue. To begin a discussion on the tensions that existed between the Cluniacs and the Cistercians some background information may be necessary to understand where each side of the argument was being generated from.

#### The monastery of Cluny.

The monastery at Cluny was in existence well before the monastery at Citeaux and had gained a reputation for grandeur. Cluny had enjoyed a

succession of competent abbots, beginning with Berno (910-926), Maieul (954-994), and Hugh the Great (1049-1109); to these men and their efforts Cluny owed its greatness. The monastery at Cluny enjoyed more autonomy than other orders, "the abbots were able to accomplish their work because of Cluny's freedom; the foundation charter removed all lay control by Duke William and his descendents and placed the house directly under papal jurisdiction. And for all their decadence the popes of the tenth century patronized and protected Cluny and its abbots as if aware of the monastery's destiny."<sup>1</sup>

The monastery of Cluny lived by the Rule of Saint Benedict, with certain adjustments made by Benedict of Aniane. "Cluny clearly accepted the view of Benedict of Aniane that nothing could be too splendid for the house and worship of God; hence its costly ornaments and its magnificent ritual."<sup>2</sup> Cluny spent most of its time preparing for liturgies and paraliturgical celebrations, many of which displayed Cluny's great devotion for the Holy Cross of Jesus and the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Cluny, moreover, expanded its liturgical services with masses of intercession for the dead and "all this helped Cluny to produce its own affective spirituality which gained much prominence in the middle Ages as did speculative spirituality."<sup>3</sup>

The expansion of the liturgical life at Cluny made the recitation of the divine office almost the sole occupation of the monks. In addition, the monastery began to discard manual labor in favor of writing and study, thereby effectively pushing aside an important part of the Rule of Saint Benedict, that of work and prayer. Simplicity was another casualty after the change of importance from manual labor to liturgical grandeur. An opulent lifestyle was evident at Cluny, but despite the fact that Cluny began to stray from the strict interpretation of the Rule of Saint Benedict

it became and remained for many years a center for those who desired the religious life.

### The Cistercians

The Cistercians were founded in 1098 by Saint Robert of Molesme, "a restless monk who wandered in and out of a score of monasteries in search of perfection before establishing his own house with a handful of followers."<sup>4</sup> What Robert considered perfection is not known, and in his days as abbot, Citeaux was nearly in total disarray and looked small and unimportant in comparison to the monastery at Cluny. Yet Citeaux, under the leadership of its third abbot, Steven Harding, became more organized and vibrant. Harding was a man with clear designs on how a monastery should be run. "He lost not time in telling the Duke of Burgundy, Citeaux's only real benefactor, that his visits were no longer welcome since they disturbed the peace of the monastery."<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Harding's skillful leadership the Cistercians gained momentum and expansion was inevitable. Abbot Harding, looking to establish a house in Clairvaux, enlisted the talents of a young monk named Bernard to head the community in Clairvaux. After Bernard was named abbot the Cistercians began establishing more houses, and though at first this expansion was a slow process, by the time of Bernard's death in 1153, 343 houses were created. "Bernard's meteoric rise paralleled that of the Cistercian order. He developed from the fanatically ascetic young abbot of 1115 into the powerful and influential preacher of the Second Crusade."<sup>6</sup> With Bernard as abbot, Clairvaux was a monastery which strictly observed the Rule of Saint Benedict. Bernard stressed the importance of manual labor and simplicity of lifestyle to his brother monks.

With the Cistercians strictly observing the Rule of Saint Benedict by

performing manual labor and simplifying its lifestyle, the Cluniacs were living the monastic life with an almost totally different philosophy. Because of these differing perspectives on monastic living, tensions began to develop between the Cluniacs and the Cistercians. The Cistercians were rigid followers of the Rule of Saint Benedict and lived a life that was austere and ascetical. The Cluniacs did not follow the Rule as rigidly and did not place the same importance on manual labor, simplicity of lifestyle, and asceticism as did the Cistercians. In addition, the Cistercians were not pleased with the way the Cluniacs had made life easy and soft in the monastery. The Cistercians were adding houses at a rapid rate, which not only displeased the Cluniacs, but some within the Cistercian order resented this rapid growth as well. Bernard seemed to expand the Cistercians with a resolve that worried some of his brother monks at Clairvaux.

#### Bernard and Peter.

However great the differences between these two great orders were, the dialogue between Saint Bernard and Peter the Venerable is, for me, most interesting and insightful into the problems and concerns of the Cistercians and the Cluniacs. The collection of letters allow one to share in the exciting inter-face between two of the most famous monastic figures of their time.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux was born a Burgundian nobleman in 1090. He grew up near a Cluniac monastery and from an early age expressed interest in the religious life. Bernard left his home to enter the monastery at Citeaux, and as was his style, brought not just himself but many friends and relatives as well. Many who knew Bernard were surprised when he spoke of becoming a monk at Citeaux thereby bypassing the nearby luxurious houses



of the Cluniacs. Citeaux, at this time in its history, was not as financially stable as Cluny, but in no way was Citeaux a ghetto or swamp. Citeaux, however, did pose problems for young Bernard. Bernard was a prayerful person who was drawn to a life of seclusion, prayer and meditation. So to be responsible for the life of a community left Bernard waiting for more time alone for his private prayer life.

Very little is known about Bernard's time inside the walls of Citeaux. What is known is that, at age twenty-eight, possibly too young yet for this responsibility Bernard succumbed to the pressures of the office and became ill. Details of Bernard's illness are difficult to find, except that those who tried to cure him were quacks, and their attempts at medicine nearly killed him. Despite the increasing demands placed upon him, Bernard was "a great mystic in the true sense of the word. His widely read sermons on the Canticle of Canticles and his extensive correspondence are as much responsible for his influence as his political activity."<sup>7</sup>

Because of his dynamic personality, Bernard was able to attract many to join him at Clairvaux, even though the community was not financially stable. After three years as abbot Bernard founded his first monastery at Trois-Fontaines. His reputation for holiness soon spread across the countryside, and because of his growing reputation, Bernard began to be in demand when occasions arose where competent leadership was needed. For roughly eight years Bernard was the central figure in the history of Western Europe. "The zenith of Saint Bernard's earthly career was reached the moment when his pupil, a former monk of Clairvaux, was elected pope as Eugenius III (1145-1153). On this pope's order, the Saint launched the Second Crusade in 1147."<sup>8</sup> By his dynamic orations Bernard was able to convince many to join in the Crusades. "His powerful words and irresistible personality worked wonders in another field of activity, among the

Manichean heretics of Germany and France."<sup>9</sup> Saint Bernard, though personally preaching in these regions, had only minimal immediate success. Yet, ". . . his sermons left a deep impression. Not so much by his eloquence as by his penetrating mind and deep erudition."<sup>10</sup> Saint Bernard was such an attractive personality that "mothers hid their sons and wives their husbands in order to keep them safe from the Saint's recruiting efforts, which brought a constantly overflowing population to his beloved Clairvaux."<sup>11</sup>

#### Peter the Venerable

In comparison to all the books and articles written on Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, what we know of Peter the Venerable is little, and usually Peter is written about because of his correspondence with Bernard. In 1122, Peter the Venerable was named abbot of Cluny, succeeding abbot Pons. Little information can be found about Pons, other than the fact that he demonstrated little leadership ability in his tenure as abbot of Cluny. Peter, like Bernard, was only twenty-eight when named abbot, and had to organize the Cluniacs after the lack of direction by Pons. If that assignment was not difficult enough, Peter came into his abbacy when the tension between the Cistercians was building. Because of the mounting tension, Peter was put into a position of defending the Cluniacs while pointing to the weaknesses of the Cistercians. In an attempt to defend his order against the attacks of the White Monks, Peter wrote a lengthy letter "in which the White Monks are severely taken to task. It is addressed to the abbot of Clairvaux. The Cistercians are represented as the true disciples of the Pharisees."<sup>12</sup> Cluny was in need of leadership and Peter began very early in his abbacy to firm up discipline within the monastery. He made

great strides in reforming Cluny despite the fact that he was a quiet man who had a great love of learning and books. This reforming process included more time for manual labor, a return to a simpler liturgical life, and discarding some of the finery worn by monks at the abbey of Cluny. "These efforts were in part at least successful and were commended by Bernard some years later."<sup>13</sup>

#### The Beginning of tension between the Cistercians and Cluniacs.

The controversy between these two monastic orders had no one single issue that started or maintained the heated exchange. However, a new spirituality spread throughout the countryside in which the opulent way of life and endless recitation of the divine office at Cluny was viewed as boring and burdensome. Many people wanted more simplicity and a release from the Cluniac form of monasticism. "The great success of the Cistercians was partly due to their filling this newly-felt need", thereby responding to the growing inability of "ordinary men and women of the day to understand the rather stately life of the Black Monks."<sup>14</sup> However, the Cluniacs could not accept the notion that their popularity was slipping away because of their comfortable way of life. Instead, the Cluniacs felt that their reputation was being soiled by a bunch of wanderers, the Cistercians. As tensions heightened Peter expressed his frustration at the lack of harmony between the two orders. "The different colour of you habit is a source of discord. For, as everyone is aware and I have seen myself, the Black Monk looks down his nose when he sees a White Monk, and the White Monk turns his back when he sees a Black Monk coming."<sup>15</sup>

Bernard's letter to Robert.

One incident which might have been the first cause of ill-feeling between the Cluniacs and the Cistercians stemmed from an incident involving Saint Bernard's cousin, Robert. While Saint Bernard was away from Clairvaux Cluny's Grand Prior, Pons, personally induced Robert to leave Clairvaux in favor of Cluny. Pons, attempting to save himself from ridicule, said that Robert's parents, Ortho of Chatillion and Diana, had offered Robert as a child oblate. Bernard deeply loved Robert, so when he returned to find Robert gone, the Saint from Clairvaux was moved to anger at Pons. Bernard was also angry at Robert for leaving the monastery in which he had professed. However, Bernard wished only for the return of his cousin to the monastery at Clairvaux. Saint Bernard wrote a letter to Robert expressing his love and affection and attempted to persuade Robert to return to Bernard. William, a brother monk of Bernard's, served as secretary as he wrote down all that Bernard wished to say to Robert. Bernard and William went to a secluded part of the monastery to begin the letter. While they were at work on the letter a strong rain began to fall on the paper. William tried to protect the paper with his body to keep the ink from spreading out over the paper, "But when he tried to protect the letter Bernard told him to write on for it was God's work and yet, although the rain fell round, the letter remained dry 'inimbre sine imbre'."16

Bernard's letter was meant to move Robert into seeing the error he committed when he left Clairvaux in favor of Cluny and to express his [Bernard's] disappointment and sorrow. "I who have been wounded am forced to recall him who wounded me; who have been spurned, him who spurned me; who have been smitten, him who struck the blow."17 Throughout this letter Bernard searched for the reason why Robert had gone away. Bernard blamed him-

self for Robert's departure by writing, "No doubt it may have been my fault that you left. I was too severe with a sensitive youth, I was too hard on a tender stripling."<sup>18</sup> The Saint appealed to Robert to forgive him and asked him Robert to share in the blame as well. "If you acknowledge your share of the blame, I forgive you. But you must forgive me what I acknowledge as my share."<sup>19</sup> Bernard tried to show Robert that he [Robert] had nothing to fear in Bernard and that a return to the Cistercians must be what Robert had to do. Bernard continued to show Robert tenderness, "Who else would not scold you disobedience and be angry at your desertion, that you should have left the coarse habit for soft raiment, a fare of roots for delicacies, in fine poverty for riches."<sup>20</sup>

After Bernard concluded his attempts to reassure Robert of his love and forgiveness, the Cistercian abbot began his assault on the Grand Prior of Cluny. "Outwardly he came in sheep's clothing, but within he was a ravening wolf. Alas! The shepherds were deceived by his semblance to a sheep and admitted him alone into the fold."<sup>21</sup> Pons was accused of luring the young Robert from the Cistercians by saying the life style at Clairvaux was unnecessarily rigid and burdensome while Cluny was more in keeping with the true spirit and meaning of the Rule. "By such sophistries the too credulous boy was talked round, led astray and led off by his deceiver. He was brought to Cluny and further heightened by the Cluniacs' reaction to Robert's coming to Cluny as a sort of victory for the Black monks over the White Monks. Bernard felt that Robert had been revered and given special treatment when he came to Cluny in order to keep him in the community. "He was befriended, flattered, and congratulated by the whole fraternity. Everyone made merry over him as though they were victors dividing a booty."<sup>23</sup> Bernard closed the letter with a threat to Robert, ". . . you will incur a greater penalty on account of this letter of mine if, when you

have read it, you do not take its lesson to heart."<sup>24</sup>

In summarizing this letter, its importance is that it marked the first public assault of one order of the other. Historians disagree as to the motive of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux in writing this letter. Some historians believe Bernard wrote the letter only for Robert's eyes to see. A.H. Bredero disagrees. Bredero says the letter was "a propaganda pamphlet in favor of Citeaux which was intended to be read by a wider public."<sup>25</sup> Bernard eventually took his case to Rome, charging that the Cluniacs were wrong in encouraging Robert to leave the monastery in which he had first professed. However, Bernard, not accustomed to losing, suffered a rare defeat as his protest was rejected.

The Apology: Bernard's response to Peter.

Peter the Venerable, soon after becoming abbot of Cluny, added fuel to the already existing fire between the two monastic communities by writing a letter addressed to the abbot of Clairvaux. In this letter Peter says of the Cistercians, "Whilst scrupulously solicitous about the lesser prescriptions of the law neglect the more important, so attentive to the rules regarding food and clothing and labour and silence that they have no time to think of such as concern humility and charity."<sup>26</sup> Peter, still on the offensive, calls the Cistercians lovers of the law while they lack for love of fellow monks. Peter asserted that the Cistercians were more concerned by the color of habit and proclaiming their own goodness in their works and words.

Peter replied to the charges made against his community by the Cistercians accusing the Cluniacs of laziness in following the Rule of Saint Benedict. To this accusation Peter states that the Cluniacs are jus-

tified in the way their monastery was run, "by altered conditions of society; whereas the Cistercians openly violated the immutable commandments of the law, whilst obstinately adhering to such as had lost their binding force: straining out the gnats they swallowed the camels."<sup>27</sup>

Peter vehemently reproached the Cistercians, while at the same time he made a strong pitch for the virtues of the Cluniacs. Within the Cistercian camp, strong sentiment grew urging Bernard to come to the defense of his order by replying to Peter the Venerable's fiery letter. Bernard, if left to himself, probably would not have answered. However, he was encouraged to answer by two friends, William of St. Thierry and Orgerius of St. Nicholas. Bernard felt the tension of writing a letter that would not sound like an attack on the monks of Cluny, and yet, address what he felt were abuses committed by the Cluniacs. Bernard also felt it regrettable that he would have to give up time which was meant to be given to prayer in order to compose a letter which would serve as a rebuttle to the letter from Peter the Venerable.

William of St. Thierry gave Bernard support and encouragement to write the letter and also served as a proof-reader of the text. The Apology was a satirical letter, "But it was of such vehemence that it would have been more correct if he had sent his apology directly to the abbot of Cluny himself."<sup>28</sup> Instead of sending the letter to Peter, Bernard addressed the letter to William of St. Thierry. A.H. Bredero suggests that Bernard made a cunning decision to send the letter to William of St. Thierry rather than to Peter the Venerable because ". . .it made it possible for this pamphlet to come into the hands of others and to get publicity even before it reached Cluny. By this method, the order of Cluny was ridiculed before the whole world."<sup>29</sup> Bredero says this attack damaged the reputation of a monastery that was very important to the Church, and

that Bernard, though his actions might be excused, did in fact do a disservice to monasticism in Europe.

Bernard begins his Apology by first singing the praises of the Cluniac order, expressing his love and admiration for his brother monks at Cluny. Bernard tries to reassure the Cluniacs that he is neither judging them nor berating them. "How can I listen in silence to the charges you bring against us, that we, the most miserable of all men, so poorly lodged and clothed, presume nevertheless to judge the world. And what is still more intolerable, that we even censure those who live saintly lives in your illustrious order, and from the depths of our obscurity, arrogantly insult the resplendent lights of heaven."<sup>30</sup> Bernard continues his self-abasement, "If puffed up with my own self-esteem like the Pharisees, I despise other men and (what is worse) men better than myself, what does all my austerity profit me? Surely I could find an easier way to hell."<sup>31</sup>

After praising the Black Monks, Bernard began his attack on the Cluniacs. "I cannot think how such intemperance in food and drink, in dress and bed-clothes, in equipages and buildings, ever arose amongst monks."<sup>32</sup> In one of the more passionate passages in the Apology Bernard points to and names all that is repulsive to him about the Black Monks. With a directness that leaves no stone unturned, Bernard hits full-stride in his criticism.

Matters have come to such a pass that where these excesses flourish most, there the Order is said to be in a better state and religion prospering. Frugality is deemed to be mean; sobriety is called austerity; and silence is considered melancholy; but dissipation is regarded as discretion; laughter as holy joy; effeminate clothes and fine equipages as cleanliness . . . At table one course follows another. In the place of flesh-meat great fish are provided. When you are satisfied with one course, if you begin on the next you feel as if you had not eaten a thing for the skill of the cooks is so great that no matter how many different dishes appear you are still able to eat more. Variety dispels all sense of repletion and the stomach is



filled without your knowing it.<sup>33</sup>

Bernard continued in the Apology to criticize the Cluniacs for the elaborate clothes they wear and for the outrageous splendor of their buildings. "He spoke of the enormous size of their oratories, their great height, their superfluous breadth, their sumptuous polished marbles and curious paintings which, while they distract the eye, impede the recollection of those who should be praying."<sup>34</sup>

#### Bernard and Peter: Friends or Foes?

Since the rivalry was intense between the Cistercians and Cluniacs, it might be assumed that Saint Bernard and Peter the Venerable may have been mortal enemies. Both men had to save the honor of their communities against each other's attacks. So what was their relationship? Were they friends or enemies?

Peter the Venerable (1090-1156) and Saint Bernard (1090-1153), as was mentioned earlier, were two of the greatest figures in monasticism during the twelfth-century. "During this century the Cluniac Order and the new Cistercian reform Order were in opposition to each other on almost all monastic issues, ranging from interpretation of the Benedictine Regula, to the definition and place of lay brothers, to the validity of monastic tithes, and even to such trivia as the length of the pauses in mass."<sup>35</sup> And despite the fact that Bernard and Peter were in the middle of this heated exchange, these two great men were also friends. "Support of this view lies in the letters between the two men, the influence each asserted on the other, and a general agreement on certain major issues of the day."<sup>36</sup>

There seems to be a bond that existed between them because they were both abbots, hence they could understand and relate to each other's struggles and frustrations. "Peter and Bernard were similar in many ways. When as young men, they came into their abbacies, they were nearly the same age. They both came from noble family backgrounds, both were dedicated to monastic ideals, both became major ecclesiastical figures. Their abbacies ran concurrently, and their monasteries were situated in the same area of France-Burgundy."<sup>37</sup> Something else that Bernard and Peter shared was the poor health they endured throughout most of their lives. Both men also had a great love for their mothers and were deeply influenced by them but to speak of similarities between the two men can in no way detract from the great differences that existed. "Peter was a mature, reflective, something of a scholarly recluse who had considerable interest in Jewish and Arab writings in his later life, a better administrator than monk in the early Benedictine sense, lacking a certain religious insight, but rational and objective."<sup>38</sup> Bernard was intense and keenly active and alive in the affairs of his monastery, church, and country, spending much of his time outside the walls of Clairvaux. "He faced an entirely different set of problems in his monastic, abbatial role than did Peter. At least one-third of his time as abbot was spent outside the walls of Clairvaux, not only on monastic business, and not in the care of his monk's souls, but as a leading reformer of Western Europe."<sup>39</sup>

Bernard and Peter, because their abbacies ran together in time, had the opportunity to correspond with each other. "Although we have only twenty letters or so in the correspondence between the two men, certain phases beyond the ecclesiastical rhetoric of the day, certain homely reference to ailments, scattered bits of humor, the sense of sharing the same problems and experiences that comes through in the letters produces in

the reader the very definite impression that these two men were friends beyond the official smiling masks demanded by their monastic positions."<sup>40</sup> Peter and Bernard share also a deeper meaning in their correspondence as Peter told Bernard that his friendship and love is more precious to him than all the gold and silver in the world, to which Bernard replies, "for a long time now we have been united in the closest friendship, and an equal affection has rendered us equals. . .[I] who love you dearly, not in mere words, but in deed and truth."<sup>41</sup>

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter the Venerable disagreed on issues of how to run a monastery at times, yet they agreed on some very crucial issues. Over the course of their abbacies these two great abbots bonded themselves to each other by the sharing of similar experiences and pains. They seemed to have almost become dependent on each other for support and advice. They seemed to have mutually affected each other because of their contact. Bernard seemed to have shown Peter that reform was needed in the Cluniac order, and "Peter made a list of the reforms he had enacted during his rule as abbot of Cluny. At this point he had been abbot for nearly a quarter of a century and the list is a heterogeneous collection that covers both important matters and trivial matters. It is possible of course, that Peter might have developed his reform attitude by himself, but it is far more likely that he was influenced by the general air of reform generated by Bernard and the Cistercian Order."<sup>42</sup> Some of the points from this list included a control on the type of bed-dress worn by the Cluniacs, eating regulations (an end of large, finely cooked meals), and a return to more daily manual labor. Peter must have also been influenced by the Apology written by Bernard, which pointed out the softness of the monk's life at Cluny. However, just as Bernard influenced Peter, so too Peter had his influence upon Bernard. "Peter's influence on Bernard was over the long pas-

sage of time where his moderate, logical manner balanced the temperamental impetuosity of Bernard."<sup>43</sup> Bernard, by Peter's example of gentleness towards his brother monks, learned that monastic life did not have to be a rigid and strict burden that made life difficult for monks, hence Bernard acquired a more moderate attitude towards monastic living.

#### Idung's Dialogue.

As is the case in many disagreements, the passage of time eases the tension and the pain experienced by those most involved in a conflict. This was true of the Cluniacs and Cistercians, as the differences seemed to melt into near similarities and Peter and Bernard's civility to each other helped defuse more hostility. One text that was written near the end of the most heated part of the conflict was a fictitious dialogue between a Cistercian monk and a Cluniac monk. This Dialogue was written by Idung, a monk from Prufening in Germany. Idung, for the most part, has little information written about him.

Perhaps one could say simply that he was one of many discontented persons who found his way into one monastery and then out again, only to enter a different monastery, following some labyrinth of the spirit. In his pursuit he seems to have been very much a bother to himself and a source of ridicule to others. For those who are too soon made glad, there is nothing and no one quite so boring as a man in deadly earnest.<sup>44</sup>

Idung's Dialogue was written in 1155. Idung was once a Benedictine but later entered the Cistercian Order, and his text is very important because it is a specific commentary on the general tension that existed between the Cistercians and the Cluniacs. "The Dialogue is a long disputation between a Cistercian and a Cluniac, in which the naive questions and inept answers of the latter merely present opportunities for the Cistercian to discourse

with remarkable erudition on issues which proved that the White Monks excelled Benedictines."<sup>45</sup> The tone of the Dialogue is set early when the Cluniac monk said, "There is no end to my astonishment at the way you so shamelessly heap blame on the heads of members of our Order who were found pleasing to God. You reject the traditions of our holy fathers, you fasten on them the charge that they acted contrary to synodal and decretal enactments and to the Holy Rule itself. . ."<sup>46</sup> Of course, the Cistercian answered with restraint and dignity. "The nature of the monastic state demands that I listen gracefully and without anger to your harsh and unrestrained language."<sup>47</sup>

One crucial advantage to having access to Idung's Dialogue is that it gives insight to the issues which began and sustained the conflict between the White Monks and the Black Monks. The Dialogue is first and foremost a defense of the Cistercian order, and in addition it is a statement on the superiority of the Cistercian form of monasticism over the Cluniac form. Idung rests his assertion of Cistercian superiority on the belief that the Rule of Saint Benedict is a law. Law was extremely important in the twelfth-century and therefore it is essential that monks follow a strict and literal observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict. Cluniacs, because they did not follow the Rule with a literal interpretation, were accused by Idung as being weak and inferior to the Cistercians.

Idung said that the avoidance of manual labor, short novitiates, the hurried way in which the Opus Dei was said (in order to get back to writing), and the frequency of private masses, contributed to the Black Monks at Cluny not having lived in the life of true Benedictine customs and tradition.

The key issue of the Dialogue is where does Cluny get its authority to do away with the traditions and customs of the Rule of Saint Benedict. Of

course the Cluniacs, with Idung answering for them, have no answer to give in this text. The Dialogue is supposed to show the reader that the Cistercians are far superior to the Cluniacs but in the final analysis the Cluniac monastic life seemed more balanced and humane. With the emphasis placed on uniformity in the twelfth century, monasticism seemed rigid and oppressive, and for that reason it is difficult not to appreciate the Cluniacs because of their openness to various ways of living the monastic life. The openness to plurality in worship and the freedom to live the monastic life apart from the rigidity that was common in the twelfth century must have indeed posed a threat to the security of other religious orders and made the Cluniacs targets of ridicule. As a parallel, the Cistercians can be appreciated for the way in which they were faithful to a life of strict observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict and for the simplicity of lifestyle.

As for Idung, it would be too easy to brush him aside labeling him as an unstable, unhappy monk, who only wrote the Dialogue to make the Cistercians look far superior to Cluniacs. "While his life (as we know it) and his writings (as we have them) reveal wanderings, one is hesitant to raise them to the level of 'spiritual peregrinations' or 'the pilgrims of a soul' -- terms which smack of the salon."<sup>48</sup> Idung showed a side of true spiritual strength and intellectual prowess, for "The author of the Dialogue gives the impression of being a spiritually intense man, who grasped thoroughly the meaning of the Cistercian movement."<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion.

The dispute between the White Monks and the Black Monks is that type of historical event that excites even the most casual, arm-chair historians.

This conflict had all the makings of a Broadway hit, with the young upstart challenging the establishment. This conflict had two legitimate stars, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter the Venerable, who, because of circumstance, put aside friendship in order to defend their way of monastic life.

In the end, what was really important about this dispute was that both central figures were able to learn and be influenced by each other because of this mutual influence both the Cistercians and the Cluniacs were able to grow and improve the quality of life within their monasteries. From Bernard's letter to his cousin Robert, to the Dialogue written by Idung, the intensity in which those in the monastic life lived their calling is strong and vivid. Though mistakes were made by both the Cistercians and the Cluniacs, there can be no doubt that both monastic groups desired a relationship with God that was spiritually intense and authentic. Bernard and Peter both had the ability to defend their religious orders with dignity and these two great abbots heightened and maintained the quality of monasticism in Western Europe at a time when monasticism was at its zenith.

### NOTES

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6. Louis J. Lekai, The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality, (Kent State University Press, 1977), p. 34.
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26. Ailbe J. Luddy, op. cit., p. 96.
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38. Ibid., p. 37.
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40. Ibid., p. 39.
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42. Ibid., p. 48.
43. Ibid., p. 47.
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- 45. Ibid., p. 25. Idung, Dialogue.
- 46. Ibid., p. 26. Idung, Dialogue.
- 47. Ibid., Idung, Dialogue.
- 48. Ibid., p. 145.
- 49. Ibid., p. 6.

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