

**I**n her article 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?', Caroline Walker Bynum argues that during the Middle Ages, theologians were not concerned with the individual in the way that 'individual' is defined in modern times.<sup>1</sup> This modern definition stresses the uniqueness of the individual and the process of finding oneself separate from the community or the group. Conversely, the medieval meaning for the growth of the individual meant "the development of the self toward God"<sup>2</sup>. Religious thinkers in the middle

**these three theologians, I will explore how each theologian perceived**

From the people who had the capacity to convert. He he did. Since

the influence that others had, through the work of God, in leading him to conversion. Augustine's contemporary, Ambrose, influenced Augustine's conversion. On meeting Ambrose, Augustine wrote, "You led me insensibly to him that he might lead me sensibly to you. He assumed a father's role toward me, to guide my wandering with a bishop's loving care."<sup>6</sup> As Ambrose assumed the role of a father, Augustine assumed the role of a child, absorbing the likeness of Ambrose and slowly learning to do as he did. When Ambrose gave a sermon about the power of the symbolic meaning of the scripture in the Bible, Augustine took note. This sermon shaped Augustine's fundamental understanding of the Bible and its importance. As he continued to read the eg

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assertion that for many noblemen, “the numerous examples all around them aroused the desire in the nobility to accept voluntary poverty”<sup>12</sup> Once again, Guibert demonstrated how others who discovered the stories of converted monks chose to mimic their actions. The underlying assumption in Guibert’s writing was that every individual had the ability to choose to follow these models.

Like Augustine and Guibert, Bernard of Clairvaux stressed the importance of following models of piety to form a better understanding of God. While Bernard emphasized that knowing oneself would improve one’s understanding of God, he also believed that it was important for the individual to recognize his own being as an example of God’s greatness. He wrote, “there are two things you should know first, what you are; second that you are not what you are by your own power.”<sup>13</sup> Bernard clearly believed that an individual could not appreciate the power of God without first understanding his own being. Moreover, Bernard believed that God gifted man with free will, the ability to choose, so that man could seek to achieve a closer identification with God. He wrote, “man’s dignity is his free will. His virtue is that by which he seeks eagerly for his Creator.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Bernard emphasized the importance of the individual only because the individual possesses the ability to recognize his Creator and seek a closer relationship with his Creator. Hence, Bernard wrote his work, “On Loving God” to provide a model that others could follow to achieve a closer relationship with God.

With the first eight chapters of “On Loving God,” Bernard established why all people, including Christians and non-believers, should love God, while in the last chapters, Bernard outlined the different

**that man should love the people around him in the way he would love himself, which is an unselfish form of love. In the same way that the individual is important because he is made in the image of God, the first degree of love is only achieved when the individual extends his love to others and can love God within others. Thus, it is important to note that before man can love others let alone God, he must first love himself. On the second degree of love, Bernard explained that a wise man should recognize the tasks that he can achieve alone and the tasks that he can only achieve with the help of God. Thus, man should love God because**

**as the sanctified model he sought to express, he became closer to God in that he was imitating a model that was more closely imitating Him. Therefore, the overall goal was to form a better union with God and to continue to proceed towards the development of the self in the image of God. Hence, the Middle Ages was not characterized by a newfound search for the individual but by a critical search for God through the understanding and modification of the individual by way of models.**