

Bernard of Clairvaux
De Diligendo Deo (On the Love of God)

This text is located under the banner Patristics on the Lectio Divina Homepage.

Some Introductory Words

A quick look at documents on this homepage reveals that some deal with the biblical Song of Songs and commentaries on them, notably those by Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Bernard of Clairvaux. The last differs from the first two by reason of greater distance but more importantly, that Bernard wrote in Latin compared with Greek.

After considering the Song of Songs and these commentaries from a number of angles, it's time to move on and consider another work by Bernard for which he's well known. That, of course, is **De Diligendo Deo** which we have here.

Part of the never-ending fascination with Bernard is his amazing ability to express spiritual realities in Latin. Rightfully it has earned him the title of Mellifluous Doctor. In fact, at times you find it difficult to believe that a human being could write as he had done. Instead, it must have been an angel. An exaggeration, of course, but if you can read his Latin, you can see there's some truth to this observation. Somewhere and somehow he has tapped into something deep in an extraordinary way.

Bernard is able to combine his appealing style with an ability to effortlessly assemble one scriptural verse after another that makes the text lightsome which by its very composition is dense. Indeed, mellifluous is an apt description, words which yield a sweetness not unlike honey. It should be noted that any translation doesn't do this justice. In fact, the English translation of any of Bernard's works can be a turn-off for many people which is quite understandable. This obstacle plays a large role in the feeble attempt presented here to make Bernard's **De Diligendo Deo** more accessible. Such is why the practice of *lectio divina* fits in very handily. Taking this route hopefully will yield fruit both for oneself and for the church as a whole. Some brief remarks are in order as to the approach taken here:

-The English text is from online, public domain:

<http://www.saintsbooks.net/books/St.%20Bernard%20of%20Clairvaux%20-%20On%20Loving%20God.pdf>

-First comes the original Latin text followed by the English translation.

-After both is a kind of running commentary. It attempts to bring the reader as closely as possible to the original or as noted above, to allow the reader to be with Bernard as he composes the text. Granted, this is awkward. It may no appeal to everyone. However, the chief purpose is to read **De Diligendo Deo** in the spirit of *lectio divina*.

-In order to find a word easily (one that has occurred earlier in the text regardless of the verb tense or gender concerning nouns and adjectives), its location is designated by the minus sign in brackets or [-]. If the word is within parentheses, for example, the minus sign alone is used.

-Since some words are so similar to their counterparts in English, they will not be translated. Exceptions will be made for should there be any discrepancies.

-Ideally it would be nice to italicize the Latin words within the third section or the notations. However, since there are so many of this, this is not done but may be done at a later time.

For now, just a few pages are posted. The reason? This text had gone through a number of renditions before settling on the current one. Hopefully it will follow through to the completion of **De Diligendo Deo**. Always the possibility remains that the notations at hand can be expanded further.

Preface

Orationes a me, et non quaestiones poscere solebatis: et quidem ego ad neutrum idoneum me esse confido. Verum illud indicit professio, etsi non ita conversatio: ad hoc vero (ut verum fatear) ea mihi deesse video, quae maxime necessaria viderentur, diligentiam et ingenium. Placet tamen, fateor, quod pro carnalibus spiritualia repetitis, si sane apud locupletiores id facere libuisset. Quia vero doctis et indoctis pariter in istiusmodi excusandi mos est, nec facile scitur, quae vere ex imperitia, quaeve ex verecundia excusatio prodeat, si non in iuncti operis obeditio probat: accipite de mea paupertate quod habeo, ne tacendo philosophus puter. Nec tamen ad omnia spondeo me responsurum. Ad id solum quod de diligendo Deo quaeritis, respondebo quod ipse dabit. Hoc enim et sapit dulcius, et tractatur securius, et auditur utilius. Reliqua diligentioribus reservate.

Hitherto (Lord Haimeric, Cardinal Deacon of the Church and Chancellor) you have been wont to seek prayers from me, not the solving of problems; although I count myself sufficient for neither. My profession shows that, if not my conversation; and to speak truth, I lack the diligence and the ability that are most essential. Yet I am glad that you turn again for spiritual counsel, instead of busying yourself about carnal matters: I only wish you had gone to some one better equipped than I am. Still, learned and simple give the same excuse and one can hardly tell whether it comes from modesty or from ignorance, unless obedience to the task assigned shall reveal. So, take from my poverty what I can give you, lest I should seem to play the philosopher, by reason of my silence. Only, I do not promise to answer other questions you may raise. This one, as to loving God, I will deal with as He shall teach me; for it is sweetest, it can be handled most safely, and it will be most profitable. Keep the others for wiser men.

According to Bernard, the Lord Haimeric is not in the habit (soleo) of seeking (poscor, to ask) solutions (quaestio also as question) to any problems. Rather, he prefers prayers (oratio, speech, discourse, manner of speaking). However, Bernard balks at being asked, claiming not qualified (idoneus, suitable, proper) for either, confido alternately as to be assured of.

Bernard puts his personal professio and conversatio, monastic profession and way of life, on the same plane as being disqualified or idoneus as above. This allows him to claim not to have either diligentia or ingenium with regard to both, the latter pertaining to that which is innate. With regard to this, Bernard deems it not just necessary but very much so, the adverb maxime or to the utmost. Actually he's glad (libet: it is pleasing) that Lord Haimeric is asking (repeto: suggests being asked once again) for spiritual counsel instead of carnal matters carnalis vs. spiritualis. However, he wishes someone more qualified (locupletior, rich, wealthy) be contacted.

It's not uncommon (mos: custom, habit) for those who are both educated and not educated (doctus and indoctus: trained and not trained) to put forth the same excuse (excuso: to excuse, allege). This makes it tough to discern whether it derives from modesty or ignorance, verecundia and imperitia (knowing one's place, shyness and inexperience, awkwardness). The only way to tell (probo, to probe) is by obedience (obeditio) to the matter at hand.

Bernard cautions Lord Haimeric to take from his poverty (paupertas: indigence, need) and not reckon (puto: to suspect, suppose) him to be a philosopher

due to his silence (taceo: to hold one's tongue, be at rest). He goes on to qualify himself by promising not to answer other questions, spondeo and responsurus). However, Bernard says that he will deal only with loving God, diligo or to esteem, prize, have regard for. That is, he will answer according to what God gives him because it tastes sweet, treated more securely and listened to more profitably. The adverbs are dulcius, securius and utilius. As for anything else, that will be kept (reservo: to retain, save) for those who are more diligent (diligentior: more carefully).