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Kissing Christ: Masculinity and
Religious Experience in the Medieval
Period, *c.* 400 - 1240

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A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of Auckland,
2012.

Abstract

Is the apparent lack of 'male mystics' in the high medieval period an historical reality or is it a modern historiographical illusion? Gender informs the two approaches which drive this question: how does gender influence our modern expression of medieval mystics and mysticism? And how did gender influence medieval understanding of mystics and mysticism? These questions are not mutually exclusive and this thesis will demonstrate that both medieval and modern authors had and have an expectation that medieval religious men and women will express spirituality in particular ways. My work seeks to address the issue that there has been little scholarly attention given to the role which men played in creating and enforcing a gendered norm for other men. The specifically revisionist, gendered approach I intend to pursue is under-represented within the wider historiography of mysticism and it is my hope that this research will provide a contribution to medieval historiography at two points. Firstly, this work will become part of the continuing project to illuminate the lives of medieval men and the study of masculinities, and secondly, by undertaking a more gendered approach to the study of medieval religious men, this work will contribute to the already well-considered realm of medieval mysticism.

For Rebekah, Joshua, Brooke, and Tayla:

You can achieve anything

To Ruth and Godfrey Hawes:

Thank you

Acknowledgements

This is the most gratifying and humbling part of this thesis to write. I have many people to thank who helped me along on this journey.

Firstly, my biggest debt of thanks goes to my supervisors, Dr Kim Phillips and Dr Lisa Bailey. Kim has been a continual source of inspiration to me and the shape of this work is due in large part to her pushing me to extend my research and thinking. This was difficult at times, but well worth it now. Her faith in me, particularly near the end of the process, helped me immensely. Lisa encouraged me to embrace the 'Dark Ages,' bringing a new dimension to my work which has only enhanced it. She has been a constant source of support to me, especially during some difficult times, and for that I am very grateful.

I must give thanks to Fr Martinus Cawley who generously allowed me to use his transcription of the *Life of Arnulf*. I would also thank him for his helpful comments along the way. I also thank E. A. Jones for providing me with an advance copy of his essay which appeared in *Texts and Traditions of Medieval Pastoral Care* (2009). Also, thank you to all the staff at the University of Auckland Library, particular Philip Abela, and the staff of the Interloans Department.

I owe a huge debt of thanks to my good friend Elinor Harris, who has toiled diligently over my footnotes and bibliography in these final days of preparation. Her friendship, thoughtful comments (even though she is not a medievalist!), robust arguments, and continual support during my time back in the university fold have made it worthwhile. Thanks Ellie.

To my fellow medievalist and friend Dr Michelle Smith, thanks for reading, commenting, coffee, references to obscure men, and all the other things that mates do for each other. I also owe a huge thanks to Dr Kerryn Olsen for her rapid final edit and to her and her husband Dr Greg for their wonderful friendship. To my other university friends who are now spread far and wide—Simon Thode, Charlotte Greenhalgh, Mara Beich, Jenni Taylor, and Toby Harper—I really need to boast that, "I finished first!"

Seriously, our many conversations over each other's work were inspiring to me. Thank you all.

Finally I need to thank my incredibly supportive family. To my brothers Peter and Robert, and my sisters-in-law Erin and Delwyn, I know I have been grumpy and difficult and absent from time to time, and I cannot thank you enough for all of your support over these past five or so years. I love you all. To my nieces, Rebekah, Brooke, and Tayla, and my nephew Joshua, I hope you forgive me for missing birthdays and sports, but now that I'm finished you can have me back all to yourselves.

To my Mum and Dad, Ruth and Godfrey, I love you both very much and I hope that I have made you proud of the person I am.

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Abbreviations

- AASS *Acta Sanctorum*, 1st edn, Antwerp, 1643-.
- Apop. patrum* *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, London, 1975.
- Brewer *Giraldus Cambrensis, Gemma Ecclesiastica*, in J. S. Brewer ed., *Giraldus Cambrensis Opera*, vol. 2, London, 1862.
- CCCM *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*, Turnhout, 1966-.
- Dia. Mir.* *Caesarius of Heisterbach, The Dialogue on Miracles*, 2 vols, trans. H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, intro. G. G. Coulton, London, 1929.
- Dimock *Magna Vita S. Hugonis Episcopi Lincolnensis*, ed. James F. Dimock, London, 1864.
- Eccl. Hist.* *Orderic Vitalis, The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols, Oxford, 1969-1980.
- Gem. Eccl.* *Gerald of Wales, The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis*, trans. John J. Hagen, Leiden, 1979.
- Henriquez *Goswin of Bossut, Vita Idae Nivellensis*, in *Quinque prudentes virgines*, ed. Chrisostomo Henriquez, Antwerp, 1630, pp. 199-297.
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
- Reindel *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, ed. Kurt Reindel, *MGH Epistolae*, 4 vols, Munich, 1989.
- Boretius *Capitularia Regum Francorum*, ed. Alfred Boretius, *MGH Leges*, vol. 1, Hanover, 1883, pp. 53-61.

- Waitz *Ardo, Vita Benedicti abbatis Anianensis et Indensis*, ed. George Waitz, *MGH Scriptores*, vol. 15.1, Hanover, 1887, pp. 198-220.
- Arndt &
Krusch *Gregory of Tours*, ed. W. Arndt and Bruno Krusch, *MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 1, Hanover, 1885.
- PG *Patrologia graeca*, ed. Jacques Paul Minge, Paris, 1857-76.
- PL *Patrologia latina*, ed. Jacques Paul Minge, Paris, 1841-64.
- RB *Benedict of Nursia, The Holy Rule of St Benedict*, trans. Carolinne White, Harmondsworth, 2008.
- Reg. Mon. *Columbanus, Regula Monachorum*, trans. G. S. M. Walker in, *Columbani Opera*, Dublin, 1956, pp. 124-142.
- Strange *Caesarii Hesterbacensis Monarchi, Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange, Brussels, 1851.
- Tobacco *Petrus Damiani, Life of Blessed Romuald*, edited by G. Tobacco, FSI, 94, Rome, 1957.
- VArn. *Goswin of Bossut, The Life of Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers*, in, *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003.
- VAbn. *Goswin of Bossut, The Life of Abundus, Monk of Villers*, in, *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003.
- VBen. *Ardo, Benedict of Aniane: The Emperor's Monk, Ardo's Life*, trans. Allen Cabaniss, Kalamazoo, 2008.

- VCM Thomas de Cantimpré, *The Life of Christina Mirabilis*, trans. and intro. Margot H. King, Toronto, reprinted 1995.
- VCM_y. *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot, Oxford, 1959.
- VGuth. *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, trans. and intro. Bertram Colgrave, Cambridge, 1956.
- VIda Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée*, in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003.
- VMO Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of Marie D'Oignies*, trans. Margot H. King, Toronto, 2003.
- VRA Baudri of Dol, *First Life of Robert of Arbrissel*, trans. Bruce Venarde, *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, Washington, 2003.
- VRlcd. Marbod of Rennes, *The Life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu*, in *Robert of La Chaise-Dieu and Stephen of Obazine*, trans. and intro. Hugh Feiss, Maureen M. O'Brien, and Ronald Pepin, Minnesota, 2010.
- VRom. Peter Damian, *The Life of Blessed Romuald*, in *The Mystery of Romuald and the Five Brothers: Stories from the Benedictines and Camaldolese*, trans. Thomas Matus, California, 1994, pp. 165-270.
- VSO *The Life of Saint Stephen of Obazine*, in *Robert of La Chaise-Dieu and Stephen of Obazine*, trans. and intro. Hugh Feiss, Maureen M. O'Brien, and Ronald Pepin, Minnesota, 2010.

Introduction

As an historian of gender, I am confronted with two problems, or rather, assumptions. “Oh, you study women,” people often say, as if women and gender were the same thing or at least an inseparable binary. When I reply that my interest and research is with men and masculinity, the raised eyebrow or tilted head betray that I should have made that clear in the first place. If I begin a discussion about my research with the mention of mystics, I am often faced with the same response: surely I study women? The assumption that the study of *x* equals the study of *y* is what brought this work to light. I wanted to investigate the lives of male mystics, particularly during the period 1000–1240, in an effort to understand medieval ideas concerning masculinity. Imagine my surprise, when consulting the historiography, to find that male mystics existed, but in a way that would be not recognizable to the student of medieval history. That is to say, for my period of interest, I could not locate much scholarship at all which focused on the male equivalent of Christina Markyate (d. 1155), Marie D’Oignies (d. 1213), or Christina of St Trond (d. 1224)—if indeed a male equivalent to these three women existed at all.¹

Consider then, the following recollection:

I saw, standing in front of the altar . . . an image of the Lord Saviour. As I was in deep contemplation, I recognized the crucified Lord himself crucified in that very place and I beheld him, living, in my mind's eye . . . I took hold of him whom my soul loves, I held him, I embraced him, I kissed him lingeringly. I sensed how gratefully he accepted this gesture of love when, between kissing, he himself opened his mouth, in order that I kiss more deeply.²

This quote bears striking similarities to an example of the passion that a medieval woman mystic experienced when in the thrall of a vision or the presence of her saviour Christ. The extremely intimate nature of this encounter may evoke discomfort or disturbance but not disbelief; after all, a religious (woman) ‘kissing’ her Saviour (man) is not particularly problematic. Can we suspend our disbelief, however, when

¹ These three religious women are recognised in modern historiography as mystics primarily because of their visionary and ascetic experiences.

² Rupert of Deutz, *De gloria et honore filii hominis super Mattheum*, ed. H. Haacke, CCCM 29, Turnhout, 1979, book 12, pp. 382-3, cited in Robert Mills, ‘Ecce Homo’, in Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih eds, *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, London, 2002, p. 152.

confronted with the knowledge that the quote above comes, not from a religious woman, but from a religious man? What manner of man imagines or experiences such a scenario? Why did he fear that his experience would be considered a ‘childish fantasy’?³ As a young man in his twenties the Benedictine monk Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129) experienced a ‘vocational crisis’.⁴ This crisis was centered on Rupert’s concern for his salvation. His desperate response was finally to agree to ordination and this precipitated his ‘conversion’ from an ordinary monk into an ordained cleric and ‘[t]he most prolific of all twelfth-century authors’.⁵ Rupert is considered a theologian first and foremost, a cleric second, and a visionary not at all.

His journey from troubled young monk to writer is defined not by his visions but by his words—and he himself spends only a few words recounting his extraordinary visions some twenty years after the fact.⁶ Modern scholarship concerned with Rupert’s visionary experiences, particularly that where he was ‘kissing Christ’, search for meaning within a variety of contexts. John van Engen, one of Rupert’s modern biographers, treads the same path, focusing more on Rupert’s development as a theologian and less on his visionary experiences. Bernard McGinn discusses Rupert’s visions at length from a perspective which sees mysticism as an important component of theology, and in Rupert’s experience, a component which authorized his writing.⁷ Like McGinn, Abigail Young examines Rupert’s visionary experiences in an attempt to identify the moment his post-vision exegesis is authorized.⁸ Richard Trexler, C. Stephen Jaeger, and Robert Mills have all explored the homoerotic attachment between religious men and Christ—a connection seen as implicit because of the erotic nature of visions such as Rupert’s.⁹ Rupert is widely recognized as a prolific writer of his time,

³ John H. van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, Berkeley, 1983, p. 51.

⁴ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, p. 50.

⁵ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, p. 3. Also see, G. Constable and B. Smith, ‘Introduction’, in *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Ecclesia*, ed. and trans. G. Constable and B. Smith, Oxford, 1972, p. xix.

⁶ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 50-1.

⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*, vol. 2, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1994, pp. 328-333.

⁸ Abigail Ann Young, ‘The Fourth Gospel in the Twelfth Century: Rupert of Deutz on the Gospel of John’, February 1998, accessed at <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~young/rdintro.html>

⁹ Richard C. Trexler, ‘Gendering Jesus Crucified’, in B. Cassidy ed., *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsered by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 23-24 March 1990*, Princeton, 1993, pp. 107-20; C. Stephen Jaeger, *Enobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*, Philadelphia, 1999, p. 134; and Robert Mills, ‘Ecce Homo’, in Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih eds, *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, London, 2002, pp. 152-173. Also see Sara Lipton, ‘The sweet lean of his head’: Writing About Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages’, *Speculum*, 80, 4, 2005, pp. 1172-1208; and Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*, New York, 2002.

but my point in highlighting his story is that, if he were a woman, his astonishing visions would have generated more scholastic attention which focused on Rupert as a medieval man.

Is the apparent lack of ‘male mystics’ in the high medieval period an historical reality or is it a modern historiographical illusion? Gender informs the two approaches which drive this question: how does gender influence our modern expression of medieval mystics and mysticism? And how did gender influence medieval understanding of mystics and mysticism? These questions are not mutually exclusive and my research will demonstrate that both medieval and modern authors had and have an expectation that medieval religious men and women will express spirituality in particular ways. In a recent monograph, *Christian Mysticism* (2009), we find a clear example of the separation of female expression or experience from all others, especially in the words which open the chapter on female mysticism: ‘This chapter explores the idea that women’s mysticism constitutes a particular type of mysticism that, while different from that produced by men, is no less a form of mysticism.’¹⁰ This encourages the assumption that men did not experience the divine in the same manner as women, and that the mysticism of medieval women was somehow inferior to that of men. Some men did engage in the kinds of spiritual expression that women did, just as some women wrote about their theology as men did.

When considering responses to eucharistic ecstasy, Caroline Walker Bynum makes a passing comment in her 1984 article ‘Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century’, noting that ‘holy men were clerics and holy laypeople were women.’¹¹ This statement boldly claims that the performance of religion was gendered, with men and women confined to dichotomous (cloistered and secular) religious realms. Within those realms they were confined to disjunctive (intellectual and experiential) mystical expressions of the divine. However, this gendered division is not necessarily the product of modern historical writing. Amy Hollywood has noted that the gendered distinctions starkly apparent in modern scholarship echo the views

¹⁰ Louise Nelstrop, Kevin Magill, and Bradley B. Onishi, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches*, Ashgate, 2009, p. 139.

¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century’, in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York, 1992, p. 139.

of medieval commentators such as Jean Gerson (1363-1429), who decried women's visionary experiences and 'the insatiable itch to see and to speak, not to mention . . . the itch to touch.' Yet, as Hollywood makes clear, the documentary evidence does not necessarily support this rigid formulation of 'affective, emotional, visionary, and often erotic forms of mysticism' as being exclusively feminine and contra-wise, 'speculative, intellectual, often explicitly antivisionary forms of mysticism' as solely masculine.¹² Rupert certainly experienced an erotic encounter with Christ, but what prevented him from revealing this to others, and why are his visions not as important in secondary scholarship as the subsequent theological deluge they unleashed?

There is the danger that this thesis could become just another collection of examples used to illustrate that, in fact, holy men did have visions and did engage in a more affective spiritual life. But I want the discussion to range wider than that. My work seeks to address the issue that there has been little scholarly attention given to the role which men played in creating and enforcing a gendered norm for other men. The specifically revisionist, gendered approach I intend to pursue is under-represented within the wider historiography of mysticism and it is my hope that this research will provide a contribution to medieval historiography at two points. Firstly, this work will become part of the continuing project to illuminate the lives of medieval men and the study of masculinities, and secondly, by undertaking a more gendered approach to the study of medieval religious men, this work will contribute to the already well-considered realm of medieval mysticism.

Our historiography is, in a sense, gendered. Works concerning *mystics* and their experiences are often about women, and consider a range of factors such as social and cultural influences on the individuals involved. Yet, academic works which focus on medieval *mysticism* (how to have a mystical experience) draw largely from the theological works of medieval religious men. Chapter one presents an examination of the varying definitions of 'mystic' and 'mysticism' and reveals the complexities which accompany any consideration of this topic. In addition, this chapter engages with the extensive secondary literature dealing with female religious experience, although the focus of this thesis is male religious experience and masculinity. Feminist histories concerning medieval mystic women have broken away from the religious and

¹² Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, Chicago, 2002, p. 8.

theological focus evident in many works devoted to mysticism, and have re-evaluated the intellectual output and spiritual experiences of women as being a product of their gender. This is an approach not often taken when considering men in the historical record and one which I intend to take with this research into individual holy men who display similar attributes to holy women in their practice of spirituality. The study of men *qua* men is the rationale behind this research and, unlike other works dealing with Christian mysticism, such as Grace Jantzen's *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (1999), men and the performance of masculinity will be the focus, not women.

Chris Beasley notes that gender has been criticized as a term because it divides the sexual and the social too concisely, ignoring the role of nature in the organization of societies.¹³ This is a position forcefully argued in the 2003 volume *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*. In her introduction to this work, Sharon Farmer argued that the essays in the text 'consider not only the fluidity and multiplicity of gendered identities but also the way in which gendered constructs interact with other categories of difference'.¹⁴ A central tenet of this argument is the idea, expanded upon by Carol Braun Pasternack, that gender can be perceived in one of two ways: either as a binary system (masculine versus feminine); or as multiple points within a matrix or along a continuum.¹⁵ Indeed, the essays in the collection are representative of the diverse points within that matrix and, read as a whole, present a persuasive argument for the fluidity of gender.

This furthers the work presented in the 1999 volume *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, where the editor, Dawn Hadley, also noted that, rather than being static and universal, 'masculinities were constructed, reconstructed and challenged'.¹⁶ Adopting this fluidity model for the study of gender appears to be the most sensible approach but it does rely on the basic principal that there is a foundation state against which all other variants are measured. Farmer alludes to this when she notes that, despite the progress made by medievalists, feminist scholarship defaults to expressions of the binary model, contrasting a variety of feminine models against an unchanging

¹³ Chris Beasley, *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*, London, 2005, p. 13.

¹⁴ Sharon Farmer, 'Introduction', in Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack eds, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 2003, p. ix.

¹⁵ Carol Braun Pasternack, 'Negotiating Gender in Anglo-Saxon England', in Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack eds, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 2003, p. 108.

¹⁶ D. M. Hadley, 'Introduction: Medieval Masculinities', in D. M. Hadley ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London, 1999, p. 2.

masculine one.¹⁷ As an adjunct to the above questions, this thesis will also ask whether men simply followed the traditional intellectual pathway to mystic experience *or* were actively discouraged from engaging in visionary forms of mystic experience. If we are to understand *why* the appellation 'mystic' has come to represent action in women while 'mysticism' represents thought in men and in the secondary historiography, then it is necessary to address both the biological determinants of gendered behaviour and social expectations concerning the behaviour of men and women.

This thesis is concerned with homosocial relationships amongst men, particularly with regard to the monastic environment, and the evolution of monastic rules which helped to shape an environment which had an andocentric focus on membership, participation, and ritual. Living or acting outside of this environment immediately called masculinity into question, and it is my argument that this controlled and moderated version of masculinity did not encourage alternative spiritual expression in the high medieval period, such as the reporting of mystical visions or the engagement in physiological deprivation to the extent that we find in the lives of holy women. My second chapter, then, focuses on the development of monasticism and particularly the rules associated with both the cenobitic and eremitic ways of life. To do this I employ a range of sources from the late antique period through to the high medieval period. The main factor in my decision to do this lies with the importance afforded the lives of men such as Antony (d. 356), the sayings of the Desert Fathers, and the writings of Jerome (d. 420) and Augustine (d. 436). They became extremely influential in high medieval thought and I want to illustrate the continuity of ideas and social constructions of behaviour, particularly in the monastery, and it is not possible to do this without consulting these early works.

That these works were important is clearly evident in the text, *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Aecclesia*.¹⁸ In this unfinished work written in the first half of the twelfth century, the anonymous author provides us with an insight into the various orders prominent at this time. Using examples from the Old and New Testaments, the Saying of the Desert Fathers, and the Church Fathers, the *Libellus* author explains clearly the origins of monastic orders such as the Cluniacs and Cistercians, and canonical orders such as the Premonstratensians. This diversity was a

¹⁷ Farmer, 'Introduction', p. x.

¹⁸ *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Aecclesia*, ed. and trans. G. Constable and B. Smith, Oxford, 1972.

product of reform and renewal which had been ongoing since the time of Charlemagne. Chapter three focuses on reforms, something of which the high medieval period was not short. A key aspect of these reforms was the strengthening of models of religious masculinity which further constrained religious men. The Carolingian reform provides a starting point as it is during this period that the Benedictine Rule was given official recognition as the rule under which all of Charlemagne's monasteries would operate, presaging an even wider monastic reform which focused on exactly how a monk should live under the Rule.

The masculinity of religious men was not so much called into question during the period of the so-called Gregorian Reform which gathered momentum in the eleventh century; rather, behaviours and boundaries were redefined and redrawn as the reformers sought to separate the men of the Church from all others. The stipulation that medieval men were impregnators, protectors, and providers – in other words, they created a family, then protected and provided for that family – allows no room, it seems, for the man who did not have sex; the clergy to be exact.¹⁹ In an effort to contextualize or define these particular men, the hypothesis of the third gender has been posited.²⁰ R. N. Swanson admits that this formulation, which he terms 'emasculinity', may indeed be artificial but can be carried back to the Middle Ages as a means of categorizing men who did not appear to act like men.²¹ It is the implication that any group needs categorizing and the artificiality of the construct which renders such a hypothesis inflexible; it also forces a re-evaluation of all other gender models which do not follow a particular set of guiding principles. Both Ruth Mazo Karras and Jacqueline Murray downplay the suitability of imagining men (or women) who did not participate in sexual relationships as being part of a 'third gender.' Each maintains that the battle within and the transcendence of lust marked medieval religious men as even more manly than their secular brothers.²² However, even within the group defined as religious men, there are schisms and disruptions which complicate our understanding of what it meant to be a male in the medieval period.

¹⁹ Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages', in Clare A. Lees ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 1994, p. 34; P. H. Cullum, 'Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval England', in D. M. Hadley ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London, 1999, pp. 182, 186.

²⁰ R. N. Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from the Gregorian Reform to Reformation', in D. M. Hadley ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London, 1999, p. 161.

²¹ Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate', pp. 161-62.

²² Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, New York, 2005, p. 42; Jacqueline Murray, 'Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis eds, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Cardiff, 2004, p. 37.

Religion is not static and it is not timeless. It moves and adapts and changes form, like a living thing, as the environment surrounding it, and pervaded by it, changes. The first two centuries of the second millennium saw the core tenets of catholic Christianity stretched to their limits, as successive monastic and ecclesiastic reforms collided with a rapidly changing and expanding western European population. Diverse interpretations of the *vita apostolica* came to the fore driven by holy individuals of both sexes; charismatic individuals who often attracted devoted followers, again from both sexes. The growth in diversity was so great that in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, the Church leadership was compelled to make the following proclamation: 'The founding of new religious orders is forbidden. New monasteries must accept a rule already approved. A monk may not reside in different monasteries nor may one abbot preside over several monasteries.'²³ The irony here is that it was the Church which forced a number of charismatic holy men (and their many followers) to formalise their relationship with the Church. The result was a proliferation of new orders or variations in the expression of the Rule.

Chapter four focuses on these men who inhabited different layers in the religious atmosphere. Heroic ascetics such as Romuald of Ravenna (d. c. 1025/27) and Dominic Loricatus (d. 1068) lived in the rarefied air of the spectacular holy individual who could not be slavishly imitated. Like Christina Mirabilis or Marie D'Oignies, Romuald and Dominic were exemplars, displaying all of the traits of humility, obedience, and devotion to Christ expected of the truly religious. Slightly more numerous, slightly less fantastic, and slightly closer to the earth is the worldly man turned hermit—men such as Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1116), Stephan of Obazine (d. 1154), and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu (d. 1087). Having lived ordinary, albeit religious, lives, these men elected in adulthood to abandon society and disappear into the wilderness, searching for their own private desert in which to do battle just as Antony had. As Gerald of Wales noted, however, 'these times are different, indeed, and there are different customs for different times'.²⁴ These men may have wished to live as hermits, with one or two close companions who lived their life in Christ alongside them, but they failed rather spectacularly. Instead, they attracted followers from all walks of life who were drawn to their charismatic preaching or inspired leadership—in fact, they were so successful

²³ H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, St. Louis, 1937, Canon 13.

²⁴ Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis*, trans. John J. Hagen, Leiden, 1979, II.6.

that they were required to found new monastic houses in which their followers would live. In this sense, men like Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine were able to be contained and controlled by the Church leadership and their preaching or leadership talents were redirected towards an institutional setting.

What changed in the eleventh-century mentality concerning religious masculinity? What caused Robert of Arbrissel and Robert La Chaise-Dieu to be pulled back into the institutional setting from which they had tried to escape? Andreas Buss notes that the reforms of the eleventh century contributed to this change in attitude stating that 'the church now came to be viewed as a visible, legal and corporate unity, with the emphasis shifting . . . from sacredness in the sense of otherworldliness to the manifestation of the sacred in the political, economic and social life of the times'.²⁵ While outstanding holy men, such as Robert of Arbrissel, Stephen of Obazine, and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu were a boon to the Church, they also needed to be seen as fully integrated into that legal and corporate entity. Thus, we find the lives of such men pivot at the point where their charismatic individuality brought them to the attention of the leaders of the Church. Charismatic monks and hermits were problematic to 'a church run by bishops, who had spiritual and administrative authority over all Christians living within their well-defined areas of jurisdiction'.²⁶

Lay brothers provide us with a group of men who I believe were more akin to religious women in that they too occupied a liminal status within the religious realm. Lay brothers were neither fully within nor fully excluded from the monastery, just as many medieval holy women were either loosely associated with a formal order, or attached literally by an anchorhold to a church. Lay brothers, however, were the crucial conduit between the sacred and the secular, allowing the monastery to maintain its untainted status, and we find a wealth of evidence which suggests that the lay brothers themselves became the conduits for the expression of religious masculinity. The performance or expression of spirituality we find in the lives of lay brothers bear remarkable similarities to those of medieval holy women. Some lay brothers engaged in extreme forms of bodily mortification echoing the fierce asceticism of women such as Christina Mirabilis or Marie D'Oignies, whilst others exhibited the clear future-vision of a prophet. However, they also represent the continuity of a

²⁵ Andreas Buss, 'The Evolution of Western Individualism', *Religion*, 30, 2000, p. 11.

²⁶ Lester K. Little, 'Monasticism and Western Society: From Marginality to the Establishment and Back', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 47, 2002, p. 85.

tradition of harsh asceticism and visionary experience amongst monastic and eremitic religious men since the time of Antony.

Chapter five focuses attention on asceticism and questions whether or how gender drives the motivation for such practices. Did medieval religious men and women expect different outcomes when they inflicted pain upon themselves? Some modern scholarship has applied modern medical science to this question, with works such as *Holy Anorexia* and *The Mystic Mind* offering rational psychological explanations for these practices.²⁷ The main premise of these arguments is that medieval individuals understood that, by engaging in fasting or self-flagellation, they would be able to transcend their normal state of consciousness, thereby gaining access to visions and physiological experiences of the Divine. Works driven by feminist theory attribute to medieval religious women an innate sense of feminism which saw them employ their bodies as visual placards of protest against a patriarchal Church.²⁸ The very public nature of the lives of extraordinary medieval religious women is paradoxically almost always the result of a man, either as a biographer, confessor or scribe. Can we describe these men as feminist as well? Or were women a more convenient parchment upon which to inscribe the wonders of God? It is my argument that the pressures to conform ensured that medieval religious men, entrenched in the institution, were unable to participate in the more diverse and less-structured forms of spiritual expression attributed to medieval women.

The reactions of other medieval religious men also appeared to influence the reporting of religious visions by their brethren. While some medieval religious men, such as the lay brothers Arnulf of Villers (d. 1228) or Simon of Aulne (d. 1230), were open about their experiences, other religious men, such as the theologian Rupert of Deutz, were less forthcoming. Chapter six turns to visionary experience with the same guiding principles and questions as chapter five. Did medieval religious men 'see' or 'feel' the same kinds of things when in the thrall of a vision? Rupert of Deutz certainly seemed to but as I have already noted, his visionary experiences are not the major focus of modern literature concerning Rupert or his theology. The visionary experiences of Simon and Arnulf seem to be less problematic because they are received

²⁷ Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, Chicago, 1985; Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics*, New York, 2005.

²⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of the myriad ways in which women's mysticism had been considered see, Dyan Elliot, 'Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100 - c. 1500*, Turnhout, 2010, pp. 13-46.

and reported in the same way that female visionary experience is; as simple, uneducated men they are suitable vessels for divine grace. In these final two chapters I will consider closely the differences and similarities between lay brothers such as Arnulf and Simon, and holy women such as Christina Mirabilis, Marie D'Oignies, and Ida of Nivelles. My aim is to understand if there are any aspects attributable to the lives of these individuals which contribute to the different appellations they receive in modern scholarship.

Simon of Aulne and Arnulf of Villers are two lay brothers who feature prominently in the final two chapters of this work. Coupled with the exploration of the lives of the Desert Fathers and Antony in chapter two, and the pseudo-hermits of the high medieval period in chapter four, this thesis considers a number of *vitae* from a broad period of time. It also means that the initial chapters of my work will range across a broad geographic spectrum. As I have stated, an important aspect of this thesis is the investigation of the powerful and controlling nature of social relationships amongst men in religious settings. This is especially true of the twin themes of humility and obedience which register in many of the works—didactic and hagiographic—considered in this thesis.

This also accounts for my decision to include a discussion of the Carolingian monastic reforms, as this proved to be a crucial period in the evolution of monasticism. The Benedictine Rule, and the compliance and conformity it demanded, was corporatized by a religious man who represented the superiority of the Benedictine way over any other. Benedict of Aniane (d. 821) began his life as a fierce ascetic, devoted to the ways of the Desert Fathers before him but turned to the more moderate ways of his famous predecessor Benedict of Nursia. In Benedict of Aniane's life we find a striking example of a religious man who turned away from an individualistic affective way of life, in favour of the more moderate and structured community living of the Benedictine monastery. Perhaps in Benedict we can find some reasons for his change of heart.

Searching for continuity in medieval male understandings of what was correct masculine behaviour, will be a key to unlocking why affective spirituality amongst religious men seems missing in the high medieval period. My high medieval period ends at the year 1240 for two reasons. Firstly, I made a conscious decision to focus on the eleventh and twelfth centuries as this was a period of great reform and change in Christian Europe. Religious diversity flourished and opportunities for medieval

people to engage in a religious way of life became more pronounced. Secondly, 1239 marks the year of the death of Abundus, monk of Villers. His death is the last of the group of individuals I have chosen to study in this thesis. Along with his chronological and geographical contemporaries, Arnulf of Villers (d. 1228) and Ida of Nivelles (d. 1231), Abundus represents the end of a period of reform and change, and the beginnings of the flourishing female mystic presence, which has captivated historians of women. I hope to find in the lives of these eleventh- and twelfth-century individuals some indication as to why we, as modern spectators, appear to see these medieval religious men and women in different lights. To begin, however, we need to untangle the mysteries of 'mysticism' and 'mystic'.

1. 'Mysticism' and 'Mystic' as Constructions in our Modern Historiography: A Discussion

Now I must address, once again, the mystic faction that accepts, without a hint of incredulity, Ramanujan's claim that his mathematics came to him in dreams, or that formulae were inscribed upon his tongue by a deity.¹

It was expected that God's finger infected those it touched with holy madness; Acton was commanding the respect accorded to skeletal men gibbering in caves in the East, or to a stylite balancing on his pillar. Did not saints embrace discomfort? Had not the corpse of St Thomas Becket been wearing a hairshirt swarming with lice? Dirt, exaltation and an ability to quote the Bible were signs of sanctity.²

Introduction

David Leavitt's 2007 novel, *The Indian Clerk*, dramatizes the brief but remarkable relationship of the British mathematician G. H. Hardy and Srinivasa Ramanujan, the eponymous Indian clerk. The largely uneducated Ramanujan, dubbed the "Hindoo calculator" by a British newspaper, attributed his innate genius in number theory to the divine intervention of his family deity—Namagiri. His biographers note that he often stated that: 'An equation for me has no meaning, unless it represents a thought of God.'³ Hardy, an affirmed atheist, found this notion difficult to digest; nonetheless, he recognized the 'miracle' of travelling into regions of the mind, from which most were barred, in pursuit of mathematical inspiration. More importantly, Hardy recognized the fundamental divide between his culture and that of Ramanujan:

Were I to announce, today, that a goddess was writing formulae on my tongue, you would show me the way to the asylum. But Ramanujan was Indian, and so he was labelled a "visionary."⁴

Ramanujan's 'mysticism' was rooted in his culture and religion, according to the authors of his *vita*; thus, his textural/numeric production could be viewed as the tangible result of his devotion to Namagiri and as Namagiri's gift to Ramanujan for his devotion.

¹ David Leavitt, *The Indian Clerk*, London, 2007, p. 323.

² Ariana Franklin, *Mistress of the Art of Death*, New York, 2007, p. 118.

³ Robert Knaigel, *The Man Who Knew Infinity: A Life of Genius, Ramanujan*, New York, 1991; Gregory Chaitin, 'Why Mathematics Needs New Heroes', *New Scientist*, 195, 2614, 2007, p. 49.

⁴ Leavitt, *The Indian Clerk*, p. 323.

The words I have quoted are, of course, the words of a novelist. They are a fiction constructed from the textual flotsam of two discursive lives thrown together for the briefest period of time. Yet they clearly illustrate the difficult path this thesis must follow in determining what or who makes a mystic. The importance of interpretation in this work cannot be overstated, and I am speaking here not only of the interpretive efforts of the mystics themselves, but also of the efforts of their biographers, contemporary and potential. Ninian Smart argues that an interpretation of religious experience can be 'made from various points of view'.⁵ Smart outlines three main perspectives which must be taken into account when considering the interpretation of religious experience. Firstly, there is the description of the event as offered by the 'man himself, in terms of his own tradition'. Secondly, there is the view offered by other men from the same tradition as to the man's experience. Finally, there is the interpretation or description of the experience as offered by men of another tradition in their own terms.⁶ Smart concludes that '[w]e crucially, then, should distinguish between a mystic's interpretation of his own experience and the interpretation which may be placed upon it from a different point of view'.⁷

The two most important questions addressed in this chapter are hidden away in Smart's statement; who are these 'men' and who is 'we'? While taking into account the fact that Smart was writing at a time when gender-neutrality was less emphasized in academic writing, his use of the noun 'man' illuminates the paradox at the heart of this thesis, that is the scholarly tendency to view mysticism as male and mystics as female. As I have noted in the introduction to this thesis, these elusive religious men are the ones I am chasing after. Although the medieval historiography is awash with religious women 'infected . . . with holy madness', men seem strangely absent – unless one turns the conversation towards mysticism. The search for male mystics has proven to be rather tricky. I had imagined that there would be no problem in uncovering biographies of men who were the equal of Christina Mirabilis or Marie D'Oignies, but my initial investigations proved my imaginings to be erroneous. Even the seemingly simple task of conducting a search in a library is hampered by the fact that there is no

⁵ Ninian Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', in Richard Woods ed., *Understanding Mysticism*, New York, 1980, p. 83.

⁶ Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', p. 83.

⁷ Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', p. 83.

subject heading for 'men mystics' or 'male mystics.'⁸ Their female counterparts, however, enjoy 28 listings under the subject heading 'women mystics.' Further complicating the issue is a striking division, clearly illustrated in the cluster of works from both the early twentieth century and the modern period, between mysticism and mystics. It is this division which seems to account for the bibliographical inequality I noted above. In an effort to understand more about this paradoxical separation, I decided to review the literature that dealt with mysticism, hoping that I would also be able to identify some of the reasons why mystic men are less prominent in the modern historiography.

Despite evidence offered to the contrary by a number of authors on the topic, mysticism is not a phenomenon that is fixed through time. From its early, apparently non-supernatural origins, it has worn various guises over time, adapting to and being adapted by those who have sought to comprehend humanity's relationship to the Divine. The mystic's relationship to mysticism is necessarily shaped not only by theological evolution, but also by societal and cultural expectations concerning religion. How mysticism becomes constructed over time is central to understanding how mystics become visible in the historical record. More importantly, how the mystical experience is interpreted, and therefore constructed by peripheral authors, is crucial to understanding how one individual might be labelled a mystic while another may not.

What, or who, makes a mystic? This double-edged question lies at the crux of this work; for, without determining what or who makes a mystic, how can one find or recognize one? The question is binary in nature because it can (and should) be applied in two different historical contexts. What environmental, social, and cultural factors

⁸ The following represent a small selection of the works focused on female mystics and mysticism: Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard eds, *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe*, trans. Sheila Hughes, New York, 1989; Paul Lachance, *The Mystical Journey of Angela of Foligno*, Toronto, 1990; Ritamary Bradley, *In the Jaws of the Bear: Journeys of Transformation by Women Mystics*, Toronto, 1991; Roger de Ganck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*, Kalamazoo, 1991; Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge, 1992; Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*, Oxford, 1994; Anne Clark Bartlett, *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, Cambridge, 1995; Monica Furlong ed., *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics*, Boston, 1996; Rosalynn Voaden ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, Rochester, 1996; Patricia Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition*, New York, 1998; Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne eds, *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liege and their Impact*, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 2, Turnhout, 1999; Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant*, Mahwah, 2005; Beverly J. Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: a Feminist Mystical Theology*, Minneapolis, 2005; Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, London, 2009; Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100 - c. 1500*, Turnhout, 2010.

led to what Bernard McGinn has noted as the twelfth-century increase in the involvement of women in mystical behaviour?⁹ Is the 'mysticism' of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the 'mysticism' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries upon which much of the modern historiography bases its definition? To further extrapolate or modify McGinn's question, one might ask, where are the male heroic ascetics and visionary mystics, and why are they less visible than women? Understanding the construction of the paradigm of mysticism is important to this work: therefore, understanding *who* Ninian Smart's 'we' is becomes a key which unlocks that construction.

It is beyond the scope and not the point of this work to determine what mysticism is: that is a task for the theologian or philosopher. Rather, I wish to determine how historians of the medieval period have used a construction of mysticism as a context for reconstructing medieval lives. Mysticism, as a term, is not the stable immutable paradigm it appears as in the historiography. These definitions are not bounded by category or discipline. The Hellenistic origins of the word mysticism belie the catholic use of the word in modern definitions.

The Foundations of Mysticism

Mysticism in the context of this work arises from less than mystical beginnings in pre-Christian Greek religious cults. The terms 'mystery', *mysterion*, or *mystikos* are derived from 'μυστικός which comes from the verb μύω, which means "to close," and more particularly, to close the eyes.'¹⁰ Louis Bouyer notes that the term, at this point in time, merely referred to a 'secret' which is 'purely ritual' and that these secrets were kept by those who were initiated into the cult.¹¹ Thus the mysteries were ineffable only because the initiate was **not** to speak of them rather than being **unable** to speak of them. Contrast this with David Knowles's assertion that '[t]o analyse and describe it [the essence of Christian mysticism] must always be difficult, for the experience itself is

⁹ Bernard McGinn, 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism', *Church History*, 65, 2, June 1996, p. 201. Also see Michael Goodich, 'The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography', *Church History*, 50, 1, March 1981, pp. 20-32, for a discussion of female piety in the thirteenth century.

¹⁰ Louis Bouyer, 'Mysticism / An Essay on the History of the Word', in Richard Woods ed., *Understanding Mysticism*, New York, 1980, p. 42; F. C. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*, revised edn, Harmondsworth, 1970, p. 18.

¹¹ Bouyer, 'Mysticism', p. 42; Margaret Smith, 'The Nature and Meaning of Mysticism', in Richard Woods ed., *Understanding Mysticism*, New York, 1980, p. 19.

rare and by definition supernatural and ineffable'.¹² The apparent ineffability of the Hellenistic mysteries also hides the fact that there was no actual doctrinal component to these secrets: a myth surrounding doctrine perpetrated, according to Bouyer, by historians 'influenced by romanticism'.¹³

As Bernard McGinn notes, *mystikos* (i.e., hidden), had become a normal part of the Christian lexicon by the end of the second century and although it intimated the entwined nature of mystery and exegesis, 'mysticism' as the construct employed by many modern scholars remained in the future.¹⁴ Tim Vivian casts a slightly different light on the role of the 'mystery.' In the introduction to his translation of Paphnutius' *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt*, Vivian attributes the 'mystery' with a physical presence: 'The eucharist is a mystery. . . . But mystery is not something separated off and kept in hiding; mystery, like bread, is daily and sacramental.'¹⁵ This physicality is emphasized in the *Lausiac History* of Palladius. There he recounts the story of a man who coveted another's wife and how the woman was transformed into a mare via a magical spell. She is taken by her distressed husband to visit the monk Macarius of Egypt, in order that he might have mercy on her. Although Macarius chastises the brethren telling them that the woman 'has not been transformed, except in the eyes of deluded men,' he nonetheless lays some of the blame at the woman's feet: '[n]ever give up the church, never stay away from the Communion. For these things happened to you because you did not attend the mysteries for five weeks.'¹⁶

A treatise entitled *The Mysteries* (c. 387), authored by Ambrose of Milan, reinforces this notion that the mysteries of the Church reside in the sacraments.¹⁷ This symbolic or allegorical use of the noun 'mystic' remains in use until well into the second millennium as we can see, for example, in the *Poems* of William of Shoreham (c. 1320). William was an English religious writer active in the late thirteenth and early to mid-fourteenth centuries. He composed several religious poems and is thought to be the author of the earliest English version of the Psalter.¹⁸ In William's poem, 'De septem

¹² David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, New York, 1961, p. 21.

¹³ Bouyer, 'Mysticism', p. 42.

¹⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*, vol. 2, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1994, p. xi.

¹⁵ Paphnutius, *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius*, trans. and intro. Tim Vivian, Kalamazoo, 1993, p. 30.

¹⁶ Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer, Westminster, 1965, Macarius of Egypt, 9.

¹⁷ Ambrose, 'On the Mysteries', trans. Rev. H. De Romestin, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, A Select Library Of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series 2, vol. 10, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, pp. 315-325.

¹⁸ Michael Ott, 'William of Shoreham', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 15, London, 1913, p. 638.

sacramentis. De psalmo, Exercitatus sum et defecit spiritus,' we see lines such as 'Cryst and hijs membrys, men, O body beþe ine mystyke' and 'þys ylke bok þe mistyk ys Of þese sacramentis'.¹⁹ This clearly illustrates that the term mystic, as a noun, was still allegorical in its use well into the fourteenth century.

Michel de Certeau has demonstrated the early-modern emergence in French of the noun *la mystique* from the adjective *mystique*.²⁰ The difficulty posed by language is clearly noted by de Certeau's translator, who states that there is no equivalent word in English to correspond to the French *la mystique*. The use in English of the noun 'mystic,' to denote someone who has or seeks mystical experiences, is not formally noted as occurring by the Oxford English Dictionary until 1640.²¹ In its adjectival form, 'mystical,' we find an even later initial use in English and one that appears to be rather critical: 'How much nobler a Field of Exercise...are the seraphic Entertainments of Mysticism and Extasy than the mean and ordinary Practice of a mere earthly and common Virtue!'²² This brief lexical overview is significant as it is illustrative of the mediation and alteration that texts are exposed to when translated, especially if the translator seeks to enhance the reputation of a particular individual or work. An important example of this is seen in the Cistercian Fathers Series *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*. I have highlighted the questionable translation of the Latin word *spirituale* as the English word mystical below:

Non est enim cuiusvis hominum ex affectu hoc dicere; sed si quis ex ore Christi *spirituale osculum* vel semel accepit, hunc proprium experimentum profecto sollicitat, et repetit libens.²³

Those to whom it is given to utter these words sincerely are comparatively few, but anyone who has received this *mystical kiss* from the mouth of Christ at least once, seeks again that intimate experience, and eagerly looks for its frequent renewal.²⁴

¹⁹ William of Shoreham, *The Poems*, ed. M. Konrath, London, 1902, pp. 23, 76.

²⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: Volume One The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Chicago, 1992, pp. ix-x, 79-112. Also see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, vol. 1, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1991, pp. 266-67.

²¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, 2009, available at <http://www.oed.com> (3 February 2009) For example, from 1640: W. Vaughan, *Church Militant*, 'That no Lay-men receive the Sacrament By Married Priests, though with devout intent; As if Gods Mysticks from John Baptists Sire, Or Peter savour'd of Profaner Fire.'

²² *Oxford English Dictionary*, from 1724; A. Collins, *Disc. Grounds Christian Relig.*, 'Just as remote from the real literal sense of Hoseah as the mysticism of the allegorists, and altogether as obscure to the understanding.'

²³ Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-Vallensis Sermones In Cantica Cantorum*, PL 183, col. 0794a.

²⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Song of Songs*, 4 vols, trans. Kilian Walsh, intro. M. Corneille Halflants, Kalamazoo, 1971, vol. 1, 3.I.1.

In this English version of Bernard's famous exegesis on the Canticles, his translator Kilian Walsh employs the adjective 'mystical' in an anachronistic attempt to reinforce Bernard's reputation as one of the greatest medieval writers on mysticism. There is no doubt that Walsh has allowed himself an interpretive privilege which, in this instance, has completely altered Bernard's original statement; this is especially true if we keep in mind that for Bernard the words mystic and/or mystical did not carry the meaning that they do for his modern translator.

Language is only a part of the puzzle concerning mysticism. De Certeau also recognizes a shift in emphasis from exegesis and textual hermeneutics to experience in making mystic claims, beginning sometime in the sixteenth century.²⁵ I would argue, however, that this transformation appears much more fluid than de Certeau claims and affected the interpretation of male and female religious experience differently. At this point, however, it is important to note that this transformation also reiterates the Christian invocation of mystic as representing something 'hidden' or 'unknowable'. The close association of the term mysticism with the textual mysteries of the Bible remains in force until the sixteenth century. It is at this point that the focus of mysticism/mystic becomes more experiential; that is, mysticism or mystical practice becomes less about the mystery of sacred text and more about experiencing the mystery of God. As de Certeau notes, this emphasis on experience opens the way to the redefining and proliferation of texts considered to be mystical.²⁶ For works focussing on medieval mystics by historians, this paradigm of contact with or experience of the divine also seems to be the starting point for the reclamation of the individual mystic. Another telling point which arises from de Certeau's researches is the notion that an author from the sixteenth century (and before perhaps?) would not use the term 'mystic' as we might today; rather, they might use 'contemplative' or 'visionary.'²⁷ Vision and contemplation; female and male; mystic and mystical. If we are to consider why it seems so difficult to recover male mystics then these stark binaries brokered by language, culture, religion, and 'natural philosophy' provide a starting point.

What all of these works do highlight, despite theoretical or methodological difference, is the stark differentiation between studying mysticism and studying

²⁵ de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, p. 96. Also see, Françoise Meltzer, 'Between Mysticisms: The Trial of Joan of Arc', in Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard eds, *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, Chicago, 2003, p. 76.

²⁶ de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, p. 96.

²⁷ de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, p. 94.

individual mystics. Paradoxically, the two seem mutually exclusive in the historiography. Mystics are integral to any general discussion of mysticism, but in many of these works they suffer the same hagiographic treatment they certainly seemed to attract whilst alive. They are often women who are celebrated by their modern hagiographers as exceptional, supernatural individuals who transcended, literally and figuratively, their 'ordinary' existence (whatever that existence was). Works concerned with mysticism, on the other hand, are strongly centered on deep spiritual and theological beliefs: therefore, they lack any determined investigation of an author's personal and social circumstances. They are focused on philosophy, theology, and spirituality in a tantalizing attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible, and, more often than not, they are focused on men. Defeating the conflation of the terms 'mystic' and 'mystical' is an important first step for this work, although considering them in isolation from one another is extraordinarily difficult. Despite this, it is useful to survey each facet of this paradox individually in order to identify the problems of constructed categories.

Mysticism, as a topic for academic attention, has had two periods of fluorescence in the modern era: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and from the 1960s onward. These periods are patrolled by a broad assembly of works that stride across a number of disciplines ranging from philosophy, theology, psychology, and the history of religion. As discussed in the Introduction, many of the foundation texts devoted to the study of mysticism come from this earlier period (although not all) and they present mysticism as a timeless phenomenon, not influenced by culture or society; consequently, the works produced emanate the faint glow of a-historicism.²⁸ Perennialist readings only take into account the individual's relationship to the Divine and the intellectual expression of that relationship. This provides our first clue as to the reason for the apparently gendered nature of mysticism. Mysticism, or the study of, it is the product of the philosophy of religion; a philosophy, according to Nancy Frankenberry, which is 'male-authored, mainstream, monochromatic, and myopic in

²⁸ These are the texts classified as perennialist in Louise Nelstrop, Kevin Magill, and Bradley B. Onishi, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches*, Ashgate, 2009, p. 2. For example, Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: a Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th edn rev., London, 1930; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature: Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh 1901-2*, London, 1952; Edward Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 1st edn 1922, New York, 1966; Happold, *Mysticism*; William James, *Writings, 1902-1910*, New York, 1987.

its selection of topics'.²⁹ Are men only visible in works concerning mysticism because mysticism is an intellectual pursuit therefore masculine? Amy Hollywood extends this analysis further by claiming that 'mysticism . . . is [either] simply associated with femininity or with women and so denigrated, or a distinction is made between good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, non-pathological and pathological forms of mysticism, with the first category in each case associated with masculinity and men and the second with femininity and women'.³⁰

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915-1968) clearly perceived this gendered divide:

[D]ogmatic and mystical theology, or theology and "spirituality" [have] been set apart in mutually exclusive categories, as if mysticism were for saintly women and theological study were for practical but, alas, unsaintly men.³¹

Merton is described by historian Steven Fanning as 'both a mystic and a writer on mysticism'.³² Fanning's deliberate separation of mystic and mysticism in his description of Merton illustrates the epistemological division of theology and spirituality which Merton himself decries. This division, expressed in the individual by Fanning, is also evident in the collective. Paul Szarmach's introduction to the collected edition, *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, is telling in its synopsis of the individual contributions to the volume. The chapters devoted to the male mystics are summarized on the basis of their intellectual content: that is, the philosophy or doctrine of the mysticism of each mystic or theologian is considered with little reference to the actual individual. Contrast this to Szarmach's summation of Valerie Lagorio's chapter which introduces the continental female mystics to the reader. Here we learn of Hildegard of Bingen's multifaceted life and achievements (intellectual and spiritual), the socio-economic movement of the Beguines, and the cultural significance and influence of Catherine of Siena and Brigitta of Sweden.³³ Of course, Szarmach is providing a précis of the works for the reader, but what emerges is a clear distinction between male mysticism and female mysticism, both in the activities which the historical individuals pursued **and** how those pursuits are presented by

²⁹ Nancy Frankenberry, 'Introduction: Prolegomenon to Future Feminist Philosophies of Religions', *Hyppatia*, 9, 4, Feminist Philosophy of Religion, Autumn 1994, p. 1.

³⁰ Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, Chicago, 2002, pp. 7-8.

³¹ Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, New York, 1972, p. 197, cited in Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd edn, New York, 2007, p. x.

³² Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*, London, 2001, p. 212.

³³ Paul E. Szarmach, 'Introduction', in Paul E. Szarmach ed., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, Albany N.Y., 1984, pp. 10-11.

their modern biographers. The key difference expressed in these brief summations is the totality with which the lives of the female mystics are treated. Lagorio is tasked with providing an introductory chapter on the continental female mystics, yet this same task is not attempted for the male mystics whose work, it appears, speaks for itself with little contextualization. Bernard McGinn's chapter on Meister Eckhart comes closest to Lagorio's when he examines the historical context within which Eckhart's mysticism saw him condemned as heretical.³⁴

Mystics, too, have enjoyed periods of illumination in the historical record. This is aptly illustrated in Steven Fanning's 2001 work, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*, a work which exemplifies how arbitrary the constructions of 'mystic' and 'mysticism' are in the historical lexicon.³⁵ Fanning adopts a definition of mysticism taken from Evelyn Underhill's 1925 work, *Mystics of the Church*, which maintains that mysticism is 'the direct intuition or experience of God'.³⁶ Fanning's employment, without interrogation, of Underhill's definition allows him to 'catch' many more individuals in the mystic net; yet some of those individuals who claim mystic status according to Fanning may not have been granted that same status by Underhill. Two individuals which stand out in this regard are Christina Mirabilis and Joan of Arc, neither of whom produced any written works which could be deemed mystical and who both could be regarded as individuals who were affected by visions and/or ecstasies. For Underhill, the 'substance of mysticism' must be disentangled from the 'psycho-physical accidents of the trance, ecstasy, vision and other abnormal phenomena which often accompany it,' which, in turn, vindicates 'genuine knowledge of transcendental Reality – with its accompanying demonstration of the soberness and sanity of the greatest contemplative saints – [and] is the last of the beneficent changes which have transformed our study of the mystics'.³⁷ The evanescent 'substance of mysticism' clouds our historical vision, and coupled with disjunctive disagreements over the individual's engagement with mysticism, make both mysticism and mystic, as categories for the excavation of historical lives, too diffuse.

Fanning's use of Underhill's definition perfectly distils de Certeau's assertion concerning the transition from textual (exegetic) to experiential mysticism. Fanning

³⁴ Bernard McGinn, 'Meister Eckhart: An Introduction', in Paul E. Szarmach ed., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, Albany N.Y., 1984, pp. 237-257.

³⁵ Fanning, *Mystics*.

³⁶ Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, Cambridge, 1925, reprint 1975, p. 10, cited in Fanning, *Mystics*, p. 2.

³⁷ Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. x-xi (preface to 12th edn).

reinforces this evolution when he states that the individuals singled out for attention in his work are 'mystics and not simply writers on mysticism'.³⁸ As such, he is obliged to omit any number of individuals, a fact which he owns to without any explanation of how he determined who would be included and who would not. Ultimately then, and despite his qualifying statements concerning selection, Fanning still provides a consciously mediated group of individuals which he believes is representative of the Christian mystic tradition. At this point I want to focus briefly on the timeline that Fanning included as an appendix to his work, in order to illustrate two important points concerning that mediation: firstly, the exegetical, textual tradition of mysticism versus the experiential, physical mystic; and secondly, the male versus the female.

The timeline, reproduced here (Figs. 1 and 2), clearly illustrates these traditions and transitions.³⁹ The first section of the timeline shows a grouping of mystic individuals occurring between 150 and 450 CE, corresponding to the formalization and flourishing of Christianity in Europe (Fig. 1). Fanning does not differentiate here between the eastern and western Christian traditions, which were already beginning to show variations in approach. These differences only became more evident when the quasi-Christian emperor, Constantine I, founded a new eastern capital for the Roman Empire on the former site of Byzantium, and they were cemented when Theodosius I made the formal and final division of the Roman Empire into east and west in 395 CE.

According to Fanning, the second major cluster of mystics to brighten the Christian horizon occupy a period that is almost continuous, running from the beginning of the twelfth century through to the year 2000 CE (Fig. 2). A closer inspection of this larger cluster reveals that it is, instead, a tripartite construction corresponding loosely to periods of transformation in the Christian Church, particularly *c.* 1000-1350 CE, which witnessed a period of intense reform, and *c.* 1500-1700 CE, which encompassed the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. I must restate here that Fanning's collection is by no means a complete list of those considered mystics: this in itself illustrates my argument that the attachment of this particular descriptor to individuals is, at best, subjective. A close examination of the timeline prompts certain questions which Fanning fails adequately to address such as: what are the criteria for selection? Who is eligible for inclusion on the list? Why are particular individuals excluded? As I noted previously, Bernard McGinn comments on the

³⁸ Fanning, *Mystics*, p. 3.

³⁹ Fanning, *Mystics*, pp. 257-258.

marked increase at the beginning of the twelfth century in the number of women involved in mystic behaviour. Many have asked, where did all these women come from? I want to ask, where did all the men go?

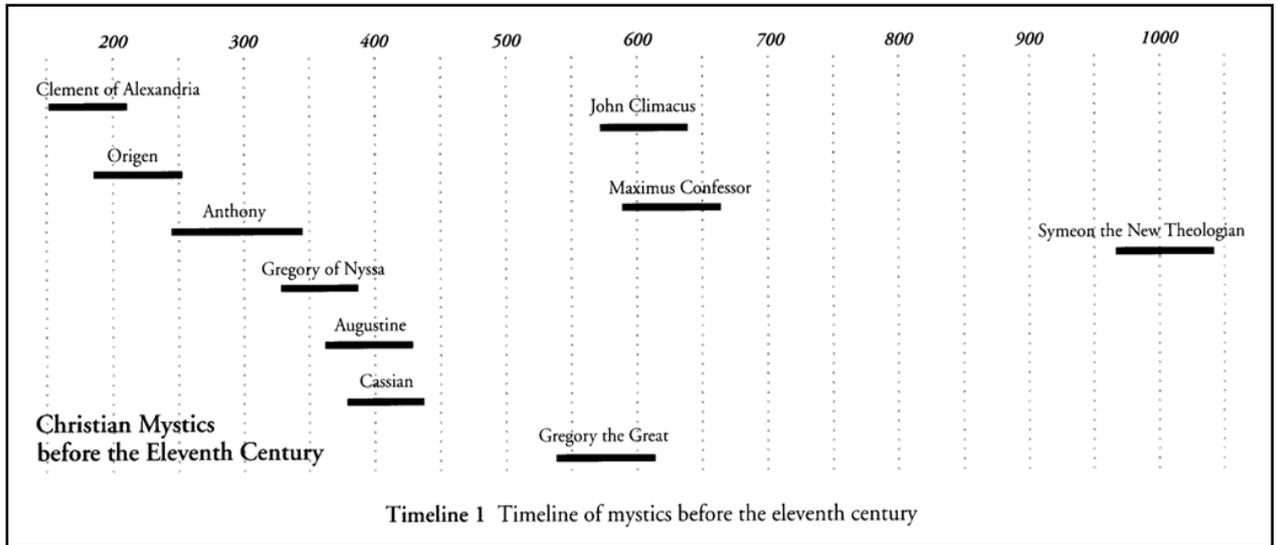


Figure 1: Timeline of mystics before the eleventh century. Detail of table from, Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*, London, 2001, p. 257.

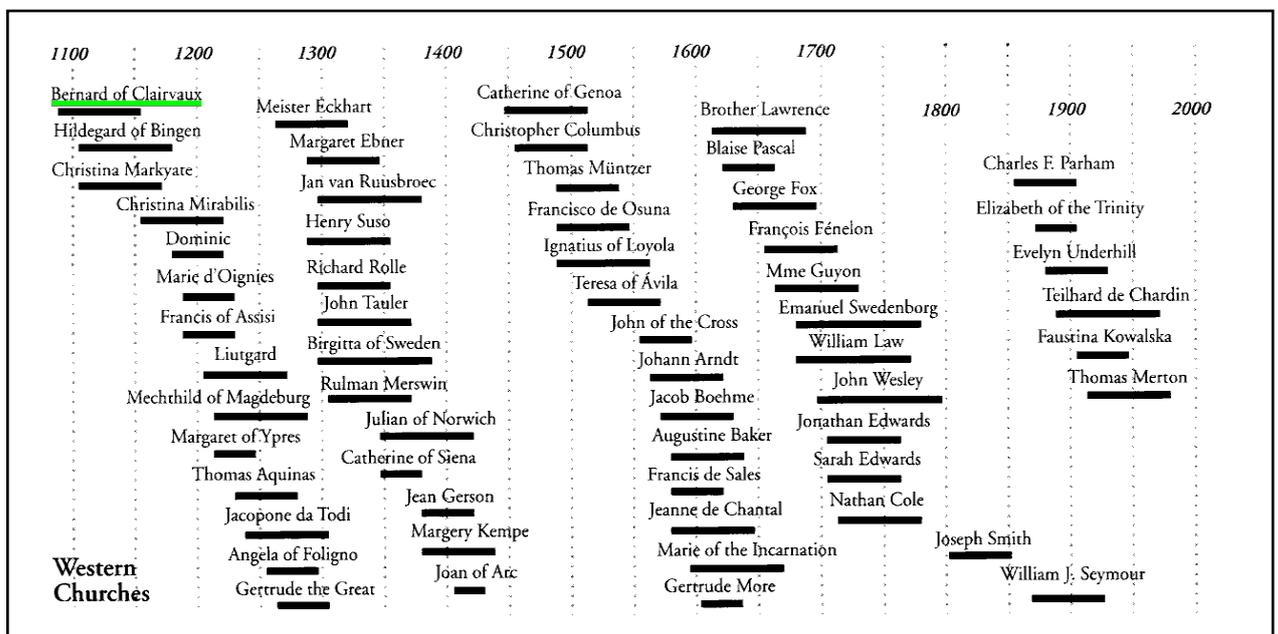


Figure 2: Timeline of mystics from 1100-2000. Detail of table from, Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*, London, 2001, p. 258.

The period 150-600 CE is illustrative of two facts which are central to this thesis as I try to understand the apparent reversal in mystical fortunes for men and women. Firstly, all the men mentioned in this period can be rightly considered to be authors of text(s) concerned with patristic theology or the monastic way of life.⁴⁰ Only the hermit Antony would appear to fit into the category of visionary. Secondly, according to Fanning, during this period there are no female mystics. At first glance, this may seem contradictory to the student of Church history who is aware that, although already expressing concern about the role of women in the priestly caste, the late-antique Church was far less strident in its demands for a female-free environment than its eleventh-century progeny. When we compare this to the period of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, which is replete with religious women of all stripes, this contradiction is thrown into even starker relief as this period reflects the increasing alienation and eviction of women from the institutional functions of the Church.⁴¹ However, the over-riding and far more salient fact at this point, concerns the men who **are** listed on the mystic timeline in the early stages of the growth of Christianity. Fanning is by no means the only vocal, modern, supporter of Clement, Origen, Antony, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Cassian, and Gregory the Great. Meanwhile, it is the women from the later period who are portrayed as the exemplars of particular forms of affective medieval mysticism which exclude men. Rather than explore why women were missing from this earlier period it is perhaps more important to understand why only certain men were included on this exclusive list. Even more crucially, the following question should be addressed: were these men identified as mystics by their contemporaries?

A deliberate dismantling of the constructed terms 'mystic' and 'mysticism' is necessary. If a 'direct intuition or experience of God' is the criteria for being a mystic, then an author on mysticism, such as Augustine, barely makes the grade. Simply qualifying this obvious flaw by stating that one is going to include, for example, both mystics **and** writers of mysticism in a book concerned primarily with mystics is, I believe, the fundamental fault which fractures the scholarship concerned with mysticism and mystics. The privileging of certain individuals (male and female), certain activities, and certain outcomes is at once confusing and disingenuous. To put

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Gregory the Great are recognized as theologians; Antony and Cassian should more properly be viewed as monastics.

⁴¹ Both of these issues will be dealt with in-depth in my thesis.

it more colloquially, one historian's mystic is another historian's eccentric. The most vibrant example of this is the dismissal of the medieval English mystic, Margery Kempe, by Knowles, who claimed that 'Margery Kempe can only improperly and accidentally be classed among the English mystics and that little . . . spiritual instruction is to be found in her *Book*'.⁴² Margery's faults lay in her 'lack' of textual sophistication and her 'excess' of weeping. Her omission from the ranks of mystics, so clinically expressed by Knowles and widely accepted after his proclamation, highlights the subjective nature of the constructions of 'mystic' and 'mysticism.' However, we need to return to Augustine: should we consider him as a mystic writer or as a patristic theologian? The debate over the influence of the Church Fathers versus the Desert Fathers on the development of mystical practice and theology is one which I would like to turn to now.

Evelyn Underhill is unequivocal when she maintains that Augustine was the single-most influential individual in the development of a literature of mystical experience. She claims that '[l]ater mystics, recognizing this fact, constantly appeal to his authority, and his influence ranks next to that of the Bible in the formation of the mediæval school'.⁴³ Etienne Gilson, however, makes a rather telling remark in his 1940s work, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, when discussing the influences that encouraged Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Saint-Thierry toward the idea that a 'mystical union with God' is the zenith of the monastic life.⁴⁴ Gilson questions the role of the early Christian authors such as Tertullian, Origen or Gregory of Nyssa in helping to shape Bernard's Cistercian mysticism. More importantly, he questions Augustine and his exalted status as a leader in developing Christianity's mystical doctrine:

Apart from the unique instance of the rapture at Ostia, personal mystical experiences are absent from the works of St. Augustine. Of all those who had read and meditated before St. Bernard from the opening of the ninth century, none, not even St. Anselm, ever dreamt that a mystical doctrine could be gathered from his writings. . . . What was required was the inspiring contagion of example, and this it was precisely that St. Bernard and his companions found in the *Vitae Patrum: the Lives of the Desert Fathers*.⁴⁵

⁴² Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, p. 149.

⁴³ Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 456.

⁴⁴ Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A. H. C. Downes, London, 1940, p. 16. For further discussion on using the epithet 'mystic' for Augustine see, Fanning, *Mystics*, pp. 76-77; and McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, pp. 229-31.

⁴⁵ Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, p. 17.

Gilson highlights a fundamental disjunction in the literature of mysticism which is all too easily overlooked: that is, the difference between the examination of mystical theology and the undertaking of mystical experience. This statement also highlights the tendency of both medieval and modern authors on mysticism to be a-historical when discussing Christian mysticism and mystics. This error of a-historicism is recognized in the contention of Michel de Certeau: 'Whatever one thinks of mysticism, even if one recognizes in it the emergence of a universal or absolute reality, one can only deal with it in relation to a particular cultural or historic situation.'⁴⁶

A closer examination of the 'conversion' of the great Doctor of the Church, St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), reflects many aspects of the struggle(s) endured (or imagined) by men as they tried to live a religious life during the early years of Christianity. Augustine's life and his initial rejection of the Christian faith of his mother could not have been more at odds with the Church he would come to represent. The young North African man was a rhetorician and, more importantly, a Manichaeon.⁴⁷ Book VIII of Augustine's *Confessions* illustrates clearly the profound connection men were perceived to have to the physical; lust was almost insurmountable and the taming of concupiscence seemed the key to spiritual progress. This is antithetical to the clearly articulated vision of an earthly, corrupt woman as the more physical representation of humanity. Augustine makes it clear that his will or his spirit betrays him, although this betrayal rests at the feet of the female temptress.⁴⁸ Despite his adoration of the Church as God's house, he feels unable to overcome his earthly connection: 'But I was still held firm in the bonds of woman's love.'⁴⁹ Augustine raged and wept at his inability to accept wholly the love of God as he sat in the garden of his lodgings in Milan. He was tormented 'by mere trifles, the most paltry inanities, all my old attachments,' who refused to release his soul.⁵⁰ Relief came in the disembodied voice of a child who urged him to 'take it and read'.⁵¹ For Augustine, all became suddenly clear:

So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting, for when I stood up to move away I had put down the book containing Paul's Epistles. I seized it and opened it,

⁴⁶ Michel de Certeau, "Mystique", *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Paris, 1968, 11:521-26, cited in McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, p. 311.

⁴⁷ The Manichaeans were a heterodox group who had a dualistic view of the world, believing that there were two Gods, one Good and the other Evil, who represented Light and Darkness.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. and intro. R. S. Pine-Coffin, Harmondsworth, 1961, 8.1, 5.

⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.1.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.11.26.

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.12.29.

and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather arm yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought in nature and nature's appetites (Rom. 13. 13-14). I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was though the light of confidence flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.⁵²

Augustine's narrative seems to channel the words of Antony who said that, 'Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'⁵³ In his struggles with temptation, Augustine is no different from many other male religious writers. Other early Christian authors routinely mentioned in literature on mysticism such as Ambrose, Cassian, Gregory the Great, and Dionysius the Areopagite, also concentrate much of their efforts on understanding and resisting temptation. Temptation, in this context, takes on two main forms: the macrocosmic (the world); and the microcosmic (women). It is within these contexts that a distinction must be made between the theology of men such as Augustine and Ambrose, and the activities of a man such as Cassian; a group of men whom McGinn claims should be considered as the founders of Western mysticism.⁵⁴

As I have indicated previously, the foundation individuals listed by Fanning fall into two main categories: monastic and patristic. Of the seven authors listed to 600, the odd one out appears to be Antony who was written about as an exemplar for the monastic life, rather than writing about monastic life himself. Monastic writers such as Cassian, or monks such as Antony, were fundamentally concerned with a macrocosmic view of temptation as being generated from within and without. By retreating to the 'desert,' in this instance a physical and metaphorical place, they believed they were better able, through a life of asceticism and contemplation, to do battle with worldly temptation. For patristic authors, most of whom were involved in secular affairs and holders of high clerical office, temptation was more compartmentalized into forms such as women, money, and power. The patristic

⁵² Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.12.29. [Itaque concitus redii in eum locum ubi sedebat Alypius: ibi enim posueram codicem apostoli cum inde surrexeram. Arripui, aperui, et legi in silentio capitulum quo primum coniecti sunt oculi mei: non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudiciis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite dominum Iesum Christum et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis. Nec ultra volui legere nec opus erat. statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt. (PL 32, col. 0762)]

⁵³ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (hereafter *Apop. patrum*), trans. Benedicta Ward, London, 1975, Antony the Great, 5. This is a translation from the original Greek, not the subsequent Latin edition.

⁵⁴ McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, p. 218. McGinn points out that it is because of the engagement these men had with the wider Christian community that they should be considered elemental in the development of Christian mysticism; see McGinn, 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism', p. 198.

compulsion to worry about these particular temptations had its flowering with the so-called Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century, which focused its efforts on long-standing issues such as clerical chastity, simony, and ecclesiastical power. However, prior to this well-known period of clerical reform, there was also a period of monastic reform which saw a revival of the Benedictine Rule and a move away from what Giles Constable has called the 'so-called period of the *Regula mixta*, or mixed rule, from the sixth to the ninth century'.⁵⁵ This reform also witnessed a fundamental change in attitudes towards the monastic life. As Constable notes, by the twelfth century, the need for consideration and restraint in ascetic practices, the cornerstone of the early monastic lifestyle, encouraged a 'growing distrust of conspicuous signs of holiness'.⁵⁶

Yet again, a contradiction confronts us when we peruse the literature dealing with mysticism and mystics. Monastic and patristic (secular) religious theology and practices are conflated as modern authors attempt to prise more authority for the development of mystical theology from the medieval sources. Evelyn Underhill, for example, lists monastic reformers such as St Romuald (c. 950-1027), St Peter Damian (1007-1072), and St Bruno (1032-1101) as foundational first authors in the 'great current of mediæval mysticism [that] first shows itself in the eleventh century'.⁵⁷ Her reason for this neatly identifies the strong link between monasticism and mysticism. Underhill argues that the monastic reform amounted to an effort on behalf of the reformers to 'establish an environment in which the mystical life could be lived'.⁵⁸ These sentiments are echoed by McGinn who notes that 'monks were the main scriptural exegetes in an era when mysticism was still inseparable from reading and praying in the Bible'. The monastic life 'provided if not the only, certainly the most effective, context within which the ideal of *contemplatio* could actually be pursued'.⁵⁹ However, this assumes that mysticism is only contemplation and exegesis, and if we review Fanning's timeline of mystics again (Fig. 2), it is clear that there are other qualifiers at work in determining who is considered a mystic. The most obvious

⁵⁵ Giles Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering in the Middle Ages', The Ninth Stephen J. Brademas, Sr. Lecture, Brookline, Mass., 1982, p. 13, reprinted in Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, [original pagination]. Constable notes that during this period 'every religious house had its own way of doing things, and many types of monastic life, some of great severity, were found in Western Europe.'

⁵⁶ Giles Constable, 'Moderation and Restraint in Ascetic Practices in the Middle Ages', in Haijo Jan Westra, ed., *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, Leiden, 1992, p. 318, reprinted in Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, [original pagination].

⁵⁷ Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 458.

⁵⁸ Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 458.

⁵⁹ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 27.

difference between Figure 1 and Figure 2 are the sheer number of women who make an abrupt appearance after 1100. What did these religious women have access to which religious men did not?

A cursory glance at the scholarship suggests that religious women had access to more physical and affective forms of religious practice than men and, certainly, it is during this period that the stricter modes of monastic life were falling out of favour. It is also apparent that modern historians of women have been the ones to determine that visions, fasting, and feeding from Christ's breast are all markers of mysticism. Works focused solely on holy women in the medieval period are numerous, especially works centered on the high to late medieval period, when women are more visible in the historical record and when alternative forms of spirituality begin to flourish.⁶⁰ Three works which set the tone for much of the scholarship which followed are Carolyn Walker Bynum's *Jesus as Mother* (1982), *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (1987), and *Fragmentation and Redemption* (1991).⁶¹ Bynum's work emphasized the importance of the female body as a tool for spiritual performance, and argued 'against the traditional explanation of female spirituality, especially the intensity of asceticism, in terms of internalized misogyny and denial of the body'.⁶² Dyan Elliot notes that Bynum's work has been critiqued by authors such as Martha G. Newman, Sarah Salih, and Karma Lochrie, who have rallied against a view of women's spirituality that is focused on their bodies and not their spiritual motives (Salih) or the seemingly heteronormative

⁶⁰ There is a vast historiography of works that focus on female mystics and spirituality. I have listed many of the monographs and edited collections in my bibliography and the following are a small selection representative of some of the essays concerning female mystics and spirituality: Elizabeth Petroff, 'Medieval Women Visionaries: Seven Stages to Power', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 3, 1, Spring 1978, pp. 34-45; Anne Llewellyn Barstow, 'Joan of Arc and Female Mysticism', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 1, 2, Fall 1985, pp. 29-42; Karen Scott, 'St. Catherine of Siena, "Apostola"', *Church History*, 61, 1, March 1992, pp. 34-46; Frankenberry, 'Introduction', pp. 1-14; Patricia Ranft, 'A Key to Counter Reformation Women's Activism: The Confessor-Spiritual Director', *Journal of the Feminist Studies of Religion*, 10, 2, Fall 1994, pp. 7-26; Galen Johnson, 'Church and Conscience in William Langland and Julian of Norwich', *Fides et Historia*, 32, 2, Summer-Fall 2000, pp. 51-66; Thomas Merton, 'Saint Lutgarde: Nun of Aywières, Belgium', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 35, 2, 2000, pp. 217-230; Barbara R. Walters, 'Women Religious Virtuosae from the Middle Ages: A Case Pattern and Analytic Model of Types', *Sociology of Religion*, 63, 1, Spring 2002, pp. 69-89; Molly Morrison, 'Ingesting Bodily Filth: Defilement in the Spirituality of Angela Foligno', *Romance Quarterly*, 50, 3, Summer 2003, pp. 204-216; Elizabeth A. Dreyer, 'Whose Story Is It? – The Appropriation of Medieval Mysticism', *Spiritus*, 4, 2, Fall 2004, pp. 151-172; Jennifer N. Brown, 'The Chaste Erotics of Marie d'Oignies and Jacques de Vitry', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 19, 1, January 2010, pp. 74-93.

⁶¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in Spirituality in the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley, 1982; idem., *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Berkeley, 1987; and idem., *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York, 1991.

⁶² Dyan Elliot, 'Flesh and Spirit: The Female Body', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100 – c. 1500*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 21.

implication that loving a male Christ relied upon female embodiment (Lochrie).⁶³ Martha Newman argues that some holy men from this period also expressed their spirituality in physical ways that were more akin to their female contemporaries. More often than not, however, these men are not referred to as mystics by modern scholars. I want to illustrate this with a quick bibliographical comparison of Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) and Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129), two important individuals from the transitional or reforming period of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

There are as many similarities as there are differences between Hildegard and Rupert in terms of vocational and spiritual experiences, yet they come to the modern student or historian of the medieval period as Hildegard the mystic and Rupert the theologian.⁶⁴ This is reflected in the works associated with each individual. For example, Hildegard of Bingen attracts works which deal with her life, mysticism, visions, art, theology, music, and medical knowledge.⁶⁵ Rupert, on the other hand, has only one monograph in English dedicated to his life, and many of the other works he is associated with are focused on theology.⁶⁶ This is despite the fact that Rupert

⁶³ Elliot, 'Flesh and Spirit', p. 32. See Karma Lochrie, 'Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies', in Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz eds, *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, Minneapolis, 1997, pp. 180-200; Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*, Woodbridge, 2001; and Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues: Monks, Lay Brothers, and Women in Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Saints' Lives', in Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack eds, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 2003, pp. 182-209.

⁶⁴ I discuss these similarities more fully in chapter 6.

⁶⁵ *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, text by Hildegard of Bingen with commentary by Matthew Fox, Santa Fe, 1985; Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine*, Berkeley, 1987; Wighard Strehlow and Gottfried Hertzka, *Hildegard of Bingen's Medicine*, trans. Karin Strehlow, Santa Fe, 1988; Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies eds, *Hildegard of Bingen: An Anthology*, with new translations by Robert Carver, London, 1990; Constant J. Mews, 'Heloise and Hildegard: Re-visioning Religious Life in the Twelfth Century', *Tjurunga: Australasian Benedictine Review*, 44, 1993, pp. 20-29; Carolyn Wörman Sur, *The Feminine Images of God in the Visions of Saint Hildegard of Bingen's Scivias*, New York, 1993; Audrey Ekdahl Davidson ed., *Wisdom Which Encircles Circles: Papers on Hildegard of Bingen*, Kalamazoo, 1996; Constant J. Mews, 'Seeing is believing: Hildegard of Bingen and the life of Jutta', *Tjurunga: Australasian Benedictine Review*, 51, 1996, pp. 9-40; Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke eds, *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, London, 1998; Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: A Visionary Life*, London, 1998; Barbara Newman ed., *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and her World*, Berkeley, 1998; Régine Pernoud, *Hildegard of Bingen: Inspired Conscience of the Twelfth Century*, trans. Paul Duggan, New York, 1998; Constant J. Mews, 'From *Sciviâs* to the *Liber Divinorum operum*: Hildegard's Apocalyptic Imagination and the Call to Reform', *Journal of Religious History*, 24, 1, 2000, pp. 44-56; Fiona Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen: The Woman of her Age*, London, 2001; Dreyer, *Passionate Spirituality*; Victoria Sweet, *Rooted in the Earth, Rooted in the Sky: Hildegard of Bingen and Premodern Medicine*, New York, 2006.

⁶⁶ John H. van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, Berkeley, 1983. Also see: Robert E. Lerner, 'Ecstatic dissent', *Speculum*, 67, 1, 1992, pp. 33-57; Anna Sapir Abulafia, 'The Ideology of Reform and Changing Ideas Concerning Jews in the Works of Rupert of Deutz and Hermannus Quondam Iudeus', *Jewish History*, 7, 1, 1993, pp. 43-63; Marcia L. Colish, 'The Sentence Collection and the Education of Professional Theologians in the Twelfth Century', in Otto Gründler ed., *The Intellectual Climate of the Early University: Essays in Honor of Nancy Van Deusen*, Kalamazoo, 1997, pp. 1-26; Neil Adkin, 'Horace's *Ars poetica* and the *Commentaria in Eoangelium Ioannis* of Rupert of Deutz: an Addendum', *Eos*, 85, 2, 1998, pp. 221-228; Neil Adkin, 'Some Unidentified Citations in the *De omnipotentia Dei* of Rupert of Deutz', *Acta Classica: Verhandeling van die Klassieke Vereniging van Suid-Afrika / Proceedings of the Classical Association of South Africa*, 41, 1998, pp. 131-

experienced nine visions, two of them Christocentric and extremely erotic in nature, over the course of eight years, as he came to terms with his vocation.⁶⁷ The real difference which looms large between these two medieval holy individuals in the modern historiography is gender, and it is to the question of why this might be that I want to turn next.

The Feminist Influence

Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity has ever been established without the help of the divine. If women have no God, they are unable to communicate or commune with one another.⁶⁸

What has so strongly attracted historians of women to the study of mystics and (by extension) mysticism? The answer may well lie within the texts of two of the most influential feminist writers of the twentieth century: Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray. Both de Beauvoir and Irigaray wrote about medieval religious women considered mystics and more importantly '[argued] that mysticism is the sole place within the history of the West where women have achieved full and autonomous subjectivity'.⁶⁹ My purpose is not to expose or reconsider the philosophies of de Beauvoir and Irigaray, but rather to highlight the influence their 'feminist' philosophies had on the historical project devoted to the reclamation of women.

135; John H. van Engen, 'Theophilus Presbyter and Rupert of Deutz: the Manual Arts and Benedictine Theology in the Early Twelfth Century', *Viator*, 11, 1980, pp. 147-163; Martijn Schrama, 'The Office in Honour of Saint Augustine: an Unknown Work of Rupert of Deutz', *Augustiniana: Revue pour l'étude de Saint Augustin et de l'Ordre des Augustins*, 54, 4, 2004, pp. 589-651; Sara Lipton, "The sweet lean of his head": Writing About Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 80, 4, 2005, pp. 1172-1208; Abigail A. Young, 'Mission and Message: Two Prophetic Voices in the Twelfth Century', in James R. Ginther and Carl N. Still eds, *Essays in Medieval Philosophy and Theology in Memory of Walter H. Principe, CSB: Fortresses and Launching Pads*, Ashgate, 2005, pp. 19-30; Rachel Fulton, "'Taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West', *Journal of Religion*, 86, 2, 2006, pp. 169-204; Alison I. Beach, 'The Multiform Grace of the Holy Spirit: Salvation History and the Book of Ruth at Twelfth-Century Admont', in Alison I. Beach ed., *Manuscripts and Monastic Culture: Reform and Renewal in Twelfth-Century Germany*, Medieval Church Studies 13, Turnhout, 2007, pp. 125-137; Rodney M. Thomson, 'The Place of Germany in the Twelfth-Century', in Alison I. Beach ed., *Manuscripts and Monastic Culture: Reform and Renewal in Twelfth-Century Germany*, Medieval Church Studies 13, Turnhout, 2007, pp. 19-42; Elisabeth Mégier, 'Jewish Converts in the Early Church and Latin Christian Exegetes of Isaiah, c. 400-1150', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 59, 1, 2008, pp. 1-28; Nils Holger Petersen, 'Biblical Reception, Representational Ritual, and the Question of "liturgical drama"', in Gunilla Iversen and Nicolas Bell eds, *Sapientia et Eloquentia: Meaning and Function in Liturgical Poetry, Music, Drama, and Biblical Commentary in the Middle Ages*, Turnhout, 2009, pp. 163-201.

⁶⁷ Rupert of Deutz, *De Gloria et Honore Filii Hominis super Mattheum*, ed. Hrabanus Haccke, CCCM 29, Turnhout, 1979, book XII, pp. 363-396. Also see McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 328-333.

⁶⁸ Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, New York, 1993, p. 62.

⁶⁹ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p. 6.

Coupled with their powerful and significant feminist rhetoric, de Beauvoir and Irigaray provided the impetus for a revolution in historical writing that would now focus attention on the 'her' not the 'his'.

Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 work, *The Second Sex*, asks the fundamental question that has preoccupied many before and since: 'what is a woman?'⁷⁰ De Beauvoir interrogates the concepts of 'man' and 'woman,' 'masculine' and 'feminine,' 'male' and 'female' throughout her work, but it is in the 'Introduction' where she makes a startling observation which I believe is reflected, either consciously or unconsciously, in the many histories of women which followed this work:

A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man.⁷¹

Women are positioned as Other in de Beauvoir's philosophy, a category/position which reduces woman to the Object against which man (the Subject) measures his own worth. She clearly sets out to understand why women find themselves in the position of Other, a category which is as 'primordial as consciousness itself'.⁷² De Beauvoir wants to know 'why should man have won from the start?'—especially since any duality (including that of the sexes) gives rise to conflict.⁷³

De Beauvoir is forthright and fulsome in her praise for historical and contemporary female mystics. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir notes that the supreme vocation of woman is love and 'the mystic' represents a 'mode of escape' that encapsulates this feminized role of lover and wife:

To be sure, there have also been men who burned with that flame, but they are rare and their fervour is of a highly refined intellectual cast; whereas the women who abandon themselves to the joys of the heavenly nuptials are legion, and their experience is of a peculiarly emotional state.⁷⁴

However, the woman de Beauvoir presents to the reader is also a paradox. She is at once at the zenith of the expression of love, yet in her state of apogee, she is as far away from the independent feminist woman as you may get. To be intellectual is to be masculine and to be emotional is feminine, and this passage clearly highlights why de Beauvoir's work was 'marginalized and even criticized as extremely misogynistic' by

⁷⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley, London, 1997, p. 15. *Le Deuxième Sexe* was first published in French in 1949.

⁷¹ de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 15.

⁷² de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 16.

⁷³ de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 21.

⁷⁴ de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p. 679.

so-called cultural feminists.⁷⁵ In my estimation, this is a misreading or misrepresentation of de Beauvoir's work which ignores her fundamental thesis; that is, to expose woman's position as 'Other' and to express ways to subvert that position. Using the example of mystic woman is one such strategy which she employs to illustrate how that subversion may happen.

In her 1974 work, *Speculum de l'autre femme*, Luce Irigaray also focused her gaze on 'La Mystérique'. Irigaray's translator Gillian Gill comments on the impossibility of accurately reflecting the 'economy and richness' of Irigaray's neologism 'mystérique' in English. Gill also notes that four elements combine to contribute to this term: 'mysticism, hysteria, mystery, and the femaleness ["la mystérique"] fundamental to the previous three.'⁷⁶ Irigaray feminizes mysticism and it becomes 'the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly.'⁷⁷ As a philosopher (not an historian), Irigaray has the luxury of making such a definitive statement. It would, perhaps, be more accurately written as follows: 'the only place in the history of the West in which woman *appears* [to] speak and act so publicly.' What Irigaray seems to have identified with was that curious phase in the history of Christianity where women suddenly materialized and were *textualized*—both in their own words and in those of their male contemporaries.

Irigaray seeks to reformulate women's history by remaking woman, 'not only "biologically," but also socially, culturally, and symbolically (and to some extent the former depends on the latter)' to enable her to exist as 'truly other than [man]'.⁷⁸ Thus, her comments on the need for woman to discover or invent a feminine divine in her own image, which opened this section of my chapter, resonate with what some feminists have charged as a biologically-essentialist thread that undermines the feminist project. However, as Amy Hollywood points out, the woman Irigaray is dealing with is a 'philosophical construct both absent from and in excess of male discourse'.⁷⁹ This argument is borne out in Irigaray's comments in the introduction to her 2004 work *Key Writings*. Irigaray notes that since the writing of *Speculum* '[her]

⁷⁵ Karen Vintges, 'Beauvoir's Philosophy as the Hidden Paradigm of Contemporary Feminism', in Tjitske Akkerman and Siep Stuurman eds, *Perspectives on Feminist Political Thought in European History: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, London, 1998, p. 205.

⁷⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca, 1985, translator's note, p. 191.

⁷⁷ Irigaray, *Speculum*, p. 191.

⁷⁸ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p. 188.

⁷⁹ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, pp. 188-89.

project has been how to render possible a philosophy, and more generally a culture, of two subjects'.⁸⁰

There is a curious tension evident between early and late twentieth century feminist works. Both de Beauvoir and Irigaray have been subject to criticism from second-wave feminists, reacting to what they considered to be negative or even harmful philosophies evident in the works of the aforementioned.⁸¹ Karen Vintges exposes the belated acknowledgement of de Beauvoir by feminists such as Karen Millet and Betty Friedan, both of whom admit to the influence of de Beauvoir on their own philosophy only after the fact.⁸² Vintges locates de Beauvoir's omission by these women within the fractures of a philosophical clash which (re)defined the very intentions of the feminist movement—the 'first-wave' claims for equality with men were becoming subsumed in a growing movement that 'wanted to offer fundamental alternatives to the dominant culture'.⁸³ That is, feminists did not want women to be seen as 'the same as' men, but rather that they be seen as individuals who were both different from **and** equal to men. The apparent misogyny of de Beauvoir, and the biological essentialism of Irigaray, paradoxically both subvert and support this philosophical position.

Toril Moi highlights the profound difficulty that faces the feminist and, I would add, the historian of women:

[T]he feminist struggle must both try to undo the patriarchal strategy that make 'femininity' intrinsic to biological femaleness, and at the same time insist on defending women precisely *as* women. In a patriarchal society that discriminates against women writers because they are *women*, it is easy enough to justify a discussion of them as a separate group. The problem, more urgently, is how to avoid bringing patriarchal notions of aesthetics, history and tradition to bear on the 'female tradition' we have decided to construct.⁸⁴

The privileging of women as a separate group for discussion has been of fundamental importance to historical study, yet the construction and negotiation of this 'female tradition' has amplified Judy Chicago's 'nagging voices'.⁸⁵ Are some historians of women guilty of promoting any number of women to positions of import simply 'because—as Virginia Woolf remarked of the eighteenth-century novelist Eliza

⁸⁰ Luce Irigaray ed., *Luce Irigaray Key Writings*, London, 2004, p. vii.

⁸¹ See Judith M. Bennett, 'Medievalism and Feminism', *Speculum*, 68, 2, April 1993, p. 310.

⁸² Vintges, 'Beauvoir's Philosophy', p. 204.

⁸³ Vintges, 'Beauvoir's Philosophy', p. 205.

⁸⁴ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, London, 1985, p. 82.

⁸⁵ Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage*, New York, 1979, p. 54.

Haywood—"she is dead, she is old, she wrote books, and nobody has yet written a book about her."⁸⁶ There is no question that the rapid rise of women in the historical record is of the utmost importance and it is best summed up in the simple question which historian Joan Kelly asked of herself in 1971: 'Suppose we look at the Renaissance from the vantage point of women?'⁸⁷ My key point here is not to question the importance of history from a feminist perspective, but rather to interrogate the categories utilized to expose those women from history for whom we have some remaining evidence. Virginia Woolf may have been commenting on an eighteenth-century novelist, but her intimation that it seemed that any woman was worthy of investigation simply because she was old, dead, and wrote books, carries equal weight in the period of the high to late middle ages, particularly with regard to the categories of mystic and mysticism.

Despite the success of the revival of women in the historical record, there remains criticism of the methodologies and the ideologies behind that revival. Elizabeth Dreyer makes specific reference to the complexities involved in the retrieval of medieval mystical texts and expresses concern for the 'projection of contemporary agendas onto the middle ages'.⁸⁸ Dreyer cites, for example, works by Sarah Beckwith and Sheila Delaney to illustrate this point. She claims that Beckwith and Delaney, 'viewing Margery Kempe through a feminist/Marxist lens, find her not feminist enough because she failed to make a complete break with the clergy. They accuse her of not adequately assessing clerical decadence—that is, on Beckwith and Delaney's terms.'⁸⁹ By 1987, Delaney was also questioning the agenda of feminists such as Judy Chicago, the creator of the art installation *The Dinner Party*. Chicago shies away from a 'nagging voice' which persists in reminding her that the invitees to her soirée are all 'women of the ruling classes'.⁹⁰ Herein lies the paradox: in the process of re-creating women's history, the position of subject and object has been reversed, resulting in a feminist narrative which is at times as incomplete as the masculinist one it seeks to

⁸⁶ Cited in, Sheila Delany, "'Mothers to Think Back Through": Who are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan', in Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman eds, *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, Ithaca, 1987, p. 180.

⁸⁷ Joan Kelly, *Women, History & Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, Chicago, 1984, p. xiii.

⁸⁸ Dreyer, 'Whose Story Is It?' p. 155.

⁸⁹ Dreyer, 'Whose Story Is It?' p. 155. The texts cited by Dreyer are: Sarah Beckwith, 'A Very Material Mysticism: The medieval mysticism of Margery Kempe', in David Aers ed., *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*, New York, 1986, pp. 34-57; and Sheila Delaney, 'Sexual Economics, Chaucer's Wife of Bath, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Minnesota Review*, 5, 1975, pp. 105-15.

⁹⁰ Chicago, *Dinner Party*, p. 56.

rectify, and this appears, to some extent, to be the position in which we find ourselves with mystics and mysticism.

As I have noted, by discussing particular medieval religious women and their lives in direct correlation to their philosophies, Beauvoir and Irigaray provided the signposts which directed scholars to the very women who would become the heroines of the feminist history project. Medievalists also looked to exemplary female authors such as Christine de Pizan, who unwittingly provided a 'model' for the reclamation of 'woman worthies' with her *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405). Of course, other female authors were already well-known to the scholars of religious history and theology, with women such as Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, and Theresa of Avila all prominent in works dealing with both religious theology and spirituality. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the evolving study of women's history and how that study has led to the conflation of the categories of mystic and mysticism, and the gendering of those categories: Hildegard of Bingen (once more) and Christina Mirabilis.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) provides an example of the evolving status of women in the historical record. Considered by Evelyn Underhill as one of the four great personalities of the twelfth-century religious revival, Hildegard is described as a 'woman of powerful character' who, along with her fellow twelfth-century female mystics, 'emerged from an obscure life to impose their wills . . . upon the world'.⁹¹ Underhill acknowledges Hildegard's political attack on the 'corruptions of Church and State,' and although she positions Hildegard using somewhat feminist language, Hildegard is still firmly sited within the religious realm where her influence is most palpable.⁹² In the 1988 text, *A History of Their Own*, Hildegard receives a far more modern politico-hagiographical treatment.⁹³ Her political power is expressed in terms of the relationships she had with powerful men: 'Popes and emperors accepted her scientific treatises. Popes and emperors believed her to be a prophet.'⁹⁴ More importantly, the claim is made that Hildegard was 'unique among the women *and* men of the learned monastic enclaves'.⁹⁵ The authors appear trapped by the very history they seek to re-imagine as, paradoxically, Hildegard is perceived as influential and

⁹¹ Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 459.

⁹² Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 460.

⁹³ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, vol. 1, New York, 1988, pp. 188-190.

⁹⁴ Anderson and Zinsser, *History of Their Own*, p. 188.

⁹⁵ Anderson and Zinsser, *History of Their Own*, p. 188, (emphasis mine).

important precisely because of her relationships with men.⁹⁶ Hildegard's literary and musical achievements are not in dispute, but rather the way in which she is portrayed, and the selective omission of **her** thoughts about the nature of women. Even Hildegard subscribed to the theory of the inferior nature of woman, claiming that Eve sinned first because she was 'weaker than the male,' therefore her sin was less grave and 'more easily eradicated'.⁹⁷ I suspect that this ideal would not have fitted into a wider work attempting to understand and subvert those same cultural attitudes which marked women as inferior to men.

Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224) provides the perfect foil to the intellectual authority wielded by Hildegard. Christina rarely makes an appearance in the works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which are concerned with mysticism, nor is she touted as a feminist exemplar. Evelyn Underhill rejects, for the most part, the kinds of 'psycho-physical' aspects of mysticism as displayed by women such as Christina, believing that 'very few of these phenomena are mystical in the true sense'.⁹⁸ The phenomena which Underhill is referring to include trances, ecstasies, visions, and levitations; phenomena closely associated with the somatic hence the feminine. Christina exhibited a number of these phenomena during the course of her life, including levitation, perching in trees, climbing into ovens, and displaying a gift for prophecy, to name but a few.⁹⁹ More significantly, Christina left no textual legacy – autobiographical or otherwise – and we have access to Christina only through her mediated *vita*. However, Christina's unusual and remarkable life, as recorded by Thomas of Cantimpré, allows us to illuminate the transformation of a female religious curiosity into a woman of great mystical influence. As noted by Margot King and Bernard McGinn, Thomas's *Life* has largely been treated with scepticism by the academic community of the twentieth century (if at all), and both writers record the criticism voiced by Herbert Thurston, a Jesuit scholar who focused on the physical aspects of mysticism, and who claimed Thomas's narrative was 'utterly

⁹⁶ Anderson and Zinsser, *History of Their Own*, p. xv. The authors state that one of the key factors driving this work was the notion that, until recently, all women were defined by their relationships to men.

⁹⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et cure*, trans. and intro. Margret Berger, Cambridge, 1999, 3.5.

⁹⁸ Evelyn Underhill, 'The Essentials of Mysticism', in Richard Woods ed., *Understanding Mysticism*, New York, 1980, p. 38; idem, *Mysticism*, pp. x-xi.

⁹⁹ Thomas de Cantimpré, *The Life of Christina Mirabilis* (hereafter *VCM*), trans. and intro. Margot H. King, Toronto, reprinted 1995. See, for example: 1.5; 1.9; 1.11; 2.29.

untrustworthy'.¹⁰⁰ The modern reader will certainly experience feelings of disbelief and discomfort when reading Christina's *vita*, as it is replete with gravity- and death-defying feats designed, it seems, to invoke those very feelings. However, as with Hildegard, it is not Christina's actions which are important here; rather it is her textual transformation over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century which is of importance.

Christina is written about precisely because she is there and she is unusual, not for any other reason. Without a doubt, a close reading of this short text can give us an important insight into the religious milieu of Christina's time, but can it really tell us much about the lives of women? According to Toril Moi, '[t]he implication is not only that the feminist critic should turn to 'gynocritics', the study of women's writings, precisely in order to learn 'what women have felt and experienced', but also that this experience is directly available in the texts written by women'.¹⁰¹ If we follow Elaine Showalter's theoretical premise of 'gynocritics,' as outlined by Moi, and maintain the view that texts '[transmit] authentic human experience,' then the text concerning Christina will tell us more about the world seen through the male eyes of Thomas, the Dominican *vitae* specialist, than Christina the 'mystic.'¹⁰² I am reminded at this point of a question posed by Virginia Woolf: 'Why are women . . . so much more interesting to men than men are to women?'¹⁰³ Where are the modern *vitae* of holy male mystics who also embraced Christ passionately, both figuratively and literally? Perhaps, as Hollywood suggests, those men reside within or upon the very lives of women so celebrated by modern historians of women.¹⁰⁴ The task of this thesis is to untangle those lives.

Yet, feminism is not the only specific gravity to influence historical research in the twentieth century. Those rapidly recovered historical women who are evident in the academic literature of the second half of the twentieth century orbit a binary system composed of two influential theoretical developments: feminism and social history. Social histories step outside the fundamental contexts for historical study, such as

¹⁰⁰ Margot H. King, 'Introduction', in Thomas de Cantimpré, *The Life of Christina Mirabilis*, trans. and intro. Margot H. King, Toronto, reprinted 1995, p. 5; Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*, vol. 3, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1998, pp. 161-62.

¹⁰¹ Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 76.

¹⁰² Thomas Cantimpré (1200-1270) is the biographer for three other religious women: Lutgard of Aywières (1200-1264); Margaret of Ypres (1216-1237); and he also authored a supplement to the life of Marie of Oignies (1177/8-1213) originally authored by Jacques de Vitry (c. 1170-1240).

¹⁰³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Harmondsworth, 1928, reprint 2000, p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p. 240.

politics and economics, to consider the minutiae of life in an attempt to understand what that life was like for ordinary individuals. Social historians adopted a number of new methodological and theoretical strategies with which to revisit history, including: quantitative history; demographic history; oral history; regional history; Marxist theory; feminist theory; psychohistory; institutional history; and gender history. Whilst social history demanded, as its most basic tenet, the investigation of the 'ordinary' person – so-called 'history from the bottom,' – feminist historians turned that emphasis on women specifically. Works such as Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser's *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, attempt to embrace all facets of social history as they searched for the "Golden Age" of women – a period in history where a 'matriarchal culture' of women dominated. However, rather than identifying a "Golden Age," the authors pinpointed instead the early nineteenth century as the 'nadir of European women's options and possibilities'.¹⁰⁵ The more important feature of this work, however, is the authors' contention that gender is the single most influential aspect to have shaped the lives of European women.¹⁰⁶

The development of gender studies as a paradigm for considering historical lives is one of the major theoretical approaches to emerge from the rapidly developing discipline of social history. In its most basic expression, gender refers to the categories masculine and feminine which express the socially-constructed patterns of behaviour and identity associated with biological maleness and femaleness. In other words, "[g]ender" typically refers to the social process of dividing people and social practices along the lines of *sexed identities*.¹⁰⁷ As a favoured theory of social constructionists, gender can explain the social drivers behind the continued oppression of women in the historical record and it allows the scholar to construct the patterns of behaviour which maintain that oppression over time: for example, the long-held belief that women were intellectually inferior to men, therefore they could not participate in political or literary exploits. However, there is a two-fold consequence of adherence to gender theory in this way. Firstly, it ignores the fact that the inferiority of women was biologically driven in the medieval period. Secondly, it reduces human beings to 'bundles of behaviours or collective thought patterns'.¹⁰⁸ A further complication was the apparent conflation of gender with women – women's history became gender history. I will not

¹⁰⁵ Anderson and Zinsser, *History of Their Own*, p. xxii.

¹⁰⁶ Anderson and Zinsser, *History of Their Own*, p. xv.

¹⁰⁷ Chris Beasley, *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*, London, 2005, p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy F. Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', *Speculum*, 68, 2, April 1993, p. 432.

enter into the debate as to whether this was the patriarchal reaction of the academy which, as it sought to reassert its control over 'history,' effectively subsumed women's history by renaming it and 'conveniently moving attention away from women's subordination.'¹⁰⁹ I will repeat however, that even in the twenty-first century, if one mentions that one is a gender historian, the assumption is quickly made that one is studying women, not men. 'Gender' should no longer be an intellectual ideogram representing 'woman,' and we need to determine whether the historical individuals we study – men or women – 'are human beings or [merely] cultural ideograms'.¹¹⁰

If writing about women was once an innovation, it is now an imperative.¹¹¹

Allen Frantzen's opening gambit was designed to provoke. He might well have added, if writing about men was the norm, it is now the exception. As 'the token man' in a 1993 issue of *Speculum* subtitled 'Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, and Feminism,' he wryly noted that 'with no desire to speak for all men . . . I fear that I speak for them nonetheless'.¹¹² I fear that Frantzen was also teasing his audience ever so slightly. His contention that 'feminist scholarship today pervades the disciplines of art, history, law, literature, and religion' is at odds with Judith Bennett who, in the same issue, claims that 'although *women* are better assimilated into medieval studies in the 1990s, *feminist scholarship* is not'.¹¹³ Does the non-feminist Frantzen see feminist scholarship where the über-feminist Bennett does not? Are their differences ideological, methodological or theoretical? The upshot is that Frantzen and Bennett both agree on the very positive impact feminism has had on the medieval academy; albeit a belated one. The key difference is in their rhetoric: Frantzen makes an implicit connection between feminism and gender (and by extension the study of women) whilst Bennett focuses on feminism and feminist theory and is precise in her delineation of women and gender. Seventeen years previous to that issue of *Speculum*,

¹⁰⁹ Judith Bennett, 'Feminism and History', *Gender and History*, 1, 3, 1989, pp. 251-272. Also see, Beasley, *Gender and Sexuality*, p. 11; and Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, New York, 2005, p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Partner, 'No Sex, No Gender', p. 423.

¹¹¹ Allen J. Frantzen, 'When Women Aren't Enough', *Speculum*, 68, 2, April 1993, p. 445.

¹¹² Frantzen, 'When Women Aren't Enough', p. 445.

¹¹³ Frantzen, 'When Women Aren't Enough', p. 445; and Bennett, 'Medievalism and Feminism', p. 314.

This vast divide is also observed by Nancy Partner who, in her Introduction to this issue, noted that she could not 'attempt to reconcile their views or one side against the other'. See Nancy F. Partner, 'Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism', *Speculum*, 68, 2, April 1993, p. 305.

Natalie Zemon Davis was already wrestling with these peculiarities of feminist scholarship. According to Davis, 'the study of the *sexes* should help promote a rethinking of some of the central issues faced by historians—power, social structure, property, symbols, and periodization'.¹¹⁴ The emphasis here is mine and it raises the question as to how the study of women became the study of gender. She goes on to state that '[o]ur goal is to understand the significance of the sexes, of gender groups in the historical past. . . . Our goal is to explain why sex roles were sometimes tightly prescribed and sometimes fluid, sometimes markedly asymmetrical and sometimes even more'.¹¹⁵ One can argue that the implementation of feminist and gender theories have led to a far more complex and comprehensive historiography, which grapples with issues which purport to have a lineal connection over time with women as the conduit: issues such as inequality, misogyny, female subordination, and sexual discrimination to highlight a few. However, while extremely important, this historiography crucially fails to address the protagonist of oppression, and that is men.

The final *coup de grâce* offered up to the historian of woman was the rise of post-modernism in the 1990s and its influence on both social history and gender theory. Social history came to be even more strongly focused on pluralities not binaries, with the pluralist model concerned with the maintenance of difference whilst emphasizing the need for equality.¹¹⁶ Although this model fits nicely with the aims of some second-wave feminists, this emphasis on pluralism de-privileged the social history-based binary of oppressor/oppressed that utilized categories such as woman/man, class, and race. It re-politicised the study of groups such as minorities and masculinities and, more importantly, turned the focus of historians of women onto the 'richness and variety of women's daily lives'.¹¹⁷ These groups do not fit so neatly into a binary-focused division of oppressed and oppressor.

As Chris Beasley notes, 'Feminism'[s] *critical stance* takes the form of a critique of misogyny, the assumption of male superiority and centrality'.¹¹⁸ Gender theory, although seemingly focused on the binary of biological sex (male/female), provides a far more fluid environment in which to consider relationships of power, not just

¹¹⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case', *Feminist Studies*, 3, 3/4, Spring-Summer 1976, p. 90.

¹¹⁵ Davis, "'Women's History'", p. 90.

¹¹⁶ Bennett, 'Medievalism and Feminism', p. 313, n.15.

¹¹⁷ See, Miri Rubin, 'A Decade of Studying Medieval Women, 1987-1997', *History Workshop Journal*, 46, Autumn 1998, pp. 213-239; and Beasley, *Gender and Sexuality*, p. 192.

¹¹⁸ Beasley, *Gender and Sexuality*, p. 16, (author's emphasis).

between the sexes, but *amongst* them. Frantzen makes the very valid comment that gender helps to 'expose the inadequacy of assessments in which women are always oppressed and men always oppressive: women can be oppressive and men can be oppressed'.¹¹⁹ However, I believe that Frantzen has not clearly expressed what these alternative relationships of imbalance are. Yes, women can oppress and men can be oppressed but the key here is who the mirror for that oppressive/oppressed relationship is. I have no doubt that there were a small number of women of a particular position/class who had power over men, but I would argue here that medieval men were more likely to be oppressed by other medieval **men**—after all, masculinity is surely best expressed in the relationships men have with power and with one another. As Ruth Mazzo Karras notes, '[t]he subjection of women was always a part of masculinity, but not always its purpose or its central feature'.¹²⁰ The twin issues of power and oppression within the medieval masculine world will be fundamental to this thesis, as will understanding how to reconfigure de Beauvoir's Subject/Other paradigm when dealing with only one sex.

It is important to consider the role which gender has apparently played in the construction of the medievalist categories of mystic and mysticism. The female mystic's affective behaviour(s) appear to be driven by the notion that medieval religious, both male and female, were encouraged to 'shed those attributes of gender which create barriers to Christ'.¹²¹ Mysticism's 'masculine' attributes—contemplation, exegesis, philosophizing—may well provide the reason as to why male religious are 'missing' from the historiography of affective mystics and mysticism. However, as I have already indicated, there appears to be an epistemological divide in historiographical production when considering mysticism and mystics and this divide is not just a function of gender, but also of discipline. C. T. McIntyre expresses this division as the dichotomous pair, 'history and religion'.¹²² This macrocosmic division encompasses, and often is discussed in association with, microcosmic pairings which are in affinity with each other:

Heading the list is the pair "secular and religious." A short list continues with the following: temporal and spiritual, natural and unnatural, temporal and

¹¹⁹ Frantzen, 'When Women Aren't Enough', pp. 446, 451.

¹²⁰ Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, Philadelphia, 2003, p. 11.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Psakis Armstrong, 'Womanly Men and Manly Women in Thomas À Kempis and St. Teresa', in Anne Clark Bartlett ed., *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism In Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 108.

¹²² C. T. McIntyre, 'Transcending Dichotomies in History and Religion', *History and Theory, Theme Issue*, 45, December 2006, p. 81.

supratemporal, material and spiritual, nature and grace, this-worldly and other-worldly, body and soul, state and church, reason and faith, public and private, social and personal, profane and sacred, science and religion, scientific and theological, objective and subjective, rational and emotional, modern and medieval, and so on. The pairs come gendered as masculine and feminine.¹²³

One might add to these pairings mysticism and mystic. This dichotomy might also be expressed as the difference between the study of the philosophy of religion and the study of theology.

Feminist philosophies of religion desire an attempt at, or a completion of, the Irigarayan project of feminizing the divine: more specifically, Irigaray's argument that for women to become fully 'free, autonomous, sovereign,' they would have to cultivate a female divine.¹²⁴ In a 1994 issue of the journal *Hypatia*, devoted to the 'Feminist Philosophy of Religion,' the claim is made that feminists have been divorced from the philosophy of history.¹²⁵ This accounts, perhaps, for the gendered division between mystics and mysticism and there is certainly a fundamental disjuncture in the historical study of an individual labelled a mystic and the study of mysticism. Men considered male mystics – Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Henry Suso, Meister Eckhart – fulfil the role of authoritative theologian writing deeply spiritual tracts which purport to offer a way into the mysteries of the Scriptures, and thence, God. As such, they are only absent in that their practice or performance of mysticism is founded in a higher gendered model: that is, somatic for women and scholastic for men. Women who transgressed this model were, or are, considered exceptional.

One thing becomes abundantly clear and that is the negative aspect cited above; female mystics are almost singularly tied to a more affective, physical mysticism. I say negative because, as I have noted, this 'type' of mysticism was dismissed amongst many medievalist scholars.¹²⁶ There are, of course, exceptions to this as with any attempt to neatly categorize any historical individual: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and Mechthild of Magdeburg are examples of medieval mystic women celebrated for their writing. Yet we return to Knowles, for there is another individual considered to be a mystic, whom Knowles dismisses for similar reason: Richard Rolle.

¹²³ McIntyre, 'Transcending Dichotomies', p. 81.

¹²⁴ Penelope Deutscher, "'The Only Diabolical Thing About Women . . .': Luce Irigaray on Divinity', *Hypatia*, 9, 4, Feminist Philosophy of Religion, Autumn 1994, pp. 89-90; Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, pp. 213-14.

¹²⁵ Frankenberry, 'Introduction', pp. 1-14.

¹²⁶ See p. 25 above for David Knowles' comments on Margery Kemp.

Richard Rolle (1290-1349) was born at Thornton Dale on the North Riding of Yorkshire. He studied at Oxford, eventually becoming established at Hampole near Doncaster.¹²⁷ Knowles is unequivocal in his criticism of Rolle's status as a mystic:

This is a mistake. Of purely mystical prayer and experience Rolle knows little or nothing. He is without question perfectly sincere in describing his experiences with their heat, sweetness and song, which seem to have continued for many years, but these, even if there is nothing of auto-suggestion about them, are physical and psychological phenomena common in a relatively elementary stage of spiritual life, and as such are not found in those who have been raised to pure spiritual contemplation.¹²⁸

The implication here is clear: visions, hallucinations or any other physical experience were not, in Knowles' tradition, to be considered truly mystical. I have highlighted this point in Knowles' work to illustrate one of the reasons why men may be less visible as individuals in the historiography of 'mystics.' It appears that Rolle failed to meet the requirements for mysticism on two points. Firstly, he writes about visual and physical experiences, and secondly, he displays a (perceived) lack of comprehension of mystical theology. In other words, his mysticism may not be masculine enough. This is my interpretation of Knowles' exclusion of Rolle from the pantheon of mystics, and I believe it will ring true for a number of men who, had they been women, would have been considered mystics.

If we wish to understand why the study of mystics is conflated with the study of women from the high medieval period, then it is necessary to understand how the terms 'mystic' and 'mysticism' are employed in our historiography. What this chapter has illuminated is a subject of such complexity that it is difficult to unravel. It is clear that 'mysticism' is concerned with the theoretical and theological components of an aspect of spirituality that has a presence in a number of religious belief systems. The complication centres on whether an individual who authors a text on mystical theology should properly be called a mystic. If we follow the contention of a number of modern scholars discussed in this chapter, a 'mystic' is someone who has an experience of the divine. This leaves us with anomalies in our attempts to classify medieval religious individuals, further complicating our endeavour to understand past relationships between men and women.

¹²⁷ Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, pp. 50-51.

¹²⁸ Knowles, *English Mystical Tradition*, p. 64.

The fact that women are more closely associated with the study of 'mystics' is due in large part to the growth in scholarship from the middle of the twentieth century, which adopted a feminist perspective. There is, without doubt, a fine patina of theoretical influence attributable to the French feminist philosophies of women such as Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir glossed across the work of many historians of women. That fact that Irigaray and de Beauvoir were also keen students of the medieval holy women who exhibited a style of sanctity which was, at first glance, different from their male counterparts, also stimulated the desire to seek out women from the historical past who challenged the hegemony of the medieval Church, further widening the gap between the sexes. Using their bodies, medieval religious women fasted and vomited and bled their way to a relationship with Christ, leaving frustrated and awe-struck religious men in their wake.

Thus, we are left with the distinct, and not often challenged, notion that the spirituality of medieval women was somatic whilst that of men was intellectual. But is this necessarily an accurate portrayal of medieval religious individuals, particularly with regards to mysticism? I wish to turn to the beginnings of monasticism now in my search for the reasons why religious men seem absent from this particular style of spirituality.

2. The Evolution of Regulations for Religious Communities and Individuals: The Importance of Obedience and Humility

The demons, therefore, if they see all Christians, and monks especially, labouring cheerfully and advancing, first make an attack by temptation and place hindrances to hamper our way, to wit, evil thoughts. But we need not fear their suggestions, for by prayer, fasting, and faith in the Lord their attack immediately fails.¹

Introduction

As Athanasius noted in his *Life of St Antony*, the monastic way of life—prayer, fasting, and faith in the Lord—was the deadliest weapon a holy person could wield against the ancient enemy. However, the enemy was not just Satan and his lackeys—the enemy was also the world at large and the sins contained therein. One of the responses of religious men and women in the early centuries of Christianity was to isolate themselves from this sinful (and persecuting) world, and so they retreated to the deserts of Palestine and Egypt as they sought to engage more fully in this battle. However, with official recognition as the religion of the empire in the fourth century came the need for Christianity and its disciples to develop alternate ways of expressing separateness. The baptismal cleansing of a bloody martyrdom was no longer the crowning glory for a Christian; the solitude and hardships of the desert came to replace the ultimate sacrifice, as Christians sought to remove themselves from the world. This physical and spiritual isolation provided the fertile soil in which the first seeds of the monastic way of life were sown. The ascetic approach to life also encouraged behaviours which challenge modern sensibilities, including fasting, deliberate exposure to heat or cold, self-imposed silence, solitary confinement, and, in the extreme, physical self-harm. Monasticism also played a vital role in the development of a way of life which encouraged contemplation and union with God, the fundamental components of the mystical life. However, as I have discussed previously, much of the secondary historiography concerned with medieval mysticism

¹ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, trans. H. Ellershaw, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 4, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 23.

appears to gender these two fundamental aspects – the physical and the spiritual – and in doing so disengages with all but a few elite monastic men.

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, in twentieth-century historiography, medieval female mysticism is scarred with the marks of physical excess and self-abnegation, phenomena which were familiar to the Late Antique holy male. However, almost as soon as communities of male monks began to form, some time in the fourth century, most appear to move away from the solitary, physical, ascetic ideal espoused by the Desert Fathers. Why were physical austerities and the solitary life suddenly problematic in the male religious environment? This chapter takes a microcosmic and macrocosmic approach to the monastic universe, in order to understand how influential this holy way of life was in the creation of mysticism as a category for historical investigation. Monks and clerics were constantly reminded of their obligation to act manfully by the examples set by their ancient forebears and their contemporaries. Even more importantly, monks were ordered to complete obedience and the renunciation of their own will. On a microcosmic level, the focus is on the ascetic life of the monk and how that was shaped by medieval concerns with masculinity. Masculinity within the monastic community seems to be found in two forms – spiritual and physical – as reflected in the two books of the life of Arnulf of Villers. The macrocosmic universe of monasticism will be considered with a view to establishing how, in the broadest sense, we can get from a man like Antony (d. 356) to a man like Arnulf (d. 1228). Finally, if the monastery provides the optimum environment within which mysticism could flourish, why were so few monks of the high medieval period considered mystics?

The factor which ties both approaches together is the monastic rule. Rules ordered both the interior and exterior life of the monk, and neglected no aspect of the monastic world. Monastic rules quite clearly point towards an environment where difference, excess or disobedience could mark an individual as disruptive, to the point where they may be asked to “go away now”.² A rule implies a sense of regulation or discipline, it imposes boundaries, and it provides the measure of conduct which all members of a particular organization, be it religious or secular, agree to adhere to. What I am

² Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer, Westminster, 1965, 18.16. Palladius recounts the story of Macarius who was asked to ‘go away now’ by Pachomius because he was such an exceptional monk.

interested in is how monastic rules were constructed, how they set out deliberately to modify the behaviour of religious men, and whether this had any influence on the ability of religious men to engage in affective, physical forms of spiritual expression in the high medieval period. The formalizing of monastic life and the composition of a number of Rules for monastic orders coincides with a decline in recognizably super-austere behaviours. From around the sixth century, monasticism settles into a period which Giles Constable describes as the 'so-called period of the *Regula mixta*, or mixed rule'.³ Constable contends that this period lasted until the ninth century and that it represents a time when 'every religious house had its own way of doing things'.⁴ C. H. Lawrence aligns the development of the 'mixed rule' to the Columbanian monastery established at Luxeuil by the Irish missionary monk Columbanus (540-615).⁵ Lawrence notes that, shortly after Columbanus' death, the monastery at Luxeuil relaxed the severity of the Columbanian Rule by tempering it with the 'more humane Rule of St Benedict'.⁶ This form of Columbanian monasticism then spread throughout the Gallic region due to the influence of both ecclesiastic and Frankish aristocratic patronage.

The monastery at Nivelles in the Brabant, home to Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles (d. 1231) and a contemporary of Arnulf of Villers, was founded during this period (640) and was strongly influenced by both the Columbanian 'mixed rule' and Irish monasticism in general, with the first abbess, Gertrude, sending for monks from Ireland to instruct her sisters in the liturgical chant.⁷ The influence of this 'mixed rule' in the Brabant area may prove to illuminate the hagiographies of Goswin of Bossut more fully.⁸; my emphasis at this juncture, however, is not the idea that the Rules were mixed, but rather that there were Rules at all. I am particularly interested to discover whether the development of these monastic Rules had any impact on the way monastic men imagined themselves as men and, in turn, influenced their behaviour as men. My focus will be especially on behaviours that we might recognize as 'mystical' or focused on attaining a closer relationship with God through ascetic practices.

³ Giles Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering in the Middle Ages', The Ninth Stephen J. Brademas, Sr. Lecture, Brookline, Mass., 1982, p. 13, reprinted in *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, [original pagination].

⁴ Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering', p. 13.

⁵ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn, Harlow, 2001, p. 47.

⁶ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 47.

⁷ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 50.

⁸ The three biographies authored by Goswin are collected in Goswin of Bossut, *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003.

Although there were a number of Rules composed during this period, I will focus on five 'Rules' composed for men who wished to follow a relatively austere life: the Rule of Pachomius; the Augustinian Rule; the Rules of the Fathers and the *Regula Orientalis*; the Benedictine Rule; and the Rule of St Columbanus.⁹ I will also address the writings of Jerome, and those of John Cassian (d. 435) and Basil of Caesarea (d. 379), whom Benedict of Nursia (d. 547) in particular describes as 'the tool of virtue for monks who wish to lead a virtuous and obedient life'.¹⁰ Benedict alerts us immediately to a key concept evident in all of the writings listed above—obedience. It is this notion of total obedience which had, I believe, the single biggest impact on the development of male monastic behaviour and led to the decline in behaviours that commentators contend are familiar to mystics. Obedience became the *raison d'être* of the monk living within these developing religious communities. Although the total submission of a monk's will to his superior appears at odds with the notion that a monk was an individual fighting demons in the desert, one could argue that this renunciation of self-will was an even greater struggle. The notion of obedience was familiar to the Desert Fathers—the hermits, ascetics, monks, and nuns who lived in the Egyptian desert singly and in small groups and who were revered as the founders of the monastic life by their descendents in the high medieval period. It was expressed either as a narrative of action—following the rules of fasting for instance—or as the premium virtue that should direct the monk's life.¹¹ However, the eremitic monastic life encapsulated in the *Sayings* and championed by Antony in the third and fourth centuries, was giving way to the community-based cenobitical environment of Pachomius, an environment which encouraged the development of monastic rules.

⁹ Adalbert de Vogüé maintains that by the end of the eighth century there were some thirty 'rules' associated with the monastic life. This number includes texts that 'have a certain legislative character [and excludes] those texts which are simply hortatory or descriptive'. He also notes that we must recognise the 'extreme diversity of these rules' in terms of dimension, presentation, and tone. He goes on to say: 'But no matter how different these rules are, they nonetheless form a compact whole. They are closely connected to each other, not only by their common aim of regulating the cenobitic life of Christian monks and by a number of identical doctrinal principles, but also by a network of literary relations which was constantly extending itself and getting more complicated.' See, Adalbert de Vogüé, 'The Cenobitic Rules of the West', *Cistercian Studies*, 12, 1977, pp. 175-176. This is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the monastic rules developed during this period of which there are many; rather, I am more concerned with the growing institutionalization of the lives of religious men.

¹⁰ Benedict of Nursia, *The Holy Rule of St Benedict* (hereafter *RB*), trans. Carolinne White, Harmondsworth, 2008, 73. [Nec non et collationes Patrum, et instituta et vita eorum; sed et Regula sancti Patris nostri Basilii, quid aliud sunt nisi bene viventium et obedientium monachorum instrumenta virtutum? (*PL* 66, col. 0930a)]

¹¹ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (hereafter *Apop. Patrum*), trans. Benedicta Ward, London, 1975, for obedience in fasting see Elias, 8; for obedience as a virtue see Rufus, 2. This is a translation from the original Greek, not the subsequent Latin edition.

An investigation into the beginnings of monasticism is important to the search for male mystics. It is not possible to consider clearly the high medieval religious landscape without reference to the early authorities of Christianity. In this regard it is important to consider not just the Church Fathers, but also another important group of men and women invested with religious authority during the early centuries of Christianity: the so-called Desert Fathers.¹² The *Vitae patrum* is a collection of exemplary tales, moral guidelines, and supernatural experiences attributed to the predominantly male citizens of the geographical and spiritual desert of Upper Egypt. When considered in conjunction with Palladius' *Lausiac History* and Paphnutius' *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt*, we can begin to develop a picture of the development of monasticism during this period.¹³ These 'athletes of Christ' were 'models of ascetic practice'.¹⁴ Their way of life—visions, asceticism, contemplation, divine experience—mirror the markers of female mysticism mentioned above and provide a gateway into the labyrinth of religious experience.

Late Antique Monasticism

So now I begin my tales. I shall leave unnoticed neither those in the cities nor those in the villages or deserts. For the object of our inquiry is not the place where they have settled but the fashion of their plan of life.¹⁵

Amma Syncletica, one of the three monastic women accounted for in the *Vitae patrum*, reinforces Palladius' sentiments concerning the location of the desert: 'There are many who live in the mountains and behave as if they were in town, and they are wasting their time. It is possible to be a solitary in one's mind while living in a crowd, and it is possible for one who is a solitary to live in the crowd of his own thoughts.'¹⁶ The period encompassed by works such as *The Lausiac History* and the *Vitae patrum* is the period which saw monasticism develop and flourish through the examples set by men and women such as Antony the Great, John the Dwarf, Paphnutius, Theodora,

¹² Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, London, 1940, p. 16.

¹³ *Apop. patrum*. Also see: Paphnutius, *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt* and the *Life of Onnophrius*, trans. and intro. Tim Vivian, Kalamazoo, 1993; and Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, W. K. Lowther Clarke, London, 1918.

¹⁴ Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering', p. 9.

¹⁵ Palladius, *Lausiac History*, prol., 15.

¹⁶ *Apop. patrum*, Syncletica, 19.

and Poemen. These religious retreated to the desert, following the example set by Antony who, in most instances, is credited as the father of monasticism. However, this claim was being debated not even 20 years after Antony's death in 356. In 374 or 375, Jerome penned the 'Life of Paulus the First Hermit,' where he made the comment that, although it was partly true that Antony was the 'originator of this mode of life . . . the fact is not so much that he preceded the rest as that they all derived from him the necessary stimulus'.¹⁷ Jerome reinforces the point which Etienne Gilson was making in the above-mentioned statement: more so than the Church Fathers, it is to the Desert Fathers that we should look as the inspiration for the monastic life which Bernard of Clairvaux so actively encouraged.

Despite Jerome's grumbles, it seems that for the majority of hermits, Antony provided the template for the monk wishing to live a moral life.¹⁸ His biographer, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, recalled the virtuous young Antony as he visited those men who surpassed him in a particular discipline. The qualities exhibited by these men included: graciousness; unceasing prayer; freedom from anger; loving-kindness; endurance; fasting; meekness; and long suffering. He 'observed' and 'studied' each of them, and '[t]hus filled, he returned to his own place of discipline, and henceforth would strive to unite the qualities of each, and was eager to show in himself the virtues of all'.¹⁹

The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* provided a comprehensive, though at times discordant, register of the way in which a religious man should live his life. For the most part, the monk should suffer the following in order to be saved: exile; poverty; silence; fear; humility; obedience; and fasting.²⁰ Although these themes for living are evident in varying forms and degrees across the *Sayings*, John the Dwarf left no stone unturned in instructing the fervent disciple:

I think it best that a man should have a little bit of all the virtues. Therefore, get up early every day and acquire the beginning of every virtue and every commandment of God. Use great patience, with fear and long-suffering, in the love of God, with all the fervour of your soul and body. Exercise great humility, bear with interior distress; be vigilant and pray often with reverence and groaning, with purity of speech and control of your eyes. When you are despised do not get angry; be at peace, and do not

¹⁷ Jerome, 'The Life of Paulus the First Hermit', trans. W. H. Freemantle, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series 2, vol. 6, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, prol. [Alii autem, in quam opinionem vulgus omne consentit. Asserunt Antonium hujus propositi caput, quod ex parte verum est: non enim tam ipse ante omnes fuit, quam ab eo omnium incitata sunt studia. (PL 23, col. 0017a)]

¹⁸ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, prol.

¹⁹ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, 4.

²⁰ *Apop. patrum*, Andrew, 1; Biare, 1; Eupreprios, 6; Elias, 8; and Theodore of Pherme, 5.

render evil for evil. Do not pay attention to the faults of others, and do not try to compare yourself with others, knowing you are less than every created thing. Renounce everything material and that which is of the flesh. Live by the cross, in warfare, in poverty of spirit, in voluntary spiritual asceticism, in fasting, in penitence and tears, in discernment, in purity of soul, taking hold of that which is good. Do your work in peace. Persevere in keeping vigil, in hunger and in thirst, in cold and nakedness, and in sufferings. Shut yourself in a tomb as though you were already dead, so that at all times you will think death is near.²¹

I note that the advice proffered is discordant because it is also clear that a monk should not necessarily try to encompass all of the virtues. Athanasius noted the variety of qualities which Antony sought to live by were each displayed by *different* men. Abba Poemen remarks that Abba John the Dwarf recognised that, ‘the saints are like a group of trees, each bearing different fruit, but watered from the same source. The practices of one saint differ from those of another, but it is the same Spirit that works in all of them’.²² At once, we can recognize that the way of life for the eremitic monk was not a function of its external appearances and the sum of its virtues, but rather it should reflect the internal struggle and spiritual path chosen by the individual. This is neatly summed up by Abba Ammonas when he was asked what the “narrow and hard way” spoken of in Matt. 7:14 was. He replied, ‘The “narrow and hard way” is this, to control your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God’.²³

In the ‘Introduction’ to his revision and translation of Palladius’s *The Lausiaca History*, W. K. L. Clarke describes the developing monastic movement as one of stern spirits reacting to ‘the secularisation of the fourth-century Church’.²⁴ The fourth century was a period of order *and* disorder for the wider Church: order, with the elevation of Christianity to the position of the official religion of the Roman Empire; and disorder, as theologians sought to establish religious orthodoxy in both a spiritual and practical sense. With official recognition came a decline in opportunities for committed Christians to suffer as martyrs for their religion.²⁵ With martyrdom no longer an option, devoted followers of Christ looked for new forms of religious practice within which to express their faith, and the monastic movement provided an alternative “narrow and hard way” for individuals who wanted to live in Christ.

²¹ *Apop. patrum*, John the Dwarf, 34.

²² *Apop. patrum*, Poemen, 43.

²³ *Apop. patrum*, Ammonas, 11.

²⁴ W. K. Lowther Clarke, ‘Introduction’, in Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, W. K. Lowther Clarke, London, 1918, p. 21.

²⁵ Lester K. Little, ‘Monasticism and Western Society: From Marginality to the Establishment and Back’, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 47, 2002, p. 84.

Clarke's emphasis on the 'secularization' of the Church is particularly important. With recognition from the Roman Empire came order and acceptance; thus Christians found themselves faced with a dilemma. Christians had believed themselves, from the start, to be 'in the world but not of it'.²⁶ The anonymous author of the second-century letter to Diognetus underscored the antiquity of this concept of a liminal Christian society. When speaking of Christians, the author described their cultural foundations in terms of difference: 'Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. . . . They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.'²⁷ The author was also acutely aware that, by this very act of differentiation, Christians left themselves teetering on the precipice of persecution. The author recognised that Christians 'love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life'.²⁸ The stark bi-polar nature of these comments impresses upon the modern reader a palpable imprint of early Christian life as being one of *communitas*; a state of understanding which was to become a major force in the developing religion.

This sense that Christian society was liminal, functioning in between the spaces of the secular, real world and the eternal paradise, was to influence profoundly the evolution of monastic living. Before official recognition, Christians and Christianity were marked as separate by persecution and martyrdom. Announcing that you were Christian immediately separated you from society and was a declaration that the individual no longer existed according to or within 'the structures of society'.²⁹ Martyrdom, if the Christian was lucky enough to be chosen, ensured the eternal existence of the individual in the ultimate liminal cosmos, Paradise. Without this legitimized sense of separateness and difference, Christians turned to alternate modes of life to emphasize Christianity's uniqueness. Martyrdom became an exercise in living a rigorous, austere life, and the monks of the desert clothed themselves in the rags of poverty, silence, and renunciation in order to again mark themselves as apart from society.

²⁶ Duncan Fisher, 'Liminality: the Vocation of the Church (I)/the Desert Image in Early Medieval Monasticism', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 24, 3, 1989, p. 191.

²⁷ 'The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus', ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in Philip Schaff ed., *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids, 1885, 5.

²⁸ 'The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus', 5.

²⁹ Duncan Fisher, 'Liminality: the Vocation of the Church (II)/the Desert Image in Early Medieval Monasticism', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 25, 3, 1990, p. 189.

A man such as Antony epitomised this exodus to the desert and using the grace bestowed upon him by the Lord, 'he consoled many that were sorrowful, and set those at variance at one, exhorting all to prefer the love of Christ before all that is in the world'.³⁰ Christians sought this separation because it underscored both their faith and their desire to become natives of a universal city: 'And thus it happened in the end that cells arose even in the mountains, and the desert was colonised by monks, who came forth from their own people, and enrolled themselves for the citizenship in the heavens.'³¹ Augustine provided, perhaps, the most consummate articulation of the State and the Kingdom which Christians found themselves betwixt and between. Some 600 pages into his epic work, *City of God*, Augustine paused to recapitulate on how his two cities came to pass: 'We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self.'³² This conceptualization of love and contempt as developed by Augustine articulates a way of life which became focused in the monastic realm. Monks were to love God and their brothers, but not themselves. As the rules regulating the behaviour of monastic men developed apace with the ever increasing number of monastic communities, the key concepts of obedience, love, and renunciation/humility became central to the lives of monastic men.

Of course, men were not the only citizens of the Christian 'City of God'. Women were drawn to the new religion in numbers and, according to a story related by Justin Martyr in the second century, were already attempting to convert their pagan husbands.³³ We find, therefore, that communities of virgins were already a feature of Christian life during this early period of persecution and then recognition.³⁴ Indeed,

³⁰ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, 14.

³¹ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, 14.

³² Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, Harmondsworth, 2003, 14.28. [Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo; terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, coelestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui. (PL 41, col. 0436)]

³³ Justin Martyr, 'The Second Apology of Justin for the Christians Addressed to the Roman Senate', ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in Philip Schaff ed., *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids, 1885, II.

³⁴ See the following works for in-depth discussions concerning women and the new religion of Christianity: Jo Ann McNamara, 'Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginitly in Early Christian Thought', *Feminist Studies*, 3, 3/4, Spring-Summer 1976, pp. 145-158; Anne Yarborough, 'Christianization in the Fourth Century: The Example of Roman Women', *Church History*, 45, 1976, pp. 149-165; Ross Kraemer, 'The Conversion of Women to Ascetic Forms of Christianity', *Signs*, 6, 1980-1981, pp. 298-307; Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement: A Paradox of Late Ancient Christianity', in

Antony was not able to retreat to the wilderness after the death of his father until he had fulfilled his responsibility as guardian to his sister. To ensure her safety, he 'committed his sister to known and faithful virgins, and put her into a convent'.³⁵ Women also played a prominent role in the lives of many other famous Christian ecclesiasts: Augustine's mother was a committed Christian, a fact which continued to haunt him as he worried over his own conversion; and Jerome kept the company of a number of well-known Christian women. For the monks of the desert, women appeared less frequently and in quite polemical guises, being seen either as the instrument of the devil or as exemplars of the ascetic life. Abba Arsenius caused distress to a young virgin by telling her that he would 'pray to God to remove remembrance of you from my heart'. When she fell ill because of this slight, Archbishop Theophilus reminded her that 'you are a woman, and that it is through women that the enemy wars against the Saints. That is the explanation of the old man's words; but as for your soul, he will pray for it continually'.³⁶

Two further examples illustrate how women could transcend their perceived physical and intellectual deficiencies, and in the process, they proved both an example and a source of shame to the men who knew them. Abba Bessarion and his disciple, Doulas, met with a monk who refused to speak with them. After visiting another father, they returned to find the monk dead and proceeded to prepare his body for burial: 'When we took the body to bury it we perceived that it was a woman. Filled with astonishment, the old man said, 'See how the women triumph over Satan, while we still behave badly in the towns.' Having given thanks to God, who protects those who love him, we went away.'³⁷ Amma Sarah, one of the few women mentioned by name in *The Sayings*, and well known for her ascetic endeavours, put two 'great

Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, New York, 1986, pp. 175-208; David G. Hunter, 'Resistance to the Virginal Ideal in Late-Fourth-Century Rome: The Case of Jovinian', *Theological Studies*, 48, 1987, pp. 45-64; Jane Simpson, 'Women and Asceticism in the Fourth Century: A Question of Interpretation', *The Journal of Religious History*, 15, 1, June 1988, pp. 38-60; Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis, 1998; Jo Ann McNamara, 'An Unresolved Syllogism: The Search for a Christian Gender System', in Jacqueline Murray ed., *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, New York, 1999, pp. 1-24; David G. Hunter, 'The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine', *Church History*, 69, 2, June 2000, pp. 281-303; E. Ann Matter, 'Christ, God and Woman in the Thought of St Augustine', in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless eds, *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, London, 2000, pp. 164-175; Roger Steven Evans, *Sex and Salvation: Virginity as a Soteriological Paradigm in Ancient Christianity*, Maryland, 2003; Guy Halsall, 'Gender and the End of Empire', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34, 1, Winter 2004, pp. 17-39.

³⁵ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, 3.

³⁶ *Apop. patrum*, Arsenius, 28.

³⁷ *Apop. patrum*, Bessarion, 4.

anchorites' in their place when they attempted to humiliate her. Assuming that she would be proud at their visiting her they taunted her weakness as a woman, but she responded by saying '[a]ccording to nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts'.³⁸ Amma Sarah and the unnamed monk/nun clearly demonstrate to modern readers the profound influence which gender had in the earliest years of Christianity and I argue that, rather than coming to terms with those issues over the coming centuries, theologians continued to be vexed by the issue, to the point where constructions of gender for religious men and women became complex and restrictive.

Palladius reflects none of the disquiet concerning women displayed by his early twentieth-century translator, Clarke.³⁹ In the 'Preface' to his work, Palladius offers the reader some insight into the already clearly delineated gender of religious practice in the late antique period:

This book is a record of the virtuous asceticism and marvellous manner of life of those blessed and holy fathers, the monks and anchorites which inhabit the desert, (written) with a view of stirring to rivalry and imitation those who wish to realize the heavenly mode of life and desire to tread the road which leads to the kingdom of heaven. It contains also memoirs of aged women and illustrious God-inspired matrons, who with masculine and perfect mind have successfully accomplished the struggles of virtuous asceticism, (which may serve) as a model and object of desire for those women who long to wear the crown of continence and chastity.⁴⁰

As Palladius makes clear, the only way for women is up. By adopting and enacting a masculine way of life, they serve as a model for others wishing to 'wear the crown of continence and chastity'. Palladius's statement presupposes that his audience understood exactly what a 'masculine and perfect mind' was. It also strongly implies that, for men, it was entirely possible to backslide and become 'feminine.' Palladius reinforces his opinion on the virtue of women in Chapter 49 titled 'Holy Women.' He includes the chapter because it 'is necessary also to mention in my book certain women with manly qualities . . . lest any should pretend that women are too feeble to practise virtue perfectly'.⁴¹

In Chapter 25, Palladius offered the reader a concise example of the late antique understanding of masculine and feminine behaviour and how that is intimately related

³⁸ *Apop. patrum*, Sarah, 1, 4.

³⁹ Clarke, 'Introduction', p. 23. It is important to note here that Clarke was writing at the beginning of the twentieth century and it would be anachronistic to condemn his views on women. I feel that it is important to point out however because Clarke, despite his obvious affection for Palladius, completely dismisses the anecdotes concerning women as irrelevant.

⁴⁰ Palladius, *Lausiac History*, pref., 1.

⁴¹ Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 41.1. It is interesting to note here that Palladius is less than complimentary about the role Jerome played in the life of Paula, implying that Jerome hindered Paula's impressive spiritual development because he was jealous.

to how a person should conduct their life. Palladius recounted the story of his neighbour, an ‘excellent young man’, whose name was Heron. Heron, however, was ‘attacked by pride and flung off all restraints and cherished presumptuous sentiments against the fathers’.⁴² Despite the intervention and best efforts of his fellow monks, Heron became ‘excessively abstemious in his mode of life,’ and eventually, unable to restrain himself, he ‘went off to Alexandria, by (divine) dispensation, and, as the saying goes, “knocked out one nail with another”’.⁴³ The final indignity for Heron came in the form of a carbuncle on his private parts which caused him to become ‘so ill that the parts rotted away and fell off’.⁴⁴ With a renewed vigour and religious frame of mind, Heron returned to the desert to confess his sins and after a few days ‘fell asleep’.⁴⁵

Heron’s rather active life contains a number of telling commentaries on the monastic life and it also provides an interesting insight into late antique concerns with gender. Heron exhibits two major faults which come to influence strongly eleventh- to thirteenth-century monasticism—pride and excess.⁴⁶ The susceptibility of men to pride is reflected in Canon 2 of the Council of Nicaea (325), relating to the appointment of bishops, where it is noted that ‘the apostolical saying is clear, “[Appoint] Not a novice; lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into condemnation and the snare of the devil”’.⁴⁷ For early Christian commentators, pride could seduce the most devout man and ‘one would not be far wrong in saying that [pride] is the seed-root of all the thorns of sin’.⁴⁸ Pope Gregory I, Augustine, and Jerome all offer perspectives which evoke the various ways the sin of pride could manifest itself, including boastful internal thoughts, spiteful behaviour toward other sinners, and empty words.⁴⁹ Pride and

⁴² Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 26.1.

⁴³ Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 26.2-4.

⁴⁴ Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 26.5.

⁴⁵ Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 26.5.

⁴⁶ Giles Constable, ‘Moderation and Restraint in Ascetic Practices in the Middle Ages’, in Haijo Jan Westra ed., *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, Leiden, 1992, p. 318, reprinted in Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, [original pagination].

⁴⁷ ‘The First Ecumenical Council: The Council of Nice’, ed. Henry R. Percival, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 14, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, canon 2.

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, ‘On Virginity’, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 5, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 4.

⁴⁹ *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great*, trans. Terrence G. Kardong, Minnesota, 2009, 20; Augustine, ‘Holy Virginity (*De sancta virginitate*)’, trans. John McQuade, in Roy J. Deferrari ed., *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 27, Washington, 1955, 32.32; idem, ‘On Marriage and Concupiscence’, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallace in, Phillip Schaff ed., *Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Early Church Fathers: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, St. Augustine Volumes, vol. 5, Grand

excess are also traits that are closely linked to the masculine and feminine respectively through their association with Adam's sin. As Shaun Kraemer notes, by the twelfth century Bernard of Clairvaux was articulating longstanding gender hierarchies in his discussion of Adam, Eve, and the original sin.⁵⁰ Adam certainly transgresses in a masculine, proud way when he arrogantly and wilfully disobeys God and instead follows his wife's urging to aspire to knowledge.

What is more interesting about Bernard's treatment of Adam's sin, however, is his feminizing of it. Isidore of Seville noted in the *Etymologies*, that the word '*femina* [may also be] derived by a Greek etymology from "fiery force," because she lusts so strongly, for the female is much more sensual than the male, among women just as among other animals. Hence, love beyond measure among the ancients was called "womanly love," *femineus amor*'.⁵¹ Adam's excessive love for his wife caused him to become 'effeminate,' further destabilizing his masculinity. Heron's sin of pride is treated briefly by Palladius and it is clear that pride is first established by Heron's belief that he is worthier of God's word than the other monks—to the extent that he did not 'attend the mysteries'.⁵² However, his sin of pride is amplified by the excessive feminizing behaviour that eventually leads to his downfall. Heron fasted excessively, he walked in an excessively fast manner, and eventually, unable to remain in his cell because of the excessive fire in his soul, he removed himself to Alexandria where he indulged in excessive amoral behaviour. Heron was 'punished' for this excessive behaviour when he became physically gendered a female; losing his external, visible, male genitalia reduced him physically and metaphorically to the lower status of female. Contrast this to Palladius' words about 'God-inspired matrons' in his opening comments. These are women who, with 'masculine and perfect mind,' have left that feminine status behind. Clearly there was more at stake here for the religious man, and Heron is not the only example, provided us by Palladius, of a man who is caught out by the sin of pride.

Rapids, 1887, 20; Jerome, 'Against Jovinianus', trans. W. H. Freemantle in, Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Early Church Fathers: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 6, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 2.3; idem, 'Letter 133: to Ageruchia', trans. W. H. Freemantle in, Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Early Church Fathers: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 6, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 15.

⁵⁰ Shawn Madison Kraemer, 'Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the Works of Bernard of Clairvaux', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 37, 1, 2002, p. 4.

⁵¹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, Jennifer A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, Cambridge, 2006, 2.24.

⁵² Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 26.2.

Palladius devoted a small group of chapters in his work to the stories of three men and one woman who had fallen at the final hurdle and had seen their 'triumph of asceticism . . . dissipated in an instant by pride and selfconceit'.⁵³ As with Heron, Valens and Ptolemy both succumbed to pride to the extent that they claimed they had no need of the mysteries.⁵⁴ The unnamed 'Virgin Who Fell' was also consumed by arrogance, although there is a clear distinction made here between male and female behaviours. While Heron, Valens, and Ptolemy become prideful because of what they have achieved, the virgin begins her religious life with corrupt intentions, which ultimately lead to the loss of her chastity. She already occupies the feminine position and never achieves a state of having a 'masculine and perfect mind'. For the men, their stories exhibit how it is possible, and extremely easy, to backslide; once this has occurred, particularly in the cases of Heron and Ptolemy, excessive feminine behaviour follows. This illustrates a strong and recognisable understanding in Late Antique society of what was acceptable feminine and masculine religious behaviour. These behaviours were further entrenched by the development of the rules for monastic communities. While the male monastic life clearly provided the opportunity and environment for the pursuit of a mystical connection with God, these rules tempered the behaviour of men resulting, I believe, in fewer opportunities for men who displayed attributes considered 'mystical.'

Monastic Rules

Although Pachomius (c. 292-348) set out to live an eremitical life after the style of Antony, he quickly came to embrace the more collective form of monasticism evident in the proto-communities of Macarius. As Marilyn Dunn comments, an earlier generation of historians attributed Pachomius' desire for the communal life to his previous occupation as a soldier in the Roman army.⁵⁵ This prosaic view discounts the more spiritual explanation for the founding of the Pachomian monastery at Tabennisi. Palladius recounts that, while sitting in his cave in contemplation, Pachomius was visited by an angel who told him, "You have successfully ordered your own life. So it

⁵³ Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, pref., 6.

⁵⁴ Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 25.2, 5; 27.2.

⁵⁵ Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages*, Oxford, 2000, p. 29.

is superfluous to remain sitting in your cave. Up! go out and collect all the young monks and dwell with them, and according to the model which I now give you, so legislate for them;” and he gave him a brass tablet on which this was inscribed . . .⁵⁶ W. K. Lowther Clarke points out that the angel appears to be an apocryphal addition to Palladius’ commentary; as a literary device however, the angel provides the perfect vehicle with which to deliver the ‘rules’ which would aid the regimentally-minded Pachomius in the development of his monastery.⁵⁷ These early instructions on the monastic life clearly illustrate both the need for obedience in order for the monastery to run smoothly and the recognition of the ascetic capabilities of some individuals. For example, obedience was expected of the entire community and this is evident in a hierarchical ordering of the rules. Younger members were to obey their elder, and if an elder told them to change tables, ‘[they should] do it at once, without contradicting him at all’.⁵⁸ Even a task as simple as the lighting of a fire was governed by a rule: ‘No one shall light a fire in his house before the brothers have been so commanded.’⁵⁹ The chairman (the late-antique equivalent of the prior), in turn, was expected to follow the father of the monastery and it was made clear that ‘[h]e shall not resist higher authorities with swollen mind’; nor should he ‘be a displacer of boundaries’.⁶⁰ However, the chairman of each house was to receive bread for those who ‘dedicate themselves to greater abstinence’ and have no wish ‘to eat in common with the others.’ The chairman was to respect ‘when they want to eat’.⁶¹

This tension between the need for order and the recognition of the spiritual athlete is encapsulated in Palladius’ account of the exploits of Macarius of Alexandria, who was already famous for his asceticism.⁶² Upon hearing of the great monastery at Tabennisi and the ascetic endeavours of its monks, Macarius presented himself to Pachomius in the garb of a ‘workman’ and expressed his desire to be admitted to the monastery. Pachomius rejected him saying, ““You have already reached old age, and you cannot be an ascetic. The brethren are ascetics and you cannot endure their

⁵⁶ Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 32.1.

⁵⁷ Clarke, *Lausiac History*, n.200.

⁵⁸ ‘The Rules Of Saint Pachomius’, in *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives Rules and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*, vol. 2, trans. and intro. Armand Veilleux, Kalamazoo, 1981, 1.30.

⁵⁹ ‘The Rules Of Saint Pachomius’, 1.120.

⁶⁰ ‘The Rules Of Saint Pachomius’, 2.18.

⁶¹ ‘The Rules Of Saint Pachomius’, 1.79.

⁶² Benedicta Ward, in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, London, 1975, p. 151.

labours”’.⁶³ However, Macarius persisted and was eventually allowed entry, where he observed the various ascetic actions of the brethren over the period of Lent, which included fasting and standing for long periods of time. Macarius then proceeded to outdo the other brothers:

So having moistened palm-leaves in large numbers, he stood in a corner and until the forty days were completed and Easter had come, ate no bread and drank no water, neither knelt down nor reclined, and apart from a few cabbage leaves took nothing, and them only on Sunday, that he might appear to eat. And if ever he went out in obedience to nature, he quickly came in again and took his stand, speaking to no one and not opening his mouth but standing in silence.⁶⁴

Not surprisingly, Macarius’ actions provoked resentment and anger amongst the brethren who, rising up in revolt, told Pachomius that if he did not evict ‘this fleshless man’ they would all leave.⁶⁵ The response of Pachomius to this threat reveals his recognition of how disruptive excessive behaviours could be and his ultimate desire to maintain order in the monastery. After praying for some revelation as to the visitor’s identity, Pachomius confronted Macarius:

Here, good old man, you are Macarius and you hid it from me. For many years I have been longing to see you. I thank you for letting my children feel your fist, lest they should be proud of their ascetic achievements. Now go away to your own place, for you have edified us sufficiently. And pray for us.⁶⁶

Macarius has fulfilled two roles in this tale: firstly, he is the elder, the monk to whom all others must aspire with particular regard to humility. Macarius emphatically represents the combative, competitive eremitic monastic life which first drew Pachomius to the desert. Secondly, Macarius is positioned as a negative exemplar. He represents the disruption which can occur if an individual within a community does not adhere to the rules. Ultimately, Pachomius recognised that Macarius’ presence would cause more harm than good. As a role-model for the other men of the Pachomian community, he was too individualistic and too extreme. His actions were disruptive and provided occasion for discord. These are precisely the traits which also appear in high medieval accounts of monastic lives illustrating both the antiquity and continuity of these anxieties.

The discussions concerning the issue of obedience were not restricted to the monastic community. In 411, Jerome penned a letter to the young monk Rusticus of Toulouse, who had sought Jerome’s advice as to whether he should pursue the life of a

⁶³ Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 18.13.

⁶⁴ Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 18.14-15.

⁶⁵ Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 18.15.

⁶⁶ Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 18.16.

solitary or enter a monastery. For Jerome, the fundamental deciding factor in his advice to join the monastery was the issue of education. In his inimitable way, Jerome maintains that, '[n]o art is ever learned without a master. Even dumb animals and wild herds follow leaders of their own'.⁶⁷ His fear was that, without a guide, the young man would 'turn . . . to the right or to the left,' or that he might 'go too far or else not far enough'.⁶⁸ Jerome felt that, for Rusticus, the monastery provided the most effective environment for instruction in the ascetic life: 'For there, while you will be under the control of one father, you will have many companions; and these will teach you, one humility, another patience, a third silence, and a fourth meekness.'⁶⁹ Jerome reflects, in these comments, the words of Athanasius in his *Life of Antony* when he recounted Antony's observation and adoption of the practices of many different ascetic men. Jerome, however, reinforced the belief in the importance of instruction by elders in his letter to Rusticus by returning to the common metaphor of the soldier training for spiritual battle. He tells Rusticus that he commends the solitary life, but he wishes 'to see the monastic schools turn out soldiers who have no fear of the rough training of the desert'.⁷⁰ For Jerome, concerns with education and obedience have come to prevail and these themes continue to dominate the monastic rules composed during the last half of the first millennium.

Jerome also presented in his work a re-imagining of what exactly was expected of the religious man. As noted by Julia Smith, in three of his earlier treatises—'The Life of Paulus the First Hermit' (c. 374-75), 'The Life of S. Hilarion' (390), and 'The Life of Malchus, the Captive Monk' (391)—Jerome illustrated no reluctance in recording the miracles of these three men.⁷¹ Yet in his letter to Rusticus (411), Jerome was clear in his opposition to the notion of some 'silly men' who invent 'monstrous stories of struggles with demons, designed to magnify their heroes in the eyes of the crowd and before all

⁶⁷ Jerome, 'Letter 125 to Rusticus', trans. W. H. Freemantle, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series 2, vol. 6, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 15. [Nulla ars absque magistro discitur. Etiam muta animalia, et ferarum greges, duces sequuntur suos. (PL 22, col. 1080)]

⁶⁸ Jerome, 'Letter to Rusticus', 9. [Mihi quidem placet, ut habeas Sanctorum contubernium, nec ipse te doceas, et absque ductore ingrediaris viam, quam nunquam ingressus es, statimque tibi in partem alteram declinandum sit, et errori pateas, plusque aut minus ambules, quam necesse est; ne aut currens lasseris, aut moram faciens, obdormias. (PL 22, col. 1077)]

⁶⁹ Jerome, 'Letter to Rusticus', 15. [Ut doceam te, non tuo arbitrio dimittendum, sed vivere debere in monasterio sub unius disciplina Patris, consortioque multorum, ut ab alio discas humilitatem, ab alio patientiam: hic te silentium, ille doceat mansuetudinem. (PL 22, col. 1080)]

⁷⁰ Jerome, 'Letter to Rusticus', 9. [Sed de ludo monasteriorum, hujusmodi volumus egredi milites, quos eremi dura rudimenta non terreant. (PL 22, col. 1077)]

⁷¹ Julia M. H. Smith, 'The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c.780-920', *Past and Present*, 146, February 1995, p. 29.

to extort money from it'.⁷² His views appeared to have altered as to the veracity and usefulness of the miracle tale and he has developed a certain distrust of the individual ascetic whose feats of spiritual battle cannot (apparently) be reasonably verified. Physical asceticism and visionary experience are two of the main markers associated with female mystics in the high middle ages. Jerome's importance to my argument lies in his demonstration of the evolving nature of male spiritual behaviour, particularly as imagined by influential ecclesiastics, and how this influential opinion appears to have negated asceticism and visions as a part of male spiritual experience.

Despite the fact that they were not monks, the influence of urban ecclesiastics such as Jerome and Augustine cannot be ignored at this juncture. Marilyn Dunn makes the claim that Jerome and Augustine should be considered as 'the most influential writers on asceticism and monasticism in the West'.⁷³ However, we must not suppose that Jerome and Augustine thought about monasticism in the same way as Basil of Caesarea or John Cassian. There are commonalities, of course, the most significant being the trend in thought toward the utility of the cenobitic life, and both Basil and Cassian allude to the importance of instruction and guidance for a young monk. Yet it is clear that for Augustine, in particular, the monastic community would be one overseen by a cleric, and that at its apogee would be a community of clerics.⁷⁴ This is amply illustrated when Augustine's Rule, which was not rediscovered until the late eleventh century, became particularly important in the formation of a number of major religious institutions in the high medieval period including the canons regular and the Dominicans.⁷⁵ As a template for the growing order of the canons regular in the twelfth century, Lawrence notes that Augustine's Rule can be seen as expounding the notion that clerics living a communal life were the epitome of the *vita apostolica*.⁷⁶ This view, however, was not universal.

Gregory the Great, for example, did not appear to believe that the monastic profession was compatible with the office of the cleric. In a series of letters to Marinianus, Bishop of Ravenna, and his predecessor John, Gregory is at pains to emphasize the different roles of monks and clerics. He is particularly clear on this

⁷² Jerome, 'Letter to Rusticus', 9. [Qui nesciunt secundum quosdam ineptos homines, daemonum pugnantium contra se portenta confingere, ut apud imperitos, et vulgi homines miraculum sui faciant, et exinde lucra sectentur. (PL 22, col. 1077)]

⁷³ Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, p. 67.

⁷⁴ *The Rule of Augustine*, trans. Robert Russell, New Jersey, 1976, 7.1-2, based on the critical text of Luc Verheijen, 'La regle de saint Augustin', *Etudes Augustiniennes*, Paris, 1967.

⁷⁵ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 162.

⁷⁶ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 162.

point when writing to Marinianus, advising him that ‘you must take care that, if any of the abbots or monks of any monastery should accede to any clerical office or sacred order, he shall have, as we have said, no power there any longer’.⁷⁷ When concerned that monasteries under the fraternity of Marinianus were being ‘oppressed by importunities and various annoyances from the clergy,’ Gregory instructed Marinianus to ‘restrain it [the clergy] by strict prohibition, to the end that the monks who live therein may be able to exult freely in the praises of our God’.⁷⁸ Gregory posed a simpler question to the sub-deacon of Ravenna, John: ‘What, indeed, is a monk’s state of life but a despising of the world?’⁷⁹ Gregory’s recognition of the division between the cleric (secular) and the monk (ascetic), Augustine’s wish for a cleric-controlled community, and Jerome’s dis-ease with miracles and demons, illustrate the influence and concerns of ecclesiasts in this period. It also anticipates the role which ecclesiastical reform was to have on monasticism at the turn of the millennium in helping to shape monastic rules and further influence the behaviour of monastic men.

While the thoughts of Jerome and company were significant, it is Basil of Caesarea and John Cassian who come to have the most influence on the predominant rule of the period, the Rule of St Benedict. Basil maintained that those ‘nearly approaching the divine life should not undertake this discipline of their own accord or as solitaries. It is fitting that such a way of life have a witness, that [it] may be free from base suspicion’.⁸⁰ Basil’s role in reconciling the two strands of religious life was recognized by Gregory of Nazianzus in his Funeral Oration for Basil. Gregory notes that Basil

⁷⁷ Gregory the Great, ‘Gregory to Marinianus, Bishop of Ravenna’, in ‘The Book Of Pastoral Rule, and Selected Epistles, of Gregory the Great Bishop of Rome’, trans. James Barnaby, in Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series 2, vol. 12, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 7.43. [Sed ne vel per cujuslibet monachi aut abbatis promotionem aliquod onus monasteria fortasse sustineant, studendum vobis est ut si quispiam abbatum aut monachorum ex quocunque monasterio ad clericatus officium vel ordinem sacrum accesserit, non illic aliquam habeat ulterius, ut diximus, potestatem, ne monasteria hujus occasionis velamine, quae prohibemus, sustinere onera compellantur. (PL 77, cols 0902b-0902c)]

⁷⁸ Gregory the Great, ‘Gregory to Marinianus, Bishop of Ravenna’, 6.29. [Praeterea pervenit ad nos quia monasteria quae sub fraternitate tua sunt constituta clericorum importunitatibus et diversis eorum molestiis praegraventur. Quod ne de caetero fiat, districta hoc interminatione compesce, quatenus monachis illic degentibus libere in Dei nostri laudibus liceat exsultare. (PL 77, col. 0821b)]

⁷⁹ Gregory the Great, ‘Gregory to John, Subdeacon of Ravenna’, in ‘Selected Epistles of Gregory the Great’, trans. James Barnaby, in Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Gregory the Great (II), Ephraim Syrus, Aphrahat, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series 2, vol. 13, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 12.24. [Quid est autem habitus monachi, nisi despectus mundi? (PL 77, cols 1233c-1234a)]

⁸⁰ Basil of Caesarea, ‘An Ascetical Discourse’, in Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetical Works*, trans. Sister M. Monica Wagner, Washington, 1950, p. 210.

‘occupies an important place in the narrative concerning the development of monastic communities’ that had been

in many respects at variance and dissension, while neither of them was in absolute and unalloyed possession of good or evil: the one being more calm and settled, tending to union with God, yet not free from pride, inasmuch as its virtue lies beyond the means of testing or comparison; the other, which is of more practical service, being not free from the tendency to turbulence. He founded cells for ascetics and hermits, but at no great distance from his cenobitic communities, and, instead of distinguishing and separating the one from the other, as if by some intervening wall, he brought them together and united them, in order that the contemplative spirit might not be cut off from society, nor the active life be uninfluenced by the contemplative, but that, like sea and land, by an interchange of their several gifts, they might unite in promoting the one object, the glory of God.⁸¹

Gregory’s comments reveal the already troubling disjuncture evident in these two forms of religious life, which seem to revolve around the issues of pride, obedience, and the correct expression of the ascetic life. For Basil, obedience is the foundation upon which the monastic life is constructed. To this end, he enjoins that the community will be composed of ‘one heart, one will, one desire, and that the entire community be, as the Apostle enjoins, one body consisting of divers members (1 Cor. 12:12)’.⁸² Furthermore, he maintains that ‘[a] greater reward . . . is accorded to obedience than to the virtue of continency’.⁸³ Basil’s words stress the value of obedience to the monastic community, but he is now investing that obedience with a divine importance, further emphasizing to the monk that difference and disorder were not acceptable.

Basil’s insistence on obedience reaches into the heart of the religious practices of the monk, with particular concern for ascetic practices. Basil does not condemn physical austerities at all—in fact, he encourages the religious man to ‘become a man of violence; bow your neck to the yoke of Christ’s service’.⁸⁴ Violence in this context means the ‘affliction of the body which the disciples of Christ voluntarily undergo’ in order to reach the kingdom of God. The yoke should be worn thin ‘by labor in acquiring virtues, in fasting, in vigils, in obedience, in silence, in psalmody, in prayer, in tears, in manual labor, in bearing all the tribulations which befall you at the hands of

⁸¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, ‘Oration 43: Funeral Oration on the Great S. Basil, Bishop of Cæsarea in Cappadocia’, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, in Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, A Select Library Of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series 2, vol. 7, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 62.

⁸² Basil of Caesarea, ‘An Ascetical Discourse’, p. 217.

⁸³ Basil of Caesarea, ‘An Ascetical Discourse’, p. 219.

⁸⁴ Basil of Caesarea, ‘An Ascetical Discourse and Exhortation on the Renunciation of the World and Spiritual Perfection’, in Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetical Works*, trans. Sister M. Monica Wagner, Washington, 1950, p. 30.

men and demons'.⁸⁵ However, for Basil, obedience was the behaviour which reigned supreme. He reminded his reader that, although 'continency and all corporeal mortification are of some value . . . if a man following his private caprice [does] what is pleasing to himself and heed[s] not the advice of his superior, his fault will be greater than the good he does; 'for he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God' (Rom. 13:1-2)'.⁸⁶ These mortifications cannot be pursued without the consent of a superior, and obedience to a superior is shown 'not only by their refraining from every untoward action in accordance with his advice, but also by their not doing even what is approved without his consent'.⁸⁷

Basil's unwavering focus on the issue of obedience, particularly with regards to ascetic behaviour, is crucial in illuminating an unconventional analysis of male religious behaviour. Rather than assuming that men, in this case religious men, were emancipated and able to behave as they pleased, we should consider how closely regulated male relationships appear to have been within this particular context. Were religious men within the monastery discouraged from affectively pursuing a relationship with Christ? According to Dunn, Augustine's theology certainly appears to dissuade religious individuals from believing that 'human initiative' has any place in the process of salvation and it does not support the idea that ascetic discipline would allow anyone to grow towards God.⁸⁸ Coupled with the notions of obedience and humility, it becomes clear that extreme ascetic behaviours were, in the age of Augustine, less acceptable within the male monastic community.

The twin themes of obedience and restraint are also clear in the writings of the most influential monastic writer of this period, John Cassian (d. 485). The details of Cassian's life and travels need no repeating here; rather, I want to focus on the development of these two themes in Cassian's works, *The Institutes* and *The Conferences*, and assess their importance to following monastic authors. *The Institutes* preceded *The Conferences* and takes a form which is similar to the more legalistic monastic rules which were to follow it. *The Institutes* advised the monk on basic issues, such as dress, psalmody, and prayer, and then discussed the eight principle faults and how a monk can best combat them, while the *Conferences* represented the collected

⁸⁵ Basil of Caesarea, 'An Ascetical Discourse and Exhortation', p. 30.

⁸⁶ Basil of Caesarea, 'An Ascetical Discourse', p. 219.

⁸⁷ Basil of Caesarea, 'An Ascetical Discourse', p. 218.

⁸⁸ Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, p. 73.

wisdom of the Desert Fathers visited by Cassian, and is more concerned with the inner life of the religious man. The key to spiritual combat is the way of life which a monk adopts, and both works focus at various points on the question of whether the solitary or communal life is best. John Cassian's eighteenth and nineteenth conferences are important to consider at this juncture as they depict, respectively, the kinds of monks and ways of life one was to find in the desert, and the importance of the two most significant ways of life. In conference eighteen, Cassian, like Jerome before him and Benedict after him, instructs the reader as to the variety of monks and which of these monks led the most praiseworthy life.⁸⁹ The two most important classes of monks in Cassian and Germanus's dialogue with Abba Piamum, are the communal cenobites and the solitary anchorites.

It is apparent that a hierarchy of importance was developing in the monastic community, founded upon the idea that the young monk seeking salvation must direct his full attention to 'the most accomplished teachers'.⁹⁰ In a telling story in *The Institutes*, Cassian recounted the tale of two young men who, charged with taking figs to a sick elder in the desert, became lost and eventually perished. When finally discovered, it was found that they had preserved the figs rather than 'violate the commands of their senior'.⁹¹ This notion of total obedience, however, is carefully tempered by an emphasis on discretion and restraint. The second conference recalled the story of two monks who wandered into the desert without food, trusting that God would provide for them. One accepted food provided by the 'Mazices (a people more

⁸⁹ The recognized types are: the coenobites; the anchorites; the sarabites; and the gyrovagues. Jerome only mentions the first three, and while the fourth type is unnamed in Cassian, the description appears to match that of the gyrovagues mentioned in Benedict. See: Jerome, 'Letter 22 to Eustochium', trans. W. H. Fremantle in, Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Early Church Fathers: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 6, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 34-35. [Et quoniam Monachorum fecimus mentionem, et te scio libenter audire, quae sancta sunt, aurem paulisper accommoda. Tria sunt in Aegypto genera Monachorum. Unum, *Coenobitae*, quod illi *Sauses* gentili lingua vocant, nos *in commune viventes* possumus appellare. Secundum, *Anachoretae*, qui soli habitant per desertum; et ab eo quod procul ab hominibus recesserint, nuncupantur. Tertium genus est, quod *Remoboth* dicunt, deterrimum [al. *teterrimum*] atque neglectum, et quod in nostra provincia aut solum, aut primum est. (PL 22, col. 0419)]; John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, New York, 1997, 18; and *RB*, 1. [Monachorum quatuor esse genera manifestum est. Primum coenobitarum: hoc est monasteriale, militans sub regula vel abbate. Deinde, secundum genus est anachoretarum, id est eremitarum, horum qui non conversionis fervore novitio, sed monasterii probatione diuturna, didicerunt contra diabolum multorum solatio jam docti pugnare; . . . Tertium vero monachorum teterrimum genus est sarabaitarum, qui nulla regula approbati, experientia magistri, sicut aurum fornacis; . . . Quartum vero genus est monachorum quod nominatur gyrovagum. (PL 66, cols 0245a-0246b)]

⁹⁰ Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.2.1.

⁹¹ John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Rev. Edgar C. S. Gibson, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Sulpitius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series 2, vol. 11, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 5.40.

inhuman than almost any barbarian nation)' seeing it as 'divinely ministered to him.'⁹² The other refused, and his lack of discretion (and his lack of faith in God) led to his death from starvation.⁹³ Discretion is allied to the renunciation of the will; monks should not think for themselves or harm would befall them.

The monastery is a site of fundamental importance in the development of the notion of total obedience. At this juncture in the development of monasticism, some tension exists as to whether the cenobitic or eremitic life is the most praiseworthy and, indeed, which of these came first. Cassian is clear, in both *The Institutes* and *The Conferences*, that the cenobitic life came first.⁹⁴ I believe this is an important development, as it reinforced the role of the monastery as a place where the behaviour of men could be regulated. As to which life is more exemplary, Cassian's advice in this regard appears confused, as he lauded the cenobitic life as the 'first not only in time but also in grace'.⁹⁵ He goes on to state that the cenobium was 'this most fruitful root of holy persons, the flowers and fruits of the anchorites sprouted forth afterward [from it]'.⁹⁶ As Boniface Ramsey points out, in *The Institutes* Cassian is not above 'apply[ing] superlatives to the cenobitic life without denying even greater superlatives to the anchoritic life'.⁹⁷ Cassian was at pains to show that the correct path for the eremitic monk was through the monastery, and this accounts, perhaps, for his apparent confusion.

This is clear in his nineteenth conference, where Cassian presented a discourse with a certain Abba John, who had become proficient in both the ascetic solitary life and the cenobitic community life. Although John's life is played out as a reversal of the pathway expressed by Cassian, his story is instructive because John submits to the discipline and obedience of the communal life. John's reasons for doing so offer more insight into the discomfort felt by religious men in the throes of spiritual ecstasy:

I recall that, as a result of our Lord's kind gift, I was frequently seized by such an ecstasy that I forgot that I was clothed in the burden of bodily frailty, and my mind abruptly rejected all external contacts and was completely absent from every material concern, such that neither my eyes nor my ears exercised their proper function. My mind was so filled with divine meditation and spiritual theoria that I often did not

⁹² Cassian, *Conferences*, 2.6.2.

⁹³ Cassian, *Conferences*, 2.6.3.

⁹⁴ Cassian, *Institutes*, 5.36; idem, *Conferences*, 18.5.4.

⁹⁵ Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.5.4.

⁹⁶ Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.6.1.

⁹⁷ Boniface Ramsey, 'Eighteenth Conference The Conference of Abba Piamun: on the Three Kinds of Monks. Translator's Introduction', in John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, New York, 1997, p. 631.

know whether I had taken my evening meal, and the next day I had no idea as to whether I had broken my fast the day before.⁹⁸

John's reluctance to become a victim of 'the waves of spiritual pride and the dangers of a fatal vainglory' led him to submit to the will of 'the abba until death'.⁹⁹ John's narrative provides a stunning reinforcement of the cenobitical life and drives home the image of the religious man as part of a community, practicing total humility and obedience, not as an individual exercising his own will and subject to the whims of ecstasy.

The opening statement of conference eighteen also sheds some light on the purpose of Cassian's work and how he appeared to be consciously developing a model of religious male behaviour which was steering religious men away from more peculiar expressions of spirituality:

For we have promised to write not of the miracles of God but of the institutes and works of the holy men that we are able to remember, so that we may offer to our readers only what is necessary for instruction in the perfect life and not a useless and vain object of wonderment without any correction for faults.¹⁰⁰

Cassian could not be any clearer in his position regarding miracles, and his statement certainly mirrors Jerome's evolving stance to the role of miracles as a marker of sanctity in the lives of monastic men. Indeed, Cassian made clear the distinction between the works of God (miracles) and the works of men, implying that religious men needed to be particularly careful in making claims to actions they were not capable of. The influence of Cassian can be clearly seen in the Benedictine Rule and his works illustrate the unmistakable evolution of a vision of monastic life which was to become profoundly influential in the high medieval period. Even the aforementioned Abba John believed that 'a universal rule should not be made based upon a small community . . . but upon what is available to the many'.¹⁰¹ As Cassian's works spread throughout Western Europe, the monastic rule continued to develop, emphasizing the ideals of community and obedience and downplaying the role of the individual religious man.

In Western Europe, during the fifth century, there appears a collection of monastic rules which are closely related to the Rules of Pachomius, Basil, and Augustine before

⁹⁸ Cassian, *Conferences*, 19.4.1.

⁹⁹ Cassian, *Conferences*, 19.6.2; 19.6.6.

¹⁰⁰ Cassian, *Conferences*, 18.1.3.

¹⁰¹ Cassian, *Conferences*, 19.7.2.

them, and the Rule of Benedict written c. 540 which followed shortly after.¹⁰² The five rules—Rule of the Holy Fathers Serapion, Macarius, Paphnutius and Another Macarius (RIVP), the Second Rule of the Fathers (2RP), the Rule of Macarius (RMac), the Third Rule of the Fathers (3RP), and the *Regula Orientalis* (RO)—illustrate clearly the transmission of the fundamentals of Egyptian monasticism into the west and, more importantly, the evolution of the debate as to what was the correct form for the monastic life.¹⁰³ The first four rules, although separate in provenance, are closely related, and each either deals with issues not considered in previous rules or is influenced strongly by its predecessor(s).¹⁰⁴ The *Regula Orientalis* is, in format and tone, more akin to the slightly later Rule of Benedict, as it attempts to combine information from Pachomius, the Second Rule of the Fathers, and the anonymous redactor.¹⁰⁵ A brief survey of these rules illustrates many aspects which will become particularly influential in European monastic life via the Rule of Benedict.

The key precepts of community and obedience to a superior all take shape in these rules, with RIVP in particular emphasizing the difficulty of the solitary life: ‘the desolation of the desert and the terrors of various monsters do not permit the brothers to live singly.’¹⁰⁶ Three of the rules—RIVP, 2RP, and 3RP—begin in almost identical fashion with a statement that the ‘composers’ of the rule had ‘convened’ or were ‘sitting together’ with the purpose of establishing a rule for the brothers to follow.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Carmela Viricillo Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, ‘Introduction’, in *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis*, trans. Carmela Viricillo Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, Minnesota, 1982, pp. 9-14.

¹⁰³ What follows is a summary of the proposed dates and region or monastic community of origin for each of the rules: RIVP, c. 400-410 from the community of Lérins, or c. 425-450 from the region of Rome, or c. 450-500 from the area of Southern Gaul influenced by Lérins; 2RP, c. 427 from the community of Lérins, or c. 450-475 from Italy, or c. 490-500 from Southern Gaul; 3RP, c. 500-550 from Gaul; RMac c. 480-500 from Provence influenced by Lérins; and RO c. 480-500 from either Italy or the monastery of Condat influenced by Lérins. See, Franklin et al, ‘Introduction’, pp. 10-12.

¹⁰⁴ Franklin et al, ‘Introduction’, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Franklin et al, ‘Introduction’, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Rule of the Holy Fathers Serapion, Macarius, Paphnutius and Another Macarius (RIVP)’, in *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis*, trans. Carmela Viricillo Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, Minnesota, 1982, 1.2. [. . . et quia heremi vastitas et diversorum monstrorum terror singillatim habitare fratres non patitur.]

¹⁰⁷ RIVP, 1, [Sedentibus nobis in unum, consilio saluberrimo comperti Dominum nostrum rogavimus ut nobis tribueret Spiritum Sanctum qui nos instrueret qualiter fratrum conversationem vel regulam vitae ordinare possimus.]; ‘The Second Rule of the Fathers (2RP)’, in *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis*, trans. Carmela Viricillo Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, Minnesota, 1982, Pref. [Residentibus nobis in unum in nomine Domini Ihesu Christi secundum traditionem partum virorum sanctorum, visum est nobis conscribere vel ordinare regulam quae in monasterio teneatur ad profectum fratrum . . .]; and ‘The Third Rule of the Fathers (3RP)’, in *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis*, trans. Carmela Viricillo Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, Minnesota, 1982, 1. [Cum in nomine Domini, una cum fratribus nostris convenissemus, imprimis placuit ut regula et instituta partum per ordinem legerentur . . .]

Although RMac and RO differ in this respect, lacking any formal kind of introduction, RMac makes clear that the aim of the rule is to help ‘order [the brothers’] steps,’ illustrating clearly that these rules were associated with cenobitical living.¹⁰⁸ RO begins with the very important process, mirrored in Benedict, of ascertaining what kind of man the abbot should be, and discussing the appointment of ‘two seniors . . . who will have charge of the discipline of all the brothers’.¹⁰⁹ The rules then diverge slightly; each appears to have a different focus or purpose although the overriding theme is one of obedience.¹¹⁰ Obedience in the monastic context is twofold: firstly, there is an explicit practical obedience, whereby the monk is instructed to practice obeisance, not just to the abbot, but to any brother of a higher rank.¹¹¹ This is particularly clear in RMac which focuses on regulating the behaviour of the individual. For example, chapter three of the rule opens with the exhortation; ‘Let no one consider himself more just than another, but let each one disparage himself as inferior to all.’¹¹² Secondly, there is an implicit spiritual obedience evident in the refrain that the brothers should be ‘[m]utually striving after the most perfect obedience’.¹¹³ Perfect obedience and the relinquishing of the will are lauded, and compared to Abraham’s act of total submission to God. It is this profound obedience, this act of submission, which I believe shapes the spiritual activity of religious men.

¹⁰⁸ ‘The Rule of Macarius (Rmac)’, in *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis*, trans. Carmela Virgilio Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, Minnesota, 1982, 1. [Milites ergo Christi sic taliter suos debent componere gressus caritatem inter se perfectissimam continentes Deum ex tota anima diligere et ex tota mente et ex toto corde et ex tota virtute sua.]

¹⁰⁹ *Regula Orientalis (RO)*, in *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis*, trans. Carmela Virgilio Franklin, Ivan Havener, and J. Alcuin Francis, Minnesota, 1982, 1, 2, 3; 2. [In monasterio seniors sint duo, ad quos vel praesente abate vel absente omnium fratrum disciplina et omnis cura monasterii pertineat, dantibus sibi vices per dies et dividendum inter se pondus ac necessitate monasterii.]

¹¹⁰ RIVP provides an overview of the purpose of the monastic life; 2RP focuses on the interior life of the monk, particularly prayer; 3RP dictates the punishment for those monks, including the abbot, who stray from the path; and RMac is concerned with the external and internal behaviour of the monk.

¹¹¹ RIVP, 1.4. [Volumus ergo unum praeesse super omnes, ne eab eius consilio vel imperio quicquam sinistrum declinare, sed sicut imperio Domini cum omni laetitia oboedire, dicente Apostolo ad Hebraeos: Oboedite praepositis vestris, quia ipsi vigilant pro vobis; et Dominus dixit: Nolo sacrificium, sed oboedientiam.]; 2.6. [Astantibus ergo ad orationem, nullus praesumat sine praecepto eius qui praest psalmi laudem emittere.]; 2RP, 1. [ita ut sine ipsius voluntate nullus fretrum quidquam agat neque accipat aliquid neque det nec usquam prorsus recedat sine verbo praecepti.]; 4. [Illud quoque observandum est ut praesente senior quocumque vel praecedente in ordine psallendi, sequens non habeat facultatem loquendi vela liquid praesumendi, nisi tantum is qui in ordine, ut dictum est, praecedere videtur.]; 3RP, 5, [quod iniunctum fuerit, sine murmuratione perficiat.]; 7. [Ad mensam autem specialiter nullus loquatur, nisi qui praest, vel interrogates fuerit.]

¹¹² RMac, 3. [Nullus se ab alio iustiore arbitretur, sed unusquisque ab omnibus se inferiorem contemnat, quia qui se exaltat humiliabitur et qui se humiliat exaltabitur.]

¹¹³ RMac, 2. [Invicem inter se perfectissimam sectantes oboedientiam . . .]; RIVP, 1.4. [His ergo tantis virtutibus fermata oboedientia magnopere, magno studio teneatur.]

Although it is apparent that Benedict was influenced to a small extent by these writings and others, there is no doubt that, of the monastic rules composed in the early medieval period, Benedict of Nursia's Rule (c. 540) was to become the most influential in the high medieval period.¹¹⁴ Obedience was the framework upon which the walls of the monastery would be constructed and three other significant features of the Rule clearly demonstrate the evolving nature of the monastic community: the trend towards a monastic hierarchy; the positioning of community above the individual; and the reduction in the severity of ascetic practices. The keystone to Benedict's overarching Rule was the abbot, and chapter two of his Rule defines 'What kind of man the abbot should be'. In this chapter, we can identify an increasing emphasis on the regulation of monastic behaviour and what attributes were most seemly for the monk. Leading the way should be the abbot:

Consequently, when someone is appointed abbot he should manage his disciples by teaching them in two ways: he ought to display all that is good and holy in his actions as much as in his words. In this way he will use words to teach the more able disciples the commands of the Lord, while to those who are stubborn and less intellectually sophisticated, he will demonstrate the Lord's teaching by means of his own actions. . . . He must not show any favouritism in the monastery. He ought not to love one more than the other, unless he finds one to be better in good deeds and in obedience.¹¹⁵

This increased emphasis on the qualities of the man who would lead the other monks is markedly different from the Pachomian Rule which, although it refers to the father of the monastery, makes no specific reference to who this man should be.¹¹⁶ Jerome and Augustine also emphasized the role of a father or leader, who was to be looked to for instruction and guidance, but they did not stray much beyond the prescription that the superior be obeyed and that he must be a man of good works.¹¹⁷ Benedict's Rule, however, sets out clearly to delineate the hierarchies of the house and the roles attendant to those hierarchies, including chapters additional to that concerning the

¹¹⁴ de Vogüé, 'The Cenobitic Rules', fig. 1, p. 182.

¹¹⁵ *RB*, 2. [Ergo cum aliquis suscipit nomen abbatis, duplici debet doctrina suis præesse discipulis; id est omnia bona et sancta factis amplius quam verbis ostendat; ut capacibus discipulis mandata Domini verbis proponat duris vero corde et simplicioribus factis suis divina præcepta demonstret. Omnia vero quæ discipulis docuerit esse contraria, in suis factis indicet non agenda, ne aliis prædicans ipse reprobis inveniatur, nequando dicat illi Deus peccanti: *Quare tu enarras justitias meas, et assumis, testamentum meum per os tuum? Tu vero odisti disciplinam, et projecisti sermones meos post te.* Et qui in fratris tui oculo festucam videbas, in tuo trabem non vidisti. . . . Non ab eo persona in monasterio discernatur. Non unus plus ametur quam alius, nisi quem in bonis actibus aut oboedientia invenerit meliorem. (*PL* 66, cols 0263b-0263c)]

¹¹⁶ Pachomius mentions the superior(s) some eighteen times, but all deal with how a monk should respond to the superior, not with what type of man the superior would be. See, for example: 'The Rules Of Saint Pachomius', Part 1, 'No one will dare to visit a sick person without the permission of his superior'; 'Nobody will sit during the work without the order of his superior'; Part 2, '[discipline] will be done only by the will and determination of his superior.'

¹¹⁷ Jerome, 'Letter to Rusticus', 15; *RB*, 7.1, 3.

Abbot which deal with the deans of the monastery, the cellarers, the prior, the porters, and the role of priests.¹¹⁸ This desire for hierarchy, and concern with the personal attributes of those members of the monastery's hierarchy, emphasises how *controlled* the monastic environment was. There was, paradoxically, little room for the individual in an environment created for the individual pursuit of a relationship with God.

Benedict's Rule also provides some insight as to why the austerities of the Egyptian monks were to become less acclaimed in the West for a period of approximately 400 years. Most obvious is a reduction in the expression of the ascetic life. Benedict developed rules concerning fasting, wakefulness, and clothing, encouraging monks to be moderate, but not excessive, in these things. Benedict is clear that, although the monks are '[to] love fasting,' it was up to the Abbot to ensure that this practice was not overbearing.¹¹⁹ For example, the brother who was to do the weekly reading should be allowed to 'receive a little to eat and drink before he begins to read, because of Holy Communion, and so that he does not find it too difficult to wait for his food'.¹²⁰ In keeping with the thoroughness of his instruction, Benedict devoted a chapter in his Rule to outlining when the monks should regularly fast, noting that during the period from Easter until Pentecost, they should dine twice a day. After Pentecost and during the summer, heat and work permitting, the monks should fast on Wednesday and Friday until the ninth hour; however, if it became too hot the brethren should continue to dine at the sixth hour.¹²¹ Benedict was also clear that monks should be allowed to rise during the winter season at 'the eighth hour of the night; so that, having rested till a little after midnight, they may rise refreshed,' and that a monk's clothing should take into account the 'nature of the climate in which

¹¹⁸ *RB*, see chapters: 21 Of the Deans of the Monastery; 31 The Kind of Man the Cellarer of the Monastery Ought to Be; 62 Of the Priests of the Monastery; 65 Of the Prior of the Monastery; and 66 Of the Porter of the Monastery.

¹¹⁹ *RB*, 4. [Jejunium amare. (*PL* 66, col. 0295c)]

¹²⁰ *RB*, 38. [Frater autem hebdomadarius accipiat *mixtum*, priusquam incipiat legere, propter communionem sanctam, et ne forte grave sit ei jejunium sustinere. (*PL* 66, col. 0604a)]

¹²¹ *RB*, 49. [A sancto Pascha usque ad Pentecosten, ad sextam reficiant fratres, et ad seram coenent. A Pentecoste autem tota aestate (si labores agrorum non habent monachi, aut nimietas aestatis non perturbat) quarta et sexta feria jejunent usque ad nonam: reliquis vero diebus ad sextam praudeant. Quae prandii sexta, si opera in agris habuerint, aut aestatis fervor minus fuerit, continuanda erit, et in abbatis sit providentia; et sic omnia temperet atque disponat, qualiter et animae salventur, et quod faciunt fratres, absque justa murmuratione faciant. Ab idibus autem Septembris usque ad caput Quadragesimae, ad nonam semper reficiant. In Quadragesima vero usque ad Pascha ad vesperam reficiant. Ipsa tamen vespera sic agatur, ut lumine lucernae non indigeant reficientes; sed luce adhuc dici omnia consumentur. Sed et omni tempore, sive coenae sive refectionis hora sic temperetur, ut cum luce fiant omnia. (*PL* 66, cols 0655d-0658a)]

they live, because in cold regions more is needed, while in warm regions less'.¹²² These chapters are all illustrative of the argument posited by George Cyprian Alston, that Benedict's aim was to promote an austere but healthy life, which created fit monks more able to perform the Divine Office.¹²³ This is emphasised by a particularly telling comment of Benedict in his chapter concerning fasting and prayers: 'Each brother must tell the abbot what he is offering and ask for the abbot's blessing and consent, because whatever is done without the father's permission might be attributed to unwarranted pride and a desire for self-glorification rather than to any reward.'¹²⁴ The role of the monk is clearly stated in Benedict's Rule: he is responsible for prayer and saving souls, as illustrated by the emphasis placed on the development of the Divine Office and the thirteen chapters devoted to describing exactly how and when each office should occur.¹²⁵ This regime could only be enacted in a community which was disciplined and obedient. There appeared to be no room for heroics or individualism as these sowed the seeds of discord and, more importantly, represented acts of disobedience towards the superior of the community.

In his contemporaneous rule, the Irish monastic St Columbanus (c. 590) takes the notion of obedience even further than Benedict. Columbanus asks, 'To what limits should obedience be carried? Obedience unto death is certainly enjoined on us, because Christ was obedient to His Father for us, unto death'.¹²⁶ At the root of Columbanus' austere and rigorous approach to the monastic life is the denial of one's will. He mirrored the concerns of Jerome when he emphasized the importance of praying to God to light the path of discretion as, '[o]n the right and the left of the path . . . the enemy places divers stumbling-blocks and snares'.¹²⁷ However, a monk's discretion is not enough; he must 'do nothing without counsel. . . . Though this may

¹²² *RB*, 8, 55. [8. Hiemis tempore, id est a calendis novembres usque in Pascha, juxta considerationem rationis, octava hora noctis surgendum est; ut modice amplius de media nocte pausetur, et jam digesti surgant. (*PL* 66, col. 0409b)] [55. Vestimenta fratribus secundum locorum qualitatem ubi habitant, vel aerum temperiem, dentur: quia in frigidis regionibus amplius indigetur, in calidis vero minus. (*PL* 66, col. 0771b)]

¹²³ George Cyprian Alston, 'Rule of St. Benedict', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, New York, 1907, accessed at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02436a.htm> (21 Aug 2009)

¹²⁴ *RB*, 49. [Hoc ipsum tamen quod unusquisque offert, abbati suo suggerat, et cum ejus fiat oratione et voluntate: quia quod sine permissione Patris spiritualis fit, praesumptioni deputabitur et vanae gloriae, non mercedi. (*PL* 66, col. 0738a)]

¹²⁵ *RB*, see chapters: 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; and 20.

¹²⁶ Columbanus, *Regula Monachorum* hereafter (*Reg. Mon.*), trans. G. S. M. Walker in, *Columbani Opera*, Dublin, 1956, pp. 124-142, 1. [Obedientia autem usque ad quem modum definitur? Usque ad mortem certe praecepta est; quia Christus usque ad mortem obedivit Patri pro nobis. (*PL* 80, col. 209b)]

¹²⁷ *Reg. Mon.*, 7; c.f. W. H. Freemantle, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series 2, vol. 6, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, p. 20, n.79.

appear hard to the hard of heart, viz., that a man be always dependent on the will of another . . . nothing gives greater peace and security to the mind than a peaceful conscience, and nothing is better calculated to procure this peace of conscience than the renunciation of one's own judgment'.¹²⁸ This declaration begins the section on mortification in Columbanus' Rule and it provided a clear statement as to the dangers of exercising one's will. It is also illuminating because it highlights the intent to suppress any overt expression of spirituality and it is clear that this very act of suppression provides a template for the behaviour of religious men:

The mortification of the monk is threefold: he must never think what he pleases, never speak what he pleases, never go where he pleases. No matter how distasteful the command imposed on him may be, he shall always say to his superior: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt," after the example of our Savior, who says elsewhere: "I came down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him that sent Me."¹²⁹

The aspects of the Rule concerning fasting, clothing, and silence are simply the elements which, enacted correctly, combine to produce the spiritually-driven, behaviourally-restricted monk.

Like Benedict, however, Columbanus also hinted at the dangers of excess, particularly when he reminded the reader that '[i]t is reasonable to promote spiritual progress by bringing the flesh into subjection by abstinence, but if abstinence is practised to excess, it ceases to be a virtue and becomes a vice'.¹³⁰ Hence, although it is proper for a monk to fast, he must also 'refresh his body with food'.¹³¹ I believe the notion that excess was portrayed as a vice in monastic literature is a vitally important point to remember when considering the apparent lack of extreme behaviours amongst religious men, particularly during the period of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries

¹²⁸ *Reg. Mon.*, 9. [*Sine consilio nihil facias* . . . Sed licet duris dura videatur haec disciplina, ut scilicet homo semper de ore pendeat alterius; caeteris tamen Deum timentibus dulcis ac secreta inveniatur, si ex integro, et non ex parte conservetur: quia nihil dulcius est conscientiae securitate, et nihil securius est animi impunitate, quam nullus sibi ipsi per se potest tradere, quia proprie aliorum est examinis. Hoc namque defendit a timore iudicii, quod jam examinaverit iudicantis censura, cui alieni ponderis imponitur moles, et totum portat quod suscipit, periculum. *Majus enim*, ut scriptum est, *periculum iudicantis quam ejus qui iudicatur*. (PL 80, col. 0251b)]

¹²⁹ *Reg. Mon.*, 9. [Mortificationis igitur triplex est ratio; non animo discordare, non lingua libita loqui, non ire quoquam absolute. Suum semper est dicere seni, quamvis contraria jubenti: *Non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu vis*: juxta exemplum Salvatoris, qui ait: *Descendi de coelo, non ut faciam voluntatem meam, sed voluntatem ejus qui misit me, Patris*. (PL 80, col. 0216a)]

¹³⁰ *Reg. Mon.*, 3. [Cibus sit vilis et vespertinus monachorum, satietatem fugiens, et potus ebrietatem: ut et sustineat, et non noceat. Olera, legumina, farina aquis mixta, cum parvo panis paximatio, ne venter oneretur, et mens suffocetur. Etenim utilitati et usui tantum consulendum est, aeterna desiderantibus praemia; et ideo temperandus est ita usus, sicut temperandus est labor: quia haec est vera discretio, ut possibilitas spiritalis profectus cum abstinentia carnem macerante retentetur. Si enim modum abstinentia excesserit, vitium, non virtus erit: virtus enim multa sustinet bona et continet. Ergo quotidie jejunandum est, sicut quotidie orandum est, quotidie laborandum, quotidieque est legendum. (PL 80, cols 0210c-0211a)]

¹³¹ *Reg. Mon.*, 3.

when the rise of female mystics in the historical record is the most marked. Excess is not presented as a problem for holy women such as Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), who lived for long periods solely on the Eucharist, or Christina Mirabilis (d. 1224), who would thrust herself into ovens.

While there are monastic rules written specifically for women, Christina's relationship to her community also raises another point concerning regulation. Christina was not a nun or an anchorite attached to a religious community or a church, and she certainly did not operate under the auspices of a rule. However, it is important for us to consider the monastic rules written specifically for women in order to discern if there were any substantive differences in how men and women were regulated.

Regulation of Women

The monastic reforms of the tenth century, and the so-called Gregorian Reform of the eleventh, fundamentally altered the interpersonal and wider societal relationships of the ordained clergy within the Western Catholic Church. While the Church reconfigured and strengthened its economic and political status within western Europe, it also perpetrated moral reform that was grounded in both monastic and ecclesiastical authority. Major casualties in this moral war were women, who were further marginalized within the institutional realm of the Church. Women also appear to have lost some ground within the sphere of contemplative religious life, despite a growth in monastic foundations over the eleventh century. While female monastic foundations maintained their links to male monasticism via the rules of Benedict or Augustine, pre-Reform rules written expressly for female monastic communities disappear, to be replaced by texts which deal specifically with the anchoritic way of life such as the *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclausarum*. These texts suggest that women had access to, or were attempting to access, forms of religious living which fell outside of the ever-tightening control of Rome. A lack of comparative male-focused texts such as these indicate that religious men continued to live within a strict and confining set of regulations, which did not allow them the spiritual freedom which was to be attained by a number of prominent women from the late twelfth century.

At the risk of the reader feeling slightly displaced in time, I wish to return to the early medieval period to comment briefly on the role of regulation in the female religious world. As male monasticism continued to reform throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, women religious were faced with a decline in acceptance and opportunity. As Julie Ann Smith notes, by the tenth century, 'monastic reformers were more concerned with male religious'.¹³² The reason for this lay in the belief that women would be unable to withstand the rigours of the newly invigorated Benedictine monasticism.¹³³ This understanding and concern that female weakness could hinder the correct practice of the Rule, is particularly evident in a letter from the twelfth-century abbess Heloise to Peter Abelard:

Through lack and need of this [a rule] it is the practice today for men and women alike to be received into monasteries to profess the same Rule, and the same yoke of monastic ordinance is laid on the weaker sex as on the stronger.

At present the one Rule of St Benedict is professed in the Latin Church by women equally with men, although, as it was clearly written for men alone, it can only be fully obeyed by men, whether subordinates or superiors.¹³⁴

In 512, Caesarius, bishop of Arles, composed the *Regula ad Virgines*, a rule specifically written for the female monastery of St Jean located in Arles.¹³⁵ In developing this rule exclusively for women, Caesarius presaged the concern spoken of some five hundred years later by Heloise. Caesarius had expressed the same sentiments in his *Regula* when explaining its construction: 'Because of this [difference] we have made the choice of certain prescriptions . . . so that you may all lead together . . . a regulated life and so that you may apply yourself to the practice of spiritual observances which are specifically adapted to your sex.'¹³⁶

I have argued to this point that religious men were more restricted in their ability to express themselves spiritually because of the overwhelming cultural forces exerted by monastic rules, particularly the Rule of Benedict. What this brief exploration of female monastics rules will show is that, prior to the tenth- and eleventh-century reform in monasticism, men and women had operated under very similar precepts. What, then, marks rules for women, written by men such as Augustine, Caesarius, and

¹³² Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West*, Aldershot, 2001, p. 147.

¹³³ Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives*, p. 147.

¹³⁴ *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. and intro. Betty Radice, revised M. T. Clanchy, Harmondsworth, 2003, Letter 6, p. 94.

¹³⁵ Thank you to Sarah Greer for bringing this Rule to my attention and allowing me to use her translation.

¹³⁶ Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad Virgines*, trans. Sarah Louise Greer, 'Sainted Rule: Female Religious Authority and the Role of the Abbess in Sixth-Century Gaul', unpublished BA (honours) Dissertation, University of Auckland, 2010, Appendix.

Donatus of Besançon, as feminine compared to the near-contemporary masculine Benedictine Rule? And did the demise of the female monastic rule lead to greater freedom for religious women?

Although Augustine's Rule is best known as the rule adopted by the canons regular and the Dominicans of the high medieval period, it began its life as a letter of counsel that Augustine wrote to his sister.¹³⁷ Despite the uncertainty about which version of the rule came first—the feminine or the masculine—the important point to note is that they are virtually the same.¹³⁸ This suggests that Augustine believed that both female and male monastics were capable of living a restricted and focused life.¹³⁹ In areas where we might expect variance for women, such as obedience to men or ascetic practice, we see none at all. Chapter seven directed the nun or monk to obey her or his superior: 'Obey your superior as mother/father, always with the respect worthy of her/his position, so as not to offend god in her/him. Be especially obedient to the priest who bears responsibility for all you.'¹⁴⁰ Augustine exhibited no sign that he was concerned at the presence of a male (priest) in the female community and he expected both nuns and monks to afford this cleric the greatest regard. This equality between the sexes is also illustrated in his precept on fasting, where he expected that they should fast 'to the extent [their] health allowed' and anyone who was unwell should be allowed to eat.¹⁴¹ This pattern of similarity is repeated when we compare the rules of both Caesarius and Donatus with the Benedictine Rule.

While Caesarius's *Regula* was written some twenty five years before Benedict of Nursia composed his Rule for monks, and Donatus of Besançon's Rule appears approximately fifty years after, it is the **similarities** in the texts which are striking; not any sense of gendered difference. For example, when discussing the sleeping

¹³⁷ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 162; Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives*, p. 117; Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 66; and Jo Ann McNamara, 'The Ordeal of Community: Hagiography and Discipline in Merovingian Convents', in Jo Ann McNamara, *The Ordeal of Community*, Toronto, 1993, p. 6.

¹³⁸ There does appear to be some disagreement as to the chronology of the feminine and masculine version of Augustine's *Ordo Monasterii*. George Lawless notes that 'one is a transcription of the other' and that historians are hampered in their dating of these works 'by a vacuum of historical evidence'. See Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford, 1987, p. 69.

¹³⁹ Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives*, p. 117.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, 'Rule', in George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule*, Oxford, 1987, 7, pp. 116, 100. The first page reference is for the female version of the Rule and the second for the male version. The Latin text is masculine in grammatical gender but as Lawless notes, the female version of the Rule is near identical with feminine grammar and pronouns substituted for the male; [Praeposito tamquam patri oboediatur, honore seruato, ne in illo offendatur dues; multo magis presbytero, qui omnium uestrum curam gerit].

¹⁴¹ Augustine, 'Rule', 3, pp. 111, 85. [Carnem uestram domate ieiuniis et abstinentia escae et potus, quantum ualetudo permittit]

arrangements for the nuns, Caesarius stated unequivocally that '[a]ll shall live in a communal room with separate beds'.¹⁴² Benedict also maintained that each monk should have his own bed and 'if possible they should all sleep in one room'.¹⁴³ On the issue of monks and nuns possessing their own property, Caesarius, Benedict, and Donatus were again in agreement, with Caesarius noting that '[n]o-one should consider anything to be her own property, whether it is an article of clothing or any other object'.¹⁴⁴ Benedict took this precept even further stating: 'no one should presume to . . . possess anything of his own—nothing whatever, not a book or writing tablet or pen or anything at all, for monks should not even count their own bodies and wills as their own.'¹⁴⁵ This accord is evident across a number of other precepts, including: the need to keep silent; the admittance of newcomers; the care of the sick; and the administration of punishment.¹⁴⁶ This clearly illustrates that male and female religious were living in communities which operated under extremely similar practical and didactic instruction.

Without doubt, the Rules of Caesarius and Benedict were developed using the same sanctioned literature, with both illustrating strong parallels to works from Cassian, and late-antique monastic rules such as the Rule of Pachomius and the Rule of the Master discussed previously.¹⁴⁷ Donatus, as he states quite clearly in the Prologue to his Rule, has gathered 'the choicest blooms' from 'the rule of the holy Cæsarius . . . along with those of the most blessed Benedict and the abbot Columbanus' when constructing his rule.¹⁴⁸ This didactic continuity reinforces the authoritative nature of the texts, and emphasized the authors' expectations that they were creating policy for similar environments where gender was not necessarily visible. Where variation is in

¹⁴² Caesarius, *Regula*, 9; Donatus of Besançon, 'The Rule of Donatus of Besançon', trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg, in Jo Ann McNamara, *The Ordeal of Community*, Toronto, 1993, 11. [Ut nulli liceat semotam habere mansionem. (PL 87, col. 0297b)]

¹⁴³ RB, 22. [Singuli per singular lecta dormiant. (PL 66, col. 0489c)]

¹⁴⁴ Caesarius, *Regula*, 17; Donatus, 8. [Ut nulli liceat rem propriam possidere].

¹⁴⁵ RB, 33. [Praecipue hoc vitium peculiare radicitus amputandum est de monasterio, ne quis praesumat aliquid dare aut accipere sine jussione abbatis, neque aliquid habere proprium, nullam omnino rem, neque codicem, neque tabulas, neque graphium, sed nihil omnino: quippe quibus nec corpora sua, nec voluntates licet habere in propria potestate. (PL 66, col. 0551c)]

¹⁴⁶ On silence see, Caesarius, *Regula*, 17, 19; RB, 6; and Donatus, 19; on newcomers see, Caesarius, *Regula*, 4; RB, 58; and Donatus, 6, 7; on the sick see, Caesarius, *Regula*, 32, 71; RB, 36; and Donatus, 12; and on discipline see, Caesarius, *Regula*, 12, 13, 26, 34; RB, 23, 24, 25; and Donatus, 73.

¹⁴⁷ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁸ Donatus, prol., [Quam ob causam saepius mihi injungitis ut, explorata sancti Caesarii Arelatensis episcopi regula, quae specialius Christi virginibus dedicata est, una cum beatissimorum Benedicti quoque et Columbani abbatum, ut puta quibusdam, ut ita dixerim, collectis in unum flosculis ad instar Encheridion excerptere vobis, vel coacervare, deberem, et quae specialius femineo sexui custodienda competere promulgarem, dicentes quod regulae praedictorum Patrum vobis minime convenirent, cum easdem viris potius, et nequaquam feminis, edidissent. (PL 87, col. 0273b)]

evidence, and it is most prominent in precepts concerning intercession, enclosure, and asceticism, the spectre of gender becomes less evanescent.

The *Regula*, and to a lesser extent Donatus' rule, exhibit a strong sense that the female monastery had a particularly powerful intercessory role. In his 'Prologue,' Caesarius 'implores' the 'consecrated virgins' to pray that he may be 'admitted to follow alongside you'.¹⁴⁹ To conclude his recapitulation of the Rule, Caesarius reminded the nuns of his opening plea:

Nevertheless, most pious sisters, I beseech you and entreat you before our Lord God, that you recall my humble self and your holy mothers, that is, those who have founded this monastery and instituted the Rule, in perpetual gratitude and through your charitable intercession keep vigil for us day and night. And that the supplications of your holiness, by public prayer whether in offices by day or vigils by night will obtain it for us, that your implorances rising to the sight of the Lord, allow us and grant us, me to be a worthy bishop of his Church, and they to be worthy superiors and servants of the holy virgins.¹⁵⁰

There appears far less emphasis in Caesarius's rule concerning issues of personal salvation and a personal relationship with God. This is a particularly important aspect of Benedict's Rule and he devoted most of his prologue to reminding the monks that 'we must prepare our hearts and bodies to fight by means of holy obedience to his instructions'.¹⁵¹ Donatus, echoing Caesarius, also resorted to an almost self-serving plea for intercession in his prologue.¹⁵² The nuns were to focus on aspects of their shared life such as community coherence and a devotion to worldly intercession which were not going to become as important in the male monastic setting until the later Carolingian period.

While the rules for virgins encouraged unity and intercession, they also were at pains to provide a workable model which restricted the nuns' contact with secular society to the absolute minimum. In Benedict's Rule, provision is made for brothers who needed to undertake journeys outside of the monastery and although it was not a desirable activity, Benedict, rather than discouraging it, instead simply provided

¹⁴⁹ Caesarius, *Regula*, prol.

¹⁵⁰ Caesarius, *Regula*, 72.

¹⁵¹ *RB*, prol. [Ergo praeparanda sunt corda et corpora nostra sanctae praeceptorum obedientiae militatura. (PL 66, col. 0218b)]

¹⁵² Donatus, prol. [Hoc ergo ego omnium ultimus specialius almitati vestrae humili et subnixa prece deposco, ut pro me, qui petitioni vestrae obtemperans haec per cola vel commata temperavi, tam in diurnis quam in nocturnis officiis, dum in hoc luteo corpusculo dego, creberrimas fundatis preces, et postquam Domino jubente migravero, sacras per me hostias offerri Domino faciatis, quatenus cum vobis in choro sacrarum ac sapientium virginum, virginitatis palma beatitudoque tribuetur; saltem mihi cunctis onerato peccatis delictorum venia tribuatur. (PL 87, cols 0274c-0274d)]

guidelines for the behaviour of the brothers when absent.¹⁵³ Caesarius, however, was adamant in his belief that all nuns should remain inside the monastery: 'This is a point that we especially wish for you to observe without any reduction, that until her death, no-one amongst you, either with permission or on her own presumption, is to leave the monastery or go into the basilica, where you have a door.'¹⁵⁴ This concern with contact was further emphasized in a series of rules which determined who was able to enter the monastery and when they were able to do so.¹⁵⁵ This extreme emphasis on claustration was disregarded by Donatus, however, as it was not seen as a suitable or practical expectation for women living in an isolated environment.¹⁵⁶ This kind of disagreement or difference in opinion on what was correct behaviour is something we are more likely to encounter in the customaries of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁵⁷ What it illustrates is the continuing anxiety over how women were to be accommodated *within* the ever-growing enterprise that was the western Catholic Church.

Perhaps the single biggest difference between the Rules of Caesarius and Donatus and the Rule of Benedict is the lack of discussion concerning asceticism. As I discussed previously in this chapter, Benedict was careful to provide instruction to the brothers on how maintain balance in their ascetic lives. This included direction on appropriate clothing and the dangers of excessive wakefulness and fasting. In neglecting to discuss aspects of the ascetic life at all, Caesarius provides us the strongest evidence that his Rule was composed for 'your sex'. His chapter on fasting is brief and refers only to *when* fasting should take place; there are no references at all as to *how* fasting should be approached.¹⁵⁸ There are two possible reasons for this: firstly, Caesarius saw no need for this kind of instruction, because the nuns did not engage in any kind of ascetic practice; or secondly, Caesarius did not believe that nuns *could* engage in the same kinds of ascetic practices as men. Unfortunately, the *Regula* offers us no indication as to Caesarius's thoughts on this matter, although I am inclined to the second reason;

¹⁵³ *RB*, 51 pertains to brothers on a short journey; 67 discusses brothers sent on a journey.

¹⁵⁴ Caesarius, *Regula*, 50.

¹⁵⁵ Caesarius, *Regula*, 36-40.

¹⁵⁶ McNamara, 'The Ordeal of Community', p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Customaries provided monasteries with a set of guidelines which complimented the Rule of Benedict. They were of particular importance because they recorded the established practices of monasteries and provided supplementary guidelines that all monasteries in a particular area could follow, thus maintaining conformity. See, Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, pp. 107-08; and Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 170-71.

¹⁵⁸ Caesarius, *Regula*, 67.

particularly when we take into account his extreme policy on enclosure. This strongly suggests that Caesarius saw the nuns as vulnerable and weak.

Donatus, while also neglecting any constructive discussion of asceticism, proceeded to present female vulnerability in another way. His Rule presented a staggering range of physical punishments to be employed as correctives. For example, any nun who takes the hand of another in affection 'will be improved with twelve blows'.¹⁵⁹ Swearing incurred a punishment of 'two suppositions of silence and one hundred blows'.¹⁶⁰ These specific and overtly physical punishments reflect the influence of Columbanus's rule on Donatus's work. Compare this to Benedict, who advocated the use of 'stripes and other bodily punishments' only for those who failed to amend their behaviour after two verbal admonitions or for the 'wicked and the hard of heart, and the proud and disobedient'.¹⁶¹ By advocating the use of physical punishment as the first action for correction, Donatus presents female vulnerability as intellectual inferiority. He is suggesting that women cannot learn by reason or admonition and that their connection to their physical body meant that they were more able to absorb correction through physical punishment.

When Heloise penned her request for a rule, 'because we find this was never done by the Holy Fathers,' there is a strong indication that she was either unaware of the earlier rules for women, or that she believed them to be inadequate, and therefore not necessary to mention.¹⁶² Heloise composed her letter to Abelard sometime between 1133 and 1138, while monasticism was moving through a second phase of reform which had seen the number of monasteries established for women in western Europe and England double between the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁶³ However, this growth accounted for less than five percent of the total growth of monastic

¹⁵⁹ Donatus, 32. [Prohibetur ne pro dilectione aliqua ulla alterius teneat manum, sive steterit, sive ambulaverit, sive sederit. Quod si fecerit, duodecim percussioibus emendetur. Juvenculae, quibus imponitur terminus, ut non se appellent invicem, si transgressae fuerint, quadraginta percussioibus poeniteat. (PL 87, col. 0284c)]

¹⁶⁰ Donatus, 35. [Juramentum, vel maledictum, velut venenum diaboli fugere et vitare contendat; quod si fecerit, duabus silentii suppositionibus, et centum percussioibus poeniteat. (PL 87, col. 0285b)] Also see rules 25-28, 33. Rule 34 prescribes genuflexion as form of repentance for those nuns who endure nocturnal visions or illusions of the devil.

¹⁶¹ RB, 2. [Et honestiores quidem atque intelligibiles animos, prima vel secunda admonitione verbis corripit; improbos autem et duros corde, ac superbos, vel in obedientes, verberum vel corporis castigatione in ipso initio peccati coerceat. (PL 66, col. 0264b)]

¹⁶² Heloise and Abelard, *The Letters*, 6, p. 94.

¹⁶³ For dates see Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215*, Ithaca, 1997, p. 18.

establishments in the eleventh century—monasticism was very much a male concern.¹⁶⁴ What is also clear from Bruce Venarde's analysis is that many female monastic foundations were not aligned with male monasteries. He notes that during the 'period of the most rapid growth, 1126-1150, nearly 60 percent of the new nunneries were either autonomous Benedictine or Augustinian communities or the houses of Fontevrist and Gilbertine orders'.¹⁶⁵ This fracturing of the relationship between monastic men and women is not unusual if we consider the process of ecclesiastic reform which had been underway since the early years of the eleventh century, a point I will return to later. What is also clear is that, from the early years of the second millennium, there is an increasing diversity in religious practice. Monasteries were no longer the domain of the elite and, coupled with a surge in the desire to live an apostolic life, more men came into contact with institutionalized forms of religious life.

Rules for solitaries

What this attention to monastic rules for holy men and women indicates is that their lives were constrained and controlled. However, while generations followed Pachomius and elected to live their lives within religious communities, many still wished to follow the way of Antony and retire to the 'desert'. There is ample evidence from the time of Antony through to the high medieval period of individuals—both men and women—who chose to remove themselves from all society. Gregory of Tours (d. 594), tells us of St Friardus, a recluse, who 'left his small dwelling, forgot his family and his country, and went to find the wilderness, lest by staying in the world mundane activities should be an impediment to his prayers'.¹⁶⁶ Gregory also records the story of Leobardus as an example of one 'who turn(ed) from the world and . . . had the strength to complete the pious enterprise with the help of divine mercy'.¹⁶⁷ These examples

¹⁶⁴ Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*, p. 18.

¹⁶⁵ Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁶ *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, trans. and intro. Edward James, Liverpool, 1991, 10.2. [Et egressus ab hospitolo suo, oblitus parentes et patriam, eremum petiit, ne saeculo habitanti impedimentum aliquod de oratione mundi sollicitudo conferret. (PL 71, col. 1056c)]

¹⁶⁷ *Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers*, 20.prol. [Ecclesia fidelis aedificatur, quotiescunque sanctorum gesta devotissime replicantur: et licet de his teneat maximum gaudium, quod hi qui ab intio aetatis religiosam vitam ducentes pervenire meruerunt perfetionis as portum, tamen et de his Domino iubente laetatur, qui conversi a saeculo opus inchoatum valuerunt perducere, divina opitulante misericordia, ad effectum. (PL 71, col. 1092)]

from Gregory show how it was important to relay to the audience the different ways in which an individual could approach the religious life. In the high medieval period, Stephen of Obazine (d. 1154) and his companion Peter decided to visit the hermit Bertrand for some instruction as they embarked upon the solitary life, again illustrating the importance these liminal individuals had in the wider religious community.¹⁶⁸ A similar story from the *vita* of Romuald of Ravenna (d. 1027), sheds light on how problematic the solitary life could be. He went to visit a hermit named Venerio and, rather than seeking advice, he chastised him for not living under a rule.¹⁶⁹ Is it possible to have a rule for solitaries and how can it be enforced? I want to consider these questions now.

The beginning of the tenth century saw the composition of the *Rule for Solitaries*, written by Grimlaicus. This is, according to Andrew Thornton, ‘the first rule for people who live as cenobitic solitaries’.¹⁷⁰ The notion that an individual could live as solitary amongst others seems counterintuitive, yet if we pause to reflect on the words of Amma Syncletica quoted near the beginning of this chapter, it becomes clear that the physical environment should be of lesser importance than the state of the monk’s mind.¹⁷¹ Grimlaicus was proposing a rule for solitaries who lived within a community, not solitaries who lived by themselves; however, it is at this point that the definition or understanding of the terms monk, solitary, and hermit becomes clouded. Grimlaicus opens his Rule by attempting to clear the air over these apparently different kinds of religious men:

We must first indicate why someone is called a “monk” or “solitary,” and then, with God’s gracious help, proceed to explain other matters. The word monk [*monachus*] comes from Greek and means that a person is single [*singularis*]. *Monas* is Greek for the Latin singleness [*singularitas*]. Hence “solitary” gives the meaning of the word “monk.” That is why, whether one says “monk” or “solitary,” it is one in the same thing.

But let us see how many kinds of solitaries there are. There are two kinds of solitaries: one is anchorites, that is, hermits; the other is cenobites, that is, those who live in

¹⁶⁸ *The Life of Saint Stephen of Obazine* (hereafter *VSO*), in *Robert of La Chaise-Dieu and Stephen of Obazine*, trans. and intro. Hugh Feiss, Maureen M. O’Brien, and Ronald Pepin, Minnesota, 2010, 1.3.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Damian, *The Life of Blessed Romuald* (hereafter *VRom.*), in *The Mystery of Romuald and the Five Brothers: Stories from the Benedictines and Camaldolese*, trans. Thomas Matus, California, 1994, 24. [Cui Romualdus ait: “Si crucem Christi portas, superest ut Christi bedientiam non relinuas. Vade igitur et consensu a proprio abbate suscepto revertere et sub eius dominio humiliter vive, quatinus sacri operis edifitium, quod bona voluntas edificat, humilitas erigat, obedientie virtus extollat.” (Tobacco, p. 51)]

¹⁷⁰ Andrew Thornton, ‘Introduction’, in Grimlaicus, *Rule for Solitaries*, trans. and intro. Andrew Thornton, Minnesota, 2011, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ *Apop. patrum*, Syncletica, 19.

monasteries. Neither of these kinds should be instituted in the first fervor of conversion, but they should first be given a prolonged testing in the observance of the monastery.¹⁷²

Was Romuald aware that such a Rule existed when he berated Venerio for not living under the direction of another? Certainly, the key point to recognise here is that the solitary needed to submit to the authority of another, lest his own self-will usurp his humility. This obedience is best achieved in a communal setting. Not many could achieve the status of an Antony, and as I will illustrate in chapter four, even the most extraordinary holy men in the high medieval period who desired to become hermits were eventually reclaimed by the institution.

If we look to the high medieval period, we are offered no clear companion to Grimlaicus's Rule, particularly for men. They remained under the control of the Rule of Benedict, now firmly established as the premier rule for monastics by the Anianian reforms of the Carolingian period. Rules for solitary women, however, point to some of the issues confronting the solitary religious individual. The introduction to the 1993 Penguin translation of the *Ancrene Wisse* raises an interesting point concerning asceticism, as Hugh White eloquently explains the role of the anchorite or hermit in the medieval religious landscape. Reflecting on St Benedict's thoughts concerning anchorites and hermits, White describes them as 'the spiritual crack-troops, particularly heroic operatives in the fight against the forces of evil'.¹⁷³ The terms anchorite and hermit have an interchangeable function when it comes to gender, although anchorite is particularly attached to women in its feminine form anchoress. Likewise, hermit is, in the high medieval period, attached more to men. Hermits and anchorites also functioned within two differing spatial contexts, with anchorites being committed to a cell in a fixed place for life, whilst hermits were wanderers continually in search of solitude.¹⁷⁴ The solitary, transient life of the male hermit contributes, I

¹⁷² Grimlaicus, *Rule for Solitaries*, trans. and intro. Andrew Thornton, Minnesota, 2011, 1. [Primum igitur indagare oportet cur monachus, vel cur solitarius, et sic demum, auxiliante divina clementia, ad caetera exponenda rite transeamus. Monachus enim graeca etymologia vocatur, eo quod sit singularis. Monas enim Graece, Latinae singularitas dicitur. Ergo solitaries interpretatur vocabulum monachi. Idcirco enim sive dicatur monachus sive solitaries, unum atque idem est. sed jam videamus quot sunt genera solitiorum. Duo sunt namque genera solitiorum; unum anachoretarum, id est, eremitarum; alterum vero coenobitarum, hoc est, monasteriale. Haec autem amborum genera non conversionis fervore novitio debent institute, sed diuturna monasterii exeritatione prius debent probari, quatenus probati ad perfectionis culmen, domino miserante, conscendere valeant. (PL 103, cols 0577d-0578d)]

¹⁷³ Hugh White, 'Introduction', in *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Hugh White, Harmondsworth, 1993, p. xii; RB, 1.

¹⁷⁴ White, 'Introduction', p. viii.

believe, to his absence in the historical record. For every Antony, Bernard of Aniane or Robert of Arbrissel, there must have many others about whom we can know nothing.

While female anchorites were fixed in space and, therefore, accessible to all and sundry, transient religious were probably more common at this time of religious revival but less extraordinary and less worthy of comment.¹⁷⁵ Those hermits who do exist within the historical record come to us either via their own *vita*, or by mention in the life or works of another person.¹⁷⁶ As Henry Mayr-Harting points out in his discussion of twelfth-century England, these *vitae* of a few individuals couple with references to other texts such as pipe rolls, charters, narratives, and archeological discoveries of and in monasteries, to give us some sense of those individuals 'who could not, so to speak, break the historical sound barrier with miracles when their more 'discrete' methods failed, and who are thus, at best, only names to us'.¹⁷⁷ Mayr-Harting also suggests that the rules for recluses provide some insight into the world of the hermit and anchorite, although rules aimed specifically at recluses are not common—Mayr-Harting mentions only two: Aelred of Rievaulx's *The Eremital Life* and the *Ancren Riwele*.¹⁷⁸ There could be a strong argument made that all monastic rules are rules for recluses, seeing as they deal with instruction for those who have chosen to remove themselves from the world in order to pursue a closer relationship with God.

As we have seen, however, monastic rules are focused as much (or more) on the maintenance of the community as they are on the religious development of the individual. In this aspect, Aelred and the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* differ, in that they have staked a claim for their status as instructional rather than institutional. The *Ancrene Wisse* and Aelred provide an interesting point of departure in that they were both works written specifically for women—the *Ancrene Wisse* for a small group of solitary women and Aelred's text composed for his sister who wished to become a recluse. Are these texts evidence of a separate form of religious life accessible only to women? At first glance, the answer to this question seems to be yes. However, a closer examination of both texts reveals instruction that is not differentiated on the grounds of gender, but rather on the basis of input and outcome—in other words, the

¹⁷⁵ Henry Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse', *History*, 60, 1975, p. 337.

¹⁷⁶ Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse', p. 337; for example, Godric of Finchale has his own *vita* whereas Venerio, mentioned above, only comes to us via the *vita* of Romuald.

¹⁷⁷ Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse', p. 337.

¹⁷⁸ Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse', p. 337. Mayr-Harting has used an alternative spelling here for the *Ancrene Wisse*.

more a religious individual devotes himself or herself to the spiritual life, the greater the reward.

In the Preface to the *Ancrene Wisse*, the author emphasized the inappropriate importance afforded to the institutional orders by those who would immediately ask the anchorites which order they belonged to:

Paul, the first anchorite, Antony and Arsenius, Macarius and the others—were they not religious and of St James's order? Also St Sarah and St Synclectica and other such, both men and women, with their coarse mattresses and their hard hairshirts—were they not of a good order? And were they white or black, as foolish people, who think the order resides in the cloak, ask you?¹⁷⁹

The author suggested that the true expression of spirituality resides within, not without, and that religion resides in the purity of the inward soul, not in the outward clothing.¹⁸⁰ The author is not degrading the religious orders—indeed, he argues that when a group is intent on expressing love together then outward uniformity is desired—yet the text draws a clear distinction between the solitary hermit or anchorite, and those living in a community.¹⁸¹ Above all things, the anchorite is to protect the purity of her inward life and to so this she must erect external barriers.

The *Ancrene Wisse* portrays a powerful gender stereotype in its instruction concerning the cell of the anchorite in the second distinction, 'Protecting the heart through the senses'. This chapter creates a powerful metaphor for seclusion using physical objects, symbols, and colour. This metaphor focuses on the windows (eyes) as the entranceway to the interior of the cell (heart). An anchorite should shield her eyes lest they let in a vision which could steal away her heart. Thus, the windows of her cell should be shrouded in black cloth, as it signifies 'that you are black and worthless to the world outside'.¹⁸² The black curtain should be marked by a white cross which signifies purity and virginity; thus, the white cross protects white virginity.¹⁸³ However, while the curtains solved a practical purpose as well in keeping out the wind, they also prevented the inward destructive gaze of men. This concern with men looking at women is common in religious writings from the high medieval period, and the texts mirror the unequal nature of this exchange.

¹⁷⁹ *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses*, trans. Hugh White, Harmondsworth, 1993, pref.

¹⁸⁰ *Ancrene Wisse*, pref. The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* is believed to be a Dominican friar from Shropshire or Herefordshire; see, Hugh White, 'Introduction', pp. xviii-xix.

¹⁸¹ *Ancrene Wisse*, pref.

¹⁸² *Ancrene Wisse*, 2.

¹⁸³ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2.

Gerald of Wales instructed the clergy to be guarded when it came to looking at women: 'If you could imagine the skin removed [from the body], you would look upon that which once enticed you as wholly contemptible. What then would you find so desirable? What then would you find so delightful to your eyes or to your embraces.'¹⁸⁴ Yet Gerald was also careful to point out that women were not to blame completely for this problem, and he also raised an interesting point concerning gender. He recounted the story of a 'certain hermit' who, coming across a convent, turns away lest he 'cast [his] sight upon women'. The prioress of the convent happens to meet him upon the road and rebukes the hermit for his actions telling him that, "Were you a perfect monk, you would not even think of us as women".¹⁸⁵ Gerald, in this instance, blamed the curious gaze of man, but at the same time appeared to be at pains to explain away this certain vulnerability in men. Adam of Eynsham related Hugh of Lincoln's account of the modest St Ancelin, Bishop of Bellay. According to Hugh, Ancelin never had cause to look upon a woman, apart from one exception, and when discussing the 'need for caution in looking at women' was heard to 'generally say, 'I, indeed, see all women as one and the same, for I refuse to observe what they look like'. He, too, contended that a man would be less likely to desire a woman if 'he should see the filth and corruption within'.¹⁸⁶ Unlike Gerald and Adam, the ecclesiastic reformer Peter Damian (d. 1072) chose to illustrate the dangers of looking at a woman with an example from the natural world:

On a certain mountain in the East there are fiery stones that are both male and female, and are called *pyroboli*. When they are apart from one another they do not burn; but if the female stone approaches the male, fire suddenly erupts from them, so that everything near the mountain is consumed by the smoking flames. From these stones we should learn that if we are not to be engulfed by the fire of lust, we should avoid

¹⁸⁴ Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church: A Translation of Gemma Ecclesiastica by Giraldus Cambrensis* (hereafter *Gem. Eccl.*), trans. John J. Hagen, Leiden, 1979, II.4. [Item si cute revolute per abstrhentem saltem intellectum, quae te tunc allicit, continens hoc ordine simul et contemptum inspexeris, quid tunc, quaeso, concupiscibile, quid delectabile vel oculis occurred vel amplexibus? (Brewer, p. 182)]

¹⁸⁵ *Gem. Eccl.*, II.16. [Cui obviam pergens priorissa quaesivit ab eo quare a via divertisset. Respondit ille, dicens: "Ne in mulieres, scilicet oculos, injicerem." Cui illa: "Si perfectus," inquit, "monachus esses, nec nos etiam faeminas esse perpendisses." (Brewer, p. 240)]

¹⁸⁶ Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis: The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, Decima L. Douie and Hugh Farmer, eds, 2 vols., London, 1961, 4.12. [Cum super hujuscemodi cautela oculi in mulierem non fingendi sermo haberetur, coram meraorato Belensi episcopo, dicero idem consueverat, "Ego sane," inquit, "feminas indifferenter quaslibet aspicio, sed mox universas excorio." Quod ea ratione proferebat quod nimirum suo aspectui illecebrosae cutis praestigium lenocinari non sineret, cujus animus affectu voluptatis extrinsecum non intueretur nitorem, sed potius motu doloris, veluti pelle subducta, intrinsecus latentem conspicaretur corruptionis foeditatem. (Dimock, p. 204)]

looking at women. For, in seeing them, flames may be ignited and cause us a brush fire, not on the mountain, but in our very soul.¹⁸⁷

In each of these examples, the danger for a man of looking at a woman is made clear and he should fear not only her ability to arouse lust, but also his apparent inability to inhibit that arousal. This particular understanding of male physiology is something I will return to later.

The *Ancrene Wisse* provided an alternative view of this traditional understanding of the interaction between man and woman. An anchorite is to ensure that her heart or purity does not escape via a fleeting glance, with the text offering examples of biblical individuals who were betrayed by vision: Lucifer, who fell because he looked upon his own handsome countenance; Eve, who looked upon the tree; and Bathsheba, who *caused* David to sin when she uncovered herself in his sight.¹⁸⁸ This last example expressed to the anchorite her responsibility for remaining within the realm of her interior (both physical and metaphysical) and outside of the realm of the world. David sinned because of Bathsheba, not because of David. The author then amplifies this by equating the eyes of women to weapons for use against ‘the lady of chastity – that is, God’s wife’.¹⁸⁹ This intensity of instruction concerning the soul’s windows to the world greatly shrinks the universe of the anchorite. She must be wary of the outside and of others. She ‘[must] not invite any man to look in at your altar’.¹⁹⁰ A sexually-generated fear of woman is implicit in this statement. Female sexuality must be contained.

A story from the *vita* of Arnulf of Villers (d. 1228), however, tells about his rebuke of a recluse who turned away a young man. We are offered in this tale, a contradictory view of the responsibilities of solitary women. According to Arnulf’s biographer, Goswin, there lived, near to the monastery of Villers, a ‘very devout and correspondingly gracious’ recluse who had a great friendship with Arnulf.¹⁹¹ She was

¹⁸⁷ Peter Damian, *The Letters of Peter Damian*, trans. Owen J. Blum, vols. 1-3, 5-7, The Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation, Washington, D.C., 1989-2005, 86.15. [In quodam nempe monte Orientis lapides sunt igniferi, qui masculus et femina nuncupantur, et dicuntur phiroboli. Qui nimirum cum al se invicem procul sunt, non accenduntur, si vero femina appropinquaverit masculo, protinus ex eis ignis egreditur, ita ut omnia quae circa mon tem sunt flammis vaporantibus exurantur. Ab ipsis ergo lapidibus edocemur, ut si consumi libidinis incendio nolumus, muliebris aspectus speciem declinemus, ne de conspecta forma flamma prosiliat, quae in nobis non montis, sed mentis fructa pervadat. (MGH, Reindel, p. 468)]

¹⁸⁸ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2.

¹⁸⁹ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2.

¹⁹¹ Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers* (hereafter VArn.), in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*,

often visited by a young cleric who sought her advice and over time his visits became more frequent until he sought recourse with her daily. She was troubled by this and ordered him to attend to his classes more frequently rather than visiting her.¹⁹² When he refused, she ‘became angry and indignant with him and vowed to the Lord, quite indiscreetly, that she would not speak to him for a month’.¹⁹³ This engendered a counter-complaint to the Lord from the young man that he had been deserted by ‘this teacher and mother of his’.¹⁹⁴ The recluse was stricken by a fever, brought down upon her by the Lord, according to Arnulf, because she had ‘so senselessly rebuff[ed], and treat[ed] as a stranger, one whom you *had mothered in Christ* (1 Cor. 4:15), a newborn infant you should still be cradling, still nursing with the milk of *consolation!* (Isa. 66:11)’.¹⁹⁵ There is no concern portrayed at all as to any impropriety at a young man visiting a reclusive woman so often. In fact, the Lord, via Arnulf, is actively encouraging a relationship that countermands the *Ancrene Wisse* entirely.

The *Ancrene Wisse* provides further insight into the reasons why mystic women are more pronounced in the historical record. In this case, it may be that those women are more visible because they did **not** conform to the idea that women should be invisible and silent. The *Ancrene Wisse* is forthright in its instruction to the anchorite as to her behaviour at the visit of a priest:

Listen to his words and keep completely silent, so that when he leaves you, he does not know either your good or evil and does not know whether to blame you or praise you. Some are so learned or speak so wisely that they would like the person sitting with them to know it, and give word for word and degenerate into scholars when they should be anchoresses, and teach him, who had come to teach them—would through their conversation to known and recognized as one of the wise.¹⁹⁶

This silence is not the silence of contemplation; rather, it is the silence of the meek. Talking too much is indicative of the excessive behaviour associated with women which monks were encouraged to avoid. There is also the suggestion that educated

trans. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003, II.11a. [Fuit quaedam reclusa non longe a monasterio Villariensi degens, valde religiosa [& ideo plerisque gratiosa & amabilis] quae viro Dei Arnulfo plurimum in Christo dilecta, ipsum appellabat Patrem suum [carissimum.]] I wish to thank Fr. Cawley for generously allowing me to use his own transcription of Arnulf’s *Life*. The Latin used is from this source.

¹⁹² *VArn.*, II.11b. [Reclusa autem videns quia novus suus in Christo filius [dies suos quodammodo perdens] studere cum sodalibus suis negligebat, monuit eum ut deinceps rarius ad eam veniens frequentius solito ad scholas recurreret.]

¹⁹³ *VArn.*, II.11b. [Quod videns reclusa [indignatione magna] irata est contra eum & indiscrete votum vovit Domino quod per mensem ei non loqueretur.]

¹⁹⁴ *VArn.*, II.11b. [conquestusque est gubernatori omnium Domino de magistra & matre sua quod eum quodammodo quasi desperatum sine consolatione reliquisset.]

¹⁹⁵ *VArn.*, II.11c. [Merito, ait ille, febris coarctaris, eo quod clericum illum, quem in Christo genueras & nuper genitum in cunis infantiae suae quasi lacte “consolationis” nutrire debueras, quasi alienum insipienter a te repulisti.]

¹⁹⁶ *Ancrene Wisse*, 2.

women should not advertise this fact, and that education has no place in the anchoritic world. Speaking and the giving of advice, also contravenes St Paul's words to Timothy: 'But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence' (1 Tim. 2:12). This is further emphasized in the last chapter of the *Ancrene Wisse* when the anchorite is advised that 'you must not send letters or receive letters or write without leave'.¹⁹⁷ It is clear that the anchorite is to display no signs of learning or education.

Another aspect of the instruction given in the *Ancrene Wisse* which is important in understanding presumed gendered approaches to female religious, is contained in two small passages in section eight dealing with physical asceticism. The first deals with fasting and follows a similar approach to male monastic rules. The anchorite is advised to be temperate in her consumption of food, including a prohibition on eating meat.¹⁹⁸ Despite the desirability of constraint, the author expressed his concern to the 'dear sisters . . . that your food and drink are less than I would wish. Do not fast on any day on bread and water unless you have leave'.¹⁹⁹ This temperance in fasting should be coupled with an amicable relationship with the physical body:

Let no one put on any kind of belt unless by her confessor's leave, nor wear any iron, or hair, or hedgehog skins, nor beat herself with these or with a leaded scourge, nor draw blood from herself with holly or brambles, without her confessor's leave; let her not sting herself with nettles anywhere, nor beat herself on her front, nor do any cutting, nor take at one time over-harsh disciplines to extinguish temptations.²⁰⁰

This passage poses two problems that are difficult to solve. Firstly, was the instruction placed here because the young women for whom the text was written already indulged in these kinds of practices? The suggestion that they fasted excessively does allow us to speculate that they may have, although we cannot know for certain. The second issue is the question of commonality – were these practices common amongst all individuals who chose a life of solitude, both men and women? This suggests that spiritual practice was not founded in a gendered model, but rather that there was a 'one size fits all' approach. Without a contemporaneous rule for solitary men, it is difficult to know.

¹⁹⁷ *Ancrene Wisse*, 8. White notes that the *writen* in the original text could mean either copying or writing books, p. 235, n.26.

¹⁹⁸ *Ancrene Wisse*, 8.

¹⁹⁹ *Ancrene Wisse*, 8.

²⁰⁰ *Ancrene Wisse*, 8.

The author of the *Ancrene Wisse* acknowledged the influence on his text of the *De Institutione Inclusarum* (Rule of Life for a Recluse) authored by Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx, c. 1160-1162.²⁰¹ Like the *Ancrene Wisse*, this is a work composed for a woman (Aelred's sister) who was already living a religious life. As David Knowles notes, Aelred's sister made repeated requests for a rule or guidance of some sort, and Aelred's delay in replying may contribute to the fact that his rule is focused on the inward life of the recluse.²⁰² What is also clear is that Aelred recognized his sister's already pious life, and determined that her instruction should be focused on the mind which, he noted, 'roams at random, grows dissolute and distracted by cares, disquieted by impure desires'.²⁰³ He made clear that his instructions concerning the outward life are not needed by her but he acknowledged that other young girls, perhaps known to his sister, required instruction.²⁰⁴ Perhaps more relevant is the fact that Aelred was seeking to 'blend the spiritual with the corporeal'.²⁰⁵ In this, we see the same tension evident concerning physical practice as that seen in the monastic rules for men. Moderation is one of the key tenets of Benedict's rule, a work which had a strong influence on Aelred's text.²⁰⁶

Moderation for Aelred encompassed all aspects of the life of the recluse, from speaking with local women, the generation of income, and playing with children, to silence and interactions with men.²⁰⁷ Even prayer is to be moderated: 'she must take care that prolonged prayer does not engender a distaste for prayer; it is more profitable to pray often and briefly than for too long at one time, unless of course it be prolonged without one's knowing it, by the inspiration of devotion'.²⁰⁸ What is suggested by Aelred's desire to include this instruction is the notion that moderation and restraint were also expected of female religious, a concern amplified by their liminal position in institutionalized religion.

²⁰¹ White, 'Introduction', pp. xvi-xvii; John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, 'Introduction', in John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt eds, *Aelred of Rievaulx's De Institutione Inclusarum*, London, 1984, p. xxxix, n.1.

²⁰² David Knowles, 'Introduction', in M. Basil Pennington ed., *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, Kalamazoo, 1995, p. xii; Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', in M. Basil Pennington ed., *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, Kalamazoo, 1995, Address 1.

²⁰³ Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', 1.2; 1.9.

²⁰⁴ Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', 1.7.

²⁰⁵ Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', Address 1.

²⁰⁶ Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', 1.8-13. The sections of Aelred's text dealing with the times for speaking and silence and are drawn largely from the Rule of Benedict.

²⁰⁷ Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', 1. All of section one, entitled 'The Outer Man', deals with moderation.

²⁰⁸ Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', 1.9.

The picture painted of the anchorite by the *Ancrene Wisse* is a dull reflection of the heroic religious women presented in much of the historiography. The *Ancrene Wisse's* anchorite is silent, meek, hidden away, and moderate in her ascetic practices; she does not appear to have lived the kind of life that encouraged the kinds of practices commonly associated with individual medieval religious women. Why is this important to understanding male spiritual behaviour? As I have discussed, the apparent lack of affective male mystics seems founded in the issue of gender. Monastic rules for men focus on obedience, conformity, and moderation; sexuality plays a far less problematic role. Monks only needed to avoid looking at women, although, from time to time, this instruction could be a double-edged sword as illustrated by the example above of the monk rebuked by the abbess. However, these rules apply to a community, not a solitary and I would argue that the solitary – male or female – posed a problem for religious authority.

If monasteries were developing as the ultimate environment within which to practice the contemplative theology as developed by writers on mysticism, then we must consider how that environment contributed to, or detracted from, the pursuit of a relationship with the Divine. What I have illustrated in this chapter, is a powerful didactic tradition of regulation and conformity. Homosocial relationships must be a key feature in any discussion of masculinity and the monastery provides an excellent environment within which to consider how religious men engaged in such relationships. It is clear that individuality and difference were not tolerated within male religious communities and this provides another clue as to the why singular holy men are less apparent in the historical record. Surprisingly enough, rules for women also reinforce this directive to conformity; in fact, the only significant differences between rules for monks and nuns concern the strict enclosure of nuns, and the appropriate response to visit from members of the opposite sex. And yet, individual holy women stand out in our historiography; why is this so?

The re-emergence of the charismatic holy individual in the early centuries of the second millennium was aided by the rapid transformation of western European society at that time. Concurrent religious reform and societal and cultural development created an environment in which diversity flourished, with many individuals taking the opportunity to engage in a religious life which had not been

previously available to them. However, before focusing attention on some of the holy individuals who came to the attention of the Papacy during this period, it is important to consider what, exactly, the reforms meant for the medieval religious man.

3. Religious Reforming Movements from the Carolingians to the Gregorians: Searching for the Correct Path

And thus, drawing the integrity of the Rule over the whole tenor of their life—liturgical observance as well as daily living—they followed faithfully in its track, and, having stripped off the old self, they rejoiced to have put on the new.¹

Introduction

‘They’ were the twenty-one monks, including Robert of Molesmes and Stephen Harding, who set forth from the monastery at Molesmes in 1098 in order to embark upon a new way of life in the wilds of Cîteaux. The ‘Rule’ that they intended to live by was the Rule of Benedict. Robert had established the monastery at Molesmes some twenty years earlier, seeking in it greater solitude and a stricter way of life more aligned with the Benedictine Rule.² Robert had become concerned with the growing wealth of the Benedictine order and its focus on liturgy at the expense of an ascetic life. This led him to seek the permission of the papal legate, Hugh, Archbishop of Lyons, to lead several other like-minded brothers into the wilderness and establish a new monastery. Although Robert was forced to return to Molesmes, the core of the new congregation remained and, under the guidance of the Englishman Stephen Harding, the Cistercian order was born.

Robert’s decision to (re)turn to a stricter way of life and a more literal interpretation of Benedict’s Rule illustrates two important themes which must be considered in the wider context of this thesis. Firstly, Robert’s actions are illustrative of a wider community engagement with Christianity, which found many individuals, both men and women, seeking what they believed to be the *vita apostolica*, although the definition of what the *vita apostolica* exactly was became a central point of disagreement amongst monastic reformers. Secondly, the path that Robert takes in his

¹ ‘The Little Exord (*Exordium pavum*)’, in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. Pauline Matarasso, Harmondsworth, 1993, 15, p. 6.

² Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 29; C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn, Harlow, 2001, p. 172.

quest is the same followed by a number of religious men of this time; characterised by a desire to live religious life more perfectly, religious men broke free of the confines of their current observance only to submit to a newly-formed rule or concordance. Towering over these attempts at renewal was the Rule of Benedict, which had become the monastic rule of choice during the Carolingian reforms undertaken by Charlemagne (d. 814) and his chief reformer Benedict of Aniane (d. 821).

The action taken by the monks of Molesmes did not represent an isolated incident of discord. The period between the early tenth and early thirteenth centuries represents a period in the history of Christianity of remarkable growth and change, which resulted in the emergence of diverse expressions of spiritual life. This diversity occurred during a period of rapid change across all aspects of society in western Europe. In particular, a growing population became even more connected to the Church of Rome, becoming citizens of the ever-spreading 'nation' of Christendom. Although an increase in opportunities to participate in the institutional Church burgeoned for men, this did not appear to be the case for women. The strong female monastic tradition which had flourished from the sixth century began to lose traction, and while regulation for men continued to be renewed and refined, women appear to have chosen, or been forced into, less-structured forms of religious life.

While monasticism had in many ways been in a constant state of reformation since the time of Benedict of Aniane, Ardo's commentary on the life of Benedict also revealed a developing tension between the monastic and clerical arms of the Church which was to become even more apparent in the eleventh century. In chapters 29 and 39, Ardo made a passing reference to the clergy; in both instances, those remarks are allied to negative comments about the treatment of either Benedict or his monks. The first instance concerned Benedict's growing significance in the religious landscape of the late eighth century. Satan, who was despairing of Benedict's good works, set about to '[fire] the minds of the clergy' so that they would belittle God's soldiers and 'provoke the most serene Emperor Charles against Benedict'.³ The second instance recalls the practice of the secular clergy in securing monasteries after the monks had been driven from them, a situation only resolved by Benedict's supplications to the

³ Ardo, *Benedict of Aniane: The Emperor's Monk, Ardo's Life* (hereafter *VBen.*), trans. Allen Cabaniss, Kalamazoo, 2008, 29.3. [Prefatis ergo proficuis actibus Deoque dignis agnitis, quorum stipatus agmine invidiae iaculis armatus, male pugnaturus processit; et primum quidem clericorum in eius derogatione accendit animos. . . . Quorum vesana saevitia as tantum nefas prorupit, ut animum serenissimi imperatoris Karoli erga eum concitare temptarent. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 211)]

emperor.⁴ These two incidents suggest an already tense relationship between the two religious groups, with secular clergy portrayed as weak, suggestible, and greedy. These are characteristics strongly associated with both women and the secular world, which came to be important in the debate over who was morally superior: monks or clerics.⁵ It appears that Ardo was offering a vision of masculinity whereby masculine monks were superior to feminine clerics.

This formulation of masculinity was to become increasingly important in the eleventh century, as ecclesiastical reformers sought to illustrate that their religious men (clerics) were the manliest of all.⁶ With the very maleness of religious men being questioned and debated during this period of renaissance and reform, it is clear that opportunities for engaging in activities which fell outside those prescribed by commentators were few. In particular, expressions of spirituality connected to the

⁴ *VBen.*, 39.1. [Cernens quoque, nonnullos totis nisibus anelare in adquirenda monachorum coe nobia, eaque non tantum precibus, ut obtineant, verum etiam decertare muneribus, suisque usibus stipendia monachorum expendi, ac per hoc diruta nonnulla, alia vero, fugatis monachis, a secularibus obtineri clericis, adiit hac de causa piissimum imperatorem precibusque pulsat, ut ab huiusmodi contentionibus clericis, monachos vero ab hoc redderet periculo extorres. (MGH, Waitz, p. 217)]

⁵ For discussion about the inferior female body, see: Robert W. Ackerman, 'The Debate of the Body and the Soul and Parochial Christianity', *Speculum*, 37, 4, Oct. 1962, pp. 541-565; Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. – A.D. 1250*, Grand Rapids, 1985; J. Giles Milhaven, 'A Medieval Lesson on Bodily Knowing', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 57, 2, Summer 1989, pp. 341-372; Carolyn Walker Bynum, 'Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval Contexts', *History of Religions*, 30, 1, The Body, August 1990, pp. 51-85; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, Mass., 1990; Meredith B. McGuire, 'Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29, 3, Sept. 1990, pp. 283-96; A. Kevin Reinhart, 'Impurity/No Danger', *History of Religions*, 30, 1, The Body, August 1990, pp. 1-24; Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, 'Caro salutis cardo: Shaping the Body in Early Christian Thought', *History of Religions*, 30, 1, The Body, August 1990, pp. 25-50; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*, Cambridge, 1993; James F. Keenan, 'Christian Perspectives on the Human Body', *Theological Studies*, 55, 2, June 1994, pp. 330-347; Caroline Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry*, 22, 1, Autumn 1995, pp. 1-33; Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis eds, *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, York, 1997; Conrad Leyser, 'Custom, Truth and Gender in Eleventh Century Reform', in R. N. Swanson ed., *Gender and Christian Religion*, Studies in Church History, vol. 34, Suffolk, 1998, pp. 75-91; Mark S. R. Jenner and Bertrand O. Taithe, 'The Historiographical Body', in Roger Cooter and John Pickstone eds, *Companion to Medicine in the Twentieth Century*, London, 2003, pp. 187-200. On the moral superiority of monks, see: Phyllis G. Jestice, 'Why Celibacy? Odo of Cluny and the Development of New Sexual Morality', in Michael Frassetto ed., *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, New York, 1998, pp. 81-115.

⁶ There are a number of excellent works which deal with this aspect of the so-called Gregorian Reform. See, for example: Jo Ann McNamara, 'The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150', in Clare A. Lees ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 1994, pp. 3-29; idem, 'An Unresolved Syllogism: The Search for a Christian Gender System', in Jacqueline Murray ed., *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, New York, 1999, p. 9; John H. Arnold, 'The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity', in Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih eds, *Medieval Virginites*, Cardiff, 2003, pp. 102-18; Jacqueline Murray, 'Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis eds, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Cardiff, 2004, pp. 24-42; and Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, New York, 2005, p. 49.

physical body, such as fasting and flagellation, could lead to accusations of feminine behaviour.

Competing models of religious masculinity emerged, as monastic men and clerics vied for authority. What surfaced was a rhetoric of battle, as monastics fought against their disobedient souls, whilst secular clerics waged war with their sinful bodies. Despite the diversity in opportunities to participate more fully in Christianity which arise at this time, it appears that religious men were further constrained and encouraged to conformity by the battle between the monastic and the secular. The effect of this rapid growth in diversity, coupled with the intense Gregorian reform programme, created a situation of conflict between the secular and monastic arms of the Church which resulted in a specifically constructed paragon of religious masculinity which may have been too difficult to live up to. However, my major focus in this chapter is to understand why men, despite the growth in diverse expressions of the religious life, did not participate in individualistic expressions of spirituality.

Carolingian Reform

The period between c. 500 – c. 900 presents a challenge to the modern historian because it is treated, to all intents and purposes, as a rather ‘dead’ period in history – indeed, it was frequently referred to as the Dark Ages, that time when civilization appeared to regress and no ‘light of learning shone through the gloom’.⁷ This is not the minority position, or simply the echo of an earlier historical tradition, and it is pertinent to show by way of example, how the notion of the “Dark Ages,” if not the term itself, persists in modern scholarship concerning different aspects of religious study. Bernard McGinn makes the comment that John Scottus Eriugena is the only mystical writer between the sixth and tenth centuries, noting that ‘despite the absence of classic mystics in this period, there are certainly writers and texts that deal with mystical themes and practices, such as solitude and silence, prayer and contemplations, and the vision of God’.⁸ In their discussions of saints and sanctity, both Thomas Noble and Julia Smith allude to an apparent lack of saints during the

⁷ This description of the period c. 600-900, was given at a Summer School class I attended in 2010, illustrating that the notion of the ‘Dark Ages’ is still alive and kicking!

⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*, vol. 2, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1994, p. 119.

Carolingian period. Noble attributes this to the development of an idea of secular holiness which related directly to 'what you did in this world, not your ability to manipulate the potency of the other world'.⁹ Smith maintains that the absence of 'charismatic ascetics, healers, prophets or visionaries' rests on the notion that they were members of a 'church whose bishops were implacably hostile to any such form of religious expression'.¹⁰ Although both provide examples in support of these arguments, they are tantalizingly brief in their discussion of the period. Ruth Mazo Karras is also fleeting in her discussion of the Carolingian period in her article concerning clerical masculinity. In fact, she moves from a discussion of Merovingian monasticism of the late sixth century to the foundation of Cluny in the tenth, with barely a mention of the period between.¹¹ My point here is not to criticise the work of these scholars, but rather to point out that, across a range of topics associated with men and religion, the Carolingian period is often seen to contribute little. Yet it is precisely within this period that the Benedictine Rule is elevated to the influential position which it comes to occupy in the high medieval period, and this is highlighted in the *vita* of Benedict of Aniane (d. 821) and the *Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, authored by the monk Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel in 817.

Benedict was of the 'nation of the Getae [Goths] in the area of Gothia'.¹² As a boy, he was sent to the court of King Pepin where he was 'brought up among the Queen's scholars'.¹³ As with many young men, Benedict became enlightened by divine grace and he began to 'blaze with heavenly love'.¹⁴ It is interesting to note, at this point, that the cause of Benedict's enlightenment is not dwelt upon in the *vita*. Unlike his eponymous ancestor, Benedict of Nursia, or Augustine, Benedict appears not to have suffered a crisis or any other such dilemma. Rather, he simply becomes 'enlightened' and then embarks on a programme of asceticism designed to prepare him for 'future

⁹ Thomas F. X. Noble, 'Secular Sanctity: Forging an Ethos for the Carolingian Nobility', in Peter Wormald and Janet L. Nelson eds, *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 33.

¹⁰ Julia M. H. Smith, 'The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c.780-920', *Past and Present*, 146, February 1995, p. 4.

¹¹ Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt', in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz eds, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, Philadelphia, 2008, pp. 58-59.

¹² *VBen.*, 1.1. [Igitur vir venerabilis nomine et merito Benedictus abbas ex Getarum genere parti bus Gotiae oriundus fuit, *nobilibus* natalibus ortus; set eum superna pietas potiori virtutum claritate nobilitavit. (MGH, Waitz, p. 201)]; also see Allen Cabaniss, 'Translator's Introduction', in *Benedict of Aniane: The Emperor's Monk, Ardo's Life*, trans. Allen Cabaniss, Kalamazoo, 2008, p. 29.

¹³ *VBen.*, 1.1. [Hic pueriles gerentem annos prefatum filium suum in aula gloriosi Pipini regis reginae tradidit inter scolares nutriendum. (MGH, Waitz, p. 201)]

¹⁴ *VBen.*, 1.2. [Interea, illustrante divina gratia, superno coepit flagrare amore et ut seculum linqueret totis aestuare nisi bus periturumque fastidire honorem, ad quem cum laborem adtingere posse cernebat, set adeptum cito amittere. (MGH, Waitz, p. 201)]

struggle'.¹⁵ This mirrors the early life of Arnulf of Villers, who also prepared for the religious life whilst still involved in the secular world.¹⁶ This suggests that Arnulf's biographer, Goswin, was well-versed in the literary topos of the secular man who amplified his religious behaviour and then becomes a devout Christian.

Upon becoming a monk, Benedict undertook a severe programme of asceticism in order to damage his body. Ardo described the extreme fasting, sleep deprivation, silence, and service to others which Benedict undertook as he sought to serve God.¹⁷ However, much like Macarius before him and Arnulf after, Benedict found himself chastised for his way of life:

His face grew gaunt with fasting; his flesh was exhausted by privation; his shriveled skin hung from his bones like the dewlaps of cows. Not so much taming a young but ungovernable animal, as mortifying the body, although he was compelled by the abbot to exercise rigor against himself more sparingly, he gave assent reluctantly. Declaring the Rule of blessed Benedict was for beginners and weak persons, he strove to climb up to the precepts of blessed Basil and the rule of blessed Pachomius.¹⁸

As well as enforcing the notion that the monastic environment required order, this passage also suggests that the Benedictine Rule was becoming more influential as a formula for monastic discipline. Although Macarius was seen as disruptive, in that he caused agitation amongst the other brothers, he was not accused of either breaking or adhering to a particular rule. In fact, he was recognized as a great monk and one to whom the other brothers should aspire.¹⁹ Seven hundred years later, Arnulf was admonished by a fellow brother for 'overstepping the common practices of the Order and taking upon yourself without permission the singularity of a more rugged, austere life.'²⁰ Furthermore, Goswin suggests that the abbots whom Arnulf lived under may

¹⁵ *VBen.*, 1.2. [Temptabat igitur infra hoc spatium, si con tinentiae culmen arripere posset, subtraere corpori somnum, reprimere linguam, absti nere a cibo, parcius sumere vinum et veluti peritus athleta ad futurum se componere bellum. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 201)] This desire to undertake a religious life without a precipitating crisis in faith is also a feature in the lives of Robert of Arbrissel, Stephen of Obazine, and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu. These will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

¹⁶ *VAm.*, I.1b; I.5; I.1e; I.7a.

¹⁷ *VBen.*, 2.3-4.

¹⁸ *VBen.*, 2.5. [Pallebant ora ieiuniis, et macie exausta carne, pellis ossibus inherebat hac in modum pallearia bovm rugata pendebat. Hoc modo tenerum quasi indomitum animal non tam mansuefaciens quam, ut ita dicam, mortificans corpus, cum cogeretur ab abbate parcius erga semet exercere rigorem, adsen sum minime prebuit. Regulam quoque beati Benedicti tironibus seu infirmis positam fore contestans, ad beati Basilii dicta necnon et beati Pacomii regulam scandere nitens, quamvis exiguis possibilita gereret, iugiter impossibiliora rimabat. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 202)]

¹⁹ *Apop. patrum*, Macarius.

²⁰ *VAm.*, I.2d. ["Frater Arnulfe, cave tibi ne communes Ordinis institutiones transgrediens vitae tibi asperioris non licentiatus assumas austeritatem vel singularitatem, quia magnum inde corporis tui posses incurere detrimentum."]

have also suffered approbation because they did not attempt to modify his behaviour.²¹

Benedict of Aniane is illustrative of a linear evolution in monastic behaviour, which I argue is responsible for the increased emphasis on control and obedience, thereby modifying male religious spiritual behaviour. Sitting at the midway point of this evolution, Benedict became the ‘example of salvation for many and . . . inflamed with love for the Rule of Benedict . . . like a new athlete’.²² The implication in this statement is that Benedict needed to be ‘inflamed with love’ for the Rule of Benedict; he did not arrive at this conclusion independently, rather ‘divine favor decreed’ that he become the representative for the Rule.²³ The argument is even made that Benedict of Aniane is the ‘organizer of true benedictine monasticism’.²⁴ What is clear from Ardo’s *Life* is that Benedict, having memorised the Rule, became much esteemed and ‘circumspect in his own life . . . [and] . . . ready to obey’.²⁵ Benedict’s influence also crossed over into the secular world, as demonstrated by his relationship with King Charles the Great. In 782, according to Ardo, Benedict was instructed by Charles to construct another monastery.²⁶ Charles then fortified the Benedictine Rule by stating, in an ‘immunity’ written for Benedict, that the Church would be free from external interference and that the monks of Benedict’s monastery were free to elect their abbot as long as he was ‘of similar kind or better, one faithful to us in all matters, one able to govern that holy congregation according to Saint Benedict’s Rule’.²⁷ The importance of the Rule is further enhanced by Louis the Pious, King of Aquitaine (r. 781-814) who ‘set

²¹ *VArn.*, I.6c. [Quibus satisfaciētes respondemus quod huic beato viro, qui sub quattuor abbatibus, domino videlicet Carolo, Conrardo, Galtero atque Guillelmo, fortiter Domino militavit, iidem abbates licentiam adhibendorum corpori ejus tormentorum dederunt, sed ei rursus quandoque interdixerunt, timentes ne sub tot & tantis martyriis deficeret.]

²² *VBen.*, 2.5. [His se poenitentiae lamentis preli bans, quoniam inimitabilis erat vel nullis vel paucis, coopitulante gratia divina, ut multorum fieret documentum salutis, in amore prefati viri Benedicti regulae accenditur, et veluti de singulari certamine novus atleta ad campum publice pugnaturus accessit. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 202)]

²³ *VBen.*, 2.5.

²⁴ Josef Semmler and Heinrich Bacht, ‘Benedikt von Aniane’, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 1, (Munich 1980) 1864-1867, here 1864, cited in Annette Grabowsky and Clemens Radl, ‘A Review of Recent Scholarship’, in *Benedict of Aniane: The Emperor’s Monk, Ardo’s Life*, trans. Allen Cabaniss, Kalamazoo, 2008, p. 1.

²⁵ *VBen.*, 2.6. [Abbas quoque eum summo colebat affectu, eo quod esset in omnibus utilis et suae vitae cautus, aliorum a salute sollicitus et circa mini sterium frequens, in loquendo rarus, ad obediendum promptissimus, in monendo affabilis. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 202)]

²⁶ *VBen.*, 17.1. [Nunc opitulante Christo, ex precepto Karoli quibus modis aliud a in eodem loco coenobium hedificaverit, evidenti ratione pandamus. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 205)]

²⁷ *VBen.*, 18.3-5. [Et quandoquidem divina vocatione supra scriptus venerabilis Benedictus abbas vel successores eius de hac luce ad Dominum migraverint, qualem meliorem et nobis per omnia fidelem ipsa sancta congregatio de supra scripto monasterio aut de qualicumque loco voluerint eligere abbatem, qui ipsam sanctam congregationem secundum regulam sancti Benedicti regere valeat, per hanc nostram auctoritatem et permissa indulgentia licentiam habeant. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 207)]

him [Benedict] over all the monasteries in his realm,' at which point Benedict proceeded to visit many monasteries not yet aware of the Rule, in order to instruct them in its precepts: 'By God's foresight it therefore came to pass that almost all the monasteries located within Aquitaine accepted the plan of the Rule.'²⁸ Louis the Pious was also responsible for Benedict's deployment to existing monasteries in Auvergne, Poitiers, and Bourges in order to spread the Rule and offer assistance in interpretation.²⁹ Benedict, the extreme ascetic, was now the premier exponent of the moderate Benedictine Rule and no doubt helped to guarantee that it became the pre-eminent Rule heading into the new millennium.

Benedict of Aniane was not the only champion of the Benedictine Rule during this period of monastic reform. Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel was, like Benedict, a native of southern Gaul, born sometime between 750 and 770.³⁰ An attendee of the synods called by Louis the Pious and Benedict of Aniane in Aachen in 816 and 817, Smaragdus should be considered a supporter of the Carolingian monastic reforms.³¹ As we shall see he also comes to be influential in the twelfth-century monastic reforms as well. However, amongst scholars concerned with the monastic reforms of the Carolingian period, there is some disagreement as to the extent of Smaragdus' role in the reforms and the efficacy of the two texts (his last) which came directly from that role: the *Diadema monachorum* (816) and the *Expositio in regnam sancti Bernardi* (817).³² Matthew Ponesse notes that both Jean Leclercq and Josef Semmler argued that Smaragdus' text, the *Expositio*, is 'overly theoretical' and therefore fails to reveal 'how the newly

²⁸ *VBen.*, 29.1. [. . . quem etiam omnibus in suo regno monasteriis prefecit, ut normam salutiferam cunctis ostenderet; . . . sicque actum est providente Deo, ut omnia pene monasteria in Aquitania sita regularem suscipere formam. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 211)]

²⁹ *VBen.*, 31.1; 33.1.

³⁰ Jasmijn Bovendeert lists dates for Smaragdus of c. 750-826/830, while Daniel Marcel La Corte suggests c. 760, and Terrence Kardong proposes a date of c. 770. See, Jasmijn Bovendeert, 'Royal or monastic identity? Smaragdus' *Via regia* and *Diadema monachorum* reconsidered', in Richard Corradini, Rob Meens, Christina Pössel, and Philip Shaw eds, *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, Vienna, 2006, p. 239; Daniel Marcel La Corte, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel: Ninth-Century Sources for Twelfth-Century Reformers', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 41, 3, 2006, p. 273; and Terrence Kardong, 'Introduction: Smaragdus and his Work', in Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. David Berry, Kalamazoo, 2007, p. 1.

³¹ Matthew D. Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel and the Carolingian Monastic Reform', *Revue Bénédictine*, 116, 2, 2006, p. 372; and Kardong, 'Introduction', p. 2.

³² Smaragdus' works include *Liber in partibus Donati* (early ninth century), *De processione spiritus sancti* (809), *Via regia* (c. 810-814), and *Expositio libri comitis* (c. 810-812). See, Bovendeert, 'Royal or monastic identity?' p. 239, n.2; La Corte, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 274; and Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', pp. 368-69.

imposed regulation was received into the monastery'.³³ Included in this criticism is the observation that much of Smaragdus' work derives directly from Benedict of Aniane's *Concordia regularum*.³⁴ Countering this view, Alain Dubreucq suggests that due to their shared heritage and the fact that they had both resided in 'Aquitaine during the reign of Louis the Pious,' Benedict and Smaragdus were actually intimate acquaintances and 'likely had opportunity to confer in the days leading up to the synod'.³⁵ Terrence Kardong looks to Smaragdus' texts for evidence of his involvement in and support of the reforms implemented by Louis. He finds two examples where Smaragdus makes brief but positive reference 'to the proceedings at Aachen' thereby confirming his contention that Smaragdus did indeed support the reforms.³⁶ Kardong also maintains that Smaragdus' 'style of Latin [was] plain and simple,' indicating that he intended his work to be accessible to 'ordinary monks'.³⁷ This is in contrast to Smaragdus' earlier work, *Liber in partibus Donati*, which is a commentary focusing on 'the grammar of Donatus'.³⁸ Leclercq maintains that Smaragdus' emphasis on grammar and Latinity in this work came about as he sought to instruct the 'elect' so that they would be 'admitted to the knowledge of the Trinity'.³⁹

When we come to consider Smaragdus' influence on the monastic reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a different picture emerges. This is particularly important for this work, as an emphasis on Smaragdus' commentary would have reinforced to religious men the importance of obedience and humility—two of the three fundamental precepts, along with love, of the Benedictine Rule. Leclercq presents a far more positive image of Smaragdus' effect in the twelfth century, noting that 'Smaragdus' *Expositio* not only aided the Cistercian understanding of the *Rule*, a key element in their reform, but also provided the Cistercians with their profession formula'.⁴⁰ Joyce Hill underlines Smaragdus' importance to this period by

³³ Jean Leclercq, François Vandenbrouke, and Louis Boyer, *La Spiritualité du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1961, p. 106; and Josef Semmler, 'Benedictus II: Una regula – una consuetudo', in W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst eds, *Benedictine Culture 750-1050*, Leuven, 1983, p. 25, cited in Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', pp. 373-74.

³⁴ Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 374.

³⁵ Alain Dubreucq, 'Smaragde de Saint-Mihiel et son temps: enseignement et bibliothèques à l'époque carolingienne', *Mélanges de la Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne*, 7, 1986, pp. 7-36, cited in Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 375.

³⁶ Terrence Kardong, 'The Earliest Commentator on RB: Smaragdus on Benedict's Prologue', *American Benedictine Review*, 55, 2004, pp. 172-73, cited in Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 374.

³⁷ Kardong, 'Introduction', p. 3.

³⁸ Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 369.

³⁹ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi, New York, 1957, p. 44.

⁴⁰ Jean Leclercq, 'Introduction', *On Precept and Dispensation*, CF1, Massachusetts, 1970, p. 83, cited in La Corte, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 278.

highlighting his inclusion on a list of six 'source authors' in Aelfric's *Catholic Homilies*.⁴¹ While 'Haymo' is indicated as a supplementary source, Smaragdus stands alongside Augustine, Jerome, Bede, and Gregory as foundation texts for Aelfric.⁴² Although Hill is primarily concerned with Aelfric's use of Smaragdus' *Expositio liber comitas*, she does note that the *Expositio in reglam sancti Bernardi* was used by Bishop Aethelwold to translate the Benedictine Rule into English.⁴³ Smaragdus' importance to reform, and his reputation as a knowledgeable author, is also evident in the numbers of surviving manuscripts of his work. Bernard McGinn notes that some 120 copies of the *Diadema monachorum* survive, while La Corte observes that 44 copies of the *Expositio in reglam sancti Bernardi* are still in existence, including two from twelfth-century Anglo-Saxon libraries.⁴⁴ There is little doubt then that Smaragdus' works were well known to reformers in the twelfth century and his step-by-step commentary on Benedict's Rule emphasizes the principles encapsulated in the statement: *diversi sed non adverse*. Smaragdus recognized that regional (cultural?) differences would lead to some diversity in the performance of the liturgy, and he sought to ease the anxiety associated with conformity to Benedict's tenets concerning this important aspect of spiritual life. However, the stress on obedience and humility – by both authors – as the fundamental attributes of the monk, provides us with the touchstone as to the regulation of the behaviour of religious men.

When discussing the theological importance of Smaragdus' work, particularly with regards to his exegesis on Bernard's instruction concerning the liturgy, Jean Leclercq remarks that Smaragdus 'insists that the monastery be viewed as a society and a fraternity'.⁴⁵ In his employment of these two nouns, Leclercq has astutely described the boundaries enacted upon the medieval religious man, particularly those given to a life of contemplation rather than action. We must consider these boundaries as concomitant but functioning at different levels of intensity. As a society, the monks were necessarily bound together by common ideals and a common purpose: to provide prayer for all Christians. As a fraternity – as brothers – they were even more

⁴¹ Joyce Hill, 'Aelfric and Smaragdus', in Michael Lapidge ed., *Anglo Saxon England*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 203.

⁴² Hill, 'Aelfric and Smaragdus', p. 203.

⁴³ Hill, 'Aelfric and Smaragdus', pp. 206-07.

⁴⁴ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 124, n.20; and La Corte, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 275. Also see, Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, p. 39; and Michael Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of Saint Aethelwold*, Oxford, 1991, p. liii.

⁴⁵ Jean Leclercq, 'Smaragdus', in Paul E. Szarmach ed., *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, New York, 1984, p. 44.

closely constrained by their very maleness. This powerful bond of gender and the implied familial ties of brotherhood ensured that individual, excessive, and/or outrageous spiritual behaviours were not an acceptable part of the monastic environment, which was perceived to provide the optimum conditions for attaining a mystical connection with the divine.

Smaragdus' intention in providing a thorough narration on the Benedictine Rule is clear in his extensive exposition on the 'Prologue' to the Rule. Just over three pages from Benedict become sixty-one pages in Smaragdus' commentary.⁴⁶ It is in the 'Prologue,' particularly the first third, where Smaragdus amplifies Benedict's emphasis on obedience. Indeed, he mentioned obedience three times more often than disobedience, stressing that obedience was the first step on the path to God.⁴⁷

We return to God by the labor of obedience when with all our strength we humbly carry out the orders we have been given, when we hate our self-will and do not fulfil the desires of the flesh; when we patiently bear persecution for justice's sake; when we do not return evil for evil or curse for curse; when we do not hold deceit in our heart, or bear a grudge; when daily in our deeds we carry out the Lord's precepts, and in all things obey the orders of our seniors; when we apply ourselves frequently to prayer, and by means of vigils, fasts and tears, and by many labours and diverse afflictions, chastise our body and bring it into subjection, take up our cross, deny ourselves and hasten to run after Christ. The labor of obedience includes every chastisement of the body and every affliction of the heart endured for God, all the low esteem, the contempt and rejection that monks experience. This is the straight and narrow way which brings those who walk in it to eternal life.⁴⁸

This passage clearly highlights the most important aspect of monastic life and that is the renunciation of self-will. Everything which a monk should do is done not for himself, but is to be 'endured for God'.

This is reiterated by Benedict when he advised the monk to 'take up the strong bright weapons of obedience'. Smaragdus did more than simply gloss this sentence; he attempted to invest, in his words, some measure of the totality of obedience and humility that the monk should offer:

⁴⁶ The texts employed to make this comparison are *RB*, pp. 7-10; and Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. David Berry, Kalamazoo, 2007, pp. 49-110.

⁴⁷ Smaragdus speaks of obedience 36 times and disobedience only 12 times.

⁴⁸ Smaragdus, *Commentary*, p. 53. [Ad Deum enim per obedientiae laborem redimus, quando ea quae nobis sunt praecepta, totis viribus humiliter adimplemus, quando propriam voluntatem odimus, et desideria carnis non perficimus; quando persecutionem pro justitia patienter toleramus; quando nec malum pro malo, nec maledictum reddimus pro maledicto; quando nec dolum in corde tenemus, nec iracundiae tempus reservamus; quando praecepta Domini factis quotidie adimplemus, et seniorum nostrorum jussionibus in omnibus obedimus; quando orationi frequenter insistimus, vigiliis, jejuniis, lacrymisque, et multis laboribus, diversisque afflictionibus castigatum corpus in servitum redigimus; crucem nostram tollimus, et abnegantes nosmetipsos post Christum currere festinamus. Labor prorsus obedientiae est omnis pro Deo castigatio corporis, et afflictio cordis, vilitas, omnis despectio, et abjectio monachorum. Haec enim est arcta et angusta via quae per se gradientes ad vitam perducit aeternam. (*PL* 102, cols 0693b-0693d)]

What can be stronger or more resistant than that a man should voluntarily subject himself to a man in all obedience, and in the very obedience should patiently bear the hard and contrary justices inflicted on him, than that he should be content with great poverty and hardship, and be ready for everything enjoined on him; than that not only with his tongue he declare himself, but also in his heart consider himself inferior to and of less value than everyone else, and wherever he is, whether sitting or walking, with his head always bowed and his eyes fixed in the ground, he consider himself guilty of his sins, saying: Lord, I am not worthy to look up and see the height of heaven on account of my injustices?⁴⁹

Benedict himself exhorts the monk to '[h]ate your own will'.⁵⁰ This is because, according to Smaragdus, 'it is private and uniquely one's own . . . [and so] it is not good because it is self-will, and it is not approved with the counsel of any father'.⁵¹ Smaragdus reinforces the importance of obedience by then referring to Gregory the Great's *Moralia*: 'Obedience to be sure is rightly preferred to sacrifices, because through sacrifices the flesh of something else is slain, whereas through obedience one's own will is slain.'⁵²

Obedience, humility, and renunciation of the will were central to the operation of the monastery, and, as foci for religious communities, had lost none of their primacy over time. From the period of the Desert Fathers we find reference to these ideals with Abba Poemen advising that '[l]ife in the monastery demands three things: the first is humility, the next is obedience, and the third which sets them in motion and is like a goad is the work of the monastery'.⁵³ Amma Syncletica maintained that 'obedience [was] preferable to asceticism [as] the one teaches pride, the other humility'.⁵⁴ As the monastic communities began to gather together more disciples, these principles became even more important to the successful development of this distinct form of spiritual life. As Leclercq noted, while customaries came to deal with the 'details of

⁴⁹ Smaragdus, *Commentary*, pp. 60-61. [Quid enim fortius aut durius esse potest quam ut homo homini voluntarie se in omni subdat obedientia? et duras et contrarias in ipsa obedientia patienter illatas sustineat injurias? quam ut omni vilitate et extremitate contentus sit, et ad omnia quae illi injunguntur paratus, et omnibus se inferiorem et viliorem non solum sua lingua pronuntiet, sed etiam corde existimet? et ubicunque fuerit, sederit vel ambularit, inclinatio sit semper capite et fixis semper in terram oculis; reum se de peccatis suis existimet dicens: Domine, non sum dignus aspicere et videre altitudinem coeli prae injustitiis meis. (PL 102, cols 0697b-0697c)]

⁵⁰ RB, 4. [Desideria carnis non perficere; voluntatem propriam odire. (PL 66, col. 0297a)]

⁵¹ Smaragdus, *Commentary*, p. 232. [Voluntatem propriam odire. Propriam dicit, id est privatam, vel singulariter suam, quam nullus alius approbat, nullus justam esse proclamat, quia etsi bona illi videtur qui eam conatur implere, ideo non est bona, quia propria, et quia nullius Patris consilio approbata. (PL 102, col. 0787a)]

⁵² Smaragdus, *Commentary*, p. 251. [Obedientia quippe victimis praeponitur, quia per victimas aliena caro, per obedientiam vero voluntas propria mactatur. (PL 102, col. 0797b)]

⁵³ *Apop. patrum*, Poemen, 103.

⁵⁴ *Apop. patrum*, Syncletica, 16.

daily existence,' the Rule and its fundamental precepts could not be ignored.⁵⁵ The Desert Fathers testified to the importance of obedience not just in narratives of action, but also in felicitous expressions of obedience's virtue:

O obedience, salvation of the faithful! O obedience, mother of all the virtues! O obedience, discloser of the kingdom! O obedience opening the heavens and making men to ascend there from earth! O obedience, food of all the saints, whose milk they have sucked, through you they have become perfect! O obedience, companion of the angels!⁵⁶

Obedience was not only a virtue which inspired action in the monk, it was also an action which enhanced virtue and gained reward, for 'when someone obeys God, God obeys his request'.⁵⁷ Thus, when we consider the emphasis which Smaragdus placed on issues of obedience and discipline, he can be seen as 'a witness to ancient monasticism in general'.⁵⁸ This reinforces the argument that patterns of correct spiritual behaviour expressed by the inhabitants of religious communities in the high medieval period had developed very early in life of Christianity and monasticism, and were firmly entrenched in its foundation literature. The chronological interval did little to lessen the emphasis on the core ideals which had been developed in the wilds of the Egyptian desert and now came to command the men and women of the rather more formalized Carolingian monastic realm.

As well as being a 'witness' to ancient tradition, Smaragdus was also a conduit for convention. As one of a number of religious commentators operating as part of the Carolingian Reforms, Smaragdus was participating in a continual process of religious renaissance which began under Charlemagne. The reformers aimed to 'correct abuses in the clergy . . . [and] took a particular interest in the conduct of monks'.⁵⁹ This is clearly seen in the *Admonitio generalis* [General Admonition] of 789, a document which drew on Scripture, late-antique conciliar recommendations, and papal decrees to

⁵⁵ Jean Leclercq, 'The Relevance of Smaragdus to Modern Monasticism', in Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. David Berry, Kalamazoo, 2007, p. 30. Also see Giles Constable, 'The Authority of Superiors in Religious Communities', in George Makdisi, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine eds, *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident. Colloques internationaux de la Napoule (23-26 octobre 1978)*, Paris, 1982, p. 191, reprinted in *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe*, London, 1988, [original pagination].

⁵⁶ *Apop. patrum*, Rufus, 2. For narratives of obedience in action see: John the Dwarf, 1: John planted a stick in the barren earth of the desert and watered it at the request of his Abba for three years when it then bore the 'fruit of obedience'; Mark, a disciple of Abba Sylvanus, 1, 2, 3: Mark was renowned and loved for his obedience by his Abba who recounted the incident where Mark gave off writing the letter omega (ω) when the Abba called to him.

⁵⁷ *Apop. patrum*, Mios, 1.

⁵⁸ Leclercq, 'The Relevance of Smaragdus', p. 30. Also see Matthew D. Ponesse, 'Editorial Practice in Smaragdus of St Mihiel's Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict', *Early Medieval Europe*, 18, 1, 2010, p. 66.

⁵⁹ Ponesse, 'Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel', p. 371.

remind clerics, bishops, *sacerdotes*, and monks of their responsibility to ‘strive with vigilant care and sedulous admonition to lead the people of God to the pastures of eternal life and exert yourselves to bear the erring sheep back inside the walls of the ecclesiastical fortress in the shoulders of good example and exhortation’.⁶⁰ For monks, the *Admonitio* is forthright and to the point as to how they were to approach their life. At three points in the admonition, monks (along with clerics in one instance and virgins in another) are reminded that they must ‘persist in their way of life and the promise which they have pledged to God’.⁶¹ The overwhelming emphasis is on obedience to the way of life which a monk has chosen. Even if he finds himself promoted to holy orders, ‘a monk is not to abandon the way of life of the monastic calling’.⁶² Articles 72 and 73 attend to this idea in more detail, with article 73 in particular, mentioning ‘the rule,’ which we can be sure in this instance is the Rule of Benedict.⁶³ Thus, the monks of the Carolingian period were left in no doubt as to their vocation and how they were to conduct their lives. The emphasis on obedience and following ‘the rule’ ensured an environment where conformity was received with approbation, and difference was a source of agitation.

The monastic calling was enshrined in the Benedictine Rule by Charlemagne and further enhanced by the actions of his son Louis the Pious, via the works of reformers such as Benedict of Aniane and Smaragdus of St Mihiel. While Benedict’s active role in reform has seen him perceived as more successful, Smaragdus’ representation as compiler, rather than author, detracts from the amount of serious scholarship devoted to his works.⁶⁴ As Matthew Ponesse notes, Smaragdus recognised a need to emend complicated texts in order to make them accessible to the ‘average reader’.⁶⁵ He fulfilled an important role in disseminating the knowledge of ancient authorities, both

⁶⁰ ‘General Admonition: Aachen, (23 March?) 789’, in *Charlemagne: Translated Sources*, trans. P. D. King, Lancaster, 1987, Prologue, p. 209. [ut vigili cura et sedula ammonitione populum Dei ad pascua vitae aeternae ducere studeatis, et errantes oves bonorum exemplorum seu adhortationum humeris intra ecclesiasticae firmitatis muros reportare satagimini. (MGH, Boretius, p. 53)]

⁶¹ ‘General Admonition’, 26, p. 212. ‘To monks and all clergy. Further, in the same council: that clerics and monks are to persist in their way of life and the promise which they have pledged to God.’ [Monachis et omni clero. Item in eodem concilio, ut clerici et monachi in suo proposito et voto quod Deo promiserunt permaneant. (MGH, Boretius, p. 56)] 52, p. 213. ‘To bishops, monks, virgins. Further from the same: that monks and virgins are to observe their way of life in all respects.’ [Episcopis, monachis, virginibus. Item eiusdem, ut monachi et virgines suum propositum omnimodis observent. (MGH, Boretius, p. 57)]

⁶² ‘General Admonition’, 27, p. 212. ‘To sacerdotes. Further, on the same matter, in the decrees of pope Innocent: that a monk is not to abandon the way of life of the monastic calling if he is promoted to holy orders.’ [Sacerdotibus. Item in decretis Innocenti papae de eadem re, ut monachus, si ad clericatum proveatur, propositum monachicae professionis non amittat. (MGH, Boretius, p. 56)]

⁶³ ‘General Admonition’, 72, 73, p. 217.

⁶⁴ Ponesse, ‘Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel’, p. 370.

⁶⁵ Ponesse, ‘Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel’, pp. 370-71.

monastic and ecclesiastical. However, it is important to note at this point another intriguing aspect of his modern representation. In his chapter on Smaragdus in the edited collection, *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, Jean Leclercq states quite categorically that Smaragdus' doctrine should be legitimately considered mystical.⁶⁶ In Smaragdus then, we encounter that murky luminal space between theory and practice which complicates the study of mystics and mysticism. If mysticism is a direct intuitive experience of the divine, then Smaragdus is no mystic. Rather his works are a 'guide,' if you will; they offer the monk instruction on how to go about a life of contemplation, inner prayer, and love—the primary form of monasticism and the primary matter of mysticism. Leclercq, in fact, describes him as 'the popularizer of the ancient monastic life'.⁶⁷ So how does this 'popularizer' help us to understand the social forces which helped to shape male spiritual behaviour? What is clear from Smaragdus' work is that the monastic community could not function without obedience, humility, and love. What is also clear is that there is little room for individualism in the men living in monastic communities, and we must seriously consider the effect that this rigorous discipline had on men.

I want to reiterate at this point the importance of monasticism to the development of a spiritual life in which mystical behaviour—such as we understand it—could flourish. Evelyn Underhill makes the claim that 'the original aim of monasticism was to provide a setting in which the mystical life could be lived'.⁶⁸ Underhill can be accused here of ignoring the other motivating factors in the establishment of the monastic life in favour of the mystical, but it is clear that monasticism has a large role to play. Despite his reservations that the success of monasticism during this period restricted the mystical element in Christianity, Bernard McGinn is clear in his emphasis that the *ordo monasticus*—the life of poverty, chastity, and continence—was the foremost setting within which the mystic could prosper.⁶⁹ The question is whether the regulations imposed on male monastics prevented them from expressing their spirituality in ways that could be seen to transcend normalized masculine behaviour.

⁶⁶ Leclercq, 'Smaragdus', p. 38. Also see, Kardong, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁶⁷ Leclercq, 'Smaragdus', p. 39.

⁶⁸ Evelyn Underhill, 'The Essentials of Mysticism', in Richard Woods ed., *Understanding Mysticism*, New York, 1980, p. 34.

⁶⁹ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 128.

Christendom

These tensions within the monastic community and the wider religious community did not develop within the vacuum of a stable physical or cultural environment in Europe. The onset of the so-called Medieval Warm Period sometime around the year 800 sparked a period of intense change across all aspects of society in western medieval Europe.⁷⁰ A very moderate rise in temperature created conditions that aided agricultural development, improved health, accelerated population growth, and eventually promoted a burgeoning mercantile economy.⁷¹ This multifaceted change is most fully documented in Georges Duby's seminal text *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West (L'Économie Rurale et la Vie des Campagnes dans l'Occident Médiéval)*. Written in 1962, Duby's text is muted on the role of climate in precipitating this change, but this is clearly due to the fact that the term 'Medieval Warm Period' had yet to be coined.⁷² In a sense, Duby's meticulous historical research is prescient, in that it anticipates the scientific interest in this period of climate change, an interest which itself turned to medieval sources to provide evidence of the changing nature of the medieval environment.⁷³ Duby sounds a note of caution, however, when he reminds the reader that, after the ninth century, 'the shadows lengthen' and documentary evidence for growth becomes scarce, with parchment being devoted to other uses rather than recording 'the management of rural estates'.⁷⁴ While historians such as Duby, Robert Bartlett, and Robert Fossier recognise this period of change, N. J.

⁷⁰ I say 'so-called' as the 'Medieval Warm Period' is still contested as a phenomenon, particularly in light of the recent debates concerning global warming. However, there appears sufficient palaeoclimatic evidence to suggest that northern Europe, over the period of the eighth to fourteenth centuries, saw an increase in average temperature. See, for example, C. V. Hammer, H. B. Claussen, and W. Dansgaard, 'Greenland Ice Sheet Evidence of Post-Glacial Volcanism and its Climatic Impact', *Nature*, 288, 20 November 1980, pp. 230-35; Edward R. Cook, Jonathan G. Palmer, and Rosanne D. D'Arrigo, 'Evidence for a 'Medieval Warm Period' in a 1,100 year tree-ring reconstruction of past austral summer temperatures in New Zealand', *Geophysical Research Letters*, 29, 2002, pp. 12-16; and Yun Zhang et al, "'Medieval Warm Period" on the northern slope of central Tianshan Mountains, Xinjiang NW China', *Geophysical Research Letters*, 36, 2005, pp. 1-5.

⁷¹ For excellent general studies concerning this period of growth see: Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, trans. Cynthia Postan, Columbia, 1976; N. J. G. Pounds, *An Historical Geography of Europe*, Cambridge, 1990; Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350*, New Jersey, 1993; and Robert Fossier ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of The Middle Ages II 950-1250*, trans. Stuart Airlie and Roby Mack, Cambridge, 1997. Also see, Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, 1984, p. 131; Arno Borst, *Medieval Worlds: Barbarians, Heretics, and Artists*, trans. Eric Hansen, Chicago, 1992, p. 130; and Constable, *Reformation*, p. 300.

⁷² The first scientific text to consider this climate anomaly is H. H. Lamb, 'The Early Medieval Warm Epoch and its Sequel', *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimate, Palaeoecology*, 1, 1963, pp. 13-37. Also see H. H. Lamb, *Climate, History and the Modern World*, London, 1982, esp. chapter 10.

⁷³ Lamb, 'The Early Medieval Warm Epoch', p. 19.

⁷⁴ Duby, *Rural Economy*, p. 61.

G. Pounds perhaps sums up the frustration with this lack of evidence best: 'Yet this increase, so apparent in the growth of cities, the extension of agricultural land, and the increase in wealth, is very difficult indeed to measure.'⁷⁵ Despite this lack of evidence, a picture of western Europe and its population at the turn of the millennium is possible.

Duby maintains that the year 800 saw Europe as almost completely rural, with 'towns' little more than settlements of a few hundred people 'deeply immersed in the surrounding countryside'.⁷⁶ By the mid-eleventh century, accompanying the apparently rapid agricultural expansion—and fuelling it—was a concomitant increase in population which was reflected in the growing number of established settlements across north-western Europe. Projections by N. J. H. Pound and Josiah Russell put the population of Europe in the year 1000 anywhere between 38.5 million to 51 million, with Josiah Russell putting the population at 73.5 million by 1340.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, western Europe's population nearly trebled between 1000 and 1340, going from 12 million to 35.5 million.⁷⁸ Although the existing evidence cannot be accurate, what is clear is that western Europe experienced 'an epoch of economic growth, territorial expansion and dynamic cultural and social change,' and it would also witness a remarkable period of reform for the Latin Christian Church.⁷⁹ This reform would have an immense role in reinvigorating the traditional home of contemplative religious experience: the monastery.

The Church could not be immune from this rapid expansion in population. Whilst Duby and others map the growth of Europe using a range of sources, Robert Bartlett looks to Latin Christendom as a strong referent for the expansion occurring in Europe by charting the foundation of bishoprics.⁸⁰ Bartlett allows that this is 'not a subtle way of reporting changing spiritual experience,' but it does stress that Christianity was a fundamental component of medieval society.⁸¹ Joseph Lynch puts the number of dioceses in the western Church in 1000 at 'approximately 250,' but he also quick to

⁷⁵ Pounds, *Historical Geography*, p. 120.

⁷⁶ Duby, *Rural Economy*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Pounds, *Historical Geography*, p. 121; Josiah C. Russell, 'Population in Europe', in Carlo M. Cipolla ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe, Vol. I: The Middle Ages*, London, 1972, pp. 25-71.

⁷⁸ Russell, 'Population in Europe', pp. 25-71.

⁷⁹ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 2; and Robert Fossier, 'Introduction', in Robert Fossier ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of The Middle Ages II 950-1250*, trans. Stuart Airlie and Roby Mack, Cambridge, 1997, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 5.

⁸¹ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 5.

point out that the majority of those dioceses were subject to the control of a 'lay lord'.⁸² There is some evidence to suggest that church leaders were aware of the growing population and they sought to accommodate the increasing numbers of Christians. Bishop Otto of Bamberg (d. 1139) recognized the increasing population and put an apocalyptic spin on his reason for establishing more monasteries:

'At the beginning of the world,' Otto is reported to have said, 'when there were few men, the propagation of men was necessary, and therefore they were not chaste, but everyone married and gave in marriage. Now, however, he said, at the end of the world, when men have multiplied beyond measure, is the time of chastity; whoever can must be chaste and devoted to God. But chastity and other works of sanctity can be better observed within monasteries than outside. This was my reason, he said, my intention in multiplying monasteries.'⁸³

Otto's comments, apart from providing support for the thesis of an extensive population increase, also make clear the importance of Christianity in this period. Of course, an increase in population does not automatically equate to an increase in Christians; however, while Constable and Smith note that it is not possible to know how many men and women devoted their lives to some form of religious life, it is clear that this form of living flourished with what they estimate as a possible 'ten-fold [increase] in some regions'.⁸⁴ This suggests that Christianity became even more relevant to the lives of medieval Europeans, as religious beliefs and practices also underwent a marked transformation.

As the old millennium gave way to the new, the Christians of eleventh-century Europe witnessed the birth of the crusades, a new wave of church construction, and a re-imagining of Jesus Christ.⁸⁵ The opportunities for participating in some sort of spiritual life, or in other words, the opportunity to develop a personal relationship to God, became more numerous and diverse. Allied with and, perhaps, fuelling this trend toward a renaissance in the *vita apostolica*, came a sense that Christians 'could easily think of themselves, not as voluntary recruits to a particular community of believers, but as members of a Christian race or people'.⁸⁶ The concept of Christendom had developed apace from the time of the Charlemagne and was 'literally, a Christian

⁸² Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History*, London, 1992, pp. 123, 128.

⁸³ Herbord of Michelsberg, *Dialogus de Ottone episcopo Bambergensi*, i. 18, in Ph. Jaffé ed., *Bibliotheca rerum germanicarum*, v, Weimar, 1869, 717, cited in G. Constable and B. Smith, 'Introduction', in *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Aecclesia*, ed. and trans. G. Constable and B. Smith, Oxford, 1972, p. xi.

⁸⁴ Constable and Smith, 'Introduction', p. xi.

⁸⁵ Michael Frassetto, 'Introduction', in Michael Frassetto ed., *The Year 1000: Religious and Social Response to the Turning of the First Millennium*, New York, 2002, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 251. Also see Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, pp. 158-59.

realm or *imperium Christianum*'.⁸⁷ By the eleventh century, Christendom had moved, as Robert Bartlett notes, 'increasingly toward a territorial, rather than an abstract, sense'.⁸⁸ In addition, Christendom was no longer the domain of the Holy Roman Emperor; it was directed instead by the Pope, who could 'legitimately demand the obedience of 'the Christian people (*populus christianus*)'.⁸⁹ Thus, the Europe of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was a Europe of increasing prosperity, increasing population, increasing attachment to a universal faith, and increasing opportunities to become involved in that faith. The problem for the Church now became one of control: how to control this growing Christian population and how to regulate the increasing diversity of religious expression evident in that expanding population.

This diversity created practical problems for the Church, not the least being how to manage the growing number of 'new' orders that formed during this period.⁹⁰ By the time of the Fourth Lateran Council, held in 1215, it was clear that Rome was struggling to cope with repeated requests to provide papal authorization for new religious orders. Canon 13 makes explicit this concern:

Lest too great a diversity of religious orders lead to grave confusion in the Church of God, we strictly forbid anyone in the future to found a new order, but whoever should wish to enter an order, let him choose one already approved. Similarly, he who would wish to found a new monastery, must accept a rule already proved. We forbid also anyone to presume to be a monk in different monasteries (that is, belong to different monasteries), or that one abbot preside over several monasteries.⁹¹

The text represents a dialogue between the ecclesiastic and monastic bodies of the Church, bodies which had been increasingly at odds over the previous 200 years. Central to this conflict was the disagreement over who was more suitable to lead the Church—clerics or monks. However, this is a simplistic view of what was a complex theological problem, and accessing an increasingly diverse and changing society presented a significant problem for the Church.

⁸⁷ Judith M. Bennett and C. Warren Hollister, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 10th edition, New York, 2006, G2.

⁸⁸ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 252. Also see Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, pp. 158-59.

⁸⁹ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 244.

⁹⁰ It is important to note at this point that the diversity referred to here is not heresy. I am not concerned with difference stemming from doctrinal disagreement; rather, I am interested in how religious individuals, particularly men, operated within established boundaries for spiritual expression when it is clear that Christianity was experiencing something of a revolution.

⁹¹ 'Canon 13', in H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, St. Louis, 1937, accessed at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html>, February 2009.

Diversity and Reform

By the eleventh century, reform was occurring within both the monastic and ecclesiastic arms of the Church, further complicating the key issue for the Church: what 'type' or 'kind' of religious man was most suitable to take the message of the gospel to the *populus christianus*? However, to employ the term 'monk' or 'cleric' is to simplify what was clearly a far more complex religious landscape. The ecclesiastical movement wanted their clerics to be more like monks and, according to Phyllis Jestice, the 'driving force behind monastic reform [in the tenth and eleventh centuries] was the issue of monks' active involvement in the world.'⁹² The problem with this was that monks were supposed to be isolated from the world—the antithesis of what was required of a cleric. However, we should be aware that, concomitant with this diversity, was a desire for conformity to existing rules and structures; so, for example, while Cluniacs and Cistercians quibbled about their perceived differences, each order continued to function in obeisance to the Rule of Benedict. Uncoupling these dynamics of desire for change and direction to conformity provides insight into why men like Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1116), despite their best efforts to renew their religious life, returned to the monastic fold. It is this continued re-engagement with authority and structure which lessens our chances of identifying religious men with the desire for a more personal singular relationship to God and explains why it is difficult to identify affective male mystics in this period.

The diversity wished for—or indeed, acted out—by the rapidly increasing Christian populace was not what Benedict of Nursia had in mind when he structured his Rule to take into account local customs in the practice of the liturgy and what was appropriate clothing, for example. Diversity also caused Aelred of Rievaulx to ask: 'What are you doing, O human soul, what are you doing? Why are you seized by so many distractions? One thing alone is necessary. Why so many? Whatever you seek in the many exists in the one. If you long for excellence, knowledge, delight, abundance, all is there, there to perfection and nowhere else but there.'⁹³ Anselm of Havelburg responded to this criticism of new forms of religious life: 'All these people,

⁹² Phyllis G. Jestice, *Wayward Monks and the Religious Revolution of the Eleventh Century*, Leiden, 1997, p. 1.

⁹³ Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, trans. Elizabeth Connor, Kalamazoo, 1990, I.5.15. [Quid agis, o anima humana, quid agis? Quid per diversa raptaris? Porro unum est necessarium. Ut quid multa? Quidquid appetis in multis, in uno est. Si excellere, si scire, si delectari, si abundare; totum hic et perfecte hic, et nusquam nisi hic. (PL 195, col. 0509c)]

because they have nothing else to do, pose such questions and disturb simple souls, saying that a religion is contemptible if it changes like this. For, they say, how could a wise man imitate anything so mobile, so variable, so unstable? Its very instability shows there is nothing there which one can really grasp.⁹⁴ The theological nature of this dispute, focused as it was on what was the correct way to live the religious life, was mirrored by more practical concerns which are evident in the concomitant monastic and ecclesiastic reforms of the eleventh century. In both instances, a new category of religious masculinity was promulgated, which in turn sought to cleanse the polluted male body and create a spiritually focused, religious warrior.

Historians argue for and against a number of factors driving the reform of monasticism from the early tenth century. In an oft-cited article published in 1960, Norman Cantor attributed this 'crisis' in western monasticism to 'the internal and external activities of the monastic order'.⁹⁵ Put simply, internally, monasticism was turning to a more ascetic way of life while, externally, monks were losing their privileged position in society to professional bureaucrats and a growing secular education system.⁹⁶ In 1984, John van Engen referred to Cantor's approach as a 'sweeping interpretation of the supposed crisis,' noting that 'this crisis now seemed an accepted fact, even if the details remained to be worked out'.⁹⁷ Van Engen finds, instead, that reform centered on an increasing interaction with society which the Black monks were unable to avoid.⁹⁸ Jestice argues that the reform was driven by an increasing desire amongst some monks to be more active 'in the world outside the monastery's confines'.⁹⁹ This is the view put forward by Bernard McGinn, although he marked the tension between the active and contemplative at an earlier point in the

⁹⁴ Anselm of Havelburg, *Dialogi*, 1.1, cited in M. -D. Chenu, 'Nature and Man: The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century', in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* by M. -D. Chenu, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little, Chicago, 1968, p. 218. [Tales, cum otiose sunt, inducunt quaestiones, et corda simplicium pervertunt, dicentes omnem religionem tanto esse contemptibiliorem, quanto mobiliorem. Quod enim, inquit, est tam mobile, tam variable, tam instabile, quomodo alicui sapientum digne potest esse imitabile? Propria quippe sui varietate probat se resplendum esse. (PL, 188, col. 1142c)]

⁹⁵ Norman F. Cantor, 'The Crisis of Western Monasticism', *The American Historical Review*, 66, 1, October 1960, p. 50.

⁹⁶ Cantor, 'The Crisis of Western Monasticism', p. 51-54.

⁹⁷ John van Engen, 'The "Crisis of Cenobitism" Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050-1150', *Speculum*, 61, 1986, reprinted in John van Engen, *Religion in the History of the Medieval West*, Aldershot, 2004, p. 272. Van Engen provides a concise overview of the literature relating to this idea of crisis although, as van Engen notes, the word or concept of crisis does not occur in any of the contemporary literature concerning the reform; see pp. 271-73.

⁹⁸ van Engen, 'The "Crisis of Cenobitism" Reconsidered', p. 303.

⁹⁹ Jestice, *Wayward Monks*, p. 7.

evolution of monasticism.¹⁰⁰ McGinn, in fact, plots three distinct ‘waves’ of reform within monasticism occurring between the years c. 900 and 1100.¹⁰¹ C. H. Lawrence marks this period of reform as one where ‘a search for the order of the primitive Church’ redefined what it was to be a monk.¹⁰² For van Engen and Jestice, diversity and options became the norm for religious men at this point and Jestice, in particular, quite rightly makes this the focal point of her argument. She uses, as an example, Odo of Tournai who was at turns a canon regular, a hermit, and finally a monk.¹⁰³ Odo’s attempts to find a ‘way of life’ which fit his understanding of the spiritual life saw him have a go at nearly the whole range of options available to him. I argue that it was the regulation and the institutionalized nature of the religious life for men—even those who tried to work outside of the institution— which prevented a less-structured, affective mystical relationship with Christ.

This reforming movement encompassed far more than the moral and institutional operation of the Church.¹⁰⁴ As Uta-Renate Blumenthal argues, ‘the ideal of individual Christian renewal was linked with the renewal of society as a whole, that is to say of the Church as a whole.’¹⁰⁵ Theologians of the twelfth century were also engaged in a dialogue with what M. -D. Chenu labelled ‘a conflict between natural science and symbolism’.¹⁰⁶ Central to this conflict was the revival of a classical notion: ‘the perception of the universe as an entity.’¹⁰⁷ This concept provided a schema which allowed diverse individuals to conceive of themselves as part of a whole and it also cemented into place a hierarchal formulation which assigned each of the parts of this whole a correct position in the universal entity. Hugh of St Victor expressed this order when he stated that ‘the ordered disposition of things from top to bottom in the network of this universe . . . is so arranged that, among all the things that exist, nothing

¹⁰⁰ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 120.

¹⁰¹ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 121.

¹⁰² Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, pp. 146-47.

¹⁰³ Jestice, *Wayward Monks*, p. 15, n.28.

¹⁰⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the meaning of ‘reform’ see; Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, Harvard, 1959; idem, ‘Terms and Idea of Renewal’, in Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable eds, *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., 1982, pp. 1-33; Giles Constable, ‘Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities’, in Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable eds, *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., 1982, pp. 37-67; Constable, *Reformation*.

¹⁰⁵ Uta-Renate Blumenthal, ‘The Papacy and Canon Law in the Eleventh-Century Reform’, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 84, 2, April 1998, p. 201.

¹⁰⁶ Chenu, ‘Nature and Man’, p. 16.

¹⁰⁷ Chenu, ‘Nature and Man’, p. 5.

is unconnected or separable by nature, or external'.¹⁰⁸ This recognition of humanity's place in a wider, ordered system allowed man to '[understand] himself as the main part, the key-stone, of nature'.¹⁰⁹ It encouraged a philosophical shift from imagining man as at the whim of the supernatural to a search for what Southern terms 'self-knowledge'.¹¹⁰ Monasteries, and the men within them, were integral to a developing theology which reassessed man's relationship to both his creator and the universe fashioned by his creator. However, as with many other facets of medieval life in the first two centuries of the second millennium, the monastic profession was undergoing a change, with the two most prominent Benedictine orders coming into conflict by the twelfth century.

The development of Cistercian monasticism was a reaction to the perceived decadence which had developed within the Cluniac institution.¹¹¹ Founded in 909 by William III, Duke of Aquitaine, the monastery of Cluny represented the success of the Anianian reforms of a century earlier, which had cemented the pre-eminent place of the Benedictine Rule in the monasteries of the Carolingian realm.¹¹² Cluny was not the only Benedictine monastery of note, but the advantage it held at the time of its founding was in the freedom from lay interference afforded it by William III. He recorded in Cluny's foundation charter that he wished for the monks of Cluny to 'not be subjected to us, or to our kinsmen, or to the splendour of royal greatness, or to the yoke of any earthly power'.¹¹³ Rather, Cluny was to be under the control of the Apostolic See, particularly the apostles Peter and Paul.¹¹⁴ This autonomy was a key feature in Cluny's development as a 'super-abbey,' and resulted in hundreds of

¹⁰⁸ Hugh of St Victor, *De Sacramentis Christiane Fidei*, 1.2.1-2, cited in Chenu, 'Nature and Man', p. 7, n.10. [Rerum omnium ordo dispositioque a summo usque ad imum, in universitatis hujus compage ita sese causis quibusdam rationumque genituris prosequitur, ut omnium quae sunt, nihil inconnexum aut separabile natura externumque inveniatur. (PL, 176, col. 206c)]

¹⁰⁹ R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*, Oxford, 1970, p. 32.

¹¹⁰ Southern, *Medieval Humanism*, p. 34.

¹¹¹ Constance Berman contests the timeline for the development of Cistercian monasticism suggesting that colonization was less likely than amalgamation. Constance Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Philadelphia, 2000. Also see, Brian Golding, 'Hermits, Monks and Women in Twelfth-Century France and England: The Experience of Obazine and Sempringham', in Judith Loades ed., *Monastic Studies: The Continuity of Tradition*, Bangor, 1990, p. 127.

¹¹² Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, pp. 109-110; Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 83; Jestic, *Wayward Monks*, pp. 17-28.

¹¹³ *Recueil des chartes de l'abbaye de Cluny*, ed. A. Bernard and A. Bruel, *Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France*, vol. 72, part 1, Paris, 1876, pp. 126-27, cited in Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, p. 110.

¹¹⁴ *Recueil des chartes*, pp. 126-27, cited in Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, p. 110.

dependent abbeys looking to the abbot of Cluny for guidance.¹¹⁵ It also resulted in the rapid growth of Cluny and this growth became a source of concern for those within the order and a means to criticise it from without.¹¹⁶

It is important to distinguish between differences and conflict between the Cluniac and Cistercian orders. The primary difference between the two revolved around the interpretation of the Benedictine Rule. To use a modern analogy, Cluny was 'corporatized' by the Carolingian royalty, who 'piously founded monasteries and made ample provision for the food and clothing for the servants of God'.¹¹⁷ Cluny was the fullest representation of the notion that the primary role of a monk was to pray for the salvation of the world and for their patrons. Thus, Cluny's benefactors 'introduced numerous dependents to carry out all of the external duties and established monks to devote their time to sacred reading, devout prayers for all their benefactors and the divine office'.¹¹⁸ The monks of Cluny achieved this with Benedict of Aniane's additions to the liturgy, which stretched the eleven chapters devoted to the liturgy in the Rule of Benedict to their maximum, and his (and his benefactors') desire for conformity.¹¹⁹ As I have previously discussed, conformity and order were powerful influences on male religious behaviour, and at Cluny and its satellites, these stimuli were no less ignored than anywhere else. There seemed little room for individuality, and this is reinforced by the fact that the focus on prayer and contemplation was directed towards the outside world, not toward the interior man.

The intense focus on liturgy and prayer came at the expense of engagement in manual labour and poverty and it was this that was at the heart of the philosophical conflict between the Cluniacs and the Cistercians. Orderic Vitalis tells us that Robert

¹¹⁵ Estimates concerning the growth and number of Cluniac houses vary with Jestice noting that monasteries may have been present in numbers ranging from 200 to 2000; see Jestice, *Wayward Monks*, p. 21. Lynch suggests that the expansion of Cluniac houses was rapid noting that 'from fewer than 30 monasteries in the year 1000, there were an estimated 600 houses with about 10,000 monks in 1100. By the abbacy of Peter the Venerable (1132-56), there were more than 1000 Cluniac monasteries and hundreds of others influenced by Cluny, though not all of them were actually governed by the abbot of Cluny'; Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, p. 112. Constable notes that during the abbacy of Hugh and his successor Pontius (1049-1122), the number of monks at Cluny itself went from 60-80 to over 300; Constable, *Reformation*, p. 28. Also see, Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, pp. 84-85.

¹¹⁶ Constable, *Reformation*, p. 28.

¹¹⁷ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica* (hereafter *Eccl. Hist.*), ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, vol. 4, Oxford, 1973, viii.26.

¹¹⁸ *Eccl. Hist.*, viii.26. [Dagobertus rex et Teodericus atque Carolus Magnus imperator aliique reges et augusti coenobia deuote codiderunt, et de suis redditibus ad uitcum et uestitum seruorum Dei ubertim erogauerunt, multitudinemque clientum ad extiora ministeria pleniter explenda subegerunt, monachosque lectionibus et sacris orationibus pro cunctis benefactoribus suis et cœlestibus misteriis intentos esse constituerunt.]

¹¹⁹ *RB*, chapters 8-18 deal specifically with devotional prayers and liturgy. For some insight into Benedict's desire for regularity see, *VBen.*, 36-38.

of Molesme considered the acceptance of tithes and oblations, which were now a substantial source of income for the Cluniac Order, to be wrong and he claimed that as monks, 'we are gorged with the blood of men' and this practice was akin to 'participating in sin'.¹²⁰ Robert wished to 'follow after Christ in the footsteps of the fathers,' and the rejection of tithes became one the cornerstones of the Cistercian order.¹²¹ The monks who followed him wanted to return to a life which was more focused on the Benedictine Rule and its balance of work and contemplation. Bernard of Clairvaux, Cîteaux's most famous son, emphasized the austerities of the Cistercian life in a letter he wrote c. 1119, trying to convince his nephew to return to the monastery at Clairvaux after Robert had left to return to Cluny:

Does salvation rest rather in soft raiment and high living than in frugal fare and moderate clothing? If warm and comfortable furs, if fine and precious cloth, if long sleeves and ample hoods, if dainty coverlets and soft woollen shirts make a saint, why do I delay and not follow you at once? But these things are the comforts for the weak, not the arms of fighting men.¹²²

According to Bruno Scott James, this letter shows Bernard firing the first shot in the controversy which developed between the Cluniac congregation and the Cistercian reformers, especially concerning tithes and possessions.¹²³ This distaste for chattels and wealth is echoed by the Cistercian in Idung of Prüfening's *A Dialogue between Two Monks*. Written in the form of a conversation between a Cluniac and a Cistercian, this work seeks to promote the austerity of Cîteaux and its monks by creating a sense of dissonance about the extravagant practices at Cluny. While not defaming the Cluniac directly—after all, they both lived under the auspices of St Benedict—the Cistercian accuses his brother's Order of 'receiv[ing] more because it wants more—not because it needs, but merely because it wants, more'.¹²⁴ Simplicity and austerity were to be the cornerstones of the Cistercian order, indicating a return to a less complicated way of life as envisioned by Robert of Molesme. What the Cistercians also promoted,

¹²⁰ *Eccl. Hist.*, viii.26. [Sic nimirum sanguine hominum uescimur, et peccatis participamur.]

¹²¹ *Eccl. Hist.*, viii.26. [Et sic per uestigia partum post Christum currere feruenter insudemus.] On tithes see, Giles Constable, *Monastic Tithes: from their Origins to the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, 1964.

¹²² *The Letters of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James, London, 1953, 1.11. [Salus ergo magis in cultu vestium et ciborum est opulentia quam in sobrio victu vestituque moderato? Si pelliciae lenes et calidae, si panni subtiles et pretiosi, si longae manicae et amplum caputium, si opertorium Silvestre et molle stamineum sanctum faciunt, quid moror et ego quod te non sequor? Sed haec infirmantium sunt formenta, non arma pugnantium. (PL 182, col. 0077a)]

¹²³ Bruno Scott James, *The Letters of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno James Scott, London, 1953, pref. to Letter 1, p. 1; Constable, *Reformation*, p. 227.

¹²⁴ Idung of Prüfening, *Cistercians and Cluniacs, the Case for Cîteaux. A Dialogue Between Two Monks, an Argument on Four Questions*, trans. Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan, Kalamazoo, 1977, 1.36.

particularly Bernard of Clairvaux, was a turn towards the contemplation of the inner man because, without knowing yourself, how could you know God?

We cannot ignore the fact that, central to the creation of the new religious man in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was conformity to existing monastic rules and structure, particularly those orders dedicated to the Benedictine Rule. Despite their frequently voiced differences, Cluniacs and Cistercians were both committed to the Benedictine rule. It is important to consider this conflict when discussing mysticism because—to return to a fundamental premise of this thesis—the monastery was the ideal site for contemplation. In fact, one would imagine at first glance that the Cluniac model of monasticism was more attuned to developing a mystical paradigm, focused as it was on contemplation and prayer. I think that changes discussed above, particularly with regard to natural philosophy and theology, are what drives the Cistercians' relationship with Christ. Giles Constable argues that monastic theology, in this period of reform, owes more to the philosophical works of the late antique fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, than to contemporary discussions of man's place within a wider universe.¹²⁵ While this may be so, the Cistercian effort to reconcile the inner man with Christ points to an individualistic approach to spirituality—one that, while mirroring the early fathers, spoke in contemporary ways, indicating that Cistercian theologians were well aware of this philosophy. Something as simple as the giving of alms was presented as an opportunity to pursue the inner man, as illustrated by Idung of Prüfening: 'The person who wishes to give alms must begin with himself. This means that he has first to have mercy on himself, that is, he must repent his sins, because it is written: 'Have pity on your soul' etcetera.'¹²⁶ Mark Burrows notes that when Bernard 'calls his monastic brothers to study "the book of [their] own experience," he meant that they should exegete the "texts" of their inner lives as monks engaged in the monastic journey *ad Deum*, as travellers through a carefully constructed interior landscape.'¹²⁷ In order to do this, the new monastic man needed to be capable of rational thought, something that the child oblate was not considered capable of.

Oblati or *nutriti* was the name given to the young boys dedicated to a monastery by their parents. This ages-old practice was little questioned until the eleventh

¹²⁵ Constable, *Reformation*, p. 288.

¹²⁶ Idung of Prüfening, *Cistercians and Cluniacs*, I.35.

¹²⁷ Mark S. Burrows, 'Foundations for an Erotic Christology: Bernard of Clairvaux on Jesus as "Tender Love"', *Anglican Theological Review*, 80, 4, Fall 1998, p. 480.

century, without doubt because of its representation in the Rule of Benedict.¹²⁸ It is not surprising, however, to see the practice of child oblation questioned at a time when debates were occurring considering the nature of man's place in the universe; even Cluny, considered the pre-eminent representation of old black Benedictine monasticism, voiced concerns about the propriety of such a practice. Ulrich of Zell claimed that the parents of disabled or deformed children only committed them to the monastery in order to free themselves of a burden.¹²⁹ Guibert of Nogent also blamed the practice for inducing complacency and a 'slacker zeal' amongst the monks; these are the monks which he claims were causing real monks to become 'scarcer,' as the religious life became less important to them.¹³⁰ Implicit in this is an understanding that the intent driving an action was more important than the action itself.¹³¹ Cistercians adopted a negative vision of child oblation, despite its prominent place in the Benedictine Rule, based upon the understanding that children were incapable of the rational thought required to make a decision to devote their lives to God. Bernard of Clairvaux reminded his nephew Robert that the reason he denied Robert's pleas to be admitted to Cîteaux was because of Robert's 'tender age'.¹³² He furthers this analogy when he states: 'I nourished you with milk when, while yet a child, it was all you could take. And I would have given you bread if you had waited until you grew up. But alas! how soon and how early you were weaned.'¹³³ When he asks Robert to 'listen to your conscience, examine your intention, consider the facts,' Bernard is

¹²⁸ *RB*, 59. [Si quis forte de nobilibus offerit filium suum Deo in monasterio, si ipse puer minor ætate est, parentes eius faciant petitionem quam supra diximus, et cum oblatione ipsam petitionem et manum pueri involvant in palla altaris, et sic eum offerant. . . . Similiter autem et pauperiores faciant. Qui vero ex toto nihil habent, simpliciter petitionem faciant et cum oblatione offerant filium suum coram testibus. (*PL* 66, cols 0839a-0840b)]

¹²⁹ Ulrich of Zell, *Consuetudines Cluniacenses, Ep. nunc.*, cited in Constable, *Reformation*, p. 100. [Accedit aliquoties admodum grata et jocunda memoria pollicitationis tuæ de cavendo ingenio quorundam hominum saecularium, qui nimirum, non magnopere curantes de alio quam de hac sola temporali vita, postquam domum habuerint, ut dicam, plenam filiorum et filiarum, aut si quis eorumdem claudus erit aut mancus, surdaster aut caecus, gibbosus aut leprosus, vel aliud quid hujusmodi quod eum aliquo modo saeculo facit minus acceptum, hunc quidem impensissimo voto ut monachus fiat offerunt Deo, quanquam plane non propter Deum, sed propter hoc tantum ut seipsos expediant ab eis educandis et pascendis, vel aliis suis liberis possit esse magis consultum. (*PL* 149, cols 0635-0636)]

¹³⁰ Guibert of Nogent, *De vita sua*, ed. Georges Bourgin, Paris, 1907, 1.8, trans. John Benton, *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent (1064-c.1125)*, New York, 1970, p. 54.

¹³¹ Peter Abelard, *Ethics*, in *Peter Abelard: Ethics and Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade, intro. Marilyn McCord Adams, Indianapolis, 1995, pp. 1-58.

¹³² *Letters of Bernard*, 1.8. [Quaesisti, petisti, pulsasti; sed pro tui adhuc teneritudine, te licet invitio, dilates es per biennium. (*PL* 182, cols 0074d-0075)]

¹³³ *Letters of Bernard*, 1.10. [Nutrivi deinde lacte, quod solum adhuc parvulus capere poteris, daturus en panem, si expectares ut grandesceres. Sed heu quam preapropere et intempestive ablactatus es! (*PL* 182, col. 0076a)]

clearly stating that the ability to think rationally is an important aspect in the process of conversion and one that clearly resides in the adult mind.¹³⁴

The 'type' of man required for the monastery was redefined by this turn away from child oblation. The new monk would be more aware of the outside world and the dangers inherent in it; he would also be more aware of himself and just what it was – money, property, family – that he was rejecting in order to be closer to God. The new monastic man made a choice based upon an understanding of himself and his position within a wider universe. The new monk was also encouraged to have a life that was 'inwardly rich, that is, rich in interior spiritual and affective experience.'¹³⁵ While this encourages the idea that monks from the eleventh century onward were completely knowledgeable and devoted to their conversion, I argue that the drive to inspect the inner man had the potential to be problematic. While an awareness of the world-at-large could provoke fear, it could also encourage desire and, as many confessed monks were educated, questioning the hows and whys of a spiritual relationship with a supernatural deity would surely have arisen. In Bernard's own words: 'a priest is of God's calling; a monk is a monk of his own choice.'¹³⁶

This 'choice' resulted in more than the creation of the Cistercian order. The new 'hybrid orders' of the canons regular emerged and began to operate under the re-discovered Augustinian Rule, which was designed to manage the more interactive lives of ordained men who wished to live in a communal setting.¹³⁷ New monastic orders which were, by and large, independent also began to appear with the foundation of the Carthusian Order by Bruno in 1084, and the establishment of the Grandmontine Order by Stephen of Muret in 1124.¹³⁸ In 1209, Francis of Assisi took a group of his followers to Rome in order to gain papal approval from Innocent III for their way of life, thereby taking the first step in the formation of the Franciscan Order.¹³⁹ This set in motion the development of a new kind of monastic way of life

¹³⁴ *Letters of Bernard*, 1.9. [Attende cor tuum, dicute intentionem, consule veritatem. (PL 182, cols 0075b-0075c)]

¹³⁵ G. R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, Oxford, 2000, p. 24. Also see, M. B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams*, Leiden, 1994, p. 6.

¹³⁶ *Letters of Bernard*, 42, cited in Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, p. 29. [Nempe monarchum facit profession, praelatum necessitas.]

¹³⁷ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 147.

¹³⁸ Jacques Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel: Sex, Sin, and Salvation in the Middle Ages*, Washington, 2006, p. 35.

¹³⁹ Francis of Assisi is, perhaps, the most recognised non-institutional religious man from my period of study, but there are two main reasons why I have chosen not to discuss him further in this thesis. Firstly, there exists a huge body of work which focuses on many aspects of Francis's life and while he is important, I wanted to investigate some less well-known men. Secondly, Francis's premature death at the

termed the mendicant orders.¹⁴⁰ These cenobitic groups have a connection: all were founded by individual men who had set out to redefine what a spiritual life should encompass. Various classed as hermits, evangelical preachers, or ascetic holy men, they added to, and were subsequently consumed by, an institution that demanded order.

The religious literature from high medieval period clearly illustrates a diversity of life 'styles'. The author of the *Libellus de Diversibus* takes a systematic approach to presenting the various orders of the Church, while authors such as Caesarius of Heisterbach and Gerald of Wales relay stories encompassing many models of life. The *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Aecclesia* provides a remarkable insight into this variety of religious life. Penned in the first half of the twelfth century, the *Libellus* is described by Giles Constable as 'one of the most perceptive, impartial, and clearly organized examples of . . . religious controversial literature'.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, only the first of what appears to have been two books survive; tantalizingly missing is the second book, which promised to discuss less formal ways of religious life such as male recluses and *licosi*, and all types of female religious life.¹⁴² Nonetheless, the surviving text provides an opportunity to understand the multiple approaches to religious living taken by men during this period.

Beginning with hermits, the author goes on to describe the three types of monks and the three kinds of canons. Hermits stand alone in the commentary and are treated first by the author because 'they are fewer in number and usually live alone'.¹⁴³ That they are fewer in number is reflected in Caesarius of Heisterbach who relays only 17 stories concerned with hermits or anchorites in his Dialogue.¹⁴⁴ The *Libellus* author's reason for this lies in his desire to avoid any 'complaint' that he has privileged one form of life over another. In doing so, the author gives the reader a clue as to his own

height of his popularity makes it difficult to assess how the institution may have dealt with him in later years.

¹⁴⁰ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, pp. 238, 250.

¹⁴¹ Constable and Smith, 'Introduction', p. xiii.

¹⁴² *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Aecclesia*, ed. and trans. G. Constable and B. Smith, Oxford, 1972, prol.

¹⁴³ *Libellus de Diversis*, prol. [Ita et hic faciemus, primum heremitas ponentes, qui pauciores sunt et soli sepe habitant, deinde monachos, quorum multiplicior est numerus, sicque as canonicos ueniemus, quorum maxima in diuersis locis et frequens habitatio diuerse uiuentium esse comprobatur.]

¹⁴⁴ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles* (hereafter *Dia. Mir.*), 2 vols, trans. H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, intro. G. G. Coulton, London, 1929. For example: he tells the story of a hermit who was an advisor (vii.32); he talks of Brother Herman, a recluse who was fooled by the devil (iv.87); and he relays the trials of the virgin recluse who was tempted by the flesh (viii.42).

vocation, saying: '[I]est it be said of me that in this work I seek my own and desire to honour it, I shall not put the canons in first place.'¹⁴⁵ Thus, after discussing the hermits, he then moves on to 'the monks, whose numbers are greater, and we shall thus come to the canons, who are known mainly to live in different kinds of places and to frequent different kinds of houses'.¹⁴⁶ In striving to maintain some measure of impartiality, the author evokes a sense that conflict—or at least, disagreement—permeated the cloister. This is clear in the author's discussion of the term 'monk' and his understanding of the definition of the word. For the *Libellus* author, proximity to the world should not impede the true monk who 'is rightly called 'one' and 'alone' who prefers to live with his brothers and to be completely cut off from the pleasures of the world'.¹⁴⁷ However, there is a strong sense that the author sees, in the differing monastic and canonical orders, some sense of a hierarchic perfection. Although he does not condemn the Cluniac order for its proximity to men, his repeated defense of those monks who lived amongst people points to some disquiet about the contact these men had with the world. For example, the author poses a question on behalf of his audience: 'Why do you assign to monks who live in cities what is more suitable for clerics and many other of the faithful?'¹⁴⁸ In response to the perceived criticism, the author curiously echoes Idung of Prüfening's Cistercian when he notes that it is an 'appropriate assignment for monks' to expound the faith to others.¹⁴⁹

This brief exchange highlights the difficulty in untangling the perceived or imagined differences between religious men during this period of change. How important, then, was it for orders to maintain a sense of discipline and uniformity? The *Libellus* author confronted these differences by framing all religious life as being within the boundaries of the Rule, saying that 'I believe those who answer they observe the rule'.¹⁵⁰ It is then up to each individual to decide how to construct his

¹⁴⁵ *Libellus de Diversis*, prolog. [Nam pro certo scio canonicos monachosque maiorem locum in ecclesia tenere, et tamen neutrum horum primum positum reperiet.]

¹⁴⁶ *Libellus de Diversis*, prolog. [Ita et hic faciemus, primum heremitas ponentes, qui pauciores sunt et soli sepe habitant, deinde monachos, quorum multiplicior est numerus, sicque ad canonicos uenimus, quorum maxima in diuersis locis et frequens habitatio diuerse uiuentium esse comprobatur.]

¹⁴⁷ *Libellus de Diversis*, II.9. [Ad quod respondeo, quia ille unus et solus recte dicitur, qui unum et solum cum fratribus uiuendi habet affectum, et a uoluptate secularium omnino segregatum.]

¹⁴⁸ *Libellus de Diversis*, II.13. [Sed dicit aliquis: Quare id quod etiam clericis et multis aliis uel omnibus fidelibus congruere potest, monachis tantum qui in ciuitatibus degunt assignas?]

¹⁴⁹ *Libellus de Diversis*, II.13. [. . . quandam monachorum talium propriam assignationem.]

¹⁵⁰ *Libellus de Diversis*, II.14. [Fauo bene intelligentibus, credo se obseruare regulam respondentibus, laudo secundum ordinem uniuscuiusque monasterii uiuentes, predico et apello dominos et patres, admirer et ueneror ipsam regulam etiam ad litteram omnino seruantes.]

religious life using that framework, employing his own 'judgement and strength'.¹⁵¹ For the *Libellus* author, it was counterproductive and prideful to consider another's way of life wrong or contrary to the rule:

And if these monks argue amongst themselves about the rule, and one says to another that he should work in the fields and should wear such clothing as is prescribed in the rule and should eat this or that kind of food according to the rule, let him who says or believes this understand that if anything seems different to wise men from his understanding, it has been done wisely and not in vain, either in order to accommodate the weakness of many or in order that the weakness of those who wish to save their souls through the example of such monks should not be alarmed.¹⁵²

This invocation of self-knowledge as the guiding principle for the religious man and the recognition that all men were not equally capable of enduring the rigours of some forms of monastic life are important factors in understanding why this period witnessed such a growth in sanctioned diversity. However, it is also important to recognize that these factors functioned within the structure of the Benedictine Rule. Central to my argument is the idea that while men had many more options for religious life than women, they were in fact more constrained by a continuing didactic which exhorted them to humility, obedience, and conformity. This is the crux of the problem we encounter when looking for religious men who acted outside of the perceived norms.

By listing three types of monks and three kinds of canons, the author alerts us to the fact that, for medieval people, religious life was multi-faceted and existed beyond the simple designation of monk or cleric. Yet, if we consider the chapter headings of the *Libellus*, we will see that the major point of difference between the various kinds of monks and canons is spatial rather than vocational:

- I. Hermits, who usually live alone or with a few others
- II. Monks who live close to men, such as the Cluniacs and the like
- III. Monks who remove themselves far from men, such as the Cistercians and the like
- IV. Monks who are called secular, who take no vows
- V. Canons who establish themselves far from men, such as the Premonstratensians and the canons of Saint-Josse
- VI. Canons who have their houses near the activities of men, such as the canons of St. Quentin in the field and of St. Victor

¹⁵¹ *Libellus de Diversis*, I.6. [. . . et unusquisque arbitrii sui potestate utatur . . .]

¹⁵² *Libellus de Diversis*, II.15. [Quod si inter se ipsi monachi de regula contendant, et dicat alter alteri quia laborare in agro debet, et talia indumenta qualia in regula prescripta sunt habere, et illis uel epulis secundum regulam uti, intelligat qui hoc dicit et credat si quid a sapientibus aliter quam ipse intelligit uisum est, non frustra sed sapienter esse actum, ut uel multorum infirmitas reuelaretur, uel illorum qui se exemplo talium monachorum saluare cupiebant imbecillitas non terreretur.]

VII. Canons who live among men of the world and are called seculars¹⁵³

As I have mentioned, the author goes to great lengths in explaining away the differences between Cluniac and Cistercian monks (and the like) by positioning them within the institutional framework of the Benedictine Rule. Certainly, the author wishes to show ‘how such servants of God differ and what the purposes of the different forms of calling are’.¹⁵⁴ Yet, only two of these ‘callings’ appear to be substantially different from the others when we consider them in terms of regulation: hermits, and monks who are called secular. While being quite clear as to who or what constitutes a hermit, the *Libellus* author had far less to say about ‘monks who are called seculars’. In fact, the author offered no indication as to who this curious group might be and he provided no insight to any spiritual foundation for their existence, restricting his comments to a short discussion on the ‘negligence of masters’ and to the ‘dissoluteness’ that affluence produces.¹⁵⁵ This curious designation appears to have more in common with the gyrovagues of Cassian and Benedict, as they moved from this thing to that, neither satisfied when they had too much, nor pleased when they had too little. I suspect that the author may be referring to lay brothers, a group who became important to the growing monastic movement at this time and who occupy an even more liminal position than hermits. I want to close this section with an overview of both hermits and lay brothers because they appear to represent a form of male religious experience which is liminal, and it is in this space that we may find less regulated expressions of spirituality. I will discuss individuals who came from each tradition in the following chapter, but at this point I want to try to decipher how a medieval commentator imagined this kind of religious man and how this is relevant to a wider argument concerning obedience.

The *Libellus* author sets out to illustrate the antiquity of the eremitic ideal using examples from the Old Testament. The author notes that because Cain is said to be the first man to construct a city and ‘set boundaries and limits on the earth . . . [it] is therefore highly unsuitable for hermits to worry about the building of houses’.¹⁵⁶ The

¹⁵³ Although I have listed canons here, I will not be discussing them at length.

¹⁵⁴ *Libellus de Diversis*, prolog. [. . . ostendendum est Deo auxiliante, quae in talibus Dei seruis differentia, quae intentionis sit in diuersis professionibus forma.]

¹⁵⁵ *Libellus de Diversis*, IV.30. [Ex magistrorum enim negligentia . . . Contiguet enim aliquando ut rerum affluentia dissolutionem pariat . . .]

¹⁵⁶ *Libellus de Diversis*, I.2. [Locum uero certum eos nequaquam tenuisse eo modo conitio, quia non ante Cain domus uel ciuitas aedificata fuit, et Iosephus eundem metas terris et limites primum imposuisse

association of cities and houses with Cain fulfils two purposes: the first, chronological purpose, simply stated that if Cain was the first to build, then it implies that the first men lived in solitude; and the second, more moral, explanation draws a comparison with the wickedness of Cain and the desire of individuals to live in 'city-houses'.¹⁵⁷ This is perhaps a commentary on the rapid growth in population and, therefore, cities which western Europe was experiencing during this period. The author is suggesting that men should consider a return to a more 'innocent' age, without 'luxury . . . covetousness and ostentation'.¹⁵⁸ Cain's brother, 'the just Abel . . . having doubtless sought solitude, where he [could] live without being disturbed and feed the sheep,' provided the positive exemplar in the author's commentary, emphasizing that this way of life was pleasing to God.¹⁵⁹ It is clear from the commentary that hermits were a common feature of medieval religious life although the author, unfortunately, offers us no contemporary examples of men who had adopted this form of religious life.

Another point of interest in the commentary related to the attitudes of the community at large to those engaged in this form of religious life, particularly the diversity which was a feature. Diversity in this instance is related to whether individuals chose to live alone or in small groups and the author likens it to the diversity found 'among hermits of old'.¹⁶⁰ The *Libellus* author makes it clear that others should not be 'disturbed' by this diversity amongst hermits and asks them to consider 'the creation fashioned by the Creator in various ways, and how a harmony has been achieved from different chords'.¹⁶¹ What is also striking is that the level of diversity is decided by the hermit himself: 'let each use the judgement and strength he has so that he may attempt as much as he wishes and as much as his powers allow,

asserit. Domorum ergo aedificandarum cura heremitis summa non conuenit, ne dicatur de eis quia heremum non incolunt, sed in heremo domos permodicus, talibus congruit.]

¹⁵⁷ *Libellus de Diversis*, I.2.

¹⁵⁸ *Libellus de Diversis*, I.2. [. . . sine luxu, sine cupiditate illa et iactantia quae modo in nobis set uiuentes . . .]

¹⁵⁹ *Libellus de Diversis*, I.2. [Habemus ergo in priori astate heremitarum similitudinem expressam, ubi inuenimus Abel iustum in arborum umbra morantem et pascius ouium intentum sine dubio solitudinem quaesisse, ubi et sine tumultu ueret, et oues suae innocentiae indices nutriet . . .]

¹⁶⁰ *Libellus de Diversis*, I.6. [Caeterum non moueat quemquam si in hoc ordine quaedam diuersitas appareat, et aliter atque aliter unusquisque uitam suam instituat, ueluti est illud, ut quidam horum soli habitant, quidam uero adiunctis sibi duobus aut tribus aut pluribus, et illud quod alter altero leuius aut durius uiuit, cum et hanc diuersitatem in antiquis heremitis inueniamus . . .] Also see Paul Meyvaert, 'Diversity Within Unity, a Gregorian Theme', *Heythrop Journal*, 4, 2, 1964, pp. 141-162; G. A. Loud, 'Varieties of Monastic Discipline in Southern Italy during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory eds, *Discipline and Diversity*, Suffolk, 2007, pp. 144-158; and Anne J. Duggan, 'Tempering the Wind . . .': Moderation and Discretion in Late Twelfth-Century Papal Decretals', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory eds, *Discipline and Diversity*, Suffolk, 2007, pp. 180-190.

¹⁶¹ *Libellus de Diversis*, I.6-7. [Si autem adhuc tibi displicet quod omnes huius professionis homines non uno modo uiuunt, inspicere facturam mundi a bono conditore diuersae dispositam . . .]

and not be condemned by the Lord for it.’¹⁶² This is in stark contrast to formal monastic rules, which demanded conformity of behaviour, suggesting that hermits, although accepted, were viewed as unusual and on the fringes of society both spatially and intellectually.

The rapid expansion of the Cistercian monastic model saw the implementation of a workforce comprised of men who were neither fully monastic nor fully secular. These were men commonly called lay brothers or *conversi*, and they were tasked with the manual labour required to keep the monastery operational.¹⁶³ Brian Noell stresses that the lay brothers fulfilled more than practical roles in the burgeoning Cistercian world. He claims that they were seen and used as models of humility and obedience, the key principles of Cistercian monasticism.¹⁶⁴ In this sense, the lay brother performs an important function in the wider literature of monastic culture. They occupy a curious liminal position within the monastic realm where they are neither fully within nor without the monastery. This accounts for their, at times, unusual activities and experiences which do not entirely fit with the masculine model promoted for religious men in this period. While the Desert Fathers, late-antique Church Fathers, and contemporary theologians provided models and direction for the spiritual life of the monastic—whether that be eremitical or cenobitic—lay brothers illustrated ‘ordinary’ or ‘simple’ aspects of living that monks would do well to imitate. Caesarius of Heisterbach, for example, has some fifty stories relating to lay brothers in his *Dialogue* which encompass a range of narratives from divine visions to demonic visitations—compare this to only seventeen tales of recluses and hermits. Lay brothers appear in ten of the twelve chapters dealing with topics from conversion to death, highlighting their importance in the wider Cistercian corpus.¹⁶⁵

I wish to stress again the importance of these developments in the monastic life when considering mysticism because, as McGinn notes, the reforming monasticism of

¹⁶² *Libellus de Diversis*, I.6. [. . . et unusquisque arbitrii sui potestate utatur, ut quantumlibet, et quantum vires suas pensat aggrediatur, nec a Domino inde dampnetur.]

¹⁶³ I will use the term lay brother as *conversi* is often used to describe adult converts to the religious life.

¹⁶⁴ Brian Noell, ‘Expectation and Unrest Among Cistercian Lay Brothers in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 32, 2006, p. 253.

¹⁶⁵ *Dia. Mir.*, see, for example: the lay brother Liffard who had a vision of dead bodies in a cemetery (iv.4); a lay brother deceived by a cuckoo (v.17); two lay brothers who saw a floating cross (viii.17); and a lay brother who died who revisited the monks (xii.53).

this period came to be closely identified with the contemplative life.¹⁶⁶ Bernard's exhortation concerning contemplation echoes the words of Gregory the Great:

For it is not that the grace of contemplation is given to the highest [the clergy] and not to the least, but frequently the higher, frequently the least, more frequently "those set apart" [*remoti*, that is, the monks], and sometimes even the married receive it. Therefore, there is no Christian state from which the grace of contemplation can be excluded. Whoever has an interior heart can be illuminated by the light of contemplation.¹⁶⁷

However Gregory, unlike Bernard, shines the light of illumination beyond the walls of the professional religious institution. By Bernard's era, the effects of contemplation occurred in a less haphazard fashion and a more systematic representation of the souls that could seek God developed. John of Fécamp divided those souls into three types of contemplatives: the first are 'less proficient' and should 'maintain the practice of the active life, imitating Martha'; the second are those contemplatives for whom 'the exercises of the spiritual life' usurp the active life, like Mary; and the final group are those who are able to actively combine the traits of Martha and Mary and 'advance in each life every day'.¹⁶⁸ The development of this hierarchy of ability, while not explicitly gendered by John, bears the stamp of an ideology concerning the physical nature of the body and its link to spiritual experience.

This link dates back to the earliest Christian writers who grappled with the complexities of spirituality and the end goal of contemplation. Evagrius Pontius (d. 399) maintained that the 'entire nature of body will be withdrawn' once the individual had achieved contemplation.¹⁶⁹ As David Brakke notes, Evagrius did not see the body as an evil to be escaped, rather 'the goal [of the contemplative] is liberation from the body'.¹⁷⁰ The transformative capability of the contemplative body is clearly seen in the story I recounted in chapter two, which concerning Abba Bessarion and his disciple Doulas who found a dead monk to, in fact, be a woman.¹⁷¹ The brother had triumphed

¹⁶⁶ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 120.

¹⁶⁷ Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Ezechielem*, 2.5.19, cited in Bernard McGinn, 'Asceticism and Mysticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', in Vincent L. Wimbush, and Richard Valantasis eds, *Asceticism*, Oxford, 1998, pp. 69-70. [Non enim contemplationis gratia summis datur et minimis non datur, sed saepe hanc summi, saepe minimi, saepius remoti, aliquando etiam conjugati percipiunt. Si ergo nullum est fidelium officium, a quo possit gratia contemplationis excludi, quisquis cor intus habet, illustrari etiam lumine contemplationis potest, quia intra portam undique per circuitum fenestras obliquas constructas sunt, ut nemo ex hac gratia quasi de singularitate gloriatur. (PL 76, col. 0996a)]

¹⁶⁸ John of Fécamp, Ep. 12, in Jean Leclercq and Jean-Paul Bonnes, *Un maître de la spirituelle au XIe siècle : John de Fécamp*, Paris, 1946, 210.135-36, cited in McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 143.

¹⁶⁹ Evagrius Pontius, *Kephalaia Gnostika*, trans. Luke Dysinger, 2.62, accessed at http://www.ldysinger.com/evagrius/02_Gno-Keph/00a_start.htm

¹⁷⁰ David Brakke, 'The Lady Appears: Materializations of "Woman" in Early Monastic Literature', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33, 3, Fall 2003, p. 397.

¹⁷¹ See chapter two, p. 55.

over the female propensity to excessive speech and as such, clearly illustrated to the likely male recipients of this story Evagrius' contention that contemplation rendered the body removed or left behind. Contrast Evagrius' position to that of Augustine, who understood 'contemplation and reflection' to be 'signs of weakness, servitude to sin, and inattentiveness;' in other words, feminine.¹⁷² Augustine believed that religious men should be engaged in manly battles against lust, a feature of the eleventh-century ecclesiastical reform which was to become a defining difference between the monk and the priest. It was also to become a defining difference between the religious man and the religious woman. As contemplation for men became an intellectualised pursuit, allowing men to access Christ through the Scripture, the experiential aspect of contemplation allowed women to access the scripture through their experiences of Christ.¹⁷³ I argue, therefore, that men became restrained by a medieval understanding of masculine contemplation as being intellectual, not experiential, and they were less likely to be open about visionary and physical experiences. This became even more of an issue as the lines became more clearly drawn between the monastic and ecclesiastic communities.

Monks were also intimately involved in ecclesiastical reform, wanting to maintain control over spiritual matters. As C. H. Lawrence notes, it was to the great Benedictine foundation of Cluny that men were accustomed to look 'for spiritual leadership and religious inspiration' before the ascension of Leo IX to the papal chair.¹⁷⁴ But herein lay the problem. If monks were supposed to be dead to the world, how could they preach to it? It is in this environment which we find the new kind of religious man who is neither priest nor associated with any monastic community (at least initially). The new kind of holy man this evolving situation required provides insight into the problems facing religious men who operated outside of normal boundaries. The tension between teaching and preaching is best summed up by the Cistercian in his dialogue with the Cluniac:

Every man who has intellectual understanding, namely, that which the wicked servant buried in the earth, if he is not a hermit, if he lives among men, has a duty to teach, because he owes it to his brother whom he sees stray from the path of truth and moral behaviour to lead him back to the right way by teaching. . . . But the duty to preach, that is to teach publicly, is reserved to those specifically sent: bishops and priests in

¹⁷² Erin Sawyer, 'Celibate Pleasures: Masculinity, Desire, and Asceticism in Augustine', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 6, 1, 1995, p. 4.

¹⁷³ Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, Chicago, 2002, especially pp. 6-13.

¹⁷⁴ Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 83.

their churches, and abbots in their monasteries, to whom the care of souls is entrusted.¹⁷⁵

The Cistercian is arguing here for the reinforcement of delineated models of performance, but his comments clearly indicate that diversity was recognised amongst religious commentators.

Despite the increase in opportunities to engage in diverse spiritual experiences which flourished from the eleventh century, men continued to be constrained by rules, both institutional and societal. While monastic reform gives us an insight into the institutional aspects of constraint, the concomitant ecclesiastic reform gives us an insight into the societal expectations of the religious man.

Religious Masculinity

As monastic reform continued apace, a movement toward reform was also accelerating in the ecclesiastic arm of the Church. Starting with Leo IX (r. 1049-1054), successive popes sought to reform a Church which they saw as corrupt and impure. However, like the monastic reform, the so-called Gregorian Reform should not be seen as a single movement with a central locus. Rather, it should be seen as a multiplicity of actions, objectives, and individuals.¹⁷⁶ It would also be unwise to consider the monastic and clerical reforms as anything other than concomitant. This is most clearly represented in some of the important figures of the clerical reform including the monastic popes Gregory VIII and Victor III, and monks such as Odilo of Cluny and Peter Damian. The monastic and clerical orders should not be seen as diametrically opposed, despite the apparent spatial, and at times, ideological and teleological differences which loomed large between monks and priests. Rather, they should be

¹⁷⁵ 'Dialogue Between a Cistercian and a Cluniac', ed. E. Martène and U. Durand, *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, Paris, 1717, 5, 1621-2, cited in M. -D. Chenu, 'Monks, Canons, and Laymen in Search of the Apostolic Life', in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* by M. -D. Chenu, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little, Chicago, 1968, p. 220, n.37. [Omnis homo habiens intellectum, illum scilicet talentum quod nequam servus fodit in terram, si non est solitarius, si habitat cum hominibus, officium habet docentis, quia debet fratrem suum quem videt errare a veritatis vel morum via, ad rectam viam docendo reducere. . . . Sed officium praedicandi, id est publice docendi, non habent nisi missi, id est episcopi et presbyteri in ecclesiis suis, et abates in monasteriis suis, quibus commissa est cura animarum.]

¹⁷⁶ Kathleen G. Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century: Spirituality and Social Change*, Manchester, 2005, p. 30; Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000-1150*, London, 1984, p. 69.

seen as two expressions of religious life, each undergoing a process of reformation designed to enhance Christianity and strengthen the political power of the Catholic Church in a rapidly developing society.

Ecclesiastical reform had a marked effect on how masculinity was presented in the high medieval period, particularly the masculinity of priests. One of the key reasons for reforming the clergy was the increasing importance of the eucharist. By 1215, the doctrine of transubstantiation had been set into canonical stone at the Fourth Lateran Council. Preceding this time, religious writers had focused on 'miracles' where the literal presence of the flesh and blood of Christ had converted the unconvertible, and solidified the faith of lax Christians. Gerald of Wales provides two excellent examples of the power of the host in his *Gemma Ecclesiastica*. His first example comes from the time of Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) and recounts the conversion of an entire Jewish family to the Christian faith after the father secretly partakes of the host and is astounded to find that it is truly the flesh and blood of Christ when consecrated by the priest.¹⁷⁷ In another, more common medieval example, he relates how the host was given to a woman by a careless priest. After securing it in a locket, the woman forgot that she had the host in her possession until the locket became surrounded by a great light for three consecutive nights. When the locket was opened by the priest, 'the host appeared like bleeding flesh on one half and bread on the other'.¹⁷⁸ Gerald has a wider purpose than simply extolling the power of God. The examples are part of a wider didactic exercise undertaken by Gerald to educate and strengthen the people of faith in Wales, and central to this exercise is the reassertion of the importance of the host.

The first Distinction (or book) of Gerald's work focuses on the purity of the host and the reverence which must be shown in handling it. The power of the host in returning those who erred to the true teaching is demonstrated by the spatial positioning to miracles which take place in areas known to be strongholds of the 'Patari or Cathari', especially on the border of Flanders.¹⁷⁹ The body, in the form of Christ and the priest, was the vital component in the sacrament of transubstantiation. As the transfiguration of Christ's body became the central feature of the Mass, the priest's body too required a new form of handling. The priest's human body was

¹⁷⁷ *Gem. Eccl.*, I.11.

¹⁷⁸ *Gem. Eccl.*, I.11. [. . . apertoque a sacerdote nodo coram omnibus, inventa est hostia quasi per medium carne existente cruenta, altera medietate sub specie panis permanente . . . (Brewer, p. 40)]

¹⁷⁹ *Gem. Eccl.*, I.11. [Quod in illis mundi partibus in quibus heretici illi nostri temporis, qui Patari seu Catari dicuntur, et circa hunc praecipue articulum, scilicet de copore Christi conficiendo, enormius errare noscuntur, scilicet in Flandriae finibus, magis abundant, hoc declaravit. (Brewer, pp. 40-41)]

problematic because it was essentially a vessel of sin and it was required of the priest to be pure both in body and spirit. In Gerald's second Distinction we find a startling overemphasis on the destructive capabilities of the flesh, particular flesh in the form of a woman.

Why is this increasing emphasis on the importance and sanctity of the host relevant to my search for male mystics? There are two reasons: firstly, the role of the priest becomes far more important during this period, and the restrictions placed upon him in terms of his social behaviour point to a constrained version of religious masculinity, an issue complicated by what R. N. Swanson terms the 'sacerdotalization of the monasticism . . . and the monarchization of the priesthood'.¹⁸⁰ This conflation of the roles of monks and priests complicated the already distinctive masculine roles assumed by each group. Secondly, Gerald alludes to the fact that taking the host too often is unworthy. The reliance on the host as the sole form of calorific intake by some female religious marks this practice out as other or differentiating and therefore not acceptable for men.¹⁸¹ The life of Catherine of Siena provides one well-known example from a slightly later period of this phenomenon; a practice which forced her biographer, Raymond of Capua, amongst others, to admonish her for her excessive fasting and her predilection for taking only the Eucharist for nourishment.¹⁸² To also approach the host in an unworthy state is a situation which Gerald stresses is unacceptable and harmful.¹⁸³ The unworthy state Gerald refers to concerns priests who were tainted by sin, particularly the sin of bodily pollution.

As Jacqueline Murray illustrates, gender roles are directly correlated to an individual's biological sex. Thus, men participated in roles attributed to the male gender such as provision for and protection of the family, while women were

¹⁸⁰ R. N. Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from the Gregorian Reform to Reformation', in D. M. Hadley, ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London, 1999, p. 162.

¹⁸¹ See in particular, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Berkeley, 1987, esp. Chapter 4, pp. 113-149. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100 - c. 1500*, Turnhout, 2010, provides an excellent collection of short, insightful biographies of many of the women mentioned by Bynum.

¹⁸² Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, Chicago, 1985, pp. 23-26; Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, p. 140; Suzanne Noffke, 'Catherine of Siena', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100 - c. 1500*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 601. Also see, Karen Scott, 'St. Catherine of Siena, "Apostola"', *Church History*, 61, 1, March 1992, pp. 34-46.

¹⁸³ *Gem. Eccl.*, esp. 1.50. [Quoniam autem Eucharistiam sacram qui totiens oepitlln of conficiunt et sumunt, quia cotidie semel vel bis, tanti sacramenti dignitatem minus attendere videntur, corpus Dominicum non plena discretionem dijudicantes, contra indigne conficientes et sumentes de caetro dicemus. (Brewer, p. 138)] And, 1.51. [Nec solum ad corpus Christi conficiendum, sed etiam ad sacram ejusdem evangelium indigne legendum acceditur periculose. (Brewer, p. 147)]

housekeepers and caregivers.¹⁸⁴ Murray challenges this strict gendered division as do other modern authors such as R. N. Swanson, and Patricia Cullum.¹⁸⁵ Swanson in particular posits that the Church sought to divide the male gender into two: a masculine laity and an emasculated clergy.¹⁸⁶ Swanson terms this emasculated version of the religious man the 'third gender' on the basis that the priest, in particular, was directed to 'abandon contemporary ideas of masculinity'.¹⁸⁷ While this concept allows medieval historians to step outside of and away from the binary constructions prevalent in medieval sources, Murray and Karras are right to question as to 'how many third genders can there be'.¹⁸⁸ More importantly, the third gender thesis assumes that heterosexuality was a fundamental component in the formation of gender identities and that any kind of abstinence from sexual activity disqualified a person from the category male or female.¹⁸⁹ It also assumes that, before the reform period, alternative expressions of gender either did not exist or were so rare as to be lost in the historical record. I argue that the reform period simply saw an amplification of the varieties of masculinity recognised, particularly with regards to the Church.

Caroline Walker Bynum suggests that models and roles became important in helping to construct the dialogue between an omnipresent God and a flawed man.¹⁹⁰ If we consider Bynum's 'model' theory closely, we can make sense of the hagiographic and biographic styles that we encounter from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Bynum suggests Abelard as an example of this phenomena, deducing that he was writing in the model—or rather writing to the model—of the philosopher.¹⁹¹ Providing models of correct behaviour across a range of religious 'occupations' could explain the increase throughout this period of hagiographic works, such as the biography of the reforming pope, Leo IX; these works present their subjects with both internal and external holiness fashioned in a particular way. Concerning mystics, then, we may be searching for a model that was not conceptualized in the high medieval period. If this is so then a closer examination of religious masculinities from this

¹⁸⁴ Jacqueline Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?' in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz eds, *Gender and Masculinity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, Philadelphia, 2008, p. 34.

¹⁸⁵ Murray, 'One Flesh', p. 34; Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate', pp. 160-77; P. H. Cullum, 'Introduction: Holiness and Masculinity in Medieval Europe', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis eds, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Cardiff, 2004, pp. 1-7.

¹⁸⁶ Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate', p. 161.

¹⁸⁷ Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate', p. 163.

¹⁸⁸ Murray, 'One Flesh', p. 36; Karras, 'Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt', p. 53.

¹⁸⁹ McNamara, 'The Herrenfrage', p. 14.

¹⁹⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31, 1980, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹¹ Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?' p. 9.

period may explain why the affective spiritual practices seen in the lives of a number of religious women from the high medieval period are not as familiar for men.

This notion of categories is not new. Felice Lifschitz contends that categorization became important in the sixth and seventh centuries in the compiling of liturgical lists.¹⁹² This need to categorize saw the 'male heroes of the Christian past' modelled as 'apostles, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, and sometimes also hermits or other subcategories'.¹⁹³ Leaving aside for the moment Lifschitz's focus, which was concerned with the non-categorization of women, this deliberate modelling of Christian men as particular 'types' of men suggests the longevity of ideas concerning roles, which eclipses Bynum's twelfth-century citing of this phenomenon. The reimagining of religious masculinity during this period of diversity, population growth, and the Christianization of Western Europe, further emphasized the rigidity and importance attached to notions of obedience and conformity. We can identify three models of religious masculinity that were either deliberately promoted, or at least recognizable, to both religious and lay men at this time: the heroic ascetic monk; the evangelical wandering hermit; and the celibate priest. While monks and priests were not new in the pantheon of religious masculinity, the evangelical hermit was, and although he may seem to fall outside of institutional control, more often than not he became the founder of a monastic order.

The *Gemma Ecclesiastica* provides an insight into the stresses faced by the secular church as reform progressed into the twelfth century. The *Gemma*, according to Gerald, functioned in two ways: 'one of precept, the other of examples.'¹⁹⁴ Gerald highlights the actions of religious men, secular and monastic, as he seeks to instruct the secular clergy in the new heightened regime of the Church. An emphasis on purity for the secular clergy is clearly evident in Gerald's work and this focused on the issues of women and sexual relationships.¹⁹⁵ This focus illustrates the variance in masculinities for men *within* the religious world. If we factor in the ecclesiastical reforms and the role of the monastic world in the eleventh century, we find the matrix for male religious life at this time gestating two forms of hyper-masculinity which are emphasized by the authors of this period. The masculine monastic man was obedient

¹⁹² Felice Lifshitz, 'Priestly Women, Virginal Men: Litanies and Their Discontents', in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz eds, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, Philadelphia, 2008, p. 87.

¹⁹³ Lifshitz, 'Priestly Women', p. 87.

¹⁹⁴ *Gem. Eccl.*, pref. [In duobus igitur haec doctrina consistit, praeceptis scilicet et exemplis. (Brewer, p. 6)]

¹⁹⁵ *Gem. Eccl.*. The first 21 chapters in Distinction 2 of Gerald's work are focused on these topics although there are examples throughout the work.

and showed restraint, whilst his secular brother was charged with engaging in a manly fight against lust.

We find then, competing forms of religious masculinity in the eleventh century, and the question arises as to whether this struggle for the most appropriate model of masculine behaviour has any influence on the perceived lack of affective male mystics. If we return to Gerald, we can see examples that seem to cede to the superior life of the monastic, and urge the cleric to become more pure. Gerald makes reference early on in his text to St Bernard who in his own works, *Sermiones in Cantica* and *de Consideratione*, criticized the clergy for their lapses:

As St. Bernard says: "Today the spurs of clerics glisten more brightly than the altars; more rich cloaks [*pallia*] are bought for mistresses than palls [*palla*] for the churches [*Sermiones in Cantica*, 33]." And in the same book, *On Reflection*, he inveighs in a similar manner against clerics of this kind; "Soldiers in dress, clerics in aspiration, and neither in act! Because they do not preach as the latter, nor make war like the former [*De consideratione*, 3.5]."¹⁹⁶

Gerald's employment of Bernard's voice is significant here. As well as being the pre-eminent monastic author of his time, Bernard was also intimately involved in the politics of his time. Rather than employing an example from the clerical world—for instance the Pope—Gerald highlights to his reader the faults of the clerical world as expressed by a monastic man, while at the same time holding up that monastic man as an example to follow. However, as his work progresses, Gerald does employ examples from the clerical realm to provide instruction and direction to his audience. He relates the story of Eusebius, bishop of Vercelli who, devoted to his reading, failed to hear all of the church bells of the city ringing. Gerald makes a passing comment in relation to this event saying: 'Consider that he who is wholly given over to reading and prayer has little concern for external happenings.'¹⁹⁷ Although he was discussing a bishop, Gerald used a common aspect of monastic life—contemplation—to urge his readers to greater spiritual heights.

The majority of Gerald's commentary is concerned with the exclusive priestly function of handling the sacrament. At this point in Gerald's narrative, the masculinity of the monk and the priest diverge. The secular world that the priest inhabits becomes

¹⁹⁶ *Gem. Eccl.*, I.10. [Porro sicut ait beatus Bernardus: "Hodie magis nitent clericorum calcaria quam altaria, pluris emuntur concubinarum palla quam ecclesiarum palla." Et in libro ejusdem De Consideratione, ubi in clericos hujusmodi similiter invehitur, dicens: "Milites habitu, clerici quaesta, actu neutri, quia nec evangelizant ut isti, nec militant ut illi; in quo igitur ordine resurgent! timeo ne in ordine ubi nullus est ordo." (Brewer, p. 36)]

¹⁹⁷ *Gem. Eccl.*, I.22. [Put a qui totus lectioni datus erat et oratione, minimam circa exteriora cures habens. (Brewer, pp. 60-61)]

the defining cultural difference within the matrix of religious male masculinity. P. H. Cullum, in the 'Introduction' to the work *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, outlines the rationale for the volume as being the need to consider how 'the performance of both holiness and masculinity intersected with, and was informed by . . . monasticism . . . mysticism [and] sanctity'.¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately, this is a chicken and egg dilemma which is difficult to solve: does being holy or religious affect masculinity? Or, do masculinities influence your performance of holiness? For instance, does acting in a masculine ascetic way encourage viewers, medieval and modern, to see you as a saint rather than a mystic? My argument is that the evidence suggests a tension and reluctance, for the most part, to emphasize physicality as a way for religious men to achieve a mystical experience.

Arthur Brittan contends that, 'most discussions of masculinity tend to treat it as if it is measurable. Some men have more of it, others less. Those men who appear to lack masculinity are, by definition, sick or genetically inadequate'.¹⁹⁹ Although the focus of Brittan's work was modern understanding(s) of masculinity, this statement rings true for the high medieval period. There are certainly many examples from this period which illustrate the fragility of masculinity.²⁰⁰ Brittan goes on to note that when the specificity of a masculinity is discussed, 'it is always in terms of its relationship to the hierarchical heterosexual structuring of gender relationships'.²⁰¹ What marks the gender relationships of religious men of the high medieval period out as unusual is the fact that those relationships are between two men, rather than a man and a woman. In this sense, gender relationships between men follow the theoretical model of homosociality developed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: that is, the specifics of masculinity are centered on the relationship of one man to another.²⁰²

The factors which have contributed to the equation of masculinity and homosocial relationships are fluid and have altered over time. For example, Procopius (d. c. 565) reinforced the idea that biology was less important in the equation concerning

¹⁹⁸ Cullum, 'Introduction', p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power*, Oxford, 1989, p. 1.

²⁰⁰ See Roscelin's attack on Peter Abelard in, Martin Irvine, 'Abelard and (Re)Writing the Male Body: Castration, Identity, and Remasculinization', in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler eds, New York, 2000, p. 92; or Anna Comnena's narrative account of Gaita's exhortation to her husbands toops to 'Halt! Be men!', in Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter, Harmondsworth, 1969, pp. 146-7.

²⁰¹ Brittan, *Masculinity*, p. 18.

²⁰² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, 1985.

masculinity by opining that the Queen Regent Amalasantha ‘proved to be endowed with wisdom and regard for justice in the highest degree, displaying to a great extent the masculine temper’.²⁰³ Gregory of Tours gives another example of how holiness influences masculinity in a negative fashion. When the Frankish king, Clovis, captures his rivals Chararic and his son, he visits an improbable punishment upon them:

Chararic and his son were both bound and then Clovis had their hair cut short. He ordered Chararic to be ordained as a priest and he made his son a deacon. Chararic objected to this humiliation and burst into tears.²⁰⁴

This suggests a strong understanding of the clerical life as being less masculine than that of the warrior. Medieval men were obviously well-aware of societal expectations in their role as men and were concerned about those expectations. Moreover, they were also concerned about homosocial relationships. Ruth Mazo Karras touches upon this issue when she reminds her readers that medieval masculinity was as much about a man’s relationship to other men, as it was about his relationships to women.²⁰⁵ Chararic’s demotion to cleric would have dented his masculinity in a number of ways.

We will also see that, in the conflict between the monastic and the clerical, these ideals of masculinity are fully tested. The *Life of Pope Leo IX* (r. 1049-54) provides an exceptional expression of male bodily sanctity.²⁰⁶ Initially, his *vita* follows a normal path with an opening that is all too familiar in the *vitae* of holy men. The author relates how Bruno inherited from his parents a lineage that was both noble and devout in faith. Bruno’s grandparents and parents were the founders of monasteries at Hesse, Altdorf, and Woffenheim.²⁰⁷ His pregnant mother was assured of the holiness of her unborn son by a ‘man in a religious habit’ who appeared to her in a vision during the night.²⁰⁸ When Bruno was finally born, the prediction of his holiness was confirmed by the appearance of ‘little crosses’ which ‘the whole of his small body was found to be

²⁰³ Procopius, *History of the Wars, Books V and VI*, trans. H. B. Dewing, Cambridge, Mass., 1916, 5.2.

²⁰⁴ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. and intro. Lewis Thorpe, Harmondsworth, 1974, II.41. [Quem circumventum dolis coepit cum filio vincetusque totondit et Chararicum quidem presbiterum, filio vero eius diaconem ordinari iubet. Cumque Chararicus de humilitate sua conquereret et fleret. (MGH, Arndt & Krusch, p. 91)]

²⁰⁵ Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia, 2003, pp. 10-11.

²⁰⁶ There are, according to Robinson, some twelve hagiographical works on Leo IX in existence. See, *The Papal Reforms of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*, trans. I. S. Robinson, Manchester, 2004, p. 17, n.98. Robinson elects to use *Bibliotheca hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, ed. Socii Bollandini, 1898-1901, 4818. For a Latin edition I have consulted the *Life* attributed to Wilburtus in PL 143 because of ease of accessibility.

²⁰⁷ *The Life of Pope Leo IX*, in *The Papal Reforms of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*, trans. I. S. Robinson, Manchester, 2004, 1.1.

²⁰⁸ *Life of Leo*, 1.2. [Nam quadam nocte vir in religioso habitu per visum eidem apparuit, et quia masculam sobolem magnamque ante Deum futuram concepisset edocuit, atque Brunonem nominari iussit. (PL 143, cols 0468a-0468b)]

marked with'.²⁰⁹ Bruno, however, was not the only future pope who was born bearing a remarkable somatic sign of sanctity; Hildebrand of Sovana, later to be Pope Gregory VII, was said to have been seen with fire engulfing his clothes as an infant, a motif that was to be prominent in a number of the miracles linked to him thereafter.²¹⁰ The primary model for this phenomenon is John the Baptist, who was sanctified in his mother's womb. Therefore, according to Gerald of Wales, John becomes the template for all priests.²¹¹ This predicated sanctity would become less pronounced in a somatic sense in the *vitae* of holy men who came after Bruno and Hildebrand, men such as Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine, suggesting a shift toward an embodiment of sanctity which was less supernatural and somatic, and more functional and intellectual.

As a template for religious masculinity, Leo's life would have been difficult, if not impossible, to imitate; but that is not necessarily the point. Authors such as Jacques de Vitry and Gerald of Wales recognised that, while relaying the impressive feats of holy men and women to their audience was important, imitation of those feats was not possible and in fact could be detrimental. Jacques de Vitry, when writing about the ascetic excesses of Marie D'Oignies, maintained that her excess and fervor were commendable, and while '[we] imitate her virtues . . . we cannot imitate the works of her virtues without individual privilege'.²¹² Likewise, Gerald of Wales relayed the stories of Origen's self-castration to avoid temptation and St Brigid's removal of her own eye to avoid marriage; their actions illustrated, he claimed, 'their remarkable fervor for continence,' but he stressed that these deeds were not to be imitated.²¹³

Other events recorded in his life further the image of Leo as representing the ideal religious man. For example, his 'manly' exploits against the agents of the devil and the Normans reflect what was to become a very common motif for religious men in the

²⁰⁹ *Life of Leo*, 1.2. [Qui undecimo Kalendas Julii, anno videlicet ab humanato Dei Verbo millesimo secundo, indictione quinta decima, ubi in hanc lucem fusus est, mirabile dictu, totum ejus corpusculum invenitur charaxatum [cod. 1 scalptum] quasi crucicularum stigmatibus. (PL 143, col. 0468b)]

²¹⁰ Paul of Bernried, *Life of Gregory VII*, in *The Papal Reforms of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII*, trans. I. S. Robinson, Manchester, 2004, 2.

²¹¹ *Gem. Eccl.*, 1.51. [Sed Johannes in heremo a pueritia conversatus, in utero matris sanctificatus, etiam a Domino invitatus, non ausus est illum tremendum angelis et reverendum Deum verticem tangere. (Brewer, p. 145)]

²¹² Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of Marie D'Oignies* (hereafter *VMO*), trans. Margot H. King, Toronto, 2003, I.12. [Ejus virtutes imitemur; opera vero virtutumejus, sine private privilegio imitari no possimus. (AASS, Papebroeck, p. 639)]

²¹³ *Gem. Eccl.*, II.20. [Non haec tamen tanquam imitanda vobis introduxi, sed potius ut in eis munditiae zelum et continentiae fervorem admirabilem magis ostenderem quam imitabilem. (Brewer, p. 268)]

following century.²¹⁴ While Bernard's letter to his nephew emphasized the austerities of the Cistercian life, it also had several passages alluding to the 'warrior for Christ metaphor which was common in Gregorian reformist literature'.²¹⁵ In an event similar to the episodes of spiritual castration recorded in Caesarius, Peter Damian, and Gerald of Wales, Leo is cured of a serious gastric illness when he was 'caught up in an ecstasy,' during which St Blasius appeared to him, took out his entrails, washed them, administered medicine, then put his entrails back in.²¹⁶ As with spiritual castration, such as the one visited upon Hugh of Lincoln where his testicles were 'removed' by the spirit of 'Basil the late holy prior of Chartreuse,' the important factor here is not disease or any other form of somatic disruption; rather, the importance lies in the method of the cure which was divine.²¹⁷ This is further reinforcement to the audience that these individuals were special and singled out. To round out Leo's credentials, he also exhibited the ability to cure the members of his own entourage of a fatal disease, and was considered worthy enough to enjoy visions.²¹⁸

Leo is positioned, via his *vita*, as an 'exemplary' prophet, the prophet whom Max Weber describes as 'an exemplary man who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation'.²¹⁹ The exemplary prophet does not have a divine mission (although he may imagine he does), but rather he directs others to

²¹⁴ *Life of Leo*, on agents of the devil see, 1.16. [His ergo aliisque bonis actibus perspiciens eum cluere humani generis adversarius, ejus piae religioni modis omnibus contraire nititur; et licet non possit eum usquequaque a recto deviare tramite, tamen per suos satagit satellites tentationum et adversitatum spiculis a sancto proposito deterrere. (PL 143, cols 0481d-0482a)]; on the Normans see, 2.21. [Itaque pessima gens Normannorum, peracta caede familiae mitissimi papae, non sine magno detrimento suorum, aggreditur oppidum, Civitatulam cognominatum, ubi idem beatus, ignarus eorum quae acta erant, tardantem suum exspectabat comitatum. Qui cum imminentes hostes cerneret et quid suis contigisset intelligeret, cum ea quae sibi remanserat clericorum frequentia coeptum iter versus Beneventum arripuit, et cunctis hostibus attonitis, quasi leo confidens, absque terrore per medium illorum transiit. (PL 143, cols 0500b-0500c)]

²¹⁵ Bruno Scott James, *Letters of Bernard*, pref. to Letter 1, p. 1.

²¹⁶ *Life of Leo*, 1.17. [Tunc divino admonitus instinctu, jubet se nocturnali hora ante sancti Blasii altare ferri, confisus se ejus dignis meritis a praesenti angustia citissime liberari. Itaque ibidem raptus in exstasi, non dico per somnum, qui eum omnino aufugerat, videt quasi sanctum Blasium ab altari progressum sese invisentem atque modum languoris compatienter exquirentem, cunctisque suis languentibus praecordiis apertis, veluti ipse ea conspicaretur, misericordi manu abluentem ac medicamine refoventem, omnibusque suo loco restitutis, eo quo venerat redeuntem. (PL 143, col. 0483c)] Caesarius tells the story of the monk Bernard who in a dream saw himself made a eunuch and so was cured of his temptation, *Dia. Mir.*, IV.98; and Peter Damian relates how the hermit Leo was visited by angels who cut off his temptation, *Letters*, 44.14.

²¹⁷ Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis: The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, ed. Decima L. Douie and Hugh Farmer, 2 vols, London, 1961, II.2. [Moxque patefactis novacula, quam manu tenere videbantur, visceribus ejus, quasi struman igneam inde visus est exsecuisse, et longius extra cellam projecisse: dataque benedictione, medicus discessit. (Dimock, p. 58)]

²¹⁸ *Life of Leo*, on curing disease see, 2.1; for examples of visions see, 1.16 and 2.4.

²¹⁹ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, Boston, 1963, p. 55.

salvation by illuminating the path that they should follow.²²⁰ The key here, of course, is that Leo is represented by someone other than himself, and the constructed nature of the *vita* could skew our understanding of what masculinity meant for religious men like Leo and those around him. However, the mediated nature of the text is useful in that it amplifies those traits which religious men imagined were important for them to maintain authority. In Leo's case, it is made very clear from an early point in his *vita* that his humility was a significant aspect of his person and one that should be admired.²²¹ The author of the life then provides a summation of all the young Bruno's attributes:

Desirous from his youth to please God alone, he strove beyond the limitations of his age and strength to crucify his flesh together with his vices and lusts, burning so fiercely with the divine fire that even in the earliest period of his Christian noviciate he was thought to be more perfect than the most perfect. Finally, to say nothing here of his supreme celibacy, his dovelike innocence, his serpentlike wisdom, his keen perception and the mature dignity of his youthful genius, he inflicted such fasts and vigils upon himself that he could literally say with the blessed Job: 'My bone cleaves to my skin, to my wasted flesh [Job 19:20].'²²²

Rather than the supernatural aspect of Leo's complexion, this passage highlights the traits that the reader could strive to emulate – innocence, celibacy, wisdom, perception, and humility. So, while the author cautions against imitation, the *vita* still makes clear those aspects of masculine religious behaviour which were considered important at this time of reform.

From the time Charlemagne embarked on his ambitious programme of monastic reform, the Benedictine Rule and the conformity it demanded became the pre-eminent means of control in the monastery. The Black monks flourished under the direction of a man such as Benedict of Aniane, who provided the ultimate model of restraint; turning his back on the extreme and harsh ascetic practices which he had once deemed appropriate, he championed the more moderate ways of Benedict. Despite the subsequent emergence of the Cistercian Order, and its reinterpretation of the Rule, the core tenets of St Benedict remained: obedience, humility, and charity. Of particular concern in this chapter were humility and obedience. These were the traits which won

²²⁰ Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 55.

²²¹ *Life of Leo*, 1.3.

²²² *Life of Leo*, 1.3. [Nam a primaevio, soli Deo placendi cupidus, supra aetatem suam et valetudinem, carnem suam cum vitiis crucifigere conatus est; adeo fervens igne divinitatis, ut ab ipsis Christiani tyrocini rudimentis putaretur perfectissimus. Denique ut in praesentia de plurimo ejus coelibatu, de columbina innocentia, de serpentina prudentia, de discreta acrimonia, deque matura gravitate, in tenera indole taceatur, in tantum semet jejuniis et vigiliis affecit, ut illud beati Job etiam historialiter dici possit: *Pelli meae consumptis carnibus adhaesit os meum.* (PL 143, cols 0469a-0469b)]

out in a religious environment which was showing signs of emulating the diversity of a rapidly changing western European society. The *Libellus* author makes a claim for this diversity, but it is clear that the differences between the orders are focused on spatial, rather than ideological differences. That said, it is clear that many individuals who may not have previously considered the religious life to be an option were now able to participate in it in a number of ways.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries were a time of tension and change. The reforming movements amplified a construction of masculinity which had been present in Christianity from its earliest years: the soldier of Christ. This imagining of the militaristic religious man was needed to counter the emasculating concept of total celibacy for a priest, which was a key part of ecclesiastical reform. For monks, celibacy was not considered as much of a problem, as they were ostensibly separate from the world (notwithstanding allegations of homosexual behaviour in the monastery).²²³ For married and unmarried priests, however, contact with women became problematized as the papacy sought to reform the Church. This conflict is important to the changing nature of theology and how individuals interacted with the institution of the Church. More importantly, the extreme asceticism of heroic monks and individualistic hermits was subsumed in a religious culture of masculine constraint and moderation.

The institution also needed to regain some sort of contact with its non-institutionalized people, and this is where religious laymen became elevated in importance as the ones more able to connect with society – unlike priests, who were deliberately elevated above it, and monks who had essentially ‘abandoned it’.²²⁴ Key individual holy men, such as Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine, became important players in the reforming movements of the Church as their growing popularity forced them to become founders of new religious houses. While I am arguing that religious men appeared to have many more vocational options open to them, compared to their female contemporaries, religious men were, in fact, far more constrained by the rigid ideals encapsulated in monastic rules and the societal understanding of masculinity. These pressures combined to dissuade any individual holy man from attempting to engage in a solitary way of life.

²²³ See especially, Peter Damian, letter 31 which is known as the *Liber gomorrhianus*. Damian, *Letters*, 31. For an in-depth discussion of the *Liber gomorrhianus* see, Conrad Leyser, ‘Cities of the Plains: The Rhetoric of Sodomy in Peter Damian’s “Book of Gomorrah”’, *The Romanic Review*, 86, 2, March, 1995, pp. 191-211.

²²⁴ Chenu, ‘Monks, Canons, and Laymen’, p. 221.

4. Individual Holy Men in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Their Place in an Evolving Institution

He quarrelled with God in incomparable wailing and pledged his whole self as a sacrifice. Mild and gentle with everyone, Robert was an implacable enemy at war with himself alone.¹

Introduction

If Carolingian corporate monasticism functioned on the premise that the monastery was the site of holiness, not the individual monk, then the re-emergence of the holy individual in the eleventh and twelfth centuries created a problem for the Church. Men such as Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1116) and Romuald of Ravenna (d. c. 1025/27) became the focal points or beacons for a new version of an old way of life. Their transience, charisma, and ability to attract followers (both male and female) put them at the forefront of a renewed apostolic movement. However, the *vita apostolica* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was not the evangelizing in the world as practiced by Robert and promoted in Matt. 19:21.² Rather, it was a solidification of the tenth-century ideal of communal living espoused in Acts 2:44-45.³ This produced a problem for a Church which needed its clerical men to reconnect with a growing and changing population. As Chenu argues, 'laymen were more likely to operate spontaneously within a new spiritual or intellectual framework whilst clerics were 'bound within an

¹ Baudri of Dol, *First Life of Robert of Arbrissel* (hereafter *VRA*), trans. Bruce Venarde, in Bruce Venarde, *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, Washington, 2003, 2.11. [Litigabat enim ejulatu incomparabili cum Deo, et totum se vovebat pro sacrificio. Omnibus mitis et modestus, sibi soli tantum inimicabatur, obstinatus et iniquus. (*PL* 162, col. 1050)]

² Matt. 19:21: Jesus saith to him: If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. [Ait illi Iesus si vis perfectus esse vade vende quae habes et da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelo et veni sequere me] All scriptural references from, *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, with facing Latin from, *Biblia Sacra: Juxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, London, 2010.

³ Acts 2:44-45: And all they that believed were together and had all things common. Their possessions and goods they sold and divided them to all, according as every one had need. [Omnes etiam qui credebant erant pariter et habebant omnia communia. Possessiones et substantias vendebant et dividebant illa omnibus prout cuique opus erat]. Acts 4:32 also promotes a similar theme: And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul. Neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own: but all things were common unto them. [Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor et anima una nec quisquam eorum quae possidebant aliquid suum esse dicebat sed erant illis omnia communia.]

institutional framework'.⁴ Yet, operating outside of the framework of the institution made these men less able to be controlled, and hence they challenged the status quo. Further to this, Gerald of Wales recognized that a slavish identification with the ideals of an older time would not be successful when he noted that 'these [present] times are different, indeed, and there are different customs for the time.'⁵ In Gerald's eyes, the world was now a very different one than that graced by the Church Fathers and the holy men of late antiquity.

While the monastery may have provided an excellent environment for mystical practice to flourish, it was not a particularly welcoming environment for the spiritual individual. Giles Constable maintains that the monastery could not function without a balance or tension between 'three distinct sources of power: the word of the founder . . . personal holiness . . . and the official ranks of ordination and office within the community'.⁶ These aspects are distinct, but we cannot imagine that they operated in isolation from one another. The personal word and holiness of the founder are realised in the rule of the community, something a monk was bound to adhere to, even as he searched for his own version of personal spirituality. I have argued, throughout this work, that conformity and obedience to a rule did not foster an environment where exceptional holy men could practice diverse forms of spirituality in the manner of their female contemporaries and thus become as visible to modern readers as mystics. Yet these individuals did exist, both inside and outside of the institutional environment, with lives written about heroic ascetics such as Romuald of Ravenna and Dominic Loricatus, hermits such as Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine, and lay brothers such as Arnulf of Villers and Simon of Aulne. In these lives, we witness the performance of spirituality through a wide range of actions which clearly mark these men as special or exceptional. The expression or performance of spirituality during this period of intense social evolution and ecclesiastical reform was tempered by gender, which influenced particularly the relationships religious men had with each other and exactly how men could express their spirituality.

⁴ M. -D. Chenu, 'Monks, Canons, and Laymen in Search of the Apostolic Life', in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* by M. -D. Chenu, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little, Chicago, 1968, p. 219.

⁵ *Gem. Eccl.*, II.6. [Ideoque nunc aliud tempus, alii pro tempore mores. (Brewer, p. 187)]

⁶ Giles Constable, 'The Authority of Superiors in Religious Communities', in George Makdisi, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine eds, *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, Paris, 1985, p. 189, reprinted in *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe*, London, 1988, [original pagination].

As Carolyn Walker Bynum explains, we must not imagine that ‘the individual’ apparently ‘discovered’ in the twelfth century has any bearing on our twenty-first-century understanding of the concept.⁷ Rather, medieval religious writers were grasping the concept of the ‘inner man’ or the ‘soul’, and creating a dialogue which explored how both the inner and outer man functioned in salvation. This development or recognition of what Colin Morris terms ‘self-awareness’ or ‘self-consciousness’ is reflected in the literature of religious writers of this period, as they sought to elaborate on the fundamental connection between man and God.⁸ Amedeus of Lausanne, in his Fourth Homily on the Virgin, asks a series of questions which strike at the heart of this discourse on knowing God:

If you cannot fathom yourself and the shallows of your own mind, how will you rise to infinite majesty? How can a man who cannot count pronounce on arithmetic? Will he who does not know a point from a line excel at geometry? Could the person unable to emit a sound teach music? Or someone with no idea of movement make a good astronomer? In the same way, he who does not know himself cannot penetrate the depths of God.⁹

Gilbert of Hoyland, another Cistercian author, turned to Seneca as he searched for an expression of this inward-looking ideal: ‘Everything should be discussed with a friend, but himself first and foremost.’¹⁰ Since the time of Basil, however, the monastery had not been promoted as a place for the individual holy man, especially an actively ascetic one, as the ‘only kinds of mortification allowed were those that the superior had authorised’.¹¹ Trying to reconcile this desire for personal holiness within a community which demanded obedience was a difficult task, which could lead to conflict between a man such as Romuald and his fellow monks. Romuald was forced to move repeatedly

⁷ Carolyn Walker Bynum, ‘Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?’ *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31, 1980, p. 4.

⁸ Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*, London, 1972.

⁹ Amedeus of Lausanne, ‘From the Fourth Homily of the Virgin Mother’, in *Text of the Homilies*, cited in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. Pauline Matarasso, Harmondsworth, 1993, p. 142. [Nam si teipsum et brevem abyssum animi tui non colligis, in infinitatem majestatis qualiter ascendis? Qui nescit usque ad primum limitem numerare, quomodo poterit de arithmetica judicare. Qui nescit quid sit punctus aut linea, eritne perfectus in geometria? Qui nescit sonum edere, musicamne poterit docere? An erit peritus astronomus, nesciens quid sit motus? Ita qui se ignorat, alta Dei non penetrat. (PL 188, col. 1321b)]

¹⁰ Gilbert of Hoyland, ‘Letter 1: to Brother Richard’, cited in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, ed. and trans. Pauline Matarasso, Harmondsworth, 1993, p. 223. [Tam vero quam veteri uteris, mi Richarde, proverbio: “Omnia cum amico deliberanda esse; de ipso tamen prius.” (PL 184, col. 0289b)]

¹¹ C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edn, Harlow, 2001, p. 10.

because his expression of personal holiness was often too exacting for his brethren to match, the conflict leading, in one instance, to a threat to kill.¹²

My previous chapter concluded with the observation that many individual holy men who attempted to live a solitary holy life in fact became important members of the reforming Church. In this chapter, I investigate some of those men, and I also turn to a new type of religious man who was neither fully inside nor fully outside the monastery and that is the lay brother. The lay brother, I argue, provided a vehicle for the transference of unusual or exceptional spiritual ability particularly forms of spirituality which came to be associated with the holy women of the thirteenth century. The *vitae* of the *mulieres sanctae* have yielded much information about the role of holy women who often operated just outside of the institutional setting. Alastair Minnis identifies three major areas which constitute the 'work' of holy women: advising and admonishing public figures; as prophets in politics; and as sources of private prayer.¹³ The work that this essay appears in, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition* (2010), clearly illustrates a central idea which I addressed in my opening chapter and that is the attention paid to medieval female religious by modern scholars. In this chapter, I want to focus some attention on medieval male religious who would make up the inhabitants of a companion volume.

Hermits

It is all too easy for modern readers to imagine the medieval hermit as an individual who shunned the company of other humans entirely, but this is far from the truth. While the hermit occupies an important place in the history of Christianity, solitary holy individuals were a common feature of community life before the coming of Christ. Andreas Buss argues that the so-called Axial Age, c. 800-200 BCE, saw the development of fundamental relationships between humanity and the Divine.¹⁴ The upshot of these developments was the creation of 'outworldly individualism,' where men who recognized the tensions inherent in this relationship between the

¹² *VRom.*, 3. [Cumque redarguendis eorum vitiis vehementer insisteret, illi autem iunioris et novitii verba pro nichilo deputarent, tandem hoc obprobrium non ferentes, dum propriam emendare vitam despiciunt, de corripientis morte tractare ceperunt. (Tobacco, p. 19)]

¹³ Alastair Minnis, 'Religious Roles: Public and Private', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition*, c. 1100-c. 1500, Turnhout, 2010, pp. 63-77.

¹⁴ Andreas Buss, 'The Evolution of Western Individualism', *Religion*, 30, 2000, p. 3.

'transcendental and the worldly order' left the world in order to interact more fully with the Divine.¹⁵ The concept of the outworldly individual provides us with a space within which to work with the idea of the solitary religious man, someone who distances himself from his community, but also remains intertwined with it as a conciliator and conduit. The central belief system operating in this space is not so important; rather, it is the recognition of a supernatural or divine entity which can be experienced but not known. Peter Brown comments that in late Roman society, the holy man or the 'stranger' was the individual within a community upon whom fell the difficult and unpopular decisions required in a communal setting.¹⁶ The severe asceticism of the holy man allowed him to be divorced from the community because of his difference; importantly, the holy man in this instance was not someone who had been 'possessed by a god,' but rather, a man whose identity was intact and whose dissociative state allowed him a measure of impartiality.¹⁷ These men who made or imagined themselves as liminal and 'strangers' appear to possess the spiritual qualities and performance attributes which we are searching for when looking for individual holy men who could be given the title mystic.

The liminal position occupied by hermits and their role as intercessors is a theme which historians return to when discussing the re-emergence of male solitaries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Henry Mayr-Harting describes Wulfic of Haselbury (d. 1154) as the "hinge-man' between the local community and a wider world', while Brian Golding notes that the hermit, Robert of Knaresborough (d. 1218), 'soon came to occupy that familiar 'grey' middle ground between the recluse proper and the religious community'.¹⁸ I argue, however, that by the high medieval period, this separation or apartness from the community became more difficult due to the changing nature of western European society at this time. This is coupled with a change in religious mentality which monastic life encouraged. Without 'community and affectivity,' as Brian McGuire notes, 'the monk or nun becomes a hermit who denies the presence and possibilities of his or her everyday life in the proximity of

¹⁵ Buss, 'Evolution of Western Individualism', pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 61, 1971, p. 91.

¹⁷ Peter Brown, 'Rise and Function of the Holy Man', pp. 91-93. Also see, E. A. Jones, 'Hermits and Anchorites in Historical Context', in Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden, and Roger Ellis eds, *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 17.

¹⁸ Henry Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse', *History*, 60, 1975, p. 334; Brian Golding, 'The Hermit and the Hunter', in John Blair and Brian Golding eds, *The Cloister and the World: Essay in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, Oxford, 1996, p. 100.

others'.¹⁹ McGuire's observation that 'the monk or nun *becomes* a hermit,' and D. Alexander's suggestion that the asceticism of the medieval hermit 'was the visible sign of his rejection of society's values,' indicates that, by the high medieval period, hermits may not have had the social cache that they once did.²⁰ Patricia Ranft sums up best the traditional view of these men who left the world in search of the eremitic way; she characterizes them as scholars and learned individuals who were 'arguably . . . among the best and brightest . . . who were exposed to medieval theology as it developed in the new schools and who then left the world of ideas to construct a new life structured on the principles of that theology'.²¹ While the scholastic angle is important in a number of these narratives, when we look more closely at the lives of holy men such as Guthlac, Romuald of Ravenna, Robert of Arbrissel, Robert La Chaise-Dieu, and Stephen of Obazine, their initial attempts to leave the world are thwarted and each man eventually becomes re-claimed by the institution because they are extraordinary men who need to be contained.

The *vitae* of solitary holy men follow a narrative structure which is recognisable to historians of the medieval period as one that is used for saints, popes, monks, and nuns. It is worth discussing this narrative convention to see if we can identify any directives for religious men, both individually and collectively, hidden between the lines. We can also develop a model for the religious man by examining the traits that mark these particular men out as special individuals. As Ronald J. Ganze rightly points out, '[c]onvention is a tool for communication; it is not necessarily an impediment to individual expression'.²² For example, when we read Stephen of Obazine's *Life*, we find that Stephen and his companion the priest Peter visit a hermit named Bertrand when they first set out to live the solitary life. Bertrand's appearance in Stephen's *vita* serves to illustrate an important point about these 'specialized' narratives; Bertrand is a representative of any one of a number of hermits who inhabited the fringes of western European society.²³ He was devoted to teaching, had

¹⁹ Brian Patrick McGuire, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion in Arnulf of Villers', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 28, 3-4, 1993, p. 241.

²⁰ D. Alexander, 'Hermits and Hairshirts: the Social Meanings of Saintly Clothing in the *vitae* of Godric of Finchale and Wulfric of Haselbury', *Journal of Medieval History*, 28, 2002, pp. 205-206.

²¹ Patricia Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition*, New York, 1998, p. 134.

²² Ronald J. Ganze, 'The Medieval Sense of Self', in Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby eds, *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages*, New York, 2008, pp. 107-08.

²³ Romuald of Ravenna also seeks advice from an 'untrained' hermit called Marino; *VRom.*, 4. [Cumque in eius animo perfectionis amor magis ac magis in dies cresceret nullamque mens eius requiem inveniret, audivit quia in Venetiarum partibus quidam spiritualis vir esset, Marinus nomine, qui heremiticam duceret vitam. (Tobacco, p. 20)] Also see Rotha Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*, London,

only a few followers, and ultimately Stephen and Peter only remained with him for ten months, because they were not fully tested by his way of life.²⁴ Bertrand was not seen as a holy man in the same vein as Stephen. What is it about Stephen that makes him special? And why do these singularly inspirational individual men come full circle and find themselves back inside the institution?

The most obvious indication that men such as Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine were special was the fact that they have lives written about them. Just as with the holy women who emerge in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, individual holy men who displayed extraordinary spirituality were singled out as different, usually from birth (or even before). The hermit Guthlac (d. 714), provides us with a good early example of the type of man Peter Brown is describing in 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity'. He is positioned at the mid-point of a wider narrative concerning individual religious men, and gives us insight into the continuity of ideas and how societal expectations influenced changes to the holy man's way of life. Born in the 'district of the Middle Angles,' Guthlac's birth was indicated by a miracle which marked him out as being 'destined to greatness'.²⁵ Felix related that, at the moment of his birth, 'a human hand was seen shining with gold-red splendour, and reaching from the clouds of the heavenly Olympus as far as the arms of a certain cross, which stood in front of the door of the house in which the holy woman, now in labour, was bearing an infant son'.²⁶ This indication that an individual was marked to become someone special is present in many other accounts from the high medieval period.

The spiritual phenomena recorded as associated with the birth of a holy man was not merely a narrative convention. The form or type of phenomena was seen as indicative of the special traits which individual was destined to display. For example, in my previous chapter I discussed the pre- and post-partum miracles associated with the births of two reforming popes: Leo IX and Gregory VII.²⁷ The maternal vision and the small crosses which adorned the baby Leo's body, and the fire seen on the clothing of the infant Gregory, were powerful allegorical symbols linking the infants to

1914, for a work which focuses on hermits as a timeless feature of the English social and religious environment. For a more modern treatment of hermits see, Tom License, *Hermits and Recluses in English Society, 950-1200*, Oxford, 2011.

²⁴ *VSO*, 1.3.

²⁵ *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (hereafter *VGuth.*), trans. and intro. Bertram Colgrave, Cambridge, 1956, 1, 5.

²⁶ *VGuth.*, 5. [igitur cum nascendi tempus advenisset, mirabile dictu! ecce humana manus croces rubri nitoris splendore fulgescens ab aethereis Olympi nubibus as patibulum cuiusdam crucis ante ostium domus, qua sancta puerpera futurae indolis infantulum enixa est, porecta videbatur. (Colgrave, p. 74)]

²⁷ See chapter 3, pp. 138-39.

important pastoral forebears, particularly John the Baptist and the prophet Elijah. When we consider the birth miracle associated with the life of the hermit Robert of La Chaise-Dieu, we find that his mother was compelled 'by God's providence . . . to give birth in a solitary place'.²⁸ The symbolism inherent in this particular incident does not require too much unpacking; born in a solitary place, Robert was destined to become a solitary man. That he was to become a solitary *holy* man is emphasized in a story from his infancy. When the infant Robert was handed over to a wet nurse, 'as was customary . . . he refused to taste, not because he did not like the smell of the milk, but because he felt distaste for the sin of the nurse'.²⁹ Rejecting the woman a second time, in favour of his mother, Robert's actions (albeit unconscious) proved to reinforce not only his own rectitude but also his mother's. Robert's unconscious selection of his Christian mother over the immoral wet nurse (she was a prostitute) marks Robert out as one through whom 'the power of God works'.³⁰ Stephen of Obazine's mother, like Leo's, was heavily pregnant when she had a dream which foretold her son's piety:

In this dream it was if she had given birth to a lamb in place of a son, and when he was fully-grown, a great flock of sheep was handed over to him. When she reported this to a certain holy man of God, she heard from him that she would bring forth a son, to whom a vast number of souls would be entrusted by Christ to be instructed by his heavenly teaching.³¹

While Robert seemed destined to be a solitary holy man, the allegory associated with Stephen's birth clearly indicates his future position as the founding abbot of the monastery of Obazine. The key point is that each man began his journey from a position of divinely appointed spirituality, and no matter the diversions which appeared in his path, each was destined to a special relationship with religion.

This phenomenon is not only associated with holy men from this period. The mother of the recluse Christina of Markyate (c. 1095-1155), was also the beneficiary of a sign that pointed to the child's sanctity before she was born. Whilst gazing upon the 'monastery of Our Lady . . . she saw a dove, whiter than snow leave the monastery and

²⁸ Marbod of Rennes, *The Life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu* (hereafter *VRlcd.*), in *Robert of La Chaise-Dieu and Stephen of Obazine*, trans. and intro. Hugh Feiss, Maureen M. O'Brien, and Ronald Pepin, Minnesota, 2010, 1.2.3. [Nam mater ejus ipso gravida, cum, imminente partus tempore, ad quoddam castrum tenderet, non sine Dei nutu, urgente necessitate, in solitudine partum effudit. Nimirum solitudinis erat futurus amator, et vitam hanc in qua nascebatur, viam reputaturus, non patriam. (PL 171, col. 1507a)]

²⁹ *VRlcd.*, 1.2.5. [Quem cum illa mammae admovisset, gustare noluit, non tam lactis detestatus odorem, quam peccati lactantis horrorem. (PL 171, cols 1507a-1507b)]

³⁰ *VRlcd.*, 1.2.7. [Mulier enim illa meretrix erat, et ob hoc infans, cum lac respueret, damnabat peccatum; nesciebat utique quid damnaret, sed Dei virtus etiam in nescientibus operatur. (PL 171, col. 1507b)]

³¹ *VSO*, 1.1.

come straight toward her in gentle flight; and, with its wings folded, it took shelter in the sleeve of the tunic she was wearing'.³² Christina's anonymous biographer interprets the sign for his reader commenting that the child 'would be filled with the Holy Spirit'. He adds:

It showed also that she would be taught by the example and strengthened by the protection of Blessed Mary, ever a virgin, and be holy both in mind and body; detaching herself from the things of the world and finding peace in the contemplation of the things that are above.³³

The narrative structure of Christina's life is similar in many respects to those of her male contemporaries, but there are clearly gendered aspects which differentiate male and female *vitae*. In Christina's case, this is seen in the struggle she had with her parents who forced her into marriage despite their acknowledgement of Christina's vow of chastity (i.e., marriage to Christ) which she committed to as a young girl.³⁴ The subsequent theological debate, which is played out over some thirty chapters of the life, suggests that the sacrament of marriage was a topic which occupied contemporary minds. Christina provided a model through which men argued about obedience; should she be obedient firstly to her father, or was her promise to Christ more important? The range of behaviours attributed to various men—religious and secular—during this period of Christina's life suggests that the audience for this text would be men. From the wicked Ralph Flambard, bishop of Durham, who attempted to convince Christina 'to commit a wicked deed,' to the young unnamed servant who helped her to escape her parents and died a 'truly Christian death,' we find male behaviour scrutinized and judged.³⁵ Meanwhile, throughout the entire drama of her forced betrothal to Burthred, Christina illustrated through her unshakable devotion to Christ, her true Bridegroom, picture-perfect Christian behaviour.

³² *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse* (hereafter *VCMy.*), ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot, Oxford, 1959, 1. [Quam dum mater sua gestaret in utero, contigit eandem matrem de domo sua prospectare monasterium beate dei genitricis quod in civitate situm erat. Et ecce columbam unam nive candidiorem egressam de monasterio vidit ad se recto itinere, modesto volatu venire, et in dexteram manicam tunice qua erat iduta, iuntis alis sese totam immergere. (Talbot, p. 34)]

³³ *VCMy.*, 2. [Nec non beate marie semper virginis et erudiendum exemplo et communiendum presidio ut esset sanctum corpore et spiritu, ab hiis que sunt mundi vacans, et in contemplacione supernorum requiescens perhibuit. (Talbot, p. 34)]

³⁴ *VCMy.*, 4-34. This is also a feature in the life of Marie D'Oignies who was betrothed at the age of fourteen despite her obvious religiosity; see, *VMO*, 1.12.

³⁵ *VCMy.*, on Ralph Flambard 5. [Impudicus episcopus virginem per alteram tunice manicam irreverentur arripuit et ore sancto quo misteria [divinia solebat] conficere, de re nephanda [sollicitavit] (Talbot, p. 42)]; on the unnamed servant 31-36. [(36) Mane facto cum visionem aperuisset ocultrici sue Alfwen, et monuisset securam fore, iuvenis venit qui diceret illum more fidelium felici morte solutum vinculis carnis. (Talbot, p. 96)]

The protagonist in this kind of narrative is not restricted to young women who have disavowed their parents. Two significant examples from the writings of Peter Damian serve to highlight how exceptional holy men had to survive the impediment of less-than-perfect parents. Romuald of Ravenna first took himself off to the monastery of Sant' Apollinare in order to do forty days penance as a result of his father, Sergio, killing a relative in the commission of a duel.³⁶ Damian's other champion of the eremitic life, Dominic Loricatus (d. 1060), felt compelled to enter the monastery at Luceoli when he found that his father had bribed their local bishop with 'a piece of soft goat skin so that he [Dominic] might be ordained a priest'.³⁷ These narratives imply that individuals through whom God has chosen to act will be compelled towards the religious life no matter what circumstance they find themselves in. This is also illustrated by a story which Damian relays about Romuald, and how he was drawn to the solitary life despite his militaristic and aristocratic upbringing and tendency to vice and sin:

For example, when he was out hunting and happened upon a pleasant glade, he immediately felt drawn into solitude and said to himself, "How fine it would be to live like hermits, deep in these woods, how easy to stay quiet and free from the world's turmoil!"³⁸

If we return to Guthlac, we find that he went through a similar experience to Romuald. Despite his auspicious birth, Guthlac did not turn to the religious life at first; rather, he became a military leader and took to attacking 'his foes' with 'fire and sword'.³⁹ This continued for nine years, until the day 'a spiritual flame, as though it had pierced his breast, began to burn in this man's heart' and, at the age of twenty four, Guthlac entered the monastery at Repton.⁴⁰ After spending two years in the monastery (a

³⁶ *VRom.*, 1. [Romualdus autem licet nullum perempto vulnus inflixerit, quia tamen interfuit, penitentiam tanti reatus accepit moxque ad Classense monasterium beati Apolenaris, more homicidarum diebus permansurus in luctibus, properavit. (Tobacco, p.15)]

³⁷ Peter Damian, *The Letters of Peter Damian*, trans. Owen J. Blum, vols. 1-3, 5-7, The Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation, Washington, D.C., 1989-2005, 109.10. [Dominicus itaque cum esset in saeculo clericus, quia tunc symoniaca vigeat heresis, quae et nunc utinam prorsus esset extincta, ut presbyter fieret, a parentibus eius data est episcopo hircinae pellis aluta. (MGH, Reindel, p. 208)]

³⁸ *VRom.*, 1. [Nam et si quando se ad studium venationis accingeret, ubicumque per silvas amenum locum reperire poterat, mox se ad heremi desiderium eius animus accendebat, dicens intra se: "O quam bene poterat heremite in his nemorum recessibus habitare, quam congrue possent hic ab omni secularis strepitus perturbatione quiescere!" (Tobacco, p. 14)]

³⁹ *VGuth.*, 11-15 for descriptions of Guthlac as a young boy; and 17. [. . . et cum adversantum sibi urbes et vilas, vicos et castella igne ferroque vastaret . . . (Colgrave, p. 80)]

⁴⁰ *VGuth.*, 17. [Et adueto more vagabunda mente sollicitus mortales intent meditatione cogitaret, mirum dictum! Extimplo velut percussus pectore, spiritualis flamma omnia praecordia supra memorati viri incendere coepit. (Colgrave, p. 80)]; 20. [Exin coepto itinere, relictis omnibus suis, monasterium Hrypadun usque pervenit, in quo misticam sancti Petri apostolorum proceris tonsuram accepit sub abbatissa nomine Ælfthryth . . . (Colgrave, p. 84)]

period that attracts only four short chapters in his life), Guthlac left Repton seeking the 'desert' so that he might pursue 'the solitary life of monks of former days'.⁴¹ Guthlac is clearly following the path we see articulated by Benedict in his Rule. First, a man must learn to live a spiritual life within the confines of the monastery; only when he is equipped to endure the rigours of solitary life can he leave for the wilderness.

This clear demarcation between the cenobitic and eremitic in Guthlac's life becomes less distinct in the tenth- and eleventh-century lives we are concerned with here. When we consider Romuald, the pattern is still visible but less clearly stated. Although he was destined to become an important spiritual individual, his childhood was ordinary and his entrance to the monastery was predicated by his father's behaviour. Entering the monastery did not precipitate Romuald's desire to become a religious man either; in fact, he took some convincing to take up the habit permanently. Romuald fell into conversation with an elderly lay brother who urged him to take up monastic vows. It took two visions of the martyr, Saint Apollinaris, filling the church 'with such a splendour that it seemed the sun had focused all its rays there' for Romuald to be swayed.⁴² A mystical experience appeared to make certain the decision:

The days went by, and one morning Romuald was praying with great intensity. At that moment the Holy Spirit set his heart on fire with love, and he burst into tears. He went and threw himself at the feet of the monks and begged them through his tears to clothe him in the monastic robes.⁴³

However, Romuald only remained in the monastery for three years before he left, seeking a more austere way of life. It is this action which marks Romuald as different and he presents the monastic reader of his life with some questions. For example, was Romuald disregarding the Rule of Benedict when he refused to stay put in his monastery, developing the skills required to live as a solitary holy man?

⁴¹ *VGuth.*, 24. [Decursis itaque bis denis bis binisque alternantium mensium circulis, quibus sub clericali habitu vitam immensae moderantiae peregit heremum cum curioso eximiae sollicitudinis animo petere mediabatur. Cum enim priscorum monachorum solitariam vitam legebat, tum inluminato cordis gremio avida cupidine heremum quaerere fervebat. (Colgrave, p. 86)]

⁴² *VRom.*, 2. [Confestim vero tantus splendor totam replevit ecclesiam ac si sol fulgoris sui radios intra ipsos parietes cohiberet. (Tobacco, p. 17)]

⁴³ *VRom.*, 2. [Dumque hoc quadam die post visionem attentius faceret, tanto mox divini amoris igne mentem illius Spiritus sanctus accendit, ut in fletum repente prorumperet, uberes lacrimarum rivos restringere non valeret, monachorum se pedibus prostratus advolveret, tradi sibi monachicum habitum inenarrabili desiderio flagitaret. (Tobacco, p. 18)]

Dominic Loricatus never left the monastery once he entered it, but instead he became a hermit within its walls, where ‘he remained chaste until his death’.⁴⁴ In this sense, Dominic’s life does not follow the narrative pattern discussed thus far. However, he did fulfil an important role in Peter Damian’s reformist polemic, as the ultimate example of the solitary, heroic, religious man. Moreover, Dominic had managed to attain his hyper-masculine image while remaining within the institution, reflecting Damian’s desire to have the best of both monastic worlds: one being the heroic battleground of the solitary desert fathers, and the other being the civilised, organised, and disciplined monastic community. If we look again at the earlier life of Guthlac, this tension between the eremitic and the cenobitic is also apparent. Like the great solitary Antony, Guthlac took up residence on an isolated and small island called Crowland, a dismal spot hidden away in the marshes of the fen. It was deserted ‘on account of the phantoms and demons which haunted it,’ making it the perfect dwelling place for a spiritual warrior.⁴⁵ Like Antony, Guthlac proceeded to engage in a robust battle against the devil and various demonic visitations, including one group of phantoms who disguised themselves as a marauding crowd of Britons intent on killing him and burning his hut to the ground.⁴⁶ However, the narrative path in Guthlac’s life takes a stark turn from that of Antony at this point, serving to demonstrate the changing nature of expectations for solitary religious men.

Once he arrived in the wilderness, Guthlac was not able to avoid the individuals who came to his remote post to profit from his exemplary abilities. While living on Crowland, Guthlac displayed many significant traits associated with holy men: he was gifted with the spirit of prophecy; he cured the sick; he exorcised demons; he had power over fish and birds; and he provided advice and comfort for secular and religious men.⁴⁷ This engagement with—rather than avoidance of—other Christians is a key similarity that Guthlac’s *vita* shares with those of the solitary religious men of the high medieval period. Guthlac represents the continuity of a tradition of solitary and extraordinary holy men in Christian history, but his engagement with others and

⁴⁴ Damian, *Letters*, 109.10. [Virgo usque ad obitum fuit, vitam heremiticam non omisit, ubi nimirum sub magisterio sancti viri Iohannis, qui dicebatur de monte Feretri, per plurimos vixit annos. (MGH, Reindel, p. 208)]

⁴⁵ *VGuth.*, 25. [Nullus hanc ante famulum Christi Guthlacum solus habitare colonus valebat, propter videlicet illic demorantium fantasias demonum . . . (Colgrave, p. 88)]

⁴⁶ *VGuth.*, 29-34. The Britons at this time were the enemies of the Saxons.

⁴⁷ *VGuth.*, on prophecy 35, 43, 46, 48; on healing, 45; on exorcism, 35, 41, 42; on fish and birds, 38; on intercession, 35, 46, 49, 52.

eventual ordination by the bishop of Lichfield and Leicester, Headda, shows clearly how the traditional solitary man was evolving with the changing society around him.⁴⁸

Unlike Guthlac, Romuald, and Dominic, the paths of Robert of Arbrissel, Stephen of Obazine, and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu are less clear, and in one case, speak clearly of the tensions evident between the ecclesiastic and monastic realms of the Church. Robert of Arbrissel followed a far more convoluted path to solitary holiness. As a young boy, 'Robert began to develop mature habits and did not carry on in the wanton ways characteristic of youth. Rather he embraced radiant chastity, insofar as he was able, and inwardly loved cleanliness'.⁴⁹ The notion that the holy individual was blessed with adult maturity and a desire for chastity as a child is a recurrent one. Robert of La Chaise-Dieu grew with 'divine mercy' and he 'evaded the evils' of youth by entering the clerical ranks and eventually becoming a priest.⁵⁰ Oftentimes in his youth, he would spend 'whole nights keeping vigil in the church,' further reinforcing his inborn piety.⁵¹ Being a saintly child or youth is also a feature of the *vitae* of many holy women. For instance, Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles (1199-1231), as a young child, 'avoided any worldly girls of wanton, unrefined behaviour'.⁵² At the age of nine, she recognised a plot by her relatives to marry her off, as her father had just died; she fled her father's home and hid with a company of virgins in the town.⁵³ Marie D'Oignies, 'almost from the womb,' rejected the frivolities of youth, choosing instead

⁴⁸ *VGuth.*, 47. [Guthlac vero, petitionibus episcopi nolens resistere, ocius se solo prosternens, volentiae illius se oediturum esse promittit. (Colgrave, p. 144)] Also see notes for chapter 46, p. 190.

⁴⁹ *VRA*, 7. [Ipse denique Robertus ab ipsa pueritia, maturis moribus inolescere coepit; nec enim, ut assolet, juvenis aetatis illius sequebatur lasciviam; sed nitidam, prout poterat, amplexabatur castimoniam, et intrinsecus diligebat munditiam. (*PL* 162, col. 1047a)]

⁵⁰ *VRlcd.*, 1.3.1-2. [Crevit igitur cum infante divina miseratio, et cum puer factus esset, traditus est disciplinae apud vicum Brivatem in ecclesia martyris Juliani, ubi et clericus factus et deputatus est inter canonicos: procedente postea tempore, per ordines ecclesiasticos ad presbyteratum usque pervenit. Pueritiae tempora sic peregit, ut ab his malis, quibus tenera aetas vel proprio vitio, vel alieno plerumque imbuitur, illaesus evaderet. (*PL* 171, cols 1507b-1507c)]

⁵¹ *VRlcd.*, 1.3.3. [Nam in ecclesia totis saepe noctibus cum lacrymis excubebat, mirantibus qui cum taliter reperiebant, utpote ab ipsis custodibus ignoratum. (*PL* 171, col. 1507c)]

⁵² Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles* (hereafter *VIda*), in *Send me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003, 1c. [Cum autem annos infantiae que usque ad septimum extenduntur, adhuc ageret numquam antea, seu postea, cum infantibus vicinarum domorum, vel cum puellis saecularibus, quarum lasciui and inordinate errant mores, egressa est ad ludendum in platea. (Henriquez, pp. 199-200)]

⁵³ *VIda*, 1e. [Cognati vero illius videntes eam patris solatio orbatam, accepta inter se consilio, eam filio cuiusdam civis Niuellensis matrimonio coniungere disposuerunt. . . . cum pauperibus virginibus quae illic habitabant in adiutorio altissimi, sub protectione Dei caeli commorata est. (Henriquez, p. 201)]

to love 'the ascetic life'.⁵⁴ Again, we find that these holy individuals are pre-destined to become exemplars of Christian living. They are not to be emulated, because they simply cannot be, but they do promote the positive aspects of living a life with Christ.

Robert of Arbrissel's attempt to withdraw from the world and live in imitation of the first Christian hermits was thwarted in two ways. Initially, many devout men and women flocked to his remote hermitage in the forest to hear him preach. Baudri of Dol noted that Robert's words were so effective that 'many, after hearing him, were heartstruck and renounced their wicked ways'.⁵⁵ Robert then found himself surrounded by ardent Christians who wished to follow him; rather than flee further into the 'desert,' like an Antony, Robert remained and organised them into a community called La Roë.⁵⁶ The second force which propelled Robert towards a more public life was the Papacy. Baudri of Dol reported that Pope Urban II 'had heard about Robert, for such great light ought not be hidden under a bushel [Matt. 5:125, Mark 4:21, Luke 11:33]'.⁵⁷ Robert's future path in the religious life was then decided for him by Urban, who 'ordered him to be summoned' and then 'commanded him' to address the congregation of a church which Urban was due to consecrate.⁵⁸ Robert of La Chaise-Dieu also wished to be 'removed from the company of people,' so that he might 'build a monastery in a solitary place, where professed to God alone, he could live the canonical life in the religious habit with two or three others'.⁵⁹ As Robert's reputation flourished, so too increased the number of disciples, both secular and clerical, who travelled to his remote location to live under his auspices. He recognized, according to Marbod, that to '[turn] his back on the salvation of so many' would be to cause great

⁵⁴ *VMO*, 1.11a. [Ita enim fere ex utero projecta est in Domino, quod numquam vel raro, sicut mos est puellarum, cum laudentibus miscuit se neque cum iis quae in levitate ambulabant participem se praebuit. . . . Adeo enim ab infantia cum ea crevit miseratio and pietas, and quasi naturali affection religionem diligebat. (*AASS*, p. 639)] Christina of Markyate also took to the ascetic life from an early age, beating herself even when she was too young to distinguish between right and wrong; see *VCMly.*, 2. [Inde fuit quod cum adhuc per etatem discernere nequiret inter rectum et iniquum suam tenellam carnem virgis cedebat quociens aliquod illicitum se fecisse putabat. (Talbot, p. 36)]

⁵⁵ *VRA*, 2.12. [Unde factum est ut eo audito multi corda sua percuterent, suisque pravis conversationibus abrenuntiarent. (*PL* 162, col. 1050a)]

⁵⁶ *VRA*, 2.12; also see Bruce L. Venarde, *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, Washington, 2003, p. 124, n.29.

⁵⁷ *VRA*, 2.13. [Audiuit de Roberto; non enim abscondi debebat tanta lucerna sub modio. (*PL* 162, col. 1050c)]

⁵⁸ *VRA*, 2.13. [Accersiri eum mandavit, ejusque colloquium desideranter cupivit. Celebrare ibi habuit solemne cujusdam ecclesiae dedicationem, ad quam confluisse putares totam orbis amplitudinem. In tanto conventu Robertum loqui praecipit. (*PL* 162, col. 1050c)]

⁵⁹ *VRlcd.*, 1.6.10. [Quod autem desiderabat, hoc erat, ut ab hominum frequentia remotus aedificare posset in solitudine monasterium, ubi sub religionis habitu canonicam vitam cum duobus vel tribus duceret soli Deo professus. (*PL* 171, col. 1509c)]

peril to his soul.⁶⁰ Having reconciled himself to the idea that he could no longer embrace a solitary life, Robert took it upon himself to construct a monastery which would travel under the Rule of Benedict.⁶¹

Urban's reaction to Robert of Arbrissel's success in his preaching endeavour speaks volumes about the changed nature of the relationship between the holy man and the institutional Church. Robert's triumph saw him co-opted by the leader of that institution, and redesignated as 'God's word-scatterer'.⁶² Bruce Venarde argues that Robert was re-cast as St Paul, a pioneer of Christianity and one whose sagacious preaching could convert pagans.⁶³ I would argue that Urban II was also exercising control over an individual who, because of his popularity and ability, posed a threat if left to function outside of the institution. It is not surprising to see the words 'ordered', 'commanded', 'urged', and 'insisted' prominent in Urban's dialogue, as he sought to gain some control over Robert. As Brian Golding comments, '[a] successful hermit was, if not a contradiction in terms, at least a paradox, in that his very charisma ensured that he could not escape from the demands of followers'.⁶⁴ This kind of charismatic holy individual needed to be contained; while a man like Robert was secure in a monastery—either his own or someone else's—and following a rule, the religious leadership had less reason to be concerned about divergent preaching. Thus the Papacy ensured that holy men, who had the potential to attract the kind of attention we see directed at holy women a century later, were kept firmly under their auspices.

The experiences of both Roberts, as they tried to embrace the eremitic life, are not unique. Stephen of Obazine also found himself surrounded by a community of adherents rapidly increasing in number. This became a real concern for Stephen because, as his anonymous biographer noted: 'He had not sought out this aforementioned place to gather many throngs there, but in order that, dwelling in solitude, he might devote himself more privately and freely to God, and might torture

⁶⁰ *VRlcd.*, 1.17.5. [Videns Dei famulus tanti boni praepraratam divinitus occasionem, sciensque veraciter ad suae periculum animae pertinere, si tam multorum saluti, propriae quietis respectu, deesset, habita super hoc cum fratribus suis deliberatione, assensu etiam et consilio Arvernensis episcopi bonae memoriae Renconis, laboriosa procuratione se induit, coepitque monasterium aedificare, cum summa omnium gratulatione ac favore, juxta loculum in quo prius habitaverat. (*PL* 171, cols 1516a-1516b)]

⁶¹ *VRlcd.*, 1.17.4-6.

⁶² *VRA*, 2.14. [Secundum a se eum statuit Dei seminiverbum. (*PL* 162, col. 1051a)]

⁶³ Venarde, *Robert of Arbrissel*, pp. 120-121, n.3.

⁶⁴ Brian Golding, 'Hermits, Monks and Women in Twelfth-Century France and England: The Experience of Obazine and Sempringham', in Judith Loades ed., *Monastic Studies: The Continuity of Tradition*, Bangor, 1990, p. 129.

his flesh without restraint, since he would fear no one's praise or approbation.'⁶⁵ Guibert of Nogent described how Peter the Hermit 'was surrounded by great throngs of people', while Bernard of Trion attracted 'great crowds not only of hermits but also of the people' to hear him preach.⁶⁶ The issue of hermits preaching was complex one. As we have seen, Urban was so enamoured of Robert of Arbrissel that he licensed him to preach. The granting of licences appears to have been an initiative of Gregory VII, with the first to be granted a licence one Wederic, monk of Ghent, who was encouraged to preach 'the word of God throughout Flanders'.⁶⁷ Despite the granting of licences, which legitimized and encourage preaching, discontent with this practice was still apparent amongst some in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This is probably due to the fact that, in preaching, hermits trod a fine line between 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy'.⁶⁸ For example, despite his papal authorization, Robert of Arbrissel was one whose preaching and way of life attracted criticism, particularly from Marbod of Rennes who authored the life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu.⁶⁹

Robert of Arbrissel then, while wanting to be a hermit and attempting to be a hermit, ultimately failed because as a holy man his rightful place is deemed to be preaching for and, more importantly, within the institution. Why did Robert wish to be a solitary man in the first place, and how common was his experience for other holy men in the high medieval period? The monastic reform of the ninth and tenth centuries is, I argue, the major force influencing men who desired to live a way of life which had been gradually disappearing from the religious landscape. Peter Damian offers repeated examples in his letters as to the divide occurring within monastic ranks. His dedication to Romuald of Ravenna and Dominic Loricatus is a pointed commentary on the glories of the solitary life and in a letter to the hermits Ambrosius and Liupardus, Damian makes clear his criticism of the perceived extravagances of the dominant Cluniac monastic model:

⁶⁵ *VSO*, 1.10.

⁶⁶ Guibert of Nogent, 'Urban and the Crusaders', in *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, Dana C. Munro ed., vol. 1-2, Philadelphia, 1895, 20; Geoffrey Grossus, *The Life of Blessed Bernard of Tiron*, 6, cited in Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000-1150*, London, 1984, p. 75.

⁶⁷ Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 75.

⁶⁸ Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 76.

⁶⁹ See, Marbod of Rennes, 'Letter to Robert of Arbrissel', in *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, trans. Bruce Venarde, Washington, 2003, pp. 92-100. In particular, Marbod criticized Robert for his association with women.

And so, despising the pleasure of carnal desire, you have bravely seized upon the arduous regimen of this solitary life. Boldly condemning the attractions of carnal desire, you have seized upon the difficult practice of this solitude, which especially amazes me where you are concerned, brother Liupardus, since after the renunciation of the world you abandoned riches and, moreover, a monastery accustomed to the most splendid luxuries.⁷⁰

Damian's powerful condemnation of 'carnal desire' in this passage highlights what had become a major concern for reformers of the eleventh century. If we look back to Guthlac's life, we can see that, while he traversed a pre-determined path, demonstrating along the way his conformity to hierarchy, his life also illuminated themes which give us an insight into issues of the time. Guthlac's life lacks a certain sense of internal conflict present in other narratives of men undergoing a religious conversion, particularly with regards to sexual temptation, indicating that, at the time the work was penned, this was less of a concern for authorities.

Peter the Venerable more eloquently described both the desire to become a solitary religious man and the importance of a community in abetting that desire. Although it is difficult to discern an individual's motives, even from auto-biographic works, it is clear that Peter's desire for solitude stemmed from a deep discomfort with his rapidly changing world:

"Lo, I have gone far off, flying away, and I abode in solitude" (Ps. 54.8). And as in the enclosures of mountains, so let us build for ourselves in the hidden places of our hearts solitudes where alone a true hermitage is found by those who truly despise the world, where no outsider is admitted, where the storm and noise of worldly tumults is calmed, where the voice of the speaking God is heard without any sound of a bodily voice in "a whistling of a gentle air" (3 Kings 19.12). Let us go back constantly to this solitude "while we are in the body and are absent from the Lord" (2 Cor. 5.6), and placed in the middle of crowds, and let us find in ourselves what we seek in the uttermost borders of the world, for "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17.21).⁷¹

⁷⁰ Damian, *Letters*, 128.2. [Contempnentibus itaque carnalium illecebras voluptatum audacter arripuistis arduum huius solitudinis institutum, quod de te, frater Liuparde, vehementius miror, qui post abdicationem saeculi dives etiam et opulentissimis assuetum deliciis monasterium reliquisti. (*MGH*, Reindel, p. 429)]

⁷¹ Giles Constable, 'The Ideal of Inner Solitude in the Twelfth Century', in Henri Dubois, Jean-Claude Hocquet and Andre Vauchez eds, *Horizons marins. Itinéraires spirituels (Mélanges Michel Mollat, I: Mentalités et Sociétés)*, Paris, 1987, reprinted in Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, p. 29. Peter the Venerable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, ed. Giles Constable, Cambridge, Mass., 1967, Ep. 58. [Sed si non datur, uel quousque detur aemulemur eum qui inter populorum frequentias, et regales epulas, et auratos parietes, dicebat: Ecce elongaui fugiens, et mansi in solitudine. Et uelut intra septa montium, sic intra archana cordium nobis solitudines aedificemus, ubi a ueris mundi contemptoribus uera tantum heremus inuenitur, ubi nullus externus admittitur, ubi mundanorum tumultuum turbo fragor que sopitur, ubi sine ullo corporeae uocis sono in sibilo aerae tenuis uox dei loquentis auditur. Ad hanc fili dilectissime solitudinem dum sumus in hoc corpore et peregrinamur a domino, in medio quoque turbarum positi, assidue recurramus, et quod in extremis orbis finibus quaereremus, in nobismetipsis nam et regnum dei intra nos est inueniemus. (Constable, vol. 1, p. 188)]

However, we must temper Peter's motivation in light of Orderic Vitalis's words concerning the efflorescence of new religious orders and hermits at this time. While acknowledging the absolute motivation of some, Orderic urges his reader to be wary of imitators: 'In my opinion voluntary poverty, contempt for the world, and true religion inspire many of them, but many hypocrites and plausible counterfeiters are mixed with them, as tares with wheat.'⁷² He cites a poem by one Pain Bolotin, a canon of Chartres, in which he 'exposed the covert superstitions of their hypocrisy at length'.⁷³ Orderic gives us some small insight into an underlying concern which must have occupied the minds of many in the ecclesiastic hierarchy and driven the impulse to exert control over extraordinary religious men.

Orderic Vitalis also brings the importance of the Benedictine Rule to the reader's attention. Chapter 26 of his seventh book in the *Historia ecclesiastica* is focused on the founding of Cîteaux, particularly Robert of Molesme's desire for his monks to adhere to the 'Rule of St. Benedict in everything, taking care not to turn aside either to the left or to the right'.⁷⁴ We see a similar motivation for Romuald, in that he was forced to leave Classe because his admonishment of the monks via the precepts of Benedict turned them against him.⁷⁵ This cry for adherence to the Rule of Benedict was a direct criticism of the dominant Cluniac model and, as Henrietta Leyser notes, it was 'a cry that would be much repeated'.⁷⁶ It was also a cry for a new understanding of the *vita apostolica*.

As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the *vita apostolica* which resided in the consciousness of Robert of Arbrissel was concerned with evangelizing, not a renewed sense of communal living, although Robert was eventually compelled to realign with the communal model. Communal living also had, as its focus and as a model, the ways of the Desert Fathers and writers such as Cassian, and the 'new' hermits used this literature as 'both a source of inspiration and a guide to actual

⁷² *Eccl. Hist.*, 8.26. [Voluntaria paupertas mundique contemptus ut opinor in plerisque feruet ac uera religio, sed plures eis hipocritæ seductoriique simulatores permiscetur ut lolum tritico.]

⁷³ *Eccl. Hist.*, 8.26. [Paganus Carnotensis canonicus cognomento Belotinus pulchrum Carmen adonico metro nuper edidit, in quo palliatis horum hipocrisi superstitiones subtiliter et copiose propalauit.]

⁷⁴ *Eccl. Hist.*, 8.26. [Laudo igitur ut omnio regulam sancti Benedicti teneamus; cauentes ne ad dexteram uel ad sinistram ab ea deuiemus.]

⁷⁵ *VRom.*, 3. [Cumque redarguendis eorum vitiis vehementer insisteret, illi autem iunioris et novitii verba pro nichilo deputarent, tandem hoc obprobrium non ferentes, dum propriam emendare vitam despiciunt, de corripientis morte tractare ceperunt. (Tobacco, p. 19)]

⁷⁶ Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 25.

observances'.⁷⁷ A frequent accusation was that contemporary society and the monks living in it were more concerned with luxury and comfort, and monasteries no longer afforded the environment in which to live an apostolic life:

When you mentioned the model of the primitive church to which, as you truly say, I wish to cleave, I rejoiced and with all my heart I thank you for your watchful attention, but good father, as scripture testifies and as I have learnt from your own teaching, the model of the primitive church is no more, nor less than the life of the apostles and the disciples shaped by gospel teaching; the life of those to whom it is said 'if any man will take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also', those who are forbidden not only to resist theft, but also to go to law; those to whom it said 'be ye perfect as your heavenly father is perfect' . . . this manner of perfection can, by your own testimony rarely or ever be kept within monasteries and this I reckon is because the poverty which the poor Christ preached is kept out of them as far as possible.⁷⁸

In this letter to Ivo of Chartres, Rainaud is justifying his departure from the community of canons to which he once belonged in order to become a hermit. We experience in his letter a strong sense of an individual who desired to live 'correctly,' and whose understanding of that ideal was rooted in the past.

Rainaud's concern that many monasteries failed to emulate Christ's poverty was one echoed by Peter Damian. However, rather than encouraging individuals to roam about the actual countryside, Damian relocated the solitary holy man to the spiritual desert of the hermitage cell, where the key to emulating the authentic desert as experienced by Christ, Antony, or Hilarion, was to enact ascetic behaviours including fasting and self-discipline. Damian is perhaps our best source for investigating this curious coming together of the eremitic and the cenobitic ways of life; yet his works are complicated by the fact that he was a leading ecclesiastical reformer of the time, being a close ally of Bishop Hildebrand before he became Pope Gregory VII. Damian found himself dragged into the secular realm of reforming politics rather against his will, and his heart really lay with his community at Fonte Avellana.⁷⁹ Damian's *Lives of Rodolphus and Dominic*, and his thirteenth treatise 'On the Perfection of Monks,' clearly illustrate how Damian sought to merge two distinct stands of living together whilst maintaining a focus on reform.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits*, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁸ Dom Morin, 'Rainald l'ermite et Ives de Chartres: un épisode de la crise du cénobitisme aux XI-XII siècles', *Revue Benedictine*, 40, 1928, p. 101, cited in Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Damian, *Letters*, 57. This is the letter Peter wrote to both Pope Nicholas II elect and Hildebrand in 1058 begging to be released from his office and to be allowed to return to Fonte Avellana. He seems to display an anxiety about the secular world that borders on phobic, relating many tales about people who were eaten by wild beasts or burned in fires.

⁸⁰ Damian, *Letters*, 109, contains the lives of Dominic and Rodolphus; and Peter Damian, 'On the Perfection of Monks', trans. and intro. Patricia McNulty, in Patricia McNulty ed., *St Peter Damian: Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, London, 1959, pp. 82-136.

In Dominic Loricatus, we find the most revered example of the ascetic way of life which Damian advocated for all religious men. As indicated by his name, Dominic was perhaps best known for his practice of wearing the *lorica*. In a letter to Pope Alexander II, Damian relates that, for fifteen years, Dominic ‘wore an iron corselet next to his flesh, girded himself with two iron bands, and used two others that restricted his shoulders’.⁸¹ Moreover, Dominic was also a prodigious flagellant, who would spend whole days and nights ‘meditatively reciting the psalter nine times, and while doing so, almost continuously beat[ing] his naked body with scourges held in both hands’.⁸² Coupled with the shame which drove him to become a monk, Dominic fulfilled two roles in Damian’s rhetoric concerning the supremacy of the eremitic monastic life. Dominic represented, through his fiercely harsh ascetic practices, a devotion to Christ which should be the goal of every monk and cleric. He also provided a moral example concerning the sin of simony, which was rife in the Church and one of the major targets of the reform movement.

For Peter Damian, Rodulphus of Gubbio provided a supreme example of how all clerics of the Church should live. Rodulphus practiced many austerities as a monk: he wore a hair shirt continually; he fasted excessively, ‘waging an inner war on gluttony’; he slept only in his undershirt during winter; and he suspended himself by ropes from the ceiling of his cell as he chanted the psalms.⁸³ Tellingly, however, Rodulphus was also a bishop. Damian recalled how he would be charged by Rodulphus to ‘never . . . hesitate in punishing him if he should perhaps sin in any way, but to apply to him every kind of discipline which monks deserved’.⁸⁴ Damian observed that ‘in this way he laudably observed the Rule as a monk, and in turn preserved his authority as a

⁸¹ Damian, *Letters*, 109.21. [Hic denique tribus iam circiter annorum lustris lorica ferrea vestitur ad carnem, duobus autem ferreis circulis in corpore cingitur, duobus item per brachiorum armos artatur. (MGH, Reindel, pp. 213-214)]

⁸² Damian, *Letters*, 109.20. [Est inter nos, qui nonnumquam uno die continuato cum nocte novem psalteria meditando decurrat, et interim pene semper utraque manu scopis armata nudum corpus afficiat. (MGH, Reindel, p. 213)]

⁸³ Damian, *Letters*, 109.5. [Eisdem quippe terebat semper membra cilitiis, eisdem contentus erat per exiguis admodum ac despicabilibus indumentis. Plane dum iuvenalis aetatis ingruente natura gravissimam sepe pateretur accidiam, laquearibus cellulae funiculos innectebat, sicque ulnis insertis psalmodiae studio pen dulus insistebat. Numquam adipe, numquam ovis vel caseo vescebat. In eisdem vero, quae apponebantur, eduliis continens eum frugalitas cruciabat, ut discumbens non tam reficeret quam certaret, et intestinum potius esset gulae bellum, quod extrinsecus videbatur esse convivium. (MGH, Reindel, p. 204)]

⁸⁴ Damian, *Letters*, 109.7. [Sepe me per clementiam Christi terribiliter adiurabat, ut si quando fortassis excederet, nequaquam me ab eius correptione subducerem, sed omnem in eo disciplinae modum, qui monachis debebatur, implerem. (MGH, Reindel, p. 206)]

bishop'.⁸⁵ It is clear that a monastic life of strict discipline and penance was the only way, in Damian's mind, to authorize clerical men.

In Rodulphus and Dominic, Peter Damian presented a vision of religious masculinity which is warrior-like in its intensity and, indeed, Damian never questioned the intensity of the ascetic practices of his heroes. As Patricia McNulty notes, the essence of Damian's monastic desire lay in 'the solitude, the fierce austerity—his ascetic ideal contained much of the violence and severity which had characterized the first beginnings of monasticism in the deserts of Syria and Egypt'.⁸⁶ Throughout his treatise 'On the Perfection of Monks,' Damian decried the 'lack of zeal' in the holy order, comparing monks to 'bastard sons, who delight in being called by their father's name'.⁸⁷ He asked: 'what is to be thought of us, who in our monastic profession vowed that we would scale the heights of perfection, and yet lie inert in the valley of our shortcomings in a torpor of sloth?'⁸⁸ Summed up, Damian advised the monks that what is desired of them 'is nothing other than this: a fervent love of God and mortification of yourself'.⁸⁹ It is clear then that Damian perceived great shortcomings within the monastic order, so with typical morbidity and verbosity, he set out to instruct monks on those short-comings and how to negate them.

We must ask, however, whether the desire to replicate the extreme ascetic way of life espoused by Damian through examples like Dominic and Rodulphus, motivated those hermits such as Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine. The individual holy men who realised these new communities certainly engaged in some of ascetic behaviours favoured by Damian, and this forms an important aspect of their *vitae* in that it reinforced their connection to holy men of the past. Giles Constable notes that such self-imposed suffering 'may be divided, broadly speaking, into negative and

⁸⁵ Damian, *Letters*, 109.7. [Ita plane et regulam monachi et auctoritatem episcopi sub alterna vicissitudine lauda biliter observabat. (MGH, Reindel, p. 206)]

⁸⁶ Patricia McNulty, 'Introduction', in Peter Damian, 'On the Perfection of Monks', trans. and intro. Patricia McNulty, in Patricia McNulty ed., *St Peter Damian: Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life*, London, 1959, p. 51.

⁸⁷ Damian, 'Perfection of Monks', 1. [Itaque non ignoratis, fratres mei, quod gemens loquor, ad quantum sancti fervoris lapsus sit, imo proclivius quotidie labi non desinat noster ordo defectum, ut jam omnium pene mandatorum negligenter obliti, sola professionis hujus videamur veste contenti. . . . Ac si spurius puer patris quidem se censi nomine gaudeat, sed generis sui degenerata conditio legibus hunc ab haereditate repellat. (PL 145, col. 0291c)]

⁸⁸ Damian, 'Perfection of Monks', 2. [Si ergo regnum simul et vitam illis Deus omnipotens abstulit, non ob aliud crimen, nisi quia tam boni operis, quale regem decuerat, in eo plenitudinem non invenit; quid de nobis est sentiendum, qui sub professione manastica et scandere perfectionis excelsa promisimus, et adhuc tamen sub torpore desidia in imperfectionis nostrae convalle jacemus? (PL 145, col. 0293c)]

⁸⁹ Damian, 'Perfection of Monks', 2. [Sed volo compendiose perstringere, quo menti vestrae valeat facilius, ac per hoc arctius inhaerere. Itaque nihil est aliud nisi fervor in Deum et mortificatio in temetipso. (PL 145, col. 0294a)]

positive mortifications, that is, into forms of deprivation and the active imposition of suffering'.⁹⁰ The individual's motivation for enacting severe austerities will be more fully discussed in the following chapter but it is worth noting that the holy men under investigation here engaged in both types of ascetic performance—negative activities, such as chastity, poverty, obedience, fasting, solitude, silence, and humility; and positive, such as wearing *lorica* or *cilicia*, immersion in cold water or fire, rolling in thorns or nettles, flagellation, liturgical exercises, living on pillars, kissing the earth, the feet of the poor or the diseased, or enduring illness as sent from God as a test.

Fasting is the most familiar of the ascetic practices engaged in, with Robert of La Chaise-Dieu's biographer noting that, while still a youth, he 'fasted willingly and prayed, and as much as he could he distributed open-handedly to the poor'.⁹¹ Marbod continues that, when Robert seemed to have given everything to the poor, 'he often added his cape and cloak for them to use,' a sentiment which has a strong resonance with Rainaud's words cited above.⁹² Once he became a hermit, Robert continued to engage in mostly negative ascetic practices such as fasting and sleep deprivation—this is in contrast to the *vitae* of Stephen of Obazine and Robert of Arbrissel, where we find more graphic, positive ascetic practices. Robert of Arbrissel 'raged against himself' by engaging in practices 'like wearing a pig-hairshirt, shaving his beard without water, [fasting] . . . [and] abusing natural frailty by rarely getting a night's sleep'.⁹³ Like Dominic, he also wore the *lorica* or iron tunic 'next to his skin' for a period of two years.⁹⁴ The wearing of the *lorica* is significant because, as Katherine Allen Smith has noted, it is a practice most often associated with men who 'lived on the fringes of the institutional church as hermits and holy men only loosely affiliated with a particular

⁹⁰ Giles Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering in the Middle Ages', The Ninth Stephen J. Brademas, Sr. Lecture, Brookline, Mass., 1982, p. 10, republished in Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, [original pagination].

⁹¹ *VRlcd.*, 1.4.5. [Jejunabat propensius et orabat, et quantum posset, larga manu distribuebat pauperibus. (PL 171, col. 1508b)]

⁹² *VRlcd.*, 1.4.6 [Certum est illum, cum omnia pauperibus erogasset, in usus eorum saepe chlamydem vel pallium adjecisse; Christum plane in pauperibus attendebat, et suam parvipendens, illius festinabat tegere nuditatem. (PL 171, col. 1508b)] For Rainaud's comment see above, p. 161.

⁹³ *VRA*, 11. [Ibi quantis inhumanitatibus in se totus saevierit, quot et quantis crucibus se ipse mactaverit, quam diris concussionibus sese extenuaverit, quis digne recenseat? Nam praeter ea qua extrinseca videbantur, uti pilis porcorum cilicium induere, barbam, sine aqua radere, lectisternium praeter humum vix nosse, vinum omnino cibosque lautos et saginatos nescire, somnum permodicum, naturali fragilitate compellente, raro capere. (PL 162, cols 0149c-1049d)]

⁹⁴ *VRA*, 10. [Destinans itaque carnis illecebris austerius dominari, subtus ad carnem indutus est lorica: qua veste duobus usus est annis, antequam ad eremum processerit. Ad eremum quippe postea processit, seque totum contemplationi dedicavit. (PL 162, col. 1049b)]

monastic order or community'.⁹⁵ It also fulfilled two important purposes, metaphorical and physical. Metaphorically, the *lorica* worn by these liminal men represented the armour they had donned as *milites Christi* or soldiers of Christ.⁹⁶ Physically, the *lorica* was central in the battle against all of the temptations of the flesh including lust and gluttony. The *lorica*-wearing holy men take this martial model to the extreme, but in a rapidly-changing social environment, and a religio-political environment which demanded order and obedience, men like Dominic Loricatus and Robert of Arbrissel provided a model for other men to aspire to.

Like Robert of La Chaise-Dieu, as a youth, Stephen of Obazine also tended to negative practices such as giving to the poor and chastity.⁹⁷ However, when he embarked on his solitary life, he engaged in more positive actions such as immersion in freezing water, continual chanting of the psalms, and lashing both the other brothers and himself.⁹⁸ These ascetic practices contributed to the marital model of religious masculinity and they also had a precedent in the literature. Immersion in freezing water as a means to control lust was a tactic familiar to both lay men and holy men because, as the natural philosopher William of Conches noted, 'we know that cold freezes humors'.⁹⁹ This hyper-masculine warrior for Christ was a consciously constructed man, an individual mediated by his creator. However, it would be a mistake to not consider the importance of this model and its influence on the behaviour of religious men.

⁹⁵ Katherine Allen Smith, 'Saints in Shining Armor: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050-1250', *Speculum*, 83, 3, July 2008, p. 584.

⁹⁶ Key essays which focus on masculinity during the reform period include: Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being Male in the Middle Ages', in Clare A. Lees ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 1994, pp. 31-45; Jo Ann McNamara, 'The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150', in Clare A. Lees ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 1994, pp. 3-29; Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage eds, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, New York, 1996, pp. 123-152; P. H. Cullum, 'Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval England', in D. M. Hadley ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London, 1999, pp. 178-96; Conrad Leyser, 'Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emissions and the Limits of Celibacy in the Early Middle Ages', in D. M. Hadley ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, London, 1999, pp. 103-120; Jacqueline Murray, 'Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis eds, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Cardiff, 2004, pp. 24-42; idem, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz eds, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, Philadelphia, 2008, pp. 34-51; and Katherine Allen Smith, 'Saints in Shining Armor', pp. 572-602.

⁹⁷ *VSO*, 1.1.

⁹⁸ *VSO*, 1.2, 6.

⁹⁹ William of Conches, *A Dialogue on Natural Philosophy (Dragmaticon Philosophiae)*, trans. Italo Ronca and Matthew Curr, Notre Dame, 1997, 6.8.1.

While Damian may have championed the cause of the ascetic hermit, he stressed that this 'simplified monastic life' must happen within the confines of a community such as Fonte Avellana or Camaldoli.¹⁰⁰ In his letter to the hermit Teuzo, Damian recounts their less-than pleasant meeting, which resulted in Damian being thrown bodily out of Teuzo's cell.¹⁰¹ Damian laid the blame for Teuzo's 'quarrelsome' and 'arrogant' behaviour squarely at Teuzo's own feet:

Now as to the source of this fatal disease that so suddenly seized you, I will not take pains to explain, so long as it is impossible for you to listen patiently. Never having been subjected, as it is said, to any monastic discipline, never having been brought to live under the restraint of superiors, and remaining stiffnecked and rigid even while you were still being formed in this new way of life, you went your own way, teaching before you had learned, first giving orders before you had observed the Law yourself. And so it happened that you decided to live an eremitical life, not in the wilderness, but within the wall of a densely populated city, where anything that is said by a man of such great reputation is seized upon as if it were some oracular prophecy proceeding from a Sibylline source. But, I ask, if you are a monk, what business do you have in cities? If you are a hermit, what are you doing among the crowds in town? What do noisy marketplaces or towered fortresses contribute to a cell?¹⁰²

Damian raised several key points in this passage which are evidence of the control which ecclesiastical authorities wanted to impose on wayward or errant holy men. This is clearly expressed when Damian claims that Teuzo has never been subject to monastic discipline or the restraint of a superior. In this assertion, Damian is fudging the details slightly; Teuzo had, in fact, been a monk at the monastery of St Mary in Florence, but he had left because of his continual conflict with the abbot.¹⁰³ The themes of submission, obedience, and humility are starkly presented here, and they are central to our understanding as to why exceptional holy men did not follow a similar spiritual path as their female counterparts.

¹⁰⁰ Lester K. Little, 'Monasticism and Western Society: From Marginality to the Establishment and Back', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 47, 2002, p. 90.

¹⁰¹ Damian, *Letters*, 44.1-5. [Dehinc paucis quasi rationibus irrationabiliter redditis et cum iurgio et tumore impatienter effusis ad trabale scilicet odium non evellendum sed enixius radicandum, tandem per semicintias correpti violenter excludimur, et pre damnatis foribus familiare colloquium ulterius non meremur. (MGH, Reindel, p. 12)]

¹⁰² Damian, *Letters*, 44.6. [Nunc unde tibi huius origo morbi loetalis obrepserit, tantummodo te sit possibile patienter audire, ego non gravabor exponere. Nulla siquidem disciplina, ut dicitur, monasticae institutionis attritus, sub nulla maiorum custodia maceratus, in ipso conversionis novae tirocinio adhuc durus et rigidus, huius propositi iter arripiens ante cepisti docere quam discere, prius iura depromere quam legum mandata servare. Huc accedit, quod heremiticam vitam non in heremo sed intra populosaie urbis moenia ducere decrevistis, ubi nimirum quicquid a tam magnifici nominis auctore praecipitur, sic arripitur, tamquam si a sibillino aditu vaticinii oraculum reportetur. Sed, quaeso, si monachus es, quid tibi cum urbibus? Si here mita, quid tibi cum civium cuneis? Quid enim cellae vel fora strepentia vel turrita conferunt propugnacula? (MGH, Reindel, pp. 12-13)]

¹⁰³ Owen J. Blum, *The Letters of Peter Damian*, trans. Owen J. Blum, vols. 1-3, 5-7, *The Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation*, Washington, D.C., 1989-2005, vol. 2, p. 221.

It is all well and good to promote this martial model of masculinity but the Church would have undoubtedly faced more than a few problems if the men attracted to this way of life were left to their own devices. The Church's desire for some form of institutional control over the men who wished to take up the eremitic life is clearly seen in the Lives discussed above. As I have already noted, Robert of Arbrissel was 'commanded' to preach on behalf of the Church, and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu recognized that he could not turn his back on his followers, so he built a monastery. Stephen of Obazine also found that he needed to build a monastery for the growing number of followers he attracted, but balked at the prospect of becoming the prior. It took the directive of 'the legate, the Bishop of Chartres . . . [who] entrusted the office of prior to Lord Stephen and enjoined upon him the care of the souls subject to him'.¹⁰⁴ Stephen submitted to the physical need for order in building his monastery, and also to the spiritual directive of obedience when he deferred authority to the Bishop of Chartres and assumed the role of prior.

The monastic life provided an excellent arena within which to battle the evil of 'carnal pleasure [for] there is no crime that cries out more loudly to heaven'.¹⁰⁵ The issue of chastity for religious men was as old as Christianity itself. Antony stressed the importance of fellow monks 'looking at one another, [so] we would not commit carnal sin'. The point of this was to ensure the subjection of the body and to 'trample on the devices of the enemy'.¹⁰⁶ While the stress is on the individual and his solitary battle against carnal desires is the focus in this passage, a passage from the *Vita patrum* would have also been of interest to Damian and his pursuit of reform, particularly when it came to assessing the worthiness of one man to direct others. Abba Orsisios makes a strong connection between a carnal mind and the inability to lead:

If an unbaked brick is put in the foundations near the river, it does not last a single day, but baked, it lasts like stone. So the man with a carnal disposition of soul, who has not been in the fire through fear of God like Joseph, utterly disintegrates when he accepts a position of authority.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ VSO, 1.14.

¹⁰⁵ Damian, *Letters*, 86.14. [Excitat enim venatorem vox clamoris, cum te accendit flamma libidinis. Nulla quippe vox criminum sonorius elevatur in caelum. (MGH, Reindel, p. 467)]

¹⁰⁶ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, trans. H. Ellershaw, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, Early Church Fathers: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 4, Grand Rapids, 1886-1990, 55.

¹⁰⁷ *Apop. patrum*, Orsisios, 1.

So for Damian, an excessive ascetic life proved to be a marker of manliness and a key component for the superiority of the monastic life. As Jacqueline Murray notes, the celibate monk ‘transcended and conquered lust in a way that enhanced his masculinity’.¹⁰⁸ This sentiment is reinforced by commentators such as Alexander Neckam, who suggested that ‘[t]hrough chastity a virgin may prove herself to be masculine’.¹⁰⁹ It is this hyper-masculine model of monastic life which obscures medieval religious masculinity and makes it difficult for the modern historian to recover any men who conform to modern constructions of mysticism.

To stress the importance of the hermitage or monastery in shaping the heroic hermit, Damian turned to a number of examples of men who had achieved an eremitical way of life *within* the institution, whilst maintaining an aura of humility and obedience. Besides his usual heroes such as Romuald, Dominic, and Leo of Sitria, Damian speaks of Martin Storacus, an ‘uneducated peasant’ who resided in Damian’s hermitage. Although his penance is at times too extreme even for Damian, Martin’s humility and simplicity in devotion led him to become a source of comfort and advice for Damian, who by accepting his counsel also displayed his own humility.¹¹⁰ A story is also told in the life of Romuald about a hermit with no superior who is corrected by Romuald. Venerio had fled his monastery because the other monks were jealous of his humility and simplicity, choosing to live instead as a hermit. Romuald, reflecting on his own experience as a solitary, went to visit with Venerio:

Romuald asked him, “To what monastic authority have you submitted your rule of life? As a hermit, whom do you obey?”

Venerio answered, “I am under no particular authority; I am free to do what seems best to me.”

“If you are bearing the cross of Christ,” Romuald told him, “you must not forget Christ’s obedience. Now go, ask your abbot to give his consent, and then come back here, but as his humble disciple. Thus the house of your holy life, which your

¹⁰⁸ Murray, ‘Masculinizing Religious Life’, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Neckam, *Suppletio Defectuum Book 1: Alexander Neckam on Plants, Birds and Animals*, Christopher J. McDonough ed., Sismel, 1999, p. 13. Also see Jo Ann McNamara, ‘An Unresolved Syllogism: The Search for a Christian Gender System’, in Jacqueline Murray ed., *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, New York, 1999, p. 6, where McNamara argues that Christian men were now challenged to ‘seek acceptable access to womanly virtue’.

¹¹⁰ Damian, *Letters*, 44.9 on Martin’s vigils. [Quendam habemus in cellula rusticum idiotam, vix quinquaginta psalmos utcumque balbutientem, eosdem tamen per dies singulos subiectis semper letaniis sexies iterantem. (MGH, Reindel, p. 15)] 44.11 on his advice to Damian. [Saepe rogatus, ut pro necessitatibus aecclesiasticis vel foederanda pace procederem, cum mihi detrimentum esse pernoscerem, licet aliis proveniret, hunc fratrem ea fide consului, ut illi divina gratia dignaretur infundere, quid mihi decerneret expedire. (MGH, Reindel, p. 16)]

goodwill is building, will rest upon the foundations of humility and will have the strong support of obedience.”¹¹¹

Romuald’s comments to Venerio reflected his own turmoil, experienced when he was shunned by his monks at Bagno and he elected to never care for the souls of others again. The sheer terror he experienced at this thought convinced him that an unencumbered and inward-focusing life would lead only to his own downfall.¹¹²

Men needed to be ordered, obedient, and controlled, and this was recognised not only by those deemed responsible for the care of souls, but also those who would fall under the control of another. We can gain a brief insight into the motivations of those who attached themselves to a holy man and their reasons for doing so. In an interesting passage from the *Primordia Calmosiacensia*, we have an explanation as to why a group of hermits elected to reside with the priest Anthenor at Chaumouzey. They had come across him living a solitary life and decided to join him:

Casting aside the things of the world and equally, according to Gospel precept, our own wills, we undertook the fellowship of the common life with him and under him; although we were as yet uncertain which of the holy fathers in the habit of religion we should most closely follow, nonetheless seeking to be under the direction of a single master everyone of us strove, with the help of divine grace to turn away from the broad paths of the old life and to renew the divine image which we have destroyed in the secular world through penitence and to the best of our abilities.¹¹³

What is clear from this passage is the recognition by the group that they needed to live under the authority of a ‘master,’ someone who would then direct them in the appropriate way to live the eremitic life. As an aside, there is no mention of how the priest felt about a random assortment of men coming along and joining him in what was his solitary life.

As I argued in chapter 2, the monastery did not provide an environment which encouraged individual spiritual action. The monks were constrained by rules which discouraged difference and set firm guidelines as to correct behaviour. As we have

¹¹¹ *VRom.*, 24. [Quem interrogans sub cuius regimine degeret cuiusve arbitrio sue conversationis obedientiam exhiberet, respondit se, alieno solutum imperio, hoc sequi quod sibi utilius videretur. Cui Romualdus ait: “Si crucem Christi portas, superest ut Christi obedientiam non relinquis. Vade igitur et consensu a proprio abbate suscepto revertere et sub eius dominio humiliter vive, quatinus sacri operis edifitium, quod bona voluntas edificat, humilitas erigat, obedientie virtus extollat.” (Tobacco, p. 52)]

¹¹² *VRom.*, 18. [Post quam videlicet cogitationem tantus animum eius terror invasit, ut si in eo quod mente conceperat obstinate persisteret, periturum se dampnandumque divino iudicio nullatenus dubitaret. (Tobacco, p. 48)]

¹¹³ Seher, *Primordia Calmosiacensia*, 1, cited in Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits*, p. 42. [Abiectis igitur mundi rebus, nec minus iuxta euangelicum praeceptum propriis renuntiantes voluntatibus, cum eo et sub eo communis vitae societatem suscepimus; et licet adhuc incerti, quem sanctorum patrum maxime in habitu religionis sequeremur, sub unius tamen patris dispositione obedientiae studentes, satagebat unusquisque nostrum, cooperante gratia divina, veteris conversationis itinera lata declinare, et imaginem dominicam, quam in saeculo deleveramus, per poenitentiae lamenta pro viribus renovare. (*MGH Scriptores*, vol. 12, ed. George Henry Pertz, 1855, p. 326)]

seen with the examples of solitary religious men above, it was also very difficult for them to function outside of the institutional setting, which leaves an important question: where could religious men engage in individual spiritual practices? The rapidly expanding Cistercian monastic environment may provide an answer to this.

Lay Brothers

Earlier in this chapter, I related the story of Romuald's reluctance to commit fully to the monastic order. While the visions he experienced sealed the deal, so to speak, a key figure who influenced Romuald's actions was an elderly lay brother. We are not privy to his name, nor do we know what position he held amongst the lay brothers, but his role in Romuald's story is very important. It is he who convinced Romuald to follow through with his pledge to become a monk; he was also responsible for directing Romuald to the chapel where he experienced the visions of St Apollinaris in the company of the elderly lay brother.¹¹⁴ Damian also recalled the advice offered to him by an illiterate peasant who was resident at Fonte Avellana, illustrating the importance of non-institutional individuals in providing spiritual guidance which came from the heart not the head.¹¹⁵ These are men who reside inside of the monastery, and are therefore subject to the monastery's rules and social structure, but they are sufficiently detached from the monastery's intellectual environment as to provide accessible role models for the rank and file monks.

While attracting monks searching for an alternative to the Cluniac way of life, the Cistercian environment also attracted an increasing number of lay people who were perhaps seeking some shelter from the rapidly changing society which they found themselves within.¹¹⁶ Cîteaux had denounced the liturgical-heavy process of Cluny and reintroduced a way of life which included more manual labour for its brothers. The Cistercian philosophy that they should provide for themselves, rather than relying on tithes and donations, required them to develop a system of labour which allowed the professed monks some freedom to attend to the spiritual aspects of their life. This

¹¹⁴ *VRom.*, 2.

¹¹⁵ Damian, *Letters*, 44.

¹¹⁶ Mayr-Harting, 'Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse', pp. 337-352.

system was realised in the lay brother or *conversus*.¹¹⁷ Lay brothers occupied a unique position within a religious hierarchy, which was becoming more clearly defined within its own walls, and more clearly differentiated from the secular world around it. As such, lay brothers present the most liminal of all religious professions in that they had a foot in both worlds.

This is best expressed by the fact that the lay brothers were professed to an order, yet they were not monks—a curious juxtaposition that has neither been fully addressed nor subsequently understood.¹¹⁸ Conrad Greenia provides an excellent portrayal of the lay brother: 'A Laybrother is a religious brother under vows, dedicated to a life of toil, and occupying an auxiliary position in his community.'¹¹⁹ Bruce Lescher presents a timeline for the establishment of the lay brother profession, taken from the extensive research of Kassius Hallinger, which illustrates the clear connection between this formative vocation and both ecclesiastical and monastic reformers of the high medieval period:

1. Romuald at Camaldoli, before 1012.
2. Peter Damian at Vallumbrosa, between 1039 and 1051.
3. William of Hirsau, before 1079.
4. Bruno and the Carthusians at Chartreuse, around 1084.
5. Cluny, around 1100.
6. Cistercian at Cîteaux, before 1119.¹²⁰

Crucially, the establishment of the lay brothers is more often associated with reforming orders and not with the existing Benedictine regime. This is somewhat of a paradox, as one would expect that Cluny, with its liturgical-heavy programme, would benefit more from this system. However, it is clear that the 'new' orders provided an environment which attracted those lay men and women who wished or needed to adopt a more pious way of life. Hildegard of Bingen struck a note of caution concerning the motivation of those who flocked to the Cistercian monasteries, claiming that the '*conversi* . . . do not convert themselves to God in their way of life, since they

¹¹⁷ In the interest of clarity, I will use the term lay brother rather than *conversus* as this term in the medieval religious community had more than one meaning. See, Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 77.

¹¹⁸ Bruce Lescher, 'Laybrothers: Questions Then, Questions Now', *Cistercian Studies*, 23, 1988, pp. 63-64.

¹¹⁹ Conrad Greenia, 'The Laybrother Vocation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Cistercian Studies*, 16, 1981, p. 39.

¹²⁰ Kassius Hallinger, 'Woher Kommen die Laienbrüder?' *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis*, 12, fasc. 1-2, 1956, pp. 7-37, cited in Lescher, 'Laybrothers', p. 66.

love contrariety more than rectitude'.¹²¹ As Giles Constable notes, it is impossible to determine whether monks or lay men drove the development of the lay brother order, but I believe we can suggest that the monasteries' desire for more 'staff' and the flourishing social and economic environment of eleventh-century western Europe were equally responsible for the emergence of the lay brothers.¹²²

Duncan Fisher sums up liminal individuals thus: 'Liminal persons have no status, property or insignia indicating a position in society. Their behaviour is normally passive and humble, showing perfect obedience to their instructors and often accepting arbitrary punishment without complaint.'¹²³ Fisher's discussion of the religious institution as liminal is focused on the early Christian church, and the belief held by early Christians that they were 'in the world but not of it'.¹²⁴ He adopts Arnold van Gennep's theory of liminality, which suggests that change of status in human society follows a three-stage process: separation (pre-liminal); transition (liminal), and incorporation (post-liminal).¹²⁵ By the eleventh century, this understanding of Christianity's place in the world was dramatically altered, and Christians now occupied the third phase of van Gennep's three-stages of liminality: the post-liminal.¹²⁶ The institutional Church, and particularly the monastic orders, sought to bridge the gap between humanity and the divine through prayers and they took on this role of intercessor both in the seclusion of the monastery and through the very public role of the priest. Rather than being liminal, however, these roles were fully conceived (at this point) and the Church was fully incorporated into the lives of western Europeans. Eleventh-century reformers did seek to re-establish the liminal position of institutional religious men through a programme of reform which aimed to elevate priests, in particular, to a position of moral superiority, but I do not believe that we can claim that the medieval Christian Church was anything other than the macrocosmic environment within which status change was now acted out.

¹²¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Ep.* 51, cited in Constable, *Reformation*, p. 80. [Haec itaque praeclara genera, videlicet hominum illorum, qui per leonem et vitulum designati sunt, aliud quoddam genus hominum ad se trahunt, quos ipsi conversos vocant, quorum plurimi se ad Deum in moribus suis non convertunt, quia contrarietatem potius quam rectitudinem diligunt, et opera sua cum sono temeritatis agunt. (*PL* 197, cols 0263d- 0264a)]

¹²² Constable, *Reformation*, p. 80.

¹²³ Duncan Fisher, 'The Vocation of the Church (I): The Desert Image in Early Christian Tradition', *Cistercian Studies*, 24, 3, 1989, p. 182.

¹²⁴ Duncan Fisher, 'The Vocation of the Church (II): The Desert Image in Early Medieval Monasticism', *Cistercian Studies*, 25, 3, 1990, p. 189.

¹²⁵ Fisher, 'The Vocation of the Church (I)', p. 181.

¹²⁶ Fisher, 'The Vocation of the Church (I)', p. 181.

In fact, we more clearly see the dynamic pattern of status change encompassed in van Gennep's stages of separation, transition, and incorporation in the lives of the individual religious men of the high medieval period whom I have just discussed. Men such as Robert of Arbrissel began life already in the initial stages of separation, indicated by the unusual signs associated with their birth and their pious activities as youths. When they seek the eremitic solitary life, usually as young men, they are entering into the transitional or liminal stage, where they are neither of society-at-large, nor of the religious institution which played a major role in that society. Finally, the religious institution reclaimed its exceptional holy men and this represents the final stage of incorporation. What we are concerned with here are those individuals who remain in the second—transition or liminal—stage, of this process of religious development.

Lay brothers, to use Fisher's description of the liminal, had no status and no property; in fact, nothing to mark them as contributing members of the wider society. Economics aside, however, lay brothers did provide a much-needed and important conduit between the enclosed monks and the people they prayed for and relied upon for support. Even more importantly, lay brothers provided another less-controversial setting for the telling of stories which sought to direct Christians to live more appropriate lives. The *Lives* of men such as Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine could be seen as rather intimidating for the ordinary Christian man, whether he was in a religious order or not. Not everyone was born in a saintly state and in this regard, the narratives supplied by an author such as Caesarius of Heisterbach can be seen as an attempt to appeal to a wider audience, encouraging them that they too, could look forward to salvation if they lived their lives in the correct way. An example of this is the story of Henry, a laybrother of Villers. According to Caesarius, Henry, despite his good works in the hospital for the poor, despaired for his salvation because of words spoken to him by the devil: "Because thou art not a son of legitimate birth, thou shalt not be an heir to the kingdom of Heaven."¹²⁷ He gained consolation only when a vision from God allowed Henry to see that there were many legitimate

¹²⁷ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.4.31. [Immiserat enim diabolus quandam desperationem cordi eius, Et ut diceret: Quia non es filius legitimo thori, non eris heres coelestis regni. (Strange, p. 202)]

individuals who would never reside in heaven because they, unlike Henry, were 'reprobate'.¹²⁸

Lay brothers also endured temptation in the form of women—a crucial narrative trope at this time of reform, as religious leaders sought to further marginalize women by invoking an irrational fear of them amongst men, particularly those of the clerical offices. Again, these examples serve to direct men as to the appropriate way to respond to temptation in the course of everyday events. Because lay brothers were active in the world outside of the monastery, real interactions with real women were able to be portrayed, thus adding a sense of normalcy to narratives that could be seen as supernatural in other circumstances. Caesarius tells us of a lay brother who was tempted by a 'maid servant of his host' as he delivered wine from his monastery to Flanders. He avoids the obviously planned seduction by dressing and going to pray at his window for the remainder of the night.¹²⁹ Unlike monks, lay brothers could not avoid interaction with women, and the story highlights the issues of restraint and chastity to the audience. Also unlike monks, the lay brother would no doubt endure this kind of temptation again, as he ventured out into the world to do the business of the monastery and his ability to deal with this situation provided an excellent example of practical, chaste living.

Lay brothers were also prey to demons, and the resulting interactions illustrated to the ordinary Christian man that you did not need to be special or gifted in order to resist them. The second significance of these narratives is their highlighting of the kinds of behaviours that were considered less acceptable in the lives of religious men. An excellent example of this is the story of the lay brother who was deceived by the devil (disguised as an angel) into believing that his love of learning would win him the bishopric of Halberstadt. The elderly lay brother, in this tale, transgresses in a number of ways but the foci of the narrative are the deception perpetrated by the devil, and the lay brother's love of letters which drive him to apostasy.¹³⁰ The *Usages of the Cistercian Lay Brothers* makes it clear that 'no one is to have a book or learn anything except the *Pater noster*, the *Credo in Deum*, the *Miserere mei, Deus*, and this not from a written text,

¹²⁸ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.4.31. [Et facta est ad eum vox: Heurice, vides hanc multitudinem? Omnee quidem de legitimo thoro sunt nati, sed omnes reprobati sunt praeter te. (Strange, p. 202)]

¹²⁹ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.4.100. [. . . nocte quadam ancilla hospitis sui, dum secundum consuetudinem lectum illi in solario domus praeparasset, sibi alium ad pedes conversi stravit Conversus cum dicto completorio isset cubitum. . . . quia mox ut vocem muliebrem audivit, ilico surrexit, vestes induit, et ad fenestras solarii vadens, orationes suas dicendo, mane illic exspectavit. (Strange, p. 271)]

¹³⁰ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.5.16.

but only by heart'.¹³¹ The text gives no further instruction and no real insight into the rationale behind this direction. Chrysogonus Waddell notes, in his adjacent exegesis of this rule, that the notion that anyone other than clerics could or should be educated is simply a reflection of twelfth-century society's understanding of what was appropriate for each group.¹³² In contrast, Thomas Brockhaus argues that the denial of education to lay brothers was a way to keep them in a submissive and auxiliary state.¹³³ Certainly, being lettered did not have a desirable outcome for the laybrother mentioned by Caesarius: he was eventually hanged for theft, when he took a horse in order to ride with dignity to his new bishopric.¹³⁴ As for the appearance of the devil in angel's clothing, this aspect is of great importance when we come to consider the reluctance of some religious men to report their visionary experiences, as scripture reminds them that 'the angel of Satan himself may transform himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. 10:14)', an issue I will return to in chapter six of this work.

The examples above all have a foundation in narratives stemming from the late antique period—battles with demons, with lust, and various other temptations and trickery are continually recycled but, more importantly, re-sited in an effort to make them relevant to contemporary society, giving us an insight into the concerns surrounding masculine religious identity at this time. The emergence of the lay brother as the key protagonist in this wide range of narratives is, I argue, the direct result of the reforming movement and the desire to elevate both clerical and monastic men to a morally superior position. Of course, a text such as Caesarius's contained tales of the deeds and misdeeds of both clerics and monks, but the lay brother represented the perfect model to present to ordinary men and those of the religious hierarchy who were accused of less salubrious behaviour.

However, lay brothers could also be seen as exceptionally problematic, and Brian Noell suggests that in this aspect, the role of the lay brother as an example is just as important.¹³⁵ The 'restiveness' concerning historians such as Noell and David Knowles

¹³¹ *Usages of the Cistercian Lay Brothers*, in *Cistercian Lay Brothers: Twelfth-Century Usages with Related Texts*, ed. Chrysogonus Waddell, Brecht, 2000, 9. [Nullus habeat librum nec discat aliquid nisi tantum pater noster et credo in deum, miserere mei deus, et hoc non littera sed cordetenus. (Waddell, p. 68)]

¹³² Chrysogonus Waddell, *Cistercian Lay Brothers: Twelfth-Century Usages with Related Texts*, Chrysogonus Waddell ed., Brecht, 2000, pp. 182-3, n.2-3.

¹³³ Thomas Aquinas Brockhaus, *Religious Who are Known as Conversi*, Washington, 1946, pp. 2-3.

¹³⁴ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.5.16.

¹³⁵ Brian Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest Among Cistercian Lay Brothers in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *Journal of Medieval History*, 32, 2006, p. 254.

is, however, more to do with instances of rebellion or disorder amongst lay communities, or brothers involved in the secular affairs of the monastery, rather than spiritually-generated turmoil.¹³⁶ Knowles takes a particularly paternalistic view of the 'illiterate' lay brothers involved in a revolt at Sempringham which took place sometime between 1166 and 1169.¹³⁷ Labelling the ringleaders of the revolt as 'extravagant, dishonest, and immoral,' Knowles makes no effort to question his sources, taking the various authors at their word.¹³⁸ It is also probable that Knowles is influenced by a similar determination made of lay brothers in the *Usages of the Cistercian Lay Brothers*. This twelfth-century document provides, according to the unknown author, the lay brothers with a similar set of provisions as provided to monks so that 'in things both temporal and spiritual . . . diversity may not be found in their way of life, either'.¹³⁹ The author makes it clear that the reason for the document is that 'those known to be simpler and uneducated are the ones most in need of our care and attention'.¹⁴⁰

I believe it is important at this point, to consider the full text of the 'Prologue,' as it allows us to understand that the paternalistic tone is directed not at the lay brothers, but rather at the abbots who were charged with the care of all of their flock.

Since it is clear that we have received from bishops the care of souls of lay brothers equally as of monks, I am amazed that certain of our abbots devote indeed all due diligence of discipline to the monks, but none or very little to the lay brothers. Some, holding them in contempt because of their innate simplicity, think that material food and clothing are to be provided for them more sparingly than for monks, but that they are nevertheless imperiously to be made to do forced labor. Others, on the contrary, giving in to their murmuring more than is expedient for souls, indulge bodies the better to get more work if they threat them with greater indulgence as regards food, and greater laxity as regards clothing. And thus in one way or another, they both require work and gloss over faults; and while they studiously expend that care which is of slight avail, they openly show that which they seek from the society of lay brothers is in their own interests, not Jesus Christ. In a word, if they too have been bought with the same great price, why should they be cared for any differently – those who, it is clear, are equals in the grace of redemption?

If we ask reason, reason answers that those known to be simpler and uneducated are the ones most in need of our care and attention.

¹³⁶ Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest', p. 255; and David Knowles, 'The Revolt of the Lay Brothers at Sempringham', *The English Historical Review*, 50, 199, July 1935, pp. 465-487.

¹³⁷ Knowles, 'Revolt at Sempringham', pp. 466, 469.

¹³⁸ Knowles, 'Revolt at Sempringham', p. 469.

¹³⁹ *Usages*, Prologue, 8. Waddell notes in his 'Introduction' that the author of the *Usages* is almost certainly the author of the *Ecclesiastica Officia* which is the equivalent document for monks. Based on this assumption, Waddell makes the informed guess that the author is Stephen Harding; see, Waddell, 'Introduction', pp. 20-1.

¹⁴⁰ *Usages*, Prologue, 7.

This is why, just as we necessarily indeed had to draw up Usages for monks so that unity may everywhere be preserved in our manners, so we have decided that provision should be made in the following brief document for the lay brothers, in things both temporal and spiritual, so that diversity may not be found in their way of life, either.¹⁴¹

There is no doubt that the author is seeking to remind abbots of their duty of care. However, it is also clear that the lay brothers were seen as unsophisticated, and therefore in need of protection from the unscrupulous.

However, it is clear from the work of Brian Noell and others that the lay brothers were more than illiterate peasants providing manual labour for monks in return for spiritual succour.¹⁴² Noell lists several examples of lay brothers or *conversi* intimately involved in, if not in charge of, the secular affairs of the monastery.¹⁴³ For example, the English Cistercian house of Beaulieu in Hampshire had, in 1270, '73 monks and 68 *conversi*' illustrating the high number of lay brothers needed to keep the monastery running.¹⁴⁴ *Conversi* were involved in a number of activities associated with the monastery including being assigned to: granges; the gate house; the monastic infirmary; the stables; the forge; the mill; and the guest house.¹⁴⁵ Lay brothers also participated in the legal functions of the monastery; in many examples, they witnessed legal documents and donations to the monastery, as did Ralph, a Swiss Cistercian lay brother.¹⁴⁶ This example, along with others, illustrates that lay brothers were important to the monastery, not just as manual labour, but also as capable business

¹⁴¹ *Usages*, Prologue, 2-8. [Cvm constet super animus fratrum laicorum eque ut monachorum curam nos suscepisse ab episcopis, miror quosdam abates nostros monachis quidem discipline debitam impendere diligentiam, conuersis uero aut nullam aut miniman. Alii illos, pro ingenita eorum simplicitate contemptui habentes, ipsum etiam corporalem uictum uel uestimentum restrictius ipsis quam monachis administrandum putant, et ad opera nichilominus eos imperiose satis angariant. Alii per contrarium eorum murmurationi cedentes, ultra quam expediat animabus indulgent corporibus quo taliter opera magis eliciant, si eos remissius in cibo et inuestimento dissolucius tractent. Sic itaque, uel hoc uel illo modo, et opera exigent et culpas dissimulant; dumque illam que ad modicum ualet studiose imponunt, et ad illam que ad omnia ualet minime instruunt, aperte monstrant quod de societate conuersorum que sua sunt querant, non que ihesu christi. Denique si empti sunt et ipsi precio magno, cur discernuntur in cura regiminis quos pares constat esse in gratia redemptionis? Nisi quod qui simpliciores et sine litteris esse noscuntur, ipsos magis nostra cura et opera indigere ratio consulta respondent. Proinde sicut monachorum usus necessarie quidem conscripsimus ut ubique in moribus nostris unitas conseruetur, ita et conuersis qualiter et in temporalibus et in spiritualibus prouidendum sit in subiecta breui scriptura dignum duximus intimandum, ne uel in eorum conuersatione diuersitas inueniatur. (Waddell, p. 56)]

¹⁴² Jacques Dubois, 'The Laybrothers' Life in the Twelfth Century: A Form of Lay Monasticism', *Cistercian Studies*, 7, 1972, pp. 161-213; Greenia, 'The Laybrother Vocation', pp. 38-45; Bruce Lescher, 'Laybrothers', pp. 63-85; and Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest', p. 255.

¹⁴³ Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest', pp. 267-68. Also see, Dubois, 'The Laybrothers' Life', p. 168; and Duane J. Osheim, 'Conversion, *Conversio*, and the Christian Life in Late Medieval Tuscany', *Speculum*, 58, 1983, p. 371.

¹⁴⁴ Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest', p. 269.

¹⁴⁵ Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest', p. 269.

¹⁴⁶ Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest', p. 268.

associates. This intensive involvement in secular affairs was a contributing factor to the increasing incidences of discord amongst lay communities.

However, as I noted previously, this discord or rebelliousness seems focused on areas associated with secular affairs and authority, and it was not portrayed as religious resistance. Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogue on Miracles* provided a clear illustration of a lay brother who became so enmeshed in his secular duties that he was accused of falling victim to avarice. The *Dialogue* described how the Praemonstratarian *conversi* had become 'so skilful and circumspect in the administration of their property, so energetic and accomplished an organiser that everything passed through his hands'.¹⁴⁷ As noted by Noell, these kinds of men were not uncommon in the Cistercian monastic environment, and successful lay brothers were often demoted or removed from their positions entirely, in order to reaffirm humility.¹⁴⁸ This was, indeed, the fate of the aforementioned lay brother who was deposed by his provost.¹⁴⁹ Reading the story, one might be led to believe it is a narrative about a greedy lay brother whose behaviour was out of control. I would argue that the story was, in fact, not concerned with the lay brother, whose behaviour was not all that abhorrent, but rather with the provost. The narrative continued with the provost protecting this lay brother from further involvement in activities which may lead him astray, suggesting that the lay brother was not spiritually corrupt but rather that he was weak.¹⁵⁰ The spiritual fortitude of the provost is further demonstrated when he rebukes a junior monk (and the elders of the community) when the youth happens to look too closely upon a 'very comely maiden'.¹⁵¹ The lay brother provides the example for monks of the dangers of the secular world, but it is the provost who is the model of exemplary behaviour.

¹⁴⁷ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.4.62. [Habebat autem unum conversum, in administratione exterioram ita sdolum et circumspectum, ita sollicitum et perfectum, ut omnia per manus eius transirent, et curtibus ecclesiae, quae necessaria erant, tam in aratris quam in pecoribus sive expensis, ipse quasi solus uniuersa provideret. (Strange, p. 229)]

¹⁴⁸ Noell, 'Expectation and Unrest', pp. 270-72.

¹⁴⁹ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.4.62. A provost is the Praemonstratensian equivalent of an abbot.

¹⁵⁰ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.4.62. [Mane ergo in claustro tuo frequenter oratorium tuum, ut die noctuque possis peccata tua deirangere. Exspecta paulisper, et habebis satis terrae subtus te, et supra te, et intra te, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris. Haec audientes quidam ex fratribus senioribus, dixerunt: Domine, domine, si conversus iste fuerit amotus, domus nostra subsistere non poterit. Ad quod ille respon: Melius est ut domus pereat, quam anima. Et non acquieuit petitioni eorum. (Strange, p. 230)]

¹⁵¹ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.4.62. [Cum paululum processissent, volens Praepositus tentare iuvenem, ait: Puella ista videbatur mihi multum formosa fuisse. Cui cum ille diceret: Credite mihi, domine, et hoc ipsum visum est mihi; respondit Praepositus: Unum tantum deformat eam, scilicet quod monocula est. Respondit iuvenis: Vere, domine, utrumque oculum habet; ego enim satis diligenter consideravi eam. Tunc motus Praepositus ait: Et ego considerabo dorsum tuum. Tanta debueras esse simplicitatis, ut utrum esset mas vel femina, scire non posses. (Strange, p. 231)]

Unlike the individual holy men who were eventually taken back by the institution, the lay brother maintains his liminal position. It is worth reiterating here that I am interested to find any male equivalent for the female mystic of the thirteenth century. These are women who were, more often than not, born in a near-saintly state and who proceeded to live individual lives of great asceticism while prophesying and performing miracles. They also enjoyed a powerful relationship with God which was conducted through visions and visitations. Certainly, some of the individual holy men we have looked at in this chapter seemed to be following a similar path in their lives; born under saintly signs, they too sought to live in a solitary state as ascetics, having the ability to perform miracles and experiencing visions. However, rather than continuing to the end of their lives in this state, they were often surrounded by followers and eventually were reclaimed by an institutional Church which sought to control their behaviour, and that of their disciples, by reorganising their community and providing it with a superior (more often than not, the hermit himself) and a rule. On the other hand, lay brothers provide us with another avenue for exploration, because of their continual un-fixed state and the fact that they, too, appear to have the same qualities as these individual holy men.

Arnulf and Simon

The two lay brothers I want to look at closely were contemporaries living in the Brabant region of Flanders, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: Arnulf of Villers (d. 1228) and Simon of Aulne (d. 1229). Of the two, Arnulf has a much fuller biography for us to work with and in the following two chapters I will be examining his life in more depth, as I search for the differences and similarities between his life and those of his female contemporaries who were considered mystics. Unfortunately, Simon only comes to us through fragmentary sources gathered together in a small publication edited by Fr Martinus Cawley.¹⁵² Caesarius of Heisterbach devoted a

¹⁵² *Send Me God by Goswin de Bossut, Cantor of Villers-in-Brabant: Volume Two, Arnulf the Wagoneer with an appendix on Simon of Aulne*, ed. and trans. Martinus Cawley, Lafayette, 2000. Fr Cawley's appendix is a compilation of the available sources of Simon's *vita*: from 1603 comes a collection of Cistercian Lives edited by Jean d'Assignies; from 1621, an anonymous expander added to the Assignies text; and in 1968 Baron de Dorlodot published both the Assignies text and that of the anonymous expander. These sources are employed by Fr Cawley in tandem with the chapter from Caesarius of Heisterbach and the fragments from Thomas de Cantimpré.

chapter to Simon, focusing on his remarkable prophetic abilities, while Simon also makes an appearance in the life of Lutgard of Aywières, written by Thomas de Cantimpré.¹⁵³ This initial consideration of their lives intends to illustrate the continuity in the narrative structure in works concerning holy men, and the transference of the ideal of religious masculinity on to the men who now occupied the liminal position within the religious institution.

Arnulf came to the Cistercian life as a lay brother at twenty-two years of age after spending his formative adult years, according to his biographer Goswin of Bossut, 'bent on twisting pathways to death and catering all he like[d] to the voluptuous whims of the flesh'.¹⁵⁴ Having heeded the call of the Lord and 'vomited up in confession the harmful virus of his sins,' Arnulf devoted himself to preparing for a life in Christ.¹⁵⁵ The sources for Simon agree that he became a lay brother in his youth, but are at odds as to how he came to be in the monastery of Aulne in the first place. Caesarius claims that '[f]rom his boyhood he was brought up in Aulne, and kept the flocks of the monastery; then becoming a lay-brother he showed so much aptitude that he was made master of one of the granges; by the good and faithful administration of outward things, as a good and faithful steward, he won spiritual gifts'.¹⁵⁶ The Assignies text, however, stated that Simon was of noble origins and came to the monastery because of guidance given to him by an angel.¹⁵⁷ What is clear from the fragmentary textual remains of Simon's life is that his transition to the religious life was prefaced by a number of visions which clearly correspond with his future as a prophet.¹⁵⁸

Goswin's *Life of Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers*, offered an interesting and clear delineation between Arnulf's physical austerities in Book 1, 'Arnulf and his

¹⁵³ *Dia. Mir.*, 1.3.33; Thomas de Cantimpré, *The Collected Saints' Lives: Abbot John of Cantimpré, Christina the Astonishing, Margaret of Ypres, and Lutgard of Aywières*, trans. Barbara Newman and Margot H. King, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts* 19, Turnhout, 2008, 2.10.

¹⁵⁴ *VArn.*, I.1a. [Sed levis moribus & verbis per tortuosa mortis itinera coepit erraticus viator incedere, & quantum libuit carnis suae voluptatibus deservire.]

¹⁵⁵ *VArn.*, I.1b. [Ad cuius dulce susurrium a somno mortis excitatus, abiit ad sacerdotem vicarium Christi & noxium peccatorum suorum virus in confessione evomens, exiit veterem hominem cum actibus suis & induit novum qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia & sanctitate veritatis.]

¹⁵⁶ *Dia. Mir.*, 3.33. [A pueritia enim in Alna nutritus pecora eiusdem monasterii pavit Deinde factus conversus, adeo profecit, ut cuiusdam grangiae magister efficeretur. Qui bene ac fideliter administrans exteriora, sicut bonus ac fidelis dispensator, dona meruit interiora. (Strange, p. 155)]

¹⁵⁷ Jean d'Assignies, p. 7, cited in Martinus Cawley, 'Appendix', *Send Me God by Goswin de Bossut, Cantor of Villers-in-Brabant: Volume Two, Arnulf the Wagoneer with an appendix on Simon of Aulne*, ed. and trans. Martinus Cawley, Lafayette, 2000, p. 80.

¹⁵⁸ Assignies, pp. 5, 13, 17, 19, 21-23, cited in Cawley, 'Appendix', *Send Me God*, 2000, pp. 80-81.

Austerities,’ and his spiritual gifts in Book 2, ‘His Virtues and His Deeds.’ Goswin stated in his ‘Preface’ that, in light of the number of afflictions Arnulf visited upon himself, it ‘seemed fitting’ that an entire book be devoted to his austerities.¹⁵⁹ It is also in this book that the claims to Arnulf’s superior, but at times transgressive, behaviours are at their most explicit. Like Arnulf, Simon too was an ascetic, with Cawley noting that although his ‘two penitential “breastplates” present a mild parallel to Arnulf,’ his fasting had no equivalent.¹⁶⁰ Unlike Arnulf, this was not an important aspect of Simon’s life; rather, it was his spirit of prophecy which marked him out as extraordinary. Caesarius devoted his chapter on Simon to this aspect of Simon’s life, especially his interactions with other religious men. These lives are important in the context of this work because they illustrate continuity in narrative to a point; once these two individuals become entrenched in the monastic environment—albeit partially—they continue to live in a manner which was considered out of the ordinary but tolerated. At no point, unlike the individual holy men considered earlier in the chapter, are they elevated to a more inclusive position within the religious hierarchy where they might direct others in a holy life. Rather, they are extremely important because they are ordinary men who are extraordinary. Simon and Arnulf illustrate the rewards of divine grace achievable by ordinary men.

Much like Goswin’s text, the final two chapters of this work will focus on physical asceticism and visionary experiences, and the role which gender plays in the presentation of these important facets of medieval spirituality. In particular, I want to investigate the idea that excessive ascetic behaviour by religious men could see them considered as feminine. In Book 1 of *Arnulf’s Life*, Goswin employed four core tropes to describe Arnulf’s behaviour—man, athlete, soldier, and martyr. By far the most prevalent are two which are recognizable from Scripture, with allusions to Arnulf as a soldier or martyr occurring seven and nine times respectively in the course of the first book.¹⁶¹ Evoked fewer times, but no less important, are the references Goswin makes to Arnulf as an athlete—three examples; and to his manful efforts—four examples.¹⁶² Goswin makes a clear point of relaying Arnulf’s (or his own) concerns to the reader in

¹⁵⁹ *VArn.*, pref. c. [Et quia multae sunt afflictiones quas ille beatus corporaliter sustinuit, congruum nobis visum est in Primo Libro Vitae ejus, non solum corporales ejus afflictiones, sed etiam instrumenta afflictionum tantummodo annotare, ut discant omnes longo illum martyrio fuisse coronatum.]

¹⁶⁰ Cawley, ‘Appendix’, *Send Me God*, 2000, p. 81.

¹⁶¹ *VArn.* For references to soldier or soldiering see: I.1e; I.3a; I.4a; I.6a; I.6c; I.12b; and I.12f. For references to martyr and martyrdom see: I.3 (pref. c); I.3d; I.5a; I.6c; I.6d (twice); I.11c; I.12b; and I.12e.

¹⁶² *VArn.* For references to athlete see: I.1e; I.2g; and I.11a. For references to the terms manly or manliness see: I.1e; I.10a; I.10d; and I.11b.

this twelve chapter book by making reference to the discomfit which is clearly caused by Arnulf's super-austerities. Arnulf is rebuked outright, or acts with discretion, three times in the first book, and Goswin also alludes to an incident where the abbots whom Arnulf lived under might have been charged with indiscretion over Arnulf's behaviour.¹⁶³ It is sufficient to say at this point that, although not made explicit by Goswin, there was certainly a line which a religious man could not cross in terms of the self-affliction of physical punishment.

Goswin seemed all too aware of the problem of excess in Arnulf's behaviour and took steps to remind the reader that, although ascetic behaviour is admirable, it must not be taken too far.¹⁶⁴ For Peter Damian, excess in behaviour was not an issue; in fact, the more outrageous and excessive the behaviour, the more forcefully Damian could make his point about the moral robustness of the monastic life. Damian was arguing for the moral superiority of the monastic orders during the eleventh century, as part of a burgeoning ecclesiastical reform. We can witness, in his *Life of St. Romuald of Ravenna*, an example of Romuald's influence over clerics with particular regard to the issue of simony. Challenged by 'secular priests who had gotten their ordination for money,' the monastic hermit Romuald not only proved to them through canon law texts the error of their ways, but also 'had them live in community as canons; no more were they to dwell alone or with wives and children, but they were to submit to a superior and live together as brothers'.¹⁶⁵ For Damian, simoniac behaviour was not the only sin of the secular clergy; chastity and continence were also strong planks of reform, and these issues also resonate within Damian's writings. This persistent concern with how men behaved and the didactic expressions of masculinity that the reform encouraged indicate that the control of religious men was high on the ecclesiastical agenda.

¹⁶³ *VArn.* Arnulf is rebuked directly in I.2d, I.5c, and I.8c. In I.6c, Goswin makes it clear to the reader that the four abbots of Arnulf's period were always careful not to let his behavior go too far.

¹⁶⁴ Giles Constable, 'Moderation and Restraint in Ascetic Practices in the Middle Ages', in Haijo Jan Westra ed., *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, Leiden, 1992, pp. 315-327, reprinted in Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, [original pagination]. Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux: Song of Songs*, 4 vols, trans. Kilian Walsh, intro. M. Corneille Halflants, Kalamazoo, 1971, on excessive zeal see 1.18.4 and 3.49.5; on temptation to excessive asceticism see 2.33.10; on conspicuous and superstitious abstinence see 3.64.4; on the care of the body which is also Christ's see 4.67.7.

¹⁶⁵ *VRom.*, 35. [Inter ceteros autem, precipue seculares clericos qui per pecuniam ordinati fuerant, durissima severitate corripiebat, et eos, nisi ordinem sponte desererent, omnino damnabiles et hereticos asserebat. . . . Qui dixit eis: "Canonum mihi libros afferte, et utrum vera sint que dico, vestris attestantibus paginis comprobate." Quibus itaque diligenter inspectis, et crimen agnoscunt et errata deplangunt. Constituit itaque vir sanctus plures canonicas, et clericos qui laicorum more seculariter habitabant propositis obedire et communiter in congregatione vivere docuit. (Tobacco, pp. 75-76)]

The men at the heart of this chapter participated in religion in diverse ways, whether hermits like Guthlac, ascetic monks like Romuald and Dominic, wandering preachers like Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine, or lay brothers like Simon and Arnulf. However, there is one crucial factor which linked these religious men, and that was their affiliation to the institutional Church. This chapter has demonstrated the difficulty faced by an individual religious man who conceived of a way of life based upon that of his late antique ancestors. Guthlac provided us with an example of tradition in transition. While raging against the demons in his own 'desert' of Crowland, Guthlac still acceded to the wishes of the local bishop who wished him to become ordained, therefore securing Guthlac as an official religious man. Romuald and Dominic, so beloved of the reformer Peter Damian, were also religious men who looked to a past tradition but were enmeshed in an environment of reform. Dominic remained secluded in his hermitage for the rest of his life—hardly conducive to the kind of notoriety apparently afforded to the singular religious woman Christina Mirabilis some 100 years later. Romuald suffered at the hands of his own brethren, usually because he was seen as too austere for the community setting, thus he wandered from place to place, as he sought some kind of eremitic refuge.

Robert of Arbrissel, Stephen of Obazine, and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu represent new 'types' of religious men who engaged in a social environment quite unlike that of their predecessors. All three initially sought to live as hermits, but were unable to maintain any semblance of solitude as their renown spread. The apostolic way for Robert of Arbrissel began as one of preaching, but he was ultimately forced to conform to the community ideal endorsed by the institutional Church. This was also the fate of Stephen and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu. These men are important because their early lives tell us that they were blessed and special, destined for great things, but those things could and would only occur in the correct setting. Charismatic individuality in individual religious men was usurped by conformity to a rule or order and these men, who had the potential to become 'famous' individuals, instead became 'famous' members of the religious establishment.

We are left then with Simon and Arnulf. In the lay brothers, we find the kind of liminality needed in order to function outside of the establishment whilst still maintaining a connection to it. Lay brothers, in this sense, are very much like religious women in that they have an attachment to an order but they are not subsumed by it, or separated from the rest of secular society. In Arnulf and Simon, we find individual

religious men who were blessed with prophetic gifts, extraordinary physical abilities, and an innate holiness which is the equivalent of many of their female contemporaries who occupy the manor called 'mystic' in our modern historiography. The final two chapters of this work will look more closely at these men in comparison to some of the more well-known religious women of their time.

5. The Importance of Conversion Crises and Asceticism in Shaping Male and Female Religious Experience in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

Got to be braver; got to be manly; *manly I've got to be* (Ps. 26.14); friends need it badly; this stroke for this one; that stroke for that one; take *that* in the name of God.¹

At other times she jumped into cauldrons of boiling water and stood there immersed either up to the breast or the waist depending on the size of the cauldron, and poured scalding water over those parts of her body which were untouched by the water.²

Introduction

As he scourged his back with a branch from the spiky 'butcher's broom' plant, the Cistercian lay brother, Arnulf of Villers, was heard to repeat an exhortation to be manly. What exactly did Arnulf mean when he said 'got to be manly' as he beat himself? What was his understanding of gender? Why did Christina Mirabilis feel the desire to submit her physical body to such tortures as boiling and burning? Did she do so because, as a woman, it was her only avenue for religious expression? These are difficult questions to answer, dealing as they do with the personal motivations of individuals long since gone and who speak to us only through a third person. What I wish to examine in this chapter is how the understanding of gender, both in the high medieval period and the modern, has influenced the portrayal of medieval religious individuals, with a particular focus on conversion narratives and physical asceticism.

For medieval individuals gender was as complicated and fluid as it is today and it plays an important part in the story of mysticism, both in the original telling and our subsequent modern versions. We could be swayed into thinking that for medieval people, gender was simply a matter of being biologically male or female, particularly when we read comments such as those made by Roscelin of Compiègne, Peter

¹ *VArn.*, I.11b. [Agendum est mihi fortiter, agendum viriliter, (Ps 26.14) viriliter inquam agendum, quia valde necessarium est amicis meis; ictus istos & istos pro illis & pro illis infero mihi in nomine Domini.]

² *VCM*, 1.11. [Intrabat etiam aliquando cacabos plenos bullientis aquae usque as ubera, vel usque as renes secundum altitudinem cacaborum and membris, quae foris immunes a supplicio remanebant, aquam fervidam. (AASS, p. 652)]

Abelard's former teacher. Roscelin wrote a stinging attack against Abelard, which included a reference to his pseudo-masculinity: 'Therefore since the part that makes a man has been removed, you are to be called not 'Peter' but 'incomplete Peter.'³ Liutprand of Cremona, in his narrative account of his voyage to Constantinople in 968, also pens a remarkable description of a man who is not: 'As general of this force . . . [the emperor] has appointed a man of sorts – I say of sorts because the fellow has ceased to be male and has not been able to become a female . . . [He is] a gentleman of neither gender.'⁴ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen remarks that it is not biology which de-genders this man in Liutprand's eyes, but nationality, while Nira Gradowicz-Pancer would argue that class and social status caused Liutprand to see the eunuch in a differing light.⁵ Although both of these arguments present aspects relevant to the debate about medieval gender, I believe they obfuscate the importance of the physical body to medieval people by focusing too fully on constructions of gender which at times struggle to contend with a medieval worldview which saw women as inherently inferior.

Roscelin and Liutprand were much closer in time and thought to the twelfth-century author, Hildegard of Bingen, who grounds her understanding of the differences between men and women in humoral theory, which holds that women were colder than men, thus they were 'weaker than the male'.⁶ Furthermore, she considers that women should be excluded from the priestly ministry 'for they are an infirm and weak habitation'.⁷ Hildegard could hardly be labelled a misogynist or anti-feminist, and she illustrates for modern readers, in the simplest terms, what she and many other medieval individuals saw as the fundamental difference between men and women. This expression of a fundamental physical difference which is based on

³ J. Reiners, *Der Nominalismus in der Frühscholastik*, Münster, 1910, cited in Martin Irvine, 'Abelard and (Re)Writing the Male Body: Castration, Identity, and Remasculinization', in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler eds, New York, 2000, p. 92. [Sublata igitur parte, quar hominem facit, non Petrus, sed imperfectus Petrus appellandus es. (PL 178, cols 0371a-0372a)]

⁴ Liutprand of Cremona, 'Report of his Mission to Constantinople', in *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, ed. Ernest F. Henderson, London, 1910, p. 456. [Mihi credatis velim, et credetis scio, omnem ipsum exercitum quadringentis vestris, si fossa murive non impediunt, posse occidere, cui exercitui, ut puto ad contumeliam vestram, hominem quandam – sed quandam eo dixi, quia mas esse desiit, mulier fieri nequit – praeposuit. (PL 136, col. 0921b)]

⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Medieval Masculinities: Heroism, Sanctity, and Gender', accessed at <http://www8.georgetown.edu/departments/medieval/labyrinth/e-center/interscripta/mm.html> (19/11/07); Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-gendering Female Violence: Merovingian Female Honour as an 'Exchange of Violence'', *Early Medieval Europe*, 2, 1, 2002, p. 5.

⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et cure*, trans. and intro. Margret Berger, Cambridge, 1999, 3.5.

⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, New York, 1990, 2.6.76.

biological sex, is the default setting from which all variations of gendered behaviour then develop, and the religious life provides us with many examples of this fluidity.

As I have argued in chapter one of this work, mystics and mysticism are presented in modern historiography in a gendered way. Due to the increased efforts of feminist scholars and historians of women, many medieval women have taken their rightful place in the historical record, particularly within the spiritual and religious realms. Women such as Christina Mirabilis and Hildegard of Bingen are now well-known to scholars of women. However, despite the manifest differences in their individual religious and social circumstances, the polymath Hildegard and the illiterate Christina are still both recognized in modern literature as mystics. Yet Christina bears more in common with her contemporary Arnulf, and this is why I have chosen to focus on their lives – despite the similarities in their spiritual expression, both have assumed rather different positions within modern historical writing concerned with religion and spirituality.

I will argue that Arnulf's qualification as an eccentric lay brother, and Christina's as a mystic, resides in both medieval and modern understandings of gender, which have influenced the telling of the stories of mystics. Conversion narratives set the scene in any spiritual life, but it would be a mistake to prescribe certain themes to each gender. A closer inspection of the *vitae* of Arnulf and Christina will illustrate that each conforms to some hagiographic traditions, but that they also subvert those traditions. As Bernard McGinn notes, '[a]ll hagiography is didactic, intended not so much to give a historical account of a life as to teach a lesson about how to live'.⁸ In part this may be true, but the *vitae* of Arnulf and Christina, I believe, do allow us an insight into how gender influenced these lessons on how to live.

I will also examine medieval responses to the problem of the 'infirm and weak habitation' and question how physical asceticism has become a measure of difference between religious men and women of the medieval period. Physical asceticism for religious men was explicitly linked to the battle for chastity and continence, those constant companions of first millennium Christianity. By their very nature, chastity and continence are antithetical to the uncontrollable concupiscence supposedly experienced by many men, and they could potentially emasculate them.⁹ Activities

⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*, vol. 3, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1998, p. xiii.

⁹ Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Rule of Life for a Recluse', in *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises and Pastoral Prayer*, ed. M. Basil Pennington, Kalamazoo, 1995, 1.6; Gillian Clark, 'Women and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: The

such as fasting, flagellation, sleep deprivation, and exposure to temperature extremes were all techniques used to dampen lust. For religious women, the reasons for adopting these practices are less clear, with no one specific reason apparent. However, as Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach argue, the reasons for engaging in such practices may be linked to basic physiological effects which could induce a trance-like state in the individual.¹⁰ Asceticism also has a powerful genealogy amongst devout medieval individuals, and this religiosity coupled with the strength of conviction to conduct an austere life, must be taken into account. As Giles Constable reminds us, 'the monks who lived in the Nitrian desert were looked upon as models of ascetic practice'.¹¹ These 'models' had their stories copied and repeated down through the ages, first and foremost within the monastic setting.¹² This tradition focuses on ascetic solitary men and thus the ascetic life is largely associated with male monastics, such as Dominic Loricatus, not male mystics, such as Bernard of Clairvaux.

By contrasting the lives of Arnulf of Villers and Christina Mirabilis, specifically their ascetic practices, I hope to illustrate that neither individual fits neatly into clearly delineated categories of masculine and feminine behaviour which we may recognize as the most familiar for religious men and women. In fact, these two individuals display, at once, fixed and fluid aspects of gender which complicate any attempt to categorize their behaviour.

Arnulf and Christina

Despite the similar somatic focus of their spirituality, Arnulf of Villers (d. 1228) and Christina Mirabilis (d. 1224) have assumed remarkably different positions in modern historiography. Their lives were, of course, by no means similar but I want to investigate this disparity as I believe it has some bearing on their final epitaphs:

Refusal of Status and Gender', in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis eds, *Asceticism*, Oxford, 1998, p. 37.

¹⁰ Jerome Kroll and Burt Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics*, New York, 2005, p. 27.

¹¹ Giles Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering in the Middle Ages', The Ninth Stephen J. Brademas, Sr. Lecture, Brookline, Mass., 1982, p. 9, republished in Giles Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe*, Aldershot, 1996, [original pagination].

¹² Samuel Rubenson, 'Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Traditions', in Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis eds, *Asceticism*, Oxford, 1998, p. 49.

Christina the mystic; and Arnulf the curious lay brother. Christina and Arnulf both engaged in extreme self-mortification, they both experienced religious visions, and provided spiritual succour and advice to many of their contemporaries. Yet they inhabit remarkably different spheres within the historiography. Neither individual features in the late nineteenth- nor early twentieth-century works on mysticism and spirituality by authors such as Evelyn Underhill, William James, Edward Cuthbert Butler, and William Ralph Inge.¹³ Although I have discussed these works more fully in my first chapter, it is worth reiterating at this point the major concerns which these influential writers expressed regarding asceticism and its role in a mystic's life.

The first point to note is that all of these authors, when considering medieval mystics, refer to those of the late medieval period such as Henry Suso (d. 1366), Meister Eckhart (d. ca. 1327), Theresa of Avila (d. 1582), and St John of the Cross (d. 1591). Their reluctance to consider religious individuals from an earlier period appears to stem from their decided distaste for excessive ascetic practice. James and Underhill, in particular, wrote extensively on asceticism, in an attempt to rationalize behaviours which to modern readers seemed completely irrational. James believed ascetic conduct originated 'on diverse psychological levels' which range from 'a mere expression of organic hardihood' to 'psychopathic persons . . . [with] a sort of obsession' or 'genuine perversions of . . . bodily sensibility'.¹⁴ Although accepting that asceticism plays a part in the religious experience of some mystics, James marks it as problematic to religious individuals by making the comment that 'asceticism . . . [is] a virtue liable to extravagance and excess'.¹⁵ If you practise asceticism, you are still attached to the body, and this is not the optimum state of being for a mystic. For Underhill, mystics are the 'geniuses of religion' in the same way that artists or musicians are the geniuses of sight and sound.¹⁶ In her significant work, *Mysticism*, Underhill approaches asceticism cautiously, accepting that although 'most mystics have practiced asceticism as a means to an end, all ascetics are not mystics'.¹⁷ Her focus is on the point when mystics are required to 'give up' their mortifications, a

¹³ William James, *Writings, 1902-1910*, New York, 1987; Edward Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 1st edn 1922, New York, 1966; Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church*, Cambridge, 1925, reprint 1975; Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: a Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th edn rev., London, 1930; William Ralph Inge, *Mysticism in Religion*, London, 1947.

¹⁴ William James, 'Saintliness', reprinted in William James, *Writings*, p. 272.

¹⁵ William James, 'The Value of Saintliness', reprinted in William James, *Writings*, pp. 327-328.

¹⁶ Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 206.

point which she marks as the beginning of their mystic existence.¹⁸ The extreme self-mortifications of Arnulf and Christina ensured that they had no place in a historiography which lays the foundation for the study of mysticism in the twentieth century.

However, Christina's categorization as an important female mystic endures despite this indifference and the approbation of the next generation of historians. Simone Roisin has called Thomas de Cantimpré's *vita* a 'tissue of extravagances,' while the Jesuit scholar Herbert Thurston described it as 'utterly untrustworthy' and a 'preposterous narrative'.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Thurston included Christina in his discussion of mystics because Thomas's discussion of her marvels 'bear a curious relation to certain phenomena of mysticism which come to us upon much better evidence in the case of many late mystics'.²⁰ Despite this criticism, which is better read as criticism of Thomas, Christina remains an important individual because of her gender, and as such makes an appearance in a wide range of late twentieth-century scholarship dealing with medieval women and spirituality. Brenda Bolton, Margot King, and Robert Sweetman have all written essays which confront the troubling somatic aspects of Christina's *Life*, in particular trying to discern how her position as a lay woman is able to accommodate her apostolate.²¹ Steven Fanning merely repeats some of the main points in Christina's *vita* as part of a wider discussion of beguine spirituality, making no comment as to the veracity of the text, nor offering any critical interpretation of it.²² Barbara Newman reads Christina as hysterical or a demoniac, who becomes authorized only through the intervention of a male cleric.²³ This is an argument questioned by Amy Hollywood who maintains that labelling Christina (or any other holy woman) as hysterical seems 'to presume that she has no available interpretive

¹⁸ Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 219-220.

¹⁹ Simone Roisin, 'La méthode hagiographique de Thomas de Cantimpré', in *Miscellanea Historiae in Honorem Alberti de Meyer*, vol. 1, Louvain, 1946, pp. 546-557; Herbert Thurston, *Surprising Mystics*, London, 1955, pp. 147, 149.

²⁰ Thurston, *Surprising Mystics*, p. 149.

²¹ Brenda Bolton, 'Vitae Matrum: A Further Aspect of the Frauenfrage', in Derek Baker ed., *Medieval Women*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 253-273; Margot H. King, 'The Sacramental Witness of Christina *Mirabilis*: The Mystic Growth of a Fool for Christ's Sake', in Lillian Thomas Shank and John A. Nicols eds, *Medieval Religious Women Volume Two: Peaceweavers*, Kalamazoo, 1987, pp. 145-164; Robert Sweetman, 'Christine of Saint-Trond's Preaching Apostolate: Thomas of Cantimpré's Hagiographical Method', *Vox Benedictina*, 9, 1992, pp. 67-97.

²² Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*, New York, 2001, pp. 97-98.

²³ Barbara Newman, 'Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century', *Speculum*, 73, 3, July 1998, pp. 733-770. Also see, Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, London, 2009, in particular chapter 3, 'Penitential Demoniac: Christina of St Trond/Christina *Mirabilis*', pp. 39-53.

frame for her experience'.²⁴ In her works *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* and *Fragmentation and Redemption*, Caroline Walker Bynum focuses in particular on Christina's relationship to food and fasting as part of her wider discussion of the role of food asceticism and spirituality for medieval women.²⁵

Despite these variations in the discussion of her life or aspects of it, the fact remains that, as a woman who enjoyed a miraculous resurrection, had visions of purgatory and heaven, and acted upon the Lord's instruction, Christina is now seen as an important figure in the foundation of a new form of female spirituality and its subsequent mysticism, which began to take hold in the Brabant region in the thirteenth century. Indeed, Bernard McGinn sees in Christina the characteristics which were to become familiar amongst other holy women of her period.²⁶ Brenda Bolton places her among a group of five important female figures in this developing movement, along with Mary D'Oignies, Ivetta of Huy, Margaret of Ypres, and Lutgard of Aywières.²⁷ However, Bolton also notes that Christina was the only member of this group who was not attached to a religious order.²⁸ Bynum contends that the Benedictines, Cistercians, and Premonstratensians all made subsequent claims for Christina as one of their own.²⁹ Although she died and was buried at the Benedictine abbey of St Catherine in St Trond, she nevertheless remained a laywoman with no formal institutional affiliation.³⁰ In this sense, Christina has more in common with the lay brother Arnulf, in that they both occupied a liminal position which was situated between the clearly defined worlds of the religious and the secular.

Arnulf must endure a harsher (and leaner) legacy today, and like Christina's life, Arnulf's *vita* is subject to the criticism of a group of historians of the mid-twentieth century. However, while criticism of Christina's unusual life is directed at her

²⁴ Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, Chicago, 2002, p. 246. Also see John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, & Spiritual Power: Female Saints & Their Male Collaborators*, New York, 2006, pp. 14-15, where Coakley briefly touches on Christina's ability to sense the sin in others, and her political prophecies; and Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard and Her Hagiographers: The Remaking of Female Sainthood', in Catherine M. Mooney ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, Philadelphia, 1999, p. 32, where Newman compares the popularity of Christina's *vita* to that of Hildegard. While Hildegard's *vita* remains in only eight complete manuscripts, Christina's survives in twelve Latin, one English, and three Dutch exemplars.

²⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley, 1987; idem, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York, 1992.

²⁶ McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, pp. 160-62.

²⁷ Bolton, 'Vitae Matrum', pp. 253-273.

²⁸ Bolton, 'Vitae Matrum', p. 260. Mary was a beguine, Ivetta a recluse, Margaret a Dominican tertiary, and Lutgard a Cistercian nun.

²⁹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 24.

³⁰ VCM, 5.54; King, 'The Sacramental Witness', p. 146.

biographer, Thomas de Cantimpré, this is not a luxury afforded Arnulf. In the Cistercian hagiography of the first half of the twentieth century, the overriding views of Arnulf portray him as, at best, a curiosity and, at worst, insane. His severe physical excoriations appear to overwhelm any analysis of his spirituality – this is aided by the fact that his biographer, Goswin of Bossut, the cantor of the Cistercian monastery at Villers, elected to divide his life into two books, with the first book dealing almost exclusively with his ascetic behaviour. Consequently, Arnulf has managed to provoke what Brian McGuire reads as ‘embarrassment’ amongst certain ‘Cistercian monks and scholars’.³¹ As McGuire notes, Arnulf is called ‘insane’ in a Cistercian history of the abbey, while Thomas Merton describes Arnulf as an ‘incorrigible self torturer’ and ‘a curiosity’.³²

There is one exception to this skewed representation of Arnulf and that comes in Ernest W. McDonnell’s 1954 work, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture*. McDonnell’s engagement with Arnulf’s life is in direct contrast to the earlier or contemporary presentations which I have just mentioned and he is much more concerned with presenting Arnulf’s relationships with other religious individuals from his local area.³³ He does note that Arnulf’s penitential practices brought him ridicule at times, and offers the explanation that ‘[r]idicule, suspicion, and even active hostility were necessary concomitants of the saintly life’.³⁴ McDonnell maintains that the penance offered by Arnulf was for the women of ‘the local feminine religious movement’.³⁵ As a more traditional form of history, McDonnell makes no attempt to understand Arnulf from the perspective of gender or social status, but instead paints a picture of early Cistercian spirituality which centers on the bonds of love and friendship. On the other hand, the only Arnulf mentioned in Louis Lekai’s influential work from 1977, *The Cistercians*, is the abbot of Villers, Arnulf of Louvain (1240-1248).³⁶ Although Lekai describes Villers as ‘a fervent center of mysticism,’ he fails to mention Arnulf the Wagoner, one of Villers’ more interesting characters.³⁷ Perhaps Arnulf’s

³¹ Brian Patrick McGuire, ‘Self-Denial and Self-Assertion in Arnulf of Villers’, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 28, 3-4, 1993, p. 242.

³² E. de Moreau, *L’Abbaye de Villers-en-Brabant*, Brussels, 1909, p. 109, cited in McGuire, ‘Self-Denial and Self-Assertion’, p. 242; and Thomas Merton ed., *Modern Biographical Sketches of Cistercian Blesseds and Saints*, Gethsemani Abbey, 1954, pp. 187-93, cited in, McGuire, ‘Self-Denial and Self-Assertion’, p. 242.

³³ Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With a Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene*, New Brunswick, 1954, pp. 113, 325, 332.

³⁴ McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, pp. 446-447.

³⁵ McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, p. 326.

³⁶ Louis Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality*, Kent, 1977, p. 237.

³⁷ Lekai, *The Cistercians*, p. 235.

austerities were counterintuitive to Lekai's definition of a mystic. This is the concern which lies at the crux of this thesis: the problematic construction of the category 'mystic,' and the question of whether spiritual practice or gender decides that categorization.

Modern scholarship which engages with Arnulf's life does little to address this question although it is generally far more positive in tone.³⁸ Brian McGuire's 1993 article, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion in Arnulf of Villers', focuses on the motivations for Arnulf's asceticism, why he undertook such a regime, and how his austere life contributed toward his unique place in the monastic hierarchy at Villers. Although I disagree with McGuire's contention that Arnulf's sexuality drove his asceticism, his description of Arnulf as a nurturer, and a crucial component of the friendship networks maintained by the monastery with its granges and local population, presents an exploration focused much more on Arnulf's spiritual attributes than his asceticism. Martha G. Newman's essay for the volume, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, clearly recognizes that the 'binary separation of male and female spirituality' is deliberately complicated by the authors of the Cistercian canon and distinctions are instead 'based. . . on literary and social status'.³⁹ Newman rightly notes that Arnulf's asceticism was focused on his desire to imitate the suffering of Jesus and that his *vita* has many 'strong parallels' with Goswin's *Life of Ida of Nivelles*.⁴⁰ Arnulf and Ida are also similar in that neither is considered a mystic, indicating that, along with status, place in time may also have a function in creating the category 'mystic.'

The *Lives* of Arnulf and Christina provide an excellent insight into this problem of categorization, and display both similarities and differences which cannot be easily reduced to dichotomies such as masculine or feminine, educated or illiterate, religious or secular. While their spiritual experiences were similar in many respects, the context in which those experiences were arrived at and acted out was different. Arnulf, like many men before him, came to religion via a crisis. Although he had been 'set . . . apart since his mother's womb,' it took a spirit of counsel and the vomiting up of his

³⁸ McGuire, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion', pp. 241-259; Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues: Monks, Lay Brothers, and Women in Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Saints' Lives', in Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack eds, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 2003, pp. 182-209; Barbara Newman, 'Preface', in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. and intro. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003, pp. xxix-xlvii; Martinus Cawley, 'Introduction to the Lives', in *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers, by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. and intro. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003, pp. 1-25.

³⁹ Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues', p. 183.

⁴⁰ Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues', p. 198.

sins to convince Arnulf to change his life.⁴¹ Whereupon, Arnulf then ‘began frequenting the company of religious persons and exposing himself to familiar intercourse with the better of the menfolk’.⁴² On the death of her parents, Christina was tasked, as the youngest of three sisters, with looking after the herds.⁴³ Translator Margot King notes, at this point, that the division of labour within Christina’s household resembles that of a female monastic house—the eldest engaged in prayer (the nun), the middle sister took care of the house (the lay sister), and the youngest took care of the farm (the labourer).⁴⁴ I suggest that this division of ‘labour’ also reflects the male monastic system, with Christina fulfilling the role of the lay brother, who was responsible for the maintenance of land and animals. Robert Sweetman also recognizes this comparison, and interprets it as Thomas’s attempt to equate Christina’s life with a religious one.⁴⁵ Again, in this sense, Christina and Arnulf are similar with both fulfilling roles of equivalent stature, although it is important to emphasize that the role of the *conversi* or lay brother was not religious in the sense that the life of a monk or nun might be. However, the key difference in their lives was when that role is attained: for Arnulf, it was not until after his conversion experience that he entered the monastery, while Christina fulfilled the role of lay brother to her sisters before her remarkable resurrection.

Conversion

The call to a religious life was often marked by some form of divine intervention. This intervention, in turn, elicited two remarkably different responses that have a definite gendered sense about them. I suggest that these narratives are gendered because we have a number of similar examples of conversion stories for men and women which follow an analogous pattern. For men, conversion is often marked by a crisis or sudden realization that they must renounce their carnal lives. For women, it is

⁴¹ *VAm.*, I.1b. [Cum autem placuit Domino qui eum segregavit ex utero matris suae ut vocaret eum per gratiam suam.]

⁴² *VAm.*, I.1b. [Deinde cum omni industria segregans se a malevolo saecularium contubernio, coepit frequentare religiosas personas & bonis viris se familiarem exhibere]

⁴³ *VCM*, 1.4. [Tunc sorores secundum religiosae vitae modum vitam suam disponere cupientes, sororem aetate majorem ut vacaret oratione, mediam ut [domus] curam ageret; juniorem autem Christinam, ut ad Pascua euntia pecra custodiret, instituunt. (AASS, p. 651)]

⁴⁴ Margot King in, Thomas de Cantimpré, *The Life of Christina Mirabilis*, trans. Margot King, Toronto, 1995, pp. 41-42, n.18.

⁴⁵ Sweetman, ‘Christine of Saint-Trond’, pp. 70-71.

social circumstances, such as marriage, which can stand in the way of conversion, yet their piety is often never questioned and their spirituality seems almost fully formed from childhood. As Rosalynn Voaden and Stephanie Volf observe, this is because hagiographers and their subjects experienced the inequity of medieval society. Young girls, aware that society saw them as ‘essentially bodily and emotional,’ sought to distance themselves from this tradition by claiming their special piety from infancy.⁴⁶ Boys, on the other hand, were presented with a tradition which allowed for ‘erring males [to return] to the fold’.⁴⁷ However, the work of Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell alerts us to the danger of prescribing particular traditions too readily, by illustrating that there were a range of narratives which encompassed many models of conversion.⁴⁸ For example, some men were pious from birth, while there are numerous examples of women who, despite being forced into marriage and childbearing, were able to renounce the world and assume the role of saint. Rather than focussing on gender, although that is an important factor in their statistical analysis, Weinstein and Bell look to the stages of life to discern the particularities of conversion for men and women.

While finding that child converts of both sexes displayed preternatural piety and an intense, unshakable devotion, the picture for adolescent conversion is far more traumatic; worldly, educated boys were more likely to suffer from a crisis, while girls were often at the whims of their family and a wider society which considered their first and foremost duty as marriage.⁴⁹ It is in the stories of adult conversion that we witness the striking reversal inherent in most, if not all, narratives of conversion: ‘Yesterday’s sinner becomes today’s penitent; the greedy merchant gave away all his worldly goods; the prostitute abruptly entered the nunnery; the overproud knight decided to dedicate his sword to Mary, and the scholar pledged his pen to the Trinity.’⁵⁰ What Weinstein and Bell clearly demonstrate is a tradition of hagiographic storytelling which is permeable and flexible, and although it has formulae and patterns, these are not necessarily adhered to.

⁴⁶ Rosalynn Voaden and Stephanie Volf, ‘Visions of My Youth: Representations of the Childhood of Medieval Visionaries’, *Gender & History*, 12, 3, November 2000, p. 666.

⁴⁷ Voaden and Volf, ‘Visions of My Youth’, p. 666.

⁴⁸ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, Chicago, 1986.

⁴⁹ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

⁵⁰ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 100.

Arnulf, who spent his youth 'catering . . . to the voluptuous whims of his flesh,' was shown the light by a spirit which spoke to him.⁵¹ He visited a priest and 'vomited up in confession the harmful virus of his sins, *putting off the old Adam and his activities and putting on the new, created in accord with God in the justice and holiness of the truth*'.⁵² He separated himself from those who would lead him astray, and began a regime that would 'manfully [prepare] his soul for temptations'.⁵³ This involved seeking the 'company of religious persons' and attending as many masses as possible.⁵⁴ Although Goswin made no explicit mention of Arnulf practicing physical austerities at this time, he implied that this was indeed the case when he related how Arnulf would stand outside the church and let the raindrops from the roof fall continuously upon him if he overslept and came late to matins.⁵⁵ It was also during this period that Arnulf would escape the unwanted attentions of a woman (a story I will return to presently).⁵⁶ In this sense, Arnulf reflects many familiar conversion themes as he begins his religious life, following a similar developmental pathway as Benedict Aniane before him.

Benedict's life presages many of the *vitae* of male saints who follow him in the high and late medieval period, particularly with respect to the themes described by Weinstein and Bell concerning the conversion of adolescents.⁵⁷ Benedict arrived at adolescence as a noble, well-educated youth who had a recognizable 'brilliance of character'.⁵⁸ However, despite his secular success, Benedict 'began to blaze with heavenly love to abandon this flaming world and all its exertions'.⁵⁹ His biographer, Ardo, offers no explanation for this turn of events but, as Weinstein and Bell note, this is to become a common theme in tenth- and eleventh-century stories of adolescents

⁵¹ *VAm.*, I.1a-1b. [. . . sed levis moribus & verbis per tortuosa mortis itinera coepit erraticus viator incedere, & quantum libuit carnis suae voluptatibus deservire.]

⁵² *VAm.*, I.1b. [Ad cujus dulce susurrium a somno mortis excitatus, abiit ad sacerdotem vicarium Christi & noxium peccatorum suorum virus in confessione evomens, exiit veterem hominem cum actibus suis & induit novum qui secundum Deum creatus est in justitia & sanctitate veritatis.]

⁵³ *VAm.*, I.1e. [Pugnans itaque de caetero novus athleta viriliter, praeparavit animam suam ad tentationes.]

⁵⁴ *VAm.*, I.5. [Deinde cum omni industria segregans se a malevolo saecularium contubernio, coepit frequentare religiosas personas & bonis viris se familiarem exhibere.]

⁵⁵ *VAm.*, I.1c. [. . . sed stabat foris in eo loco ubi de tecto ecclesiae stillicidia escendebant pluviae, stillantia super terram; sed tamen raro ei contingebat.]

⁵⁶ *VAm.*, I.1d.

⁵⁷ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 48-49.

⁵⁸ *VBen.*, 1.1. [Igitur vir venerabilis nomine et merito Benedictus abbas ex Getarum genere parti bus Gotiae oriundus fuit, nobilibus natalibus ortus; set eum superna pietas potiori virtutum claritate nobilitavit. (MGH, Waitz, p. 201)]

⁵⁹ *VBen.*, 1.2. [Interea, illustrante divina gratia, superno coepit flagrare amore et ut seculum linqueret totis aestuare nisi bus periturumque fastidire honorem, ad quem cum laborem adtingere posse cernebat, set adeptum cito amittere. (MGH, Waitz, p. 201)]

renouncing the world.⁶⁰ While a biographer may provide some hint as to a crisis and give details of the conversion, more often than not they move directly to a description of the saint's ability as a miracle-worker or healer.⁶¹ Benedict undertook, for a period of three years and whilst still in the world, a programme where 'he tried to grasp the pinnacle of continence, to deprive his body of sleep, to check his tongue, to abstain from food, to take wine sparingly, and to prepare himself like a skilled athlete for future struggle'.⁶² Only after this period of asceticism and contemplation did he finally take orders.⁶³ Following in the footsteps of Benedict, after two years of ascetic preparation, Arnulf finally became a lay brother at the Cistercian monastery at Villers at the age of twenty-two.⁶⁴

It is important to note at this point that Arnulf's *vita* bears all the hallmarks of masculine conversion anecdote; yet, if we compare his narrative to that of Abundus, a choir monk at Villers (d. 1239), we can mark the differences in hagiographic tradition within the male corpus, and also note how Arnulf's masculinity is somewhat compromised by a feminine social status. Brother Abundus's story illustrates an example of a life which encompasses aspects of both the child and adolescent conversion narratives discussed by Weinstein and Bell. Born into a religious but by no means devout family, Abundus was marked from boyhood to learn letters and assist his father in his business, although his mother had far more pious plans for him.⁶⁵ His biographer, Goswin, noted that '[f]rom these first years of boyhood, as he grew into a youth, his conduct likewise grew to be ever more commendable, especially his meekness, his sensitivity to shame and his *dovelike simplicity* (Matt. 10:16)'.⁶⁶ Only the faintest hint of discord marks Abundus's early years, and that conflict is with his father, a common theme in the *vitae* of adolescent conversions.⁶⁷ When Abundus was withdrawn from school to assist his father, his mother secretly sent him to 'another

⁶⁰ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 50.

⁶¹ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 50.

⁶² *VBen.*, 1.2. [Temptabat igitur infra hoc spatium, si con tinentiae culmen arripere posset, subtraere corpori somnum, reprimere linguam, absti nere a cibo, parcius sumere vinum et veluti peritus athleta ad futurum se componere bellum. (*MGH*, Waitz, p. 201)]

⁶³ *VBen.*, 1.3.

⁶⁴ *VArn.*, 1.2a. [Egressus igitur novus Christi tirunculus cum Abraham de terra & de cognatione sua ut iret in terram quam monstraverat ei Deus, anno aetatis suae vicesimo secundo, venit ad monasterium Villariense.]

⁶⁵ Goswin of Bossut, *The Life of Abundus, Monk of Villers* (hereafter *VAbn.*), in, *Send me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Turnhout, 2003, 2.a.

⁶⁶ *VAbn.*, 2.b.

⁶⁷ *VAbn.*, 2.c; Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 71.

schoolman . . . at the canons' church of Newminster'. This greatly angered Abundus's father and in order not to further antagonize him, the boy hid the linen surplice his mother had sewn for him to wear over his clothes when he entered the choir.⁶⁸ This is the only mention of the conflict, and Abundus proceeded to 'farewell the world and its seductive promises' and he entered the monastery at Villers.⁶⁹ The attention paid by Goswin to Abundus's schooling as a youth lends support to the claim made by Martha Newman that the main distinction between monks and lay brothers was literacy: 'Monks could read; lay brothers could not and were forbidden to learn.'⁷⁰ Goswin made no mention of education playing a part in Arnulf's early life, although he did note that he 'stemmed from middle-class parents'.⁷¹ It may be that Arnulf's education was minimal or truncated if he had one, but what is certain is that Arnulf was not the pious youth of the Abundus mould, and this may also have had some bearing on his final vocational position as lay brother.

Christina, who already laboured in the fields like a lay brother in a secular monastic setting, had a far more visual and affective experience than Arnulf. Her conversion narrative is atypical when we compare it to others in the analysis of adolescent conversion by Weinstein and Bell. In fact, her biographer, Thomas de Cantimpré, offered little evidence for any aspect of Christina's childhood before she embarked upon her 'second' life which was filled with extraordinary events. Weinstein and Bell note that a prominent and common factor in conversion for both boys and girls was 'the death of a parent'.⁷² This is the only recognizable 'crisis' in Christina's life, but we are left with little upon which to focus any interpretation. Thomas simply stated that her parents died and offered no insight into how this affected young Christina.⁷³ While she laboured on the farm, Christina was apparently gifted with the 'grace of inward sweetness and very often [He] visited her with heavenly secrets'.⁷⁴ The *vita* at this point is not forthcoming as to Christina's age, or the duration of her experiences, but it does make it explicit that Christina is visited by

⁶⁸ *VAbn.*, 2.c.

⁶⁹ *VAbn.*, 5.a.

⁷⁰ Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues', p. 185.

⁷¹ *VArn.*, I.1a. [Fuit in episcopatu Cameracensi in oppido quodam verae Brabantiae quod Bruxella dicitur, adolescens quidam Arnulfus nomine, quem a mediocris parentibus duxisse originem ferunt.]

⁷² Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 53.

⁷³ *VCM.*, 1.4. [Haec defunctis parentibus, cum duabus sororibus ipsa junior relicta est. (AASS, p. 651)]

⁷⁴ *VCM.*, 1.4. [Nec mora: viliori and humiliori officio deputatae Christus non defuit consolatory; quinimo illi dedit gratiam internae dulcedinis, fecretisque caelestibus eam saepius visitabat. (AASS, p. 651)]

Christ because she willingly occupied the humblest office.⁷⁵ We can perhaps only assume two things concerning Christina's childhood: one, the family were religious, as illustrated by the division of the household after the death of the parents; and two, Christina may have internalized her suffering at the death of her parents, resulting in her final illness and death.

The end result—her physical death and spiritual journey—is remarkable. Christina tells the reader, in her own voice, that '[a]s soon as I died, angels of God—the ministers of light—took my soul and led me into a dark and terrible spot which was filled with the souls of men. The torments which I saw . . . were so many and cruel that no tongue is adequate to tell them'.⁷⁶ Thinking that she was already in hell, Christina asked where she was, only to find it was purgatory. She was then taken on to witness the torments of hell.⁷⁷ Finally, Christina was led into Paradise and it is here, 'before the throne of the Divine Majesty,' that Christina is given two choices as to the continuing journey of her soul: she can remain in Paradise with Christ; or she could

return to the body and suffer there the sufferings of an immortal soul in a mortal body without damage to it, and by these your sufferings to deliver all those souls on whom you had compassion in that place of purgatory, and by the example of your suffering and your way of life to convert living men to me and to turn aside from their sins . . .⁷⁸

Christina, without hesitation, elects to undertake suffering and she is returned to her body, there to commence with the extreme bodily mortifications and performance of miracles which have made her name and marked her as a mystic.

I note that Christina's *vita* is atypical, and if we briefly turn our gaze to Christina's contemporaries, Marie D'Oignies (d. 1213) and Ida of Nivelles (d. 1231), we can clearly see how problematic categorization is. I refer the reader again to Steven Fanning's timeline of mystics which is reproduced in this work as figure 2.⁷⁹ Both Marie and Christina are listed among those Fanning considers as mystics, however Ida is not. Marie's position as 'the finest example of the early *mulier sancta*' goes some way, I

⁷⁵ VCM, 1.4.

⁷⁶ VCM, 1.6. [Statim, inquit, ut defuncta sum, susceperunt meam animam ministri lucis, angeli Dei, and deduxerunt me in locum quemdam tenebrosum and horridum, animabus hominum pleum. Tormenta, quae in ipso loco videbam, tanta and tam crudelia errant, ut nulla lingua haec loqui sufficeret. (AASS, p. 651)]

⁷⁷ VCM, 1.6. [Inde deduxerunt me ad tormenta inferni, and agnovi etiam ibi quosdam, quos viventes agnoveram. (AASS, p. 651)]

⁷⁸ VCM, 1.7. [. . . aut ad corpus reverti, ibique [agere poenas] immortalis animae per mortale corpus sine detriment sui, omnesque illas animas, quas in illo purgatorii loco miserata es, ipsis tuis poenis eripere. (AASS, p. 652)]

⁷⁹ See chapter one, p. 24.

believe, to explaining her position as a mystic.⁸⁰ Jacques de Vitry's compelling and extensive narrative of Marie's life, supplemented by Thomas de Cantimpré, provides a fascinating insight into the life of an early thirteenth-century religious woman, and one that has been reviewed extensively by historians.⁸¹ Ida of Nivelles, although less visible than Marie in modern historiography, is nonetheless an important individual in studies of the early beguine movement.⁸² The conversion narratives for these young women present two classic examples of the path to holiness which, unlike that of some young men such as Abundus, was fraught with conflict.⁸³ Jacques de Vitry noted that Marie was marked as pious and special 'almost from her mother's womb'.⁸⁴ She did not play with the other young girls, and 'she kept her soul from the concupiscence and vanity of them all and foreshadowed in her youth what . . . she would be in the future in her old age'.⁸⁵ Ida too was apparently blessed with a ferocious piety from birth. Like Marie, 'she avoided any worldly girls of wanton and unrefined behaviour'.⁸⁶ They were both intent on prayer, and Ida in particular tried to attend mass as often as possible.⁸⁷ However, as they approached adolescence, their paths diverged, with marriage precipitating their individual crises.

At the age of fourteen, Marie was married to a youth named John and subsequently her asceticism escalated.⁸⁸ However, her fervour influenced her husband

⁸⁰ McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, p. 7.

⁸¹ Rather than reproducing the bibliography concerning Marie, I refer the reader to the comprehensive list of bibliographic sources cited in *Two Lives of Marie of D'Oignies: The Life by Jacques de Vitry*, trans. Margot H. King, *Supplement to the Life by Thomas de Cantimpré*, and *The Anonymous History of the Church of Oignies*, trans. Hugh Fleiss, Toronto, 2003, pp. 247-250.

⁸² McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*; Mary Suydam, 'Beguine Textuality: Sacred Performances', in Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler eds, *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, New York, 1999, pp. 169-210; Thomas Merton, 'Two More Cistercian Idas: Blessed Ida of Louvain and Blessed Ida Of Nivelles', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 41, 1, 2006, pp. 81-91; Mary Suydam, 'Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: Beguine Constructions of Heaven', in Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter eds, *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, London, 2007, pp. 91-107.

⁸³ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 48.

⁸⁴ *VMO*, 1.11a. [Ita enim fere ex utero projecta est in Domino . . . (AASS, p. 639)]

⁸⁵ *VMO*, 1.11a. [. . . conservans animam suam ab omni concupiscentia & vanitate; jam divino auspicio praefignas in puerita; qualis futura esset in provecta aetate. (AASS, p. 639)]

⁸⁶ *Vida*, 1.c. [Cum autem annos infantiae, qui vsque ad septimum extenduntur, adhuc ageret numquam antea, seu postea, cum infantibus vicinarum domorum, vel cum puellis saecularibus, quarum lascivi & inordinati erant mores, egrssa est ad ludendum in platea. (Henriquez, pp. 199-200)]

⁸⁷ *VMO*, 1.11a. [Unde frequenter adhuc in puerita, ante lectum nocte genua flectebat; & quondam orations, quas didicerat, quasi primitias vitae Domino offerebat. (AASS, p. 639)]; *Vida*, 1.d. [Huius aetatis tempore coepit frequenter ire mane ad ecclesiam, ut sanctorum celebrationi Missarum interesset eratque amicta palliolo statura corpusculi sui commensurato, quod pater suus ei fecerat ad portandum. (Henriquez, p. 200)]

⁸⁸ *VMO*, 1.12. [Felicibus igitur actibus ejus invidentes, cum esset annorum quatuordecim, eam juveni cuidam matrimonio conjunxerunt. Tunc vero a parentibus remota, in tantum fervoris excessum accensa est, tanta pugna corpus suum castigabat, & in servitutum redigebat; quod frequenter, cum magna parte noctis manibus suis laborasset, post laborem diuissime orabat. (AASS, p. 639)]

so much that he converted, and he too was visited by the Lord, at which point he 'promised to live a celibate and truly angelic life in continence . . . and . . . imitate his companion in her holy plan and in her holy ascetic life'.⁸⁹ We are offered little information on John, but his conversion mirrors the pattern for adult conversion whereby a married man will suddenly renounce 'carnal commerce on earth' in order that his wife may follow a spiritual path.⁹⁰ Ida was also destined for marriage, at the even younger age of nine, but upon understanding that this was to be her fate, she escaped from the house through a window, carrying only her psalter.⁹¹ She sought refuge with a group of virgins who lived in 'religious poverty' near the walls of the church in the town. Rather than pursue her, her relatives left 'her in peace, to seek peace among these women of peace'.⁹² These two narratives clearly map out the formation of two powerful religious identities which defined the cultural norms of the day. As is quite clear, even from this brief overview, Christina's story bears none of the attention to detail and narrative strategies attendant in these two contemporary lives. In fact, Christina's *vita* appears to have more in common with the lives of religious men, and when we come to investigate the ascetic practices of Arnulf and Christina more closely, her *vita* takes on an even more masculine tone whilst Arnulf's appears to become more feminized.

Asceticism

Does gender play any role in *how* the somatic austerities of Arnulf and Christina are portrayed to the reader, both medieval and modern? For medieval readers, Christina and Arnulf portrayed aspects of spiritual behaviour that were easily recognizable. Christina's ascetic practices—such as fleeing into the desert, burning

⁸⁹ *VMO*, 1.13. [. . . visitatus est a Domino, ut non solum coelibem & vere Angelicam vitam continendo promereretur; sed sociam suam in sancto proposito & sancta religione imitaretur, omnia pro Christo pauperibus erogando. (*AASS*, p. 640)]

⁹⁰ *VMO*, 1.14. [Unde & ancillae suae Dominus postea in visione apparens promisit, ut socium suum, quasi reparato matrimonio, ei redderet in caelis, qui castitatis amore a carnali commercio se subtraxerat in terris. (*AASS*, p. 640); Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, pp. 100-101.]

⁹¹ *Vlda*, 1.e. [At illa quae in castitate Domino seruire concupiebat laqueum quem sibi tendebant praecauens, de domo patris sui per fenestram occulte est egressa, & fugit, nihil omnino secum deferens nisi psalterium quod nuper discere coeperat, & simplicem vestem qua induebatur. (Henriquez, p. 201)]

⁹² *Vlda*, 1.e. [. . . & cum pauperibus virginibus quae illic habitabant in adiutorio altissimi, sub protectione Dei caeli commemorata est. Cognati vero eius nolentes eam turbare, licet adhuc paruula & infra annos discretionis esse videbatur, quaerentem pacem, cum mulieribus pacis in pace reliquerunt. (Henriquez, p. 201)]

herself in ovens and flying into treetops – represent many different aspects of Christian ascetic tradition, particularly those of the early Christian martyrs and the Desert Fathers. Arnulf, on the other hand, presents to us a completely different tradition of spiritual expression, one which at this time, was also more recognizable amongst religious men, although this was soon to change. Arnulf's extreme bodily mortifications – binding himself tightly with ropes, scourging his body with whips constructed from materials designed to damage the flesh, the wearing of vests made from the skins of hedgehogs, and the use of heavy chain-mail against his skin – are all practices associated with the ascetic monastic hermits who were particularly active between the eighth and the tenth centuries. While it is not clear whether Christina engaged in any ascetic behaviour before she was resurrected, Arnulf had already adopted an austere life before he entered Villers. However, for each individual, their conversion marked the moment when their austerities escalated and became particularly conspicuous to their peers.

Once in place at the monastery, Arnulf proceeded to lament the restrictions placed upon him with regard to his desire for an ascetic life.⁹³ He even wondered if the 'Order's penitential practices were being hidden from him'.⁹⁴ It is at this point that Arnulf began to enact the severe ascetic practices which set him apart from the other members of the monastery at Villers, and led to accusations of disobedience and excess. The notion of excess is an important theme early in Arnulf's life, particularly in Book One of his *vita*. He arrived at Villers in 1202 where he immediately met with resistance to his already austere life, which he had undertaken in Brussels. The current abbot, Charles, was opposed to additions to the regime, and Arnulf became afflicted with a 'wholesome sadness'.⁹⁵ Craving more affliction and toil, Arnulf took twin ropes made from horsehair and bound them tightly from knee to hip, with the express wish to damage his flesh.⁹⁶ However, his exertions caused him to collapse and he was reprimanded by another brother: 'Brother Arnulf, beware of overstepping the common practices of the Order and taking upon yourself without permission the singularity of

⁹³ *VAm.*, I.2b. [Ad quid veni ego ad Ordinem istum? Numquid ut frustra dies meos consumerem? Si foris remansissem in saeculo, multo plus afflictionis corporaliter potuissem sustinuisse quam hic sustineam.]

⁹⁴ *VAm.*, I.2c. [Cum haec & his similia mente tractaret, reputans secum ne forte poenitentiales Ordinis afflictiones ei celarentur, coepit cogitare & recogitare quid arctius quidve poenalius possit suae carni superaddere.]

⁹⁵ *VAm.*, I.2b. [salubriter contristari]

⁹⁶ *VAm.*, I.2c. [Fecit namque sibi furtim duos funiculos de setis tortos, quas ei cauda ministravit equina.]

a more rugged, more austere life. It could do great damage to your body.’⁹⁷ Arnulf duly confessed and was upbraided by his confessor, who imposed penance. However, now that he had permission, Arnulf bound himself yet again with a longer rope and

fastened it so tightly against his body that it served as a medicine all the more painful for its digging the more quickly through the skin . . . [and] it became so firmly embedded that the flesh began to rot and wriggle with worms. And what a stench belched forth. . . . Arnulf, the mighty athlete, was afraid the stench issuing from his rotting flesh might prove injurious to his neighbours, and so he took the step of withdrawing the rope from his flesh altogether. This was not from any lack of endurance but simply from the motive we have expressed.⁹⁸

However, these reminders to Arnulf to moderate his ascetic practices appeared to have little effect. He continued to enact harsh punishment upon his body for his own sins and for the sins of others, and he continued in his quest to imitate Christ’s passion.

What I believe is more interesting and important about this story is Arnulf’s desire to practice his physical excoriations in secret and hide them from his brethren. Goswin makes a clear point of relaying Arnulf’s (or his own) concerns to the readers in this twelve-chapter book by making reference to the discomfit that is clearly caused by Arnulf’s super-austerities. Arnulf is rebuked outright, or acts with discretion, three times in the first book and Goswin also alluded to an incident where the abbots whom Arnulf lived under may be charged with indiscretion over his behaviour.⁹⁹ It is important to note at this point that, although not made explicit by Goswin, there was certainly a line which a religious man could not cross in terms of self-abnegation and physical punishment. The key question remains what (or who) governs that point? Goswin hints here at the fine balance between manly actions and feminine excess. Arnulf, ‘the mighty athlete,’ took care not to take his excoriation too far – not because he lacked the will to do so, but because he feared he would offend his brothers with

⁹⁷ *VArn.*, I.2d. [“Frater Arnulfe, cave tibi ne communes Ordinis institutiones transgrediens vitae tibi asperioris non licentiatus assumas austeritatem vel singularitatem, quia magnum inde corporis tui posses incurrere detrimentum.”]

⁹⁸ *VArn.*, I.2e, 2g. [Ille vero factus constantior ex increpatione magistri sui, accepta licentia fecit alium funiculum longiorem, cui multos inseruit nodos, ut citius graviusque cutem cum carne secaret & sibi majorem daret haec medicina dolorem & ex eo circumcinxit se per medium sui, astringens illum fortiter corpori, quem similiter diebus multis portasse memoratur. Tandem funiculus idem cutem transfigens, carni ejus tam valide immersus est ut de carne ejus putrefacta vermes ebullirent & ipsa eadem caro magnum ex se foetorem evomeret. Timens igitur fortis athleta ne foetor qui de putredine carnis ejus procedebat laesionem proximis generaret, curavit eundem funiculum carni suae penitus subtrahere, non ob defectum quidem tolerantiae sed propter occasionem super memoratum.]

⁹⁹ *Varn.*, Arnulf is rebuked directly in I.2d, I.5c, and I.8c. In I.6c, Goswin makes it clear to the reader that the four abbots of Arnulf’s period were always careful not to let his behaviour go too far. Also see, Martinus Cawley, ‘Four Abbots of the Golden Age of Villers’, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 27, 1992, pp. 299-327.

the excessive stench. I would also argue that Goswin was well-aware of the fact that Arnulf's excessive actions could also incite resentment amongst his brothers.

Christina only came to her asceticism after she 'grew sick in the body by the exercise of inward contemplation and she died'.¹⁰⁰ Thomas de Cantimpré gave little indication of what that 'exercise of inward contemplation' actually was, although we could speculate that Christina was already engaging in ascetic practices—perhaps fasting—in response to her religious visitations, or because of the death of her parents. This is, perhaps, the most curious aspect of the *Life*. The reader is offered little insight into Christina's status as one chosen by God; she is not portrayed as deeply contemplative, she performs no great acts of sacrifice, she is not a recluse, nor is she escaping marriage or the unwanted carnal attentions of a man. Christina is simply a poor, young woman and Thomas de Cantimpré understood that his readers would be familiar with the story of a young woman whose weak and soft body made her more susceptible to divine grace; therefore, he offered no explanation because it was already understood.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ VCM, 1.5. [Et factum est post haec, ut ex interno contemplationis exercitio virtute corporis infirmata, vita excederet. (AASS, p. 651)]

¹⁰¹ For works which focus on the medieval body see: Robert W. Ackerman, 'The Debate of the Body and the Soul and Parochial Christianity', *Speculum*, 37, 4, Oct. 1962, pp. 541-565; Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, Chicago, 1987; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, 1988; J. Giles Milhaven, 'A Medieval Lesson on Bodily Knowing', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 57, 2, Summer 1989, pp. 341-372; Meredith B. McGuire, 'Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29, 3, Sept. 1990, pp. 283-96; Carolyn Walker Bynum, 'Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval Contexts', *History of Religions*, 30, 1, The Body, August 1990, pp. 51-85; idem, *Fragmentation and Redemption*; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*, Cambridge, 1993; James F. Keenan, 'Christian Perspectives on the Human Body', *Theological Studies*, 55, 2, June 1994, pp. 330-347; Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis eds, *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, York, 1997; Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York, 1995; idem, 'Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry*, 22, 1, Autumn 1995, pp. 1-33; Page DuBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*, Chicago, 1998; Dyan Elliot, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, 1999; Charles Barber, 'Writing on the Body: Memory, Desire, and the Holy in Iconoclasm', in Liz James ed., *Desire and Denial in Byzantium. Papers from the Thirty-First Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Ashgate, 1999, pp. 111-120; Brian S. Lee, 'Keeping Body and Spirit Together: the Volatile Life of St Christina the Marvellous', *Southern African Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies: Suider-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Middeleeuse en Renaissance Studies*, 11, 2001, pp. 39-50; Jacqueline Murray, 'The law of sin that is in my members': The Problem of Male Embodiment', in Samantha Riches ed., *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, Florence, KY, 2002, pp. 9-22; Mark S. R. Jenner and Bertrand O. Taithe, 'The Historiographical Body', in Roger Cooter and John Pickstone eds, *Companion to Medicine in the Twentieth Century*, London, 2003, pp. 187-200; Patricia Dailey, 'Questions of Dwelling in Anglo-Saxon Poetry and Medieval Mysticism: Inhabiting Landscape, Body, and Mind', in Rita Copeland, David Lawton, and Wendy Scase eds, *New Medieval Literatures*, Turnhout, 2006, pp. 175-214; Jessica A. Boon, 'Medical Bodies, Mystical bodies: Medieval Physiological Theory in the Recollection Mysticism of Bernardino de Laredo', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 39, 2, 2008, pp. 245-268.

Thomas de Cantimpré illustrated the idea that medieval society understood the limits of the physical body and made clear in his prologue that ‘our account . . . could by no means have occurred according to the course of nature, although such things are possible to the Creator’.¹⁰² The body fulfils two roles here, which appear counterintuitive; firstly, because of its very weakness, it allows Christina access to the Lord. Christina’s death marks the first point in the *vita* which challenges the modern reader as to the veracity of the narrative, and prompts the need for alternative understandings of her physical actuality at this point. Brenda Bolton sees the death as a ‘cataleptic trance,’ while Andrea Dickens qualifies the death by calling it ‘mystic’.¹⁰³ It appears to me that Christina’s frail, female form was simply not capable of containing her remarkable soul and, in this sense, was not requisite for her journey. However, the body’s second role in this passage is to illustrate the interconnectedness of the body and soul—they could not be treated as being mutually exclusive. In order to suffer the pains of purgatory, a soul must have a body. Christina’s miraculous body becomes impervious to harm, thus enabling her to take on the pains of purgatorial suffering on behalf of others.

This powerful connection between the body and spiritual expression can be vexing for modern readers, as we can see in Bolton and Dickens’ attempts to rationalize what actually happened to Christina when she ‘died.’ However, as Bynum argues, it may be a mistake to view the body/soul dichotomy so clearly. She notes that it is possible that medieval theorists did not see the body ‘as the enemy of the soul,’ but rather, ‘they saw the person as a psychosomatic unity, as body and soul together’.¹⁰⁴ Understanding why medieval individuals undertook extreme behaviours, such as fasting, flagellation, and sleep deprivation, to name some of the more common, has engaged modern theorists, who seek to attribute a social or physiological cause. It is worth briefly considering some of these ideas at this point, to discern whether Arnulf and Christina’s asceticism fits any particular thesis.

Chastisements such as scourging, flagellation, continual genuflexion, fasting, and immersion in cold water were practices which, although physical in application, seem profoundly psychological in their effects. An awareness of psychological response to

¹⁰² *VCM*, prol. 3. [Fatemur quidem, and verum est, narrationem nostrum omnem hominis intellectum excedere, utpote quae secundum cursum naturae fieri nequaquam possent, cum tamen sint possibilia Creatori. (*AASS*, p. 650)]

¹⁰³ Bolton, ‘*Vitae Matrum*’, p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 222.

physiological stress is one of the ‘unknowable’ aspects of medieval heroic asceticism which Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach seek to access through the adoption of modern medical diagnostic techniques. In 2005, Kroll and Bachrach published a co-authored monograph which melds modern psychological understandings of the human mind with an historical approach to their subjects.¹⁰⁵ Using the 1956 edition of *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, Kroll and Bachrach created a list of 1462 holy men and women active between the years 450-1500 CE, in order to develop some statistical models with which to work on when reviewing the individual cases of some religious ascetics more fully.¹⁰⁶ In their chapter titled ‘Pathways to Holiness,’ Kroll and Bachrach raise a number of issues which cloud the close study of spirituality; of particular importance to my current work is the development of categories with which to undertake statistical analysis, particularly concerning mystical and visionary experiences and heroic asceticism.¹⁰⁷ These categories of spiritual activity are problematic in that

[m]ysticism and asceticism can each be conceptualized as a continuous or dimensional property. One is not either a mystic or an ascetic or not, but more (or less) of each, and varying across time as one journeys through life. This is especially the case if mysticism is viewed as an aspect of spiritual ascent or progress, such that there can be progressive development (as well as temporary setbacks) and deepening of one’s spiritual life.¹⁰⁸

More crucially for Kroll and Bachrach’s study, mysticism and asceticism are actually developed as sub-sets of the wider category they have termed ‘holiness.’¹⁰⁹ I find this categorization awkward, especially considering that their work is titled *The Mystic Mind* and I think that it represents, despite their claims, an obfuscation of spiritual behaviours. By invoking the category of ‘holiness,’ they are able to broaden their database to include the wider community of saints, many of whom exhibit neither of the traits under investigation.

Their text illustrates the difficulties faced in trying to imagine a paradigm within which to site individuals—a task made even more troublesome when we consider our

¹⁰⁵ Kroll and Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind*.

¹⁰⁶ Kroll and Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind*, pp. 91-104. The authors explain fully in this chapter their reasons for using *Butler’s Lives of the Saints* over other compendia such as the *Acta Sanctorum* or Pietro Natali’s *Catalogus sanctorum*.

¹⁰⁷ Kroll and Bachrach define ‘mystical and visionary experience [as] descriptions by the holy person (or inferences by witnesses) of altered states of consciousness of and ecstatic, spiritual, and religious quality occasioned by the pursuit of the presence or nearness of God. Heroic asceticism refers primarily to the intentional self-injurious behaviours of excessive sleep deprivation, fasting, and laceration of the flesh’; see, *The Mystic Mind*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁸ Kroll and Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁹ Kroll and Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind*, p. 105.

distance from those individuals and the mediation of their voices before they have even reached us. While acknowledging these problems, Kroll and Bachrach have erred in their conflation of saints, mystics and heroic ascetics. This is not a problem only manifested in Kroll and Bachrach's study. In *Saints and Society*, Weinstein and Bell are also restricted by the category 'saints,' which they have employed for their analysis. As I illustrated in my discussion of conversion narratives, the *vitae* of Arnulf, Abundus, Ida, Marie, and Christina all contain aspects that mark them as the stories of important spiritual individuals; yet none of them are included in the 864 saint's lives studied by Weinstein and Bell.¹¹⁰

Despite what I believe to be insurmountable problems with categorization, Kroll and Bachrach's text provides one of the few modern works which attempts to demonstrate how influential gender was in determining spiritual activity, or at least the representation of spiritual activity, via a statistical analysis. It also causes us to question the motivation(s) of Arnulf and Christina in engaging in acts of self-harm. Kroll and Bachrach focus on three main ascetic behaviours: laceration; sleep deprivation; and fasting.¹¹¹ For Giles Constable, these practices can be further understood as 'negative and positive mortifications,' or in other words 'forms of deprivation and the active imposition of suffering.'¹¹² Thus, laceration falls into the positive category and sleep deprivation and fasting into the negative.¹¹³ When we consider the kinds of self-harm inflicted by Arnulf and Christina, we can identify that their behaviours fall into both categories, with those in the positive category both more prevalent and the subject of greater attention. The implication of this is that both Arnulf and Christina actively inflicted harm upon themselves; but to what end? The main thrust of Kroll and Bachrach's argument in this regard is that self-inflicted pain 'has been a common, but by no means constant, method to bring about . . . alterations in one's state of consciousness'.¹¹⁴ However, this does not appear to be the case for either Arnulf or Christina.

¹¹⁰ Weinstein and Bell provide a full list of the 864 saints under analysis in their 'Appendix on Sources', see *Saints and Society*, pp. 251-276.

¹¹¹ Kroll and Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind*, p. 19.

¹¹² Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering', p 10.

¹¹³ The traits of each type of asceticism can be summed up as follows: Negative: chastity, poverty, obedience, fasting, solitude, silence, and humility. These are all aspects of temperance where you deny yourself of something. Positive: wearing *lorica* or *cilicia*, immersions in cold water or fire, rolling in thorns or nettles, flagellation, liturgical exercises, living on pillars, kissing the earth, the feet of the poor or the diseased, illness as sent from God as a test; Constable, 'Attitudes Toward Self-Inflicted Suffering', p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Kroll and Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind*, p. 73.

This is best illustrated in a story concerning Arnulf's reception of a visiting monk who wished to speak with him. Upon enquiring where Arnulf might be, Nicholas the stable-keeper replied that he was "in his purgatory".¹¹⁵ The monk believed that it would be impossible to converse at this stage with Arnulf, to which Nicholas responded, "on the contrary . . . once informed of your arrival he will be along without delay".¹¹⁶ This story suggests that Arnulf was in no way incapacitated by his actions, nor was he in a state of altered consciousness. Indeed, when the monk, who was brought to tears at the sight of blood trickling from the 'freshly flogged body', asked Arnulf 'why do you put yourself to such a death?' Arnulf replied that it is his sins that he puts to death, not himself.¹¹⁷ Compare this to Marie D'Oignies' response when visitors arrived wishing to see her:

She tore her spirit with such great sorrow from that sweetly joyful contemplation and from the embraces of the Bridegroom that sometimes it seemed that her entrails had burst and she vomited and spat out pure blood in great profusion. She, however, preferred to be afflicted by this kind of martyrdom than to disturb the peace of the brothers or, even more so, the peace of the pilgrims.¹¹⁸

I must note at this point that Arnulf's *vita* is problematic in this respect, because Goswin chose to separate it into sections, with one dealing with Arnulf's austerities and the other his relationships, both spiritual and temporal. The *vita* is also not chronological, making it difficult to match any of Arnulf's practices to his visionary or spiritual experiences. However, there is no real indication in Goswin's narrative that Arnulf practiced his asceticism in order to invoke or enhance his relationship to God.

¹¹⁵ *VArn.*, I.3d. [Quodam die, cum monachus quidam venisset ad grangiam ubi idem vir Domini morabatur, interrogavit fratrem stabularium, nomine Nicolaum, ubinam ille esset. Qui respondens dixit eum esse in purgatorio. Ad quod verbum cum monachus miraretur & interrogaret cujusmodi esset illud purgatorium, praedictus frater subintulit dicens: Quia ille more solito verberibus purgatoriis corpus suum affligebat. Tunc monachus: "Quam libenter, inquit, colloquerer ei si id mihi ab ipso concederetur; sed, ut arbitror, tali praepeditus negotio, foras ad me modo non egrederetur." "Imo, ait ille, si vester ei adventus innotuerit, sine mora procedet." Statimque pulsans ad ostium cellae, evocavit virum Dei, nuntians ex nomine monachum advenisse qui ejus sanctum & familiare exoptabat colloquium. Confestim ille tunica se rursum circumamictans, caputiumque resumens, egressus est. Cum autem monachus videret tunicam ejus sanguine cruentatam, rivulis sanguinis de corpore ejus recenter flagellat decurrentibus, prae dolore cordis lacrimatus est, ita ut vir Domini causam lacrimarum ejus ab eo sciscitaretur. Qui respondens dixit: "Tactus sum dolore cordis intrinsecus, attendens mirabile martyrium. Et quare, carissime, interficis temetipsum?" Ad quod verbum ille monacho jocosè satisfaciens non se sui ipsius, sed peccatorum interfectorem esse respondit. Nec mirum. Acerrima enim & frequens carnis afflictio saepe adimit servis Dei ex parte non modica peccandi occasiones.]

¹¹⁶ *VArn.*, I.3d.

¹¹⁷ *VArn.*, I.3d. [Qui respondens dixit: "Tactus sum dolore cordis intrinsecus, attendens mirabile martyrium. Et quare, carissime, interficis temetipsum?" Ad quod verbum ille monacho jocosè satisfaciens non se sui ipsius, sed peccatorum interfectorem esse respondit.]

¹¹⁸ *VMO*, 2.65. [Ipsa vero, auditio extraneorum adventu, ne forte aliquem scandalizaret, a fuavi illa contemplationis jucunditate, ab amplexibus Sponsi sui, vim sirime inferens, spiritum suum tanto dolore avellana; quod quandoque, quasi ruptis visceribus, sanguinem purum in magna quanti tate evomebat vel conspuebat; malens hoc affligi martyrio, quam Fratrum, & maxime peregrinorum pacem turbare. (AASS, p. 654)]

Most of Christina's 'positive' self-punishment occurs in sections 9 to 22 of her *vita*, and after her vision of purgatory and heaven. As with Goswin's narrative, Thomas de Cantimpré offers no logical explanation—to our minds at least—for Christina's austerities. He maintained that she endured these torments because they were the 'things for which she had been sent back [to the world] by the Lord'.¹¹⁹ When 'the divine grace of contemplation descended upon her' it was because of prayer, not asceticism, and only then did her body become the focus.¹²⁰ Thomas reported that when this occurred, 'her limbs were gathered into a ball as if they were hot wax and all that could be perceived of her was a round mass'.¹²¹ In effect, Christina melted. This has a strong parallel with a story concerning Ida of Nivelles, although, significantly, the melting has become internal. As a novice, 'when she was engaged intently in prayer, her desire blazed out so ardently that her soul suddenly began to melt away (Cant. 5:6) and she was bereft of all bodily strength'.¹²² Christina's move to more negative forms of self-harm occurs only after she fully submerged herself in the baptismal font of the church in the city of Wellen; thence 'she behaved more calmly and was more able to endure the smell of men'.¹²³ However, prior to this tempering of her more outrageous activities, Christina's ascetic practices had a more ancient and masculine tenor about them.

The most vivid example of Christina's impervious physical form comes when she 'crept into fiery ovens . . . and was tormented by fires—just like any of us mortals—so that her howls were terrible to hear. Nevertheless when she emerged, no mutilation of any sort appeared on her body'.¹²⁴ In portraying Christina as immune to the flames, and by implication the eternal fire of hell, Thomas created a strong connection between historical narratives of Christian persecution and his present-day audience. The Old

¹¹⁹ *VCM*, 1.11. [Tunc coepit Christina agere illa, propter quae a Domino remissa fuerat. (AASS, p. 652)]

¹²⁰ *VCM*, 2.16.

¹²¹ *VCM*, 2.16. [Iterum cum oraret, and contemplationis in ea gratia divina descenderet, vellut calefacta cera, Omnia membra eius in unum globum concludebantur, nec poterat in eis nisi tantum corpus sphaericum deprehendi. (AASS, p. 653)]

¹²² *Vida*, 4b. [Crescente itaque gratia Domini in ea cum adhuc esset nouitia, & quadam viceorationi insisteret, coepit exardentis desiderij vehementia liquescere repere anima eius, ita vt viribus corporis destitueretur, & in mentis transiens alienationem, sursum euecta raperetur in caelum. (Henriquez, p. 211)]

¹²³ *VCM*, 2.21. [Factum est enim die quadam, ut agitate a spiritu vehementissime as ecclesiam quamdam in villa, quae dicitur Guelleir confugeret, inventoque aperto fonte sacro baptisimi, illi se totam immergeret. Quo facto, hoc inibi dicitur consecuta quod contemperatior, ex tunc fuit modus ejus vitae hominibus, quietiusque habuit postea, and melius pati potuit odores hominum, and inter homines habitare. (AASS, p. 654)]

¹²⁴ *VCM*, 1.11. [Ingrediebaturque clibanos ignivomos ad coquendum panes paratos, cruciabaturque incendiis velut aliquis nostrum, ita ut horrifice clamaret prae angustia: nec tamen in egredientis corpore laesura forinsecus apparebat. (AASS, p. 652)]

Testament story of Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago resonates in Christina's fire-defying antics. Nebuchadnezzar threw the three young men into a blazing furnace because they refused to adore his new golden statue; yet they were not harmed by the fire and 'they walked in the midst of the flame, praising God, and blessing the Lord' (Dan. 3:24). The fiery flames of the pyre, which had been the fate of many early Christians, was now replaced by the furnace of hell. Christina's ability to bear the purgatorial suffering of others and emerge unscathed perhaps best reflects the martyrdom of Polycarp. Polycarp was condemned to the fire, but the flames 'surrounded the martyr's body as with a wall. And he was within not as burning flesh but rather as bread being baked, or like gold and silver being purified in the smelting-furnace'.¹²⁵ In an age when martyrdom was a distant memory, Christina suffered the flames to help to cleanse the souls of others, easing their passage through purgatory.

The stories of the persecution of Origen and the martyrdom of Apphianus also describe forms of physical torment which are then repeated in Christina's *vita*. Thomas recalls how Christina subjected herself to the tortures of the rack and how she would hang herself on the gallows for one or two days at a time, suspended among the thieves.¹²⁶ Origen endured 'terrible sufferings' during the reign of Decius (r. 249-251) including isolation in the dark in his cell, 'threats of fire,' and the stretching of his legs 'for days on end . . . in the torturer's stocks'.¹²⁷ Christina would also stay 'under the waters of the Meuse; frequently . . . for six or more days at a time'.¹²⁸ This is clearly in imitation of martyrs such as Apphianus, who was finally drowned in the sea after enduring severe beatings, the stocks, and having 'his feet covered with linen cloths soaked in oil and . . . set on fire'.¹²⁹ Christina also engaged in other bizarre behaviours which would have resonated with her Christian peers. When she hid in the highest trees, or inhabited 'the tops of castles or churches or any lofty structure,' she was

¹²⁵ *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. and intro. Herbert Musurillo, vol. 2, Oxford, 1972, 1.5; the reference to purification alludes to Wisdom 3:6. For other stories of martyrs who were thrown into the fire, such as Timotheus and Apollonia, see Eusebius, *The Church History*, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, in Philip Scaff and Henry Wace eds, *Eusebius Pamphilus, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 14, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 'Martyrs of Palestine', 3.1 for Timothy and 6.49.7 for Apollonia.

¹²⁶ VCM, 1.13. [In rotis etiam, in quibus piratae aliquando cruciari solebant, more tortorum flectebat crura & brachia sua, & tamen, cum descenderet, non apparebat fractura in membris suis. Ibat etiam ad patibulum, & se inter latrines suspendos laqueo suspendebat, ibique uno die vel duobus suspenda pendeat. Saepius quoque sepulchra mortuorum intrabat, plangebaturque ibi peccata hominum. (AASS, p. 652)]

¹²⁷ Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.39.5.

¹²⁸ VCM, 1.12. [Sub aquis Mosae fluminis glaciali tempore frequenter ac diutius morabatur, adeo ut in iis, sex diebus & eo amplius permaneret. (AASS, p. 652)]

¹²⁹ Eusebius, *Church History*, 'Martyrs of Palestine', 4.12.

mimicing the dendritic behaviour of the late antique stylites.¹³⁰ The most well-known stylite was Simeon Stylites (d. 459) with whom Christina also had the gift of prophecy in common.¹³¹ When Thomas described her flight from society and its sinners as Christina fleeing into the desert, medieval individuals would have recognised deeply religious themes associated with the Desert Fathers.¹³² Suffice to say, Christina's behaviours imitated those of religious men who had existed across the entire corpus of Christian religious tradition, men who were legendary and revered for their spirituality.

The parallels between Christina's acceptance of purgatorial suffering on behalf of others and the suffering of the early Christian martyrs are powerful. It is clear that Christina does not engage in ascetic practices in order to provoke an altered state of consciousness or because of hatred for her body.¹³³ These powerful evocations in Christina's ascetic behaviours, not only of the tortures and torments of the Christian martyrs, but also of Christ's crucifixion, marks Christina's *vita* as a powerful reminder to her contemporaries of Christianity's heroic past. It is also a reminder of the punishment that awaits them in purgatory.

The presentation of the ascetic behaviour of Arnulf and Christina differs in two major respects: the physical outcome of their actions; and the understanding of their actions by their contemporaries. Arnulf and Christina appear, at times, antithetical to the medieval medical and theological perspectives concerning the physical body. As a man who has already been excused from the dangers of carnal lust, one of the chief causes of concern for religious men, one expects Arnulf's body to be less problematic.¹³⁴ Yet as I have mentioned, his focus was completely upon his body and his desire to sacrifice himself to the Lord. Book One of his *vita* is awash with blood,

¹³⁰ *VCM*, 1.9. [Igitur post haec cum Christina hominum praesentias miro horror fugeret in desertis, in arboribus, in summitatibus turrium vel templorum vel quarumlibet rerum sublimium . . . (*AASS*, p. 652)]; also see 1.5, 2.14, 2.16, and 2.20.

¹³¹ *VCM*, 3.29; for Simeon Stylites see Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 61, 1971, p. 88.

¹³² *VCM*, esp. chapter Two. Thomas remarks that Christina often fled to 'the desert' to avoid the presence of men; see, 1.9 (twice); 2.17; 4.46.

¹³³ Marilyn Dunn suggests that the progenitors of female asceticism, who were active in Rome during the fourth and fifth centuries, did so in order to 'transcend what was popularly considered to be their physical and moral inferiority and achieve spiritual parity with men in the ultimate goal of the mind's union with God'. See, Marilyn Dunn, 'Asceticism and Monasticism II: Western', in Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris eds, *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 2, Cambridge, 2007, p. 671.

¹³⁴ *VArn.*, I.1d.

and references to his disagreeable body.¹³⁵ His actions are designed to cause the maximum amount of physical damage, as illustrated by his discovery of 'Butcher's Broom' (*Ruscus aculeatus*) which he employed 'whenever his smiting hand found a free spot in his body . . . [and] in his relentless self-discipline he would strike until the blood flowed'.¹³⁶ However, Arnulf was not content to simply lacerate his flesh, as revealed in the chapter dealing with his coat of mail:

Oh, what a blissful warrior, so illustrious, so victorious! Not enough for his body, tamed though it had been for so long, just to be clad in mail, just to feel that hard, cold steel. No, over and above he must add pelts, horrible to look at, horrible to touch! A shirt too of sackcloth must he add, to triple his martyrdom, matching the stiff, heavy mail with the jabbing, smarting quills, and the tight fit of the shirt. Thus he did pass his days and nights, with discomfort indeed of body, but, oh, what well-wishing, what cheeriness of heart.¹³⁷

This singularly somatic focus appears to have no relevance to any attempt on Arnulf's part to attain a closer spiritual relationship with God, or to purge himself of lustful thoughts; only once in this first Book does Goswin make any mention of Arnulf actually 'forgetting' his body.¹³⁸ Indeed, Arnulf seems eternally aware of it.

This is not the view of Arnulf's austerities argued by Brian Patrick McGuire. In one of the few articles which focus on the *vita* of Arnulf, McGuire argues that Arnulf's 'self-abuse' is a direct result of his sexuality, and he states that 'Arnulf's way of coping with his masturbatory fantasies was through punishing his flesh'.¹³⁹ McGuire then, magnifies this picture of a sexually troubled man by claiming that Arnulf's self-abuse, coupled with the fact that he was thinking of others as he beat himself, 'transformed one type of replacement act into another. What would have been a replacement act for solitary masturbation became instead a replacement act for lovemaking'.¹⁴⁰ McGuire bases this sexualized vision of Arnulf on three key points: firstly, Arnulf's attraction to

¹³⁵ *VArn.*. For references to blood see 1.3c; 1.3d; 1.4b; 1.4d; 1.11a. For references to his body see 1.2b; 1.3a; 1.3f; 1.4a; 1.5e; 1.10a.

¹³⁶ *VArn.*, I.3c. [Inde est quod virgarum verbera parvipendens, coepit in silvis roscum colligere, lignum scilicet virentibus semper foliis aculeatum, faciens inde sibi fasciculos . . . Agnoscant ergo omnes, quia ubicumque manus ferientis in corpore suo locum invenisset, tam irremediabili disciplina se usque ad effusionem sanguinis solitus erat caedere ut ramos aculeatos quibus se flagellabat oporteret eum mutare frequenter & novos accipere, pro eo quod ex crebris percussionebus plures super corpus ejus confringebantur.]

¹³⁷ *VArn.*, I.12b. [O vere felicem bellatorem inclitum & victoriosum! cui non suffecit corpus suum, jam a diebus multis edomitum, lorica vestire & loricae ferreae sentire durtiam, nisi pelles visu & tactu horribiles exterius loricae superponeret. Superposuit autem & cilicium, ut per loricae pondus & rigorem, per aculeorum punctiones & dolorem & per cilicii astrictionem, quasi triplicato martyrio dies & noctes cum molestia corporis, sed cum omni benevolentia & hilaritate cordis, transigeret.]

¹³⁸ *VArn.*, I.3b.

¹³⁹ McGuire, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion', p. 245. For a discussion on the importance of the Cistercian hagiographic tradition, which includes a lengthy discussion of the life of Arnulf see, Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues', pp. 182-209.

¹⁴⁰ McGuire, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion', p. 246.

women; secondly, his hatred of his flesh; and thirdly, the language Goswin employed to describe Arnulf's state of mind during his flagellation (a point I shall return to later). I will address the first two points at this juncture, as I believe that these are prominent in the argument put forward by McGuire, and they are aspects which perpetuate a sexualized view of medieval men.

McGuire makes the claim that Arnulf was 'strongly attracted to women'.¹⁴¹ As I have already argued, I do not believe this was the main motivation for Arnulf's spiritual behaviour and I believe his *vita* suggests other motives. His first encounter with a woman occurs long before he enters the monastery at Villers and is reminiscent of other narrative accounts concerning the sexual temptation endured by religious men:

It is written that the furnace proves the potter's ware, and troublesome temptation the chaste (Sir. 27:6). Arnulf too was once tempted. The instigation was diabolic, but Arnulf proved true. A woman, youthful in age, lewd in behaviour, worldly in her living, had seen how handsome a lad he looked, and, caught in the trap of her own eyes she had blazed into longing after him. . . . A mere drive towards lustful coition! Thus it was that she planned an artful way to lure him into sin. . . . [H]e had settled down to rest on the bedding spread out for him and she, under cover of dark, sneaked into the chamber and up to the bed. Impudently she settled herself down beside him and launched into wanton words, words to egg him on to sin. But he, upon hearing her, leapt from the bed and fled. . . . But thereupon a carnal temptation seized upon Arnulf, and so forcefully (II Dial. 2.1) that he would almost have slid into the whirlpool of sin, were it not for the Lord's proffering him the helping hand of his Grace.¹⁴²

What is clear from this narrative, as with other hagiographical accounts of temptation in the lives of men such as Benedict of Nursia and Bernard of Clairvaux, is the desire of Arnulf to be free of that temptation.¹⁴³ Indeed, Arnulf thanks God and recognizes that by the Lord's 'protection, no such blaze will ever master me (II Dial. 2.1)'.¹⁴⁴

The temptation of Benedict of Nursia was well known and his response to his carnal temptation became the hagiographic standard. Tormented and tempted by 'the

¹⁴¹ McGuire, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion', p. 245.

¹⁴² *VArn.*, I.1d. [Et quoniam scriptum est: "Vasa figuli probat fornax & homines castos tentatio tribulationis," quodam tempore, instinctu diaboli, tentatus est, sed probatus. Cum enim mulier quaedam, aetate adolescentula, lasciva moribus & saeculariter vivens, videret eum adolescentem aspectu decorum, oculorum suorum capta laqueo, exarsit in concupiscentiam ejus. Sed quia putidum cordis sui amorem, libidosae commixtionis incentorem, ei palam denudare erubescibat, eo quod timoratum ac religiosae vitae deditum attenderet, coepit cogitare quali arte illiceret eum ad peccandum. Et nacta opportunitatem nocte quadam, cum ille in strato suo se collocasset ad pausandum, sub caligine noctis ingressa latenter cameram, venit ad lectum ejus, & juxta eum se impudenter collocans, coepit eum verbis procacibus incitare ad peccatum. Quod ille ut audivit, statim de lecto exiliens fugit; sicque misera mulier spe sua frustratam se esse dolens, confusa recessit. Ea hora tam valida carnis tentatione correptus est ut pene lapsus fuisset in peccati voraginem nisi Dominus gratiae suae manum ei porrexisset.]

¹⁴³ As Martinus Cawley notes, Goswin is clearly referencing two of the more important narratives in the Cistercian canon with this story; Cawley, *Send Me God*, p. 4, n.10.

¹⁴⁴ *VArn.*, I.1d.

remembrance of a woman whom he had seen,' he was 'inflame[d] with concupiscence' and 'was of a mind to have forsaken the wilderness'.¹⁴⁵ With the divine assistance of God, Benedict

came to himself; and seeing many thick briars and nettle bushes to grow hard by, off he cast his apparel, and threw himself into the midst of them, and there wallowed so long that, when he rose up, all his flesh was pitifully torn: and so by the wounds of his body, he cured the wounds of his soul, in that he turned pleasure into pain, and by the outward burning of extreme smart, quenched that fire which, being nourished before with the fuel of carnal cogitations, did inwardly burn in his soul.¹⁴⁶

Bernard of Clairvaux fared no better when he came into contact with a woman. He had to drive an 'impudent woman' from his chamber, who was trying to seduce him, by calling out "thieves, thieves".¹⁴⁷ This heroic resistance is also a particular theme in the *vitae* of religious men, especially saints.¹⁴⁸ While that resistance might involve inflicting physical punishment such as rolling in briars or leaping into icy waters, it could also include fleeing from the threat as Arnulf had done, driving the woman away, or, as in the case of William of Montevergine (d. 1142), converting the wanton woman by a display of piety.¹⁴⁹ Arnulf's behaviours represent a direct attack on his body, and if we compare his actions to those of the heroic monastic ascetics of an earlier period of reform, we will recognise a shift in emphasis that is strongly associated to the Passion.

Peter Damian's intense and devout regard for the pious ascetic life of his friend, Dominic Loricatus (d. 1060), best portray the vision of the constant physical battle that spiritual men might and should engage in. Dominic's devotion is reflected in his name, with Loricatus derived from the *lorica*, which were the metal plates that he hung

¹⁴⁵ Gregory I, *Life of St Benedict*, in *Benedict, The Dialogues of Saint Gregory, surnamed the Great: Pope of Rome*, trans. P. W., London, 1911, 2. This story is also recounted in *Gem. Eccl.*, II.10.

¹⁴⁶ Gregory I, *Life of St Benedict*, 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Dia. Mir.*, II.11.

¹⁴⁸ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 81.

¹⁴⁹ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, p. 82. William, upon finding a woman in his room, lay down in amongst the red-hot embers in his fire place and invited her to join him there. She immediately converted. Gerald of Wales, tells the story of the hermit Godric of Finchale who concealed a barrel of cold water in the floor of his cell so he could immerse himself whenever lustful passions enflamed him, *Gem. Eccl.*, II.10: [Et quia nec sic ad artem victoriae plene conscenderat, exquisito remedio dolium vir Dei in penitiori casulae suae angulo quodam, terra lignonibus effossa, in spelunca quadam aqua plenum abscondit et sepelivit, eique operculum terrae superficiem non excedens stramine superjecto ex asseribus adaptavit. Quotiens itaque temptationis ardore caro efferbuit, aperto dolii ipsius ore, corpus suum totum in ipsis ingessit, et usque ad mentum in illis infusus, artus teneros aquarum frigoribus obfrigescentes tremere et pallere coegit, carnisque calorem repressit, per nimiam frigoris castigationem, ita ut caro tota, quae lasciviendo exrestuasset, tota marcescens et squalida, prae frigore nimio tremere atque rigeret. (Brewer, p. 214)]; Jacqueline Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', in Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz eds, *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, Philadelphia, 2008, p. 45, mentions Aelred of Rievaulx's barrel of water which he kept in his cell.

from various parts of his body.¹⁵⁰ Along with the *lorica*, Dominic also enacted bodily punishment through practices such as fasting, incessant genuflection, girding his body with ‘iron bands’ and self-flagellation, not with one hand, but with both hands while reciting the psalter up to nine times a day.¹⁵¹ The focus for Dominic’s intense asceticism was his dismay at discovering that his father had paid a bribe in order to have Dominic ordained as a priest before the canonical age. Despairing at this act of simony, Dominic instead became a monk. As Giles Constable points out, Dominic was one of the most celebrated monastic ascetics of his time and Damian’s promotion of his life to both monks and clerics highlights the eleventh- and twelfth-century trend towards heroic monasticism.¹⁵² However, continually lurking beneath Damian’s ascetic-rhetoric is a concern with lust.¹⁵³

Goswin mentions the carnal faults of the body only once in relation to Arnulf’s austerities. When Arnulf’s grange master, Sygerus, discovered his charge punishing himself by winding cord about his body to increase the harshness of his hair shirt, he ‘used a tricky piece of seductive cunning to lure Arnulf away and deprive him of that insupportable torment’.¹⁵⁴ In response, Arnulf took up three iron chains and bound them about himself:

A wondrous man, tied tight around the chest with a chain of iron (meant to repress any noxious thoughts taking rise from the heart); girt also with a second chain around the belly (to repress the concupiscence of gluttony); and with a third about the loins (to bridle the movements of lust).¹⁵⁵

Again, Goswin invoked a clearly recognisable trope to help his reader understand Arnulf’s intent.¹⁵⁶ In fact, Barbara Newman suggests in the ‘Preface’ to *Send Me God*,

¹⁵⁰ Constable, ‘Self-Inflicted Suffering’, p.15.

¹⁵¹ Peter Damian, *The Letters of Peter Damian*, trans. Owen J. Blum, vols. 1-3, 5-7, The Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation, Washington, D.C., 1989-2005, 44.18; 50.35-37; 109.21.

¹⁵² Constable, ‘Self-Inflicted Suffering’, p.15. Further letters by Damian that highlight asceticism are letters 10, 56, 59, 109, 132. Also see, Katherine Allen Smith, ‘Saints in Shining Armor: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050-1250’, *Speculum*, 83, 3, July 2008, pp. 572-602.

¹⁵³ Elliot, *Fallen Bodies*, in particular chapter 4.

¹⁵⁴ *VArn.*, I.5c. [Quod dum comperisset magister grangiae, vir religiosus & omnium bonorum amicus, Sygerus nomine, timens ne jumentum corporis illius sub tanto onere deficeret, calliditate quadam illectum seduxit & ei tormentum importabile abstulit: ille autem dolens dulce sibi ablatum esse cilicium a die illa & in reliquum eisdem ciliciis quibus ante uti consueverat usus est.]

¹⁵⁵ *VArn.*, I.5f. [Hominem mirabilem fortiter astrictum circa pectus catena ferrea, ad reprimendas cogitationes noxias quae ex corde oriuntur, circa ventrem secunda catena cingebatur, ut gulae concupiscentiam reprimeret, tertia circa renes, ut luxuriae motus refrenaret.]

¹⁵⁶ See Damian, *Letters*, 59.13, for a very similar description concerning the girding of the chest and loins. ‘What is the meaning of girding the waist or loins where lust especially has its origin, with leather belts which are made of dead animals, but checking at all times the seductive impulses and desires of carnal passion by tormenting the body? And what is the significance of wearing a golden girdle round the breast, but the constant and careful control of annoying imagination and assailing thoughts? We gird our waist with leather belts when we restrain our lusting flesh by continuous fasting. We have a golden girdle round the breast, when we engage in implacable combat against the attack of molesting thoughts.’ [Quid

that Arnulf may have had access to Damian's writings which provided him with his hagiographic model.¹⁵⁷ As I will investigate in the next chapter, the influence of Damian might well account for the Christological focus of Arnulf's austerities which Goswin is at pains to point out.

McGuire also cites Arnulf's only other sexually-themed encounter with women as evidence of his 'strong sex drive'.¹⁵⁸ On the road to the grange, Arnulf encountered three demons in the guise of women who attempted to seduce him. Employing the sign of the Cross as a defense, Arnulf avoided the demons by looping around them through the woods, to regain the road at a safe distance.¹⁵⁹ These two formulaic encounters with 'women' do not speak of a heightened libido; rather, I believe that they are employed by Goswin in an effort to standardize and provide authority to his narrative. They are stories of the triumph of chastity over lust which would be recognized by many medieval people, particularly within this period of reform, but they should not be confused with the triumph of physical asceticism over carnal thoughts.

This eternal awareness of the body is a familiar theme in the works of, or concerning, religious men, particularly those involved with the growing reform movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Authors such as Peter Damian, Caesarius of Heisterbach, Gerald of Wales, Adam of Eynsham, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Anselm of Canterbury directed considerable attention to the issue of carnal lust and the devil's assault on the body.¹⁶⁰ The fragility of the somatic male is clearly seen in the most extreme example of divine assistance offered to religious men under the sway of concupiscence—spiritual castration. Damian, Gerald, Caesarius, and Adam, in particular, presented tales of mystical castration that are at once both human and

est ergo pellicis zonis, quae videlicet ex mortuis animalibus fiunt, lumbos ubi libido permaxime viget accingere, nisi omnes carnalium passionum illicites motus ac fomites per afflictionem corporis undique refrenare? Et quid est circa mamillas auream habere zonam, nisi et adversus ingruentium cogitationum inportuna phantasmata sollicita semper invigilare custodia? Lumbos ergo pellicia zona praecingimus, cum carnis lasciviam per inediae continentiam coercemus. Auream vero zonam circa mamillas habemus, cum adversus infestantium cogitationum impetus infoederabili certamine dimicamus. (MGH, Reindel, pp. 201-202)]

¹⁵⁷ Barbara Newman, 'Preface', p. xli.

¹⁵⁸ McGuire, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion', p. 245.

¹⁵⁹ VArn., II.8c.

¹⁶⁰ Damian, *Letters*, 1, 50, 59, and 80; *Dia. Mir.*, 4.95; *Gem. Eccl.*, II.17, although nearly half of the chapters in Distinction II are given over to a discussion of the reasons for abstaining from fornication; Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis: The Life of St Hugh of Lincoln*, Decima L. Douie and Hugh Farmer eds, 2 vols, London, 1961, 1.9; Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Chastity*, trans. Elizabeth Connor, intro. Charles Dumont, Michigan, 1990, 1.17.50; and Anselm of Canterbury, *Volume Three: Two Letters Concerning Roscelin, The Incarnation of the Word, Why God Became a Man, The Virgin Conception and Original Sin, The Procession of the Holy Spirit, Three Letters on the Sacraments*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, Toronto, 1976, p. 148.

divine, with the ordinary man experiencing a supernatural encounter.¹⁶¹ Adam's account of the spiritual castration of Hugh of Lincoln serves as an apt example, especially because it highlighted the idea that the battle against lust was a continual one and only the singularly pious were eventually rid of the devil's torments. Adam recounted the story which was told to him by Hugh during his last illness. On the continual temptation Hugh faced, Adam asked:

What cause could there be that a man already about forty, with a body well tamed by his many austerities and a heart purified by assiduous meditation and continuous contemplative prayer, what cause could there be, I repeat, that such a man should suddenly be handed over to an angel of Satan to be chastised by the thorns of the flesh until he almost despaired of his life?¹⁶²

This is not a battle which Arnulf apparently faced and he seems to have got off rather lightly compared to Hugh. Adam recounted the moment when Hugh was cured of his temptation. He was visited by the recently-dead prior of the Carthusian monastery, St Basil, who upon hearing Hugh's distress at the carnal assault visited on him by the devil, proceeded to 'cut open his bowels with a knife which he seemed to be holding in his hand, and extracting something resembling red hot cinders, he flung it out of the cell a long distance away'.¹⁶³ Clearly, Goswin related a far less stimulating account of Arnulf's delivery from carnal temptation. He simply stated that, upon being seized by temptation, Arnulf was rescued by 'the Lord's proffering him the helping hand of his Grace'.¹⁶⁴ No battles, no arrows fired by the enemy, no angels bearing knives and no mystical castration make for a rather dull explanation of Arnulf's sexual piety, and it is abundantly clear that this narrative by Goswin was not focused on a battle for purity, as many others were. This is the most curious aspect of the *vita*; apart from his desire to suffer as Christ had, we are offered no recognizable explanation for Arnulf's austerities.

¹⁶¹ Damian, *Letters*, 86; *Gem. Eccl.*, II.17; *Dia. Mir.*, 4.97.

¹⁶² Adam of Eynsham, *Vita Sancti Hugonis*, 2.2. [Quid enim potuit esse causae, in homine jam circiter quadragenario, jam corpus portanti contritione multiplici pervalide edomitum, jam cor habenti meditatione defacata, necnon et oratione quam continua tam et pura mundissimum; quid, inquam, habuit, aut in hoc quid potuit esse causae, ut repente traderetur angelo Satanse, stimulis carnis colaphizandus usque ad desperationem pene vitae suae? (Dimock, pp. 55-56)]

¹⁶³ Adam of Eynsham, *Vita Sancti Hugonis*, 2.2. [Moxque patefactis novacula, quam manu tenere videbatur, visceribus ejus, quasi strumam igneam inde visus est exsecuisse, et longius extra cellam projecisse: dataque benedictione, medicus discessit. (Dimock, p. 58)]

¹⁶⁴ *VArn.*, I.1d. [Ea hora tam valida carnis tentatione correptus est ut pene lapsus fuisset in peccati voraginem nisi Dominus gratiae suae manum ei porrexisset, qui servos suos non patitur tentari supra quam possint, sed facit cum tentatione etiam proventum ut possint sustinere.]

McGuire also maintains that Arnulf's punishment of his flesh reflected his abhorrence of its sexualized nature.¹⁶⁵ McGuire cites a passage from the *vita* in which Arnulf lays bare his thoughts about his body:

The foe for me is this flesh of mine, a foe more formidable for being closer at hand! Beast of burden, indeed it is, needing to be jabbed with spikes and shoved, or it will laze in its lewdness and drag me to the whirlpool of death. And so I intend to keep stirring up against it wars ever new, wars ever fresh.¹⁶⁶

Although there is no doubt that the flesh was responsible for 'lewdness', this was only up to a point. I believe this passage speaks more clearly of an overwhelming loathing of the fleshy prison which one must bear until death provides freedom for the soul. The concept of *contemptus mundi* was popular with the reformers of this period, and it became popularized in a work written by Lotario dei Segni, later to become Pope Innocent III.¹⁶⁷ His work, *De Miseria Conditionis Humane*, presented a bleak picture of human existence and he opened his work by saying, '[w]ith tears I might consider what man is made of, what man does, what man will be. Man is indeed formed from earth, conceived in sin, born to pain. . . . He becomes fuel for fire, food for worms, a mass of putridness'.¹⁶⁸ When reading Arnulf's comments concerning his own 'beast of burden,' I believe he was engaging with a world-view where '[man] endures the world as a place of exile and the body as in a prison'.¹⁶⁹ Consequently, Arnulf treated his body with the contempt it deserved and this, coupled with his desire to endure the Passion of Christ, the man who endured the ultimate punishment, produced the behaviour so assiduously documented by Goswin.

Arnulf's exhortations to himself to be more manly lay at the heart of his activities, and the more Arnulf punished himself, the more able he was to repel any temptation, and therefore 'endure and transcend his pain, and . . . become more like Christ'.¹⁷⁰ Although McGuire's argument for the motivations of Arnulf represent one aspect of medieval religious life, the battle against lust, I feel that this *vita* speaks of an

¹⁶⁵ McGuire, 'Self-Denial and Self-Assertion', p. 245, n.13.

¹⁶⁶ *VArn.*, I.3f. [Nequaquam, inquit ille, nequaquam ad effectum perducetur huiusmodi persuasio, cum caro mea hostis meus sit, tanto magis mihi formidandus quanto magis mihi vicinior est. Jumentum carnis meae stimulis pungi & actari necesse est ne lasciviat & me pertrahat in mortis voraginem, & ideo nova adhuc illi bella suscitare propono.]

¹⁶⁷ Robert E. Lewis, 'Introduction', in Lotario dei Segni, *De Miseria Conditionis Humane*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, Athens, 1978, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶⁸ Lotario dei Segni, *De Miseria Conditionis Humane*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, Athens, 1978, 1. [Consideravi ergo cum lacrymis de quo factus sit homo: quid faciat homo, quid facturus sit homo. Sane formatus de terra, conceptus in culpa, natus ad poenam, agit prava quae non licent, turpia quae non decent, vana quae non expediunt, fiet cibus ignis, esca vermis, massa putredinis. (PL 217, cols 0702b-0702c)]

¹⁶⁹ Lotario dei Segni, *De Miseria*, 17. [Sustinet saeculum tanquam exsilium, clausus in corpore tanquam in carcere. (PL 217, col. 0712a)]

¹⁷⁰ Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues', p. 194.

individual who sought to undertake suffering for the sins of others, thereby claiming a closer relationship with Christ.¹⁷¹ In this respect, Arnulf is very similar to Christina, yet their bodies have taken them in different directions.

Christina's female body – weak, porous, earth-bound – was, in contrast to Arnulf's bleeding, festering, male form, completely unaffected by her asceticism, according to her *vita*. Christina seemed able to starve, boil, drown, burn, stretch, and break herself without coming to any physical harm; what pain she did experience was to her soul.¹⁷² Thomas de Cantimpré makes no issue of Christina's weaker female form, except when it provides her with nourishment and is endowed with supernatural power. On two occasions, Thomas described incidents when God answered Christina's prayers for assistance. In the first, shortly after her resurrection, Christina had been captured by the people of the town and, with God's assistance, had 'escaped and fled into remote desert forests and there lived in trees after the manner of birds'.¹⁷³ Her prayers for sustenance were answered in a remarkable way.

Without delay, when she turned her eyes to herself, she saw that the dry paps of her virginal breasts were dripping sweet milk against the very law of nature. Wondrous thing! Unheard of in all the centuries since the incomparable Mother of God! Using the dripping liquid as food, she was nourished for nine weeks from her fruitful but virginal breasts.¹⁷⁴

This miraculous lactation was repeated when Christina was captured and bound for the third (and final) time by her sisters and the people of the village. Restrained by a heavy yoke which cause grievous wounds, and fed 'much bread and little water,' Christina's breasts produced a clear oil which she used to flavour her bread and soothe her wounds.¹⁷⁵ It was this miracle of lactation which convinced her persecutors that Christina was indeed gifted with 'Divine Will,' and they begged her forgiveness and allowed her to go.¹⁷⁶ On another occasion, Christina made her escape from the

¹⁷¹ *VAm.*, I.3b. [Cum autem sacrificium hujusmodi Domino saepius offerret, aequo animo saevientium ictus virgarum ferebat, ostendens verum se esse discipulum Domini & Magistri sui, qui sanctissimam carnem suam flagellis laniandam praebuit.]

¹⁷² *VCM*, 1.10, 11, 12, 13; 2.16, 25.

¹⁷³ *VCM*, 1.9. [. . . nocte quadam adjuta a Domino, vinculis & compendius solutis evasit, fugitque in remotis deserti silvis, & ibi in arboribus avium vivebat. (AASS, p. 652)]

¹⁷⁴ *VCM*, 1.9. [Nec more: ad se reflectens oculos, videt aridas mammas virginei pectoris sui contra ipsa naturae jura lactis stillare dulcedinem. Mira res, & post incomparabilem Christi Virginem Matrem cunctis seculis inaudita. Stillantem igitur liquorem in cibum sumens, novem hebdomadibus proprio virginei lactis ubere nutritia est. (AASS, p. 652)]

¹⁷⁵ *VCM*, 2.19. [Virginea enim ubera ejus clarissimiolei liquorem coeperunt effluere. Quem illa in condimentum siccis panis assumens pro pulmento habebat, & pro unguento; liniebatque ex eo vulnera membrorum suorum putrescentium. (AASS, p. 654)]

¹⁷⁶ *VCM*, 2.19. [Quod ibi sorores ejus & amici viderunt, coeperunt flere, nihilque ulterius divinae voluntati in Christinae miraculis renitentes, eam solverunt a vinculis, veniamque prostrati de injura postulantem, liberam dimiserunt. (AASS, p. 654)]

dungeon in which she was imprisoned by taking a stone and throwing it with such force as to break a 'hole in the wall. . . . Thus her spirit, which had been restrained more than was just, flew with her body in its weak flesh through the empty air like a bird because "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"¹⁷⁷. In these instances, Christina's body became more powerful, as it was the object through which Christ's miracles were performed. Christina is not suffering as a martyr-saint, nor is she in the grip of carnal temptation and her patterns of behaviour are all too familiar; what is important is the impetus driving those behaviours, which is the appropriation of other's purgatorial suffering.

There is a final key difference in the way of life of these two religious individuals which must be taken into account, and that is regulation. As a Cistercian lay brother, Arnulf was subject to the rules of his community whilst Christina was, for want of a better term, a free spirit. Regulation implies that a person is subject to the rules of the community in which he or she resides, and the regulation imposed on Arnulf and Christina manifested itself in the relationships which developed between each individual and their communities. I will address these relationships more fully in the following chapter, but it is important at this point to briefly touch upon regulation and its relationship to the ascetic practices of Arnulf and Christina which were evident in the initial stages of their *vitae*.

One of Arnulf's more bizarre behaviours was his insistence on wearing a vest made from the pelts of hedgehogs. He relied on sheep-herders and a 'familiar friend' to supply him with enough pelts to construct a garment which he would wear under his hairshirt.¹⁷⁸ Goswin's celebration of Arnulf's actions is, however, in direct opposition to rule twenty-two of the *Usus Conversorum*, which expressly forbid the wearing of the 'skins of woodland animals: no cat skins, no rabbit skins, no squirrel skins or miniver or others of this sort, even if on one or another occasion they are to be had; for their purchase is absolutely forbidden'.¹⁷⁹ It is clear that the rationale behind

¹⁷⁷ VCM, 2.18. [Claustris ergo cellarii spiritus ejus arctari se sentiens, arrepto saxo de area cellarii, in spiritu vehement murum pervium fecit; & us utamur exemplo, velut fagitta, quae quanto fortius in arcu stringitur, tanto robustius jaculatur, sic spiritus ejus ultra quam justum erat arctatus (quia Ubi Spiritus Domini, ibi libertas) cum ipso carnae molis corpore per aeris vacuum instar volucris volaffe perihibetur. (AASS, p. 653)]

¹⁷⁸ VArn., I.6a-b. Goswin informs the reader that Arnulf required eleven pelts to make his vest – five for the back and six for the front and sides; 1.6b.

¹⁷⁹ Cistercian Lay Brothers: Twelfth-Century Usages with Related Texts, Chrysogonus Waddell ed., Brecht, 2000, 22. [Pelles syluestres non operentur fratres nostri: non catinas, non coninas, non uarias uel grisias

this rule was the prevention of comfort, not discomfort, but perhaps this is how Goswin is able to circumvent any approbation that may have been sent Arnulf's way. There is no doubt that a hedgehog would fall under the description 'woodland animal,' yet Goswin made no attempt to downplay Arnulf's actions; indeed, he justified their use by reminding the reader that 'Saint Benedict, the Father of Monks, when discovered by shepherds as he lay in hidden in a grotto, was himself dressed in animal pelts'.¹⁸⁰ Goswin was quick to claim that he was not presuming to compare Arnulf with the blessed Father, but his point in relating the story was to highlight the severity of Arnulf's pelt, suggesting that anyone given the choice 'would certainly choose Benedict's [pelt] and would spurn and anathematize those of Arnulf'.¹⁸¹ What is difficult to know is the extent to which the *Usus Conversorum* was known and/or utilized by the abbots. Goswin himself makes no reference to the *Usus Conversorum* whatsoever; however, his comments addressing concerns that the reader might have, as to the latitude Arnulf was allowed by the abbots, do suggest that he was aware that Arnulf's mortifications were in excess of ordinary behaviour.¹⁸²

Christina resided within a completely different realm of regulation. She was not a member of a regular community, hence she was bound, initially, by the behaviour her local urban community deemed to be acceptable; and the reaction of the inhabitants of Saint-Trond, including her sisters, was unmistakably negative. Christina's sisters and friends tried and succeeded on four occasions in capturing her, fearing that 'she was possessed by demons'.¹⁸³ On each occasion, Christina was securely bound by chains, only to escape with the divine assistance of God. The final two incidents are somewhat disturbing in their brutality and illustrate two interesting points: firstly, the lengths the townspeople were prepared to go to in order to restrain the apparently mad Christina; and secondly, the abject embarrassment of her friends and family at the antics of Christina. The penultimate attempt at capture resulted in Christina's leg

seu alias eiusmodi, etiam si qualibet occasione habere contigeret; nam emere omnino licet. (Waddell, p. 77)]

¹⁸⁰ *VArn.*, I.6d. [Referente beato Gregorio Papa didicimus sanctissimum monachorum Patrem Benedictum in specu latitantem inventum fuisse a pastoribus pellibus vestitum. . .]

¹⁸¹ *VArn.*, I.6d. [. . . cui quamvis comparare non praesumamus martyrem nostrum, dicimus tamen pelles ejus pellibus ejusdem beati Patris longe fuisse dissimiles. Et certe si pelles utriusque hodie deberent a multis ad vestiendum eligi, omnes (ut arbitramur) eligerent pelles S. Benedicti & asperrando anathematizarent pelles Fratris Arnulfi.]

¹⁸² *VArn.*, I.6c. The four abbots under whom Arnulf lived were Charles, Conrad, Walter, and William.

¹⁸³ *VCM*, 2.17. [Pro his hujusmodi sorores ejus, & amici erubescerent non modice, eo quod eam homines plenam daemonibus reputarent . . . (AASS, p. 653). Also see, 1.9, 2.18, and 2.19.]

being broken 'with a cudgel' by the 'wicked man' sent to capture her.¹⁸⁴ In order to treat her injury, the doctor 'bound her firmly to a pillar in a dungeon,' lest she escape again.¹⁸⁵ However, with God's assistance she broke through the wall of the dungeon, only to be captured for the fourth and final time. At this point her sisters restrained Christina by locking her into a heavy yoke which caused her limbs to fester, and only feeding her bread and water. It was not until Christina began 'lactating' oil from her breasts which she used to dress her wounds that her protagonists recognized the divine intervention of the Lord and released her.¹⁸⁶ Despite the almost singular focus on her body, it is Christina's soul which is at the root of her asceticism. Thomas's account of her body and its incredible imperviousness merely highlighted the intensity of her soul's suffering, and ultimately did not provide the focus for her spirituality or her humanity.

It appears, then, that neither Arnulf nor Christina engaged in ascetic practices in order to quell lust or induce an alternative state of consciousness; rather, their asceticism was focused on sin. The precedent for sacrificing one's body for the sins of others is, of course, illustrated in the life of Christ. The reason for Arnulf's self-abnegation resides in his desire, according to his biographer Goswin, to offer himself in sacrifice to the Lord, 'who had once yielded his own most holy flesh to a similar mangling and flogging'.¹⁸⁷ Arnulf desires to forget his body and 'despise earthly things . . . hovering aloft in love for the Eternal,' and yet, unlike Christina, Arnulf is not considered a mystic.¹⁸⁸ This is a remarkably feminine description of Arnulf's spirituality if we consider that the notion of *imitatio Christi* was to become a fundamental feature of female spirituality as the thirteenth century progressed, particularly amongst women considered to be mystics.¹⁸⁹

Christina's life is, in a sense, a photographic negative of Christ's story, which focuses on his ministry before his resurrection. Thomas de Cantimpré's narrative is completely concerned with Christina's spiritual exploits after her resurrection. Christina is left in no doubt as to her mission when her soul is returned to her apparently lifeless body. While on her tour of purgatory and hell, Christina comments

¹⁸⁴ VCM, 2.17.

¹⁸⁵ VCM, 2.17.

¹⁸⁶ VCM, 2.19.

¹⁸⁷ VArn., I.3b.

¹⁸⁸ VArn., I.3b. [. . . terrena despiciere, coelestia desiderare, & in aeternitatis amore suspendi.]

¹⁸⁹ See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, in particular essay 4, 'Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century', pp. 119-150; McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, in particular chapter 5, 'Three Great Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch, Mechthild, and Marguerite', pp. 199-265.

that, in both places she recognized 'many dead men whom I had previously known in the flesh'.¹⁹⁰ Christina's ability to recognize sinners who needed to repent before their impending death was to become her most potent spiritual weapon, one she shared with Marie D'Oignies.¹⁹¹ It was also to become a focal point in her life, as she set about fulfilling her task of aiding sinners through purgatory.

Asceticism has a long, rich history in Christianity. As a substitute for martyrdom, fasting and flagellation became markers of the super-austere warrior for Christ. We are often reminded by medieval authors, such as Caesarius of Heisterbach, that we should marvel at the unique capacity for suffering in Christ of a particular holy individual, but that we should not try to emulate their deeds; that is not the purpose of what they do. Christina's purgatorial suffering and Arnulf's imitation of the Passion illustrate two aspects of a Christian belief system which fully recognized the interconnectedness of the body and the soul. Asceticism plays an important role in the discussion of mystics simply because it is a highly visible aspect of medieval female religious lives. Modern scholarship, driven by feminist theory, has sought to reconcile this somatic imbalance by suggesting that this fierce asceticism was a deliberate ploy on the part of these women in reaction to the patriarchal Church. This ignores the religiosity of these women and the long history of asceticism as a positive action for both religious men and women. The argument is also put forward that this deliberate, self-inflicted punishment was a means to initiate divine contact by forcing the individual into another state of consciousness. Again, this is another argument which rests upon modern theories, in this case, our understanding of physiology and psychology.

The physical austerities inflicted upon Christina, both at her own hand and that of others, were intended to remind the audience that purgatory was close by and repentance of the utmost importance. As relatively new concepts, purgatory and repentance required vindication to a wider Christian audience, and it is difficult to contend that Christina represents mysticism in any sense. She may have been blessed with visions of purgatory, hell, and heaven, but in no way does her life provide any grounding in mystical theology, or even simple instruction as to how a devout person might replicate her experiences. Arnulf displays an ascetic motivation which is more

¹⁹⁰ *VCM*, 1.6.

¹⁹¹ *VMO*, 2.67; *VCM*, 2.26-27.

christological than Christina's, and also more in accordance with a monastic tradition which we can clearly trace back to the Desert Fathers. I will make the same argument for Arnulf, that we cannot consider his austerities to have any mystical purpose; however, it is easier for me to make this argument, as Arnulf is not considered a mystic in the first instance, unlike Christina.

I ask the reader to remember the young monk who wept upon seeing Arnulf's bloodied, freshly-flogged body. He sought conversation with Arnulf, and this suggests that Arnulf had more to offer his wider community, rather than simply being viewed as the monastery's local 'curiosity.' Spiritual and friendship networks were important in the developing Cistercian movement, and Arnulf's intense spirituality was not questioned by the monks, clerics, and various other religious and secular individuals who sought his advice. It is to these relationships that we turn now.

6. Beholding Christ and the Maintenance of Masculinity: Tenth- and Eleventh-Century Religious Men and their Visionary Experiences

So he lifted his eyes and *saw the heavens open wide* (Ezek. 1:1); and then, in such measure as mortals are allowed it, he saw the choirs of all the saints. . . . Lucid and distinct was his gaze as he took in their several orders and saw how refulgent they were, how incalculably bright.¹

Introduction

While Arnulf's ascetic excesses have attracted the attention of modern scholars, his vibrant spiritual life has been little considered. I cannot claim unreservedly that this is due to the fact that Arnulf was a man, but I do believe his gender plays an important part in this neglect. Visionary experience has so often been considered a feminine aspect of medieval spirituality, with the focus of the academy clearly on female religious figures from this period. This is not to suggest that medieval religious men did not have visionary experiences, but, both medieval primary literature, and the exegesis of that by modern authors, leaves the distinct impression that the focus was firmly upon women, and that women were the predominant protagonists in this kind of spiritual experience. Medieval attitudes towards the female body and intellect precipitated the view that women were more susceptible to external influences on their bodies.

The works of Caroline Walker Bynum have reinforced this notion that women recognized the advantages their somatic frailty afforded them and thus developed an affective form of spirituality which men could only aspire to.² In a different reading, which focuses on hagiographic writings from the monastery of Villers, Martha

¹ *VArn.*, II.6c. [Quo statim sursum oculos attollente, aperti sunt ei coeli and quantum hominibus adhuc in hac mortalitate consistentibus datur intueri, vidit omnes choros omnium Sanctorum: Patriarcharum, Prophetarum, Apostolorum, Martyrum, Confessorum, Virginum ac Monachorum, insuper & choros Angelorum, quorum omnium Ordines claritate inaestimabili fulgentes lucide & distincte intuebatur.]

² The argument that the female body was the instigator of the female-centric affective spirituality is best discussed in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Berkeley, 1987, and idem. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York, 1991. Also see Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Foreword', in Catherine M. Mooney ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, Philadelphia, 1999, p. ix.

Newman attributes the 'binary separation of male and female spirituality . . . [to] literary and social status'.³ Whether the distinction was somatic or social, examples of male visionary experience, and the reaction to that, provide us with further indications that male mystic behaviour in the high medieval period was highly mediated and influenced by a millennium of controlled and constrained religious expectations.

Were visions and other supernatural phenomena considered feminine in the high medieval period? By that I mean, did the susceptibility to such events imply that an individual was somatically more porous, or endured a weaker consciousness? These traits of porousness and intellectual weakness were considered feminine by medieval authors and are important vectors in the visionary equation. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, the notion that weakness was, in fact, a form of power, is summed up thus: 'And he said to me: my grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity' (2 Cor. 12:9). The 'voice from Heaven' which spoke to Hildegard of Bingen asserted that:

The person [Hildegard] whom I have chosen and whom I have miraculously stricken as I have willed, I have placed among great wonders, beyond the measure of the ancient people who saw in Me many secrets; but I have laid her low on the earth, that she might no set herself up in arrogance of mind.⁴

To be penetrated by the light or flame of mystic knowledge meant that an individual needed to be open to the possibility of this happening. Feminine frailty gave women a head-start, and as I noted in the previous chapter, some religious men took it upon themselves to artificially create that same physical weakness – thence vulnerability – by their ascetic actions.

The issue with this, of course, is the notion that men wished or needed to become more like women. My contention is that, for religious men, this was a near impossible expectation, both in their own minds and in the minds of their contemporaries, including women. Further clouding this already opaque view is the concern about evil influences upon visions, an issue which Augustine spent some time in considering.⁵ To be open to divine visitations must also have meant an individual was open to evil invasions, further casting a shadow over the credibility of such occurrences.

³ Martha G. Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues: Monks, Lay Brothers, and Women in Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Saints' Lives', in Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack eds, *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 2003, p. 183.

⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, New York, 1990, Declaration.

⁵ Barbara Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture', *Speculum*, 80, 1, January 2005, p. 7.

The discernment of spirits has a long history in Christianity. The phrase—discernment of spirits—is not a straight-forward one. Early Christian writers focused on two kinds of discernment: the first being the ability to see the spirits of men (i.e., whether their spirits were good or bad); and the second being the ability to recognise supernatural spirits which could affect the souls of men. Chrysostom makes a clear reference to the first of these different abilities in his *Epistles on Homilies from 1 Corinthians*. As Joseph Lienhard notes, Chrysostom claims that the ‘Corinthian Christians received discernment of spirits, “so as to discern and know who is speaking by a clean spirit and who by an unclean”.’⁶ Chrysostom’s second reflection on this topic highlights the concerns surrounding false prophets. He writes: “What is ‘discernings of spirits’? It is knowing who is a spiritual man [*pneumatikos*] and who is not; who is a prophet and who a deceiver”.’⁷

Origen approached the matter from a different perspective, claiming that good and evil spirits abounded, and that it was the ability to distinguish one from the other which was important:

From this we learn to discern clearly when the soul is moved by the presence of a spirit of the better kind, namely, when it suffers no mental disturbance or aberration whatsoever as a result of the immediate inspiration and does not lose the free judgment of the will. Such, for example, were the prophets and apostles, who attended upon the divine oracles without any mental disturbance.⁸

To gain the gift of discernment, Athanasius maintained that ‘a man has much need of prayer and self-discipline,’ adding that with this gift he would ‘be able to know their characteristics—which of them are less evil, which more; what is the nature of the special pursuit of each of them, and how each of them is overcome and cast out’.⁹ Tom Licence notes that ‘hagiographers . . . had frequently invested their subjects with second sight: specifically either the ability to see invisible demons or to spot visible ones in disguise’.¹⁰ By the twelfth century, this ‘gift’ had taken on a different dimension, with prophecy, demon vision, and seeing into the hearts of other men less associated with ‘complex spiritual discipline’ and more associated with the less

⁶ Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistolam primam ad Corintios*, 29, PG, 61, 240, cited in Joseph T. Lienhard, ‘On “Discernment of Spirits” in the Early Church’, *Theological Studies*, 41, 3, Sept. 1980, p. 509.

⁷ Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistolam*, 29, cited in Lienhard, ‘On “Discernment of Spirits”’, p. 509.

⁸ Origen, *De principis*, trans. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen, On First Principles*, Gloucester, 1973, 3, 3, 4, p. 22 cited in Lienhard, ‘On “Discernment of Spirits”’, p. 512.

⁹ Athanasius, *The Life of St Antony*, in M. E. Keenan trans., *Early Christian Biographies*, New York, 1952, 22, cited in Lienhard, ‘On “Discernment of Spirits”’, p. 515.

¹⁰ Tom Licence, ‘The Gift of Seeing Demons in Early Cistercian Spirituality’, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 39, 1, 2004, p. 51.

structured experience of the lay visionary.¹¹ Rather, monastic men now sought to construct an ‘inner experience’ which was centered on contemplation, whilst trying to conform to a rigid monastic model of living.¹²

The growth of Cistercian monasticism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was central to the development of a constructed spiritual experience. Like many other facets of the medieval landscape, the long extant institution of the monastery was not exempt from the effects of reform. The turn of the twelfth century saw the two major tributaries of Benedictine monasticism dominate the landscape and while the great monastery at Cluny had perhaps reached its high water mark in terms of its influence, the flow of monks from the abbey of Cîteaux had begun to increase in volume and speed.¹³ The reformed monks wanted to return to a life that was more focused on the Benedictine Rule and its balance of work and contemplation.

Cistercian monasticism embodied cataphatic mysticism—that is, the pursuit of the light and image of the Lord—a pursuit which Gueric of Igny encapsulated in this section from a sermon: ‘So that you may light all these lamps for yourself, my brothers, come to the source of the light and be enlightened.’¹⁴ He also suggests in ‘The Second Sermon for Advent (No. 2)’, that the experience of heaven is open to all when he intimates to the assembled brothers that

Unless I am mistaken, you know from experience what I am talking about, for . . . your minds have been swept aloft as thought borne on clouds, and on occasion have been carried so far beyond that they have been favoured with some glimpse of the glory of the Lord.¹⁵

This wholly positive experience spoke of a spirituality which demanded openness and the constant assessment of the individual’s inner self. It also demanded an approach to spirituality which encompassed what Bernard McGinn calls the ‘essential themes of medieval monastic mysticism: *solitudo/silentium; lectio/meditatio; oratio/contemplatio*’.¹⁶

¹¹ Barbara Newman, ‘What Did It Mean to Say “I Saw”?’ p. 5.

¹² Barbara Newman, ‘What Did It Mean to Say “I Saw”?’ p. 3; Licence, ‘The Gift of Seeing Demons’, p. 50.

¹³ Constance Berman contests the timeline for the development of Cistercian monasticism suggesting that colonization was less likely than amalgamation. See, Constance Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Philadelphia, 2000. Also see, Brian Golding, ‘Hermits, Monks and Women in Twelfth-Century France and England: The Experience of Obazine and Sempringham’, in Judith Loades ed., *Monastic Studies: The Continuity of Tradition*, Bangor, 1990, p. 127.

¹⁴ Gueric of Igny, ‘From the First Sermon for the Purification’, in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, trans. and ed. Pauline Matarasso, Harmondsworth, 1993, p. 133.

¹⁵ Gueric of Igny, ‘The Second Sermon for Advent (No. 2)’, in *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, trans. and ed. Pauline Matarasso, Harmondsworth, 1993, p. 131.

¹⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*, vol. 2, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1994, p. 127. Also see Jean Leclercq, ‘Prayer and Contemplation. II. Western’, in Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Leclercq eds, *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, New York, 1985, p. 423.

This construction of spiritual discipline as envisaged and encouraged in the monastery is problematic because it does not account for the visionary who exists outside of the institution. As I have illustrated in previous chapters, holy men in the high medieval period encountered pressure to resume their place within the boundaries of the monastic or ecclesiastic institution, thereby subjecting them to increased scrutiny and control. I argue that this was not an environment which encouraged difference.

‘What does it mean to say “I saw”?’¹⁷

Visionary Experience

Much like the extreme asceticism discussed in the previous chapter, the visionary elements of medieval mysticism stretch our modern sensibilities to the maximum. Barbara Newman’s question of medieval mystics evokes the difficulty we have in accessing the true meaning of medieval visionary culture.¹⁸ When we consider the visions of a lay brother such as Arnulf, the question becomes more intriguing. Arnulf was not considered a visionary mystic in the mold of his female contemporaries, such as Ida of Nivelles and Lutgard of Aywières.¹⁹ This is further complicated by the textual remnants left by a holy person. Hildegard of Bingen and Rupert of Deutz both left a vast written corpus, but neither wrote to inform their audience of their visionary experiences—rather, their experiences informed and authorized their theology.²⁰ Bernard McGinn asks, ‘is mysticism to be identified with visionary experience? To put it more precisely: Must every mystic be a visionary? Is every visionary to be considered a mystic?’²¹ Of course, as I have been arguing throughout this work, the question as to who might be called a mystic is tangled in any number of threads, one

¹⁷ Barbara Newman, ‘What Did It Mean to Say “I Saw”?’ p. 1; Jeremy Hale, ‘Hell on Earth: Encountering Devils in the Middle Ages’, in Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills eds, *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, Cardiff, 2003, p. 181.

¹⁸ Works on visionary experiences include D. D. R. Owen, *The Vision of Hell: Infernal Journeys in Medieval French Literature*, New York, 1971; Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception*, Berkeley, 1976; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart, 1981; Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, 1984; and Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1992.

¹⁹ See, for example, Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*, London, 2001.

²⁰ Barbara Newman, ‘Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation’, *Church History*, 54, 2, June 1985, p. 166; McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 333, 336.

²¹ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 326. McGinn lists three types of religious individual who experience otherworldly events: the mystic, who has some sense experience of God; the mystical author, who writes about how to attain such an experience; and the visionary, who ‘see’ many different types of supernatural phenomena; McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 327.

being gender, and I want now to investigate the problem by considering male and female visionary experiences to determine if they represent compatible or oppositional views. I also want to consider the role of gender in moderating male responses to visions, both from the objective and subjective perspective. Why would the hermit Guthlac or the theologian Rupert of Deutz choose to keep their visions a secret?

When Goswin wrote of Arnulf's visionary experiences, what was his ultimate motive in reporting them? As Newman notes, '[s]cholars of spirituality and gender have examined visionary women as a group, trying to explain why the great majority of medieval women writers known to us were visionaries'.²² The literature on male visionary experience focuses on late medieval religious men such as Meister Eckhart (d. 1328), Richard Rolle (d. 1349), Henry Suso (d. 1366), and Henry Mande (d. 1431).²³ The examination of their lives appears to rest upon a construction of mysticism generated by both medieval biographers and modern scholars of mysticism. This is astutely summed up by Mathilde van Dijk who, when discussing the biography of Henry Mande, observes that his biographer Johannes Busch 'fits him [Mande] out with all kinds of characteristics that in today's scholarship are usually supposed to be typical for female visionaries'.²⁴

The questions surrounding supernatural events such as visions, miracles, and prophecy have, as with many other difficult topics, engaged the minds of Christian theologians and natural philosophers from the earliest centuries of the Christian religion. For a number of holy men, their first otherworldly or divine experience occurred when they were in the midst of a personal crisis of faith. As we have already seen, Augustine of Hippo's conversion experience was fraught with self-doubt and

²² Barbara Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"?' pp. 1-2.

²³ David Sanderlin, 'Faith and Ethical Reasoning in the Mystical Theology of St John of the Cross: A Reasonable Christian Mysticism', *Religious Studies*, 25, 3, 1989, pp. 317-333; Barbara Newman, 'Henry Suso and the Medieval Devotion to Christ the Goddess', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 2, 1, Spring 2002, pp. 1-14; Albrecht Classen, 'Meister Eckhart's Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century', *Mystics Quarterly*, 29, 1-2, March/June, 2003, pp. 6-23; Meri Heinonen, 'Henry Suso and the Divine Knighthood', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis eds, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Cardiff, 2004, pp. 79-92; Louise Nelstrop, 'The Merging of Eremitic and "Affectivist" Spirituality in Richard Rolle's Reshaping of Contemplation', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 35, 2004, pp. 289-309; Mathilde van Dijk, 'Henry Mande: The Making of a Male Visionary in Devotio Moderna', in Mathilde van Dijk and Renee Nip eds, *Saints, Scholars, and Politicians: Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies*, Turnhout, 2005, pp. 133-151; Nancy Hudson, 'Divine Immanence: Nicholas of Cusa's Understanding of Theophany and the Retrieval of a 'New' Model of God', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 56, 2, October 2005, pp. 450-470; Annie Sutherland, 'Biblical Text and Spiritual Experience in the English Epistles of Richard Rolle', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 56, 227, 2005, pp. 695-711; Bernard McGinn, "'The Traktat Von Der Minne": A Chapter in the Reception of Meister Eckhart's Mysticism', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 92, 1, April 2006, pp. 177-192.

²⁴ van Dijk, 'Henry Mande', p. 134.

temptation. Augustine's experience is not uncommon and as we move forward through time, we find that a crisis of faith often precipitates this kind of experience for religious men. The hermit Guthlac was 'anxiously contemplating mortal affairs in earnest meditation, when suddenly, marvellous to tell, a spiritual flame, as though it had pierced his breast, began to burn in this man's heart'.²⁵ This experience compelled Guthlac to devote his life to the Church. The ascetic monk, Romuald of Ravenna, could not be convinced to devote himself fully to the Church until he had had two separate visions of St Apollinaris and a final experience where 'the Holy Spirit set his heart on fire with love, and he burst into tears'.²⁶ As a final example, we can look to the theologian, Rupert of Deutz, who, as a young monk, struggled to reconcile his traditional faith with the reforming movement of the time. His crisis of vocation led to a series of visions which precipitated his ordination and authorized his career as a theologian.²⁷ These few examples illustrate the importance of the visionary experience for holy men in reaffirming their desire or decision to leave behind the temptations of the world.

Can we claim that gender plays an important role in this aspect of spirituality? If we turn to the lives of Robert Arbrissel, Robert of la Chaise-Dieu, and Stephen of Obazine, we find this conversion-crisis narrative absent. Rather, these men were certain in their faith, and their lives display a spiritual progression which has much more in common with those of holy women such as Jutta of Disibodenberg, Marie D'Oignies, and Ida of Nivelles. There is a certainty about the actions of these holy men and women which renders the *vitae* genderless; they desired to leave the world and serve God. However, as their reputations for sanctity developed, these men were re-integrated into the institution, and while prophecy and miracle-performance continued to occur, visionary experience seemed strangely absent. Holy women who managed to escape marriage and men, continued to remain somewhat adjacent to the institution and they continued to be in a position to experience divine visitation.

²⁵ *VGuth.*, 18. [Itaque cum supradictus vir beatae memoriae Guthlac inter dubios volventis temporis eventos et atrás caliginosae vitae nébulas, fluctuantes inter saeculi gugites iactaretur, quandam nocte, dum fessa membra solitae quieti dimitteret et adsueto more vagabunda mente sollicitus curas mortales intenta meditatione cogitaret, mirum dictu! extemplo velut percussus pectore, spiritalis flamma omnia praecordia supra memorati viri incendere coepit. (Colgrave, p. 80)]

²⁶ *VRom.*, 2. [Dumque hoc quadam die post visionem attentius faceret, tanto mox divini amoris igne mentem illius Spiritus sanctus accendit, ut in fletum repente prorumperet, uberes lacrimarum rivos restringere non valeret, monachorum se pedibus prostratus advolveret, tradi sibi monachicum habitum inenarrabili desiderio flagitaret. (Tobacco, p. 18)]

²⁷ Rupert of Deutz, *De gloria et honore filii hominis super Mattheum*, ed. H. Haacke, CCCM 29, Turnhout, 1979, pp. 363-396.

Despite his lack of experience concerning visions, Augustine did propose a tripartite explanation of perception in the final book of his work *De Genesi ad Litteram*. In it, Augustine lists the lowest order of perception as ‘the visual (ordinary physical sight) through the visionary (spiritual or imaginative visions) to pure intuitive insight (the *visio intellectualis*, said to be imageless).’²⁸ Isidore of Seville (d. 636), archbishop and encyclopedist, included visions in his list of the seven kinds of prophecy: ‘The first kind is ecstasy (*ecstasis*). . . . The second kind is vision (*visio*). . . . The third kind is dream (*somnium*). . . . The fourth kind is through a cloud. . . . The fifth kind is a voice from heaven. . . . The sixth kind occurs when an oracle (*parabola*) is received. . . . The seventh kind is being filled (*repletio*) with the Holy Spirit, as with nearly all the prophets.’²⁹ He then presented further a three-part discussion of vision. Like Augustine, Isidore finds that visions can be perceived with the eyes, as ‘Moses saw the fire in the bush,’ with the imagination or the spirit, as ‘Isaiah saw God on the highest seat, not bodily but spiritually (Isaiah 6:1)’ and intuitively, as ‘the gifted Daniel saw with his mind what Belshazzar had seen with his body’.³⁰ This attempt to categorize experiences which were by their very nature ineffable or inexplicable illustrates the beginnings of an effort to systematize spiritual practice with the hope of replicating these experiences.³¹ We are left with a situation where religious men, especially those

²⁸ Barbara Newman, ‘What Did It Mean to Say “I Saw”?’ p. 6.

²⁹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, Jennifer A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, Cambridge, 2006, 7.8.33-36. [Prophitiae autem genera septem sunt. Primum genus ecstasies, quod est mentis excessus; sicut vidit Petrus vas illud summissum de caelo in stupore mentis cum variis animalibus. Secundum genus visio; sicut apud Esaiam dicentem (Esai. 6,1): ‘Vidi Dominum sedentem super solium excelsum.’ Tertium genus somnium; sicut Iacob subnixam in caelo scalam dormiens vidit. Quartum genus per nubeam; sicut ad Moysen et ad Iob post plagam loquitur Deus. Quintum genus vox de caelo; sicut ad Abraham sonuit dicens (Genes. 22, 12): ‘Ne incias manum tuam in puerum.’ Et ad Saulum in via (Act. 9, 4): ‘Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris?’ Sextum genus accepta parabola; sicut apud Salomonem in Proverbiis, et apud Balaam, cum evocaretur a Balac. Septimum genus repletio sancti Spiritus; sicut pene apud omnes prophetas. (Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, *Etymologiarum Sive Originam*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, Oxford, 1911)]

³⁰ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 7.8.37-41. [Alii tria genera visionum [esse] dixerunt. Vnum secundum oculos corporis; sicut vidit Abraham tres viros sub ilice Mambre, et Moyses ignem in rubo, et discipuli transfiguratum Dominum in monte inter Moysen et Heliam, et cetera huiusmodi. Alterum secundum spiritum, quo imaginamur ea quae per corpus sentimus; sicut vidit Petrus discum illum submitti de caelo cum variis animalibus, et sicut Esaias Deum in sede altissima non corporaliter, sed spiritaliter vidit. Non enim Deum forma corporea circumterminat, sed quemadmodum figurate, non proprie multa dicuntur, ita etiam figurate multa monstrantur. Tertium autem genus visionis est, quod neque corporeis sensibus, neque illa parte animae qua corporalium [rerum] imagines capiuntur, sed per intuitum mentis quo intellecta conspicitur veritas sicut Daniel praeditus mente vidit quod Balthasar viderat corpore, sine quo genere illa duo vel infructuosa sunt, vel etiam in errorem mittunt. Omnia tam en haec genera Spiritus sanctus moderator.]

³¹ Following are some examples of the unexplainable nature of visionary experiences: In a letter to Guibert of Gembloux, Hildegard noted that ‘what I behold in vision I cannot fully understand,’ Theodoric of Echternach, *The Life of Holy Hildegard*, 1.8. Rupert of Deutz, noted that ‘Human tongue cannot grasp it [vision] with words’, Rupert of Deutz, *De Gloria et Honore filii hominis super Mattheum*, 12, cited in McGinn,

in the monastery, were dictated to as to how spiritual experience is to occur, reinforcing the argument that religious men were constrained in their practice of spirituality.

The Cistercian monastic environment played an important role in this systematized approach to spiritual practice. Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St Thierry, Gueric of Igny, and Aelred of Rievaulx produced a corpus of work devoted to teaching monks 'to search the secrets of heaven and to discern by the light of the Holy Spirit things that are beyond the knowledge of man'.³² Bernard of Clairvaux provides an excellent example of the problem confronting historians who attempt to categorise their subject. Bernard is called an 'unlikely mystic' by Steven Fanning, due to his continual battle with Peter Abelard and his involvement in secular affairs.³³ Bernard McGinn sees Bernard of Clairvaux primarily as a mystic, particularly as an author of mystical texts.³⁴ This contradiction surrounding Bernard's mysticism is based entirely upon the myriad perceptions which abound when historians come to the study of medieval religious men. The book-jacket blurb of Cistercian Publication's *Bernard of Clairvaux on The Song of Songs* is a modern-day exercise in hagiography: 'Bernard . . . towered over the society of twelfth-century Europe. A brilliant preacher and a polished writer, he counselled kings and rebuked popes. He moved in the complicated affairs of men with a dexterity which brought him acclaim and adversaries, yet he exhorted Christians to turn from worldly affairs to serve God.'³⁵

The alliterative acclamation of Bernard by Frederick M. Jelly, writing in 1999, further enhances Bernard's status as a saint: 'Bernard's life was a magnificent manifestation of prayerful contemplation and apostolic activity, both within the monastery and throughout Christendom.'³⁶ These modern evocations of the saint

Growth of Mysticism, p. 329. Christina Mirabilis wished those around her to realise that, 'those tasks with which God will charge me are above understanding', *VCM*, 1.7. Marie D'Oignies, according to her biographer, could not explain what she had been speaking about during a rapture, *VMO*, 2.48. In the midst of a vision Arnulf of Villers 'saw' 'ineffable delights of the glory' and 'unutterable treasures of his glory', *VArn.*, 2.6e. The choir monk Abundus beheld a vision 'loftier than his soul's eye could grasp', *VAbn.*, 6c.

³² Pauline Matarasso, *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, trans. and ed. Pauline Matarasso, Harmondsworth, 1993, p. 127. Also see, McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, especially chapters 5-7; St Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Letters of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James, London, 1953, 390.

³³ Fanning, *Mystics*, p. 80.

³⁴ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 163.

³⁵ *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Song of Songs*, 4 vols, trans. Kilian Walsh, intro. M. Corneille Halfants, Kalamazoo, 1971.

³⁶ Frederick M. Jelly, 'The Christocentric Devotion to Mary in Saint Bernard of Clairvaux', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 34, 1, 1999, p. 89.

reflect what Adriaan Bredero terms 'the cultic evaluation of Bernard'.³⁷ It is this modern 'cultic' representation of Bernard which can cloud our investigation into Bernard's understanding of mysticism, not because the modern reader may be unable to suspend their disbelief at the notion of sanctity, but rather, as Bredero points out, because there is a danger in trying to fuse the cultic evaluation of Bernard with an historical assessment.³⁸ The key to Bredero's approach is the separation of the cultic figure from the historical, and I do not believe that this is an issue only in the historical and contemporary representations of Bernard.

To open this discussion on male spiritual behaviour, I want to examine the 'multimedia mystic' Hildegard of Bingen and the 'traditional black monk' Rupert of Deutz.³⁹ I elected to contrast Hildegard and Rupert because I believe their similarities outweigh their differences and we can gain some sense of how the cultic and the historical have become fused in some exceptional medieval individuals. Fanning attributed the 'multimedia' epithet to Hildegard on the basis of her exceptional literary, artistic, and musical output; but a closer inspection of Hildegard sees her displaying attributes which are less like the female mystics who follow her, and more like those of her male contemporaries. There are two key features of Hildegard's life which serve to highlight this commonality: her delay in acknowledging to anyone that she enjoyed spiritual visions; and her writing. This does not detract from Hildegard's important role in the history of women and religion, but it does serve to highlight a tendency towards the application of specific traits or actions as male or female. Hildegard's reluctance to expose her visionary experiences to the wider world was not borne out of a reluctance to do so because she was a woman; rather, as Barbara Newman notes, she was 'embarrassed'.⁴⁰ Hildegard was a young child of three when she had her first vision, seeing 'so great a light that [her] soul trembled'.⁴¹ Although Hildegard noted in her *vita* that from time to time 'when I was completely inundated

³⁷ Adriaan Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History*, Michigan, 1996, pp. 16-19.

³⁸ Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, pp. 16-19.

³⁹ Fanning, *Mystics*, p. 82; McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 324.

⁴⁰ Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard and Her Hagiographers: The Remaking of Female Sainthood', in Catherine M. Mooney ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, Philadelphia, 1999, p. 19. [Prae timore autem, quem ad homines habebam, quomodo viderem, nulli dicere audebam. (PL 107, col. 0103b)]

⁴¹ Theodoric of Echternach, *Hildegard*, 2.2. It should be noted that Theodoric included in his *vita* many autobiographic passages written by Hildegard herself. [Illis temporibus nata sum, et parentes mei cum suspirio [*ms.* suspiriis] Deo me vovebant, ac tertio aetatis meae anno tantum lumen vidi, quod anima mea contremuit: sed prae infantia de his nihil proferre potui. (PL 107, cols 0102d-0103a)]

by this vision, I would say many things which were strange to my hearers,' she nonetheless attempted to maintain a conscious silence until the age of forty-two.⁴² This embarrassment at her visions, coupled with her continuing physical frailty, served to leave her feeling alienated from others in her own mind.

Hildegard's response to her experiences is similar to that of her male contemporary Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129) who endured eight years of spiritual crisis and visions whilst in his early twenties, making Rupert 25 when his visions began.⁴³ Rupert claimed, some twenty years after these events, that he had not revealed his experiences to anyone lest his visions be labelled a 'childish fantasy'.⁴⁴ Rupert represented the tension which existed in the twelfth century between 'tradition and innovation,' with Bernard McGinn calling him a new kind of theologian.⁴⁵ Consequently, Rupert found himself embroiled in theological or political disputes driven by the Gregorian reform three times in his career, each leading to a period of exile.⁴⁶ It is not difficult to imagine the turmoil which swirled around Rupert as a young man. His first period of exile came with the appointment of Otbert to the position of Bishop of Liège, in which diocese Rupert's St Lawrence monastery was situated. Otbert was a loyal supporter of the recently excommunicated Henry IV, and he immediately demanded that Rupert's abbot Berengar, who was a supporter of reform and Pope Gregory VII, to leave the monastery immediately. Thus, Rupert followed his abbot into three years exile in France.⁴⁷ Rupert, also a staunch supporter of reform, condemned simony and refused to be ordained by his simoniac bishop Otbert when he returned from exile; but his unordained state caused him to fear for his salvation.⁴⁸ So it was during this period of intense reform, whilst situated in the imperial-embracing diocese of Liège, that Rupert underwent a crisis. There can be little doubt that Rupert believed that to speak of his visionary experiences at this time would have provided ammunition to adversaries, cementing his silence.

Both Hildegard and Rupert acknowledged the moment when the realisation came to them that their experiences were guiding them towards an instinctive

⁴² Theodoric of Echternach, *Hildegard*, 2.2. [Et quando hac visione pleniter perfundebar, multa, quae audientibus aliena erant, loquebar. (PL 107, col. 0103b)]

⁴³ John H. van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, Berkeley, 1983, p. 51.

⁴⁴ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, p. 51.

⁴⁵ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 324, 328.

⁴⁶ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁷ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 26-29.

⁴⁸ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, p. 51.

understanding of the Scripture. In both instances, their revelation was centered on a sudden innate understanding of the Word. In her own words Hildegard tells us:

When I was forty-two years and seven months old, the heaven opened, and a fiery light of the greatest brilliance came forth and suffused my whole brain and my whole head and breast with a flame. Yet it *enkindled in a way that did not burn but warmed (velut flamma, non tamen ardens, sed calens)*, just as the sun does. . . . And suddenly I savoured the meaning and interpretation of the books, that is, the Psalter, the Gospel, and other Catholic books of both the Old and New Testament. *All this came about even though I did not know how to analyse the syntax of the words, or to divide their syllables or had any knowledge of their cases or tenses.*⁴⁹

Hildegard appeared to experience both the imaginative and the intuitive in her vision, and her reaction to this positive event is not what we would expect of a medieval woman whose spirituality was believed to be somatically based. Besides, as Kathryn Kerby-Fulton notes, Hildegard was not enamoured of the 'harsh ascetic practices' which her colleague Jutta inflicted upon herself daily.⁵⁰ Hildegard's approach to spiritual exercise was one of moderation, and she distanced herself from the somatic practice of spirituality which was to become closely associated with women.

Hildegard instead makes a claim to intellectual knowledge which, until this time, had been denied her, and as Newman notes, 'what she would "see" henceforth would be the goal of every monastic: the spiritual understanding, or meaning, of the Scripture'.⁵¹ Was she gifted this knowledge because she was a woman or despite the fact she was a woman? A similar expression of female intellectual (dis)ability occurs in the life of Jutta of Disibodenberg (d. 1136), where her biographer recorded that 'she came to know many things from divine revelation, for it is agreed that she learned them neither through nor from any human source'.⁵² For Newman, the medieval response was the former, as 'women . . . were often deemed too "simple" to speak of

⁴⁹ Theodoric of Echternach, *Hildegard*, 1.1. This description is taken from the introduction to Hildegard's *Scivias*. [Actum est in millesimo centesimo quadragesimo primo Filii Dei Iesu Christi incarnationis anno, cum quadraginta duorum annorum septem que mensium essem, maximae coruscationis igneum lumen aperto caelo ueniens totum cerebrum meum transfudit et totum cor totum que pectus meum uelut flamma non tamen ardens sed calens ita inflammauit, ut sol rem aliquam calefacit super quam radios suos ponit. Et repente intellectum expositionis librorum, uidelicet psalterii, euangelii et aliorum catholicorum tam ueteris quam noui testamenti uoluminum sapiebam, non autem interpretationem uerborum textus eorum nec diuisionem syllabarum nec cognitionem casuum aut temporum habebam. (PL 107, cols 0383b-0384a)]

⁵⁰ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Hildegard of Bingen', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalyn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100 - c. 1500*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 348.

⁵¹ Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard and Her Hagiographers', p. 20.

⁵² A Monk of Disibodenberg, *The Life of Lady Jutta the anchoress*, in *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources*, trans. Anna Silvas, Pennsylvania, 1999, 6. Also see *VCM*, 4.40, where Thomas claims that '[a]lthough [Christina] has been illiterate from birth, yet she understood all Latin and fully knew the meaning of Holy Scripture'; and *VMO*, 2.48, where Jacques de Vitry notes the following about the divine grace given to Marie: 'Then you belched forth many and wondrous readings from a wondrous and unheard of fullness and, had we been able to understand, you read to us from the book of life (Rev. 20:12), suddenly changing from a disciple into a master.'

the things of God unless they became direct channels of his Word'.⁵³ Even Hildegard herself believed that her feminine frailty allowed God to work through her.⁵⁴ So the argument is made, that because of her 'frailty' as a woman, God chose to speak through Hildegard, thus authorizing her words. But if we turn again to Rupert, who also claims authorial certainty through his visions, then the gendered aspect of visionary experience is not so clear-cut.

For Rupert, confirmation of authorial status came via two experiences which McGinn describes as both 'christological and erotic'.⁵⁵ The first of these experiences, and perhaps the most sensual of all of Rupert's visions, occurred during a period where Rupert was contemplating his unworthiness for ordination.⁵⁶ During a dream he literally came face to face with the Lord:

I saw, standing in front of the altar . . . an image of the Lord Saviour. As I was in deep contemplation, I recognized the crucified Lord himself crucified in that very place and I beheld him, living, in my mind's eye . . . I took hold of him whom my soul loves, I held him, I embraced him, I kissed him lingeringly. I sensed how gratefully he accepted this gesture of love when, between kissing, he himself opened his mouth, in order that I kiss more deeply.⁵⁷

The Lord's kiss convinced Rupert that he was now privy to the mysteries of the Scripture and he now felt confident to be ordained a short time later. The second and final experience, which van Engen describes as 'mystical,' finally opened the floodgates and Rupert exclaimed that '[f]rom that time on 'I have opened my mouth' (Ps. 118:131), and I have never been able to stop writing. Up to the present day, I am unable to be silent, even if I wanted to'.⁵⁸

We can take Hildegard and Rupert as a starting point from which to view the divergence in thought concerning mystic spirituality. Both were oblates (Hildegard was eight and Rupert was seven), tithed to religious houses by their parents at a time when this practice was coming to lose favour; thus, they both represent what we could term an older or more traditional form of Benedictine monasticism.⁵⁹ Both received visions that authorized prodigious and acclaimed literary outputs. Both maintained a

⁵³ Barbara Newman, 'What Did It Mean to Say "I Saw"?' p. 5.

⁵⁴ Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard of Bingen', p. 167.

⁵⁵ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 332.

⁵⁶ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 332; van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁷ Rupert of Deutz, *De gloria et honore filii hominis super Mattheum*, ed. H. Haacke, CCCM 29, Turnhout, 1979, pp. 382-83, cited in Robert Mills, 'Ecce Homo', in Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih eds, *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, London, 2002, p. 152.

⁵⁸ van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, p. 53; McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 332.

⁵⁹ See chapter 3, pp. 17-18 for a brief discussion of the changing views on oblation.

protracted silence concerning their experiences describing them as ‘embarrassing’ and a ‘childish fantasy’. To this point, there are no great theological or intellectual differences between these contemporary holy individuals; yet we are presented with Hildegard the mystic and Rupert the theologian in our secondary literature, a division which is predicated upon gender. Here illustrated is a case for a careful reconsideration of the categories employed by modern historians when attempting to classify medieval individuals. Rather than seeing Hildegard primarily as a mystic, because she is a woman, I agree with Bynum and McGinn that Hildegard should be considered ‘the first great female theologian’.⁶⁰ Of course, this understanding of medieval mystics in particular hinges upon the historian’s interpretation of mysticism. If having visions—either while awake or dreaming, in a conscious state or a rapture— which inform or authorize theology constitutes mysticism, then Rupert and Hildegard should be considered mystics first and foremost. However, if we follow McGinn’s argument that texts can only be ‘mystical’ if they promote the ways to attain a mystical state, then neither Rupert nor Hildegard can be considered mystics or even contemplatives.⁶¹

If we compare Hildegard and Rupert’s visionary experience to that of Bernard of Clairvaux’s we find yet another set of responses and instruction to the reader. Bernard did experience visions and he attempted to relay them to his audience, despite the apparent ambiguity which infused him concerning the Lord’s presence:

I admit that the Word has also come to me—I speak as a fool [2 Cor. 11:17]—and has come many times. But although he has come to me, I have never been conscious of the moment of his coming. I perceived his presence, I remembered afterwards that he had been with me; sometimes I had a presentiment that he would come, but I was never conscious of his coming or his going [Ps. 120:8]. And where he comes from when he visits my soul, and where he goes, and by what means he enters and goes out, I admit that I do not know even now; as John says: ‘You do not know where he comes from or where he goes [John 3:8].’⁶²

There is far less clarity here. Bernard is aware that an experience has occurred, but really offers no certainty to his audience as to how they might recognise such an experience themselves. Compared to Hildegard’s ever present light or Rupert’s spiritual kiss, the indistinctness of Bernard’s experience seems underwhelming.

⁶⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, p. 263; McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 333.

⁶¹ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 333, 336.

⁶² Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs*, 74.5. [Fateor et mihi adventasse Verbum, in insipientia dico, et pluries. Cumque saepius intraverit ad me, non sensi aliquoties cum intravit. Adesse sensi, adfuisse recordor, interdum et praesentire potui introitum ejus, sentire nunquam, sed ne exitum quidem. Nam unde in animam meam venerit, quove abierit denuo eam dimittens; sed et qua vel introierit vel exierit; etiam nunc ignorare me fateor, secundum illud: *Nescis unde veniat, aut quo vadat* (PL 183, col. 1141a)]

Bernard also presented a rather paradoxical understanding about who could achieve a spiritual experience of God, thus becoming what we would call a mystic. He advised his correspondent, Thomas, a provost of Beverly, that '[t]he Lord knows who are his own, but what was hitherto only known to God has now been revealed to men. He does not deign to allow others to share in this great mystery, unless they are those whom he has known and foreordained to be his own'.⁶³ Yet in his lyrical exegesis on the Song of Songs, Bernard implied that it is an experience available to all when he stated: 'Let those who were versed in the mystery revel in it; let all others burn with desire rather to attain to this experience than merely to learn about it.'⁶⁴ We do not see in Bernard a dismissal or downplaying of visionary experiences, but rather an intellectualizing of the experience which was to become a hallmark of the Cistercian approach to mysticism.

I want to return at this point to the matter of reticence in expressing unusual events. It seems that the gifts of prophecy and vision were bestowed upon only a few special individuals. Goswin of Bossut, for example, addressed the rarity of such individuals in his *Life of Ida of Nivelles*. He asked: 'How rare today are those who receive such gifts! *Who, then, will tell the Lord's mighty deeds? . . .* From her wondrous God came the wondrous visions she saw and unto him she lived her wondrous life.'⁶⁵ However, as a result of this rarity, Christians viewed those who made some claim to these unique abilities cautiously and even those who enjoyed those abilities appeared reserved in their discussion of them. To evoke an earlier instance of this reticence, we return to the hermit Guthlac. Guthlac was on his deathbed and Beccel asked him a question concerning Guthlac's conversation with an unknown person in the morning and in the evening:

Then after an interval the man of God said with a sigh: 'My son, do not be troubled about this thing, which while I was alive I was unwilling to tell anyone; but now I will make clear to you. From the second year that I began to inhabit this desert place, every morning and evening the lord has sent me an angel to talk with me for my own consolation, who showed me mysteries which it is not lawful for man to utter, who

⁶³ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letters*, 109.4 (Letter 107 in *PL*). [Novit Dominus qui sunt ejus: sed quod notum erat Dei, manifestatum est hominibus. Nec alios sane dignatur tanti participatione mysterii, nisi eos ipsos quos suos praescivit et praedestinavit. Nam quos praedestinavit, hos et vocavit. (*PL* 182, cols 0224c-0244D)]

⁶⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Song of Songs*, 1.11. [Experti recognoscant, inexperti inardescant desiderio, non tam cognoscendi, quam experiendi. (*PL* 183, col. 0789C)]

⁶⁵ *Vida*, 17d. [This passage is not recorded in Henriquez.]

relieved the hardness of my toil with heavenly oracles, and who revealed to me things which were absent as though they were present.⁶⁶

Guthlac's admission is quite striking, and although he does not reveal the exact nature of these conversations, his insistence that Beccel tell 'no one except . . . Pega [his sister] or Ecgberht the anchorite,' strongly suggest that visions of, or direct communication with, heavenly as opposed to saintly bodies was less accepted.⁶⁷ Guthlac's qualifier that Ecgberht 'will know that such things have happened to me,' strongly suggests that only particular individuals were able to access this kind of interaction.⁶⁸ This is not new nor is it surprising, but what is striking is the reluctance of Guthlac to admit that he is that person.

The exhortation to humility is a major factor in the taciturn attitude of medieval religious writers when it comes to discussing supernatural experiences. We can look back to Pope Gregory I and his entreaty to the missionary Augustine to not glory in his miracles. Gregory praised Augustine telling him that 'Almighty God, out of love for you has worked great miracles through you'.⁶⁹ But a gift such as this was fraught with danger, particularly the loss of humility bought on by compliments such as those offered by Gregory. Gregory reminded Augustine that he must be on guard against the raising up of his self-esteem:

So it remains, most dear brother, that amidst those outward deeds which you perform through the Lord's power you should always judge your inner self carefully and carefully note within yourself what you are and how great is the grace shown to that people for whose conversion you have received the gift of working miracles.⁷⁰

Examples of this forceful instruction to deny any self-worth in the face of God are evident in Lives from the time of Antony and the Desert Fathers through to the high

⁶⁶ *VGuth.*, L. [Tunc vir Dei post temporis intervallum anhelans ait: 'Fili mi, de hac re sollicitari noli; quod enim vivens ulli hominum indicare nolui, nunc tibi manifestabo. A secundo etenim anno, quo hanc heremum habitare coeperam, mane vespereque semper angelum consolationis meae ad meum colloquium Dominus mittebat, qui mihi misteria, *quae non licet homini* narrare, monstrabat, qui duritiam laboris mei caelestibus oraculis sublevabat qui absentia mihi monstrando ut praesentia praesentabat. (Colgrave, p. 156)]

⁶⁷ *VGuth.*, L. [O fili, haec dicta mea conserva, nullique alii nuntiaveris, nisi Pegae aut Ecgberhto anachoritae, si umquam in colloquium eius tibi venire contigerit, qui solus haec sic fuisse cognoscet. (Colgrave, p. 156)]

⁶⁸ *VGuth.*, L.

⁶⁹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Bertram Colgrave, 1969, reprint ed. and notes Judith McClure and Roger Collins, Oxford, 1999, 1.31. ["Scio, frater carissime, quia omnipotens Deus per dilectionem tuam in gentem, quam eligi voluit, magna miracula ostendit, unde necesse est ut de eodem dono caelesti et timendo gaudeas, et gaudendo pertimescas. (Venerabilis Bedae, *Opera quae supersunt Omnia, nunc Primum in Anglia, ope codicum manuscriptorum, editionumque optimarum*, ed. J. A. Giles, London, 1843)]

⁷⁰ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.31. ["Restat itaque, frater carissime, ut inter ea, quae, operante Domino, exterius facis, semper te interius subtiliter judices, ac subtiliter intelligas, et temetipsum quis sis, et quanta sit in eadem gente gratia, pro cuius conversione etiam faciendorum signorum dona percepisti.]

medieval period; more importantly, the concept of humility as a behaviour which can be practiced and improved upon makes its mark in rules associated with monasticism.

In Benedict's Rule, the chapter on humility is bettered in length only by the Prologue, with Benedict's twelve steps to humility providing the template for future authors to discuss this topic.⁷¹ While extolling the importance of the twelve steps, Grimlaicus (c. 900) takes a different approach to discussing humility in his Rule for Solitaries. He prefers to employ examples from Scripture and the Desert Fathers to illustrate the salvific powers of humility, noting: 'How great is the strength of humility! Not only does it save human beings, but it overcomes demons.'⁷² Grimlaicus's Rule also highlighted an issue not present in early rules for living, and that is the issue of supernatural acts. In fact, Grimlaicus devoted an entire chapter to the topic of unusual occurrences, entitled 'Solitaries Should Not Seek to Perform Signs and Miracles'. Grimlaicus is clearly commenting upon an issue that was of lesser concern during Benedict's time and he stated that he was writing about solitaries who 'do anything for show'.⁷³ Judging by Grimlaicus's commentary, solitaries walk a tightrope in living ascetic lives, stating that the devil seeks to promote vainglory with 'clothing that is filthy and unkempt,' or by causing someone to become famous because of their fasting.⁷⁴ There was then, an intense and obvious pressure placed on the solitary to not slip and fall into the sin of pride, the kind of pressure which may have dissuaded those seeking or living the solitary life to exclaim loudly about their unusual experiences of the Divine.

As we move towards the high medieval period, we find further examples highlighting the importance of humility. Romuald of Ravenna's adherence to the tenet of humility often resulted in him suffering a backlash from his fellow monks, who found his dedication to God too taxing.⁷⁵ The biographers of the hermits Robert of La Chaise-Dieu, Stephen of Obazine, and Robert of Arbrissel were all compelled to

⁷¹ RB, 7; Grimlaicus, *Rule for Solitaries*, trans. Andrew Thornton, Minnesota, 2011, 57, where the author encourages his reader to consider the 'lucidly explained' twelve steps to humility in the Benedictine Rule.

⁷² Grimlaicus, 57. [O quanta est virtus humilitatis, quae non solum homines salvat, sed etiam daemones superat! (PL 103, col. 0649a)]

⁷³ Grimlaicus, 67. [Per ostentationem vero nihil faciant solitarii. (PL 103, col. 0660a)]

⁷⁴ Grimlaicus, 67. [Nam quem diabolus sub specie pretiosae vestis ac nitidae non potest in vanam gloriam immergere, pro squalida et inculta conatur decipere. . . . Si jejunit quis palam, gloriae vanitate pulsatur. (PL 103, col. 0660c)]

⁷⁵ *VRom.*, 3. [Presumebat autem leviter conversantium vitam dure corripere et sepe ad eorum confusionem precepta regule in testimonium convocare. Cumque redarguendis eorum vitiis vehementer insisteret, illi autem iunioris et novitii verba pro nichilo deputarent, tandem hoc obprobrium non ferentes, dum propriam emendare vitam despiciunt, de corripientis morte tractare ceperunt.]

remark upon their subjects' continuing humility in the face of their growing popularity. Robert of La Chaise-Dieu was graced with powerful healing abilities and, in order to 'safeguard his humility . . . he attributed God's benefits . . . [to] the Holy Martyrs, Agricola and Vitalis'.⁷⁶ Stephen of Obazine presented a different expression of humility, expressing it as a desire to submit to the will of another (in this case his long-term companion Peter).⁷⁷ The 'poison' of 'fawning folly' and 'flattery' caused Robert of Arbrissel to hide the iron tunic he wore under fine cloth, so the other men would not praise him for his deeds.⁷⁸ The three hermits offer an insight into the external pressures which attended this apparently individual way of life. Although they had stepped outside the boundaries of the monastery to search for a more ideal way of life, they were still bound by the carefully constructed spirituality which they sought to escape.

The employment of humility as an active weapon in a religious individual's arsenal extended beyond contacts with the worldly community. As this telling excerpt from Amma Theodora illustrates, humility was also effective in interaction with the supernatural community:

There was an anchorite who was able to banish the demons; and he asked them, 'What makes you go away? Is it fasting?' They replied, 'We do not eat or drink.' 'Is it vigils?' They replied, 'We do not sleep.' 'Is it separation from the world?' 'We live in the deserts.' 'What power sends you away then?' They said, 'Nothing can overcome us, but only humility.' 'Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?'⁷⁹

So for a late antique monk, humility was to be employed as a shield against pride and a sword against demons. But, as Jerome noted, the monk needed to be careful that he was not swayed by the 'monstrous stories' of those who claimed to engage in 'struggles with demons'.⁸⁰ Jerome's advice emphasizes the complexity of the issues concerning demons and the monk's response to them. The monk should battle

⁷⁶ *VRlcd.* 1.15.2. [Accessit ad vitae meritum tanta miraculorum potentia, ut jam illis in locis nullus ambigeret virum sanctum plane a Deo meruisse gratiam curationum, quam sic ille pro humilitatis custodia fideliter petentibus ministrabat, ut divina beneficia non suis, sed sanctorum martyrum, Agricolae scilicet et Vitalis, in quorum serviebat Ecclesia, meritis imputaret. (*PL* 171, col. 1514c)]

⁷⁷ *VSO*, 1.14.

⁷⁸ *VRA*, 10. [Favorales siquidem in omni vita sua despexit nugas, et quasi venenum, omne blandiloquium aspernatus est. (*PL* 162, col. 1049b)]

⁷⁹ *Apop. patrum*, Theodora, 7.

⁸⁰ Jerome, 'Letter 125 to Rusticus', trans. W. H. Freemantle, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, series 2, vol. 6, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 9. [Sed de ludo monasteriorum, hujuscemodi volumus egredi milites, quos eremi dura rudimenta non terreant: qui specimen conversationis suae multo tempore dederint: qui omnium fuerint minimi, ut primi omnium fierent: quos nec esuries aliquando, nec saturitas superavit: qui paupertate laetantur: quorum habitus, sermo, vultus, incessus, doctrina virtutum est: qui nesciunt secundum quosdam ineptos homines, daemonum pugnantium contra se portenta confingere, ut apud imperitos, et vulgi homines miraculum sui faciant, et exinde lucra sectentur. (*PL* 22, col. 1077)]

demons using humility but he should also not boast about his success, lest he be accused of lacking humility, thus falling into the sin of pride.

'Daemons,' Richard Valantasis argues, 'are ubiquitous in monastic literature because monastic foundation revolves around the struggle with them.'⁸¹ These struggles are not necessarily provoked by something the monk or religious individual can see. In Antony's *Life* we read that the devil tormented him 'with foul thoughts' which Antony would counter 'with prayers'.⁸² The devil then assailed Antony with 'a multitude of demons' that proceeded to 'cut him with stripes [so] that he lay on the ground speechless from the excessive pain'.⁸³ These psychological and physiological encounters with demons played a significant part in the lives of some of the individuals discussed in this work, from Romuald, whose battles illustrated continuity in the understanding or acceptance of a demonic realm, through to Arnulf, whose encounters with demons were far more symbolic of the issues facing religious men at the time.

If we turn our attention to the works of Goswin of Bossut, we find in both the *Lives* of Ida the Nun and Arnulf the Lay Brother, chapters focused on their humility.⁸⁴ However, his work concerning Abundus the Choir Monk makes no direct reference to this facet of his personality at all. This differentiation in Goswin's narratives extended to the issue of demonic visions. Unlike Ida and Arnulf, Abundus had no encounters with devilish forces at all. The closest he came to dealing with the devil was in his effort to free another man from 'fleshly thoughts'.⁸⁵ This begs the question: Did Goswin feel the need to reiterate this important trait in the two subjects that occupy, in a hierarchal sense, a lower rung on the ecclesiastic ladder? Alternately, did Goswin assume that his readers were well aware that Abundus must have embraced this behaviour in order to attain his position as monk? I believe the answer is yes to both of these questions, although this is terribly difficult to prove. Martha Newman argues that this differentiation between religious women, lay brothers, and choir monks is encouraged by Cistercian hagiographers and is predicated not on the binary separation

⁸¹ Richard Valantasis, 'Daemons and the Perfecting of the Monk's Body: Monastic Anthropology, Daemonology, and Asceticism', in Vincent L. Wimbush ed., *Semeia*, Discursive Formations, Ascetic Piety, and the Interpretation of Early Christian Literature, vol. 1, 57, 1992, p. 47.

⁸² Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, trans. H. Ellershaw, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace eds, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, Early Church Fathers: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, vol. 4, Grand Rapids, 1886-1900, 5.

⁸³ Athanasius, *Vita S. Antoni*, 8.

⁸⁴ *VIda*, 1g, 1h; *VArn.*, 2.3.

⁸⁵ *VAbn.*, 17a.

of male and female, but rather by 'distinctions based instead on literacy and social status'.⁸⁶ I argue that the influence of both biological gender and social status helped shape these *vitae*, with an important consideration being the expectation that the men who were fully within the institutional order should practice and experience spirituality in certain ways.

Vision and Gender

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the powerful social model of monasticism was responsible for mediating the behaviour of medieval religious men, leaving them with little leeway in experiencing or expressing unique spiritual encounters. If we take a snapshot of noteworthy religious men and women from 995 to 1230, we find that the most striking difference between medieval religious men and women was their formal association (or lack of) to a religious institution (tables 1 and 2). All of the men listed were deeply involved in monastic orders, whether as established monks or the founders of new orders. The three hermits I have already discussed, the two Roberts and Stephen, all approached their religious lives from a liminal position, rejecting current institutions and electing to follow their own path. However, they were coerced into re-entering the institutional fold, eventually becoming founders of new monasteries themselves. With the exception of Hildegard, who entered the convent as an oblate and went on to become abbess of a nunnery, the women of this period only engaged in tentative associations with formal institutions. This clearly illustrates the central role of the formal institution in the lives of holy men, exercised through rules and homosocial relationships that encouraged conformity.

Peter of Celle gives us an insight into the difficulties which faced religious men who sought a more intimate relationship with God, claiming that you could not access God outside the monastery.⁸⁷ Was this a pervasive attitude amongst religious men at this time? I believe the answer is yes. The reform of both the monastic and ecclesiastical realms of the Church promoted new kinds of religious men. An increase in the variety of monastic orders provided more opportunity for the expression of spirituality, although that expression was hemmed in by Rules. For priests, the central

⁸⁶ Martha Newman, 'Crucified by the Virtues', p. 183. Also see van Dijk, 'Henry Mande', p. 150.

⁸⁷ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 343.

Religious Men	Birth/Death	Classification in Literature	Marital Status	Institutional Affiliation
Dominic Loricatus	995-1060	Monk, ascetic	Single	Benedictine monk at Fonte Avellana from 1040
Robert of Abrissel	c. 1045-1116	Priest, hermit, monastic	Single; accused of impropriety in practising syncretism	Founder of Fontevrault
Robert of La Chaise-Dieu	d. 1067	Cleric, hermit, monastic	Single	Benedictine
Rupert of Deutz	1075-1129	Theologian, visionary	Single	Benedictine
Stephen of Obazine	1085-1154	Priest, hermit, monastic	Single	Benedictine
Bernard of Clairvaux	1090-1153	Monk, theologian, visionary	Single	Cistercian
Francis of Assisi	c. 1181-1226	Visions, stigmata	Single	Founder of Franciscans

Table 2: Institutional Affiliation of Religious Men, c. 995-1230

Religious Women	Birth/Death	Classification in Literature	Marital Status	Institutional Affiliation
Jueta of Huy	1058-1128	Anchorite	Married at 12, widowed by 18 with 3 children	Worked with lepers for 10 years; walled up as an anchorite.
Jutta of Disbodenberg	1092-1136	Anchorite	Single	Benedictine
Hildegard of Bingen	1098-1179	Vision	Tithed to Church at 8; Anchoress then elected ' <i>magistra</i> ' by fellow nuns	Benedictine
Christina Markyate	c.1095-1155	Visionary	Took vow of chastity but forced to marry; husband released her from marital obligations	Hid with the hermit Roger; was gifted the land at Markyate and established nunnery
Elisabeth of Schönau	1129-1165	Nun, visionary, then anchorite	Single	Benedictine
Christina Mirabilis	1150-1224	Resurrection, severe austerities	Single, orphaned at 15	Catholic, not attached to any particular institution
Marie d'Oignies	1177-1213	Visions, ecstasies, psychic gifts	Arranged marriage at 14; convinced husband to live chastely	Cared for lepers in her home with husband; Beguine
Ida of Nivelles	1197-1231	Visions, prophecy	Arranged marriage at 9; ran away and hid with local virgins	Not attached to any particular institution

Table 1: Institutional Affiliation of Religious Women, c. 995-1230

issues of sex and simony, and their relationship to the purity of the Eucharist, ensured increased scrutiny of their behavior as religious men. There is also another aspect which had an influence on the way religious men conducted themselves during this period, and in particular their reaction to visions and visionary experience, and that is gender.

The issue of gender, or more correctly, masculine and feminine behavior amongst religious people, was recognized during the twelfth century and has much bearing upon how religious individuals conducted themselves. Hildegard of Bingen goes so far as to label the times in which they were living an 'effeminate age,' thereby claiming authority for her prophet status.⁸⁸ Elisabeth of Schönau (d. 1165) was also direct in her criticism of those who questioned her authority and authenticity. Comparing herself to the 'great mothers of Israel,' Elisabeth claimed her masculine role because men had become indolent and God had no choice but to fill holy women 'with the Spirit of God'.⁸⁹ For Walter Simons, the masculine stance attributed to holy women in the twelfth century centered on the unmasking of unworthy priests, a common occurrence which is represented in a number of *Lives*.⁹⁰ Also central to these narratives was the addition of a new realm to the afterlife: purgatory. It is not my intention to engage with the complex argument which is focused on the issue of the 'birth' of purgatory.⁹¹ Rather, I am more interested in the importance which the rise or invention of purgatory in the eleventh century has in the experience of the visionary and how this authorized women such as Christina Mirabilis and Ida of Nivelles.

The problem of unworthy or polluted priests is clearly addressed in the *vita* of Marie D'Oignies, where her biographer, Jacques de Vitry, described Marie's visions of 'holy angels rejoicing' and where he took aim at the less faithful:

Woe to those wretched priests, companions of the traitor Judas, who again crucify Christ as much as they are able! They defile the blood of the Testament with polluted

⁸⁸ Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard of Bingen', p. 174.

⁸⁹ Barbara Newman, 'Hildegard of Bingen', p. 174.

⁹⁰ Walter Simons, 'Holy Women of the Low Countries: a survey', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden eds, *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100 – c. 1500*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 633.

⁹¹ Jacques le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, London, 1984, first published as *La Naissance du Purgatoire*, Paris, 1981; R. W. Southern, 'Between Heaven and Hell', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 June 1982, pp. 651–2; G. R. Edwards, 'Purgatory: "Birth" or "Evolution"?' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36, 4, October 1985, pp. 634–646.

hands, with immodest eyes, a venomous mouth, and with an impure heart while they irreverently approach the Sacrament which must be venerated.⁹²

Goswin of Bossut also chose to illustrate masculine weakness by recording a number of instances involving Ida of Nivelles, where priests were shown the error of their ways. Ida's spirituality increasingly focused on the Eucharist, a point Goswin employed to berate priests 'who rush through those sweet words recited in the canon with a dry heart and without devotion'.⁹³ In another episode, an auditory visit from the Lord is required to convince a doubting priest of 'Ida's wondrous *conversatio*'.⁹⁴

Goswin also took the opportunity to berate fornicating priests in his narrative, further highlighting this *vita* as a didactic tool for the instruction of errant priests. This is the most direct and forceful criticism of priests in the *Life*, with Ida vomiting blood and taking on a debilitating illness for six months, in order to relieve a priest of his polluted thoughts:

And you priests, ever so irreverent, so unappreciative: what do you say to that? you who see the thief, the devil, thieving away the salvation of your souls, and yet you run with him, run down to hell (Ps. 49:18)! How dare you put on this outward show of religion that you do not inwardly have?⁹⁵

While Hildegard and Elisabeth expressed outright their calling to a masculine vocation in an age of change, the *vitae* of Marie and Ida illustrate how this accusatory stance in the narrative developed into a more didactic one. The role of the visionary woman 'teaching' men, albeit inadvertently, may provide an explanation as to why holy men are far less common in this type of narrative.

According to Anke E. Passenier, the human being who was Christina Mirabilis is hidden behind the 'veil' of her 'miraculous' deeds and, because of this, Christina's *Life* is 'too much . . . like an ultimate accolade'.⁹⁶ I suspect that these 'miraculous deeds' were exactly what motivated Thomas de Cantimpré when he set about gathering together the details of this rather remarkable life. The powerful presentation of purgatory in Christina's visions provided the focal point for this life, in which

⁹² *VMO*, 2.9.86. [Vae Sacerdotes miseris, Judae proditoris focis; qui Christum iterum quantum in se est crucifigunt, and sanguinem testamenti pollutum ducunt; qui manibus pollutis, oculis impudicis, ore venenato, corde impuro, dum ad reverendum Sacramentum irreverenter accedunt . . . (AASS, p. 659)]

⁹³ *VIda*, 20e. [This passage is not recorded in Henriquez]

⁹⁴ *VIda*, 26a. [Sacerdotes quidam vir Religiosus ac timens Deum, audita fama de venerabilis Idae conuersatione, minime fidem adhibebat testimonijs quibus a multis laudabiliter magnificabatur. (Henriquez, pp. 263-264)]

⁹⁵ *VIda*, 6c. [Quid ad haec respondebitis, o sacerdotes irreuerentes and infirmi, qui videntes furem diabolum, furantem vobis salute animarum vestrarum, cum eo curritis as infernum, dum quaeritis ea quae vestra sunt, no quae Iesu Christi? Quare ausu temerario religionem exterius ostentatis, quam interius no habetis. (Henriquez, pp. 215-216)]

⁹⁶ Anke E. Passenier, 'The Life of Christina Mirabilis: Miracles and the Construction of Marginality', in Anne-Marie Korte ed., *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, Leiden, 2003, pp. 146-47.

Christina displayed a wide range of extraordinary talents from the physical to the prophetic. Christina appeared to be, first and foremost, a prophet and this is directly associated with her vision of purgatory which she experienced on the occasion of her first death.⁹⁷ Thomas de Cantimpré summed up her role succinctly when he noted that '[s]he assisted the dying most willingly and gladly exhorted them to a confession of their sins'.⁹⁸ She also focused her attention on those who were not at death's door: 'She expounded many things with the spirit of prophecy and forewarned many to salvation and privately reprimanded many of their secret sins and recalled them to penance.'⁹⁹ Christina expended a great deal of energy urging those around her—dying or otherwise—to repent so they could avoid the pains of purgatory. In this sense, Christina's prophetic activities mirrored those of Simon of Aulne, but Christina took her task one step further by taking on the purgatorial pain of others.

As with many of Christina's other responses to spiritual phenomenon, her overt physicality came to the fore when she became concerned with those who are damning their own souls. Thomas de Cantimpré noted that she often walked about the town in tears, as God made her aware of those in peril. If it happened that 'one of those townspeople died whom she knew in the spirit was damned for his sins, she wept and twisted herself backwards and bent and re-bent her arms and fingers as if they were pliable and not made of bones'.¹⁰⁰ Her most significant purgatorial intervention came on behalf of Louis, count of Looz, who had become like a son to her when she had relocated from St Trond to the castle of Looz on the border with Germany.¹⁰¹ After his death, the count appeared to her asking for help and she said to him:

"Well then, go hence and fulfil the punishments due your sins according to the Divine Judgement. As for me, I will accept in my own body a half part of your purgatorial torments which must be exacted." Having taken on these burdens, for a long time afterwards you might have seen Christina in the middle of the night being tormented with burning smoke and at other times with freezing cold. Indeed she suffered torments in turn according to what the soul of the Count was suffering.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ See chapter 5, p. 200.

⁹⁸ *VCM*, 3.27. [Libentissime ac benignissime morientibus assistebat, exhortans ad peccatorum confessionem. (AASS, p. 655)]

⁹⁹ *VCM*, 3.29. [Spiritu prophetiae in multis claruit, multos praemonuit ad salutem, multos de secretis in occulto redarguit, and ad poenitentiam revocavit. (AASS, p. 655)]

¹⁰⁰ *VCM*, 3.26. [Cum aliquis in urbe detunctus esset, quem damnatum pro culpa per spiritorum congnoisset, stebat, ac torquebar and retoquebat se, curvabatque [se] ac incurvabit, and recurvabat brachia ac digitos suos, velut si fine ossibus esient mollitie flexibiles. (AASS, p. 655)]

¹⁰¹ *VCM*, 4.

¹⁰² *VCM*, 4.45. [Age nunc, and vade hinc, and secundum divinum iudicium poenas pro peccatis exsolve: ego vero in meo corpora exactura tormenta dimidiam purgatorii tui partem excipio. His ita gestis, videres Christinam multo post tempore nocturnis horis flammis vaporibus [interdum vero frigorum algoribus] cruciari; and certum secundum quod anima comitis alternatis cruciatibus torquebatur. (AASS, p. 658)]

There are three explicit aspects concerning Christina's spiritual abilities evident in Thomas's narrative. Firstly, her ability to 'see' souls who were in danger of suffering in purgatory as she walked about the town marked her as a discerner of spirits. Thomas does not elaborate on how this vision worked for Christina, so we cannot be sure whether God spoke to her or whether she saw something within the person, but certainly, this seemed to be a continual aspect of Christina's conscious state. Secondly, her ability to 'see' souls which had already passed into purgatory marked her as a visionary. Thomas records that Louis appeared to Christina after his death, indicating to the reader that Christina saw him although Thomas again fails to elaborate on how she saw him. Thirdly, and perhaps most interesting, is Christina's ability to dictate how much purgatorial suffering she will take on. Although God must still agree to Christina's request, her living relationship with the Count and her determination concerning how much of his suffering she would endure speak of an interesting gender dynamic. Christina is positioned as spiritually superior to the Count, both in life and death, and although as a woman she lacked the authority to hear his confession, as a woman she provided Thomas with a near-perfect Christian exemplar.

During the period in which Christina was active, a lay brother from the Brabant area had garnered local celebrity for his prophetic ability. Simon of Aulne (d. 1229) was a lay brother at the monastery of Aulne, which was situated some 27 kilometres from Villers. While we have a much clearer picture of Arnulf's life thanks to Goswin's biography, Simon, unfortunately, comes to us only in fragments including one manuscript that, as Martinus Cawley notes, is 'late and unreliable'.¹⁰³ That said, we can gather some indication of the measure of Simon's fame from chapter devoted to him in *The Dialogue on Miracles*, and from excerpts from Thomas of Cantimpré.¹⁰⁴ Simon's prophetic ability was far and away his most well-known attribute—so much so that he was apparently called to Rome by Pope Innocent III who 'asked him several questions, so that both he and his cardinals learnt by experience his prophetic

¹⁰³ Martinus Cawley, 'Appendix', in *Send Me God by Goswin de Bossut, Cantor of Villers-in-Brabant: Volume Two Arnulf the Wagoneer, with an appendix on Simon of Aulne*, trans. Martinus Cawley, Guadalupe, 2000, p. 79.

¹⁰⁴ *Dia. Mir.*, 3.33; Thomas of Cantimpré, *The Collected Saints' Lives: Abbot John of Cantimpré, Christina the Astonishing, Margaret of Ypres, and Lutgard of Aywières*, trans. Barbara Newman and Margot H. King, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts* 19, Turnhout, 2008, 2.10.

powers.’¹⁰⁵ Caesarius’s chapter on Simon is found in his third book, ‘Of Confession,’ where Caesarius’s monk is explaining the importance of contrition in confession to the novice, stating that ‘[h]is sin is not forgiven to the sinner without contrition, and this is only in the condition that confession shall follow’.¹⁰⁶ The prophet had a central role in exposing the sinner’s lack of contrition, by revealing his or her inner-most thoughts or predicting future events, and this was a role that was fundamental to the Christian faith. However, at no point does Simon’s purgatorial prophesying range toward the physical response affected by Christina. Simon simply reported what he had seen or been made privy to by the Lord’s grace. In a sense, Simon provided a more realistic didactic example with which to instruct the audience.

As we have seen with Christina, the female body had an important role in visionary experience, especially visions associated with penance or purgatory, but other examples illustrate that this was a common facet of female spiritual experience. The *Life* of Ida of Nivelles also shows evidence of the importance afforded the female body when it came to spiritual experiences. Ida prayed constantly for the soul of another nun’s father, and upon finding out that ‘the soul she had been pleading for to the Lord had been awarded purgatorial chastisements,’ she asked the Lord to inflict her with ‘any infirmity he might wish’. God responded by sending Ida severe fever which plagued her for six weeks.¹⁰⁷ In another episode, Ida became aware of the ‘carnal and seductive . . . temptation’ which afflicted a certain priest. Ida again resorted to asking for any kind of ill health in order that the priest’s temptation, which ‘was spreading like a canker,’ be removed. This resulted in a fever which lasted six months.¹⁰⁸ There is a difference here between the somatic vulnerability expressed in the texts concerning Marie, Christina, and Ida, and that discussed by Hildegard. For Hildegard, her frail and infirm female body provided a mouthpiece for God; her illness

¹⁰⁵ *Dia. Mir.*, 3.33. [Rediens vero ad Urbem cum gaudio magno, per totam curiam in tantum suum prophetam magnificavit, ut dominus Papa Innocentius ad Concilium suum generale illum vocaret, vocatumque de pluribus interrogaret, a quo tam ipse quam ceteri Cardinales didicerunt experimento, quod spiritu polieret propheticum. (Strange, p. 151)]

¹⁰⁶ *Dia. Mir.*, 3.1. [Non nisi per contritionem peccatori culpa dimittitur, et hoc sub quadam conditione, scilicet ut confessio subsequatur. (Strange, p. 111)]

¹⁰⁷ *Vida*, 5a. [Quod cum ei reuelatum esset, in tantu cruciatibus eius compassa est, quod petit a Domino vt eius purgatorium alleuiarentur. Exaudiuit autem Dominus oratione eius, and statim eadem hora febris tam valida inuasit eam, vt postea sex hebdomadis huiusmodi morbo vexaretur. (Henriquez, p. 213)]

¹⁰⁸ *Vida*, 6a. [Oravit ergo attente pium Dominum, vt sibi quamcumque vellet inualitudine infligeret, tatum vt lethalem morbum qui quasi cancer iam serpere coeperat, and depascere vitalem eiusdem sacerdotis vigorem, ab eius pius Dominus? Numquid repulit oratione eius? non. Sed desideratam febris quartanae infirmitatem ei immisit, qua per sex menses tenerum eius corpusculum tam sufficienter flagellauit . . . (Henriquez, pp. 214-215)]

was not caused by her visions, it simply allowed them. Marie, Christina, and Ida actively pursued an ascetic way of life, but they also took physical punishment upon themselves, often as a result of a vision which intimated that someone, either known to them or a colleague, was suffering.

Holy women were not the only ones granted a look at purgatory. C. S. Watkins illustrates in his article, 'Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm', that visions of purgatory were also experienced by men.¹⁰⁹ He cites the visions of Walchelin, a parish priest, Orm, a thirteen-year-old boy, and Ailsi, a layman, as examples of men who had gained a glimpse of the after-life. However, in all of these accounts, as with Simon, there is no suggestion that they would take upon themselves the purgatorial suffering of others. For example, Walchelin's story is more concerned with his 'conversion . . . from sceptic to believer in the efficacy of acts of restitution and suffrages for the dead,' than it is with how he might have assuaged another's purgatorial torment.¹¹⁰ In fact, Walchelin spends a large part of this account rejecting the soul in need and seeing it 'more as a sort of demonic apparition'.¹¹¹ Walchelin may have 'seen' souls in purgatory, but he did not engage with them in a physical way at all. His initial response to his visions centered on his intellectual turmoil and the problem of what was real and what was not; is this a more masculine way to respond?

Simon of Aulne and Christina Mirabilis were representative of a more engaged, egalitarian approach to prophecy. By this I mean that their interaction with the community, both lay and religious, is illustrated by events which would be accessible to all in the Christian community. For all the similarities in their activities, it appears that gender played an important role in determining who the recipients were of Simon and Christina's salvific/prophetic powers. From Caesarius's commentary alone, we can find evidence that most of the recipients (or targets) of Simon's prophetic powers, were members of the monastic orders or the clergy. Of the eight incidents that Caesarius discussed, five concern men (one a clerk, one a lay brother, and the rest monks) and three concern women (two lay women and a group of nuns). Caesarius focuses on Simon's ability to 'see' those things which ought to be confessed but were omitted by accident or design. In this sense, Simon's occupation of the liminal position

¹⁰⁹ C. S. Watkins, 'Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm: The Evidence of Visions and Ghost Stories', *Past and Present*, 175, May 2002, pp. 3-33.

¹¹⁰ Watkins, 'Sin, Penance and Purgatory', p. 10.

¹¹¹ Watkins, 'Sin, Penance and Purgatory', p. 9.

of lay brother seems to have allowed him to possess a clearer moral authority than even members of the clergy.¹¹² A visit to Simon from a 'certain secretary of the Roman curia' best illustrates both Simon's ability and the wider recognition that he was, indeed, someone special. The clerk wished to confess before Simon, a fact of which Simon was already cognisant, and when Simon had returned from an errand for the grange, the clerk began his confession:

[W]hile this clerk in the presence of the lay-brother, was making his confession to him with much devotion, and happened to pass over several things in forgetfulness, or to explain all the circumstances somewhat less fully from shame, the aforesaid Simon would interrupt his confession and say: "Why have you left out such and such sins? These things you did at such an age, and those in such a place from mere thoughtlessness, and some you did under compulsion"; correcting him everywhere in such marvellous fashion that with the queen of the south he confessed that *the half was not told him* (1 Kings 10:7) of all his wisdom.¹¹³

It is this incident which led to Simon's invitation to visit Rome and his authorization by the pope.

Caesarius addressed the myriad concerns his reader may have had about Simon in three ways. As I have already mentioned, Simon was authorized by Innocent III and this was, in a sense, the most important confirmation of Simon's authenticity. Caesarius also uses an example of a doubting lay brother to further illustrate Simon's capacity for accessing the inner knowledge of other men:

Once when Simon was standing in the choir of Villers among his brethren, a lay-brother named Evirgeld . . . began to be offended in him, and to say in his heart: "I do not believe that this lay-brother is all that people say of him; nor that his sayings come from the spirit of prophecy, but from mere conjecture"; and he began to despise him in his heart. When the service was over, Brother Simon took the monk Ulrich aside, and related to him in order all that his brother had been thinking in his heart. . . . When Evirgeld heard this he was greatly terrified, for now he learnt by his own experience what he had refused to believe on the testimony of others.¹¹⁴

¹¹² We do not know whether Simon was ordained or not so it also curious that he took confession.

¹¹³ *Dia. Mir.*, 3.33. [Cui cum, praesente converso, idem clericus peccata sua satis devote confiteretur, et in diversis locis aliqua per oblivionem transsiliret, quaedam etiam propter erubescitiam minus intergraliter cum suis circumstantiis exprimeret, interrumpens eius confessionem iam dictus Simon ait: Quare haec and haec peccata subticetis? Ista in tali aetate commisitistis, et illa et illa in tali loco ex levitate, nonnulla ex necessitate fecistis; ubique eum corrigens, ita ut valde miraretur, et cum Regina Austri mediam partem gratiae eius non se audisse fateretur. (Strange, p. 151)]

¹¹⁴ *Dia. Mir.*, 3.33. [Die quadam cum idem Simon in choro Vilariensi staret inter ceteros conversos, conversus quidam Evirgeldus nomine, frater carnalis beatae memoriae Ulrichi eiusdem domus monarchi, ex opposito eius stans coepit in eo scandalizari, et dicere in corde suo: Non videtur mihi talis esse conversus iste, sicut ab omnibus praedicatur; neque ea quae dicit, spiritu praedicere prophetico, sed tantum coniiicendo; et coepit eum dispicere. Mox finita hora, frater Simon assumto Ulricho monarcho, coepit ei per ordinem relicare, quae ille tractaverat in corde suo, dicens: Monete fratrem vestrum, ne de cetero tam insipienter gratiam Dei in aliis iudicet, ne forte ex hoc vindicatam sentiat. Quod cum fvisset, expavit Evirgeldus, discens experimento, quod aliis narranti bus credere non potuit de illo. (Strange, p. 153)]

Finally, Caesarius had the monk make clear to the novice that he had heard of ‘many other great prophecies’ by Simon, but he refused to record them ‘because I do not remember them very clearly; and I would far rather be silent even about what is true than write down what might be false’.¹¹⁵

Goswin also made clear to his readers that there are ‘hypocrites’ who think they are seeing ‘true visions,’ when in fact they are being ‘seduced by demons’.¹¹⁶ He reiterated Christianity’s deep concern about false prophets in his prologue to the *Life of Abundus*, the choir monk:

I ventured the remark: ‘Dear brother, be wary of these visions you have been seeing. They could be mere fantasies, trumped up for your misguidance by him who transfigures himself into an angel of light’ (II Cor. 11.14). ‘Ah no’, said he, ‘it is not that way, too benign is he who teaches me. He unmasks the craftiness of the malignant one and teaches man knowledge (Ps. 93.10). Inwardly he teaches me what I should choose and what I should shun.’ And so, let those willing to accept what I write of him accept it in the Lord’s name and in good faith. As for those who are unwilling, let them rest assured that no one will be forced to accept my contribution.¹¹⁷

There is a strange tension present in Goswin’s narrative. He clearly highlights the concern for false visions or prophets by directly addressing the problem in the life of Abundus. Yet he is placated by Abundus’s explanation that he simply ‘knows’ that his visions do not come to him via the devil. In a final move, Goswin abdicates all responsibility by telling the reader that they do not need to read his words if they do not wish to.

Pope Innocent III certainly appeared to embrace Simon, but not without question. The concerns surrounding visionaries and prophets were highlighted in Innocent’s first papal bull of canonization from 1199. The bull was devoted to Homobonus of Cremona, but of more interest here is the passage where Innocent restated that all must take care to be aware of the potential corrupting effects of the devil:

The angel of Satan may often transform himself into an angel of light [2 Cor. 10:14], and some may carry out good deeds to be seen by men [Matt. 23:5], and some may even perform miracles, although they may be men of corrupt lives, [and] reprobate [2 Tim. 3:8], just as is read concerning the Pharaoh’s magicians [Exod. 7:11, 7:22] and even about the Antichrist, who, if it were possible, [would] seduce the very elect [Matt. 24:24; Mark

¹¹⁵ *Dia. Mir.*, 3.33. [Sunt adhuc alia multa et magna conversi huius opera, quae ad meam notitiam non pervenerunt. Ex quibus tamen quaedam audivi, quae scribere nolui, eo quod relata minus bene retinuerim. Satius duxi etiam vera subticere, quam falsa scribere. (Strange, p. 154)]

¹¹⁶ *Vida*, 17d. [Henriquez omits this passage]

¹¹⁷ *VAbn.*, prol. d.

13:22] into error with their miracles. Therefore neither deeds nor miracles are enough.¹¹⁸

This text comes from a formalized document associated with perhaps the most significant action in Christianity—the creation of a saint. Goodich argues that Innocent’s concern about visions inspired or influenced by the devil had its roots in a growing disquiet about the proliferation of ‘vernacular translations of scripture and of unauthorized preaching’.¹¹⁹ But this fact should not detract from the concern which Innocent displayed towards supernatural events.

There is, upon reflection, a fine line between being declared a saint or condemned as a heretic, and it was this line that the Church under Innocent sought to define. It is only some 250 years later that women from the chapter of Windesheim, in the Netherlands, were banned from publishing any revelations because, as Mathilde van Dijk notes, ‘in the post-Gregorian Church, priests were supposed to have a monopoly on the diffusion of revelation,’ making Johannes Busch’s task of writing the *vita* of Henry Mande rather difficult.¹²⁰ For a medieval religious man, particularly one with ties to the institutional Church, an accusation of demonic influence or, worse even, heresy, would have been fearful to contemplate. It is not too intuitive a leap to imagine that a man such as Rupert of Deutz was actually afraid to be more open about his experiences.

If we turn to Goswin’s biographies of Arnulf and Abundus, we do find a different expression or reaction to visionary experiences. Goswin recorded two important visionary episodes for Arnulf, the first involving the Virgin Mary, and the second Christ, both of whom were often the foci for female visionaries. However, unlike Ida’s text, Arnulf’s visions do not seem to be for any other reason than as reward for his own humility and obedience. Of course, Arnulf’s experiences carried a salutary lesson for the audience, especially at Villers, but the commentary is devoid of the approbation apparent in the narratives associated with the lives of holy women. Arnulf was already faithfully devoted to Mary and spent long hours meditating upon ‘the Seven

¹¹⁸ Michael E. Goodich, ‘Vision, Dream and Canonization Policy, under Pope Innocent III’, in Michael E. Goodich, *Lives and Miracles of the Saints: Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography*, Aldershot, 2004, p. 157, [original pagination].

¹¹⁹ Goodich, ‘Vision, Dream and Canonization Policy’, p. 157.

¹²⁰ van Dijk, ‘Henry Mande’, p. 138.

Joys that the Blessed Virgin most rejoiced in while still tied down to this world'.¹²¹ In a clear demonstration of the charism a religious man could receive if he too devoted himself in like manner, the Virgin appeared to Arnulf in order that he might add to his daily meditations "'those other joys beyond compare, in which I rejoice everlasting in heaven".¹²² This is clearly a narrative designed to illustrate what a man is capable of, rather than a condemnation via a pious woman.

Arnulf's other visionary experience occurred when he was at prayer and, wishing for a place on high, he was confronted with an apparition in the form of Jesus (*apparuit ei Dominus Jesus Christus*).¹²³ Again, the vision is presented as a clear example of what could occur given the right approach to faith and the correct temperament. As Arnulf was praying, 'so great a fire of love enkindled in his soul and so vehement a stupor struck upon it, that, shaken to his very foundations, he was lifted out of his normal state and wafted aloft, in one leap of the mind, into the world on high'.¹²⁴ His subsequent interaction with Christ focused upon his desire to view the Trinity, an event which occurred only after the Lord had tested his faith by tempting him with a succession of lesser but still glorious visions, asking Goswin, "Are all these things you have seen enough for you yet? Or do you want things more sublime still be far to gaze upon?"¹²⁵ Arnulf responded with a resounding no, at which point 'he was plunged into an unsearchable abyss of divine light and was, in some measure, initiated by the master of the universe, so that he saw wondrously, wondrously, I say, he saw, inasmuch as seeing was allowed, *the triune in persons, the substantially one*'.¹²⁶ Like Hildegard, Rupert, Christina, and others, Arnulf was graced with mysterious knowledge and was able, after this experience, to decipher the undecipherable nature of the Trinity:

What wonder that this New Scholar should learn all this? Such a simple man, but educated by Grace in the School of Supreme Divinity, where he learned what many of the wise of this world, for all their wisdom, never have discovered! (1 Cor. 1:19-21) Indeed, some time later a master of theology put to him some questions about the blessed Trinity, and he, being one of those *simple folk* with whom *God's wisdom had held*

¹²¹ *VArn.*, II.5b. [Studuit etiam quotidie sedula meditatione revolvere septem gaudia quibus Virgo beatissima cum adhuc in hoc mundo teneretur specialiter gavisata est.]

¹²² *VArn.*, II.5c. [Recole etiam & ea quibus nunc & semper incomparabiliter fruor in coelestibus.]

¹²³ *VArn.*, II.6b.

¹²⁴ *VArn.*, II.6a. [Tanto amoris igne succensa, tam vehementi stupore concussa est ut a statu suo funditus excuteretur & in supermundanum quemdam mentis excessum elevaretur.]

¹²⁵ *VArn.*, II.6d. ["Sufficiuntne tibi omnia quae vidisti? an adhuc multo sublimiora cupis intueri?"]

¹²⁶ *VArn.*, II.6d. [Qui statim, ut sibi videbatur, inperscrutabili divini luminis abyssu immersus, quantum a Magistro universorum edoctus est, vidit mirabiliter, mirabiliter inquam vidit, sicut videre licuit, "trinum in personis & unum in substantia"]

converse (Prov. 3:32), readily disentangled his questions and did so with a nicety to which that master bears witness.¹²⁷

This experience has obvious parallels with those of Hildegard, Rupert, Jutta, Christina, and Marie, in that Arnulf acquired knowledge through Divine grace. Unlike Hildegard and Rupert, this did not lead to sudden literacy and a flourishing career as a theologian. Rather, like Jutta, Christina, and Marie, it led to an innate understanding of a complex theological issue which he would be otherwise ignorant of. In this sense, Arnulf is positioned more like a holy woman than a holy man.

If we look to the life of Abundus, we find another indication that Goswin understood his subjects to inhabit different spheres of the religious life. *Abundus's Life* is, in all honesty, rather tame compared to those of Ida and Arnulf. As I have already mentioned, there is little physical or spiritual turmoil in *Abundus's Life*, and most of his visions are focused in a very Cistercian way on the Virgin Mary.¹²⁸ There is, however, one account which clearly differentiates the choir monk from his lay brother. After seven years in the order, Abundus had what Goswin titles 'His First Mystical Experience.'¹²⁹ Much like Arnulf, Abundus begged the Lord 'to reveal to him those things that *eye has not seen, nor ear heard*'.¹³⁰ After countless days of contemplation and petitioning his desire is fulfilled:

Forthwith he beheld the *heavens open* before him (Acts 7:55), and he was raptured in spirit up into the admirable sanctuary of the supreme majesty. Upon entering, he beheld a vision, loftier than his soul's eye could grasp, loftier than his entire mind. For he was beholding the unchangeable light of the Lord, wondrously beholding the wondrous Lord himself.¹³¹

There is no substantial difference between Abundus's vision of 'one single Lord' and Arnulf's experience of '*the triune in persons, the substantially one*'.¹³² Ida of Nivelles also took delight in a number of visions associated with the Trinity, with her final experience occurring during her last illness where 'she contemplated herself in the Trinity and the Trinity in herself'.¹³³ However, the Trinitarian visions of Arnulf and

¹²⁷ *VArn.*, II.6e. [Et quid mirum si novus iste scholaris, vir equidem simplex a gratia instructus in schola summae divinitatis didicit quod multi mundi hujus sapientes per sapientiam suam invenire non potuerunt? Unde cum postea quidam Magister Theologus proponeret ei quaestiones aliquas de beata Trinitate, ille qui unus erat ex "simplicibus", cum quo "sermocinata fuerat Dei Sapientia", libere & absolute, eodem Magistro testimonium perhibente, propositos quaestiones enodavit.]

¹²⁸ *VAbn.*, 8, 9, 10, 11e, 14; these are all chapters which focus on visions and/or interaction with the Virgin Mary.

¹²⁹ *VAbn.*, 6.

¹³⁰ *VAbn.*, 6a.

¹³¹ *VAbn.*, 6c.

¹³² *VAbn.*, 6d; *VArn.*, 6e.

¹³³ *VIda*, 33b; also see 22b and 28c-f.

Ida are not referred to as mystical by Goswin and are afforded no special recognition or explanation.

Visionary experience adds another dimension to the already complex discussion concerning mystics and mysticism. As a parameter in the category 'mystic', visionary experience is clearly too diverse to fit into this one function. As we have seen with Hildegard and Rupert, visions were enlightening but problematic. Visions 'revealed' to them the mysteries of Scripture, but they also caused 'embarrassment' and concern. Guthlac only wanted his sister, and the anchorite Ecgberht, to know of the angel he had seen and spoken to. For Ida, Simon, and Christina, visions 'revealed' to them the souls around them who were in danger of prolonged purgatorial suffering. Arnulf and Abundus had Trinitarian visions for no apparent reason, other than that they had earned them. Bernard of Clairvaux's description of his own visionary experience was underwhelming, but it was this very inability to express what he 'felt' that marked his experience as 'mystical'. As historians of medieval religious people we must be more aware that visionary experience does not automatically equate to mystical experience, much like gender does not equal women.

The visionary experiences of Arnulf, Ida, Abundus, Simon, and Christina illustrate the myriad of ways in which medieval holy people could apprehend the Divine, but it is clear that social status **and** gender were influential in how those experiences were interpreted. Firstly, the prophetic experiences of Christina and Simon are clearly didactic in nature. They have a specific purpose, which is to 'educate' the religious and lay people around them as to the importance of repentance and confession, and as tools for teaching Simon and Christina were social equals. Gender only becomes apparent in the extra step Christina takes to endure the purgatorial suffering of others with her own body. This is not something we witness in the few examples we have from Simon's life. The liminal social status of Arnulf also appeared to mark him out as an appropriate individual to employ for instructing other religious men. His status as a lay brother gave him the latitude to push the boundaries of what was acceptable behaviour for a religious man in a monastic setting. Compared to the life of Abundus, a monk from the same monastery, Arnulf's life was certainly intended to be the one to inspire the monks of Villers to be even more devoted in their spiritual practice.

The *Life of Arnulf of Villers* marks a turning point, I believe, in how spiritual practice and inspirational individuals were marketed to Christians in the high medieval period. If we were to remove the personal pronouns and references to Arnulf's name from the text, to all intents and purposes we would be reading the life of a thirteenth-century holy woman. His asceticism was enacted as a pious devotion to Christ's Passion and his spiritual abilities and visionary experiences were portrayed as the ultimate reward for a simple individual who would live no other way but in Christ. He was the appropriate individual for his historical time; he was a man occupying a liminal position in a monastic world that had recorded, from its origins, a continual procession of liminal individuals. These individuals were the exemplars, albeit flawed ones, who showed the monastic community the correct way. However, as the monastic and ecclesiastic realms came to require a more robust and contained version of masculinity, this mantle passed to medieval religious women who, in their flawed and weaker feminine state, became the appropriate vessels of God's grace.

Conclusion

This thesis has addressed one central question: is the apparent lack of 'male mystics' in the high medieval period an historical reality or is it a modern historiographical illusion? It is a question which required two separate approaches in an attempt to answer it and so I have two conclusions to offer the reader. My first concerns the shape of our historiography and how categories are at times employed with limited critical assessment. The second concerns medieval religious men and how their lives were shaped by institutional expectations and the expectations of other men.

The desire to categorize individuals, both medieval and contemporary, is powerful. I have done this myself in this very work, labelling individual men as hermits, heroic ascetics, or monks for example. It is difficult to engage in a conversation about any particular group of individuals without resorting to category-creation. It allows us to understand the predominant characteristics which link the individuals in question together. Categorization in itself is not problematic if the parameters for those categories function for all individuals in society, not just one sector. This has been a major flaw in the scholarship concerning medieval mystics. For many modern historians with an interest in mystics (or more precisely, individuals who experience the divine), this is seen by default to be the study of women. There appear to be four criteria which contribute to the recognition of a medieval mystic: the first, and most likely parameter, was being a woman; the second is the employment of an extremely somatic approach to spiritual life; the third concerns visionary or auditory experiences; whilst the fourth is contemporary recognition. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong in employing a category in order to conceive of and describe the medieval individuals we are interested in understanding; for example, eunuchs or priests or brewers. However, the use of gender as a primary parameter for analysis automatically negates around half of the population, particularly when the study is not ostensibly gender-focused.

The study of medieval mystics is one area where a particular type of mystic experience exists for women and another for men. When considering medieval

religious men, much discussion of mystics is focussed on the intellectual output or mystical theology of the individual in question. These discussions are far less concerned with any outward expressions or performances of spirituality, rather they focus on aspects of the inner man that are to be developed in order to transcend and experience the divine. Chapter one confronted these differences by examining the etymological roots of the words 'mysticism' and 'mystic', illustrating the early-modern genesis of their modern-day meanings. The medieval women who have attracted the epithet 'mystic' in our modern literature were called anything but by their biographers. Women such as Hildegard of Bingen, Christina of Markyate, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie D'Oignies are instead called 'Christ's handmaid', or 'the unforgettable virgin', or 'the maiden'. The differences between Hildegard and Christina Mirabilis are, quite frankly, vast but as religious women they are still initially corralled together under the label 'mystic'. The similarities between Hildegard and Rupert of Deutz are numerous, but they are not considered together under the more appropriate category 'visionary theologian.'¹

Mysticism is an even more opaque topic to contend with, particularly when it concerns medieval individuals who have 'written and taught about the process of attaining and living out lives based on mystical experience of God's presence'.² Do we call an individual who does this a mystic? Or is that title reserved for those that have experiences of the divine? My thesis does not set out to provide answers to these questions but they are important to keep in mind as it becomes clear that they have an influence on our modern perceptions of medieval religious individuals.

The revolution in history which occurred in the mid-twentieth century, including the development of disciplines such as social history and women's history, had a profound influence on how medieval religious individuals were presented in our modern historiography. In the case of medieval religious women, the rise in feminist theory in the execution of women's history was further amplified by the intense interest French feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir displayed in medieval mystic women. I argue that this had a two-fold impact on the study of

¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Preface', in Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, New York, 1990, p. 3. Also see, Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great Through the 12th Century*, vol. 2, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, New York, 1994, esp. Chapter 8, pp. 324-362.

² McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, p. 327.

mystics; firstly, historians of women claimed the epithet 'mystic' as their own right from the start on the basis of the four criteria listed above. Secondly, the argument that medieval religious women were embodying an innately feminist agenda (rightly or wrongly), further distanced medieval men from the category 'mystic'. This expression of the somatic medieval religious woman was layered on top of an existing historiography from the turn of the twentieth century which viewed 'mysticism' as an intellectual therefore male pursuit, with the title 'mystic' appended to those who wrote about 'mysticism'. The end result for modern students is a somewhat divided historiography and, I believe, a misguided understanding of what spirituality was and how it influenced the lives of medieval people.

What happens if we apply three of the criteria for mystics—physical spirituality, visionary experiences, and local recognition—to medieval men? This constitutes the second approach in my thesis: to test whether scholars were overlooking mystic men or to see if they really existed at all. I looked to monasteries for some clue as to where medieval male mystics might be, as the monastery appeared to provide an almost perfect environment for the meditative and contemplative aspects of spirituality in which men participated. However, in chapter two we find that the monastery could be the least supportive environment for the kind of individualism associated with mystics. The twin themes of humility and obedience in the Benedictine Rule were designed to keep excessive displays of asceticism and spiritual practice in check. By following the development of rules for religious communities or individuals, both male and female, it became quite clear that individuality, excess, and difference were not attributes that anyone could or should embody. From the time that Pachomius told Macarius to 'go away', conformity was expected and outright displays of superior spirituality were discouraged, if not condemned outright. The rules for religious women also make clear this expectation but as western Europeans approached the turn of the first millennium, their rapidly changing society saw a reinforcement of conformity for religious men and an increased attack on the position of women in the religious realm.

The ecclesiastical reforms of the eleventh century were responsible for this hardening of attitudes towards women. Within the Church, a moral war of sorts occurred with monks claiming that their more secluded lives (i.e., they were not exposed to women) meant they were in the best position to lead the Church. Priests claimed that monks were not tested by living in the world as they were (i.e., by being

exposed to women). And anyway, how could monks preach the Word to people when they were supposed to be isolated? New models of masculinity were developed as reformers debated the case of who was fittest to lead the Church. Manly priests fought battles against lust and greed while ascetic monks re-enacted the passion of Christ and toiled endlessly against demons. What resulted from this focus on clerical masculinity was the buttressing of church-driven expectations concerning the behaviour of religious men. This reinforcement had initially developed momentum with the Carolingian Reforms which cemented the Benedictine rule in place. What developed from Charlemagne's expansive plan was a form of corporatized monasticism where the monks all followed the same rule and were expected to participate in an expanded Liturgy and devote their time to prayers for society. This in turn led to the next stage of monastic reform, the development of the Cistercian Order; Benedictine monks who wanted a life more in tune with the Rule than the corporatized Cluniacs offered. They also sought a more personal connection with Christ, an approach to spirituality which seemed less apparent in the Cluniac Order.

The period of the tenth to twelfth centuries in Europe was one of immense change, and this complexity is reflected in chapter three. However, it is important to try to come to grips with the sort of social, political, and cultural changes which fostered opportunities for medieval people to engage in a religious life. The growth of the European population led to an increasing number of people turning to the religious life, whether by accident or design. This was coupled with a rise in the variety of ways a person could go about living a religious life. The waning of oblation allowed many more adults to convert, and many more illiterate people were also able to live a religious life as lay brothers or sisters closely associated with a monastery or convent.

The increase in opportunity led to a visible rise in the number of charismatic individuals, both men and women, who looked back to the lives of the desert fathers and mothers and hermits like Antony and Simeon Stylites for their inspiration. So I looked to the lives of men who appeared to exist outside of normal institutional boundaries, even if they were sequestered within a monastery for their entire life like Dominic Loricatus. In chapter four I focused on the men who were more often considered hermits, ascetic monks, wandering preachers or holy men, designations which still hold in modern historiography. What I discovered instead were charismatic religious men like Robert of Arbrissel and Stephen of Obazine who were not permitted

to function outside of the institutional Church; or men like Romuald of Ravenna or Dominic who proved to be as outstanding in their spiritual lives as they were disruptive to the other religious men around them. The early lives of the wandering preachers in particular displayed many of the characteristics that were common in the lives of contemporary holy women; but at the point where their 'celebrity' or 'ability' became obvious they were 'ordered', 'commanded', and 'urged', to return to the institution, where their talents were employed in the service of the Church. However, the diverse orders which arose from this continual re-absorption of talented men into the fold created a problem for the Church which it addressed in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, decreeing that no new orders could be founded and individuals who wished to undertake a religious life must do so under the auspices of an existing order.

To this point I had been thwarted in my attempts to find men who had lived their life in a similar way to recognized medieval holy woman. My research to this point had reinforced my argument that men were as controlling of other men's behaviour, if not more so, than they were of women's. Lay brothers offered another avenue for investigation primarily because, like their female religious contemporaries, they were liminal members of the institutional Church, neither fully within nor without. In chapters five and six I contrasted the lives of lay brothers and religious women and found many parallels in how they approached their spiritual lives and how their biographers responded to and reported on their sanctity. In the life of Arnulf of Villers we see the full range of ascetic behaviours and visionary experiences which were common to the lives of his female contemporaries. In Simon of Aulne we find a powerful prophet who was able to see into the hearts of other men, the equal of Christina of Mirabilis or Marie D'Oignies. Yet these two religious men remain on the fringes of historical enterprise, coming to light only occasionally and certainly not in relation to any discussion about mystics or mysticism. Is it because they are men?

My answer to this is yes. However, it is a yes tempered by the very clear evidence that medieval religious men were held to an exacting performance of masculinity which did not encourage the kind of difference which is such a marked feature of the lives of medieval holy women. Monastic men could not express their spirituality in ways that contravened monastic rules which had developed over the previous 700 years. Conformity was encouraged, bolstered by an exhortation to obedience which permeated all corners of the monastic environment. Religious men who embraced the

opportunities for diversity of spiritual expression in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were quickly reclaimed by the institution they so vehemently wanted to represent in their own fashion. However, Catholic Christianity required conformity and through this it gained and maintained control over its men.

As an historian of gender, I am encouraged by these findings concerning male relationships and masculine expectations. As a historian interested in medieval mystics, the homosocial environment of the high medieval period has made it difficult for me to locate singular holy men. I responded to an historiography which I perceived as gendered and perhaps I have made the same mistake in confining my search for mystics to men only. But I do believe that my research illustrates a need for historians to reconfigure the parameters of their research in a way that removes the assumption that the study of gender equals the study of women; or that the study of mystics equals the study of women.

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