

The Temptation of Saints in Latin Narrative:
England, France, and the Low Countries, 1100-1230

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York

2008

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines a series of twelfth- and early thirteenth-century narratives in which holy men and women are tempted and tormented by what they and the shapers and readers of their life stories understood to be the devil. By analyzing the social and cultural conditions that brought about the creation of particular relationships between saints and the devil, it looks beyond the hagiographic *topos* of the saint defeating the “ancient enemy” in the “desert” to the particulars of the “desert” for each holy person. These episodes can reveal aspects of medieval religious life that may otherwise be ignored within the set pattern of a saint’s life (conversion, temptation, victory over the devil).

By replacing “the devil” with the concept of struggle or crisis, the temptation stories become charged moments in a life when new relationships are formed and old relationships changed— points at which the status quo is threatened. Several models of how this works emerge. The hagiographer may focus on an individual’s spiritual development through his relationship with the devil. In these *vitae*, the inner life of the saint is critical and the devil will build up his attacks as internal torments which include the sins of doubt and despair. In another model,

the hagiographer focuses on the individual holy person who leads a community. In these cases, the internal spiritual development of the saint is less important than the stability of his public role and responsibilities to his community. Some *vitae* concentrate on the saint's struggle to enter the religious life. In others, the entry appears seamless and difficulties (almost, but not always, associated with the devil) emerge well after the conversion. In each of these cases, the role of the devil in the *vita* reflects a larger story in which social background, age, gender, and choice of religious lifestyle are critical.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Thomas Head for his guidance, support, and patience over the years it has taken me to complete this project. I must also thank Professor Pamela Sheingorn for reading and commenting so carefully and thoughtfully.

This dissertation would never have been completed without coffee and a place to both escape and work. And so Starbucks holds a very special place in my heart. Thank you for opening so many stores in Brooklyn in the past ten years.

I also want to remind my cousin Chavie that her near constant trans-Atlantic email presence has kept me reasonably sane. Her drive and shared conviction that there is inherent worth in working to master any aspect of our world, past or present, helps me fight the demons of self-doubt.

But most importantly I need to thank my parents for everything in my life. For reading to me, and telling me stories that brought the past to life, and for taking me to Newfoundland when I was 15 so that I could be where the Vikings were a thousand years ago. And for happily following me around churches and castles and ruins and gardens when I needed to travel back to the Middle Ages in Europe.

This is for my mother—for her encouragement and her promise that she will one day read this. And for making me believe that she believes that this was worthwhile.

And this is for my father whose life continues to inspire me and whose life story first brought history and its extraordinarily everyday heroes to life. His carefully selected and shaped stories of boyhood in Poland and journeys across Europe and Middle Asia during the Second World War exemplify the human spirit as well as the exciting challenge of learning history through personal narratives. Who else would have read Egil's Saga along with me when I wrote my senior thesis? And then, seven years later, remember to stop and think of the buried treasure somewhere along the highway to Thingvellir in Iceland. Because his eyes light up when I tell him I'm done I have to believe that some part of him understands.

Finally, to all those medieval men and women whose lives I've wondered at and written about. Thanks for living such strange and familiar lives and for distracting me with your presence a thousand years later.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In *The Dialogue of Miracles*, the thirteenth-century Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach recounts the tale of a beautiful young woman from a wealthy family who refused her parents' desire that she marry. Eventually her parents agreed that she might live as a recluse. But, after "several days" in holy solitude, she began to struggle with her decision. Caesarius frames her period of transition within a construct of diabolic torment:

...(T)he devil in hatred of so much virtue shook her with various temptations, and, inflaming the innocent heart of the virgin with the poison of melancholy, brought her from full health to sickness. Soon she began to be tossed to and fro with all kinds of thoughts, to waver in her faith, and to despair of being able to persevere. She was attacked also by weakness of heart, by wasting of the body, by sluggishness in prayer and by grief for her seclusion.

When the abbot came to visit her, she voiced her doubts. "Who knows if there be a God, or any angels with Him? or any souls, or any kingdom of heaven? Who has ever seen such things, who has ever come back to tell us what he has seen?" The abbot recognized her panicked crisis of faith as a sign of the devil's interference and begged her to remain in her cell while his monastery prayed for her soul. In the end, Caesarius reassures the reader, the young woman recovered and was blessed with heavenly visions.¹

Through brief exemplary tales of his contemporaries—laypeople, priests, monks, nuns, recluses—who gave into temptation, Caesarius reinforces an

¹ In Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. H. Von E. Scott and C.C. Swinton Bland (London, 1929), 235-237.

image of the world in which the devil is ever present, especially in the lives of the holy. In another story, a group of monks and priests are feasting on Shrove Tuesday and, as the morning approaches, they are not yet sated and begin to prepare a fat hen. “When the scholar had wrung her neck, cut her open and put his hand in to take out the entrails, he drew out instead an enormous toad. Now when he felt it move in his hand, and threw it away, and saw what it was, he uttered a loud cry of fear that brought all the others out. When they saw that the hen’s entrails had been changed into a toad, the guests hurried away in alarm and confusion, for they recognized that it was the work of the devil. This was told me by one of the brethren who was present and saw the marvel.”²

Neither of these stories is extraordinary; they are stories of the expected, of how even (especially?!) those whose lives exemplify holiness can be threatened by the devil in a seemingly endless array of forms. The devil can take the form of inner doubt—a crisis of faith— but can also appear as a toad leaping out of an about-to-be-cooked hen.³ Caesarius’ tales are brief and their outcomes, for those too weak to resist, deadly: a knight plays dice with a devil and is disemboweled,⁴ a nun is tempted by a lay-brother and commits suicide by throwing herself into a well.⁵ But the dead are not saints.

On the surface these stories are very simple. They are ready-made sermon inserts with clear lessons. The devil and his demons are always ready to

² Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, 287.

³ For more on doubt as a tool of the devil in the twelfth century, see chapter two, pages 57-58. For more on the toad as devil see pages 76-77.

⁴ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, 364.

⁵ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, 240.

attack.⁶ No human is immune to temptation. Only the truly holy can defeat the devil. Because the devil is tricky and can confuse and weaken even the strong, it is too risky to battle the devil alone. Therefore, a community of the faithful is needed to help defend against the incursion of evil. As we read these *exempla* more closely, facets of the society in which they were produced and understood begin to emerge along with a long list of questions. Why is the wealth of the recluse's family mentioned? Why do her parents oppose her choice? Why is she tormented after just a few days? Why is she tortured by inner doubt instead of lust? How do the men recognize the devil in a seemingly innocent toad? Why a toad instead of a frog? Are there meaningful differences among the devil's interactions with all men and women? How do we compare the temptation of male religious and female religious during a period when the male and female spheres within the religious world were becoming more distinct? What happens when episodes of diabolic interference appear within the narrative framework of an acknowledged holy life? Along with these questions come others. What are the underlying assumptions in these stories? How might emerging models of sanctity and temptation add to our understanding of medieval society?

Medieval Christians—men, women, monastics, clerics, theologians, laypeople—accepted the reality of a devil who could, at any point, interfere in

⁶ I will be using the words “devil” and “demons” somewhat interchangeably in the following pages. There is no clear or consistent difference in usage in the sources I have read although more often devils tempt while demons torment as a means to temptation. Henry Ansgar Kelly explains that “(o)nce the devil and the demons had been united in patristic thought in terms of mythical fallen angels, the distinction between the demons as possessing spirits and the devil as tempter was no longer clear.” In *The Devil, Demonology and Witchcraft: The Development of Christian Beliefs in Evil Spirits* (New York, 1968), 98.

their lives.⁷ The devil might appear as a monster, a terrifying vision, in the form of a friend or family member, or as hidden, internal doubt. Any moment of crisis was an opportunity for the devil to torment, tempt, and weaken the vulnerable. The complexity of this reality is reflected and made tangible in the *vitae* of contemporary holy people whose lives were shaped to exemplify how evil could appear and be successfully overcome.⁸

⁷ André Vauchez explains that “(c)lerics and laypeople shared the conviction that this world was the battleground for continual warfare between the forces of Good, identified with God, and those of Evil, incarnated by Satan. This cosmic struggle had its counterpart in the hearts of men, where the virtues fought with the vices. Twelfth-century artists delighted in representing this ‘psychomachia,’ in which human forces acting alone were unable to obtain victory or even offer resistance, or in depicting the processions of equal numbers of wise and foolish virgins. Indeed, in the eyes of the people of that time, Evil had as much reality as Good, and the Devil made frequent appearances to tempt them, mock them, or beat them black and blue. But God was no abstraction either; his presence was apparent in events, and natural catastrophes or abnormal phenomena were immediately interpreted as signs of divine anger or heavenly warnings which were dangerous to ignore. In individual lives, just as in the history of groups, everything was a sign, a premonition or a symbol. But it was still necessary for people to have the wisdom to recognize them and grasp their importance before it was too late. The belief in the immanence of justice was widespread; did God not see all actions and judge even the most hidden thoughts?... . But God did not limit himself to permitting the forces of Evil to chastise sinners. He also intervened beneficently in history by performing miracles, whose reality no one in that epoch doubted. Indeed miracles played a central function in people’s lives: they reestablished in the human body and in society that divine order which had been perturbed by sin... . His interventions brought a ray of hope to a world in which the individual was defenseless in the face of nature... . It was rare, however, that God, who by definition was invisible and whose infinite grandeur surpassed understanding, was directly implored. In general it was preferable to have recourse to closer and more accessible intermediaries: the saints, whose cults, then at the height of their development, played a major role in Christian religious life. In the twelfth century, people were more interested in their miracles and relics than in their glorious deeds, which, recorded for the most part in Latin, were inaccessible to the masses.” In *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, trans. Daniel E. Bornstein (Notre Dame, Ind., 1993), 87-88. Vauchez’s assertion about the inaccessibility of Latin *vitae* to the vast majority of people is important to consider since all of the texts I discuss in the following chapters were written in Latin. While they were not written for a “popular” audience, the narratives still do reflect and reinforce commonly held beliefs.

⁸ Beginning in the twelfth century there was a trend toward writing about contemporary, recognizable saints rather than ancient heroes. Aviad Kleinberg finds that “(t)he emphasis on saints as models for action, as exemplars to be literally imitated, became more prominent... . ***The new concept of sainthood was of a spiritual struggle, often beginning with conversion and continuing with a public effort within society.***” (my bold and italics), (135) “From the late eleventh century... there was a widespread feeling that the world was showing signs of rejuvenation rather than decay, and one need not look back to find intercessors and protectors. The new heroes were not looked upon as pale imitations of past glory... Contemporary saints could focus their society’s growing need to experience the holy directly. They could be seen, touched, and imitated. They were a sign that God had not turned away from his world.” But “with

A concrete reality of the devil for would-be saints (even when put in the abstraction of a nightmare-vision⁹), their hagiographers, and their audience lies behind all *vitae*.¹⁰

Since the motif of diabolic temptation is generally a constant in the narrative constructions of saints' lives—their *vitae*—how can these critically charged moments, which, at least on the surface, appear very similar, be analyzed usefully?¹¹ In the following chapters, I will examine eight twelfth- and

the growth of literacy and the improvement of communication in the twelfth century, hagiographers faced a reading public that did not necessarily share their feelings about the saint... . Instead of portraying the saint as just another epiphany of the ideal saint, they sought to convince the reader of the authenticity of their account by providing enough noniconographic details to demonstrate a familiarity with what was unique to and distinctive of this particular saint." In *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1992), 24-25.

⁹ "The distinction between dreams and visions was thought to be important in the Middle Ages. A vision was usually accepted as a 'real' message from the other world which was to be heeded, whereas a dream was less significant, perhaps—as some medieval writers claimed—only a result of overeating before retiring." In B. Cron, ed. and trans., *A Medieval Dream Book* (London, 1963), 84.

¹⁰ What matters is that the diabolic experience was "real" to the people experiencing, describing, and hearing about it. Jeffrey Russell concludes that "(i)n a society in which demonic activity is assumed to be natural, certain subjective events are likely to be interpreted as the work of demons, and then such experiences of demons become part of the evidence for demonic activity. One need not accept the objectivity of the conclusion to observe that this is a respectable mental process." See *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), 183. In his study of the uses of the devil during the English Reformation, Nathan Johnston explains that even "if the very expectation of temptation was self-fulfilling, this does not diminish the reality of the experience for those who felt themselves to be afflicted." Although Johnston approaches his material through the specific context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant England and its new focus on internal struggle for the soul of each believer, this general statement is applicable to medieval Christians. See *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2006), 140.

¹¹ Narrative sources are challenging because they lay out an entire life's story in a seemingly complete and easy to follow manner. Valerie Edden explains that "(n)arratives, like history, impose form and order upon events; their selection and sequential arrangement make sense of the action, crafting a story rather than presenting a series of disconnected events. This overall design is as often implicit as it is explicit. The act of interpolation (*sic*) involves both responding to what is explicit in the text and also exposing what is latent in it; it thus involves reading between the lines and interpreting the silences. All narratives invite the active involvement of the reader,

early thirteenth-century narratives in which religious and semi-religious men and women are tempted and tormented by what they and the shapers and readers of their life stories understood to be the devil.¹² I will focus less on the construction of the devil as an outside force in the *vitae* than on the construction of sanctity and the role that the devil plays (greater, lesser, monstrous, familial, private, public) in the formation of holy people. By analyzing the social and cultural conditions that brought about the creation of particular relationships between saints and the devil, I will look beyond the hagiographic *topos* of the saint defeating the “ancient enemy” in the “desert” to the particulars of the “desert” for each holy person. These episodes can reveal aspects of medieval religious life that may otherwise be ignored within the set pattern of a saint’s life (conversion, temptation, victory over the devil).¹³

offering clues for interpretation which we solve by drawing on our previous experience of narratives as well as on a range of cultural assumptions.” See “Devils, Sermon Stories, and the Problem of Popular Belief in the Middle Ages,” in Andrew Guer (ed.), *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol 22, Medieval Narrative Special Number (1992), 213-225.

¹² The first text I discuss, Guibert of Nogent’s *Monodiae*, does not fit directly into either of these categories but proves very useful in establishing a more general view of models of temptation in an autobiography of sorts that reads very much like hagiography. By “semi-religious” I refer to those individuals who did not take vows and join a religious order but who nonetheless made the apostolic ideal, especially chastity, a life goal. The early beguines fit this criteria as do earlier hermits and recluses. Although he is looking at a slightly later period, Goodich includes the early beguines in his study of thirteenth-century saints. When explaining that the majority of the women who were sainted were cloistered women who founded convents, he shows that this sort of female piety, which was highly esteemed by those who determined sanctity, includes the early beguines in Flanders. See Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Stuttgart, 1982).

¹³ This pattern is clear in the *Life of Alexis*, a version of which is found in Christina of Markyate’s Psalter. Christina of Markyate’s own *vita* follows a pattern very much like that of Alexis. “Alexis’ *Life* follows closely the fixed biographical framework of the ‘hagiographical paradigm’ of birth, youth, moment of saintly self-awareness, renunciation of the world, life of saintly self-denial, death and ‘rebirth’ (posthumous miracles). Part of the value of the paradigm is its flexibility; individual characteristics of different saints become more meaningful, and in a sense more truthful when the general outline of the saint’s *Life* adhered to a recognized pattern of saintliness.” See Nancy Vine Durling’s introduction to the *Life of St Alexis* in *Medieval Hagiography*, ed. Thomas F. Head (New York, 2001), 318.

By replacing “the devil” with the concept of struggle or crisis, the temptation stories become charged moments in a life when new relationships are formed and old relationships changed— points at which the status quo is threatened. Several models of how this works will emerge. The hagiographer may focus on an individual’s spiritual development through his relationship with the devil. In these *vitae*, the inner life of the saint is critical and the devil will build up his attacks as internal torments which include the sins of doubt and despair. In another model, the hagiographer focuses on the individual holy person who leads a community. In these cases, the internal spiritual development of the saint is less important than the stability of his public role and responsibilities to his community. Some *vitae* concentrate on the saint’s struggle to enter the religious life. In others, the entry appears seamless and difficulties (almost, but not always, associated with the devil) emerge well after the conversion. In each of these cases, the role of the devil in the *vita* reflects a larger story in which social background, age, gender, and choice of religious lifestyle are critical.

I will be examining a range of writings that describe the struggles of men and women attempting to live according to the ideals of Christian piety.¹⁴ The

¹⁴ Michael Goodich explains that during the later Middle Ages there was a new emphasis on the life of the saint, rather than miracles performed. See *Vita Perfecta*, 175-76. This was partially due to a fear that the devil could use his powers to trick people into believing that his work was really the work of a holy person. For Caesarius of Heisterbach, miracles were “anything contrary to the course of nature at which we marvel, something ultimately performed by God, through saints or evil spirits.” Ronald Finucane stresses that “this last part was not original with Caesarius—indeed, very little was—but reflected the ancient Christian belief that demons or magicians could perform miracles, which lay behind the thirteenth-century rule that proof of miracles was not enough in the process of canonizing a saint since evil beings could deceive, by virtue of their miraculous abilities. A candidate must also present a virtuous life. In canonizing Gilbert of Sempringham in 1202 Pope Innocent III wrote “the evidence of miracles... is on occasion misleading and deceptive... The same confusion arose over dreams and visions sent by either God or by the Devil.” In *Miracles and Pilgrims* (Totowa, NJ, 1977), 51.

focus of my analysis will be on those works that were written as descriptions of contemporary religious. These works are representative of several directions possible in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century *vitae* but are limited in time and place to allow my understanding of the role of the devil to be tested under conditions that, while comparable, are not fully homogeneous. I have limited myself to eight narratives to allow for a fuller discussion of each life and the way the devil and his obstacles are presented.

My analysis of the principal texts will be arranged chronologically as well as by form of Christian practice. The earliest figure is Guibert of Nogent (d. ca. 1125) who wrote about himself, but included as well stories of his mother and various laymen, around 1115. This is the only text which is not a *vita* although it contains certain elements generally associated with hagiography. In chapter three, I discuss the role of the devil in the near contemporary lives of an English recluse, Christina of Markyate (d. ca. 1155/66), and a merchant turned hermit, Godric of Finchale (d.1170). Chapter four compares the place of private and public temptation in the *vitae* of two religious leaders, Gilbert of Sempringham (d. 1189), the founder of a monastic order, and Hugh of Lincoln (d. 1200), a Carthusian monk turned bishop. In chapter five, I will examine the *vitae* of three early beguines, Marie of Oignies (d.1213), Christina Mirabilis (d.1228), and Yvette of Huy (d. 1228), two of whom were married and had ongoing relationships with their children.

While most of these stories were constructed as hagiography and contain the expected *topoi*, they also include elements of biography and a contemporary

social context that are not seen in the *vitae* of early Christian saints who remained popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The authors of the *vitae* I will be discussing were personally familiar with their subjects. These are *vitae* of contemporary men and women, the details of whose lives could have been known at the time of composition, and whose struggles, especially public struggles that were shaped as battles with visible, outer demons, were still within living memory. Indeed, several of these *vitae* were written with the direct input of their subjects.¹⁵

By the very nature of their vocations, the men and women who chose to model their lives after the apostolic ideal faced obstacles similar to those faced by Jesus and his first followers as well as by early Christian saints who imitated the New Testament model.¹⁶ Authors of *vitae* often present the material and physical desires and human obstacles, against which saints must struggle, as part of the devil's plan to undermine holy lives.¹⁷ Although the devil is a

¹⁵ For a discussion of the issues involved in analyzing contemporary *vitae* see Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, esp. ch. 3. Kleinberg analyzes the lives of three saints whose *vitae* were written either within the lifetime of the saint or shortly thereafter. He finds that while "the social reality of living saints is, in the absolute sense, beyond our reach... there are grades of proximity." The circumstances under which these *vitae* were written, while "not a guarantee of authenticity, (do) increase its likelihood." 16-17. For a discussion of issues surrounding the composition and reception of *vitae* and of the shared worldview of the authors and audience, see Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1988), esp. 18-37.

¹⁶ See, for example, Matt. 4.1, Mark 1:10-13, Luke 4:13 as well as the original paradigm set by the serpent's temptation of Eve in Gen. 3. See also Athanasius' *Life of Saint Anthony* as an influential early example of a saint's life in which temptation by the devil is critical. This version of Saint Anthony's life remained popular throughout the Middle Ages. For a discussion of the origins of Christian eremiticism, see Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism* (London, 1984), ch. 2. For the role of the devil as tempter of early Christians who withdrew to the desert, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, NY, 1981), esp. ch. 6, 168-177. Thomas J. Heffernan explains that "Christ's behavior in the Gospel's was the single authenticating norm for all action. For actions (*res*) narrated in the lives of the saints to be binding for the community, they had to be an *imitatio Christi*." In *Sacred Biography*, 5.

fundamental part of the process of temptation, he is fluid in function and his attacks can most productively be considered within a specific historical context.

The ability to fight temptation or keep the devil at bay is essential to a reputation for sanctity.¹⁷ It can be seen as a pre-apocalyptic fight between good and evil in which the individual who successfully fights the devil dramatically demonstrates proof of being chosen by God to be a living exemplum. Indeed, it is the saint's very reputation for pure, chaste living that is seen as encouraging the devil and providing him with a challenge. Saintly behavior can therefore be

¹⁷ The struggle against physical, sexual temptation is especially seen in male lives and is part of both the seeming exclusion of women from many of the new orders of the twelfth century and the desire to enclose female religious. See, for example, Ann K. Warren, "The Nun as Anchoress: England 1100-1500" and Penny Schine Gold, "Male-Female Cooperation: The Example of Fontevault," in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1 ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, MI, 1984), 197-212, 151-168 and Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000-1150*, ch. 4-5. In *The Lady and the Virgin Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago, 1985), Penny Schine Gold explains that the stricter enclosure of women was explained as protecting women from their own weak natures. Ultimately, women were not able to escape the notion that they are dangerous both to themselves and to men. See also Sharon Elkins's *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988) in which she demonstrates that the establishment and growth of female foundations during this period resulted from positive cooperation between men and women. For the connection between sexual temptation and the devil, see Dyan Elliot, "From Sexual Fantasy to Demonic Defloration" in her *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA, 1999) ch. 2 in which demons are shown as instigators of sin, especially sins of a sexual nature, and in which women are seen as especially susceptible to the seductive powers of incubi. Women were seen not only as likely to be assaulted by demons but also as potential sexual predators. In *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, 1993), 102-104, Elliot discusses the background of eleventh-century Church reform as marginalizing women's spirituality. Women, as sexual tempters, were seen as dangerous to religious men and had to be separated from them both as wives and as religious sisters.

¹⁸ This expectation and the preparation necessary to defeat the devil is seen in Aelred of Rievaulx's advice to his sister who lived as a recluse. "Whenever you are troubled by warmth of passion, whenever the evil spirit suggests something unlawful, remember that he who searches hearts and minds is present and his eyes gaze upon whatever you are doing or thinking. Show reverence then for the angel who, without any doubt, stands at your side and answer the tempter; 'I have God's angel as my beloved and he watches over my body with jealous care.'" See "The Rule of Life for a Recluse" in *The Works of Aelred of Rievaulx*, vol. I (Spencer, Mass.), 1971, 66.

partly understood as a constant struggle with the devil—inciting the devil to tempt and then proving saintliness through successful resistance.¹⁹

Jeffrey Burton Russell's four volumes on the devil in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds provide an excellent introduction to the field of diabolology.²⁰ He traces the development of the idea of the devil in European folklore and in Christian theology and shows the devil's many manifestations in narrative, art, and theater. In his preface to *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, Russell maintains that there is a consistency to ideas about the devil during the Middle Ages and that "social context influenced diabolology only in a broad sense."²¹ Russell stresses that the medieval understanding of the human struggle with the

¹⁹ In an essay on Christina of Markyate, Samuel Fanous explains this battle as follows: "Having fought off the external enemy, represented by society, the desert fathers fled to the wilderness to do battle with the enemy within. This was no metaphorical battle, waged in the stillness of quiet meditation, but a real, physical war fought in the arena of the monk's cell: first and foremost with the devil himself; second with one's flesh to overcome sexual temptation; and third with other natural desires. These causes of bodily temptation are resisted in kind." He goes on to explain that "the wars against Satan and the flesh are interconnected in that it is the devil who stirs up the saint's lust. This is illustrated in one of the set pieces of Western hagiography, where the devil assumes the shape of a voluptuous woman and enters St. Anthony's cell. Such temptations are regarded as necessary and useful, and are even perceived as the natural state of the monk. Thus, temptation simultaneously provides an opportunity for monks to practice *ascesis* and functions as a sign of sanctity. Paradoxically, the absence of temptation is perceived as evidence of sin." See "Christina of Markyate and the Double Crown" in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, eds. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (London, 2005), 65. Consider as well the frequent striking images of the devil and animals associated with the devil in manuscripts such as those that appear in *The Winchester Psalter* and *The St Albans Psalter*. The latter is closely associated with Christina of Markyate. Anthony's temptation by beasts is the model for these stories. For more on the use of the devil in medieval art see, for example, Jeffrey Burton Russell's *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1984) ch. 6, Luther Link, *The Devil: The Archfiend in Art from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1995) and Barbara D. Palmer, "The Inhabitants of Hell: Devil," in *The Iconography of Hell*, eds. Clifford Davidson and Thomas H. Seiler (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992), 20-40.

²⁰ See Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY, 1977); *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, NY, 1981); *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1984) and, outside the boundaries of my research, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, NY, 1986).

²¹ Russell, *Lucifer*, 13.

devil is constant since “all times were one in the mind of God, and all things and individuals on earth manifestations of his eternal ideas... . A saint is a saint is a saint... . What saints did, therefore, remained the same through the centuries.”²² While there are elements of Christian sanctity that seem timeless, I will argue that, despite the seeming rigidity and predictability of *vitae*, the struggle with temptation should be analyzed within a set context.²³ The role of the devil as tempter, instigator, and obstacle-placer, at times quite indirectly, can be used to illuminate the social world of the medieval holy person and the place of gender in society as well as reflect aspects of both personal and spiritual development and his or her relationship with the community.²⁴

As sources, these narratives represent the major trends of twelfth- and early- thirteenth-century hagiography and monasticism in northwestern Europe. I will focus on one major feature each work shares—the devil's temptation of a holy person—and show how this expected and often overlooked *topos* can illuminate the struggles faced by religious men and women as well as

²² Russell, *Lucifer*, 213.

²³ Two recent works focus on the role of the devil from the perspective of a specific historical context. David Brakke writes about the relationship between demons and early Christian monks in *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass, 2006). In *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2006), Nathan Johnstone focuses on what he sees as an overwhelming concern with inner diabolic temptation in post-reformation England.

²⁴ Although my focus will be on the temptation of holy people and not on diabolical possession, it is important to realize that both acts demonstrate the role of the devil as well as the role of the saint as healer and as ideal Christian. Many of the exemplary works that include stories of the struggle between the devil and a would-be saint also include stories of saints curing suffering demoniacs. For a study of gender and possession in a closely related period see Barbara Newman, “Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century,” *Speculum* 73 (1998): 733-770.

demonstrate the importance of the role of gender, the individual in a community, and the development of the understanding of the inner spiritual life in medieval religious society.

The foundation and model for medieval hagiography, both for living and in recounting Christian holy lives, is found in the Gospel descriptions of the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness and in the lives of the early Christian monks and saints, especially in Athanasius' third-century *Life of Anthony*. In *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, David Brakke discusses the role of the devil in *vitae* and emphasizes the essential goodness inherent in the monk being tempted. "... (T)he monk does not form his self essentially through conflict with demons. Rather, the monk's basic ascetic task is to preserve his 'natural' self from the corruption of the passions. Then, when he is attacked by the demons, the monk must not lose heart or become careless; he must maintain his zeal and virtue in the face of the demons' efforts to unnerve him."²⁵

The zeal of the holy man became more pronounced when, in the third and fourth centuries, individual Egyptian Christians (following the model of Jesus in the desert) began withdrawing from society. Their ultimate goal was to come close to God by resisting the downward pull of the fallen demons—which is to say, by resisting the pressures of materialism and an urban society. "(T)he presence of people enervated the contesting monk by diminishing his reliance on God and depriving him of the focus he needed to see the devil and his demons"²⁶ And, in the desert, these demons were omnipresent. In Athanasius' *Life of*

²⁵ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 37.

²⁶ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 15-16

Anthony and in Anthony's letters, terrifying shape-shifting demons appear everywhere, ready to attack at the slightest sign of vulnerability.²⁷ The monks who battle these demons act as representatives for an ideal unified Christian community that the devil constantly works to undermine.²⁸ Anthony's fight with the devil "provided later monks not only with lists of thoughts and battle tactics, but also with an overarching scheme or plot for a monk's struggle with demons: the devil first attacks with thoughts, then turns to the body, and appears visually as a kind of last resort."²⁹ While these three options are evident in medieval *vitae*, the inner battle ("attacks with thoughts") takes on a different significance in the sources I will discuss in the following pages. The choice of attack on body or mind is not necessarily part of a progression but fits into certain religious and social patterns which emerge in later medieval Christianity.

Albrecht Diem outlines this development in "Encounters between Monks and Demons in Latin Texts of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages."³⁰ He explains that "the changing role of demons gives insight into the development of concepts of sanctity and the rise of Western monasticism in general" and focuses on the lasting influence of Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* and other monastic texts

²⁷ Brakke says that "despite its venerable place in Western culture, the phrase '*temptations* of Antony' is not quite accurate; better would be *trials* or *tests*. Only at the beginning of his career do the demons tempt Antony with food, money, sex, and the like, attractions that Antony brushes aside. Mostly the demons try to frighten Antony: the '*temptation*' they offer is to lose heart, to falter in his confidence in God." The goal, in each stage, "is to undermine what Antony has already achieved or to drive him away from places he has already occupied." The outcome is never in doubt. In *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 26.

²⁸ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 23-24.

²⁹ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 26.

³⁰ In *Miracles and the Miraculous in Medieval Germanic and Latin Literature*, eds. K.E. Olsen, A. Harbus and T. Hofstra (Leuven, 2004), 51-69.

from Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.³¹ He finds that three types of demons appear most frequently in monastic literature: those “who tempt a monk by causing or representing a sinful thought or fantasy, demons who appear to a monk either to frighten him, to seduce him or to challenge his *discretio* (his ability to distinguish between good and evil), and finally demons who take possession of lay people.... . The harshest assault by a demon is to cause evil and sinful thoughts and misleading visions, which not only disturb an ascetic’s full dedication to God, but might cause him to return to the world or to commit sinful acts. A relatively weak but still dangerous provocation of a demon is to stir up the desire to see one’s family or to own property. The strongest weapon of demons, however, is to cause sexual desire.”³² These demons are sometimes represented as metaphors for sin, sometimes as real physical figures. In general, there is no defined role or shape for demons in monastic texts.

After Athanasius, John Cassian and Sulpicius Severus introduced the next significant developments in understanding the role of the devil in society. Cassian explains that the human vices which provide the devil with the opportunity to approach humans are signs of the “genuine weakness of demons and stresses that demonic action requires the agreement of the threatened individual....” So, for example, “a monk whose thoughts are dedicated to greed will be recognized by his reactions and attacked by demons of greed.”³³

³¹ Diem, “Encounters Between Monks and Demons,” 52.

³² Diem, “Encounters Between Monks and Demons,” 52-53.

³³ Diem, “Encounters Between Monks and Demons,” 57.

In his *Vita Martini*, Sulpicius Severus minimizes the role of the devil as tempter and tormentor. Instead of continually fighting demons—through material and sexual temptation—saints in Gaul demonstrate their powers through exorcisms. There is a slight shift in the sixth-century *Vita patrum Iulensium* which focuses on the monk and his community both in terms of the ability to perform exorcisms, to heal and—what is new—to show that demons fight when monks occupy what was once their space. They do this by possessing members of the community, “not by causing sexual temptation, illness or insanity but by inciting them to commit acts which could cause damage to the community.” This sort of attack requires a strong abbot to regain control.³⁴ In this sort of narrative, any monks who threaten the order and community become “demonised.” This sort of devil will emerge in a somewhat different, but still familiar, form in the *vita* of Gilbert of Sempringham.

Diem explains that the late antique and early medieval model of sanctity in which monks and hermits proved themselves by overcoming demons representing sexual desire changed with the establishment of monasteries as safe spaces which keep the demons out. “Their aim was not so much to give ascetic individuals an opportunity to gain perfection in an ascetic struggle, but to shape places of institutionalized sanctity where monks and nuns prayed for the earthly well-being and the eternal salvation of the founders and their families.” And so, “the late antique definition of an ascetic as someone who engaged in a lifelong fight against sexual and other temptations, and the demonic

³⁴ Diem, “Encounters Between Monks and Demons,” 62.

personifications of sexual temptation therefore did not fit into the hagiographic discourse any longer.”³⁵ Still, as my sources will make clear, neither of these models fully overtakes the other during the Middle Ages and both provide broad enough understandings of the role of the devil in holy lives that they continued to be adapted to explain later medieval holy men and women.

For example, the solitary battles Anthony faces are transferred into later monastic stories in which the mutual support possible within a community is stressed. Brakke finds the lasting influence of Anthony and of the desert fathers in the experiences of later monks who continued to turn to them for strength in their own times of anxiety—especially in dangerous solitary struggles. This is clear in Caesarius of Heisterbach’s story of the young recluse who is tortured by doubt almost as soon as her parents allow her to follow her will. Beginning with the earliest *vitae* the monk who conquers his own will is then attacked by demons in order to strengthen his faith.³⁶

Brakke concludes his study by setting up the understanding of the devil that was inherited by medieval Christians. “Embedded now within a divided self, spiritual combat with demons required no desert, indeed no withdrawal of any kind, and so could enlist not only monks but also laypeople, who increasingly saw themselves as equally at odds with themselves.”³⁷ Still, withdrawal of some sort remained the norm for non-lay Christians throughout the Middle Ages. It is the experience of separation from society and even from normative Christian

³⁵ Diem, “Encounters Between Monks and Demons,” 67.

³⁶ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 147.

³⁷ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 246.

practice that marks the lives of would-be saints. And it is within this sometimes traumatic experience that the holy person struggles with his or her demons.

While later medieval hagiographers and individual saints modeled their lives and reputations on the ideals of the early Christian saints, these models should not be viewed as absolute. Aviad Kleinberg emphasizes that “the medieval perception of sainthood was fluid: it was personal, concrete, and of an ad hoc nature. Rather than trying to fit individuals to a clearly defined ideal, communities shaped their ideas of sainthood around specific individuals. Medieval communities venerated simultaneously very different individuals who belonged to the same external categories, indifferent to the logical contradictions such behavior entailed.”³⁸ While the community and history are important to the understanding of *vitae*, the individual experience and life cycle of the saint remain crucial to understanding the particular emphases in the struggle between the devil and a saint.³⁹

Kleinberg provides an excellent introduction to the many issues involved in using *vitae* as sources. He explains that “the eyewitness/biographer usually repeated many of the clichés of the hagiographical genre, but by proclaiming his loyalty to standard representations, he could interpret their meaning in such a way to give them an entirely new content... . Similar elements can have different

³⁸ Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 15.

³⁹ This is supported by insights gained from other fields. In reviewing the naturalist model of cognition and belief, Anne L. Clark quotes Justin Barrett as explaining that “(e)ven a belief that looks like ‘tradition,’ i.e., that has been transmitted over time, remains culturally relevant ‘because, without perceptibly modifying its public form, it lends itself to different interpretations according to the agent, the circumstances, and the state in the life cycle’.” See “Why all the fuss about the mind?” in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, eds. Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York, 2007), 173.

meanings in different *Lives*. Actions and words acquire their meaning from their role within the *Life*; only later can we relate them to the broader context of the genre... . Similar phrases, similar gestures could mean different things in different contexts.”⁴⁰

In the twelfth century then, what sort of battles did saints fight with their demons? Jeffrey Russell stresses an ongoing theological debate over theodicy and the danger of dualism. Theologians concluded that:

all actions of the Devil are subject to the permission of God and the limitation of natural laws. The Devil can do nothing that violates the natural process: he cannot change a prince into a frog. But he can work through nature, deluding the mind by suggesting illusions internally or by forming external illusions observable by the senses. To tempt us he may use external material objects such as gold or real estate, or he may act through internal ones such as bodily members and fluids. Though having no body himself, the Devil may assume a body in which he can (for example) have sexual intercourse, though neither as an incubus nor as succubus can he engender offspring. He may also possess the body of a victim for a period of time, though he may never impair the free will or conscience of the possessed.⁴¹

While this is the consensus of the scholastics, Russell argues that this is too distant from the reality of the devil in lived experiences. In order “for a concept to continue to live it must respond to human perceptions” and, according to Russell, artists and mystics grasped this reality which was instrumental in shaping contemporary *vitae*. A vivid and terrifying devil active in the world was real for medieval Christians and this perceived reality shaped both the lived lives and written *vitae* of their saints.

⁴⁰ Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 3.

⁴¹ Russell, *Lucifer*, 206.

And so these “intellectual abstractions, popularized in sermons, were accepted both by the educated and by the unlettered, in whose minds the abstractions took on immediacy and power. The degree to which they were taken seriously in the eleventh century by an intelligent, learned person who was not a theologian appears in the autobiography of Guibert of Nogent.”⁴² Still, the literal interpretation was not the only one available to medieval readers. As will be seen in the following chapter, Guibert’s own career indicates as much. Samuel Fanous, in his analysis of Christina of Markyate’s *vita*, stresses that constructed hagiography was not only meant to be read literally. “A medieval reader would always have expected any narrative to have, as did the Bible, at least three meanings; a literal, an allegorical and an anagogical; at any moment one meaning might have precedence over the other and the distinctions might become blurred.”⁴³ I will maintain that the potential for multiple readings of *vitae* does not mean that they cannot be read “literally” in order to understand the nature of the saint’s individual struggle with his or her demons.

Serious questions about the nature of the devil correspond to an intensified inward devotion to a suffering Christ in the eleventh century. A “new emphasis on the importance of the individual and his natural human emotions”

⁴² Russell, *Lucifer*, 180-1.

⁴³ See Samuel Fanous “What is this *Life*?” in *Christina of Markyate*, 202. Robert C. Gregg, in his preface to Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* explains medieval Christian Biblical exegesis along similar lines. “(M)edieval scholastics who perfected this method boiled it down to a slogan about the four “senses” or “meanings” of any passage: the literal teaches you the facts, the allegorical what you should believe, the moral what you should do, and the anagogical where you are headed.” See Saint Athanasius. *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York, 1980), xviii.

corresponded with a “new social and religious significance of women.”⁴⁴ Rachel Fulton explains that this deeply personal contemplation is especially clear in the contributions of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), whose life, as will be seen in the following chapter, intersected with that of Guibert of Nogent.⁴⁵ Anselm “transformed the fear of Judgment, heightened as it had been for a generation or more by the passing of the millennial anniversary of Christ’s Nativity and Passion into an obligation to meditate on the immensity of Christ’s sacrifice. Human beings, he recognized, could never hope to meet Christ in Judgment with the balance of their sins repaid: the debt was simply too great.”⁴⁶ The unresolved issue remained whether Christ’s death “should be understood as a sacrifice, made by humanity to God... or as a ransom, paid to the devil to release humanity from the bondage of sin.”⁴⁷ In the view of the Masters at Laon, “humanity, in succumbing to the *temptatio* of the devil at the Fall, had voluntarily withdrawn its allegiance from God and placed itself under the domination of the devil. Having done so, it had lost its freedom and was, therefore, no longer capable of escaping the devil and returning its allegiance to God. What was needed was an advocate strong enough to liberate humanity from the devil’s control and restore it to God’s: Christ was that advocate. The only problem (as the Laon Masters

⁴⁴ See Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (Cambridge, 2002), 60-61.

⁴⁵ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 60-61.

⁴⁶ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 190. For more on the development of ransom theory see Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, 1987), esp. 363-66 and 388-90.

⁴⁷ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 182.

saw it) was whether the devil had a right (*ius*) to power over humankind or whether, having obtained it through deception and fraud, the devil did not.”⁴⁸

In the twelfth century it was generally accepted that the devil retained the right to tempt and torment—especially those men and women who resisted the allure of the material for the rewards of the spiritual. Returning to the doubting recluse of Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *exemplum*, we see how this could be expressed by concentrating on the inner battles of holy people and on the dangers involved in entering the religious life without the stability that would come from the support of an established religious community.

Ineke van ‘t Spijker explains that the return to the eremitic traditions of late antiquity during the eleventh and twelfth centuries corresponded with more mature entries into the religious life and a demand for stricter communities.⁴⁹ She explains that “it is the continuous isolation from the outer world in the cell, which facilitates an inner life... . (S)olitude enables one to achieve the necessary concentration.”⁵⁰ But monastic solitude does not necessarily imply the state of being alone or markedly different from the expected religious norm. “Realizing one’s inner man, in a context where the goal is the restoration of a universally valid image, does not imply striving for a distinct individuality. On the contrary, although differences between people are acknowledged—people are prone to different vices and find different virtues more or less difficult—if there is anything

⁴⁸ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 182.

⁴⁹ See van ‘t Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Turnhout, 2004).

⁵⁰ van ‘t Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life*, 51.

altogether forbidden in monastic life, it is *singularitas*: the wish to stand out.”⁵¹ Being too distinctive could invite the devil’s attention. Still, there was room for singularity in forms of religious expression which lay outside the direct authority of particular monastic rules—this is seen in the *vitae* of the beguines as well as in Godric of Finchale’s *vita*. The cell provides a protection against the devil that is necessary in a world of human weakness. Still, the lone trials of Jesus and the early saints remained very much a part of the accepted and expected experience of holy people.

As a Cistercian abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux clearly recognized the potential rewards of being tested in the wilderness, but as preacher of the Second Crusade in 1146 he saw as well the dangers that confronted those who set out to prove themselves in foreign lands. Those who were not prepared to face the enemy faced death and the loss of the Holy Land. A parallel is seen in descriptions of the spiritual struggle that reforming Christians such as the Cistercians could expect to face. In his letter “to a nun of the convent of St. Mary of Troyes,” Bernard warned of the dangers of a solitary religious life and questioned the motives of those who seek it. He does not imagine a life of peaceful contemplation; rather, he sees the potential of unguarded and unleashed evil. He recognizes the possibility that those who sought a solitary existence did so because they had something to hide or because they wanted freedom from the rules of the monastic life—“the woods afford cover, and

⁵¹ van 't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life*, 51.

solitude assures silence... .”⁵² Even those with the most honorable motives only hurt themselves and their communities by abandoning the convent for life in the wilderness where sins go unnoticed and uncorrected and hidden virtue cannot benefit weaker sisters.

Bernard ends with an ominous warning that more than suggests the likelihood of a failed encounter with the devil. He writes that “(t)he wolf lurks in the wood. If you, a little sheep, penetrate the shadows of the wood alone, you are offering yourself as a prey to the wolf.... Whether you are a saint or a sinner do not cut yourself off from the flock or you will fall prey to the wolf and there will be none to rescue you.”⁵³ While warning of great personal risk and hinting that those who leave abandon those who need them most, Bernard stresses the importance of community and shows that the ideal of a Christian proving his faith in the wilderness can be understood as separation from the corruption of material society. This is the model seen in the establishment and growth of Cîteaux, which abandoned the literal model of the desert fathers while strengthening its symbolic and spiritual value.

The Cistercian focus on hospitality and self-sufficiency through labor explains the reality of “desert” communities not built in wastelands but in relatively isolated, yet fertile, regions with access to roads and rivers. Some of the challenges of monastic life can be seen as the inevitable results of reforming success. Each man was expected to adjust to the changes around him while

⁵² See *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James (Chicago, 1953), 179-180.

⁵³ See *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, 179-180.

cultivating the ability to cut himself off from the world in order to face his own internal struggle. This occurred against a background of thriving communities in which members continually left to establish daughter houses and unknown pilgrims, workers, and other travelers came and left. The community prepared a place in which the individual could best face the inevitable struggles of spiritual life but, in the end, the community could only support the individual as he faced his personal demons.⁵⁴

Giles Constable explains that there is a “marked tendency in the twelfth century to spiritualize and internalize the journey.... What had previously been a war against the external forces of evil and the devil was now increasingly seen as more representative of Christ's suffering or repenting than fighting external evil.”⁵⁵ This focus on a hidden internal struggle corresponded with the increasing popularity of lay sanctity during the latter part of the century. The possibility of finding holiness among the laity is seen in Jacques de Vitry's declaration that “we do not consider religious only those who renounce the world and go over to religious life but we can also call regulars all the faithful of Christ who serve the Lord.”⁵⁶

As I begin to consider variations in the manifestation of the demonic, it is necessary to clarify that my focus will be primarily on understanding the

⁵⁴ Interestingly, it was the support of prominent members of Cistercian and Premonstratensian houses that helped the early beguines gain acceptance.

⁵⁵ See Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 152.

⁵⁶ See Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 293. As I will discuss in chapter five, Jacques de Vitry, the key supporter of the early beguines, worked to shape the life of Marie of Oignies in a way that acknowledged her singular challenges but ultimately stressed the importance of women like her to the general spiritual health of the entire Christian community.

construction of saints' lives through an analysis of the ways in which they are shown to handle challenges and successfully resolve crises. In considering the many ways that the lives of men and women were remembered and shaped by their contemporaries, I recognize that the objective of the *vitae* was to establish the sanctity and power of a new saint. Witnesses are crucial in this context and are often integrated into the narrative in the form of challenging human relationships. Harmful relationships and social upheaval are often, but not always directly, associated with the devil. But even supportive relationships can demonstrate the risk of too many this-worldly attachments. These relationships—positive, negative, and those that fell somewhere in-between—are the channels through which the saint is shown choosing the spiritual over the material, the sacred over the profane—God over the devil. An analysis of these varied relationships reveals them to be signs of the ties that must be simultaneously, but not contradictorily, strengthened and loosened over the course of a saint's life. Understanding the nature of these relationships is critical if we want to understand the many ways in which twelfth-century men and women were portrayed by their contemporaries as having successfully defeated the devil.

Chapter Two: Guibert of Nogent

The shifting nature and locus of struggle against diabolic temptation and torment is a striking element in twelfth- and thirteenth-century *vitae*. Descriptions of temptation range from graphic and often sexually charged visions to the seemingly mundane challenges abbots and bishops faced from monks, lay-brothers, and their communities. But, despite its constancy, demonic interference in *vitae* cannot be dismissed as an expected literary commonplace. Rather, these stories of temptation reveal critical aspects of a would-be saint's spiritual development. Because descriptions of the devil's interference in human affairs are not limited to *vitae* and the nature of temptation must be understood within a specific historical context, the meaning and role of the devil can be examined through any personal writing in which the devil appears in a variety of forms.

Guibert of Nogent's *Monodiae*⁵⁷ contains key elements found in *vitae*.⁵⁸ A monk and eventual abbot at Nogent in northern France, Guibert (c. 1061-c.

⁵⁷ Guibert entitled this work, completed c. 1115, *De vita sua, sive monodiae*—*On His Own Life, or Solitary Songs*. There have been several translations that approximate the meaning of the Latin title. Autobiography and memoir are most common but both necessarily risk potential anachronistic impressions. It is often simply referred to as *De Vita Sua* or *Monodiae*. Jay Rubenstein refers to it as the *Monodies* in his recent study of Guibert of Nogent. I am using Paul J. Archambault's 1996 translation, *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, as well as Edmond-René Labande's 1981 edition, *Guibert de Nogent: Autobiographie*, in which a French translation accompanies the Latin text.

⁵⁸ As the earliest medieval writings that have been described as autobiography, Abelard's *Historia calamitatum* and Guibert's *De vita sua, sive monodiae* have been linked to the twelfth-century "discovery" of the individual. But it is Guibert's look at his life that most closely resembles hagiography. In contrasting the two works, Arno Borst finds that "for Abelard, the moment is not an epiphany in which divine providence is uncovered in a flash; such a manifestation of the eternal in the moment can be found in the autobiography of the Benedictine abbot Guibert of

1125), commentator on both biblical texts and contemporary events and issues, is best known for the writing of his own life's story.⁵⁹

By developing the trajectory of his interconnected personal life and career as a story of struggle in which true conversion follows crisis but crises never really disappear, Guibert of Nogent focuses on critical moments in which the devil appears as tempter and tormenter. But before I discuss select episodes of diabolic interference in Guibert's life of himself, it is necessary to look at the framework within which he wrote.

In *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind*, Jay Rubenstein places Guibert in two separate social contexts that affected his career—that of a minor aristocratic family as well as that of the environment of early scholasticism in northern France. Rubenstein describes Guibert's position within his aristocratic family as that of “the youngest son from that family's own second or third tier... (i)n short, at the fringes of a patronage network which did not extend very far.”⁶⁰ As the youngest son and one of his parents' only surviving children, it seems likely that he grew up driven to succeed but also aware that he would not automatically find himself in a position of authority or status.

Guibert was raised by a widowed mother haunted by her own demons and spent his youth torn between his tutor's largely unsympathetic ways and an

Nogent.” In *Medieval Worlds: Barbarians, Heretics, and Artists in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1992), 82.

⁵⁹ The range of his works includes his very early thinking on the nature of virginity (*De virginitate opusculum*), a critical commentary on Genesis (*Moralium Geneseos libri decem*), a chronicle of the First Crusade (*Gesta Dei per Francos*), a critique of the cult of the saints (*De pignoribus sanctorum libri quatuor*), and an anti-Jewish polemic (*Tractatus de incarnatione contra Judaeos*). For a complete bibliography see Rubenstein, 279-280.

⁶⁰ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 18.

expectation that he would enter a monastery and have the opportunity to train as a knight. He ultimately chose the monastic life. Although he was a student of Anselm of Canterbury and very much influenced by his philosophy, Guibert never attained a position of great influence, even in his own region. Still, his life and thinking reflect patterns of religious, social, and political change in northern France in the early twelfth century. Associated with these changes are a growing fear of the devil's influence in the world, especially through heresy—a label Guibert applies in increasingly broad terms by the time he writes his autobiography.⁶¹

Although Guibert describes diabolic attacks on a variety of people, his own temptations are a central part of his story. Unlike the many other temptation stories in the text, Guibert's own encounters with the devil are dangerously subtle since they involve internal torment. In describing his own struggles, Guibert recalls his own development in terms that make it clear that he believes he is unusually capable of defeating the devil independently—without the relationships that are often so integral in the development of saints. It was a common belief in Guibert's time that the inner demons might very well go unnoticed by outsiders and that therefore individual being attacked must remain on constant guard and not rely on others for detection and support. In such a case, the individual must

⁶¹ See Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 193-195. According to R.I. Moore, this fear of the devil (not only in Guibert's own life but throughout society) is connected with fear of social change and the resentment that many men of his background felt toward the emerging class of clerics attaining positions at court. In "Guibert of Nogent and his World," in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R.H.C. Davis*, ed. Henry Mayr-Harting and R.I. Moore (London, 1985), 109.

possess an intense awareness of his inner life and the strength to overcome “inner demons.”

The significance of this struggle in Guibert’s life can be understood by considering a corresponding progression found in hagiographical stories of temptation. As the saint works to secure an exemplary position in society through a life that reveals spiritual truths, the devil responds with challenges that often reflect the type of sanctity and degree of isolation the saint has managed to achieve. While the type of “wilderness” varies depending on gender, age, and type of religious community, it is the symbolic power of isolation in the temptation process that is particularly important.⁶² The devil may attack in the guise of physical violence, sexual temptation, family struggle, and intellectual challenge—even over the course of one life. Ultimately, the goal must be inner peace. It is for this reason that the saint in these stories expands his spiritual quest by silencing his inner demons—those demons only he can sense and that he must fight alone in the wilderness of his heart and soul.

This renewed focus on the ideal way to develop inner spiritual strength is seen in Bernard of Clairvaux’s disapproving reaction to graphic images of demons, monsters, and devil-inspired behaviors in traditional Benedictine monasteries. In “Monsters, Corporeal Deformities, and Phantasms in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa,” Thomas E.A. Dale considers the meanings of these compelling images and the larger intellectual context of opposition to the

⁶² The importance of “wilderness” is especially critical in my analysis of the earliest beguines who, even as an urban phenomenon, were inspired by monastic reformers such as Bernard of Clairvaux.

vivid iconography found in Cluniac houses such as that at Cuxa. While the Cluniacs approach the images as powerful didactic tools that prepare the monks for inevitable diabolic temptations, the reformed houses oppose the graphic carvings because “they evoke the monk’s curiosity and distract him from the higher calling of interior mediation.”⁶³ The general medieval conception was of monsters, hybrids, and certain beasts as inversions of the ideal man—symbols of spiritual disease and lost inner strength. But Bernard was afraid that these images would “compete with the sacred models that the monk is expected to imitate and to impress upon the inner man.”⁶⁴ In considering how best to succeed in the struggle against sin for individuals and communities,⁶⁵ twelfth-century writers theorized that the health of the spirit is reflected in outward appearance. They differed on the best way to ensure a healthy balance.⁶⁶

⁶³ In *Art Bulletin* 73, no. 3 (September 2001): 404. On the other hand, proponents of these images argued that a vulnerable monk would be strengthened by continually seeing these monstrous carvings and that, over time, “his inner demons and the phantasms of his dreams would no longer seem quite as frightening or threatening. Viewed daily in the company of other monks, the sculpted capitals, much like the words and harmonious music of the liturgy, could help the individual renew his personal struggle with the support of the community.” (431) Note that it is recognized that the monk is protected because he belongs to a community. An extension of this argument is that those men and women who live as recluses and hermits are exceptional and would have to be prepared to face the devil alone. That extensive preparation is necessary can be seen in the *vitae* of Christina of Markyate and Godric of Finchale as well as in the lives of the beguines. Bernard of Clairvaux’s warning to would-be recluses on the dangers of living alone was influential in the construction of these lives. The exceptional nature of the beguine ability to live as sometime-recluses can help explain one of the most striking elements of the *vitae* of Marie of Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, and Yvette of Huy—that is, the ability of the women to perceive demonic interference both in their own lives and against others who were trying to live good lives.

⁶⁴ Dale, “Monsters, Corporeal Deformities, and Phantasms in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa,” 409.

⁶⁵ While monastic writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux were focused with the spiritual development of both individual religious men and women as well as that of their communities, these concerns over the connection between physical and spiritual health can be seen as well in both Guibert’s analysis of the failures in the life of the urban community of Laon.

⁶⁶ This concern can be seen in the creation of an early twelfth-century manuscript of Gregory the Great’s *Moralia in Job* which highlights the context for Guibert’s focus—as well as the focus of

As a biblical exegete, Guibert was inspired both by the focus on an internal spiritual battleground and the methodology seen in Gregory the Great's symbolic reading of the Bible. Guibert dedicated much of his career to uncovering the truths he found hidden in biblical texts. He extended this approach to his analysis of his own life in which he demonstrates the centrality of the quest for contemplation in Christian spirituality as well as the hidden dangers on the path to internal peace. In writing about his youthful decision to turn his life around, Guibert describes his indebtedness to Anselm: "With great attention he set about teaching me how I was to conduct the inner self and how I was to use the laws of reason to govern my little body."⁶⁷

The model that Guibert follows in much of his biblical commentary, as well as in his autobiography, demonstrates his quest to understand "human life as a process."⁶⁸ Assertions of the devil's appearance, in whatever form, can be read as an indicator of crisis and analyzed for its role in shaping a particular life. By tracing the evolution of Guibert's writing on the nature of temptation, Rubenstein finds that, although his earliest focus was on the dichotomy between struggle in the world and internal terror, by 1115 that focus, influenced by Anselm's

contemporary hagiographers and exemplary writers—on spiritual warfare with the devil as the ultimate struggle. Concern about the dangers of internal struggle can be found in the illustrations made at Cîteaux to accompany the text of *Moralia in Job*. Gregory the Great interprets Job as a metaphor for the spiritual battles that a Christian must expect to endure and the illustrations that were prepared at Cîteaux strengthen this message. See Conrad Rudolph, *Violence and Daily Life: Reading, Art, and Polemics in the Cîteaux Moralia in Job* (Princeton, 1997).

⁶⁷ *A Monk's Confession*, 61. *Autobiographie*, 138-139.

⁶⁸ Rubenstein contrasts Guibert's writing with that of Abelard and Eadmer. He describes Abelard as "out to justify himself against a hostile world" and Eadmer as "out to defend his legacy and the legacy of his mentor to a sometimes skeptical world" while Guibert was simply trying to "understand himself and his relationship to God..." *Guibert of Nogent*, 82. For a more detailed comparison of the three men, see note 119 below.

teaching, had changed. The developments in Guibert's thinking on temptation are closely entwined with key issues that mark the intellectual and theological debates of the twelfth century—questions of will, motivation, and intention.

In his *Opusculum de virginitate* (c. 1070's), written when he was sixteen, Guibert contrasts the struggles of life-long virgins and those who choose celibacy during or after marriage.⁶⁹ True virgins “do not fight against remembered pleasures, against *memoria voluptatum*, or even against the flesh itself. They instead do battle directly with demons.”⁷⁰ Although this division is interesting and should be recalled when considering the sorts of temptation his mother faced as a wife and widow, the meaning of direct battle is significant at this point. As Guibert focused on the role of contemplation—on the ways in which the mind works toward perfecting spirituality—he began to understand that the struggle is not simply between mind as spirit and body as flesh. Rather, the most challenging struggle is that which takes place within the mind. In his *Moralia Geneseos* (c. 1084), a commentary on the first part of the book of Genesis, Guibert writes that “we find ourselves placed directly against ourselves. We find no one nearer in the work of salvation and we suffer no worse enemy than ourselves.”⁷¹ By the time he wrote his autobiography, Guibert had concluded that the internal, mental struggle against temptation is more significant— it

⁶⁹ Rubenstein discusses the difficulty of determining exact dates for much of Guibert's work, partly because some were written over the course of several years and also because revisions of earlier works later in life. For example, Guibert began the *Moralia Geneseos* by 1093 but appears to have revised it over the next three decades. (28, 227-228 n. 67).

⁷⁰ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 23.

⁷¹ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 31-32.

demonstrates an already proven ability—than the struggle to overcome carnal desire.

The role of symbolism in understanding the true nature of things is at the heart of Christian exegesis. In much the same way that biblical texts can be examined for hidden, internal truths, all lives, but especially those seen as exemplary and mirroring the truth of religious faith, can be interpreted and presented as foundational texts. According to this view, as the individual progresses in spirituality, the locus of struggle shifts—is elevated—from the external to the internal.⁷²

R.I. Moore finds that Guibert's focus on the internal is influenced, in large part, by the model of Augustine's *Confessions* and explains that he "follows Augustine in focusing attention at critical points less on the externals of people and events than on the operation of the will, or heart, which is the real theme of the confessions...."⁷³ For Rubenstein, Anselm's influence on Guibert's understanding of the nature of the internal struggle is critical to understanding the autobiography.⁷⁴ Only when Guibert recognized that a life in which conversion is the goal consists of "constant internal skirmishes fought among Reason, Will and Affection," did he begin to focus on the meaning of the earthly reward of the contemplative life. Reward is not an external life of contemplation—monastic or eremitic isolation—but rather "the attainment, even if only temporarily, of a vision

⁷² Examples of external influences may include those arising from the individual's community, family, and physical body.

⁷³ Moore, "Guibert of Nogent and his World," 112.

⁷⁴ This refers to Anselm's belief in the ability of the mind to recognize absolute truth.

of God, a taste of contemplation, which can be had through the maintenance of a well-ordered mind.”⁷⁵ A good life implies progression toward order. Disorder is associated with the devil and implies giving in to physical, animal instincts. By controlling the mind and body, man demonstrates the ability to defeat the devil. Because steady progression toward order is so difficult to achieve, the devil is constantly looking for the opportunity to interfere. This occurs at moments of vulnerability that differ based on variables such as gender and way of life.

The temporary nature of contemplation—the reality that the devil will interfere and constantly have to be subdued—is part of the larger picture that Guibert finds in his exegesis of Genesis. For Guibert, the stories of Genesis demonstrate that crisis continually unsettles the ordered, contemplative life—“a proper hierarchy exists, is undermined, is restored, and then undermined again.”⁷⁶

Although Guibert’s autobiography has been described as “his most haunting, most powerful, and most personal sermon,”⁷⁷ it is incomplete and as such “we can make no safe observations about the overall structure or coherence of the book.”⁷⁸ But, it is clear that by the time he chose to write about

⁷⁵ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 49

⁷⁶ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 51.

⁷⁷ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 60. Following the model of contemporary sermons, Guibert built his life story around a collection of exemplary stories which warn the reader about the dangers inherent in society and remind them that the devil is ever present and prepared to attack. Still, his main focus is his own inner life and the temptations of the world play a secondary role in his struggles. These dangers are very real for those who haven’t managed to attain “contemplation.”

⁷⁸ See Rubenstein pages 61-62 for a brief history of the manuscript. The basic structure of the book into three books is accepted although Rubenstein strongly suggests that someone, probably

his life, Guibert had learned from Anselm to “look at the internal world in isolation... . His thought left him almost no room for consideration of the external.... His focus on the interior world heightened his sense of, or perhaps provided a rationalization for, his own inability to live in the exterior.”⁷⁹ This does not mean that Guibert managed to achieve the ideal inner life, but it does seem that this distinction made it increasingly difficult for him to deal with the corruption of the real—external—world.

By the time Guibert wrote his autobiography his contempt for the world had become entangled with personal, career difficulties. Until this point in the work, the devil does not stand out in Guibert’s consideration of his own life. It seems possible that focusing blame on the devil risks removing responsibility from the individual. It is important to Guibert that “(R)eason... decide for itself to surrender to the external world and hence to the temptations of the devil. The key forces are rational and internal, not supernatural and external.”⁸⁰

It is from this change that Rubenstein distinguishes between Guibert the character in the autobiography, and the historical Guibert whose belief system is found in his writings. It is important to stress that the young Guibert of the autobiography is a partial creation of the mature Guibert whose struggles are

Guibert, removed certain sections. Its division into three parts is retained; book one is the most personal part—“the practical application of his theories about the mind,” which he had developed in his commentary on *Genesis*. As an application of the theory of spiritual development told as a life story, this section is very much exemplary in the pedagogical sense. Book two is a history of the abbey of Nogent, Guibert’s arrival and career there, and narrates his mother’s death. Book three is mostly the story of the uprising at Laon, which is seen as a tale of overall corruption ending in violent revolt.

⁷⁹ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 180.

⁸⁰ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 190.

reflected in his earlier self. “The old writer and young character brood about demons and do battle with them whereas the young writer dismissed them through a retreat into the inner man.... But the devil is not alone. Other earth-bound evils serve to torment the moralist in his quest for peaceful contemplation.”⁸¹

Despite his attempts to achieve lasting internal contemplation in this world, Guibert, like his mother, was never able to escape the outside world. External demons continued to torment him through what was, for Guibert, an increasingly corrupt religious and political culture. The dangers of heretics and Jews, of scholasticism, and of money (which is associated with greed) were not diminished because they existed outside the mind. The devil took the form of the new theologians, like Abelard, who believed that they could acquire truth through learning instead of mysticism, of men who sought the patronage of powerful lords, and of the lords—the castellans—who took advantage of their neighbors.⁸²

With this context in mind and while recognizing the difficulty of approaching the autobiography as a unified text, it is constructive to see what Guibert does with the devil in a variety of temptation stories. There are three types of episodes involving diabolic encounters in the autobiography. The first type involves Guibert’s mother, and these stories are the most realistically frightening; the second type reveals Guibert’s personal obstacles; and the third—

⁸¹ Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 191.

⁸² For a detailed discussion of Guibert’s end-of-career attitudes toward these external dangers see Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 191-197.

represented by the most physically graphic tales—are frequently secondhand stories about an assortment of wayward monks and laymen.

In general, the episodes including his mother are stories of external temptation.⁸³ Since she spent much of her life outside a convent—as a daughter, wife, and mother—what she perceived as encounters with the devil would have consisted of realistic, outer temptations from people around her or torment in an everyday setting. Guibert's birth is one example; her pregnancy had been difficult, childbirth nearly caused both of them to die, and they were only saved after a promise of eventual consecration for the yet-to-be-delivered Guibert.⁸⁴ Guibert's narrative of his early life is wrapped up in descriptions of his mother's encounters with the devil and her difficulty in leaving the world for a life of contemplation. He begins with her jealous, evil stepmother cursing her and thereby blocking the consummation of her marriage until another old woman removed the "evil charm."⁸⁵

⁸³ Guibert continually refers to his mother as "my mother." Nancy F. Partner suggests that since the book is presented as a confession in which Guibert's "I" is at the center, his mother can only appear in relation to him. It is for this reason that his surviving siblings do not appear in his story in any significant way. He does not see them as having key roles in his formation. Partner sees Guibert's portrait of his mother as combining the ideals of the manhood and womanhood that Guibert could not find elsewhere in society. "Men (especially the laity) are predominantly faithless, lazy, brutal, lying, ignorant, hypocritical, adulterous, greedy; (Other) Women are frivolous, vain, seductive, untrustworthy, sensual, worldly impious. Only 'my mother' combines the feminine ideals of piety, modesty, chastity, dutifulness, and steadfastness, with the masculine values of self-control, pride, courage, honor, and reputation. We see in her an exceptionally neat instance of how repudiation of sex can effectively reorganize gender...." See "The Family Romance of Guibert of Nogent: His Story/Her Story," in *Medieval Mothering*, eds. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York, 1996), 374-375.

⁸⁴ *A Monk's Confession*, 9-11. *Autobiographie*, 17-21.

⁸⁵ *A Monk's Confession*, 38. *Autobiographie*, 84-85.

Among the last episodes involving Guibert's mother's life is a strange story that links the cursed early period of her marriage to a period of self-imposed suffering as a long-term widow in a convent.⁸⁶ Guibert describes his mother's frightening vision of phantoms dragging her to a place where she saw her husband tormented by a crying phantom infant who represents a child he had fathered outside of marriage during the years he was unable to begin a family with his wife. His child died unbaptized and, after his death, he was tormented by the child's suffering. Guibert's mother tried to ease her husband's time in purgatory in traditional ways—prayer, charity—as well as by adopting an orphan who would be raised with her in the convent and might somehow atone for her husband's child.⁸⁷ The devil noticed this good deed and caused the baby to cry constantly while Guibert's mother tried to sleep. This episode is indicative of the sort of reality-based diabolic encounters Guibert's mother experienced. Visions of terrifying spirits who allowed her to see the sometimes torturous afterlife are followed by the seemingly mundane problem of a mother being up all night with a “possessed” crying baby.

A careful reading of her difficulties shows that Guibert's mother is described mostly in terms of the physical and external. But, until her death, she had

⁸⁶ *A Monk's Confession*, 64-69. *Autobiographie*, 146-158.

⁸⁷ Guibert's writings have several early or first references to concepts and mentalities that emerged over the course of the twelfth century. The story of Guibert's father's suffering after death is among the earliest descriptions of punishment in purgatory. See Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1986). Guibert's presentation of the crusaders' rationalization for attacking Jewish communities in Europe while on the way to Jerusalem provides a clear contemporary justification—“Here we are,” they said, “going off to attack God's enemies in the East, having to travel tremendous distances, when there are Jews right here before our own eyes...” *A Monk's Confession*, 111. *Autobiographie*, 246-247.

exercised a lot of influence over Guibert through her “inner eye” or dream-visions. With the exception of visions for her son’s benefit—over which she had claimed to have no control but which successfully controlled Guibert—she is not presented as seeking true contemplation. When she enters a convent, several years after her husband’s death, Guibert does not describe the devil’s attacking her during prayer or attempting to disturb her solitude.⁸⁸ Guibert does however show her constantly struggling to live virtuously while in the world or closely connected to it.

Despite her vulnerability, Guibert’s mother does not budge when faced with worldly pressures. Early on in her marriage she resists repeated attempts by her brothers-in-law to convince her to leave her husband so that they could possess his lands, and she refused the wealthy men who wanted her still virginal body.⁸⁹ Guibert does not directly implicate the devil in his mother’s troubles. He explains her worldly problems as part of the expected corruption of the material world—his mother’s stepmother would have preferred it if one of her own daughters had married Guibert’s father, the attempts at seduction “are common to human nature,” the charms “are frequently practiced among the people.”⁹⁰ These episodes are not meant to be striking—they are just part of the lives of ordinary people in which diabolic attacks are so much a part of life that their origin becomes possible to overlook. But his mother is extraordinary in her

⁸⁸ This is not the case when she works on behalf of others. See, for example, her efforts to alleviate her husband’s suffering in purgatory. *A Monk’s Confession*, 65-69. *Autobiographie*, 146-158.

⁸⁹ *A Monk’s Confession*, 35. *Autobiographie*, 76-77.

⁹⁰ *A Monk’s Confession*, 38. *Autobiographie*, 84-85.

ability to resist the temptation to leave her marriage or give into sexual desire while in a sexless marriage. Instead, for as long as it lasts, she takes the curse of virginity as a blessing.

The first time the devil actually attacks Guibert's mother she is in an especially vulnerable and isolated position. Her husband is being held as a prisoner of war by a man known for keeping his prisoners rather than accepting ransom payments. She is therefore in a sort of widowhood and alone at night when "the Devil, whose custom it is to attack those who are weakened by grief, the Adversary himself, appeared all of a sudden and lay upon her, crushing her with his tremendous weight until she was almost dead." Suffocating and unable to call for help, a good spirit—an angel?—who has been silently guarding her bed, calls upon Mary for help and fights off the devil.⁹¹ Guibert's mother is physically passive during this terrifying encounter, receives no help from her family or her sleeping servants, and learns that only God can save.

Her nighttime delivery from the devil inspires her to remain a chaste widow after her husband's death and to fight for her rights when her in-laws, once again, attempt to enrich themselves by dispossessing her. Her husband's family had everything to gain if she remarried and gave up control of her property and children. She resists the temptation to "enjoy life in the world"—in the words of one of her tempters— and instead protects her children's inheritance and remains loyal to the memory of her husband.⁹² As a model Christian widow,

⁹¹ *A Monk's Confession*, 40-41. *Autobiographie*, 90-91.

⁹² *A Monk's Confession*, 42. *Autobiographie*, 96-97.

Guibert's mother stays home until her youngest child, Guibert, turns twelve, and she dedicates herself to his education under a harsh tutor before abandoning him for the ascetic, monastic life from which she is still able to shape the course of her son's life through the power of dream-visions.

Once his mother is enclosed, followed soon afterward by his tutor, Guibert flounders and briefly experiments with the enticements of the material world, such as sleep. Even once his mother and tutor pull him back toward the religious life, he silently rebels and enters the Church hoping to gain wealth and power through it. As soon as he realizes the error of his ways and chooses the road to true conversion, the devil attacks. His first description of the devil's direct attack—through horrifying, bloody nightmares—is telling. Guibert describes the devil as “our ancient Enemy, whose long experience has taught him to adapt to every type of soul in every age, our Enemy, I repeat, had prepared to issue new challenges to my spirit and my diminutive body.” This stress on the devil's ability to change shape and method of temptation implies that, for Guibert, the devil is constantly ready to attack regardless of the extent to which the soul—inner man—has prepared itself. There is no point at which man is safe from the devil.

The description of his early demons as “internal” does not lessen their potency.⁹³ These demons first come in a waking life in which Guibert is vaguely attracted to the secular world but never seriously strays. This is followed by

⁹³ Rubenstein explains that for Guibert “the deepest level of reality... was the internal, the psychological. Physical demons are no more real, and in fact are arguably less real, than demons who exist primarily as thought and who make war in our minds Book I of the *Monodies* focuses consistently on internal warfare, whether Guibert writes explicitly about his emotions or whether he talks about shadows assailing him in his bed.” *Guibert of Nogent*, 69.

violent dreams. Guibert begins his story by bitterly recalling a childhood spend in isolation from other children or any form of worldly activity— “other boys of my age could come and go as they pleased and, at times, with no constraints at all. I, on the other hand, was scrupulously guarded from such behavior... . There was not a day, not a moment, when I was allowed a holiday.”⁹⁴ Guibert uses his memory of a harsh childhood and education, which was intended to protect him from the material world, to stress the impossibility of achieving a complete break from the world, especially when it is forced upon an individual with no will to resist or choose.

The loneliness of Guibert’s childhood was followed by the demon-filled dream-visions of a young teenager who had finally chosen the religious life for himself. These experiences taught him that ultimately people face God and the devil alone and therefore must prepare their souls for this experience. He describes his inability to overcome suffering while trying to sleep—“Deeply shaken by fear, the mind is even afraid to fall back asleep. It matters little whether we are alone or in company to fight such affliction. Company does not drive away the fear; and constant solitariness either increases or maintains it at the same level.”⁹⁵ As soon as Guibert chooses conversion, the devil begins to torture him in sleep, tempt him with ambition when awake, and trouble him with the jealousy of his peers. But his mother’s dream-based insight into his thought

⁹⁴ *A Monk’s Confession*, 16. *Autobiographie*, 30-31.

⁹⁵ *A Monk’s Confession*, 51. *Autobiographie*, 116-117.

and her advice, combined with his tutor's physical presence, strengthens him when his "soul lay exhausted and tormented under the burden."⁹⁶

Guibert describes one of his early experiences with the devil in terms that suggest that similar attacks were frequent. The attacks were physically and mentally exhausting:

One night... I was awakened by an intense feeling of panic... Suddenly I heard, not far above me, the clamor of what seemed to me many voices coming out of the dark of night, voices without words. The violence of the clamor struck at my temples. I fell unconscious, as if in sleep, and I thought I saw appearing to me a dead man who (someone shouted) had died in the baths. Terrified by the specter I leapt out of bed screaming, and as I did so I saw the lamp go out. Then I discerned in the darkness an enormous shadow, the very contour of the Devil standing near me. Such a terrifying vision might have been enough to drive me mad had not my tutor, who frequently stayed with me to calm these terrors, not appeased my distraught and troubled spirit. I was not unaware, O my God, that in my tender years, the good intentions that filled my tender soul must have contributed immeasurably to the devil's inciting me toward evil....⁹⁷

A turning point in Guibert's life comes with his first actions that are at least partly self-motivated (although his mother's influence is a constant until her death). He changes monasteries, is influenced by Anselm, and resists the constant pull toward positions of honor and career advancement that he knew could benefit his entire family's position in society: "O my God, what adversities, what envies I was burdened with at that moment! Inside me my spirit was stirred by what was being suggested to me from the outside, as if that offered a way out

⁹⁶ *A Monk's Confession*, 55. *Autobiographie*, 126-127.

⁹⁷ *A Monk's Confession*, 52. *Autobiographie*, 120-121.

of temptation. But even though this ambition was on fire within me I never allowed my tongue to give it expression.”⁹⁸ It is at this point that he describes his attempt at true contemplation: “I tried to experience that blessed solitude of mind, where one finds your presence.” Like many men in twelfth-century monasteries he sought comfort in the “Mother of the heavenly kingdom, Mary, Mother of God, my only refuge in all of my needs, and to offer her all of my inward fervor.”⁹⁹

Guibert’s description of the difficulties he faced are markedly different from his many stories of corrupt clerics and laymen whose lives or stories crossed his path. Their lives serve as a warning to men who might fall prey to the devil. They are stories of ordinary people and demonstrate a clever viciousness possible in diabolic attack—a cruelty that combines the worst of Guibert’s inner traumas and the corruption that disgusted him and the physical attacks and public humiliations his mother faced.¹⁰⁰ Guibert saw the often physically repugnant attacks on weak monks and lords as signs that there are real dangers in the world for those who are lacking in resolve.

Although Guibert feared for his own sinful thoughts, he described the most horrifying diabolic attacks on those whose actions demonstrate the very real

⁹⁸ *A Monk’s Confession*, 70-71. *Autobiographie*, 158-159.

⁹⁹ *A Monk’s Confession*, 72. *Autobiographie*, 160-161. See Caroline Walker Bynum’s essay “Jesus as Mother, Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA, 1982), ch. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Rubenstein also finds that “when Guibert applied his established ideas to the world around him, he found himself only able to describe it in terms of the basest instincts and Affections run amok. Appetites dominated the minds of these people, and their impulses, whether sexual or simply violent, overlapped and easily bled into one another.” *Guibert of Nogent*, 105.

dangers of corruption and heresy. For Guibert, these actions and their consequences are part of the ugliness of the external world and its focus on the acquisition of money, sex, and power. Guibert's exemplary stories reflect a reality in which most people are unable, or unwilling, to get past outer temptations and torments in order to be tested through inner battles. Only those who face inner battles and prove themselves worthy opponents of the devil might be viewed as potential saints. While Guibert might be writing his own hagiography—or at least a demonstration of his ability to resist the deepest corruption and temptation—the following encounters between man and devil are stories of weak men and involve the basest human desires and corresponding diabolic attacks. These stories stand in marked contrast to Guibert's stories about himself and allow him to highlight his higher level of spirituality. These arguments form a part of Guibert's recognition of a changing society in which the money economy is associated with the devil and therefore incompatible with the stability of the ideal unselfish religious life.

After describing his own internal flight from the desire for power in the face of simony, Guibert describes the cost of corruption. In his first story, a monk steals a sum of money intended for the public. The monk fell ill and died almost immediately—but not before confessing his sin and directing the focus on the investigation on a servant who had hidden the money in his daughter's cradle. The truth emerged after “demons looking like small dogs began to jump around her from every side, beating her here and there, sometimes biting her, and forcing her to cry out and weep. Both parents asked her why she was crying,

and she answered that she was being eaten by dogs.” Guibert explains that this was the devil’s way of expressing his joy at the “evil treasure.”¹⁰¹ It is also a cruel attack on a child who has done nothing wrong. The innocent child was a victim of the thieving servant and the devil and is only saved because Guibert’s mother becomes aware of the attacks and the servant is forced to give up the money. By associating the child’s torment with the monk’s actions and her father’s compliance, Guibert shows that a corrupt deed can have consequences that are unforeseen and are inevitably harmful.

If the possessed dogs attacked the child after the monk confessed his sin and was absolved, it is clear that the result of an unconfessed sin can be nothing short of nightmarish. Guibert’s next story of “monastic avarice”¹⁰² begins with the devil’s attack on a monk who accepted a small amount of money from a noblewoman. After an attack of dysentery, which makes it uncomfortable for him to confess, he is suffocated to death by the devil as he is trying to rest: “You could see his chin and his neck being violently crushed against his chest as if under some violent pressure.”¹⁰³ The monk was buried, without ceremony, away from his community and the money was buried with him as a sign of his sin and a warning to his fellow monks.

The most repulsive example of the devil’s role in the world involves a monk who submits to the needs of his body and thereby neglects his soul.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ *A Monk’s Confession*, 75-76. *Autobiographie*, 170-175.

¹⁰² *A Monk’s Confession*, 76-78. *Autobiographie*, 176-178.

¹⁰³ *A Monk’s Confession*, 76-78. *Autobiographie*, 176-178.

¹⁰⁴ *A Monk’s Confession*, 89-91. *Autobiographie*, 200-209.

The monk's first mistake comes when he falls ill and seeks the advice of a "Jew who knew something about medicine" in order to ease his physical suffering.¹⁰⁵ This relationship develops into a friendship and the monk asks his new friend to teach him about "black magic."¹⁰⁶ This seems to imply that the Jew's healing powers involve knowledge that humans are not intended to have or share. The Jew, who introduces the monk to the devil, then disappears from the story, and the devil himself takes center stage but refuses to teach the monk until the monk proves his commitment by renouncing his faith and offering a sacrifice:

The monk asked what the offering should be. "That which is most delectable in a man," the Devil said. "What is that?" asked the monk. "You will make me a libation of your sperm," the Devil replied. "When you have poured it out to me, you will taste it first, as it behooves the one offering the sacrifice." The monk obeys and is granted his wish for forbidden knowledge. With this cursed gift, he believes that he can safely pursue a relationship with a nun. One day, in danger of being caught by a fellow monk, he uses his powers: Seeing that the nun was shaking with fear, her lover, with his newly acquired powers of incantation, said "Go straight toward him, and look right nor left. And don't be afraid!" The woman believed him and headed toward the door. Her lover stood at the entrance and, using incantations learned from the Devil, changed her into a giant dog. As she and the arriving monk drew close to each other the latter exclaimed: "Hey! where did this dog come from?" Meanwhile the nun slipped out the door in complete terror.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey Richards explains that "(t)he Jews had been regarded as expert in magic since ancient times, and magic was increasingly associated with the Devil... When Christian propaganda came to link magic with worship of the Devil, this tainted the Jews. Jews were said to have the evil eye and it was because of this that they were forbidden to witness the coronation of Richard I of England in 1189." See *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London, 1991), 102. For more on the association of Jews with the devil and black magic, especially as it developed during the twelfth century see Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (New Haven, 1943). See also Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989).

¹⁰⁶ Archambault translates "malarum artium"—literally "of evil skills" or "evil arts"—as "black magic." Labande translates the phrase as "des malins artifices" (202-3)- probably in the sense of maliciously cunning tricks. The English translation carries a sense of otherworldly harmful skills which reflects an inversion of the doctor's traditional ability while the French focuses on the potential of human evil.

Only the word “dog” let her know the nature of the disguise in which she had escaped.

His powers clearly effective, the monk does not repent until he falls ill again. Guibert presents his sickness as a God-given opportunity to turn away from the devil. Although he does confess his sins, he is not fully restored to his previous state. When the story of his downfall came before Anselm of Bec, the monk was forbidden to perform the Mass or hear confessions. Despite this, the monk died believing that he would one day be made a bishop.

The monk’s inability or unwillingness to disregard his body’s needs and focus on his inner self started him on a slippery slope which ended in a deal with the devil. The deal is sealed in semen, a definite sign of his carnal nature. This is proven in his affair with the nun. Even once he confesses the worst of his acts, the devil retains a grip on him and he is never able to lose his desire for the power and status a bishopric would provide.

Even laymen attempting to live piously could be attacked by the devil in horrifying, physical ways. Guibert tells the story of a man who left on a pilgrimage to Compostella but had not completely detached himself from the ways of the world beforehand.¹⁰⁷ He carried the sash of his love—to whom he was not married—and was assaulted by the devil in the form of James the Apostle who reminds him of his inconsistent lifestyle. The layman admits that he has sinned and asks for a penance. The devil commands him to cut off his penis—“that member by which you have sinned... as a sign of fidelity to God and

¹⁰⁷ *A Monk’s Confession*, 202-204. *Autobiographie*, 442-449.

to me. After that, do away with your own life, which you have conducted so badly, by slitting your throat.”

When his fellow pilgrims find his body, they offer a Mass for him and pray for his soul. Mary intercedes on his behalf and he is brought back to life. His scars remain visible and the story of his resurrection can be used to teach others to be wary of the devil in disguise and of the danger of an impure heart—an incomplete awareness of self.

Guibert’s focus on the importance and difficulty of separating the spiritual from the material is highlighted in the last third of his work, in which he tells us how the impact of greed destroys the stability of the recently established Laon commune. Guibert expresses concern about the dangers of wealth throughout his autobiography but its horrors are only seen among those who are too weak to choose the spiritual. As a young wife, Guibert’s mother ignored the pressure to leave her marriage and find wealth with a new husband, and young Guibert rejected the potential of material success as a knight. They rejected the world almost as soon as they were faced by its temptations. In contrast, those who sought money—especially those who lacked any altruistic purpose—suffered terribly. The *exempla*-like stories of monks and laymen tortured by the devil because of a combination of greed and lust can be seen as an early reaction to the growing money economy and the fear that the changes could only benefit the devil.

This outlook is seen in Guibert’s interpretation of the events surrounding the early twelfth-century riots in Laon. The third part of the autobiography tells

the story of the violent end of an increasingly corrupt religious and secular leadership. Because the autobiography is structured in a way that allows Guibert to expand on themes that concern him while steadily moving away from himself, the story of Laon in 1112 illustrates how Guibert applied his self-understanding to the world around him. It also introduces many of the themes that mark the social and economic changes of the twelfth century that would impact the ways in which men and women expressed their spirituality, related to the world around them, and understood their struggles in relation to the devil.

In *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, Lester K. Little considers the effects of a spiritual crisis triggered by the money economy and a corresponding urban culture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁰⁸ Although some religious groups, like the Cistercians, sought to distance themselves from the prevalent culture by renouncing the material world and turning inward, others, like the late twelfth-century beguines and the thirteenth-century mendicants, imitated the life of the apostles by actively confronting the material world while attempting to reconcile the increasingly necessary co-existence of the material and spiritual.

The story of the collapse of order in Laon clearly shows Guibert's distaste for money and its association with lust and power. Guibert begins by tracing the way that the leadership of Laon degenerated in the generations before the violence of 1112. His descriptions of the characters and deeds of earlier bishops show the leadership growing increasingly corrupt. The first bishop discussed

¹⁰⁸ Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1978).

used his own wealth to build and beautify churches but demonstrated his “wickedness” by breaking his allegiance to the Carolingians in favor of Hugh Capet’s accession. Although this is a sign of his untrustworthy nature, he does not do anything that directly hurts the people of Laon. The next bishop also appeared to be virtuous but his intentions were false. Although he served the Church by donating money and building churches, the sources of his wealth were corrupt nobles, and Guibert stresses that while “he seemed to be doing much for God, it was abundantly clear that he was looking only for applause and for giving himself visibility through good deeds.”¹⁰⁹

After two bishops whose private—inner—corruption was not reflected in public, Laon chose a bishop whose corrupt nature and acts were well known.¹¹⁰ Unlike his predecessors, Enguerrand is not described as building and adorning churches. Most upsetting for Guibert, Enguerrand allowed the diocese and its wealth to fall under the king’s control. This loss of independence marked the beginning of the most corrupt era.

The bishop’s powerful relative, Enguerrand de Boves, was at the center of the violent decline of Laon. The layman appeared to be pious but could not control his lust. Although he gave generously to the Church, he also took the wife of the count of Namur for himself. His relative, the bishop, while publicly condemning the union, condoned it in private and never expressed remorse for his sins, even on his deathbed.

¹⁰⁹ *A Monk’s Confession*, 123. *Autobiographie*, 270-271.

¹¹⁰ *A Monk’s Confession*, 124-128. *Autobiographie*, 273-280.

Guibert presents Sybille, the countess of Namur, as possessing the worst qualities possible in a woman. Already pregnant with another man's child when she married the count of Namur, she was not satisfied by her husband and began a relationship with Enguerrand de Boves, lord of Coucy and Marle, while her husband was away at war. Her distorted values are even reflected in the way she committed adultery; she deserted a young husband for an old man. This reversal of the norm triggers events that ended in the reversal of normative relations in Laon in 1112 when the ordinary people attacked the secular and religious leadership.

When bishop Enguerrand died, Enguerrand de Boves worked to "ensure the election of a bishop who would be obliged to him."¹¹¹ Guibert was also involved in the process of choosing a new bishop and explains that the new bishop, Gaudry, was unqualified and did not come through the normal channels. Gaudry was chosen because it was believed that he would distribute his wealth among his supporters. Guibert makes it clear that it is not only the process that was corrupt. Gaudry's wealth was not even earned or inherited; he had stolen it during his time in England when he was chancellor to Henry I.

Gaudry's true nature was clearly revealed when he joined "a few very rich women," many local nobles, and two archdeacons in a successful conspiracy to commit murder. In Guibert's telling, no one involved was innocent. The dead man had kidnapped wealthy children for ransom and had had a relationship with a married woman. But the villains in the story are Enguerrand de Boves, his wife

¹¹¹ For Guibert's version of the full story of the events of Laon under the new bishop see *A Monk's Confession*, 128-195.

Sybill, and Bishop Gaudry. Before marrying Enguerrand, and while still with the count of Namur, Sybill had a relationship with a man, Gérard, who subsequently began to spread gossip about Enguerrand and Sybill. As the feud grew uglier, they conspired to kill Gérard. He was murdered while praying in church.

Gaudry bribed both church officials and the king's officials who suspected that he, the nobles, and the archdeacons were behind the murder. The bribes were part of life in Laon—there was no security for anyone who was not willing or could not afford to take or pay bribes. Even the money was literally corrupt. “The money coiners, once they realized that they could always ransom their crooked operations with money, corrupted it with so much base metal that many people were reduced to the direst poverty... . Unfortunately, since the people were unsuspecting when they bought goods, whether cheap or expensive, they received nothing but the basest dross in exchange. Bishop Gaudry was rewarded for allowing this practice to continue....”¹¹²

Laon's reputation spread beyond the town. The papacy, the king, and travelers from other regions witnessed it firsthand but were powerless against bribery and the real threat of violence in a town where the leadership lusted only for the external, material, signs of power. This corruption extended to one of Enguerrand's toll collectors who was known to attack travelers, steal their money, and drown them. This toll collector, who “spared neither monk, nor cleric, nor pilgrim nor member of either sex” was part of the eventual implosion. The people of the town, including the toll collector, lost themselves in an “animal fury” by

¹¹² *A Monk's Confession*, 148. *Autobiographie*, 324-325.

plotting to attack the leadership, including the bishop.¹¹³ After brutally killing the bishop, the toll collector cut off the bishop's finger and took the ring that symbolized his wealth and power.

During this upheaval, all who could escape the city did so and deserted homes were looted. The complete reversal of the normal order is seen in Guibert's description of peasants leaving the countryside and entering the undefended city while the rich, yet untitled, people tried to hide their wealth to avoid being attacked by jealous nobles who had lost all sense of order and emptied houses of "all content, all furniture, taking even hinges, locks, and bolts."¹¹⁴

The restoration of Laon was difficult since it seemed that, with individual exceptions who are praised by Guibert, no group was innocent. Guibert recognized that the greed was not unique to Laon. A tour of relics, which succeeded in raising money for the devastated town, was marred by lust for money. Guibert tells the story of a man in England who found a way to raise money for drinks by stealing from the Church:

"I've noticed that these clerics have been pumping all kinds of money from these clods with their lies and tricks. I'm going to find some way of siphoning some of that money for my own entertainment." Then he entered the church, walked right up to the platform where the relics had been placed, and giving the impression that he was bending over to venerate them with a kiss, he drew his lips close to some coins that had been left there as offerings and sucked them into his mouth.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *A Monk's Confession*, 152. *Autobiographie*, 332-333.

¹¹⁴ *A Monk's Confession*, 170. *Autobiographie*, 370-371.

¹¹⁵ *A Monk's Confession*, 178-179. *Autobiographie*, 390-393.

After the man and his friend, who recognized the sin of taking money from the saints, left the tavern, the man who stole the money hung himself “thereby expiating his sacrilegious act with a shameful death.”¹¹⁶ Although Guibert sees this as a sign Mary’s involvement in the world he never, in telling the story of Laon, directly implicates the devil in any of the crimes.

If the sordid stories behind the riots hadn’t made his point clear, Guibert adds several exemplary tales on the evils of usury. In one story, a usurer from Laon is known to be dying but insists that a poor woman return his loan with all the interest repaid. Although she begs that he forgive her debt before he dies, he refuses to do so. In a complete inversion of a Christian’s dying moment, “the dying man took the farthing into his mouth and swallowed it almost like a viaticum.” He died and “with this sort of protection went off to the Devil.”¹¹⁷

The general absence of the devil’s direct implication in the story of greed and lust in Laon is striking and I want to suggest that this is a meaningful silence. It fits into Guibert’s larger pattern of elevating the spirit over the material to such an extent that the devil does not need to make special efforts to attack those who are not determined to live lives of internal piety. Guibert implies that the people of Laon were so deeply involved in the material world that the devil goes unchallenged—and therefore unnoticed—when he torments. Instead, they took

¹¹⁶ *A Monk’s Confession*, 179. *Autobiographie*, 392-393.

¹¹⁷ *A Monk’s Confession*, 205-208. *Autobiographie*, 450-459.

his tools—greed and lust¹¹⁸—and attacked each other. They would face the devil directly in the next world.

This attitude toward the devil's involvement in the material world corresponds to Guibert's association of the spiritual with the internal. According to this worldview, only those who have overcome the temptations of the world can face inner spiritual battles in which man, strengthened by God, fights and defeats the devil as manifested through internal torments such as self-doubt. This is not wholly unlike the goal of contemplative mystics who "believed that the Devil bent his evil attention upon them more than upon others because they were seeking union with God more intensely than others, and the soul's union with God is that which Satan envies and loathes most deeply."¹¹⁹

Although he includes a variety of diabolic encounters in his autobiography, Guibert of Nogent always elevates the inner life and internal diabolic warfare over material or physical temptation. This distinction continued to develop over the course of the twelfth century and is stressed in temptation stories in a variety of *vitae*. Ineke van 't Spijker's analysis of hagiographical patterns in the twelfth century provides great insight into patterns in Guibert's autobiography and the way he focuses on the inner life. In her reading of Eadmer's *Life of Anselm* (as one of a group of contemporary *vitae* with shared elements), she is struck by a

¹¹⁸ Dale explains that it is "precisely" the sins of lust and gluttony that late-eleventh and early twelfth-century "reformers condemned, and not surprisingly these metaphors for vices took on tangible, corporeal form in the demonic creatures that invaded monastic imagination." In "Monsters, Corporeal Deformities, and Phantasms in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa," 424.

¹¹⁹ In Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer*, 290.

“quality of interiority” or “sense of access to the saint’s inner life and thoughts.”¹²⁰

Spijker finds that many twelfth-century monastic *vitae* are filled with a sense of “doubt and despair” which, at first, seems to conflict with the goal of positive or optimistic exempla in traditional *vitae*. She explains that “(I)n the hagiographic tradition as it developed in the West, the Adversary fought the saint by means of human opposition or disastrous events, leaving the inner person of the saint untouched.”¹²¹ This changed in the twelfth century as it became clear that blasphemous doubt was a potential effect of the new methods of rationalist inquiry. Clerics had to be prepared for the possibility that the crises in their conversions would be diabolic disruption in the form of dialectic reason. It was critical that these men be able to recognize this new risk as they sought faith through reason. The dangers of innovation were great and could lead to the “inner temptations of unbelief and despair.”¹²² The possibility of a new form of

¹²⁰ See “Saints and Despair: Twelfth-Century Hagiography as ‘Intimate Biography,’” in *The Invention of Saintliness*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (New York, 2002), 186. Rubenstein links Eadmer’s *Life of Anselm*—which Southern called an “intimate biography”—with Abelard’s *Historia Calamitatum* and Guibert’s *Monodiae* as the texts in which we see the formulation of the twelfth-century “discovery of the individual.” In comparing these three sources—two personal writings and one saint’s life with the feel of a new style in personal writing—Rubenstein explains that “traditional biographies—saints’ lives and ruler panegyrics—aimed not to elucidate the character of their subjects but rather to show how their subjects conformed to type. Such biographies also did not seek to illustrate personal or spiritual development, although they did often include moments of conversion. Great rulers or holy men were usually marked at birth for their destinies. They did not grow into their roles as did both Guibert and Abelard, and they certainly did not agonize over their motives or seek to justify their actions. In Anselm, Eadmer had a less problematic subject than either Guibert or Abelard had in writing about himself. Anselm’s life was more consistently virtuous.” Southern explains the intimacy of *The Life of Anselm* with the fact that “Eadmer was writing about a man whom he hoped was a saint but whose life he was unable to decorate with reports of miracles... . What makes this biography peculiar, above all else, is the psychological detail with which Eadmer invests his portrait of Anselm. In particular, there is an attention to questions of motive worthy of either Guibert or Abelard.” See Richard Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer*, 77-79.

¹²¹ van ‘t Spijker, “Saints and Despair,” 191.

internal crisis in a life of outward stability—a new hiding place for the devil—meant that members of the monastic community needed to prepare themselves for this struggle. *Vitae* written according to the new model of internal, or spiritual, crisis and conversion were the ideal exemplary tool.

The patterns of temptation seen in Guibert of Nogent's early twelfth-century *Monodiae* and described by Ineke van 't Spijker can be found, in varying degrees, in many types of *vitae*. These patterns, many of which are closely connected to larger themes that mark the twelfth century, are seen in the seven *vitae* that I will discuss in the coming chapters—that of a recluse, Christina of Markyate; a merchant turned hermit, Godric of Finchale; a bishop, Hugh of Lincoln; a founder of a new religious order, Gilbert of Sempringham; and three early beguines, Marie of Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, and Yvette of Huy.

¹²² van 't Spijker, "Saints and Despair," 197.

Chapter Three: Christina of Markyate and Godric of Finchale

In *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Caroline Walker Bynum discusses differences between the lives of male and female saints. She explains that “(C)risis and decisive change were more significant motifs in male than female *vitae* in the later Middle Ages, in part because medieval men had more power than women to determine the shape of their lives.... It is because women lacked control over their wealth and marital status that their life stories show fewer heroic gestures of casting aside money, property and family. But women’s lives also seem to be characterized by earlier vocations—by continuity rather than change.”¹²³ Although Bynum contrasts the model of the “lay female saint and clerical male saint,” this pattern of female and male sanctity can be extended and adapted to the near contemporary twelfth-century lives of a recluse, Christina of Markyate, and a hermit, Godric of Finchale. The basic model is as follows: women find their vocations as children and spend their lives perfecting their calling while men follow successful lives in the world with applauded conversions.

In this chapter I will approach Christina’s and Godric’s *vitae* with this model in mind and with questions about what is understood as the devil’s role in the formation of male and female saints. It is clear that continuity of faith does not preclude crisis and that crisis is often constructed as the result of diabolic interference. How do crises affect someone who chooses the life of a holy

¹²³ See *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), ch. 1 (especially 23-25).

person when still a child and never wavers in her (his?) commitment? How do these crises play out in the life of saint who has undergone a radical conversion later in life? What challenges were faced by men and women who sought a secure role in twelfth-century religious society? How did gender impact this process? I will show how, *despite* the continuity of Christina's internal, spiritual life, her external life was marked by obstacles that forced her to compromise her self-imposed standard of religious perfection. In contrast, the changes in Godric's life were actively sought and peacefully gained and his main obstacles, after his conversion, were internal.

Christina of Markyate's struggle with the devil, as graphically depicted in her *vita*,¹²⁴ can be analyzed in view of her relationships with men who supported her. By examining these successive relationships, I will trace Christina's religious and personal development and illuminate one way in which a twelfth-century woman was able to adapt herself to a situation that was less than ideal and make it work to her benefit. Christina's life exemplifies both the difficulties a woman could face in resisting the pressure to live as her family expected and the resulting need for compromise on the path to spiritual fulfillment. For Christina this compromise is evident in a series of supportive and deeply personal relationships with men who sheltered her and helped establish her legacy, first as

¹²⁴ The account of Christina of Markyate's life exists in one incomplete manuscript that dates from before 1450. See *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. and trans. C.H. Talbot (Oxford, 1959; repr. 1987). The dating of Christina's life is approximated at 1096-1155/66. Although the manuscript is incomplete, Rachel Koopmans has convincingly argued that the *vita* can be read as a whole. See "The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's Vita," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51 (2000): 663-698.

a recluse and later as an abbess. Identifying the nature of these relationships can be complicated since they seem to blur the boundaries we normally set between friendship and love.¹²⁵

Christina was born to an Anglo-Saxon noble family in the late eleventh century.¹²⁶ At a young age she consecrated herself to marriage with Christ despite her parents' assumption that she would marry and have children.¹²⁷ She insisted that she already had a most perfect husband in Christ but, under duress, agreed to a betrothal. Christina refused to consummate the marriage, was pressured with physical violence and attempted rape, reminded of the good life she would have as a respected wife, and kept away from supportive clergy.¹²⁸ As will be seen, these pressures are described as diabolically inspired. At some

¹²⁵ In her essay "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints," Ruth Mazo Karras explains that in twelfth-century eremitic and monastic life (and Christina's career includes both) there was room for "deep and exclusive love" between people. Intense love of Christ might find an emotional outlet in "chaste spiritual love." Although these non-carnal relationships were not encouraged, they did exist, were often beneficial, and can be hard for us to characterize. Karras uses the terms "spiritual love" and "profound emotional relationships" to describe what she finds in Christina's life. These terms are implied in my use of the word "relationship." See *The Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988): 305-320.

¹²⁶ Christopher J. Holdsworth places Christina within the context of a group of hermits and recluses with Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian names who largely remained within their native communities and sought their own salvation while serving "the needs of society around them." They did this by being both part of and apart from society. Holdsworth uses Victor Turner's term "outsiderhood" to explain the burial service that accompanied the anchorite being placed in a cell. Turner explains that individuals such as these have a special power around them which flows out into the world. See "Christina of Markyate," *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia, 1, (Oxford, 1978): 185-254. Godric of Finchale can also be considered within this context.

¹²⁷ For a woman from Christina's background, who was assured a marriage of material comfort and an admired position in society, this was a great sacrifice. That the benefits of marriage did tempt many women is seen in contemporary advice literature. See Elisabeth Bos, "The Literature of Spiritual Formation for Women in France and England, 1080-1180," in *Listen Daughter: The 'Speculum Virginum' and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, Constant J. Mews ed. (Basingstoke, 2001), 201-220.

¹²⁸ See Thomas Head, "The Marriages of Christina of Markyate," *Viator* (1990): 75-101. For an abridged version of this article, see *Christina of Markyate*, Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser eds. (London, 2005), 116-137.

point, Christina partially conceded to her family's will and tried to convince her betrothed to live with her in a spiritual, sexless marriage. She did this by encouraging him to imitate the lives of saints, especially Saint Cecilia and her husband Valerian, who had successfully overcome their physical desires, lived chastely, and welcomed martyrdom. Despite her positive approach, her offer was refused. Eventually Christina escaped and spent several years in hiding. Because she had no family support, she was forced to compromise her chosen lifestyle—which would have been in a convent—and lived as a recluse.¹²⁹ It took

¹²⁹ The importance of recluses to medieval society is seen in Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley, CA, 1985). Anchorites did not simply withdraw from society but were an essential part of it. Anchorites and anchoresses are defined as “solitary recluses” and the label of anchorite and recluse is interchangeable. (7) Recluses dedicated their lives to God, took vows of asceticism, were free from monastic obedience to a rule, often depended on the surrounding community for support, represented society's highest ideal, and prayed for the community supporting them. Unlike hermits, recluses were not free to move about. Popularized as a form of female vocation, recluses symbolically recreated the martyrdom of the early Christians within their cells. Warren stresses the orthodoxy and intense spirituality of the women who chose a lifestyle of extreme denial. It was not a viable life for women merely looking to escape difficulties, such as unwanted marriage.(123) Still, In *Hermits and the New Monasticism* (London, 1984), Henrietta Leyser explains that the eremitic life suited women who “wanted to escape from parental marriage plans” since, unlike nuns, recluses did not need permission from parents before leaving the world (1). Leyser explains that the life of a recluse was the “most rigorous form of eremitic life possible. Strictly speaking, although circumstances could alter cases, the recluse, once immured, was never allowed to leave his cell.” (14) In *Holy Women in the Twelfth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), Sharon Elkins explains that, during Christina's lifetime, women's access to monastic life was limited and recluses were not yet completely enclosed. They were similar to hermits—withdrawn from the world but still connected to it. While there was, in the early part of the twelfth century, a “reappropriation” of the Anglo-Saxon eremitic heritage in the face of Norman monasticism, Christina is shown as, or shows herself as, an example of an eremitic woman who would have chosen to join a convent if given the opportunity. For an overview of some of the issues involved in understanding the meaning(s) and role(s) of hermits and recluses in both Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England see Stephanie Hollis and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “St Albans and Women's Monasticism,” in *Christina of Markyate*, 31-33. The reality of the importance of money over the course of Christina's career is clear in the following statement. “Reclusion was not cheap either, and many of those undertaking it were married or widowed. Christina has to buy time, while achieving what imprimatur for her status she can. Institutionalizing her status as virgin is as important as the initial escape: the conventional options are formal consent by the bishop of Lincoln to her reclusion or acceptance in a religious community... . A large part of Christina's career falls within the fundamental paradigm represented by the characteristic development of religious foundations from hermitage to cloister, but in a long drawn-out and tortuous version of the process.” 38-39.

many years for her to become a prioress who was so respected that she was invited to lead important communities on the Continent.

Despite her spiritual strength, Christina needed material support and protection from her many enemies. Throughout her life she was involved in relationships with men that varied in degree of intensity and intimacy but that ultimately were crucial in establishing her legacy as a holy woman. Because Christina needed to establish and maintain close, and potentially damaging, relationships with men, there is inherent tension in Christina's efforts to distance herself from men and from her own sexuality. Also striking is how the author of the *vita*, who was a monk of Saint Albans personally acquainted with his subject, describes Christina's relationships with her male protectors.¹³⁰ The descriptions are often suggestive of marriage—that is, of the varieties of relationships possible between husbands and wives—and they may be able to indicate for us something about how male-female relationships of this nature were understood in the twelfth century. Understanding the nature of these relationships is crucial to my analysis of Christina's life. It is through these relationships that Christina is forced to recognize and overcome her weaknesses, confront and overtake the

¹³⁰ Rachel Koopmans explains that understanding the relationship between Christina and the writer of the *vita* provides further insight to understanding the construction of the saint's life. Koopmans argues that the text is very much the "writer's creation, not Christina's." As a monk of St. Albans, the author stresses Christina's relationship with St Albans, leaves out or diminishes her connections to other religious communities as well as events that must have been significant in Christina's life but are not important to the author. "While Christina's *vita* is a rich text, it is no self-portrait, and no more than a shadow of the richness of Christina's lived experience. It is not just the descriptions of Christina's actions that are the author's, but her actions themselves, actions which he reports selectively and uses to shape a particular image of Christina... . It is just possible that the desires of the *vita*'s writer were rejected, or at least not embraced not wholeheartedly, not just by other monks at St Albans but by the subject of the *vita* herself." See "Dining at Markyate with Lady Christina," in *Christina of Markyate*, 157.

devil in his many forms, and eventually find the strength to publicly defeat the devil and demonstrate her sanctity.

One thing that is important to keep in mind in any analysis of a *vita* that covers many years is the natural maturation process. The first of Christina's relationships began when she was an adolescent and the last covered an expanse of perhaps twenty years beginning when Christina was in her mid-to late twenties. As Christina's external life stabilized—as can be seen in her relationships with men—there is a corresponding change in the nature of the devil's attacks.

Diabolic temptation is an integral part of the tradition that Christina had consciously followed in attempting to separate from the world and live as a recluse and nun. Her family's opposition to her chosen lifestyle and her own concerns about the true motivations of supportive men are presented through a model that sees the devil constantly at work in the world. In preparing herself to fight family, lust, and painful gossip, Christina (and her hagiographer) would have understood her life as playing out the classic struggle between a Christian virgin and the devil. In composing her *vita*, the anonymous hagiographer traced her development as a saint by placing her life's story within the very tradition that comforted Christina and which she, understandably, imitated.¹³¹ The line between Christina's life and the *Life* of Christina as a saint can be very fine since

¹³¹ Neil Cartlidge approaches the *vita* as "self-conscious literary artistry" which re-enacts events in the New Testament. In his reading, Christina is the "product" not the "cause" of what he calls as "extraordinary text in its own right." See "The Unknown Pilgrim: Drama and Romance in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*," in *Christina of Markyate*, 89.

both she and her hagiographer would have interpreted the events of her life within the same context.¹³²

Sueno, canon of Huntington, was the first cleric with whom Christina established a close relationship. Her hagiographer writes that Sueno first saw Christina as a child and encouraged her to be strong in following her calling. But Sueno was also “so stimulated by lust that unless he were prevented by the greater power of God he would without any shame lie with any ugly and misshapen leper.”¹³³ In contrast to nearly every other episode in which Christina is threatened, this episode contains no mention of the devil. Christina was still in a transitional stage, moving from girlhood to womanhood. As a young woman living in the world, she would encounter lust as part of life. The devil doesn’t need to make a special effort to tempt ordinary people; direct diabolic attacks began only once Christina demonstrated her determination to live apart from the world.

¹³² In his discussion of Eadmer’s *Life of Anselm*, Richard Southern outlines the basic models available to a hagiographer as follows: “The heroic pattern” focuses on overwhelming concern with the impact of supernatural power on the natural world” and includes martyrs, missionaries, and foundational figures such as Saint Martin of Tours, Bede, and Saint Cuthbert (whose *vita* is clearly influential in the development of Godric of Finchale’s *vita*). “The commemorative pattern” is marked by saint’s lives that “avowedly subordinate the display of supernatural powers to the display of activity directed towards a practical end.” This category would include Hugh of Lincoln and Gilbert of Sempringham. “The secular pattern,” of which Einhard’s *Life of Charlemagne* is perhaps the best known, “approach the ideal of personal portraiture.... They at least had not the distraction of supernatural powers, and they followed a tradition which encouraged the blunt and ruthless disclosure of personal traits and eccentricities of character.” “The tradition of the desert,” which includes the basic tales of eremitic familiar to every monk, is marked by a focus on the “spoken word, unpremeditated, vivid and passionate... (which) convey(s) a sense of spiritual crisis and illustrate(s) the role of friendship and discussion in the formation of an ideal.” In *Saint Anselm and His Biographer*, 321-329.

Although there are elements of the heroic, commemorative, and the desert lives in Christina’s life, these tend not to overlap. She begins as a would-be martyr when she resists her family’s demands, spends years in danger as a recluse, and ends her career as a respected and influential abbess and holy woman. The *vita*, therefore, must rely on a variety of models for presenting the life of an exemplary woman.

¹³³ Christina’s *Life*, 37-39.

This episode reveals that Christina has the strength to challenge a human attacker. When Christina discovers Sueno's weakness, she confronts him with her knowledge and threatens to leave him. The words "I will go away immediately" cured Sueno.¹³⁴ This is curious in a relationship that appears to be in a very early stage. But this was also a period before Christina needed the sort of protection she would later come to depend on and so she could afford to threaten to leave Sueno. Still, in order for Christina's threat to have worked as intended, she must have known that their relationship had developed into one of mutual dependence. Christina's threat of leaving is described as permanently strengthening Sueno's faith— although his faith in Christina will be shown to be less secure. Sueno grew spiritually through his connection to Christina and, as the man who "discovered" her, his reputation as a potential holy man was solidified. But, as we follow their story over time, their relationship is shown to be a powerful combination of love, dependence, and fear of disillusionment.

After being impressed by the monastic life she saw as a child visiting Saint Albans, Christina vowed to dedicate her life to God by remaining a virgin. A secret marriage to Christ, fully supported by Sueno, occurred without the knowledge of her family. Christina wished to live the life of a religious without fuss. But, as fits the model development of a virgin would-be saint, Christina had to be tested; her trial came in the form of a very unwanted and unexpected betrothal. After her consecration to Christ, the "envy of the devil... burning with desire to upset her, took the initiative...." The future bishop of Durham, a close

¹³⁴ Christina's *Life*, 37-39.

family acquaintance, was overtaken by lust and tried to rape Christina.¹³⁵ Until she was enclosed, Christina's troubles reflect the sort of dangers women could expect to face.¹³⁶ She managed to escape but "that wretch, seeing that he had been made a fool of by a young girl, was eaten up by resentment and counted all his power as nothing until he could avenge the result he had suffered."¹³⁷ The devil's surrogate, desperate to attack Christina's body and break her bond with Christ, worked through the medium of her parents and convinced them that she should marry Burthred. Christina was faced with sexual temptation, promised material riches, and, in a reversal of her attempts to convince Burthred to join her

¹³⁵ R.I. Moore questions the frequent description of this episode as an "attempted rape" and suggests that it was more likely the beginning of a "seduction" within a failed courtship. Ranulf had been one of the most important men in the kingdom during the reign of William Rufus and, as bishop of Durham, could continue to elevate the family's social standing. Ranulf was already close to Christina's family, had a public relationship as well as children with her aunt, and may have been trying to "secure an advantageous match" for the eldest daughter of the family. When Christina rejected Ranulf, he suggested Burthred. While the author of the *vita* presents this episode as an unexpected, diabolically inspired threat to Christina's virginity, Moore looks at it within the larger context of an English family using marriage to remain influential in the generation after the Conquest. He concludes that Christina ultimately succeeded in securing her family's influence and legacy but she did it as a recluse and prioress, not as the wife and mother she was expected to become. See "Ranulf Flambard and Christina of Markyate," in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford, 2001), 231-235. Reprinted in *Christina of Markyate*, eds. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, 138-142.

J.O. Prestwich explains that stories like this often "tell us more about the bishop's reputation than about his conduct." He finds Ranulf, an excellent administrator, was "devoted to the interests of the numerous members of his family, sometimes unwisely." See "The Career of Ranulf Flambard," in *Anglo-Norman Durham, 1093-1193* eds. David Rollason, Margaret Harvey and Michael Prestwich (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK ; Rochester, NY, 1994), 301, 310.

¹³⁶ Compare these attacks with the difficulties that Guibert of Nogent's mother faced early in her marriage. (See *A Monk's Confession*, 35-38) The attackers are men whose company would not be suspect (brothers-in-law, clergymen, a betrothed husband) and with whom comfortable relationships were possible. These men are usually family members and are certainly from the same social circle. Once the women are enclosed, the devil is more often directly implicated in the attacks and the attacker is either the rare man with access to the woman or, more likely, the devil himself in animal form or in a vision.

¹³⁷ Christina's *Life*, 41-45.

in a spiritual marriage, she was quoted Scripture in favor of traditional, physical marriage.

She resisted Burthred's advances and tried to convince him to agree to a chaste marriage.¹³⁸ The description of one of his advances clearly links her troubles to the devil:

Burthred entered her room... in a state of agitated fury. But as he came in one door, she fled through another. In front of her was a kind of fence which, because of its height and the sharp spikes on top of it, was calculated to prevent anyone from climbing over it: behind her almost on her heels was the young man, who at any moment would catch hold of her. With amazing ease she jumped over the fence and, looking back from her place of safety, saw her pursuer on the other side, standing there unable to follow. Then she said: "Truly in escaping him, I have escaped from the devil I saw last night." For, in her sleep, she had seen as it were a devil of horrible appearance with blackened teeth who was unavailingly trying to seize her, because in her flight she sprung at one leap over a fence.¹³⁹

This is the first time in Christina's *vita* that the image of the devil is conflated with that of a person. As she looks back over the fence, a sign of both her current imprisonment and desired enclosure,¹⁴⁰ she sees a devil with

¹³⁸ For a discussion of the ideal of spiritual marriage see Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage*, (Princeton, 1993), esp. 195-265.

¹³⁹ Christina's *Life*, 53-5. Samuel Fanous, who reads Christina's *vita* not as a reflection of a lived life but as a brilliantly executed example of narrative skill, explains the devil's role in this section by comparing it to the expected episodes in the *vitae* of the early virgin martyrs. "The transformation... of Flambard to a persecuting prince-turned-suitor is particularly suitable, since it is the virgin martyr's suitor for whom the highest degree of diabolical motivation is usually reserved. In a parallel characterization, Burthred is not simply motivated by the devil but takes on a diabolical appearance, appearing in her dream dressed in a black cape and lying face down in her path, ready to seize her as she passes in her white garments. Elsewhere, he *is* the devil." For more on the influence of the paradigmatic virgin-martyr on Christina's *vita* see Samuel Fanous "Christina of Markyate and the Double Crown," in *Christina of Markyate*, 53-78 (61).

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion of images of enclosure in contemporary writing see Janice M. Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden," in *Listen Daughter*, 159-177. Pinder finds that there is a difference of emphasis in models of spiritual development for men and women. While enclosure is stressed

“blackened teeth.”¹⁴¹ Once Christina is safely on the other side of the fence, her attacks come only from demons who can follow her either through terrifying visions, by the devil's influence over the rare, trusted person with access to her, and through the danger of inner doubts. This nightmare is only the first of many to come. At this point in her life, despite her strength, Christina was still very much dependent on her human relationships.

When Sueno received word of Christina's betrothal, he turned against her and “accused her of feminine inconstancy.” She felt abandoned by the man whose “friendly intimacy and sympathy had been to her such a source of strength that what she had suffered from others was accounted of little consequence. But now, whilst the maiden stood firm, the man had wilted.”¹⁴² Christina turned to Christ and was strengthened; in time, Sueno repented. Although Sueno's support was important, Christina learned early that her only consistent relationship would be with Christ and she could only achieve that through a combination of inner resolve and God's grace. This strength allowed Christina to play increasingly positive, influential roles in her relationships with men. Sueno's change of heart is the first of a series of positive changes that Christina helped produce.

Isolated and desperate for help, Christina was comforted by Christ and

for all contemplatives, enclosure can be either a “location (the cloister, home of the monk, canon, or nun) or a state of being.”

¹⁴¹ Blackness is a common feature for the devil especially as a deformity that reflects the devil's nature as the opposite of all that is normal, pure, and blessed. For more on the appearance of the devil and additional references see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer*, 68-69.

¹⁴² Christina's *Life*, 55-57.

reminded that he too had once been abandoned by those he had trusted.¹⁴³ Kept away from Christina, Sueno prayed for her and tried to intercede with authorities on her behalf. This was the last thing that Sueno could do for Christina. When we look back on their relationship, we see a sense of imbalance in it—it began with Christina the child putting her trust in Sueno and feeling betrayed when he was tempted with lust. Her threat of leaving helped him, but he later accused her of abandoning him and her vow of virginity. In the end, when Christina was no longer a child, Sueno regained his trust in her but had no real power to get her away from her family. The strength of their relationship was tested and renewed, but ultimately could not fully withstand the doubts that had tormented one partner. Other people, mostly men, would help guide Christina in the future.

Risking her safety and that of those who helped her, Christina sought the aid of a hermit named Eadwin who was a cousin to a well-known hermit named Roger. Roger refused to help Christina because he thought she was simply unhappy in her marriage. Christina, disguised as a man, managed to escape her parents' home and found a hiding place at Flamstead with the female recluse Alfwen. Still, before Christina escaped, she suffered at home.

Unable to convince Burthred that he should free her from their betrothal and faced with corrupt clergy and a family who desperately wanted her to be married and were willing and able to bribe influential decision-makers, Christina

¹⁴³ That her strength came from the Holy Spirit should be noted. The comfort and strength given by the Holy Spirit is critical in the description of the imprisonment and death of the third-century martyr Perpetua. It is also important to note that in medieval understanding it was the Holy Spirit who lead Jesus to the desert and accompanied him during his temptations by the devil.

was imprisoned at home. When she attempted to leave, she was brought back and “from that day forward her mother, Beatrix, with God’s permission but at the instigation of the devil, loosed all her fury on her own daughter, neglecting no sort of wicked artifice... . Even before this she had been most harsh to her, but from then on she persecuted her with unheard-of cruelty, sometimes openly, at other times secretly.”¹⁴⁴

Her mother’s actions are like those of the devil: she is Christina’s main tormentor, testing her daughter’s strength, and providing her with a background against which she could prove her strength and faith. Although Beatrix is never described as possessed, she acts as an instrument of the devil and her behavior resembles that of a woman allied with the devil. Her abuse of Christina is so shocking that the hagiographer needs to remind the reader that this happened “with God’s permission” and that, although the devil is very much at work in the world, he cannot act independently. Since Christina’s suffering must be made to fit into a larger context in which she demonstrates the strength and truth of her faith, her mother’s actions become just one more necessary ingredient in the formation of Christina as a saint.

Beatrix sets out to corrupt her daughter by filling her with lust. Christina had once been trusted with the keys to her family’s gold and silver and was now tormented through the power of the money she had guarded, from which she had benefited, and with which she was expected to marry well. Her mother used the money to pay for unsuccessful potions and incantations that she hoped would

¹⁴⁴ Christina’s *Life*, 73.

drive Christina mad until she gave into her sexual desire. One of the tempters in league with Beatrix and the devil is described as a Jewish woman whose charms were more powerful than those of all the others who worked to harm Christina. But, when she saw Christina, the Jewish woman told Beatrix that “Our trouble has been all for nothing: I can see two phantoms, two persons, as it were, dressed in white, who accompany her at all times and protect her from assaults at all points. It is better for you to give up now rather than to waste time in vain.”¹⁴⁵

Beatrix doesn’t give up—she ignores the warning of a woman who resides in a parallel and dangerous world. The Jewish woman, who had intended to fill Christina with lust, recognizes that Christina is protected by heavenly figures, whose whiteness reminds the reader of the devil’s blackness, and she acknowledges her own powerlessness.¹⁴⁶ The Jewish woman gives up, but

¹⁴⁵ Christina’s *Life*, 73-75. The nature of these white persons, or “phantoms” is unclear. Are they Mary and Jesus or guardian angels? If these are guardian angels, this would be a very early reference to the protective heavenly beings. R.N. Swanson explains that “the idea of the guardian angel seems to have developed as an aspect of ordinary piety mainly in the fourteenth century, although their existence was accepted by theologians since at least the early thirteenth century.” The idea of a personal protector, specially deputed by God to deflect evil (perhaps to counter the influence of a personal demon), was clearly highly satisfactory, and gained acceptance throughout Europe.” In *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215- c. 1515* (Cambridge, 1995), 171. Swanson stresses that, since the fear of sin was a “dominant concern of late medieval Christianity,” there was an increasing focus on instructing people how to “steer the path between the advice of their guardian angels and personal tempters. The battle was an internal one, the set-piece *Psychomachia* between the vices and virtues, between the body and the soul, earth and heaven” (192). This image of opposing supernatural forces active within all humans increased in popularity after the twelfth century and it is important to recognize this imagining of the internal battle in twelfth-century hagiography.

¹⁴⁶ While the Jewish woman in question is not described as a witch and neither of the women has made a pact with the devil (they are better described as tools of the devil), the association of Jews with the devil was well developed by the twelfth century. See footnote 104. Beatrix does not call upon her to cause something unnatural or particularly evil to occur and yet her power is described as extraordinary. Of course, the attempt to undermine Christina’s vow to remain a virgin is, in itself, an attack on Christ as Christina’s husband. It is also interesting to consider the role of a Jewish woman who acts as a witness to Christina’s holiness (and thereby to the truth of

Beatrix is stubborn and ignores the clear signs of Christina's strength. She beats her daughter, leaving marks that "could never be removed as long as she lived." In the face of physical torment, Christina retreated to the comfort of Jesus and Mary—her true husband and *his* mother.

We are not told much about the period immediately after Christina's escape, but it is clear that she was well hidden. Whereas earlier the devil was able to attack through her family and their supporters, now the devil could only attack her in visions and with small animals that could find their way into her enclosure. In this way, the attacks remain grounded in Christina's reality. Christina spent two years with Alfwen the anchoress, hidden in a cell, wearing rough clothes, before she felt too unsafe. It was during this period that Christina had a terrifyingly powerful yet comforting vision of herself overcoming the devil's attacks.¹⁴⁷

She saw herself standing on firm ground before a large and swampy meadow full of bulls with threatening horns and glaring eyes. As they tried to lift their hooves from the swampy ground to attack her and tear her to pieces, their hooves were held fast in the ground so that they could not move. Whilst she gazed on this sight with astonishment, a voice was heard saying: "If you take a firm stand in the place where you are, you will have no cause to fear the ferocity of those beasts. But if you retreat one step, at that same moment you will fall into your power." She woke up, and interpreted the place as meaning her resolution to remain a virgin: the bulls were devils and wicked men.

The bulls retreat, immobilized by Christina's powerful gaze. Following the model of heroic virgin-martyrs torn apart by bulls, or, in *The Passion of Perpetua*,

Christianity itself) and who recognizes that it is futile to attempt to undermine a holy woman and her heavenly protectors.

¹⁴⁷ Christina's *Life*, 97-99.

a wild female cow, Christina remains self-possessed during her vision of terror. Christina and her hagiographer would have known of the early Christians condemned to die in public, mauled by bulls and other beasts.¹⁴⁸ These men and women were tied down, unable to struggle, and demonstrated their willingness to die for their faith. Christina's struggle is private and she demonstrates her strength foremost to herself. Her vision partially reverses the classic image of death in the arena; the wild animal stares at her, ready to attack but Christina who, like the martyrs, remains in place. Christina, though, is not a martyr-saint and must take her renewed strength back to her waking life. By reusing this image the hagiographer situates Christina in a familiar setting for temptation but, in contrast to her spiritual ancestors, she remains untouched by the bulls. By allowing themselves to be attacked to the death, the early saints proved their sanctity. A twelfth-century female needed to prove her strength by fighting to remain untouched.

Christina knows that, by nature, the bull is stronger than she is and can easily outrun her. Only the extraordinary nature of her faith can save her from the animals around her—from those who are unwilling to overcome their physical instincts and desires. Her family and their supporters, who wanted her to return

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of the events and imagery in Perpetua's martyrdom see Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography* (Oxford, 1988), 185-230. See also Thomas J. Heffernan and James E. Shelton, 'Paradisus in carcere': *The Vocabulary of Imprisonment and the Theology of Martyrdom in the 'Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis'*: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (Summer 2006): 217-223. For background and analysis on Perpetua's experience in prison and in the arena see Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (London, 1997), 85-148. For more on the development of approaches to diabolic temptation and the devil in the millennium dividing the early Christian martyrs from Christina and her contemporaries, see the introductory chapter.

home to marry, could not know of her inner victories over the devil. She was not yet at a point where she could be revealed publicly as a holy woman.

From the most imposing beasts to the smallest creatures, Christina could not avoid the devil's attacks. The *vita* continues:

Although in her hiding-place she was hidden from men, she could never escape the notice of the demons. And so to terrify the revered handmaid of Christ toads invaded her cell.... But when she refused to move and would not give up her singing of the psalms, they went away, which makes one think that they were devils, especially as they appeared unexpectedly; and as the cell was closed and locked on all sides it was not possible to see where they came from, or how they got in or out.

By the twelfth century, the image of the toad as “an agent of evil”—a symbol of violence and death—was established in a multitude of literary formats. Mary E. Robbins explains that the image of the evil toad “appears in sermons and penitential literature, in descriptions of the evils that man will experience after death should his life be ruled by one of the seven deadly sins, and in visions of purgatory and hell.”¹⁴⁹ Christina’s locked cell, impenetrable to man, was a prison of sorts.¹⁵⁰ She refused to leave her enclosure and, in reality, could not safely

¹⁴⁹ See “The Truculent Toad in the Middle Ages,” in *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nona C. Flores (New York, 1996), 29.

¹⁵⁰ Robbins presents evidence that toads were used in the twelfth century to torture prisoners. She writes that “it appears almost casually in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 1137. During the reign of King Stephen the evil bishops tortured men and women who had any type of goods, and ‘they put them into prisons that contained adders, snakes, and toads, and thereby killed them.’ Here the danger present in these animals is taken for granted by an author who assumes his audience will understand the reference.... The idea of poison is, perhaps, the one constant component of the toad’s image over the centuries. A twelfth-century Latin bestiary simply calls the animal ‘venomous,’...” (29). The thirteenth-century author of *exempla*, Caesarius of Heisterbach, describes a monk tormented by a toad who could not be killed. The toad is the devil and the monk realized that he would not be free from the devil until he allowed the toad/devil to bite him. The lesson taught is that “God often punishes sinners by monsters like this, that they may know how great a punishment is prepared in the future... .” The toad “represents satanic tenacity and resilience, as well as the fact that evil can lurk around any corner or under any stone.

live according to her own will outside her cell. Christina would not acknowledge the presence of the small, demonic creatures who are sent to torture her or, at best, distract her. Unlike the bulls of her vision, it seems that the toads, although understood as poisonous, could have been killed and removed. But Christina accepts her fate and responds only with prayer. She never physically fights the devil when he appears in non-human forms. As a recluse, Christina is dead to the world and does not need to demonstrate her faith by physically conquering the devil. The attacks are hidden from the public and she responds with hidden, inner strength.¹⁵¹

After this double trial—in hiding from men and being unable to hide from the devil—Christina finally experienced a relationship so strong in God that the devil could not harm her. It was at this point that her second significant relationship with a religious man began. As Christina gradually became recognized as a holy woman, she was faced with increasing public scrutiny.

Roger the hermit eventually realized that Christina deserved his help and had her cell brought near his. The description of their living arrangement is very much like that of a holy, celibate, marriage. The seeming impropriety of their physical closeness is explained as actually being extraordinarily holy. They are described as “one in heart and soul in chastity and charity in Christ, they were

Good triumphs because, like Christ, the monk became a willing sacrifice. Yet Caesarius also demonstrates the fact that evil in this life cannot be avoided but must be confronted and dealt with just as the monk confronted the toad.” (33-34). For more on the association of the toad with evil, especially in exemplary literature, as well as examples of ambivalent and even positive attributes associated with the toad in the later Middle Ages see Jacques Berlioz, “Le crapaud, animal diabolique: une exemplaire construction médiévale,” in *L'animal exemplaire au Moyen Âge*, eds. Jacques Berlioz and Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Rennes, 1999), 267-288.

¹⁵¹ Compare with the often physically violent battles in Godric's *vita*.

not afraid to dwell together under the same roof....” “Furthermore, through their dwelling together and encouraging each other to strive after higher things their holy affection grew day by day....”¹⁵² Since Christina and Roger feared those who would not understand their very close relationship, Christina’s presence was kept hidden—so much so that Christina herself could not have left her cell even had she so chosen. Locked away for four years until Roger’s death, Christina suffered for her faith. But this was a prison of her choosing; she was now an enclosed recluse and her intense asceticism was desired, not forced upon her. “O what trials she had to bear of cold and heat, hunger and thirst, daily fasting!... . Her burning thirst caused little clots of blood to bubble up from her nostrils. But what was more unbearable than all this was that she could not go out until evening to satisfy the demands of nature. Even when she was in dire need, she could not open the door for herself, and Roger usually did not come till late.”¹⁵³ There can be a very fine line between the devil’s torments and the self-imposed trials of a would-be saint. These torments are imposed by Roger and accepted by Christina. They are not diabolic.

There is awareness within the *vita* that all holy lives share certain characteristics, including diabolic temptation, and those men and women living according to these ideals expect their lives to mirror the *vitae* of saints. This can be demonstrated through a description of Roger praying so intensely that he

¹⁵² Christina’s *Life*, 102-103.

¹⁵³ Christina’s *Life*, 102-105. Also see Shari Horner on images of physical suffering in the lives of Anglo-Saxon female saints. Horner reads the *vita* within this context and understands the graphic descriptions of suffering as a way of “regulating the female body” and “attempting to sanctify its subject.” In *Legacies of Enclosure: Representing Women in Old English Literature* (Albany, NY, 2001) 173-185.

does not realize that his cowl has been set on fire. The hagiographer explains that Christina told him that she saw the devil manifest himself within the fire but Roger's prayers were so intense that he was unaware of the outer fire attacking him.¹⁵⁴ This brief episode illuminates the balance in Christina's and Roger's relationship. Although Roger does not need Christina to fight off the devil for him, Christina is able to rely on her own faith and ability to recognize the devil in the fire and learns that the devil attacking her companion has no power to harm him. She is safe with Roger, not fully dependent on him, but not yet in a position to be the stronger partner in a relationship.

Christina's bond with Roger is exemplified in his desire to leave the hermitage to Christina. Like a widow left to run her late husband's business, Christina feared that she would not be able to fulfill her new role satisfactorily. But she was comforted in a vision and learned that she would succeed Roger in his hermitage. Archbishop Thurstan of York met with Christina and arranged that her marriage be officially annulled and that Burthred be free to marry. But she still had enemies and needed protection. After Roger's death she was not able to remain in their hermitage and went into hiding to avoid the wrath of the bishop of Lincoln. She was placed with a cleric who remains unnamed. This was a very difficult time for Christina. The man with whom she had lived in chastity and after whose prayers she modeled her own had died of old age and had left her their hermitage but she could still not set out on her own. The man in whose protection she was placed reminded her and reminds the reader that Christina

¹⁵⁴ Christina's *Life*, 104-105.

was still unable to be independent, let alone the stronger partner in a relationship. She still had outer demons to fight.

The unnamed cleric she was sent to was unable to resist the devil and his own physical desires. “(S)ometimes the wretched man... came before her without any clothes on... .” Christina struggled valiantly—“more like a man”—to resist the clerics’ “fiery darts.”¹⁵⁵ She fasted, prayed, and inflicted pain upon herself to fight her desires.¹⁵⁶ Even once her “protector,” the cleric, repented, she found her feelings difficult to fight and left for the hermitage she had once, happily, shared with Roger. It was there that Christina had a powerful and comforting vision of Christ in which she is both mother and lover. “...(I)n the guise of a small child He came to the arms of his sorely tried spouse and remained with her a whole day, not only being felt but also seen. So the maiden took Him in her hands, gave thanks, and pressed Him to her bosom.”

¹⁵⁵ Christina’s *Life*, 114-5. This description of Christina strengthening herself “like a man” is followed by the very maternal image of Christina holding Christ as an infant. This ability to transcend male and female roles when necessary or to transform from the feminine to the masculine and then back again is part of the spiritual strength of the saint.

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Robertson discusses the reflection in female saints’ lives of the belief that women are never completely able to overcome their physical bodies and therefore prove their sanctity in the most physical ways. “Because the transcendence of the flesh is virtually impossible for women, female saints’ lives tend to make issues of the body of primary significance in their accounts of the saint’s trials. It is certainly significant that most female saint’s lives place at the center of their work the female saint’s temptation to lose her virginity.” (271) This is not to say that male saints are not tempted by lust (in fact, Christina faces male lust repeatedly from men she depends on for protection) but Robertson finds that, in a group of near-contemporary Middle English *Lives*, while “sexual temptation may be one temptation for the male saint, it is subordinated to a progressive series of temptations, usually culminating in a temptation to pride. In female saints’ lives, on the other hand, sexual temptation is either the sole temptation or the central temptation of the life.” Robertson compares the early thirteenth-century Middle English version with earlier Latin versions of the *Life of Saint Margaret* and finds that the terrifying aspects of the threat of sexual temptation and physical torture is extended in the Middle English version and becomes the ultimate obstacle that the female saint must overcome as she attempts to live a contemplative life. Robertson concludes that this reflects the contemporary stress on the limited physical nature of women, even the contemplatives to whom the story was directed. See “The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in *The Life of Saint Margaret*,” in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, eds. Timea Szell and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 268-287.

Christina's bond with Christ was strengthened and enabled her to return to Saint Albans—Roger's birth and burial place. This was a turning point in Christina's life. Her enemy, the bishop of Lincoln, had died, Christina's faith was reaffirmed through her vision of Christ, and her sanctity could be revealed to the larger world.

Even once Christina prayed that she “be released from this uncertainty” and was granted a vision in which she was crowned by messengers of Christ, there was no rest from the devil:

Disturbed by these events, the demon launched out into new warfare, so terrorizing the friend of Christ with horrible apparitions and unclean shapes that for many years afterwards, whenever she composed her weary limbs to rest, she dared not turn upon her side nor look about her. For it seemed to her that the devil might stifle her or inveigle her by his wicked wiles into committing some unseemly wantonness. But when he foiled was... the poisonous serpent plotted to break her steadfastness by creating false rumours... through the bitter tongues of his agents.¹⁵⁷

When Christina's faith remained strong, the devil “assaulted her with the spirit of blasphemy. He was confident that if he could cloud her faith with the slightest darkness, he would win the fight. He came by stealth and put evil thoughts into her mind. He suggested horrible ideas about Christ, detestable notions about His Mother. But she would not listen.” Still, Christina began to doubt herself. The devil had already attacked Christina through her family, in frightening visions, and through her own body—with lust. This final attack was an insult to the strength of mind through which she had successfully battled the

¹⁵⁷ Christina's *Life*, 129-131.

devil's torments and temptation. The relationship that followed allowed her to rebuild her faith and finally immunized her to the devil.

Interestingly, this pattern appears to reverse the normative pattern that Henry Ansgar Kelly finds influenced the understanding of temptation beginning with Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony* in which the devil begins by implanting doubt in the mind and, when that doesn't succeed, attacks physically through wild animals and physical pain.¹⁵⁸ Because the form taken by the devil must fit within the larger context of the life, Christina cannot face inner doubts until her public life is in order. It is only once she is secure for the first time since her early adolescence that Christina is able to let her mental guard down. It is at this point that she is forced to face her inner doubt and build up the strength to overcome this most elusive form of diabolic temptation. This elevation of inner torment and self-doubt corresponds with Guibert of Nogent's attitude toward the internal as well as Ineke van 't Spijker's analysis of hagiographical patterns in the twelfth century.

Christina continually worried about the integrity of her past purity. She faced slanderous accusations and blasphemous self-doubt, but her calling was confirmed in her work to help Abbot Geoffrey of Saint Albans rediscover and reinforce his own faith. Once she became confident in her own ability to resist the devil's suggestions and was able to ignore monstrous visions, she could

¹⁵⁸ See *Devil, Demonology, and Witchcraft*, 98-110.

help others resist the devil.¹⁵⁹ Her relationship with Geoffrey was the last and most enduring of Christina's spiritual friendships. It is also the relationship most clearly analogous to marriage. In a discussion of this section of the *Life*, Neil Cartlidge suggests that this relationship can be "contrasted with the carnal and economic relationship with Burthred that Christina so narrowly escaped." Christina's relationship with Geoffrey shows the contemporary ideal of Christian marriage in which the "relationship between a man and a woman could be emotionally and intellectually uplifting."¹⁶⁰

Unlike her earlier relationships in which Christina was extremely dependent on her male protectors even when she acted as a model of spirituality, the relationship with Geoffrey resembles a marriage of a couple who are close in age and strong of mind, in which each half is able to depend on the other for support and in which the wife is her husband's strength.¹⁶¹ By the time she reached her late-twenties Christina had come to a point in her life where she was able to give of herself without worrying about the sort of protection she was

¹⁵⁹ Christina's *Life*, 131. "... (D)uring the rest of her life, as often as she was assailed by temptation or wearied with suffering, she remembered the key and as confirmation of Christ's promise to His handmaiden she instantly experienced divine consolation." Christina's *Life*, 133.

¹⁶⁰ *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300* (Cambridge, 1997), 116.

¹⁶¹ Douglas Gray contrasts Christina's relationships with Roger and Geoffrey and explains that "Geoffrey the abbot is a very different person, a man of noble birth and a prelate at the heart of the Anglo-Norman establishment.... His introduction is far from complimentary: 'a certain noble and powerful person' who had begun well as abbot but 'as fortune smiled upon him through the support of noble relatives, he began to grow more haughty than was right and relied more on his own judgment than on that of his monk....' Christina's relationship with him gets off to an even more uncertain start than that with Roger, her first message to him (from a vision) being angrily rejected.. However, 'a wonderful though pure love' develops.... This relationship differs from that between Roger and Christina: it is a mutual one, and here, although Geoffrey is her protector and patron, she becomes his mentor." See "Christina of Markyate: The Literary Background," in *Christina of Markyate*, 16-17.

going to receive in return and without being excessively concerned with the inevitable criticism that would be aimed at her. Her first three relationships with men—which includes the traumatic relationship with the unnamed cleric—as well as her enduring marriage to Christ, had strengthened Christina and now she was able to give of herself with confidence. This is a complete spiritual friendship.¹⁶²

Geoffrey is described as proud and in need of saving. At first, Geoffrey ignored Christina's attempts to help him, but soon he came to depend on Christina's visions for advice. Christina helped the abbot follow the correct

¹⁶² The Saint Albans Psalter, which is traditionally associated with Christina and which may have been produced for her (although no exact connection has been determined) contains a number of images which support the strength of Christina's relationship with Geoffrey. In her analysis of the St Albans Psalter and its images, Kristine E. Haney argues that the appearance of popular Continental saints, such as Alexis (whose arguments for "spiritual marriage" are reflected in Christina's *Life* and whose *vita* is preserved in a Psalter believed to have been prepared for Christina) and Saint Martin, is a sign of the spread of Norman cults and the ideals of the *vita apostolica* in England in the decades after the Conquest. A key concept associated with these developments is that of pilgrimage and the idea that a pilgrim may undertake an internal journey, as does Alexis. This focus on the inner person is seen in Guibert of Nogent's early twelfth-century autobiography and was very much influenced by Saint Anselm. Haney argues that Anselm's ideas were known to the community at Saint Albans. This might explain why the images of saints seeking contemplation through inner pilgrimage were chosen, probably by Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans. In my discussion of Geoffrey's relationship with Christina, I will show how the eventual balance of Christina's inner and outer strength were used to help Geoffrey in his struggles. Haney explains that this "spiritual friendship" can be understood in light of Anselm's ideas on pilgrimage and might explain Geoffrey's input in the Psalter's composition. "In selecting these scenes, Geoffrey could have acknowledged the ways in which Christina had transformed his existence. Just as the lives of Saint Alexis, the Magdalene, and Saints Thomas and Martin turned outward to provide models for others, so, too, did Christina's own life increase the depth of Geoffrey's inner spirituality and its outward effect on others. This would suggest that what made Christina exceptional in the eyes of her male benefactor at Saint Albans was her love for God and her ability to draw others along the path she had chosen for herself in this era of reform. In this respect, her relationship with Geoffrey departs from the norm established for spiritual friendships in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Here the woman rather than the man assumes the role of spiritual advisor." See "The Saint Albans Psalter and the New Spiritual Ideals of the Twelfth Century," *Viator* 28 (1997): 145-73. For more on the Psalter see Talbot's introduction to the *Life of Christina of Markyate* (22-27) as well as Otto Pächt, C.R. Dodwell, and Francis Wormald, *The Saint Albans Psalter* (London, 1960). See also Tony Hunt's "The *Life* of St Alexis, in *Christina of Markyate*, 217-228. Hunt traces the development of the Alexis story from its origins in fifth-century Syria to a Greek version found in a twelfth-century Venetian manuscript and two eleventh-century versions found in France—one in Latin and one in Old French. It is possible that Abbot Geoffrey played a part in bringing the story to England, with Alexis' life paralleling Geoffrey's complex relationship with Christina.

course in his decision-making, which often involved the highest levels of Church and State. Geoffrey ignored Christina's visions and was immediately confronted by "several black and terrifying figures standing about him; who attacked him, threw him out of bed, struck him, suffocated him, and in various ways tormented him."¹⁶³ These figures, whose actions seem demonic, are sent by a neighboring holy man who wants Geoffrey to pay attention to Christina. They are sent as punishment for his current choices and perhaps as a sign of torments to come if he continues to ignore Christina's advice.

Christina's visions kept Geoffrey on the right path by anticipating his mistakes. In one vision Christina "saw herself in the presence of her saviour; and she saw him whom she loved above all others (that is Geoffrey), encircled with her arms and held closely to her breast. And whilst she feared that, since a man is stronger than a woman, he would free himself from her grasp, she saw Jesus."¹⁶⁴ Jesus closed his hand around hers and together their strength solidified Geoffrey's career.

Christina needed Geoffrey to provide the material security she would have found in the marriage her parents planned, and Geoffrey needed the spiritual direction that Christina could provide. This balance is critical to understanding the dynamic of their relationship.

As their relationship developed Christina aimed to bring Geoffrey's level of spirituality closer to hers. This relationship, which involved true responsibility on

¹⁶³ Christina's *Life*, 137.

¹⁶⁴ Christina's *Life*, 169.

Christina's part, finally enabled her to be consecrated and to have a following of young women, including a sister, around her. The strength of their union can be seen in the rumors that continually surrounded them. Slander against Christina and Geoffrey never ceased—"for the devil, their enemy, feared the advantage they would gain from one another and the great usefulness that would accrue through them to the Church... ." ¹⁶⁵ They were clearly a team to be feared. The last description of Christina in the *vita* reinforces the image of her as a good wife who thinks of her husband's needs first. "Christina's thoughts were with her dear friend Abbot Geoffrey... night and day, and she busied herself with his interests by fasting, watching, calling upon God... ." ¹⁶⁶

The close relationship that developed between Christina and Geoffrey caused observers to question Christina's motivations. Her detractors, "urged on by the envy of the devil," attacked her visions, vows, and wisdom. "... (S)ome of them called her a dreamer, others a seducer of souls, others, more moderately, just a world-weary business woman: that is, what was a gift of God they attributed to earthly prudence. Others who could think of nothing better to say spread the rumour that she was attracted to the abbot by earthly love." ¹⁶⁷ By attempting to demystify Christina's life, her enemies reduced the godly in her life to the mundane. By effecting Geoffrey's conversion and gaining influence over him, Christina drew attention to herself and had to publicly demonstrate her

¹⁶⁵ Christina's *Life*, 175.

¹⁶⁶ Christina's *Life*, 193. It is necessary to note that the surviving copy of the manuscript is incomplete and ends mid-sentence. See reference in note 123.

¹⁶⁷ Christina's *Life*, 173.

strength. Christina was at the pinnacle of her career and, with her faith stabilized, these attacks on her character did not have their intended effect and could not destroy her reputation.

Instead, when the devil challenged her by attacking those closest to her, Christina showed that she could easily rout the devil. “(The Devil) irritated by the virgin’s constancy, which he could not inwardly disturb by any attempts of his own or of his followers, tried to frighten her outwardly by assuming a monstrous appearance.”¹⁶⁸ When the devil attacked the young nuns in her community, Christina publicly overpowered the devil through prayer and protected those who depended on her for spiritual and physical protection. Only by desperately clinging to Christina and touching her clothing could the women feel safe. “At the sight of this monster the handmaid of Christ was somewhat afraid, but taking her courage in her hands, she turned to the Lord and, uttering prayers, thrust out that monstrous phantom. But for some time afterwards a more than ordinary horror swept over her.”¹⁶⁹ Christina is never presented as acting alone; she was deeply disturbed by the natural fear she continued to feel when confronted by the devil and needed to be assured that Christ was working through her. By recognizing her limitations and never overlooking the true source of her strength, Christina was able to serve her community with confidence.

Christina could not have reached a place where she could act as protector and teacher until she had experienced the reverse—a period in which she was

¹⁶⁸ Christina's *Life*, 179.

¹⁶⁹ Christina's *Life*, 179.

filled with the best of intentions but too weak to go it alone. Only after being tested, suffering physically and feeling the suffering of Christ could she become the stronger half of a mature male-female relationship. These relationships are best understood as part of her response to the devil's torments and temptations. They are the compromise that was a necessary part of her life and it is through these risky relationships that Christina proved that she could overcome all forms of diabolic intervention—including sexual temptation, the gossip of doubters, and the inner fear these triggered.

Christina managed to find a niche in religious life through the formation of potentially subversive, certainly eyebrow-raising, “extra marital” relationships. Sharon K. Elkins stresses the difficulty of these relationships by showing that the “very alliances that enabled her to preserve her virginity also threatened it, for the close relationships Christina formed with men unavoidably exposed her to sexual temptations.”¹⁷⁰ But when we view these relationships as being capable of encompassing all that a pre-arranged marriage might be—a mixture of alliance and dependence—we see that the female partner had everything to gain if she managed to control a difficult situation patiently and with a clear goal in mind. By control, I do not intend to imply manipulation in the negative sense with which it is often associated with women's behavior. Rather, the relationships highlight one way in which a woman like Christina could adapt herself to an unwanted situation. In constructing the narrative of her life, Christina's hagiographer

¹⁷⁰ Sharon K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*, 33.

stresses the dangers that only a saint could overcome and transform into a positive experience.

Christina set a path for herself while very young and took whatever steps were necessary, however difficult and risky, to live as independently as possible. Christina's spiritual strength through Christ was the constant in her life but she had so much happening around her that she also needed stable and supportive human relationships. Ironically, these human relationships can be seen as a significant compromise in her goal of living peacefully as the spouse of Christ.¹⁷¹

Christina of Markyate had to struggle through many relationships with male protectors until she was able to reach a point in her life where she could feel settled. When the devil is shown attacking a recluse, it is usually through her heart or mind or through the rare person with access to her. It would be unrealistic for the devil to take the appearance of a stranger—a beggar, pilgrim, or handsome man—in order to attack an enclosed recluse, especially if she was protected by a well-respected hermit or abbot. It is for this reason that Christina's direct association with the devil consists primarily of graphic and frightening visions. For the most part, the devil affected her indirectly through the people

¹⁷¹ Christina's *vita* has been read as a defense of her marriage with Christ. See Thomas Head's "The Marriages of Christina of Markyate." But in "The Loves of Christina of Markyate," C. Stephen Jaeger finds that love, more than marriage, structures the *vita*. He places the *vita* in its twelfth-century context by explaining that "prior to the twelfth century no strain of Western thought had incorporated the sexual act and sexual passion into an idealism of love. And yet this was precisely the conceptual *tour de force* of twelfth-century thought on the experience of love." (99) Heloise's letters to Abelard, for example, stress love over marriage. Jaeger argues that "*The Life of Christina* is also one of the major statements from the twelfth century of a daring and entirely innovative attitude towards the role of passion in the life of virtue. It makes passionate love into a testing ground of human worth and a means of inculcating virtue. He sees each of Christina's relationships with men as a series of "love stories" which "rise from rape and seduction to a deep spiritual love." In *Christina of Markyate*, 101.

close to her.¹⁷² Even her initial encounter with the devil was through a person who was a close family acquaintance who was trusted to be left with a very young unmarried woman.

As a woman who became a recluse because of familial and clerical opposition to her vocation, Christina faced continual crises despite her unwavering commitment to her marriage with Christ. Christina's struggles were rooted in both the expected and desired asceticism of recluses as well as in the behavior and attitudes of those in the world outside her cell who were angry with her, envious of her faith, or who wanted more control over her life. She had to

¹⁷² Jaeger stresses the contrast between Christina's temptations from real men with that of early Christian female saints. Unlike the late antique tempters, the twelfth-century men are not evil outsiders. "Christina's tempters are participants in the Christian life, and with the exception of her husband, Burthred, its institutional representatives." (106) Christina is also not a passive victim of male weakness. She struggles with her own feelings toward the men around her. Jaeger reads Christina's Life as a "a kind of summa of erotic-spiritual love.... It shows the rise from earthly to spiritual, a progression from the lowest to the highest forms of loving. Each love relationship has the character of a *speculum* of a certain kind of love.... The lovers move from carnality (Bishop Ranulf) to utility (Burthred), to two stages in the conquest of the body (Roger, fierce asceticism; the unnamed cleric, sensual overcome by spiritual desire), to a purely spiritual love based on moral improvement (Geoffrey). It is an extraordinarily bold affirmation of human erotic experience, at least as bold as Bernard's eroticizing the relations of the soul to Christ in his reading of the *Song of Songs*" (111-112) In an essay in the same volume, Kathryn Kelsey Staples and Ruth Mazo Karras explain that the *vita* "is a window onto a time of shifting ideas and standards about sexual temptation, highlighting important issues about women's roles and their sexuality in monastic life." (184) Before the twelfth century, "women are usually temptations to men but are not subject to temptation themselves. Traditional Christian thought held virginity as an important virtue for women, but women needed to be protected from threats to their virginity by men rather than protected from their own thoughts which might lead them astray.... In the *vitae* before Christina's, female saints are either the objects of desire or never face situations in which sexual temptation figures." (186-187) By the thirteenth century the emphasis among female religious shifted from "transcending gender" to "overcoming sexual temptation." This temptation included the vulnerability of women to "their own lust, the lust of men, their curiosity and the devil." Staples and Karras consider the possibility that Christina's hagiographer "may have been using his work, and the inclusion of her struggle against sexual temptation, to argue against the cynical rumours that surrounded Christina and Geoffrey's friendship and to dispute popular views which denounced relationships between male and female religious in general." (192) In this case, it would be the devil who planted the slander about their relationship. See *Christina of Markyate*, eds. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, 99-115, 184-196.

depend on the good will of supporters and live with the knowledge that in depending on them she was risking not only her own security but theirs as well. It took decades and many confrontations with the devil—both direct and indirect—for Christina to reach a place where she could have others depend on her for support and guidance.

Christina of Markyate's *vita* supports Caroline Bynum's conclusions about continuity in the *vitae* of female saints. But it also goes further in demonstrating how compromise might be more characteristic in a woman's life than in a man's. Christina's life shows how the continuity and early roots of a woman's vocation do not imply a lack of crisis. It also shows how that very continuity, which is praiseworthy, can be interpreted as stubbornness. It is for this reason that a female saint, facing family opposition, might be forced to compromise her desired life-style. For Christina, this compromise is seen in many more close relationships with men than she must have desired. But these relationships also gave Christina the opportunity to demonstrate her sanctity as she overcame both public scrutiny and inner doubts.¹⁷³

The construction of Christina's sanctity emphasizes her continuous interaction with figures who supported as well as endangered her. This particular process and the more general impact of gender on religious expression can be

¹⁷³ In "Christina's Tempting" Kathryn Kelsey Staples and Ruth Mazo Karras contextualize this struggle by explaining that during the twelfth century there was a shift from the "tradition of resisting temptation to internalizing it and developing spiritually from the struggle. Christina, withstanding both the advances of the cleric and the passions inflamed within her own heart, experiences with God's help both the internal struggle and the external resistance. With the inclusion of her struggle to overcome sexual temptation, Christina appears as a woman of her time while her hagiographer emerges as an author conscious of current issues and capable of adapting his subject's experiences to the anxieties prevalent among male and female religious." See *Christina of Markyate*, 193.

further revealed by comparing temptation within the context of a critical supportive relationship in the *vita* of Christina's near-contemporary, Godric of Finchale.¹⁷⁴

Where Christina the recluse mostly proves herself in the face of external doubts and criticism, the hermit Godric of Finchale fights the devil by recognizing and defeating his own inner corruption. The devil most frequently attacks him violently and in secret. But Godric's *vita* stresses that, even though he is a hermit, he does not battle the devil alone. He responds to diabolic assaults, and tries to forestall future attacks, with the guidance (and sometimes direct aid) of Roger, the prior at Durham, at whose request the *vita* was composed.¹⁷⁵ In contrasting the formative relationships that are stressed in Christina's and

¹⁷⁴ My discussion of Godric's *vita* will focus on aspects that highlight the role of these relationships and the gendered nature of the formation of sainthood with emphasis on the role of the devil in that process. Godric's relationship with the religious community at Durham and especially with its prior, Roger, is constructed in a way that places Godric at a critical center of power while limiting his authority. An overview of Godric's life can be found in Benedicta Ward's *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Philadelphia, 1982, rev. 1987), 76-82. My discussion will be based on indicative selections of Godric's *Life* from an extensive text by his contemporary, Reginald of Durham, as well as on translated excerpts from a fourteenth-century abridged version by John of Tynemouth. Probably started toward the end of Godric's life (c. 1065-1170) and completed after his death, the *vita* was written by the monk Reginald of Durham on the advice of the prior of Durham and Aelred of Rievaulx. See Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de vita et miraculis s. Godrici, heremita de Finchale*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Surtees Soc. XX, 1845). Hereafter Reginald of Durham's *Vita Godrici*. This edition includes an introductory preface which discusses the history and transmission of the manuscript. Also see *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, ed. M.A. Strouck (Toronto, 1999), 412-435. The reader contains a translation of John of Tynemouth's fourteenth-century version of the original twelfth-century account. This version was edited by Carl Horstman in *Nova Legenda Angliae* (Oxford, 1901), 475-500.

¹⁷⁵ In "Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse Revisited," Susan J. Ridyard explains that "Reginald of Durham began work on his *vita* well before Godric's death in 1170 and spent much time with Godric in his later years. He wrote for people who knew Godric, some of whom had been present on occasions which Reginald describes; the Godric he presented must have been recognizable to this audience. In general, then, we can see Reginald's accounts of Godric's practices and encounters with others as descriptions of historical events. We can also begin to distinguish the narrative of an event from Reginald's interpretation of it, expressed in the authorial comments which frame each episode." In *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, eds. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford, 2001), 237.

Godric's *vitae*, I will focus on the ways that order and authority are maintained by recalling the ways in which Christina's world gradually expands beyond her cell until she is admitted to a position of carefully guarded power while highlighting episodes that reveal the shaping of Godric's image as a holy man and his power to withstand the devil's pressures. Roger's role in Godric's formation as a hermit-saint is critical in this process.

Although it is important to consider distinctions between hermits and recluses, the line between the two need not be drawn too exactly.¹⁷⁶ Christopher Holdsworth considers the *vitae* of three twelfth-century hermits, including Godric of Finchale, and does not distinguish between the two in asking, "how had the hermit or recluse, according to the *vitae*, come to be open to this power which endowed him or her with such remarkable gifts? The answer is clear, they had won through to it, through struggle with the devil, by prayer and by their whole austere hidden life."¹⁷⁷ It is by revealing aspects of the "hidden" in these *vitae* that we illuminate potentially overlooked elements in the struggle between the

¹⁷⁶ Henry Mayr-Harting presents one difference when he explains that anchorites and anchoresses, like Christina of Markyate, were "enclosed in a cell next to a church at the heart of a community" and hermits, like Godric of Finchale, lived "away from places of human habitation." See "Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse, in *History* (1975): 337-352. Henrietta Leyser explains that, according to the medieval perspective, hermits were "found on the very highest rung of the ladder of perfection. Abbots, kings and emperors would seek their advice. Because it was so exacting a life only those of proven calibre were encouraged to take it up." In *Hermits and the New Monasticism*, 1. Early Christian hermits fit this description and for some communal and solitary religious lives were not alternative vocations but stages in spiritual development. A monk within a community built himself up spiritually before becoming a hermit. Peaceful coexistence between monks and hermits was possible because they were not viewed as being in competition. It is for that reason that we see hermits living on monastic lands and under the protection and guidance of a monastery. But it is also clear that, while these might be the ideal stages of development under the Benedictine Rule, most monks did not become hermits and many hermits had never been and would never become monks. Godric's changing relationship with the monks at Durham and his importance to them both in life and through his miracles after death should be read within this context.

¹⁷⁷ See "Hermits and the Power of the Frontier," *Reading Medieval Studies* (1990), 62-63.

saint and the devil. In Godric's case, diabolic attacks are often synonymous with his private struggle and are thereby potentially hidden from the world outside his hermitage. As in Guibert of Nogent's description of his own struggles, Godric's *vita* stresses the importance of his awareness of his interior life and his strength to overcome "inner demons."

Although both hermits and recluses usually sought a rural, ascetic life outside of religious orders, and, to varying degrees, were dependent on others for protection, there is a critical difference between female recluses and male hermits. Recluses, like male anchorites, were ideally "anchored" to cells which were attached to churches. They lived alone and yet were under constant observation. For Christina of Markyate, life as a recluse was a compromise which was made once it became clear that her goal of a monastic life might never be an option. But for a hermit like Godric, who came to his calling later in life, the religious life was "second-career" of sorts. This lifestyle was not reached as a compromise but as a new objective—a radical break with his old life. Although he did need the support of established religious figures, he was free to seek out the most ideal spot on which to settle.

Unlike Christina, Godric was not part of an influential family and it is unlikely that, had his conversion occurred in his youth, his parents would have been able to secure a position for him in a religious community. His *vita* is one of a man who was free to wander far beyond his place of birth. As a young man, Godric traveled widely, rose steadily in material worth, and eventually incorporated pilgrimages into his travels as well as between stages of eremitic

life— in which he moved from an unregulated lifestyle to one that was more formally recognized and observed. Once he gave up his wealth and newfound (uninherited) social position, he settled at Finchale as a hermit who was influenced by the monks at the Durham priory as well as by the Cistercian reformers.¹⁷⁸

He spent years shaping his chosen wilderness— cultivating the land, taming the animals and men who, at first, threatened him because they feared that he was a disturbance. And, once these were settled, he faced the inner demons who preyed on his fears of his own lust and gluttony. Unlike Christina, Godric faced no significant public opposition to his conversion and was fully supported by many of the most powerful people in Durham.¹⁷⁹ Although he

¹⁷⁸ The exact nature of the relationship between Godric and the community at Durham is unclear. Susan J. Ridyard asks, “(did) the initiative come from Godric, as Reginald implies, or from the priors, seeking to control a local hermit and benefit from his presence? Were the arrangements for screening Godric’s visitors applied consistently and for the rest of Godric’s life, or for a more limited time? Did the priors employ consistent principles in deciding who might visit the hermit and who might not? Despite these unanswered—and perhaps unanswerable—questions, Godric’s new relationship with the priors does suggest that the hermit was coming to terms with the demands which society was going to place upon him.” See “Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse Revisited,” in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 240. Victoria Tudor considers Godric’s changing status over the course of his life as a hermit, which began around 1112 and ended with his death over half a century later. She explains that, influenced by the monks at Durham, Godric became less independent and more monk-like. “(U)nder the influence of the Benedictine Rule he seems to have moderated his severe asceticism. Monks were sent out to Finchale on a regular basis to say Mass and, as Godric became increasingly infirm in old age, one monk or more came to live at the settlement. It was almost certainly under the influence of the monks, furthermore, that the hermit adopted strict rules of silence and would converse only with those visitors who brought with them a wooden cross furnished by the prior. When a monk was in residence at Finchale, in addition, his permission was necessary before a visitor could address the hermit. These provisions, which reflect passages in Benedict’s Rule, made Godric’s position comparable to that of a professed monk but they also had the effect of keeping both the hermit and his establishment firmly under conventual control... . Godric had evidently made no act of profession and we should therefore probably see him as an ‘associate monk’ rather than a full member of the house. He was also as closely bound to the convent as was possible, short of being brought to live within the wall of the monastery in Durham, which would of course have been self-defeating.” (75). See “Durham Priory and its Hermits in the Twelfth Century,” in *Anglo-Norman Durham*, 67-78.

faced some opposition from neighboring peasants who mistrusted his use of once public lands, once Godric demonstrated his sanctity to them through the performance of miracles, his primary public compromise may have been that worked out with local religious authorities who wanted to assure that his powers

¹⁷⁹ In addition to the personal attacks by the devil, which came mostly in the forms of lust and gluttony, Godric and his neighbors had to deal with Durham's sometimes precarious position just south of the Scottish kingdom and north of the powerbases at London and Canterbury. It is also important to recognize that Godric's power as a hermit was acclaimed at a time when eremitic monasticism was challenged by the alternative of the new schools and that Durham itself was "relegated to the periphery by the powerful new kingdom shaped by the Angevins." Donald Matthew approaches this period as an in-between time for Durham during which the monks and the region itself struggled, and ultimately failed, to preserve their positions of prominence. He stresses their focus on Saint Cuthbert and the belief that "his miraculous powers provided for the security of his lands and the help of his people kept enemies at bay and punished violators of his rights." (5) While this power does not seem at all unusual in a saint, the focus on the protection of land rights is very much a reflection of the larger concerns of the region during a period of local concern over jurisdiction and power—both secular and religious. This concern is also seen in Godric's direct encounter with the devil who attempts to destroy his harvest and orchard. Matthew extends the image of Durham caught in a web of competing interests. "(U)neasiness about Durham's position went even deeper. The cathedral priory had come into being during the comparatively short period after the Conquest when Benedictine monasticism had reached its highest point in public esteem. From the early twelfth century, monasticism began to suffer from criticisms within the monastic order itself that the rule of Saint Benedict had been overlaid by improper accretions and was not being observed as was originally intended. In England the bishops, once they began to exercise their episcopal duties in the Norman kingdom with some confidence, discovered that they needed archdeacons and other administrative staff to help them, rather than the support of monastic chapters. The monks tended to have very tiresome ideas about the respect due to them and a preference for choosing more monks as bishops. Increasingly, new cathedral schools were appearing... which offered better training for future bishops and episcopal servants than the monasteries could do." Interestingly, in 1140 Bernard of Clairvaux became involved in supporting the monks in their choice for bishop. It was these monks who supported Godric as a hermit; they were inspired by him, taught him, and encouraged the writing of his *vita*. There is good reason for Cuthbert to be the most visible saint in Godric's life—in which Godric, as a living saint, is the powerful protector of the land and his neighbors. Mathew suggests that "perhaps the eremetical tradition of the older monasticism continued to be important at Durham... . More significant still monks from Durham and others regularly sought solitude in the Farne islands where they felt Cuthbert's presence very close. Durham's greatest historian, Symeon, appears to have taken in religion the name of one of the most famous of all recluses. Moreover, this strongly ascetic streak in monasticism held great attraction for monks of the Cistercian order like Ailred of Rievaulx or Bernard of Clairvaux... . Did the monks of Durham show favor to hermits as much to impress the austere communities of monks and canons springing up in the new Northumbria north and south of the border as to maintain a strand of their own inheritance?" (13) See Donald Matthew, "Durham and the Anglo-Norman World," in *Anglo-Norman Durham*, 1-25.

would be associated with them, and when possible, that their dissemination be controlled by them.¹⁸⁰

A consideration of two episodes in which Godric is confronted by the devil can serve to highlight both the particular and universal in the devil's encounters with hermits and recluses and can further reveal the critical link between the form and nature of diabolic attack and the lifestyle of the would-be saint. Ultimately, Christina is attacked through her necessary relationships with men, while Godric, comforted by visions of the Virgin Mary, battles the devil as a man who, despite his desire, is somewhat reluctantly moving away from the margins of the surrounding rural and monastic social world.¹⁸¹

Rachel Fulton explains this tension within the context of the new religious movements in the twelfth century. There was an "urgent need of those who embraced the religious life to discover what they felt to be a proper balance between the life of active service in the world (its goal being love of neighbor) and the life of contemplation in the choir or private cell (its goal being love of God)." She argues that among the Cistercians "the devotion to the Virgin in her *compassion* was...an attempt to mediate this terrible tension between

¹⁸⁰ Benedicta Ward explains that "(t)he fact that three monks of Durham were eager to write about the hermit near them shows an interest in this form of life equalled by their desire to control the saint's body after his death." See *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, 78.

¹⁸¹ His solitude did not preclude an enduring relationship with his mother (who accompanied him on pilgrimages) and with his sister (who spent time with him in his hermitage and to whom he acted as a spiritual advisor of sorts). Sharon K. Elkins explains that "Godric welcomed his sister who 'from her mother's womb remained a virgin and uncorrupted, always devoted to God.' He 'constructed a certain secret cell which was somewhat removed from his own oratory, in which the virgin devoted to God lived.' In order to become a hermit, Godric had acquired permission from the bishop and received instruction from another ascetic. But Godric alone assumed responsibility for his sister; 'and therefore he showed Burchwine by example the ways to God.' In *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*, 39.

disappointment and hope, neighbor and God, Other and self. It was a manifestation of the recognition that to move inward, toward the image of Christ in the heart, the soul must first move outward... to others in pain.”¹⁸²

Godric's struggles take two primary forms but only one— graphically marked by his attempts to conquer lust by rolling in thorns, submersing his body in icy water, and wearing a hairshirt—is associated with the devil. The other shows the intense pressures he faced as a man who preferred isolation but accepted compromises in his interactions with the monastic community at Durham and the neighboring farming community because he was needed to serve publicly as a holy man. These external pressures are shaped as part of the expected reality of a twelfth-century saint and are not associated with the devil.

After a long career that involved surrendering to material desire but also involved what were, for his hagiographer, the protective powers of pilgrimage and prayer, Godric settled at an isolated hermitage.¹⁸³ He did so with Bishop Flambard's permission and with the desire to separate himself, as completely as

¹⁸² See Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 198-199.

¹⁸³ Alexander Murray places ambition and avarice at the top of the “diabolic pantheon of vices.” See *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), 60. Still, Godric's new way of life was baffling for ordinary men and women to whom poverty was involuntary. When Godric is attacked by the devil in human form—or by humans doing the work of the devil—we see attacks rooted in anger and confusion over how a man could give up wealth and choose to live like a peasant. But for the author of the *Life*, Godric's conversion may also be viewed as a restoration of the natural order of society which had been so suddenly interrupted in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In “Hermits and Hairshirts” D. Alexander approaches these attacks as signs of Godric accepting the proper social order and voluntarily rejecting the position he gained for a return to the lower social status of his childhood and his family. By not resisting attacks, Godric (and Reginald of Durham) demonstrates the humility that should be associated with peasants and saints and criticizes contemporary social mobility. This process was gradual for Godric. It begins with Godric giving up his career, but not immediately placing himself under the protection of the bishop of Durham or clearly associating himself with the surrounding religious community. Until

possible, from the outside world. This proves just about impossible to accomplish. His neighbors destroy his crops and attempt to sabotage his plans, but, by helping them through prayer and the performance of miracles, Godric eventually becomes an integral part of the community. Once established as a hermit, he tamed the surrounding wild animals, continually worked to prove to his neighbors that he had a stable role to play in their world,¹⁸⁴ and once these issues were settled, he worked to tame his own body. In contrast, Christina's struggle with her body comes early in her *vita* (although it does recur) and is rooted in the potentially dangerous external stimulus of her unnamed "protector." Godric's struggles with his body and his material world are at the heart of the two episodes which I will discuss below. By forcing Godric to question himself—to doubt the integrity of his inner life—the devil forces Godric to confront his otherwise hidden weaknesses.

The most frightening challenges to Godric's desired life come through inner torment.¹⁸⁵ Unlike Christina, whose confrontations with the devil were

he does so, Alexander sees Godric as living in "open conflict" with the norms of his society. It is during this time that the peasants trample his crops. This sort of crisis is resolved only once Godric is clearly associated with Durham. See "Hermits and Hairshirts" in *Journal of Medieval History*, (2002): 205-226.

¹⁸⁴ Alexander explains that "(o)ver and again, it is Godric's rural resources and his rustic person which are the source of his powers as a holy man; he is not seen and remembered as a *miles Christi* but as a *pauper Christi*. If he had been seen as somehow 'noble' in spirit, then there would have been miracles associating his power with the signs of his nobility, not only his poverty.... It may be that in Godric's pattern of miracles, something of Godric's own attitude is present. An ascetic wearing chainmail does not have to appear as a spiritual reflection of secular nobility... but may also have been seen as a rejection of and challenge to that class. After all, the devil appeared as a knight to attack Godric, and frequently insulted him for being a 'rustic'." In D. Alexander "Hermits and Hairshirts," 216. This particular insult is included in the second selection from Godric's *vita* that I will discuss below.

¹⁸⁵ Godric's *vita* is itself a lesson in the importance of a strong inner life. It "relates the interior miracles of prayer, vision, and prophesy; miraculous cures do not hold a large place.... The picture Reginald presents is not that of a thaumaturge; it follows the pattern of the desert fathers,

based in conflicts with her family and in her compromising relationships with men, Godric had no powerful human opponents. The devil himself became his constant tormentor. Moments of crisis emerge from his own doubts and fears as to the totality of his conversion after years of being surrounded by ordinary men and their sinful ways. A man like Godric, who made a mature decision to dedicate his life to God, would not face the sort of family opposition against which Christina struggled. But, because he chose to convert as an adult who had already experienced life in a world far removed from a hermitage, Godric struggled with a part of his life which, despite his rejection, still required his penance. His struggle takes the forms of gluttony, unceasing lust (although, since he remained isolated from unwanted visitors for much of his career, not on account of actual women¹⁸⁶) and attempts by the devil to physically breach the refuge that Godric had created in the wilderness. Christina's and Godric's experiences of temptation demonstrates an imbalance between diabolic encounters rooted in the saints' outer and the inner worlds.

Godric's *vita* portrays him as a publicly private man who needed to find a balance between the life of isolation he craved and the role he was expected to

as understood among the 'new religious' of the twelfth century. Godric's reputation for sanctity rested on his familiarity in visions with the saints, not on practical cures. By far the largest number of miracles recorded of Godric are visions. Godric talked with St Cuthbert, who directed him to Finchale; he learned a song from Mary and Mary Magdalene... Other visions were of demons, who took the forms of black beasts or birds or men, uttering noises and threats—imagery familiar in hermit literature from the days of St Anthony the Great. This familiarity with angels, saints, and demons marked the contact of hermits such as Godric with the other world; they were on the frontiers of the supernatural." See Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, 78-79.

¹⁸⁶ This does not imply that Godric avoided all women. The *vita* is clear in distinguishing between the virtuous women Godric welcomed and women whose only purpose was to incite lust. Indeed, in the development of his cult after his death, Godric is very much associated with healing women. Women who were not permitted to visit St. Cuthbert's shrine were encouraged to seek help from Godric at Finchale. See Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, 61-63.

fulfill as the local holy man. This struggle is hinted at in the description of the devil's response to Godric's hairshirt and chainmail, both worn under ordinary clothing but the latter particularly detectable by visitors and passersby. D. Alexander shows that these material embodiments of a would-be saint's ascetic suffering could have a dual purpose— to turn the hermit's potentially private, inner development into a public lesson in the powerful endurance of a holy man.¹⁸⁷ It is in one of Godric's most private and vulnerable moments, when he is immersed in prayer, naked in the river, that the devil makes an unsuccessful attempt to steal the hairshirt and chainmail which were lying on the riverbank. "(T)he Devil appeared to him spewing fire from his mouth, with ass's teeth, eyes almost a cubit long..., crooked feet and twisted limbs. When he was about to rush upon him, the man of God made the sign of the Cross against him.... And so the pestilential creature departed in confusion."¹⁸⁸ In this case, when the devil attempts to *release* Godric from his self-imposed suffering, Godric demonstrates his power by simply making the sign of the cross. Godric repeatedly demonstrates that conversion and suffering were his choice and that only he, possibly with the advice of the prior, would determine how much is too much. The devil can not be the one to cause Godric to moderate his asceticism or hide Godric's holiness from his neighbors.

¹⁸⁷ In "Hermits and Hairshirts," 205-226.

¹⁸⁸ See *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, 418. See parallel story in Reginald of Durham's *Vita Godrici*, ch. x, 87, which introduces the attack with the following explanation: "At quia hostis malignus semper bonorum studiis invidet, et pia cohibere studia non tardat, aliquando huic viro se sensibilem exhibuit, et comminando deterre praesumpsit..." "But because the evil enemy is always envious of good deeds and he is not slow to hinder pious deeds, he once made himself visible before this man, and presumed to weaken him by threatening him... ."

Still, a focus on moderation and restoration of balance is clear in a variety of confrontations with the devil. In one episode, the devil appears before Godric as a fellow hermit asking for help. The devil-hermit describes his own lifestyle as one of constant suffering and fasting and stresses that Godric should live this way as well. In appearing to criticize Godric for being overly materialistic while asking for relief from poverty, the hermit reveals himself as the devil in disguise.¹⁸⁹ The lesson is clear. A life of extreme voluntary poverty and starvation is as sinful as a life of over consumption.¹⁹⁰ This is revealed in an episode that shows how demonic attacks ward off the *possibility* of pride in the lifestyle he had achieved. Because it is dangerous for him to rest, the devil sends a demon to live with Godric and his servant. This demon causes extra work in the household and physically attacks Godric by knocking him to the ground. The torment is accepted with gratitude because it keeps Godric on constant guard. As the attacks grow in severity, Godric recognizes that the blows are actually a test of strength from God. He continues to monitor his own desires and does not moderate his extreme asceticism because to refuse the bodily pain might mean giving the devil a victory. For a saint, moderation is relative.

He lived accordingly in the manner of royalty,¹⁹¹ neither exalting his merits, nor succumbing to the vices of human weakness. Lest

¹⁸⁹ *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, 425.

¹⁹⁰ This episode is similar to a description of Marie of Oignies recognizing the devil when she is attacked as a glutton for eating at all. She saw that the devil was working to weaken her by forcing her to starve herself. See below, ch. 5.

¹⁹¹ Clearly Godric's rusticity is not consistently presented as the ideal. In this case the ideal behavior of royalty is upheld as a virtue to be imitated by all people.

therefore he extol the greatness of his painstaking virtue, the Messenger of Satan struck him, [and] he was given the torment of his own flesh; he refused indeed to lessen the devil's torment lest, through the craftiness of diabolic deception, he was sending away so much sweat of affliction and misery. Wherefore lest he take of empty vainglory, he was given a most severe exactor, who afflicted him with great torture of cruel misfortune. Residing therefore with him [Godric] sometimes he [the demon] grew warm near the hearth, and sometimes with his [Godric's] servant close to the wall of the house, in order that he [the devil] was causing any labor [that was] done; suddenly, as though sending out a hand, the devil cuffed Godric so violently that he knocked him down, so that he fell headlong almost to the ground. In that his [Godric's] servant seeing who was settling [recognizing that a demon had moved into the hermitage], and shuddering with fear at hearing [the attack on [Godric], at once inquired of him what then he had been that he [Godric] had presumed to go through so violent an attack. To which that man said "thanks to the cherished eternal father, who always brings us to triumph in Christ! Indeed (H)e himself gave such an oppressor to me, who never allowed me to devote myself to rest." The man of God did not proclaim more at these things [words?], but breathing heavily he went into his Chapel soon afterwards; and in that place he lay on the ground for a long time until he perceived the evil one to have retreated. About which, questioning the brother, he asked, "Of such a kind of suffering I endured shame from that one for much time, to such an extent, by the Lord of compassion, I merited to be freed from such a kind of misfortune; [but] lest indeed I indulge in idleness, I learned that I might goad the cruel one, that thrown down in body, although unwilling I was vigilant with (my) soul."¹⁹²

¹⁹² The chapter is entitled: "Qualiter spiritus nequam ei alapas vederit, et coliphazando temptaverit." The text follows: Gradiebatur itaque via regia, nec extollendo se de meritis, nec succumbendo vitiis humanae fragilitatis. Ne igitur magnitudo operosae virtutis eum extolleret, datus est ei stimulus carnis suae, Angelus Satanae qui eum colaphizaret; noluit enim propitia Divinitas ut per astutias fraudis diabolicae amitteret tantae sudores afflictionis atque miseriae. Unde ne vanitatis jactantia ei obreperet, datus est ei gravissimus exactor, qui eum diris calamitatibus excruciendo affligeret. Residente ergo eo aliquando ad focum ut calefieret, et quodam ejus ministro juxta parietem, ut quippiam opus efficeret; subito quasi manus emissa tam acriter colaphizando eum perculit, quod pene ad terram praeceps corruit. Quod servus ejus qui considerabat videns, et auditu pavido inhorrescens, statim sciscitatur ab eo quidnam fuisset quod eum tam gravi laesione pervadere praesumpsisset. Cui ille 'gratias' inquit, 'almo patrie aeterno, qui nos semper triumphat in Christo! Ipse quidem talem mihi exactorem tribuit, qui nunquam me quieti operam dare permittit.' Nec plura his vir Dei edidit, sed graviter suspirans Oratorium suum mox introivit; ibique tam diu orationi procubuit quousque malignum recessisse persensit. De quibus a fratribus requisitus dixit, "Hujusmodi passionis ignominias multo tempore ab illo pertuli quousque, Domino miserante, a tali incommodo liberari promerui; ne enim otio indulgerem, stimulatorem crudelem percepi, ut excusso corpore, quamvis invitus animo vigilarem. In Reginald of Durham's *Vita Godrici*, Ch. X, 88-89.

Once it is clear that Godric's servant is not sufficiently spiritually elevated for the demon to bother with him (he seems to spend the duration of the attack cowering in fear), the image we are left with is that of Godric accepting the demon's blows (when, presumably, he would be capable of vanquishing the demon with nothing more than the sign of the cross). When the servant questions him, Godric explains that he is grateful for the attack and the fact that God constantly tests him and does not allow him to grow weak in faith.¹⁹³ But Godric does not remain in the hermitage awaiting additional blows. Still recovering from the attack, he goes to his chapel to speak with the resident monk. The hierarchy of authority is clear in this episode. The servant is in awe of Godric but is ultimately powerless—he is an unworthy opponent for the devil and would neither be personally attacked nor be of any use during an attack. Although Godric is the devil's natural target, he knows his limitations. He not only finds shelter in the chapel (where he can better hide from the demon?), but he also confers with someone who is in a better position than the servant to advise him or call for the prior. In recalling the attack, Godric stresses that, although he allowed his body to be attacked, he knows that it is most important that he remained on constant guard for the integrity of his soul. This focus on inner strength—on purity of mind and clarity of intent— sometimes in the face of

¹⁹³ Clifford Geertz's understanding of suffering in a religious culture can shed light on this statement. "As a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or helpless contemplation of others' agony, something bearable, supportable—something, as we may say, sufferable." In *Interpretation of Cultures*, 104. As quoted in Aviad Kleinberg's *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 103.

the weakening or destruction of the body (or other material things), marks Godric's struggle.

When it comes to direct diabolic attack, Roger the prior is often involved in the response.¹⁹⁴ The dynamics of this relationship are seen in two indicative episodes involving diabolic attack. In the episode from Reginald of Durham's *Vita Godrici* which follows, spring planting has just ended when the devil appears in order to destroy Godric's planted field. Godric launches a counterattack and defeats the devil "*cum confusione*" but soon thereafter the devil reappears and makes the attack more personal. He calls Godric a peasant, ravages his orchard and destroys Godric's favorite tree. This is not just any uprooted tree—the demon destroys a fruit bearing tree, a tree that sustains life. The symbolism could not be clearer.

As the situation escalates, the devil sends demons to exact revenge, and Roger comes to work with Godric. Together they reveal the demons. By forcing the demons to publicly reveal their names and normally hidden natures, Godric and Roger teach others how to recognize them and thereby protect the larger public—or at least the monastic public. Godric and Roger restore order—this despite the chapter heading which explains "(h)ow the servant of God was beaten by the whips of the enemy and how the names of the demons were detected by him." But, in the telling, it is clear that Godric is not acting alone.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Recall the questions surrounding the nature of the relationship between Godric and the monastic community at Durham. See note 178 above.

¹⁹⁵ The chapter is entitled: "Quomodo servus Dei ab inimico flagris caesus sit, et qualiter nomina daemonum ei detecta sint." The text follows: Godricus Dei famulus innumeras maligni hostis insidias est expertus; nam et larvali specie saepe visibiliter ei inimicus consueverat apparere.

Godric, the servant of God, was tested with countless traps of the evil enemy; for the enemy was accustomed to appear to him, often in the form of specters. Indeed, a certain one appeared, at the time when the man of God had turned over his field, and revealed himself to him in whose image the savior is displayed through this book. He [Godric] had repelled that one away from himself with confusion. Not long afterwards he [the demon] was about to avenge his injury and came—totally gnashing and like a madman—with a kind of fruit bearing wood [wood from a fruit bearing tree] which the man of God held dearer before the others. He utterly

Quodam enim tempore postquam in agro viri Dei effoderat, ipseque ei imaginem Salvatoris in libro depictam proferens, a se illum cum confusione repulerat, non longo post tempore quasi suas injurias vindicaturus, totus frendens et furiosus advenit, et lignum quoddam pomiferum, quod vir Dei prae ceteris carius habuerat, de horto pomerii ejus radicitus evulsit, quod extra sepe extulit, et aliquanto longius delatam, secus alveum fluminis projecit. Deinde terribiliter ejulans et exclamans, et post haec diutius corvina voce crocicans, totus infremuit, et dixit, “O tu rustice Godrice, nunquam te insectari desinam quousque te turpissime deficientem de loco isto projecero.” Nocte igitur sequenti cum grandi et torto naso, flagra dirissima manu ferens, totus ignivomus advenit, et quandam aliam malignorum spirituum, quasi forma foeminea (*sic*) indutam, secum duxit; de cujus ore egredi videbatur ignis sulphureus, odor teterrimus; reliquum vero corporis ejus totum ardebat ut clibanus. Qui virum Dei corripientes, flagris diutius cecidere, et dum ille de contra conabatur orare, ille semper voces ejus praeconati sunt intercludere. Tunc alter eorum exclamans dixit, “Ego sum ille spiritus cui nomen est Corinbrand, et haec et soror mea quae vocatur Carcaueresard. Ego sum qui corda incendo ad malitiam et nequitiam, ista vero est quae carnem inquinat per luxuriam et immuniditiam.” Quae nomina saepius ingeminantes, tota nocte sic ei illusere; et eo acriter caeso, oriente tandem diluculo, evanuerunt. Quorum interpretatio nominum, ut utar noster seministrudulo sermone Anglico, cum Latino simul corrupte intermixto, talis mihi esse videtur “Corinbrand,” facula ardens in corde, quia cor inflamat ad nequitiam; “Carcaueresard,” ardor carnis ex loquacitate garrula carnem incendens ad immuniditiam. Haec simpliciter dico sicut intelligo; ceterum haec legentibus, prout eis Deus sensus verborum istorum aperuerit, sicut eis libuerit, exponenda seu enodanda dimitto. Quibus factis, Rogerum Dunelmensis Ecclesiae priorem, tunc temporis animae illius consiliatorem, quam citissime per ejus ministrum accersiri fecit; et ei omnia quae a malignis spiritibus perpeccata fuerat, secretius secum in confessione detexit. Cujus absolute habita, et cum consilio ejus disciplina ab eo percepta, admissis de intro monachis et ministris qui cum priore advenerant, priore jubente ut eum publica confessione confunderet qui eum in occulto tantis plagis lividum contudisset, coepit servus Dei ex ordine cuncta retexere, et verba ac verbera, nomina eorum et opera, informem figuram et turpem staturam, satis competenti relatione disserere. Prior vero exinde arborem avulsam in loco suo reponi fecit, et virum Dei, ut ad certamina daemonum preferenda alacrior fieret, et pia longanimitate devincere studeret, multis sacris verborum documentis instruxit.

Nocte vero sequenti, idem spiritus malignus priori semi-soporato astitit, et nomen suum ac sororis suae ei cum cachinno exponens ait, “Quia Godricum illum stercorearium adversum me et sororem meam non timuisti ut rebellem instruere, tali a nobis remuneraberis mercede.” Emissoque cum stridore foetidissimo paedore, velut a parte ejus posteriore, mox evanuit; sed per triduum, sicut prior retulit, foetor ille a naribus prioris perfecte non recessit. Forte quidem graviter tulere quod deliramenta eorum occulta in publico fecit exponere, nec mediocriter ferre potuere quod pro ipsorum ludibrio nomina eorum et opera saepius coram pluribus consueverat enarrare.

Haec omnia testantur et referunt tam monachi quam laici qui tunc cum priore illo convenerant, et haec viderant et audierant; atque usque in hodiernum diem quidam eorum adhuc superstites sunt. In Reginald of Durham's *Vita Godrici*, Ch. X, 356-358.

uprooted his orchard, the fact is that he passed over the fence and once carried further away he flung himself forward beside the bed of the stream. Afterwards, there was the most terrible wailing and crying, and still a longer time after these things, [the demon] calling like a raven, croaking, growled and said, "O you peasant Godric, I will never cease to attack you most shamefully until I have thrown you out of this place." Therefore, the following night he came wholly vomiting fire, with great twisted anger, bearing the most frightful whips in his right hand, and he lead certain other spirits of evil who assumed the female form; out of whose mouth a sulfurous fire was seen, odor most foul; truly the rest of his body was burning as when in an oven. Seizing the man of God, striking him with whips for a long time, and while they were coming down against him he was trying to pray, that one had been foretold always to cut off his [Godric's] cries. Then another of them [the evil spirits] exclaimed, "I myself am that spirit whose name is Corinbrand, and this is my sister who is called Carcaueresard. I myself am the kind who excites hearts toward wickedness and worthlessness. [That of] yours is truly the kind of flesh that corrupts through luxury and impurity." Repeating those names often, they mocked him in this way all night; and having been beaten by him violently, they vanished finally with the rising sun at dawn.

What is the meaning of the names, that our half-creaking English speech be used, with a corrupt Latin mixed in, of such kind seemed to me "Corinbrand," which means little torch burning in the heart, because he inflames the heart until it is worthless; "Carcaueresard," which means burning flesh in relation to a garrulousness which inflames the body to impurity. I speak these things simply just as I understand them; the rest will be explained through readers, through whom God will uncover the meaning of these words. At these deeds, Prior Roger of Durham, at that time advisor of those souls, was quickly summoned through his servant; and to him [Roger] all of which he [Godric] was enduring from evil spirits, he disclosed in a separate confession with him. Having had absolution from him, and, with counsel, having received instruction, and having been admitted from among the monks and servants who had come with the prior, the prior—servant of God—began to reverse the entire order that had been undermined by the devil. Thus, the he [the devil] who disturbed public confession, and who had beaten this man secretly with great blows, was weakened. First indeed the prior restored the tree that had been torn out to its place, and the man of God [Godric] was made quicker in order that the contest of demons be endured, and the pious one [Roger] strove to subdue [the demons] by things with proof of words. The following night indeed, the same evil spirit stood by the half-sleeping prior, and explaining, with loud laughter, his name and that

of his sister he said, “because of Godric that foul enemy of me and my sister you were not afraid to teach the rebel, for such you will be repaid by us with retribution/reward.”

And having been sent out with a hissing noise and with a great stinking filth, as if out of his behind, presently he vanished; but during/over a space of three days, as the prior related, that stench did not depart completely from the nostrils of the prior. As it happened indeed they endured painfully because he exposed the follies of their hidden sins in public, they were not able to bear tolerably because they were accustomed to declare instead (of) themselves their names with scorn and [their] work often in the presence of many.

This all was testified and reported both of the monk and of the layperson who accordingly had agreed upon that with the prior, and they had seen and heard these things; and also to this day some of them are still surviving.

Godric responds to the first two attacks (the destruction of his field and his favorite tree) without help from the outside. But the third attack in this sequence targets Godric's body—and more importantly his prayers—through the interference of a fire-vomiting demon. This demon is accompanied by two demons whose natures are revealed through their names—one enflames the heart to lust and the other destroys the flesh through desire. One of these “spirits of evil” emits a sulfurous odor (a traditional sign of the devil). Godric is beaten as he tries to pray but his cries are cut off. By dawn Godric has vanquished the demons and, with daylight, Godric summons Roger to his hermitage. Roger's efforts as Godric's confessor and partner in fighting the devil are notable. After absolving Godric of his sins, Roger orders that the demons appear. He reverses the damage that had been done and Godric is strengthened (through Roger's intervention?) in preparation for future battles. Roger brings about these changes—“and the pious one [Roger] strove to subdue [the demons] by means of the long-suffering one [Godric]....”

Roger is so much a part of the battle that, when the demons return, they focus their efforts against him. It does not appear that Roger is attacked because he is especially saintly but rather because he has been imbued with Godric's power and holiness. After all, this is Godric's *vita*. Still, Godric and Roger are very much unified in countering the devil's attacks—so much so that the devil attacks them as a pair. At the end of the story, Roger defeats the devil who attacked him “with a great stinking filth” by publicly revealing the demons who had previously been free to work in secret, at night. In this episode at least, it is difficult to distinguish between Godric and Roger as the saint being targeted by the devil.

A comparable story appears in the abridged version of the *vita*. In this account:

One day when he was chanting Psalms at the hour of vespers, the Devil standing outside mocked him and began to sing, and said “O you peasant, I know how to sing Psalms just as well as you.” And once, when he was on his knees praying, the Enemy entered the chapel and tried to hinder him from his purpose. But he was not afraid, and so despised him that he would not look at him. Angry at this, the [Devil] threw the pyx which contained the host at him. And when [Godric was] still so unperturbed that he would not look at him, [the Devil] threw the chalice [containing] the wine, and poured over him all that it contained. Similarly, he threw at him the water pitcher and everything which stood on the table, one by one. And when the man of God [still] did not rise from his prayer he threw down the beam on which the cross had been nailed with everything it supported. And since the man of God could not be moved, all night long the Wicked One raged against him but got nowhere; at last, put to confusion, he departed, leaving such great stink behind that hardly anyone could bear it. Nevertheless, all the things he had thrown were unharmed, and the image of the crucifix was completely undamaged. The man of God, being a layman, did not presume to touch it, but Prior Roger was called from Durham, and he told him everything, and through [Roger] all things were restored to their places. One the following night when the prior was

sleeping the Devil stood beside him saying, “You have taught this foolish peasant Godric that I use illusions and tricks, and you have turned him against me with your warnings. Take payment for your trouble!” As he said these things and left, he overwhelmed [the prior] with such a bad smell that he could hardly stand it.¹⁹⁶

In Reginald of Durham’s telling, the events unfold just as it seems that Godric might be able to feel secure in his hermitage. He is about to begin spring planting—to plan for the future—when the devil arrives to remind him that he must always remain on guard. He drives away the devil but is only allowed a temporary respite. When the devil returns, he doesn’t destroy the field (which can always be reworked) but instead mocks him with the wood from a tree that once held the promise of fruit.¹⁹⁷ The personal nature of this attack is followed by the devil’s promise that he will never give up. The devil follows through on this promise with an assault by two demons. The use of demons is common in Godric’s *vita*.¹⁹⁸ Recall that in an earlier episode “*Angelus Satanae*” are sent to strike Godric. But in this case, the messengers are brother and sister demons, each of whom represents threatening vices—lust in heart and body, invisible and visible weaknesses that are dangers to Godric as a hermit-saint.

This division of responsibility between Godric and Roger is even clearer in the second story. In the first incident, Godric calls Roger so that he can confess

¹⁹⁶ In *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, 419.

¹⁹⁷ This the orchard that Godric had protected when the trees were saplings. See the section entitled *Qualiter silvestrium animalium rabiem edomuerit, ac de horto suo ea imperio solo propulerit* (sic. propulserit?). “How he thoroughly tamed the fierceness of the forest animals, and repelled them out of his own garden from the command of this land,” 95-96.

¹⁹⁸ Jeffrey Burton Russell stresses that in folklore as well as in some Christian writings there is no significant distinction made between the devil and demons. In Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* for example, “(h)e made no distinction between the Devil and the demons; any one demon is a manifestation of the prince of all evil.” In *Lucifer*, 156.

and be given absolution as well as aid after the initial attacks. In the abridged version of the *vita*, the devil attacks holy objects in Godric's possession and overturns his chapel, but Godric does not dare restore the chapel without Roger's presence. Roger arrives to set things right and the devil responds by attacking Roger for teaching Godric how to recognize, as blasphemous, the illusion that the devil could destroy holy objects.

Godric's soul and holy objects (that is, not mere material things) take great precedence over the security of Godric's body and surrounding physical world. While the latter should be protected when possible (because they act as an additional barrier against diabolic attack), they have little intrinsic worth. The walls of Godric's hermitage—and of Christina's cell—might be breached but the would-be saint must be able to dismiss these invasions. They must remain focused on their souls and capable of ignoring the devil's attempts to divert their minds through the destruction of things that would likely devastate an ordinary person.

The violence of the battle and Godric's extreme physical deprivation may seem unnecessary in a *vita* that focuses on the inner man and his struggles. But this can be explained by looking at Ineke van t' Spijker's analysis of the militancy and asceticism in Peter Damian's eleventh-century understanding of an ideal hermit's life.¹⁹⁹ She shows how “with the help of these ascetic practices, the *homo interior* is delineated from a hostile outer world, and also how the physical ascesis is founded in an inner life: militancy turns out to be the obverse of

¹⁹⁹ Damian, like Godric, chose the religious life as an adult.

fragility. The juxtaposition of violence and fragility is comprehended in the even more fundamental contrast between divine power and human fragility.... The evocation of utter fragility is suddenly contrasted with the power which contains this fragility."²⁰⁰ The impossibility of separating the visible strength of the saint from the invisible hand of God is the ultimate lesson in the *vita*. And in Godric's *vita*, there is also a clear lesson that the power of the hermit cannot be separated from the community to which he is attached.²⁰¹

In contrasting the basic development of Christina's and Godric's *vitae*, we see Godric working his way to prominence and then rejecting the life he had made for himself. After his conversion he spends the remainder of his long life moving from the center of the new economy to the margins of his society and then toward the center of the social-religious sphere as a recognized holy man. His fears were based in his memories of his worldly life and it was these inner weaknesses that made Godric vulnerable to diabolic attack. Godric faced his demons in private (although Roger's role can't be ignored).

On the other hand, Christina's nearly invisible conversion took place during her childhood and the crises she faced were not the inner doubts that can reflect a crisis of faith. She is seldom attacked when alone. Rather, her crises are often rooted in the determined opposition of her family, their powerful supporters, and the cynicism of outsiders who suspiciously observed her

²⁰⁰ van 't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life*, 25-26.

²⁰¹ This is in contrast to what van 't Spijker explains as Peter Damian's stress on the corruption of the existing monastic life from which the ideal hermit will emerge. In the shaping of Godric's *vita*, his early independence develops into a clear association with the monastic community at Durham.

relationships with the men who helped build and secure her reputation. The earliest opposition to her calling is external and rooted in the “diabolic” marriage proposal that her family favored as sensible social strategy. Her demons, including that of sexual temptation while enclosed—for her own safety—with the unnamed hermit, are rooted in these external difficulties. As a recluse, Christina is rarely alone and is in constant fear of being forced from her enclosure. The devil attacks both through visions which express Christina’s fears and through her physical vulnerability around her male protectors. At the peak of her career, while she is very much involved in the world through her relationship with Geoffrey, the devil attacks through doubts (mostly those of outsiders) about her integrity. There is a close correspondence between her evolving human relationships, increasingly public life, and the form taken by the devil. When faced with so much external opposition to her desired lifestyle, Christina had to remain inwardly strong. The only significant sign of inner doubt is revealed toward the end of the *vita* and occurs once Christina has achieved a position of respectable stability.

While the lines distinguishing internal and external temptation can be blurry and some compromise is always necessary when individuals interact with and even rely on others, Christina’s and Godric’s *vitae* stress different models of temptation. Godric, who faces no significant opposition to his mature conversion, only moderates his lifestyle in order to be integrated more fully and positively—at least from the perspective of his hagiographer/the community at Durham—into the surrounding community. These developments are revealed in the shaping of

his confrontations with the devil. He does not need to prove his saintliness to anyone outside his hermitage. Instead, his *vita* demonstrates his holiness, all the while reminding the reader that even a trusted hermit must monitor himself constantly for weaknesses and not give into the dangerous desire to separate completely from the world outside.

Godric is most vulnerable to diabolic attack in his isolation and learns to strengthen himself for these hidden temptations. In contrast, Christina is safest (although clearly not completely safe) when hidden but struggles to attain a life in which she can be allowed a position of public responsibility. Diabolic attacks moderate by the point Christina is secure and visible in her community. The gendered nature of these diverse paths—despite the identical outcome in all saint's lives—is revealed through a focus on the role of the devil in the development and transformation of holy people. These differences, as well as similarities in temptation, reveal challenges faced by men and women who sought security in twelfth-century religious society.

During the twelfth century, as new religious orders formed that had originated in or been influenced by eremiticism, hermits remained part of the religious landscape. Christina of Markyate's and Godric of Finchale's *vitae* describe a culture in which nuns, monks, recluses, and hermits coexisted, however awkwardly. Godric of Finchale's life is just one example which reveals how "(e)remeticism did not merely continue: by developing new forms it adjusted to the new society. Recluses, men or women living in cells beside a church, had existed in the past, but now became much more common and functioned as

advisers for the neighbourhood and sometimes as visionaries... .”²⁰²

Contemporary hagiographers stressed the mutual advantages that both monastics and eremetics enjoyed when they worked together. This model could then work to the benefit of the larger community of laypeople who supported their potentially holy neighbors.

As I will discuss in the following chapters, the possibility of multiple paths to a secure religious life allowed for the formation of new types of communities and leaders. But those who founded new communities, like Gilbert of Sempringham, also came under close scrutiny and had to be able to manage critics. Bishops, like Hugh of Lincoln, who began his religious career as a Carthusian monk, were in a position to mediate disputes, examine new cults, and generally be responsible public leaders. I will address the role of the devil in these *vitae*, and the nature of his attacks (private? public? internal? external?) in the next chapter.

²⁰² In Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050-1250* (Oxford, 1989), 239-240.

Chapter Four: Gilbert of Sempringham and Hugh of Lincoln

In this chapter, I will look at the *vitae* of Gilbert of Sempringham and of Hugh of Lincoln, both of whom were controversial reformers, public figures, responsible for large communities, and canonized within twenty years of their deaths.²⁰³ Gilbert of Sempringham was the founder of a monastic order but was himself neither a hermit nor a monk.²⁰⁴ Hugh of Avalon was a monk in the new Carthusian order who became bishop of Lincoln.²⁰⁵ I will suggest that this

²⁰³ For a modern edition of Gilbert of Sempringham's *vita* see *The Book of St. Gilbert*, eds. Raymonde Foreville and Gillian Keir (Oxford, 1987). The two earliest manuscripts, both thirteenth-century, are Cotton Cleopatra B., which contains both the *vita* and letters and documents connected to his canonization, and Harley 468, which only contains the *vita*. The modern edition is based on the thirteenth-century Cotton Library manuscript which is the earliest. Brian Golding views the *vita* as "both an account of the founder intended primarily for his order and a 'piece justificative' directed against hostile critics." See *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order: c. 1130-1300* (Oxford, 1993), 9. For Hugh of Lincoln's *vita* see Adam of Eynsham's *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis: The Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, ed. and trans. Decima L. Douie and D.H. Farmer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), hereafter *The Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*. Adam of Eynsham's version of Hugh's life was written in 1212. Gerald of Wales, who also knew Hugh in the last years of his life, also wrote a (much shorter) version of Hugh's life. See Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Life of St. Hugh of Avalon, Bishop of Lincoln 1186-1200*, ed. and trans. Richard M. Loomis (New York, 1985). The oldest manuscript of Adam of Eynsham's version of Hugh's life is the later thirteenth-century MS Digby 165 which is at the Bodleian Library at Oxford and is the basis of Douie and Farmer's edition. See Adam of Eynsham, *The Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, I: xlix-liv for more on later manuscripts.

²⁰⁴ Although Gilbert was English, he, like Hugh of Lincoln, spent formative years being educated in France before returning to England as a teacher. But, unlike Hugh, Gilbert's youth was not spent in a monastic environment. This should not suggest an absolute separation between the cultures of the masters and monks. Colin Morris explains that some of the earliest masters were monks. Although Guibert of Nogent's teacher Anselm of Laon was a more typical master at a cathedral school, Bruno of Reims, founder of the Grande Chartreuse where Hugh spent his youth, is a not an uncommon example of a master who joined "a radical group of monastic reformers." The lines between master, monk and hermit were easily blurred in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See *The Papal Monarchy*, 46-47.

²⁰⁵ From this point on I will refer to him as Hugh of Lincoln. His French origins are significant in understanding his status as an often critical outsider in England. He began his religious career at the Grande Chartreuse, became prior at the Carthusian house of Witham in England, was elected bishop of Lincoln under Henry II and remained bishop through the reigns of Richard I and into the early years of King John's reign. The often contentious relationship between Hugh and the Angevin kings take up a very large portion of the *vita*, much of which focuses on Hugh's struggle to maintain the independence of the episcopate against the demands of the royal government. For background on the relationship between bishops and kings in the twelfth century see Morris, *Papal Monarchy*, esp. 219-236.

difference at least partially accounts for the different nature of the devil's appearances in each man's *vita*. The devil's role in Gilbert's life is very limited and his appearances are not at all dramatic. In contrast, there is a point in Hugh's life where he is assaulted to the point that he "almost despaired of his life."²⁰⁶ Still, even in Hugh's *vita*, there are few extreme temptation stories, and these only occur before his elevation to bishop. Hugh's hagiographer, Adam of Eynsham, writes of Hugh's weaknesses and the devil is associated with the tests through which Hugh proves his sanctity, but these are not stories of extreme torment. Both Gilbert's and Hugh's *vitae* fit into the category Richard Southern describes as "commemorative" and the role of the devil in these *vitae* is constructed in ways that clearly separate these men's lives from those of hermits, recluses, and the beguines.²⁰⁷

Although both men had public careers that involved controversy, only Hugh faces the devil (and the devil's human allies) in a series of violent battles. While the devil does make his requisite appearance in Gilbert's *vita*, his role in the formation of Gilbert as a saint is far less significant than it is in Hugh's *vita*. By focusing on the shaping of Gilbert's and Hugh's sanctity through the lens of

The Carthusians are among the reforming orders that Henrietta Leyser discusses in *Hermits and the New Monasticism*. See footnote 208 below. These new hermits did not seek holy isolation; rather they sought to confront and reform society. Hugh's *vita* is indicative of this determination. Even as a bishop Hugh spent as much as two months a year at Witham and struggled with the difficulty of remaining secure in his position while overtly criticizing the royal government. This involvement in the world is marked by the hagiographer's description of Chartreuse—"Their rule encouraged solitude, not isolation." *The Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, 1:23.

²⁰⁶ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, 1:50-51.

²⁰⁷ As quoted in the chapter on Christina of Markyate and Godric of Finchale above, Southern explains that saints in "commemorative" *vitae* "avowedly subordinate the display of supernatural powers to the display of activity directed towards a practical end." See *Saint Anselm and His Biographer*, 321-329.

diabolic involvement in the lives of holy people, I will show how the nature of temptation depends on the type of saint being constructed in each *vita*. The differences in these two men's *vitae* are especially revealing because their lives are so similar in outline—both men entered the religious life with the full support of their families, had connections in very high places, traveled widely, and were responsible for the spiritual (and, to some extent, material) well-being of large numbers of people. In Gilbert's case, he was the creator of a network of English houses for both religious and lay men and women. Hugh's job was to oversee and protect the diocese of Lincoln, with its lands, clerics, and, of course, laypeople. These were clearly formidable challenges both for the men in charge as well as for the devil, whose primary role in these *vitae* was to undermine the good work done by these visible holy men. But while the devil finds innumerable ways to attack Hugh both personally and publicly, the most striking thing about the devil in Gilbert's *vita* is his (relative) absence.

This absence might be explained by the changing role of women in twelfth-century religious life. In "The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," Jo Ann McNamara provides critical background to Gilbert of Sempringham's main challenge in creating a new monastic order for women that included men. She explains that the eleventh-century Church reformers' emphasis on a celibate clergy brought unprecedented attention to the question of what distinguishes male religious from female religious and she finds that, by the twelfth century, a crisis of masculinity led to a greater separation of

the male and female spheres within the religious world.²⁰⁸ Influential reformers, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, were reluctant to encourage potential female followers who wanted to live according to the model of an ascetic, holy life that was marked by the new monasticism.²⁰⁹ Double houses were especially problematic. Gilbert of Sempringham, whose very long life spanned the late-eleventh to the late-twelfth centuries, was among the reforming clerics who worked to find a way to include women in this religious movement without appearing to corrupt its ideals. The Gilbertine double houses—especially as they existed during his lifetime—highlight the particular challenges of those who wanted to live according to the ideals of the new monasticism but who could not, or chose not to, find a place in an existing order.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ In *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare Lees (Minneapolis, MN, 1994), 3-29. Still, even during the eleventh century, there were individuals who challenged this aspect and effect of the Gregorian reform. Bruce L. Venarde explains that Robert of Arbrissel (c. 1045-1116), founder of Fontevrault, “roused both admiration and criticism by accepting some, but not all, of the reform program. He counseled obedience to church officials—including their new claims to supervision of marriage and divorce—but also criticized clerical morals. He championed clerical celibacy, but his pastoral mission to women and the mingling of the sexes in communities of his followers challenged the prevailing agenda of gender apartheid and the mistrust of women common to many Christian reformers of his day.” This did not go unnoticed. “Robert’s patrons, disciples, and colleagues included a large number of women, apparently the majority among his followers. Robert’s extremely close relations with them were a cause for alarm in his lifetime and long after.” In *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, (Washington, D.C., 2003), xxi-xxvi.

²⁰⁹ The origins of many of the new orders can be found in eleventh-century eremiticism. Henrietta Leyser explains that the new hermits were not the solitary figures of old but founders of new orders such as the Carthusians, Cistercians, Premonstratensians and the Gilbertines (whose reach was limited to part of England but which shares many of the characteristics of the more popular and widespread orders). The “new hermits,” who include Godric of Finchale, did not necessarily seek separation from other religious but from the rest of society. But as Hugh of Lincoln’s *vita* demonstrates, separation from society could not be a permanent goal for a bishop and Hugh spent his career tied to both his responsibilities as a bishop and his desire for the eremitic life at Witham. These hermits and the reforming monks aimed for an apostolic life of poverty, work, and, for those who chose to spread and strengthen the message, preaching. See Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism*, *passim*.

Gilbertine houses were marked by a strict separation of the sexes, close supervision and guidance, and distinct roles for the cloistered women, canons, and lay sisters and brothers who made up the order. Gilbert's responsibilities to his growing order did not allow him the opportunity to pursue a less public religious life. In any case, his *vita* does not suggest that he would have preferred the eremitic life.

Gilbert had neither sought a life in the spotlight nor a life of isolated poverty. He could not avoid the attention he and his order received but never renounced everything associated with the world. Instead, he used his position of prominence within his community and the land he inherited from his father to make sure that his creation was secure.²¹¹ New communities could be difficult

²¹⁰ On the question of whether Gilbert was influenced by the model at Fontevault see Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, 91-92. Golding focuses on earlier continental influences while Foreville and Keir, in their introduction to *The Book of St. Gilbert*, xliii, approach the development of the Gilbertines as much more of a local phenomenon which was also influenced by more contemporary orders, such as that at Prémontré. Penny Schine Gold distinguishes between the Gilbertines and Fontevault by stressing that "Robert did not choose to perpetuate his own role by appointing a male master of the order, either instead of or in addition to an abbess" while Gilbert "personally selected a male successor... institutionalizing male control." See "Male-Female Cooperation," 152-153. The inclusion of women was written into the legislation of the order of Fontevault and was formalized. Still, Sally Thompson explains that the Gilbertine houses were not "isolated units" like those of the Benedictines and Augustinians and that both the Gilbertine houses and those of Fontevault were "double monasteries where masculine support was secured by an organizational framework." In "Why English Nunneries Had No History," 137.

²¹¹ Gilbert's life as a "churchman" who founded the only native English order may be significant in the shaping of his *vita*. After 1200, the only English saints who were canonized were bishops, such as Hugh of Lincoln, or "churchmen." See R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, 148-149. Although his hagiographer recalls Gilbert for his austerity, the fact that his income came from land is not ignored and there is no expectation expressed that he give up all his wealth in order to be a holy man. Instead, his hagiographer explains that after Gilbert became a priest, he "spurned himself and what belonged to him, together with this world, in order that, having cast away all hindrances, he might be free to follow the crucified Christ. I say 'spurned' because, although he made use of worldly things where they were necessary to his life, he put behind him every excess and persistent desire for possessions." In *Book of St. Gilbert*, 26-29. Both Gilbert and Hugh recognize the importance of wealth in securing their communities and neither calls for holy poverty as a universal ideal. As I will discuss in the second part of this chapter, part of Hugh's strength was owed to his wealthy, noble background. Hugh is also recalled for his moderation in approaching lay society.

to manage and double houses especially were morally questionable. In the middle of the twelfth century, bishops, including Hugh of Lincoln, were called upon to help settle some of the difficulties and criticisms new communities faced.²¹²

According to his *vita*, after acquiring the title of “master” in France and possibly receiving minor orders, Gilbert returned to Sempringham where he taught local children, inherited two churches in Lincolnshire, entered the household of the bishop of Lincoln, was ordained as a priest, but then refused the archdeaconry of Lincoln in favor of a pastoral vocation.²¹³ It was at this point, around 1130, that Gilbert enclosed seven women who were inspired by his preaching.²¹⁴ These women, who lived as anchoresses, were the first branch of his order-to-be. They were to practice “chastity, humility, obedience, and charity.” Because they were cloistered, female servants were chosen to be their connection to the outside world. The servants became lay sisters who did not live very differently from the cloistered women. They too abandoned all of their

²¹² Colin Morris discusses the transformation and structuring of twelfth-century orders and explains that “(s)ometimes the adoption of a structured monastic life did not emerge from the community itself, but was the result of pressure or persuasion by the bishop. This might be an expression of sympathetic concern for the hermits’ ideals... . There were also times when considerable pressure was applied... . Gilbert of Sempringham seemed unable or unwilling to provide any proper structure for his double order of canons and nuns.” If this was the case, the final decision of a bishop could be both comforting and add to the security of a new order. See *Papal Monarchy*, 238.

²¹³ The following overview of Gilbert’s career is based on the introduction to *The Book of St. Gilbert*, esp. xvii-xxiv.

²¹⁴ Unlike Robert of Arbrissel who continued preaching and founding new monasteries, Gilbert is not remembered for lifelong preaching. Colin Morris describes the twelfth century as a “golden age of learned preaching... . The most outstanding monastic preachers are to be found among the Cistercians, above all the great Bernard of Clairvaux... . Outside the monasteries preaching was specially the task of the bishop, and increasingly also of the *scholasticus* or head of the cathedral school.” In *Papal Monarchy*, 305-306.

material goods (although it is unlikely that these women had many to begin with), slept little, worked long hours, fasted and prayed. Lay brothers were added since men were needed to work the land that was endowed to the order.

Gilbert had hoped that the Cistercians would govern his houses but his request was refused at the meeting of the general chapter at Cîteaux in 1147. Once he was fully responsible for his foundations, Gilbert created a fourth branch consisting of canons who would be responsible for the spiritual direction of the houses.²¹⁵ It was at this point that the monasteries became double houses, with male and female communities.²¹⁶

The order faced several crises during Gilbert's lifetime. In 1164 Gilbert was suspected of being disloyal to the king by supporting Thomas Becket while he was in exile. During the same period a revolt of the lay brothers focused negative attention on the order itself. This episode and the response to it

²¹⁵ After Gilbert's death, the canons shaped the direction of the Gilbertines until their dissolution in the sixteenth century. This is in contrast to the continuing central role of the (often very prominent) women at Fontevault.

²¹⁶ With some modifications, Gilbert chose the Cistercian Rule of St. Benedict for the women—both the nuns and lay sisters, as well as for the lay brothers. The monks lived according to the Rule of St. Augustine. The rule of the Augustinian canons was practiced in more than one way during the twelfth century. The Premonstratensians, for example, stressed poverty and withdrawal from the world while the Gilbertine canons stressed service to the Christian community, both in imitation of the apostolic life. Foreville and Keir quote Dom Ph. Schmitz's definition of a double monastery. It "consists in the union of 'two communities, one of monks..., the other of nuns, established in the same place, not necessarily within the same enclosure', in completely separate buildings, under a single authority, generally disposing of a common endowment and forming a legal unit." See *Book of St. Gilbert*, xlii. "(I)t is likely that Sempringham and its daughter house at Haverholme were organized much as were other small communities of holy women, of which that at Markyate is the best known, with its church, cloister, and modest conventual buildings... His *ancillae Christi* had made a profession to bishop Alexander, just as had Christina of Markyate and her companions, but this does not necessarily imply that they were now formally regarded as nuns, and indeed it may be anachronistic at this date to draw too rigid a distinction between the anchoress, the nun, or the more imprecise *soror*. To categorize Sempringham at this stage as either a nunnery or a hermitage would, therefore, be misleading: it was a community grouped around its *magister*. Change, and that only gradual, would only come in the 1150's." In Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, 86.

highlight contemporary fears of corruption in double monasteries as well as fears of sexual temptation within the world of the religious. After the revolt, the sexes were separated even more carefully than they had been. The revolt and ensuing stricter separation may have resulted from the most well known scandal within the order—an episode involving a nun from the monastery at Watton who was impregnated by a lay brother.²¹⁷ These controversies may be the key to understanding the devil's role in this *vita*. Despite, or perhaps because of, the controversies surrounding the order, the devil is only indirectly implicated in Gilbert's struggles. It is difficult to separate Gilbert's personal struggles from those of his order. As his creation and responsibility, questionable behavior by anyone associated with the order reflected negatively on Gilbert himself.

The absence of the devil in Gilbert's *vita* is striking since the temptation of would-be saints by the devil is a fairly common hagiographical topos. These attacks may come in any number of forms—terrifying dream visions, the torments of demons, challenges by opponents who are openly described as the devil's helpers, even struggles with inner doubts that are rooted in the saint's fears about his or her ability to sustain a challenging and exemplary lifestyle. But these barely appear in Gilbert's *vita*, and crises, while they certainly exist, are neither blamed on diabolic interference nor explained as a test of his faith. In the following pages, I would like to suggest one way to approach the devil's absence in the construction of Gilbert's sanctity.

²¹⁷ The episode is recorded in Walter Daniel's *Life of Aelred of Rievaulx*, but it is not mentioned, at least not directly, in Gilbert's *vita*.

To begin with, Gilbert of Sempringham's hagiographer does not describe him in extraordinary terms. As a young man, just back from France, Gilbert chose to continue living according to the religious ideals he had been taught. The hagiographer provides no details about friends or family members who may have asked him to consider alternative paths and there is no mention of a particular moment or event that convinced him that he had chosen the right lifestyle for himself. There is no dramatic moment of conversion. His religious life as a cleric is a given, and is not presented as particularly unusual. After all, there were many young men in the twelfth century who took minor orders and then sought careers either as teachers or as administrators within the Church. These were honorable professions—both of which Gilbert spent time doing—but neither were obvious paths to sainthood.

Since the *vita* is about a man who founded an order that was troubled both by internal conflicts and the external appearances of impropriety in its earliest years, any hint of weakness in his youth may have threatened Gilbert's canonization process. His hagiographer presents him as a constant model of stability and strength and does not even describe Gilbert as overcoming the devil in the act of choosing a sexless life. While he would certainly appear to be extraordinary in his ability to overcome the natural desires of the human body, it would only weaken Gilbert and his order if there were a suggestion that, as might be expected, the devil had taken notice of Gilbert's personal success. The devil never torments him with lust for the women who were under his protection. The only description of Gilbert's choice and what appears to be a moment of

weakness occurs well before he organizes his order. Personal struggle plays little, if any, part in this *vita*. Unlike Hugh of Lincoln's struggle with carnal temptations, Gilbert's struggle between body and spirit is described briefly and is overcome without any significant obstacles:

He was, indeed, at the age when, because the body, which perishes, oppresses the soul, the growing heat of sensual desire consumes mortal hearts to their increasing danger. But while many older and well-educated persons succumb in the struggle, this man sanctified his vessel unto the Lord so completely that the spirit exercised mastery and control within him and he neither yielded to the desires implanted in his flesh nor tasted the delights proffered by the world outside... and because he had overcome the serious conflict of youth he was later deservedly raised to the firm direction of the opposite sex.²¹⁸

In recounting the one dream Gilbert has about a woman, the hagiographer does not interpret the dream as a sign of inner struggle. Instead, the dream is transformed into a sign of an innate holiness which allows Gilbert to assume responsibility for a small group of young women. His hagiographer recalls how, early in his career, Gilbert lived with a family who had a beautiful daughter:

One night he dreamt that he put his hand into this girl's bosom and was unable to draw it out. The most chaste of men was terrified that, human frailty being what it is, his dream foretold a sin of fornication, and so he immediately described his temptation and dream to the priest.... But what he saw in his dream heralded not future sin but glorious merit, for this girl was later one of the seven original persons with whom the father founded the communities of his whole Order. Her bosom into which our pastor and assiduous friend put his hand was like the mysterious peace of the church, of which he was a foundation. And his hand could not be torn away because he directed all his endeavours and his strength towards

²¹⁸ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 14-15.

constructing for the church a secret refuge of true innocence and everlasting peace....²¹⁹

This dream is markedly different from contemporary exemplary descriptions of demons assaulting sleeping monks (and nuns) who are lax in their observance of religious rules or who secretly desire access to the opposite sex. It is also not a case of a saint's holiness proven by his resistance to the devil in the shape of a woman. Gilbert's dream is a reversal of the expected exemplum. He has access to a real woman, dreams about her, but the dream is interpreted not in terms of his body's refusal to live in accordance with his soul's desires but as evidence of the absolute unity of his body and soul.²²⁰

There are no additional discussions of Gilbert's personal struggles or his inner, spiritual growth. Once the hagiographer makes it clear that Gilbert had never had any physical desire for his female charges, Gilbert becomes the perfect candidate to lead these women away from the dangers of the world. If this were a *vita* of one of the women—or men—whom Gilbert directed, the devil would almost certainly appear at this point to launch attacks on a man clearly marking himself as spiritually driven. But this does not happen. Gilbert was a public figure who was thrust somewhat unwillingly into a public role by Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the most widely respected religious figures of the period. There is no room for doubt in this *vita*. To portray doubt would cast a shadow on

²¹⁹ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 16-19.

²²⁰ For more on early Christian and medieval interpretations of erotic dreams and the question of whether these dreams might be evidence of the individual's waking will, see Dyan Elliot's *Fallen Bodies*, esp. ch. 1 and 2.

Bernard as well as on an entire order that had finally managed to overcome rumors of impurity and impropriety.²²¹

During a period in which the apostolic lifestyle was growing in popularity, Gilbert's hagiographer makes it very clear that very few people could be trusted to separate themselves from society and live independent holy lives.²²² The initial seven women sought and found Gilbert and placed him in a position of responsibility for their spiritual health. Like all men and women who were inspired by preachers to seek a religious life, these women needed a leader and

²²¹ David Brakke explains that "in the coenobitic context, the gift of discernment was an essential part of the leader's ability to counsel individual monks and to maintain the overall purity of the community." (82) Although Brakke is focused on the context of fourth-century Christians, the general statement applies to Gilbert's life. His primary responsibility was to his order. His own purity is a given. See chapter four in Brakke's book for a more detailed discussion of the role of the abbot in protecting his monks from internal conflict and other forms of demonic interference. He shows how internal division could also be tempered by blaming the problems on the devil. "As demons helped to separate the brothers and the monastery from the outside, they also helped to manage conflict and tendencies toward division on the inside. Because the monks could attribute to demons some of the irritations and misunderstandings that plague communal living, they sometimes prevented such minor frustrations from leading to outright conflict." See *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 90.

²²² Dyan Elliot interprets Gilbert's dream as a response to this very problem. She explains Gilbert's dream within the context of twelfth-century approaches to relationships between religious men and women as alternatives to marriage and finds that women generally sought out these relationships. Outsiders often questioned their intentions and actions and the devil could easily be blamed for encouraging these relationships. In considering the women's perspective on these relationships, Elliot finds that "(w)hen a carnal love is sublimated and transformed into its spiritual counterpart, an erstwhile lover could emerge as spiritual director... . Gilbert of Sempringham struggled with his sexual desire for the beautiful daughter of his landlord... . The kind of love was changed, but the sexual imagery remained." This sort of relationship usually extended from women (like Christina of Markyate) to men (like Roger or Geoffrey). "In general, men were not nearly so emotionally or spiritually preoccupied with their female charges. In this context, it is significant that a number of the celebrated founders of various female communities often stumbled upon their destinies by accident, without any apparent desire to benefit women... . Gilbert of Sempringham initially looked for a community of men to patronize without success. He soon discovered that the women of the area were both more pious and in greater need... . This rather cavalier attitude contrasts sharply with the level of female dependence.... . Although the women in question may have set aside carnal marriage, their spiritual commitments nevertheless often retain or assume a marital aspect... . (T)here is sometimes a covert impulse for female disciples to regard their spiritual directors as marriage brokers or even surrogates for the celestial bridegroom, Christ." See "Alternative Intimacies: Men, Women and Spiritual Direction in the Twelfth Century," 174-176.

protector. Although Gilbert of Sempringham did not start out looking for a public career, the women needed him. Gilbert was called to a life, which, by its nature, could not stress the personal struggles of one man. His crises were public—his responsibility but not his personally—and they are not presented in terms of Gilbert the man. He is always Gilbert of the Gilbertines. Gilbert's *vita* forces us to reconsider the creation of the image of a very public would-be saint. This involves reimagining expected descriptions of opponents and recognizing that a simple dialectic of friend-foe, saint-devil does not work in analyzing all *vitae*.

Gilbert's life is presented as a realistic lesson in the development of the qualities of leadership. Changes are not presented as revolutionary. The great challenge is in demonstrating that change is rooted in tradition. Gilbert's struggle is in creating a way life for others that blends the old and new without being too obviously new. While most studies of Gilbert and his order have focused on the order itself—its similarity to other orders, the roles of its four components, and its importance in terms of understanding the process of papal canonization in the twelfth century—in the remainder of this section I will focus on how Gilbert is presented as a leader and somewhat reluctant creator of a new order and how and where the devil plays his necessary part in the formation of Gilbert as a saint.

Early in the *vita*, after describing a complete lack of revolutionary youthful conversion, the hagiographer stresses that Gilbert always “conformed to other people only in dress and appearance, for inside everything was different from

them.”²²³ He caused no trouble for his family, his father happily supported him, but he also did not seek to completely separate himself from his social world.²²⁴

This is one key distinction between Gilbert’s life and Robert of Arbrissel’s life. While both men had female followers and founded distinctive double orders, Gilbert never stood out in the way that Robert did as a preaching hermit. Robert sought both independence and privacy as a placeless hermit but also was very public in his preaching and actions. His *vita* is filled with drama and frequent interruptions by the devil. In contrast, Gilbert never sought a radical break with his past and did not seek attention. His hagiographer stresses the positive and conservative nature of his calling. “For he considered it wise to live under the rule of the bishop and to attend to one who always attended to him rather than running hither and thither with unbridled license like men who acknowledge no authority.”²²⁵

The *vita* stresses Gilbert’s willingness and desire to follow authorities as a sign of his humility. It also serves as a warning to others who sought more radical change. For example, while forming his first house for women and bringing in lay sisters and brothers, Gilbert recognized his limitations and brought in religious men who formed the fourth branch of the order. The authority of men over women was established from the outset.²²⁶

²²³ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 16-17.

²²⁴ This also contrasts with the lives of his female followers. “They lived in the world but he sought to set them apart from it, to exile them from their land, their kind, and their father’s house, so that they should be like a church, or rather be made a church themselves, and oblivious of their families and homes.” *Book of St. Gilbert*, 32-35.

²²⁵ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 20-21.

Much of the *vita* itself reads as argument against very real, “this worldly”, opponents. Gilbert struggled with the interference of other religious figures—some low level, some with real influence—who found flaws in the Gilbertine houses. He did not face direct personal challenges. Even a hint of temporary weakness in the leader—very normal for a saint—might have destroyed the order. And so the hagiographer begins one section by saying that “(a)ny thankless and envious person who tries to censure Gilbert’s teaching because he is unable to find fault with his life therefore has his mouth stopped, because faulty doctrine cannot arise out of an exemplary life. Clearly Gilbert’s life does not conflict with right conduct....”²²⁷

In recounting the time that Gilbert spent in places of great worldly power, the hagiographer stresses that he never gave into the visible temptations that were placed before him “... (H)e would very often attend the palaces of kings and bishops as well as princely households, both on this side of the Channel and beyond. In these places he experienced many hardships on behalf of the church entrusted to his care; for through the goading of the invisible enemy, who tried always to obstruct his activities, he suffered on several occasions from visible adversaries insults inflicted not only by words but also by whips.”²²⁸ This distinction is critical to my understanding of the role of the devil in the lives of

²²⁶ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 46-47. Unlike Fontevrault, Gilbertine houses were not the first choice of women from the wealthiest and most powerful families in the country. This distinction is important to understanding Fontevrault’s security and the long lasting centrality of women in the house that Robert of Arbrissel founded.

²²⁷ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 56-57.

²²⁸ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 58-9.

saints. Unlike an isolated hermit or anchoress, Gilbert's religious life was fully public and the devil's attacks correspond to the nature of his life.

One of these temptations was the social aspect of life at a court or even at a well-endowed religious house. The hagiographer stresses that despite this necessary part of Gilbert's life, he did not allow himself to participate in the spiritually empty part of life. He didn't waste his words with fellow men. "So it happened that when speech was necessary, he spoke from an overflowing heart consistent with his deeds... (and) his words were a pure expression of wisdom and knowledge...."²²⁹

But when Gilbert did speak, his words were so powerful that they alone could defeat the devil. And so, "with sharp reproof he cured a nun, inflamed with an unbridled lust by the devices of the wicked Enemy." He does not fight the devil himself— or for himself. He simply cures the nun so that she can better fight the devil herself.

The reader is again reminded several pages later that Gilbert had no sins of his own but shared in the sins of his followers. This is presented as Gilbert's primary struggle. Because he is less an individual than a man responsible for the purity and reputation of his followers, he had to maintain his personal holiness while surrounded by, and responsible for, women and men who were not (yet?) able to live according to his standards. The struggles of Gilbert's followers become his own. "When someone offended so gravely that he set himself apart and then returned to seek pardon, Gilbert at first opposed him, appearing almost

²²⁹ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 60-61.

relentlessly severe in his determination to test the penitent's condition... . (B)ut when he understood that the penitent's change of heart was total and sincere, he wept before them all... (t)hus by abasing himself and sharing in the suffering of the afflicted, he followed after Jesus with his cross."²³⁰

With Gilbert standing in for Christ on earth, the ultimate test proving his holiness targets his creation—that is, the integrity of his order. In this test, the lay brothers are presented as the devil's "underlings"—his "satellites" in the Latin. These men, who should have acted as Gilbert's satellites—following his holy path and extending his reputation as a holy man—instead became his most dangerous enemies because their word was so readily believed. "... (T)he men who shared his peace and partook of his bread, whom he trusted and had loved most dearly, enlarged their crookedness against him... (a)nd most offensive of all, servants presumed to attack their master, contemptible men to assail a person of distinction, and obscure men one of noble birth...." The injustice of this inversion of the normal order of things grates at the hagiographer.²³¹

²³⁰ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 66-67.

²³¹ Brian Noell discusses several Cistercian exempla and proverbs that used lay brothers to teach lessons about knowing one's place, the relative roles of work and prayer, and the importance of obedience and humility. This contrasts with a reality in which lay brothers often took advantage of their opportunities for economic and social advancement. The potential for rebellion among the lay brothers in both single-sex and mixed communities was very real during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He investigates the nature of these rebellions among Cistercian lay brothers and highlights the way that the lay brothers were presented both as extraordinarily pious lay people and as divisive sinners by contemporary observers. He then looks at the ways that these attitudes have been carried on by modern scholars. The current consensus is that the policies of the Cistercians (which were very much like those of the Gilbertines) lead to discontent among the lay brothers, or *conversi*, who were legally subordinate within the hierarchy of the order. He cites Jane Sayers in explaining that "(f)reedom-denying regimentation resulted in unrest, particularly because *conversi* were marked by signs of inferiority, deprived of education and an adequate diet, and stripped of a voice in monastic politics." (254) Noell questions both those who view the lay brothers as corrupt and ungrateful and those who focus on the oppression of the lay brothers by those at the top of the order's hierarchy. Instead he explains that "in many twelfth and

When the lay brothers appealed to Rome asking that the order be revised, Gilbert argued that the men were nothing but peasants who were ungrateful for all that Gilbert had done to help them better themselves and their families—both materially and spiritually.²³² It was after this crisis that Gilbert faced a personal crisis. As a very old man, Gilbert went blind. His hagiographer struggles in trying to figure out why a great man's life ended with such a terrible fate. Was his blindness a diabolic torment? A final test of his faith? Or, was it simply a natural part of old age?

The hagiographer recalls that “(u)p until this point he had suffered no harm from so many external dangers, but like Job he was to be tested by a trial which was all the more severe for being a more intimate and long-drawn-out struggle....” His losing battle with blindness and old age is turned into a victory—possibly over the devil, possibly over the expected response of an old man to the torments of growing old. While we might expect to hear of an aging saint who

thirteenth century cases, Cistercian *conversi* rebelled when the hierarchy sought to harness ambitions generated by the very prosperity that lay brothers were empowered to bring into being.” (255) This prosperity is hinted at in Gilbert's *vita* when the lay brothers are referred to as ungrateful for the opportunities that they had been given by Gilbert and within the order. But Noell recalls that the Gilbertine lay brothers, like their Cistercian peers, started out with real authority that was legally limited over the course of the twelfth century. Cistercian lay brothers, for example, managed properties, were craftsmen, and were even sent on diplomatic and political missions. This involvement in the order's business affairs gave them real wealth and authority. When they lost this authority, they rebelled and accused the canons, whose authority was growing, of immorality. The hint of impropriety between the canons and the nuns cast a shadow on the integrity of the order. See “Expectation and Unrest among Cistercian Lay Brothers in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries” in *Journal of Medieval History*, 32 (September 2006): 253-274.

²³² In the end, it was Bishop Hugh of Lincoln who helped resolve the crisis. The hagiographer introduces Hugh of Lincoln into Gilbert's *vita* as a man of moderation and a peace-maker. He listened to the lay brothers' complaints about the rules for what they wore and how much they were allowed to eat. They argued that Gilbert's standards were overly strict and the bishop agreed that the rules should be modified and moderated. In the next section I will discuss how Hugh of Lincoln's *vita* stresses moderation and acceptance of the potential holiness of a variety of lifestyles.

remains clear-eyed to the end, Gilbert's mind remains clear while his eyes cloud over. The hagiographer approaches Gilbert's very old age with uncertainty.

I do not know whether to attribute this trial to man's deficient nature or to an accident or to the persecution of the devil. Perhaps his body was naturally so made that he could not preserve his keenness of vision any longer, especially at such a great age. But we do not know for certain whether this happened to him by accident or through some act of violence: we do know that he weakened those eyes with his frequent floods of tears while he was preaching.²³³

In *De contemptu mundi*, Innocent III (who canonized Gilbert) wrote that "(i)f anyone reaches old age, his heart is impaired, his head is disturbed, his breath is labored... his posture is bent, his eyes grow dim, his joints totter...."²³⁴ Although Innocent III includes many examples of moral weakness that are part of old age ("old men are easily provoked, but forgive reluctantly; quick to believe, they slowly withdraw their faith; tenacious and greedy..."), he does not associate these directly with signs of physical decline. Medieval encyclopedias sought moral correspondences for these signs of old age. And so, for example, blindness could be understood as a sign of ignorance.²³⁵ At the same time, a belief in the wisdom of the very old was also common. With this traditionally mixed attitude toward old age, Gilbert's hagiographer was able to consider his blindness as a sign of the devil's tenacity as well as a blessing that allowed Gilbert special insight. "For he derived new strength from his weakness and, in return for having lost light from his body, he received the illumination he merited

²³³ *Book of St. Gilbert*, 85-87.

²³⁴ See Michael Goodich, "'The Virtues and Vices of Old People in the Late Middle Ages,'" *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* (1990): 119-127.

²³⁵ See "Virtues and Vices of Old People," 122-123.

from the greater and more important blessing of the spirit.” Balance was thereby restored—the external loss of light replaced by a stronger internal light. In this interpretation of Gilbert’s blindness, God acted without any diabolic interference or, at least, turned an evil into something positive.²³⁶

In the end, while the devil does appear, his role is very limited and he never attacks Gilbert directly. Gilbert’s life is shaped not as a holy man who overcame personal demons to form and lead a religious order but is instead focused on Gilbert as the founder of an order which faced very public controversies that had to be handled with great care. While the hagiographer regularly reminds the reader that the devil was at work behind the scenes, for the most part, the devil remains a silent, occasionally threatening, force and Gilbert’s inner life and personal temptations are not important in constructing his sanctity.

This is not the case in Hugh of Lincoln’s *vita*. Gilbert was not a Gilbertine, but Hugh was a member of the Carthusian order and some of his interactions with the devil reflect his early (and recurring) career as a hermit-monk. Hugh’s direct encounters with the devil, while sometimes very dramatic, were not recurring and are never associated with his life as a bishop. His hagiographer, Adam of Eynsham, makes it clear that it was the early private encounters with the devil that were critical in shaping Hugh’s sanctity and preparing him for his very public and potentially dangerous confrontations with the kings of England.

²³⁶ In describing the many attempts to destroy the order, the hagiographer explains that “... this sinister intention on the part of one who is constantly wishing to do harm somewhere was in fact the providence of God: for He knows how to employ evil in a good cause, and now in His mercy turned to advantage what the Devil had intended in the way of destruction.” *Book of St. Gilbert*, 70-71.

Also, as bishop, Hugh was responsible for the spiritual health of his diocese and had to be aware of the many ways that the devil could undermine a vast and varied community of ordinary people. For much of Hugh's career in England, the devil attacks him by proxy—by attacking his people, attempting to sabotage the stability of the diocese, and by interfering with the autonomy of his Church.²³⁷

Hugh's years as a bishop in England were a challenging time for the Church and its relationship with secular authorities. He arrived in England just ten years after Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket's death.²³⁸ Hugh's hagiographer contrasts his unique ability to remain dignified and retain control over his diocese with the situation in England just a few years after his death (when the *vita* was written). "(R)egulars and seculars, and even bishops and archbishops have been driven out and exiled, and not only a portion of their goods have fallen prey to the greed of the laity."²³⁹ Hugh's ultimate success in avoiding this humiliating fate (both for the man and for his Church) is the endpoint in the shaping of his life's story. As bishop, his struggles, like Gilbert's, were not personal and the hagiographer never describes direct diabolic attacks. These battles are particularly dangerous for Hugh because men in the highest reaches of government—both State and Church—are described as the devil's pawns. But, unlike Gilbert, Hugh's formative years are constructed as a series of

²³⁷ Hugh is also remembered for exorcising demons from women and men in his diocese. See especially Adam of Eynsham, *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II:117-126. These battles with the devil are necessary as a sign of Hugh's ability to perform miracles but, while they help make him a saint, they are not the personal battles that form him as a saint.

²³⁸ In a reverse of things, the close relationship between the king and archbishop Hubert Walter is stressed in Hugh's *vita*. The *vita* presents both the archbishop (and the king) as obstacles (in the most generous reading) in Hugh's life.

²³⁹ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II:133.

battles with the devil. In the following pages, I will focus on these contrasting stages in the construction of Hugh as a saint.

At the start of his life as a Carthusian monk, Hugh proved himself in a traditional virtual battle with the devil. Before he could advance, he had to overcome lust:

“As soon”, he said, “as I crossed the threshold of my cell I felt the stirrings of a new temptation in my heart. It was not always the same one. Rather did the tempter direct all the ancient weapons of his infernal armoury against a new recruit to this holy warfare, and in particular, as if from a very powerful crossbow, he shot bolts which, he hoped, I could not resist, since they were part of myself. I mean that he aroused my carnal lusts. Day and night the angel of Satan never left me, but continually incited me, assailed me and buffeted me.”²⁴⁰

This description of Hugh’s state of mind upon first entering the religious life as a young man explains his behavior through a mindset that accepts that the devil can only hope to succeed by preying on a pre-existing weakness. Unlike Gilbert, Hugh has to fight his natural lust and is only saved after Christ comes to him and heals him.²⁴¹

Since Hugh lived an ascetic life at Grande Chartreuse, Adam of Eynsham emphasizes the physical risks of an extreme monastic lifestyle and explains that it is only possible for the select few.²⁴² Still, it is only after being “dead to the

²⁴⁰ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, I:28-29.

²⁴¹ In contrast to Mary’s appearance in many other contemporary *vitae*, she does not appear to Hugh in this traditional bishop’s *vita*. Still, in one episode where he is described nursing an old monk, he is compared to Mary the compassionate mother. See *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, I:34.

²⁴² This relative moderation is stressed later in the *vita* in the description of Hugh’s final illness when the removal of his hairshirt and eating meat are considered permissible—even though he is clearly described as personally resisting the temptation to make himself more comfortable.

world” for ten years that Hugh is elevated to procurator and becomes known for his preaching. It is at this point in his career that Hugh is called to serve the Church in England as prior at a new Carthusian house at Witham. This is not a simple promotion. Rather, it is portrayed as a tremendous reward and challenge since Hugh must be prepared to battle the devil in an unfamiliar way and place. England is “that miserable and sinful land” and Hugh is clearly the churchman with the ability and power to exorcise the land of its less than saintly rulers.²⁴³ And so, after defeating his personal demons, Hugh arrives in England prepared to battle the devil in devil-friendly territory. By carving out his own domain in the midst of a corrupt political landscape, Hugh defeats the devil.

Before leaving France, and for the first time since he joined the Carthusians, Hugh is attacked by the devil. This is a significant moment in Hugh’s career—in between the monastic home of his youth and the journey that will take him to a new land where he will earn his fame. By passing this final test, Hugh proves that he is strong enough for the external battles that he will face in England. Hugh’s life is not shaped as one of internal torment. It is the story of a hero who openly defended his Church.

This final attack in France recalls God’s ultimate justice and stresses the weakness and subordination of the devil. “God... suddenly tempted him in order

²⁴³ Adam of Eynsham associates the kings of England (especially King John)—or at least their actions and advisors—with the devil’s influence. Karl J. Leyser discusses Hugh as a “Holy Man” according to Peter Brown’s criteria. He explains Hugh’s shocking ability to criticize and overtly thwart the English kings without fear through both his status as an “outsider” and because he was “deemed to have the nearness to God which conferred a breathtaking authority and freedom of speech that could override, set aside, and on occasion provide a way out of the harsh routines of Angevin government which imprisoned its prisoners and practitioners alike. This also conferred upon him an immunity against sanctions which, when they hit others, not excluding bishops, were vexatious, brutal... .” See “Angevin Kings and the Holy Man,” 50-51.

to send consolation at dawn..." and Hugh was "handed over to an angel of Satan to be chastised by the thorns of the flesh."²⁴⁴ After long nights of violent battles, he has a vision of St. Basil who saves him. Thus cured—partially through his own efforts but, most importantly, through the intercession of a saint—Hugh is cured and worthy of ruling over others. Crucial in this episode is the focus on God as the master of the devil. The devil does not notice Hugh's sanctity and sets out to tempt or torture him with lust. Instead, he is summoned by God to remind Hugh that even after the longest night, the sun always rises and that he is now capable of victory over the devil in any setting. For Hugh, the bar gets higher as he demonstrates his capacity to overcome challenges.

Once Hugh is in England, the devil does not need to cause him direct difficulty; Hugh had already proven that he had the inner strength to fight temptation. In writing about this second stage in Hugh's development as a saint, the hagiographer uses the language of diabolic temptation to demonstrate his external fortitude in protecting the Church, saving the king from his own evil inclinations, and continuing to deal with troublesome former monks. Hugh's major early weaknesses—and therefore the point where Adam of Eynsham sees the devil able to interfere most easily—are his lust and pride. After St. Basil

²⁴⁴ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, 1:50-52. This episode is referred to in several accounts of Hugh's *vita*. Jacqueline Murray describes Hugh as part of a "long line of monks who struggled with the flesh." She reads this final battle as a sign of Hugh's "mystical castration." Although other accounts of Hugh's life, including that of Gerald of Wales, present this episode far more dramatically than does Adam of Eynsham, Murray stresses the description of St. Basil using a knife to cut open Hugh's bowels and "extracting something resembling red hot cinders" and then flinging the "something" away. (82) This vision of castration frees Hugh from the diabolic torment of lust and is a gift from God which allows Hugh, and other religious men, to serve both men and women without fear. This would be especially important for a bishop who would necessarily encounter non-celibate women in everyday life. In Jacqueline Murray ed., *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (New York, 1999), 73-86.

helps rid Hugh of his lust, pride is his only remaining weakness. But, after being chastised for being excited and instantly accepting his promotion to prior, Hugh learns to remain always humble.²⁴⁵ It is at this point that he is ready to face external demons.

As prior at Witham, Hugh experiences the beginning of what would become an ongoing struggle with the kings of England. Henry II, who had promised Hugh support in building up Witham, appeared to renege on his offer just after the most “important” structures were completed. The hagiographer tactfully describes the tension surrounding the construction delays. He explains that Hugh reasoned that the king, busy with matters of state, had to be allowed to come around in his own time. Even after failed missions to the king about the unpaid masons and unfinished work and the embarrassment to the order, Hugh insisted that the monks be patient and wait for payment.

The distinction between the outward concerns of the king—politics, the major buildings at the monastery—and the needs of Hugh’s monks is clear. Hugh explains to the doubting brothers that “(i)t is possible that by postponing his assistance, he is testing us.” By describing this through the lens of tests and temptation, the *vita* introduces the significant challenges that Hugh will face in England. The hagiographer presents this early difficulty in obtaining funds for the monastery as a test which, while certainly involving the devil’s interference, originates with a God who is constantly testing his holiest people. And so Hugh

²⁴⁵ “Thus, the two principal and most deadly heads of the ancient serpent were crushed in him, and he easily extracted himself from the lesser evils, that is from more venial sins.” *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, vol. I:53.

and the monks must take great care not to react emotionally. “It is a sign of patience to bear trials and adversities with gentleness and forbearance.” Even something so mundane as construction delays becomes a trial that must be overcome with honor.

Hugh finally receives the promised funds with a subtle, but guilt-inducing, blessing for the king. “I have not lost confidence in you, lord king. Rather I pity the distractions and occupations which prevent you from occupying yourself with the salvation of your soul. You are busy, but with God’s assistance you will yet complete the good work....” And so with words that no one but a would-be saint could safely say to a king, Hugh saves the king from the devil’s worldly diversions, becomes partially responsible for the king’s soul, and gets his money.²⁴⁶

This is the beginning of Hugh’s relationship with the kings of England. His key struggle over the years that followed—as prior and as bishop—was to protect the traditional liberties of the Church from the incursions of the secular, royal government. These episodes, like the one described above, required finesse on Hugh’s part and would become his primary challenge as bishop. The devil’s role in these very high level battles is clearly stated. When Hugh finds the king interfering with the freedom of the Church he accuses the king of being lost in a “labyrinth of evil.”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, I:64-68. Hugh is described as the king’s very close, and sometimes very harsh, advisor on “all matters relating to Christ and the Church, and to the general peace and tranquility of the realm and his subjects, as well as his own spiritual welfare.” (70). This is another example of Hugh as a Holy Man whose outsider status and recognized power allow him to defeat demons and safely criticize even the most powerful men.

²⁴⁷ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, 1:72.

When Hugh sees the king not only usurping his powers but also appointing unfit men as bishops and abbots, he asked the king, “(w)hy... must you, a ruler of such renown for your wisdom... bring the risk of eternal damnation upon so many of the souls whom Christ redeemed by his death, and heap up for yourself for this cause so many torments in the world to come?”²⁴⁸ Hugh is able to save Henry II through a combination of guilt-inducing praise and the threat of damnation. Although he was dangerously close to the devil, Hugh was able to pull the king out of the devil's snare.

The devil did not limit himself to the kings and their advisors. While Hugh was prior at Witham, two men who he had once trained turned on him and “at the instigation of the ancient serpent... hissed with viperish spite frequently against Hugh and all the time against the holy order, which they were unworthy to join.”²⁴⁹ In rejecting Hugh, they are compared to the men who conspired against Moses in the desert, that is, to the Israelites who rejected God's prophet in favor of slavery. In this case, France is Egypt and England is the desert which only a few extraordinary men can happily endure. Hugh's two monks preferred “monastic retirement in the world”—by which they seem to mean a place where there are more likeminded communities of monks nearby. They do not want to be Carthusian pioneers in England's desert.

The desert, of course, is the locus classicus of diabolic temptation. Although the monks flee, Hugh, who has already defeated the devil both in

²⁴⁸ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, I: 72.

²⁴⁹ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, I: 81.

private and in public, remains constantly on guard and ready to face whatever demons come his way in England. His attackers argue that Hugh forced them “to lurk amongst beasts and thorns.” Despite their public lives as teachers and monks, the two men cannot not handle the challenges of the desert and respond by attacking Hugh and attempting to weaken the resolve of the other men at Witham. Their weakness only makes Hugh appear stronger.

This episode reveals the complexity of Hugh’s responsibilities as well as the careful shaping of his sanctity as a man who was exacting for himself but could accept different standards for others.²⁵⁰ As a Carthusian monk, Hugh represented the ideal of isolated asceticism. But he was also a public figure who was, in some way, responsible for the king’s salvation.²⁵¹ It is sensible for Hugh’s hagiographer to stress the capacity of all people—not just monks and priests—to be rewarded for living well, according to the best of their abilities.

And so, while the two monks are certainly condemned for their weakness and for potentially destabilizing the entire house, the hagiographer reminds the reader that Hugh did not view the Carthusian lifestyle as the only sure path to salvation. Some monks were better suited to a more active life. The hagiographer positions Hugh as extraordinary because he was able to shift

²⁵⁰ The episode with the monks who leave Witham and are not allowed to return is an example of the potential choices that monks had in finding a religious community that suited their characters. Giles Constable explains that by the twelfth century “awareness of growth was paralleled by a recognition and increasing acceptance of a variety of forms of religious life... .” These included the many new monastic orders as well as canons, hermits and those religious men and women whose lifestyles are harder to categorize. In *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 47.

²⁵¹ Although Hugh was not any king’s confessor and kept as much distance as possible from the kings, Adam constructs his life story in such a way that makes the royal government Hugh’s enemy and, with that, his greatest challenge. If he can turn the kings around, Hugh will save not only his own Church but possibly the kings’ souls and through the kings, the people of England.

comfortably between the active and contemplative. This is exactly what he would have to do as bishop of Lincoln, as a monk living in the world.

The monk's cell exists both to ensure the individual's solitude for prayer as well as a place of protection from outside forces—often constructed as diabolic. But Hugh is continually described as capable of traveling safely between royal palace and cell. Against the background of a divided clergy, he was elected bishop of Lincoln—a bishopric that is described as “foul and choked with the weeds of sin and the thorns of unrighteousness” after having been without a bishop for many years.²⁵² Hugh's job is to save the diocese from the devil's clutches.

But before Hugh can secure the bishopric from the influence of the devil he must once again prove himself worthy. He prepares himself for the requisite life of luxury that a bishop would have to endure. “He often told us sadly in private that no one could express the daily agony of heart which assailed him, when he pictured how soon he would lose the fruitful leisure of his cell, and exchange this for the time-wasting occupation of a man of affairs. He dreaded that...dark imaginations and worldly vanities would destroy his contemplation and purity of soul.”²⁵³

The elevation to bishop is presented as a challenge through which Hugh can prove his ability to live a holy life under any conditions—even the most material and worldly. While he had a taste of the public life as a prior, he was always able to retreat to a cell at Witham. As a bishop, he would be isolated

²⁵² *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, 1: .

²⁵³ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, 1:100.

from the support of his fellow monks and would have to compromise the ideals of a Carthusian monk.²⁵⁴ In this *vita*, the interiority of a monk's cell is not the ultimate goal. The monastery is too safe for Hugh because he is too comfortable there. And so, the life of a bishop, which could easily be associated with a life of material ease and political connectedness, is transformed into the ultimate challenge.²⁵⁵

The prestige of his new position means that Hugh is now a potential threat to people in very high places. The *vita* presents this within the context of diabolic interference. "At that particular time, the son of perdition, the enemy of all good, wickedly devised by means of his favourite vessels of iniquity to kindle the wrath of the king so greatly against our bishop that he sent peremptory orders to his justiciars in England immediately to seize the goods of the bishop and canons of Lincoln and confiscate all their possessions."²⁵⁶ It would not matter as much if the devil attacked a Carthusian monk by taking away his possessions— in a sense, he would only be doing the holy man's work by making his life even simpler. But a bishop has an important public image to maintain and the loss of the material signs of wealth could diminish his authority. A bishop without the

²⁵⁴ Still, he spent time at Witham several times a year when he was bishop.

²⁵⁵ The job of bishop could be approached as a simple reward with the built-in bonus of being able to transform the potentially corrupt lives of other public figures. It is at this point in the *vita* that a very loyal swan attaches himself to Hugh. Saints are known for taming wild animals, likely as part of their ability to defeat the normally uncontrollable urges of the body and temptations of the devil. Hugh tames a swan who remains vicious around everyone but Hugh (like a partially tamed demon), finds a female partner (for company alone, not for sex—like a spiritual marriage), and attacks anyone who approaches the bishop (like a knight). The swan is another layer of protection against potential threats in the outside world. See *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II:104-109.

²⁵⁶ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II:6.

respect of the people in his diocese—the majority of whom are laypeople—would be an embarrassment to the Church. By attacking Hugh, the devil is not just attacking the bishop; through the unwitting(?) aid of the king, the ultimate force of evil is assaulting the honor of the Church. From this point on, Hugh's major challenge will be in fighting for the independence of his corner of the Church from the incursion of the English kings.

Before even telling the story of the attack or explaining why the king would take the Church's property, the hagiographer assures the reader that, in the end, justice prevails. "The malice of the ancient serpent had stirred up strife and fierce persecution against the...gallant knight of God, but to his own undoing. He came out of that conflict beaten and greatly confused, and corrupted by his own rancour and spite. Christ's soldier, however, whom he had rashly attacked with unequal resources, gained great glory from his considerable victory." The enemy—conflated with the devil—is Richard I.²⁵⁷

As bishop, Hugh had to deal with a broader spectrum of society than a hermit, monk, or abbot would expect to confront on an ordinary day. He was responsible for laypeople and their everyday concerns—property rights, inheritance disputes, monetary fines—and had the challenge of involving himself personally in less than holy matters while keeping the Church from becoming too involved in the corruption of land and money matters. Hugh's responses to ordinary people's faults, weaknesses, and need for help, appear to depend on a

²⁵⁷ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II:6-7.

combination of the individual's background and the extent of the devil's involvement in their troubles.

The following episodes reveal the way that bishop Hugh's sanctity is shaped in the retelling of some very worldly battles. Among the first people Hugh aided upon becoming bishop were the Jews of Lincoln who were under attack by anti-Jewish rioters. Although Jews were increasingly identified with the devil in the twelfth century, bishops were most often among their protectors. In Hugh's case, he is not only remembered for saving Jewish lives but also for battling the devil in the process.²⁵⁸

The description of Hugh single-handedly defeating the mob is more detailed than any previous description of him fighting the devil or his human emissaries:

... (H)e bravely and intrepidly often advanced unarmed into the midst of an armed band, and stood calm, undaunted and bareheaded amongst the naked brandished swords and clenched fists... . To say that he stood is inexact, for he rushed hither and thither, brandishing the sword of the Spirit at will against his enraged and furious adversaries and assailants, delivering the might be saved in the day of the Lord. On that occasion his courage and fortitude were the more conspicuous and amazing, since even brave men were afraid and his companions and officials completely lost their nerve when exposed to such danger. To them it was insufficient to flee to the altars, and even to hide under them gave them no sense of security. Whilst they fled and took refuge in dark corners, Hugh remained alone and castigated with his tongue those who raised their swords to brain him. His magnificent courage and the protection of his guardian angel, which armed him with divine might, caused the enraged clerks and laymen at Lincoln,

²⁵⁸ Although the *vita* does not say that the victims of the "angry men" were Jews, the modern editors of Hugh's *vita* as well as other scholars associate the attacks with the anti-Jewish riots in Lincoln and other northern cities in 1190. The image of Hugh as a friend to the Jews is further supported with a description of the Jews of Lincoln at his funeral. "Even the Jews came out, weeping to render what homage they could, mourning and lamenting him aloud as the faithful servant of one God." *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 228.

the knights and squires at Holland, and the burgesses at Northampton to give way out of shame. Thus a raging and riotous mob was quelled by one calm and undaunted man.

This image of Hugh, temporarily abandoned by all of the prominent men who normally formed his entourage—but protected by his guardian angel²⁵⁹—defeating armed men with words alone, marks Hugh as a man apart. His companions are not condemned for cowering in “dark corners.” They are simply doing what ordinary men do to protect themselves in a life and death situation. But Hugh—alone and yet not alone at all—is fearless on their behalf. That is the role of a saint. He also acts as a sort of intercessor on behalf of the mob. With words alone he shames them into retreat and allows for the possibility that this will save them after death.²⁶⁰

Hugh’s readiness to fight for justice is highlighted in his never-ending battle against those who “arrogantly believed that they could defy and rebel against ecclesiastical law with impunity....” The range of his opponents should be clear in the following examples which demonstrate the bishop’s encounters with the devil in the most varied forms and the ways he used the weapon of excommunication to cement his authority as the Church’s representative.

²⁵⁹ As noted in my discussion of Christina of Markyate’s *vita*, the development of the belief in guardian angels is generally placed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In that case, Adam of Eynsham’s mention of “*angelorum custodia*” is quite early. See Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 171. Still, the idea of protecting angels does appear in the Bible. For example, Psalm 91:11 “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.”

²⁶⁰ Later in the *vita* King Richard I becomes Hugh’s major enemy. Richard’s association with the devil is not limited to Hugh’s *vita* and his actions ran contrary to Hugh’s in many ways. For example, while Hugh is recalled as single-handedly defending the Jews of Lincoln, Richard I’s reign is associated with anti-Jewish attacks although Richard I, like Henry II, legally recognized the liberties of the Jews in his kingdom.

Hugh encountered a childless woman who was so “beguiled by satan” that she faked a pregnancy by placing a cushion over her stomach and then passing off another woman’s baby as her own in order to assure that her brother-in-law would never gain access to her husband’s estate.²⁶¹ As rumors circulated that the child was not her own, her brother-in-law came to bishop Hugh for help. After investigating the case and discovering that the woman’s husband was too old and sick to father a child, the bishop announced to the entire community that this was a sin “of such immense seriousness as to cause the eternal death of its perpetrators.” After the excommunication, the crime took on a life of its own and the weak woman’s husband died. The death is constructed as the devil’s dirty work. In this case, God does not even enter the picture. The lesson is simply that once a person allows the devil in, he only succeeds in complicating life in the most miserable ways.

When the baby of uncertain parentage was four years old the king gave her in marriage to the chief forester. The chief forester is the first in a short series of foresters who are obstacles to virtue in the diocese. Hugh condemns the marriage but even the threat of excommunication doesn’t stop the wedding from taking place when Hugh was out of the country. The *vita* recognizes that when faced with a population of ordinary people, even a would-be saint will struggle against a tide of men and women who are not willing to think beyond their immediate, and very worldly, concerns. The participants in the wedding are eventually excommunicated and the hagiographer makes it clear that, as a result,

²⁶¹ In *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II:20-23.

all of those directly involved lived and died in misery. The result of Hugh's powerful excommunication is death. And while he could have issued monetary fines for various crimes, Adam of Eynsham stresses that excommunication was the only weapon that Hugh chose.

The episodes that focus on violent and corrupt laypeople (ranging from a forester to the king), highlight a significant difference between the responsibilities of a prior (or an abbot) and a bishop. What would be shocking in a monastery is sad but expected in the outside world. Following the same logic, the standards of good behavior have to be adjusted as the devil attacks Hugh's very diverse community and he searches for allies in maintaining justice and jurisdiction over his church.

The king is quickly established as an enemy who does not recognize the independence of the church and its revenues. Raising money became a constant struggle and at some point Hugh found himself using his own money, "ready to doom himself to permanent poverty rather than allow the least threat to the liberty of the Church."²⁶²

In a reversal of an expected hagiographic topos, Hugh's prospective poverty could only serve to weaken him. He is discouraged from temporarily moving to Witham to live as a hermit because, despite his good intentions, he would not be living an admirable life of holy poverty. By accepting the authority of the king to tax the "bride of the King of Heaven," Hugh would have humiliated himself and, through him, the entire church.

²⁶² In *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 35.

The two sides to this battle are quickly established. Hugh's primary claim to fame is in defeating a range of greedy laypeople who attempted to violate the privileges of the churches under Hugh's control. These laypeople included the king and "many others who were his secret enemies, both here and overseas."²⁶³ The "overseas" enemies are not enumerated but it is clear that Hugh spent years resisting the temptation to retire to Witham and live out his life in monastic solitude. Instead he was challenged continually by some of the most prominent men in Europe and could not allow himself to retreat. For Hugh, the life of a hermit would be a sign of the devil's victory. The devil, in this case, is a combination of powerful secular authorities and one aspect of Hugh's innermost desires.

This is clear in one episode in which Hugh uses reverse psychology in dealing with an elderly monk at Witham who desperately wanted to return to the Grande Chartreuse so that, when he died, he could "be buried with those of the saints, who had formerly trained him." Hugh encouraged him to remain strong and continue to inspire the new community in England:

Do you really intend to go away without me, your nursling, and leave me alone in a strange land deprived of the consolation of my dear foster-father? I fully realize how laudable your desire is to spend the last remaining years of your life among the holy hermits in Burgundy, so much indeed is this the case that my reason and inclination both force me to do the same.

With this, Hugh removed his episcopal ring and announced that "(t)oo long have we dwelt amongst the storms of the world, and foolishly preferred its empty

²⁶³ In *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, vol II: 41.

and harassing business to the sweet and holy life in which we were reared from our youth.” Of course, after this, the monk agrees to remain in England. But this dialogue also expresses Hugh’s lifelong challenge. He was raised to be a Carthusian monk and, while he frequently returned to Witham for a respite from the responsibilities of the episcopate, he forced himself to remain a bishop because he believed that this was where he was most needed.²⁶⁴ This is his struggle and his obedience allows him to be “fearless before kings” and “powerful before demons.”²⁶⁵

The hagiographer stresses the extent to which Hugh’s struggles were based in his responsibilities as bishop and how easy it would have been for him to give up and retire to a hermitage. In describing various crises, Hugh’s weaknesses are transformed into strengths. In this way, his trusting nature, which allowed him to fall “prey to the unceasing and venomous attacks of the ancient serpent,” is not condemned. And the men who took advantage of Hugh’s good nature become the devil’s allies in their work to undermine the authority of the Church.

Hugh’s insistence on maintaining the independence of the church—even when it meant refusing the king funds that other bishops were willing to give—

²⁶⁴ In *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 62-64.

²⁶⁵ Henrietta Leyser discusses the Carthusian focus on obedience as a way of understanding Hugh’s career. She explains that Hugh’s obedience “is invoked by Adam to explain not just Hugh’s acceptance of office but also his acceptance of precisely these aspects of his work which he found least congenial; many lawsuits for example, he regarded as ‘unworthy the attention of a bishop’, since they were concerned with the worldly and earthly matter rather than the ‘spiritual and eternal’; they were a cross of penance undertaken solely for motives of obedience.” See “Hugh the Carthusian,” in Henry Mayr-Harting (ed.), *Saint Hugh of Lincoln* (Oxford, 1987), 1-18 (14-15).

often placed him in very uncomfortable and isolating situations. It must be stressed that this is how Hugh's life is shaped by his hagiographer. Karl Leyser explains that "(i)t would be quite misleading to see the relations between Hugh and the Angevin kings only in the light of Adam of Eynsham's and Gerald of Wales's stories. There is abundant evidence that as Bishop of Lincoln Hugh served his kings as they expected him to serve them, on numerous occasions. He neither opted out, nor did he disrupt, reject, and negate all the ways and means of royal government."²⁶⁶

But the episodes highlighted in the *vita* serve to mark Hugh as an independent thinker, unafraid to protect his Church. In one case, after many attempts to remove money from Hugh's diocese for the royal treasury, the king approached Hugh through the archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter. This attack—clearly associated with the "malice of the ancient serpent"—was indirect and, considering its high level origins, required Hugh to respond very carefully.²⁶⁷ With government officials clearly in place as the devil's servants, Adam of Eynsham carefully shapes a battle between Church and State in which the royal officials "and their master the devil" are constantly defeated but never fully retreat. "Their desperation now made them afraid obviously and directly to make a person of such pre-eminent holiness the centre of their plots. They therefore strove to wound him by making those most closely connected with him the object

²⁶⁶ In "Angevin Kings and the Holy Man," 71.

²⁶⁷ It is in cases like this that Hugh's strength as a Holy Man is evident. The would-be saint was a nobleman and a Frenchman—the quintessential outsider who could take more risks and follow his will more readily than a native Englishman.

of their new and subtle schemes.”²⁶⁸ Hugh’s sanctity is so powerful that even the devil backs away from direct confrontation.

In this *vita*, money is at the root of all evil—or, more precisely, the selfish desire for wealth is the devil’s work. This is clear throughout the *vita*, beginning with Henry II’s initial unwillingness to complete funding the Carthusian house at Witham and continuing with the woman who faked a pregnancy in order to inherit her husband’s estate, the royal foresters who took advantage of the poor, and, on repeated occasions, the kings of England.

In this case the king’s officials worked through the Archbishop of Canterbury to try and get money from the canons of Lincoln who, they insisted, had gold and silver to spare. Hugh is horrified by this and sends word back that “the archbishops, certainly to the danger of their souls and forgetful of their profession, have wholeheartedly devoted themselves to the promotion of his (the king’s) business.”²⁶⁹ The hagiographer stresses that anyone who attempted to act against the wishes of the bishop faced excommunication. The result of Hugh’s anger was excommunication with a chance for repentance and reinclusion in the community and was used as a powerful incentive to keep the king and his servants from interfering with the bishop’s wishes. “It was abundantly clear that divine retribution fell on anyone he had excommunicated, and in the words of the prophet the curse soon destroyed them.”²⁷⁰ But Richard

²⁶⁸ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 110.

²⁶⁹ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 112.

²⁷⁰ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 114.

I, unlike the many men who were terrified to act against the bishop on the king's behalf, remained untouched by Hugh's powerful curse. King Richard I is the constant, unredeemable, obstacle in Hugh's path.²⁷¹

Hugh was on a pilgrimage through France, visiting Fontevrault, when he received word that Richard I had been fatally wounded. The hagiographer more than suggests that this is divine retribution. After all this was the same day that the "the bishop had been so harassed by the importunity of his evil counsellors."²⁷²

Richard I died just a year before Hugh died in 1200. The bishop spent much of the last year of his life on a pilgrimage throughout France—primarily the Angevin lands in Normandy and Aquitaine as well as his own homeland of Burgundy.²⁷³ After (temporarily) subduing King John's own desires to interfere with the Church, Hugh is celebrated for his success in defeating his worldly enemies. It is at this point that his mid-life temptation returns. He, like the old monk at Witham he had counseled years before, longs to spend the rest of his

²⁷¹ From the king's perspective, Hugh was clearly interfering with his rights. In one episode Hugh pardons a thief who had been condemned to death. By applying the right of sanctuary, Hugh knew that his "enemies" would say that he had "shown contempt for the royal office" and was guilty of "high treason." But Hugh was intent on stressing the independence of the Church and ignored his advisor's warnings. *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 127-130.

²⁷² *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 134.

²⁷³ During this journey Hugh visited many monasteries and shrines and shocked observers by the way he collected relics. These relics were then placed into his bishop's ring and added to his power. He had one of St. Benedict's teeth and, in the most striking example, "(w)hen he was at the celebrated monastery of Fecamp, he extracted by biting two small fragments of the bone of the arm of the most blessed lover of Christ, Mary Magdalen." When some observers expressed their outrage he simply responded "(i)f, a little while ago I handled the most sacred body of the Lord of all saints with my fingers... touched it with my lips and teeth, why should I not venture to treat in the same way the bones of the saints for my protection... ." *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 168-170.

life at Chartreuse, but the pope insists that he must struggle through this and remain bishop, protecting the liberties of the Church.²⁷⁴ He continued to do so, even on his deathbed when he “excommunicated everyone who tried fraudulently to conceal, or forcibly carry off anything belonging to him, or to prevent his executors having complete freedom to carry out his instructions.”²⁷⁵

In her discussion of twelfth-century *vitae* that stress “hagiography less and the miracles connected with personal sanctity of life more,” Benedicta Ward explains that “(i)n this style of saintly biography, the saint himself and his reflections and reactions are central.” Just as fantastic miracles are not central to the formation of Hugh as a saint, direct confrontations with the devil—although they do occur early in his career—act to prepare him for the challenges of his public life. “St Hugh... is presented by his biographer as the wise, God inspired man who discerns reality and banishes illusion, whose virtues of charity and understanding are central to his life.”²⁷⁶ His *vita* emphasizes virtue over miracles. It also stresses Hugh’s ability to manage his house and diocese with a steady hand, aware that challenges would arise from men who are too easily tempted. These battles would not be won with dramatic clashes, but with steadiness and integrity.

²⁷⁴ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II:149-150. Henrietta Leyser stresses the constant tension between “Hugh the Hermit at heart and Hugh the bishop by profession.” Leyser interprets Hugh’s actions as bishop—acts of mercy and charity—through Hugh the hermit. See “Hugh the Carthusian,” in *Saint Hugh of Lincoln*, ed. Henry Mayr-Harting (Oxford, 1987), 13.

²⁷⁵ *The Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, II: 187.

²⁷⁶ In *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, 173-174.

In contrasting the construction of the devil in the formation of Gilbert of Sempringham and Hugh of Lincoln, two models of how an individual may achieve sainthood emerge. In one model an individual's personal spiritual development is the focus of the *vita* and confrontations with the devil determine the inner strength of the would-be saint. In the other model, the strength of the community is most important and the would-be saint is celebrated for his powerful public role and responsibility to others. In this model, the constant strength of the would-be saint is critical and the devil is imagined attacking the saint in ways that serve to strengthen his public image. Gilbert's and Hugh's *vitae* fit into this second model—their internal spiritual development is not important for their hagiographers and the devil's attacks mirror this focus. This is clear in contrasting the stages of their development. Hugh faces dramatic attacks from the devil—but only at the beginning of his career when he is determined to live quietly as a Carthusian monk. Once his public career begins, his internal development must be settled in order for him to succeed as a leader. The devil's role highlights this lesson. On the other hand, the stability of Gilbert's personal spiritual development can never be questioned through the devil's doubt or despair. This would just weaken the regularly unsettled reputation of his community. Gilbert's *vita* focuses exclusively on his role as founder of the Gilbertenes—his community is his struggle and its sometimes precarious reputation leaves no room to suggest any personal weakness on Gilbert's part.

In contrast, jaw-dropping battles would become the preserve of the beguines who, unlike Gilbert and Hugh, struggled to be accepted by mainstream

religious leaders. The changing place of women in the religious world of the twelfth century is clear when we see the controversies involving Gilbert of Sempringham's creation of his order as well as in Hugh of Lincoln's defensive statement that "almighty God certainly deserves to be loved by women, for he did not disdain to be born of woman, and thus conferred a special honour to the whole sex. To no man was it granted to be called the father of God."²⁷⁷ André Vauchez includes this quotation in explaining that "(i)n the second half of the twelfth century... (u)nder the influence of Marian spirituality, which was then at the height of its popularity, the role of women in the history of salvation came to be evaluated in a less negative fashion. 'If our Lord wanted to be born of a woman, it was not only for the sake of men but also for the sake of women,'" wrote Pope Alexander III in 1173... ." After quoting Hugh of Lincoln, Vauchez suggests that:

(w)e cannot rule out the possibility that the Church's new openness was largely opportunistic, given that this was a time when women were responding with particular warmth to heretical movements, which offered in them a way of overcoming the new handicaps that burdened their existence. Thus we see how new forms of religious life adapted to the needs of the laity were developed between 1180 and 1230. In the Low Countries (in the broad sense of the term) numerous groups of Beguines joined work and prayer within the framework of communal, non-cloistered life.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ *Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln*, I: 45.

²⁷⁸ In *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, ed. Daniel Bornstein, trans. Margery Schneider (Notre Dame, IN, 1993), 173-174. Originally published as *Les laïcs du Moyen Age: Pratiques et expériences religieuses*. (Paris, 1987).

Women like Marie of Oignies, Yvette of Huy, and Christina Mirabilis faced tremendous resistance in their attempts at a religious life and battled the devil in every imaginable form, even on their deathbeds.

Chapter Five: Marie of Oignies, Yvette of Huy and Christina Mirabilis

The *vitae* of late-twelfth- and early-thirteenth- century beguines illustrate the difficulties facing semi-religious women during a period when the gap between clergy and laity was widening and Church authorities were concerned with identifying and effectively persecuting heresy.²⁷⁹ The variety of contemporary lives used as examples of Christian piety can be seen as a sign of the range of clerical and monastic options that were available during the twelfth century. Despite this, by the early thirteenth century, clerics voiced uncertainty about the character of the clusters of women emerging in the Low Countries. Since they were visible and vocal in a densely populated region filled with the spiritually vulnerable,²⁸⁰ it was critical for authorities to determine the orthodoxy of their non-traditional lifestyles.

²⁷⁹ This can be seen in the decision not to allow the formation of any additional religious orders after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and the related pressure on relatively new forms of religious expression to be found acceptable either independently or as part of an already existing group. For an overview of these trends, see Colin Morris *Papal Monarchy*, esp. 417-470. For the beguines as “semi religious” see Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta*. Also see Fiona Bowie's Introduction to *Beguine Spirituality: Mystical Writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg, Beatrice of Nazareth and Hadewijch of Brabant* ed. Fiona Bowie, trans. Oliver Davies (New York, 1989), 14, in which recluses and early beguines are linked as “individual and small groups of women with ecstatic temperament and common religious interests but with no official status.”

²⁸⁰ Within a monastery individuals with questionable, or extreme, behavior(s) can, if necessary, be isolated from the community and certainly be isolated from outsiders. In this way, their influence is limited and they would certainly have no effect on general society. On the other hand, the earliest beguines were not always enclosed and lived in populous areas where any questionable behavior could be seen as negatively influencing their neighbors. The matter of influence—positive and negative—was clearly a concern of both supporters and detractors. The actual extent of beguine influence is uncertain partly because there was no single model to follow. Penelope Galloway finds that “unfortunately, due to the absence of evidence it is possible only to speculate on the extent to which beguines who were known to members of the surrounding community acted as visual examples of pious devotion to their fellow citizens.” See “Discreet and Devout Maidens’: Beguine Communities in Northern France, 1200-1500,” in *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Toronto, 1997), 105. The danger of harmful influence was averted by the eventual organization of “semi-cloistered courts closed off from the common bustle of the city” where, according to Jo Ann McNamara, economic and social influence

The importance of unmistakable support from recognized and respected clerics cannot be underestimated. Jacques de Vitry's recording of Marie of Oignies' life was crucial in establishing the credibility of the beguines. The reception of the trend was strengthened by Thomas de Cantimpré's *Life of Christina Mirabilis* as well as Hugh of Floreffe's *Life of Yvette of Huy*. Although each of the *vitae* is distinct, it is in each woman's encounter with the devil that we most clearly see elements of the particular struggle of the early beguines as they pushed the boundaries that separated the life of the spirit from life in the world.

Of the eleven *vitae* of women identified as beguines active between 1190 and 1250, those of Marie of Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, and Yvette of Huy are among the earliest.²⁸¹ Each died before 1230 and a male cleric, who had known her or had access to individuals who had, wrote her *vita* written shortly after her death. Walter Simons explains that the period between 1190 and 1230 was the earliest stage in which the women's "quest often involved significant breaks with social and family relationships, more so than would be the case in later stages."²⁸² Once beguinages were established after 1230 and the lives of the

was greatly limited. She argues that the establishment of beguinages occurred just as northern cities grew in economic and political stature which, in turn, isolated the women from the vitality of urban life. It is important to recognize that the earliest beguines stand out because of their relative freedom to move between city and countryside. But the moments of truest independence—and episodes of greatest vulnerability and proven strength—occur outside of the city, sometimes in more isolated, if not enclosed, circumstances than the women would ever find in the city. See Jo Ann McNamara, "City Air Makes Men Free and Women Bound," in *Text and Territory: Geography and Literature in the European Middle Ages*, eds. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia, PA, 1998), 145-156.

²⁸¹ Of the eleven women, Walter Simons lists only one other, Odilia of Liège, who was active in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century and died by 1230. See Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries 1200-1565* (Philadelphia, PA, 2001).

women were increasingly regularized, uncertainty largely disappears. Women in beguinages were more easily classified and less likely to face doubts as to their orthodoxy. It is the marginality of the lives of the early beguines that makes them particularly interesting and turns the expected commonplace of diabolic temptation and attack into something striking and significant.

The clerics who supported the careers of some of the earliest beguine women and wrote their *vitae* tended to portray them as part of a continuum of holy people living according to the *vita apostolica*. This connection would help assure their acceptance but also shows that their lives are not evidence for a radical break with older traditions. In her essay "The Origins of the Beguines," Carol Neel links the extra-regular status of the beguines to the role of lay sisters in twelfth-century reforming houses such as that at Prémontré.²⁸³ Like the beguines, these women lived chastely and nursed the sick. According to Neel, the novelty of Marie of Oignies and her contemporaries lies in their numbers, not in the originality of their roles. But, although their roles as religious were similar, their relationships with the everyday world were very different. Lay men and

²⁸² See *Cities of Ladies*, 36. In her introduction to *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, Jo Ann McNamara explains that in his study of the emergence of the beguines, Ernest McDonnell "widely distinguished the recluses and households of pious women who could be found all over Europe from the organized communities, enclosed in their Courts under Episcopal supervision that developed in the thirteenth century." She then explains that "Yvette and her contemporaries lie midway in this process." 16.

²⁸³ See Carol Neel, "The Origins of the Beguines," in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages* ed. Judith Bennet et al (Chicago, 1989), 240-260. There has been extensive scholarship on the origins and emergence of the beguines. The classic English language study is Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1954). The standard recent study is Walter Simons' *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries 1200-1565* (Philadelphia, PA, 2001). See also Brenda Bolton's "Thirteenth-Century Religious Women: Further Reflections on the Low Countries 'Special Case'" in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and Their Impact*, eds. Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout, 1999), 129-154.

women attached to Cistercian or Premonstratensian houses may have lived on the margins of the monastic world, but they remained isolated from their families and the urban world. Beguine women were able to shift between these worlds. Their semi-independence gave them a degree of freedom to leave their home bases in order to serve in other cities and find spiritual sustenance with recluses in neighboring anchorholds.

As the influence of reformers extended beyond institutions to individuals over the course of the twelfth century, voices of caution grew louder. It was only through careful spiritual preparation and monitoring that holy people (especially those whose lives were public and thereby influential) could believe that they were not being tricked by the devil into straying from the proper path. The establishment of a rule could help guarantee that every aspect of a religious life was, quite literally, regulated. The greatest danger lay among those who were either unable or unwilling to find a way of expressing themselves within the existing structures of religious society. And by the late twelfth century it was women who “increasingly tended to move outside the boundaries of religious life.”²⁸⁴

Despite varying degrees of accommodation to reformers and their followers who did not fit into the established institutions—as seen in the community established by Gilbert of Sempringham as well as in the eremitic lifestyles of Christina of Markyate and Godric of Finchale— by the end of the century there was a growing fear of heresy and a corresponding insistence on limiting new expressions of piety. At the same time there was a continuing

²⁸⁴ See Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 74.

stress on personal reform. An unintended outcome was the very real danger that an individual interpretation of reform could cross the line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The women who would become known as beguines emerged within this general religious environment. Like the tertiaries in Italy, they were primarily an urban phenomenon and can be better understood within the context of the socio-economic developments of the Low Countries during the twelfth century.²⁸⁵

As the marshes were drained and turned to arable land with canals allowing access to ports and markets, cities rapidly expanded over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. People within the densely populated urban areas faced the classic problems of city dwellers who arrive hoping for economic opportunity but continue to struggle in an unfamiliar environment. When jobs were unavailable, famine struck (as it did in Flanders in 1196-97), or disease spread, there was none of the support inherent in a family-oriented rural society. But, by the twelfth century, Flemish cities had begun a tradition of social services which, unlike many other areas in Europe, lay outside the responsibility of the Church.²⁸⁶ In those suburban areas that remained outside the jurisdiction of the

²⁸⁵ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Marie-Élisabeth Hennau stress that, while it is important to recognize the role of the city for thirteenth-century beguines, "the socio-economic context of these women should not be thought in any easy or mechanical way to offer explanations for their religious thought and practices." But, they add, it is "worth considering the prevailing conditions of the society in which the Liègeoises lived and the question of how far these may have contributed to the unusually sustained visibility of the religious lives of women within it." They describe a geographic location that favored commerce and a diocese in which the bishops were rulers of the territory but rarely successfully controlled both civic and ecclesiastical institutions. Both the citizens of the towns as well as clergy, especially the mendicants, played an active role in Liège. Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Liège, is one notable exception to the common practice of bishops focusing their attention on politics. See "Liège, the Medieval 'Woman Question,'" and the Question of Medieval Women," in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality*, 8-11.

²⁸⁶ See David Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London, 1992), 138. It must be noted that, while Flanders shares much in common with its neighbor in terms of urban context and religious

city, monastic life was largely Benedictine and controlled by local wealthy families. Within the cities there is evidence of the increasing influence of the mendicants and other groups who stressed the centrality of apostolic poverty to Christian life. Associated with these trends is a mentality of persecution in which one's enemies and the devil become closely associated.²⁸⁷

Within an urban environment in which service to community was in the hands of the laity and the religious atmosphere focused on reform, the lives of the beguines were marked by a combination of public service and private contemplation. Although women like Marie of Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, and Yvette of Huy found a kinship with contemporary recluses and, at times, chose temporary eremitic life, they did not seek permanent places within established orders. Instead, they found inspiration and opportunity in semi-independent lives of poverty and chastity influenced by the economic and apostolic revival of the twelfth century.

A significant part of the reform movement, beginning with the eleventh-century Gregorian reform and continuing through the twelfth century with the formation of new monastic orders, was inspired by the belief in the need to purify the Church from the corruption of the material world. The call for crusaders to

influences, as a diocese Liège was directly associated with the Church and the power of a bishop. Still, Adriaan Verhulst explains that although cities in Flanders had a significant degree of citizen autonomy by the early twelfth century, cities such as Huy and Liège had caught up by the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and bishops had legally given up certain rights to citizen groups with economic and political power. These changes correspond to the lifetimes of the earliest beguines and can be helpful in understanding both the wealthy merchant context of the society they rejected but still found a way to serve. See *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe* (Cambridge, 1999).

²⁸⁷ See R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance In Western Europe, 950-1215* (Cambridge, MA, 1987). For the relationship between economic and social and religious change see Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*.

conquer Jerusalem in the name of Christianity and thereby purify the Holy Land mirrors the intensity of this desire. The call to crusade extended beyond ending Muslim rule over Jerusalem. Although that was the official goal in 1096, by the end of the twelfth century individuals and groups seen as Christian heretics or threats to Christendom were targets of crusades within Europe.²⁸⁸ Those who preached for crusade recognized the appeal of actively fighting evil as well as the risks for those who found spiritual strength outside the margins of accepted religious society. By strengthening the resolve of those who left the security of home to conquer the enemies of Christendom and potentially secure their own salvation, the preachers of crusade helped make visible the internal battle of every Christian life. But, by preaching against Muslims and especially against Christian heretics, they also demonstrated that the result of life beyond the borders of orthodoxy is damnation. This is the dual message of the crusades and it is important to understanding religious expression in the twelfth century. The shared symbolism of crusading armies and saints fighting off hosts of demons is telling. The power of the raised cross in defeating the enemies of Christ was the ultimate weapon of crusaders. A true saint could often vanquish the devil by simply making the sign of the cross. Although this is a simple action,

²⁸⁸ In the period between 1150 and 1230, Europeans had crusaders on many fronts. Pope Innocent III called the Second Crusade to Jerusalem in 1146, the Third Crusade was called following the fall of Jerusalem in 1187, the Fourth Crusade was launched in 1198, the Baltic Crusade in 1202, the Albigensian Crusade in 1209, the Fifth Crusade in 1216. Selected additional works on the Crusades are: H. E. J. Cowdrey, *The Crusades and Latin Monasticism, 11th – 12th Centuries* (Hampshire, 1999); M. Gervers, ed., *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians* (New York, 1992); Hans Eberhard Mayer, *The Crusades*. Second Edition, trans. John Gillingham (Oxford, 1988); and Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History* (New Haven and London, 1987).

it is the action of a proven holy person who no longer has to struggle and has overcome both external and internal resistance.

But before the cross could be used as a weapon, the knight had to prove his commitment by choosing to leave home. The crusader was saved by actively responding to the call of preachers to follow the cross through unknown dangers on a journey to defeat the devil and purify the world. This battlefield is not unlike the solitary, demon-filled, landscape on which the Christian saint was expected to confront and successfully defeat the devil.

Although the beguines were an urban phenomenon, they were inspired by the image of Christ and the crusaders proving themselves in the “wilderness.” The ideal of an isolated, rural contemplative life plays a surprisingly important role the lives of the early beguines. In the generation before groups of women were enclosed within urban beguinages, models and inspirations for these semi-lay religious women were often found in the seeming freedom of rural recluses.

As the model of an apostolic life of giving was increasingly stressed, there were individuals who attempted to blend the religious ideal of uninterrupted contemplation with the model of serving the world by working to help those in need. This is what is seen among the beguines in the Low Countries. By the twelfth century, the humanity and suffering of Christ was at the fore of Christian theology and spirituality.²⁸⁹ The lives of contemporary holy people focus on the parallel abilities to overcome suffering and heal the sick.²⁹⁰ The *vitae* of the

²⁸⁹ See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*.

earliest beguines reflect these trends. Marie of Oignies, Christina Mirabilis and Yvette of Huy each sought her own personal wilderness, overcame diabolic temptation and attacks, and maintained a very visible and influential presence in the world. Each woman's career began with her occupying a distinct position within her family—Marie as daughter and wife, Christina as sister and orphan, and Yvette as daughter, widow, and mother. These roles are critical to understanding the development of the beguines and the particular challenges each faced. As each woman grew into or out of a particular female role, she was able to adapt her lifestyle.

The unusual and flexible religious lives of a growing number of lay women in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries was noticed by contemporary male religious figures such as Jacques de Vitry and Caesarius of Heisterbach, who described the achievement of these women in *The Dialogue of Miracles*: "They live the eremetical life among the crowds, spiritual among the worldly and virginal among those who seek pleasure. As their battle is greater, so is their grace and a greater crown will await them."²⁹¹

Although women identified with the semi-religious beguine lifestyle are found outside the Low Countries, the diocese of Liège is most closely associated with the movement in the thirteenth century. Jacques de Vitry, champion of the earliest beguines, confessor to Marie of Oignies, and author of her *vita*, was

²⁹⁰ A close relationship between the miraculous details of saint's lives, the popularity of particular saints, and society is seen in Michael Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century: Private Grief and Public Salvation* (Chicago, 1995) and in Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984).

²⁹¹ In Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 135.

familiar with both Christina Mirabilis and Yvette of Huy. As a preacher and bishop deeply concerned with heresy and a central figure in the crusade against the Albigensians, he worked to demonstrate Marie of Oignies' orthodoxy and successfully appealed to the papacy for approval of the semi-religious lifestyle. By carefully shaping the image of the early beguines Jacques de Vitry was, arguably, the individual most responsible for the acceptance and spread of beguine communities in the Low Countries and surrounding regions.

The combined strength to overcome personal obstacles and fight diabolic attacks, mostly targeted against others, is one characteristic of the early beguines. Their multiplicity of roles and ability to shift from wife to recluse to nurse can be seen as reflecting their uncertain positions in the Low Countries as well as in northern France in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. As northern Europe developed and the population expanded, the line between civilization and wilderness blurred. Since the wilderness—both literal and metaphoric—has traditionally been interpreted as the locus of temptation and resolution of spiritual struggle, these potential saints had to find their own wilderness in which to complete their spiritual growth while, at the same time, remaining in the world.

The beguines were neither dependent daughters and wives within a father's or husband's household nor were they consecrated brides of Christ within a cloister. Unlike recluses or anchoresses, they were not set apart from their communities physically but still had no formal public life despite recognized relationships with known religious figures who publicized their lives and miracles.

This attempt to balance a spiritual life that was both active and contemplative was new for women and met with scrutiny. As models of Christian sanctity, their paths to spiritual perfection were closely observed and their public struggles noted.²⁹²

One of the most striking elements that the written *vitae* of Marie of Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, and Yvette of Huy share is a focus on the ability of the women to perceive demonic interference against those trying to live good lives. Although each woman faced her own temptations, these are displayed in ways that demonstrate her spiritual strengths but that cannot be imitated. For example, a saint's demonstrated ability to handle suffering is seen as a sign of a deep understanding of Christ's humanity. Self-imposed fasts that last weeks or months and, by their very nature, ignore the needs of the body, are typical of the sort of suffering these women are described as enduring.

This extreme behavior was interpreted in several ways; these include seeing the ability to resist the temptation to satisfy physical desire as a sign of sanctity but also as a possible sign of pride or a demonically inspired delusion of sanctity. Once the women proved themselves and overcame their own temptations they were lauded for their ability to recognize and defeat the devil.

²⁹² Thomas J. Heffernan stresses the not-so-radical nature of this choice as seen in contemporary hagiography (or, as he terms it, "sacred biography"). "I would like to suggest that the social and civil upheaval depicted in the tales of the female saints, the rejection of family and state, the coarsely depicted sexual abuse and bodily mutilation suffered by these godly women pointed the way to an approved version of a type of asceticism the church felt was available to women, whether clerical, married, or single, in order to establish a new order of Christian sisterhood. Moreover, in every narrative of female sanctity of which I am aware, the issue of personal allegiance, respect, or love of the family are always presented in a binary equation in which God is the primary element. Whatever is given up or rejected is done to allow the sacred heroine to move into a deeper relationship with the Christian God. Thus, the rebellious behavior, even the rejection of the deepest ties, is subsumed into a larger pattern of obedience to the divine will." In *Sacred Biography*, 298. The positioning of the family as a possible tool of the devil fit into this model of saintly development.

Their sanctity was demonstrated through details of their extreme, legitimate asceticism and by repeated stories of observed attempts by the devil and hosts of demons to attack others before being defeated by the holy women.

The hagiographers' stress on the women's ability to fight demons on earth and counter the devil's influence in terms of the duration of punishment in purgatory is supported by John Coakley's interpretation of *vitae* produced by men about women. In summarizing his findings, Catherine Mooney explains that "male hagiographers were more likely to conceal or diminish a saint's this-worldly activities if the saint in question was a woman." Instead, the hagiographers focus on the female "proximity to the supernatural realm, a holy intimacy the men admired but felt incapable of imitating."²⁹³ The beguine's *vitae* emphasize the ability of holy women to perceive the devil's actions, even beyond this world into the world-to-come. It is this very "holy intimacy" that keeps the women from becoming possessed by the devil. Their hagiographers stress that it is because of their connection to God that the women are able to recognize the devil in their midst.

Like other female saints, Marie of Oignies faced familial opposition in her quest for a holy life but eventually convinced her husband to support her desire for a celibate marriage. As an *exemplum*, her struggle as a saint and ultimate success is meant to illustrate God's strength in preserving true faith in the face of temptation and the powers of the faithful as evidence of their sanctity.

²⁹³ See *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney, 11. In her introduction Mooney refers to John Coakley, "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography" in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, 222-246.

Born to a wealthy family who expected her to marry and enjoy her material blessings, Marie is attracted to the spiritual life from early childhood but is never described as dramatically rejecting her parents' plans for her life. Jacques de Vitry describes her as praying instead of playing, disliking the clothes and jewels young women were expected to crave and wear happily, and, literally following in the footsteps of Cistercians who passed her home. The early image of Marie is that of an obedient daughter who transitions peacefully into marriage at fourteen.

She did not rage against her parents or betrothed, fight to retain her virginity, or beg to join a convent. It was only after marriage that signs of intense spirituality emerged, and it is then that the *vita* presents her as an example of the suffering a Christian saint can expect to endure. Following a childhood in which she was misunderstood but not mistreated by her family, Marie's behavior changed radically after her marriage. It began as an internal struggle with physical desire. The immediate motivation for her dramatic spiritual turn is unclear but it seems that, no longer a physical virgin, Marie lost power over her body. This loss of control, whether it implies her disappointment in her own physical pleasure or an acceptance of the requirements of married life, is countered with actions that allow her to regain some measure of control. She tortured her body by sleeping on planks for the short time she slept each night and binding herself tightly with a rough cord.

Until this point in the *vita*, Marie had obeyed her parents and given in to external pressure to conform with her family's expectation. But early in her marriage, she begins to assert herself by secretly torturing her body as

punishment for physical pleasure. This period was short-lived since her husband agreed to a chaste, spiritual marriage and gave up his wealth.²⁹⁵ These changes were dramatic and their decision quickly became publicly known. This is a critical moment in the *vita*, and it is the point where Marie's quest for a saintly life becomes increasingly difficult.

Marie's development as a holy person can be traced by studying the nature and timing of the obstacles placed before her once she emerged publicly as a potential holy woman. One aspect of her spiritual growth that will emerge is the correlation between visible forms of sanctity that disturb family and friends and the ways in which the devil presents himself in a saint's life.

As Marie and her husband continued to distance themselves from their earlier lives of material and physical fulfillment, their separation from friends and family intensified. By abandoning the ways of the world, voluntarily giving up status associated with wealth, and leaving home to care for the poor and sick, Marie and her husband became subject to attacks by those who could not comprehend their new lifestyle. According to Jacques de Vitry, these attacks mark the true beginning of her conversion. Only by identifying with Christ's passion through her suffering and then overcoming the obstacles placed in her way by performing miracles demonstrating God's power could Marie prove her sanctity. The greatest challenge is the hypocrisy of former friends and family who no longer respect Marie and her husband:

"Demons looked at them and regarded them with malice. Worldly people, as well as their own relatives, looked at them and gnashed their teeth against the

²⁹⁵ For more on the concept of Christian "spiritual marriage" see Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage*.

persons whom they had honoured before when they were wealthy.” But it was not only the decision to give up wealth that angered former friends; Marie’s public behavior grew increasingly intrusive. She seems to have freely moved between the life of an enclosed religious in a cell attached to her church and that of an independent woman in open society able to travel to nurse the sick and “flee to neighboring fields and thickets” when she feared that all the attention on her holiness was threatening her humility.²⁹⁶

After a period of time in a “spiritual marriage” with her husband, Marie left her home and her husband. It was at this point that she experienced her first vision, cried uncontrollably at the thought of Christ’s humanity and suffering, and focused on spiritual nourishment while sacrificing her body’s need for food and comfort. Just as she grows closer to Christ, she experiences her first direct encounter with the devil. This encounter is related to the extreme fasts she undertook as her spirit struggled to overcome her body.²⁹⁷ She fasted to torture her flesh and ate to torture the devil. Her diet, which was seen as torturous, consisted of fruit, herbs, and beans as well as “such hard black bread that even the dogs could hardly chew it and her mouth bled from the gashes and wounds caused by its extreme roughness and hardness.”²⁹⁸ But she was conflicted because the “ancient enemy” attacked her as a “glutton” when she was unable to hold down the little food she forced herself to eat. Well aware of the “tricks and

²⁹⁶ *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, 78.

²⁹⁷ See Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* for more on food as a motif of later medieval female spirituality.

²⁹⁸ *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, 55.

wiles of the enemy,” Marie feared that he was intentionally encouraging her to weaken herself and fought the temptation to completely starve herself. As Marie’s suffering and spirituality intensified, her visions and powers extended beyond herself and those living around her. As a holy person, her power could not be used selfishly. And so, as she struggled with the devil, her focus shifted from herself as the locus of the devil’s torments to her new ability to use her special relationship with God to protect those who were too weak to protect themselves. Marie had terrifying visions of souls suffering in purgatory begging her to intercede on their behalf.²⁹⁹ Although she continued to struggle with guilt over an acceptable degree of physical comfort, her major confrontations with the devil were on behalf of others. Her prayers are described as so powerful that they tortured demons and exposed the devil.

Marie’s early experiences with the devil had taught her that temptation can come in unexpected form. The devil had tried to convince her that she was sinning by eating too much and that she should torture her body even more if she wanted to grow spiritually and so Marie knew that the devil could falsely appear to help. When a male friend encountered the devil in disguise as an “angel of light,” Marie struggled to convince him that he was being misled and could do so only by graphically summoning the devil to her through tears and prayer. “She did not rest until, with a mighty groan that unrighteous one was standing

²⁹⁹ While Guibert of Nogent’s mother suffered on behalf of her husband in purgatory, Marie, as a would-be saint, suffers and acts as an intercessor on behalf of anonymous souls. This role reaches an unprecedented level in Christina Mirabilis’ *vita* in which she dies, journeys to purgatory and, when she returns to life, acts to save both those in purgatory and those who will one day be there by realistically and shockingly revealing its tortures by demonstrating them on herself.

ignominiously in full view before her when she was praying one night in her cell.”

She asked:

“Who are you and what is your name?” Looking at her with a lofty expression and with savage eyes, he said, “Damnable woman, I am the one whom you compelled to come to you through your prayers, for you have taken away my friend through violence. My name is Sleep for I appear to many in sleep as Lucifer—especially to monks and religious. Through my encouragement they obey me and fall into self-exaltation since they account themselves worthy to be visited with angelic and divine words of comfort.”³⁰⁰

Marie was able to distinguish between a heavenly revelation and delusions of worthiness encouraged by the devil. The man she saved, described as one of her “special friends,” isn’t further identified but this confrontation with the devil is used as proof of her power over the devil—it isn’t likely that Marie would have secretly visited the monk to convince him that the devil was interfering in his life. But Marie couldn’t use words and reason to convince the monk of his sinful pride; her power was her ability to draw the attention of higher powers through extreme female emotional prayer.

While she continued to face her own struggles in establishing herself as a holy woman, Marie’s fame came from her ability to help others—both those who knew her and those who knew her by reputation only. There is a clear contrast between the descriptions of Marie defeating the devil when he attacks her and when the devil attack others. In her own struggle, the devil disappears once she makes the sign of the cross. But in public, when the devil is summoned, the battles are dramatic and memorable.

³⁰⁰ *Life of Marie d’Oignies*, 61.

When a young nun suffering from diabolic suggestions is brought before her, Marie does not simply counter the devil's power with prayer. She routs him violently, torturing him in ways one would expect the devil to torment a victim; the devil was not tormented by goodness and prayer but through physical pain. When the devil attacks a young nun with impure thoughts, causing her to question the strength of her faith and attempt suicide, she is brought to Marie's cell. Marie prays and fasts for forty days until the devil is graphically exorcised. "... (I)t seemed that he was vomiting forth all his bowels and wretchedly carrying all his entrails around his neck... then, groaning and pleading with her to have pity on him... to impose a penance on him."³⁰¹

The harshest attacks—on the mind of Marie's male friend and on the faith and moral purity of the nun³⁰²—are against those seen as most vulnerable to pride because they were living difficult, ascetic lives. But they lack the ability to recognize the devil and allow the ideas he planted to take root and grow. By the time Marie sees them, the situation is critical and the counter-attack dramatic. Marie's tears, prayers and lengthy fasts as well as her gift of visionary insight allowed her to see the devil where others might not and fight the devil in ways that correspond to his attacks.

The first attack on the monk is of a very different nature than that on the young nun. The devil attacks "subtly" by entering the man's mind through bad advice disguised as good. The monk, possessed by the evil spirit, uses reason

³⁰¹ *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, 63.

³⁰² As I will discuss in the following paragraph, these are also quite gender specific attacks—on a man's mind/reason and on a woman's spiritual/emotional health.

to argue with Marie—"Since that spirit has done me so much good and has foretold so many true things which are going to happen, he certainly does not wish to deceive me." Although there is certainly a logical fallacy in an argument that uses the truth of future events, the monk has not been mentally tortured and is apparently being punished for the pride of believing himself worthy of being visited by a heavenly messenger. Marie's intense prayer brings the devil out "in full view before her," he confesses and explains himself and the situation is resolved.

The devil's attack on the nun was more dangerous—he planted blasphemous thoughts in her mind and nearly drove her to kill herself. Other nuns in her convent had already unsuccessfully tried to "extricate his (Christ's) dove from the jaws of the devil" and called on Marie's powers as the last resort. But she is shown to be aware of a woman's limitations. When the devil begs her to impose a penance, she relies on the advice of a male advisor who recommends that the devil be further tortured by hurling himself into hell.³⁰³

This is a striking series of events in which Jacques de Vitry describes Marie torturing the devil until he wishes to repent. The question of whether the devil could ever repent—after the Passion? at the Last Judgment?—was a question that concerned some early Christian theologians although only Origen, in the third century, argued that Satan could and would be saved at the end of

³⁰³ Her reliance on a cleric to impose a penance is a reminder of Marie's orthodoxy and does not diminish her power. Like Yvette of Huy, Marie was seen as a visionary who could see the true nature of sinful priests. *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, 98-99.

the world.³⁰⁴ Still, this view was condemned as heretical and not preserved as a working theology into the Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas argued that the devil, like the angels, made an irreversible decision for evil or good. Once the devil and his followers were condemned there was no chance for salvation. What then is Marie doing here? What is her devil suggesting? Is this meant to vividly demonstrate that the correct response to sinful behavior is penance—and that, *if* he could, the devil would repent? Is it that Marie's power was so great that she could bring even the devil to his knees?³⁰⁵

The many ways Marie transforms herself while responding to the attacks of demons against the souls of the sick and dying may illustrate the openness of her religious lifestyle. She could choose to remain in her cell as a recluse but had the freedom to leave for the wilderness outside the city and live in a way that seems to resemble the lifestyle of a hermit. In her cell, Marie could never be completely alone and was often called to fight demons. The violence of her battles contrasts sharply with the contemplative life she craved.

In one case, she saw “howling demons” surrounding the bed of a sick woman and responded aggressively, as if called to battle. While the monks

³⁰⁴ Jeffrey Burton Russell explains that “(i)nfluenced by Clement and by Neoplatonism, drawn by the logic of his doctrine of the non-being of evil, and especially urged by his personal conviction that God in his mercy wishes the happiness of everything has created, Origen argued for apocatastasis, the idea that all things will eventually return to the God who has made them.” In *Satan*, 144.

³⁰⁵ This unusual episode also serves as a reminder of the inconsistency of the devil's role in medieval writing. Valerie Edden discusses later medieval sermon stories in which the devil recounts sins until the sinner repents. In such a story the devil is “hardly an embodiment of evil; he is a thief but he is truly penitent for his misdeeds... , and is clearly an agent for good.” See “Devils, Sermon Stories, and the Problem of Popular Belief in the Middle Ages,” 219-221.

prayed for the nun's soul, Marie took action and became a "manly woman." Marie didn't rely on prayer alone but "ran" to the bed and fought the demons by "driving them away with her mantle."³⁰⁶ The most visible symbol of pious modesty was transformed into a weapon that proved Marie's strength as a soldier of Christ willing and able to fight "troops of demons" and an "army of evil spirits."³⁰⁷

Marie's ability to recognize the "spirit of blasphemy and despair" attacking people who faced internal struggles as religious built her reputation as a saint. She prays for a male relative whose conversion from the comfortable world of knighthood earned him only scorn from friends and family who had once been impressed with his lifestyle but now mourned him as one dead. This is an interesting reversal to the traditional religious ceremony in which the cell of the anchoress or anchorite is sealed and the inhabitant is celebrated as dead to the world. Marie, who had inspired and encouraged the knight, was never permanently enclosed and was available to all who needed to pray, fast and sometimes physically battle their demons.

But because she could be interrupted in her cell, it was critical to her spiritual growth that Marie was trusted to roam freely. Complacency was dangerous; in her experiences fighting the devil on behalf of others, she had witnessed the many ways in which the devil could harm and needed to be sure that her soul was always prepared. The wilderness prepared her. While the cell

³⁰⁶ *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, 81-82.

³⁰⁷ *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, 86.

is ideally the place of fasting and prayer— signs of the contemplative life— Marie’s cell did not allow her the isolation she craved.

Marie was away from her cell the one time the devil is described as appearing in human form. While she was in an orchard, the devil appears before her disguised as a shepherd. The manifestation is unusual since location and form don’t seem to correspond. Shepherds are not normally found in orchards and wandering saints usually seek wild or open space. An orchard is neither a space beyond civilization nor the open field of a shepherd and his flock. It is an in-between space—cultivated property in which uninterrupted meditation is possible. It is also a reminder of the Garden of Eden and Eve’s temptation by the devil in the form of a serpent. But Marie is beyond the reach of temptation and the devil-shepherd has no chance to seduce her. He is instantly identified as the devil.³⁰⁸ Jacques of Vitry recalls the episode as a parable in which the devil is accused of being a false shepherd who intentionally misleads a vulnerable flock. This stress on Marie’s concern for the flock of Christians in danger as a result of their own weaknesses and the strength of the devil fits the pattern that has emerged for Marie’s life. In her twenty-two-year career, she quickly overcame personal temptations and served her community by recognizing and destroying the demons that threatened Christians weaker than herself.

Marie’s self-sufficiency is clear even in the final scene of her life when “Satan” appeared before her. Her initial reaction is to ask for the help of those praying at her deathbed but she is able to gather the strength to drive the devil

³⁰⁸ By this point in her career, Marie did not need to distinguish between men and women or fear for her safety when with men. She was filled only with “spiritual affection” and able to protect a man from weakness when near her. *Life of Marie d’Oignies*, 101.

away with the sign of the cross. Marie of Oignies' freedom to seek out new living space and to vary her degree of public visibility allowed her to confront and overcome her own demons in private before focusing her energy on helping others—especially enclosed monks and nuns—who were unable to fight the devil on their own. In justifying Marie's (and other women like her) usefulness to religious society, her internal struggle with the devil is presented as the precursor to her public role as demon-finder. By championing her semi-independence, her hagiographer begins by stressing her ability to recognize the devil as he attacks her but then shifts the focus of her *vita* to those events with reliable witnesses—to the many times she was called to defeat a demon attacking a cloistered nun. These battles would certainly have been observed, or, at the very least, heard, by others in the monastery or convent. By stressing the public usefulness of a woman such as Marie of Oignies, Jacques de Vitry deflects unwarranted attention from potential controversy over a woman whose private struggles occur in a kind of religious no-man's-land.

The ability to shift between private and public space—between internal spiritual growth and conspicuous religious edification—is most clearly seen in Thomas de Cantimpré's *Life of Christina Mirabilis*. Christina is presented as a nearly fully formed saint. Torments—both self-imposed and forced by those who misunderstood her actions and wouldn't accept her message from the afterworld—are not presented as tests of her faith or stages in her development as a saint but as signs of the corruption of the world. Hers is not a life that is meant to be imitated. It is a living model of Christ's suffering. The *vita*

continually contrasts the wilderness that her soul craves and has proven it can handle and the civilization that her body must minister to through visible suffering.

Thomas de Cantimpré describes Christina's position within her family as that of the outsider. As the youngest of three sisters, she was vulnerable after the death of her parents and depended on her sisters' decisions. She was sent to work as a shepherdess while her oldest sister lived a life of prayer and her middle sister worked in the house. This organization mirrors the division of labor of the monastery and gives Christina the most humble job.³⁰⁹ She doesn't complain when assigned to work outside with animals and we don't hear of her desires. Her isolation in the pastures would appear to make her open to assault—both to the physical advances of men and to diabolic attempts to feed on her resentment toward her sisters. These are expected temptations for a would-be saint but her struggle goes unnoticed. Christina's early separation from the world is reflected in her work which keeps her outside the house and the walls of a town on the physical margins of society. Christina's work in the fields was certainly not unusual for a child in her society, but this is noteworthy in the shaping of her sanctity. By stressing her low position, even within her family, her hagiographer stresses that God can choose anyone to be one of his holy people. Her fate as the burdened youngest sister is only noticed by God who comforts

³⁰⁹ See *Life of Christina Mirabilis*, footnote 4, 42. The three categories of labor are "1)prayer (choir nuns); 2)housework (lay nuns); and 3) farm laborers. Just as Christina would operate outside society after she returned from the dead, so now she is relegated to a position outside her monastically oriented home." To understand the structure of her life as an *exemplum* and as symbolic of the development of the soul as it is elevated see Margot King, "The Sacramental Witness of Christina Mirabilis," 145-165 (esp. 149-154).

her by giving her “the grace of an inward sweetness” and visiting “her with heavenly secrets.”³¹⁰

Thus is Christina’s soul elevated and she dies a hidden mystic and saint. Her sanctity is only revealed once she returns to life the day after her death, describes the things she had seen in purgatory, and explains that she had accepted the opportunity “to return to the body and suffer there the sufferings of an immortal soul in a mortal body without damage to it, and by these... deliver all those souls on whom (she) had compassion in that place of purgatory, and by the example of (her) suffering and... way of life to convert living men... and to turn aside from their sins.”³¹¹ Since she had already proven herself secretly in life as well as through her choice to return after death, her suffering is not presented as a test of her sanctity.

As an *exemplum*, Christina’s actions and subsequent public torment are not intended to show her own spiritual development but are meant to graphically display the personal sacrifice of a Christian. At first, Christina doesn’t embrace her public mission and retreats to the isolation she had once known and that her soul desired. But her escape to the wilderness— “into deserts, or to trees, or to the tops of castles or churches...”— is not tolerated by her sisters and neighbors who are embarrassed by her and consider her possessed by the devil. Although she always manages to break the chains of her captors when she needs to be alone, her time in the wilderness is never shown as her goal.

³¹⁰ *Life of Christina Mirabilis*, 12.

³¹¹ *Life of Christina Mirabilis*, 14.

Christina's wilderness is a place of solitude and escape which serves as a respite for her soul and as a source of renewal for a difficult mission in which she is tormented by those who continually misunderstand her extreme behavior. She was not seeking to prove her sanctity and didn't have her faith tested by the devil when alone. "She desired to remain alone with God in her hiding place in the desert" but, unlike a hermit or recluse who might be sought after by those seeking spiritual guidance, her life shifted between wilderness and civilization where her actions were meant to symbolize torments of hell that awaited the sinners around her.

In her actions, we see Christina torn between her public role as witness to Christ's suffering and the suffering of purgatory and her need for private contemplation. Mirroring the torments of purgatory, Christina throws herself into fiery ovens and provokes dogs into chasing her into thorny woods before escaping both her self-imposed torments and her human tormentors by immersing herself in the life of prayer—either alone or among recluses.

Before her sisters and friends accepted her sanctity, they worked hard to hide her from the world. Taking the place of the devil (but redeemable) they locked her in a dungeon, "bound her fast with a heavy wooden yoke and fed her like a dog with a little bread and much water." This lasted until Christina's sanctity is visibly and undeniably proven when her breasts flowed with a healing and nourishing oil.³¹² It is at this point that Christina succeeds in converting those closest to her and is free to perform her miracles in public without fear of being recaptured. This is a turning point in the *vita*; once Christina was free in

³¹² *Life of Christina Mirabilis*, 20.

body and soul her behavior moderated. This moderation, or compromise, gives Christina the audience of sinners she had undertaken to save. Instead of demonstrating the tortures of purgatory by placing her body in normally deadly situations and then allowing her soul time for contemplation, she was free to satisfy both her physical and spiritual needs through public acts of faith. These were not the singular actions she had undertaken before her family accepted her but a real change of lifestyle. While Christina's behavior does continue to draw attention, it no longer shocks or horrifies. This pattern fits the compromises in their religious callings that seem to mark many religious women's lives.³¹³

Christina's living perfection is demonstrated in the atypical use of standard temptations; when she suffers great thirst it is not because the devil is torturing her. Since she is already proven as a holy person, her suffering is intended to invoke pity in a sinner, which is the first stage toward repentance. By begging, weeping, and fasting she gives strength to those in need.

Although Christina remains deeply involved in the world by behaving in ways that both demonstrate the tortures of purgatory and soften sinful hearts, her behavior also demonstrates her deviation from normal human activity. This is publicly shown in her ability to contort herself in ways that make it appear that

³¹³ Acceptance of Christina's spiritual authority may also be related to her age. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker uses the role of the life cycle to as a way of understanding the patterns in the lives of religious women. She uses the examples of Guibert of Nogent's mother, Christina Mirabilis, (and briefly mentions Yvette of Huy and Marie of Oignies) to investigate how and why, as women matured or became widowed, they were able to have a more visible and accepted role in society. For religious women this meant that spiritual authority was less likely to be challenged. Many women left the world for an anchorhold or cell where they demonstrated their sanctity by being able to "sustain such a hard life." See "The Prime of Their Lives: Women and Age, Wisdom and Religious Careers in Northern Europe," in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality*, 215-235 (227). Physically isolated from society but spiritually powerful, the women could be found by confessors and those seeking the wisdom of their visions.

she is uninhibited by bones. During the last year of her life, Christina spends most of her time in the wilderness. While she occasionally returns to her earlier ways to save people, she is free to spend her time in solitude. Still, the emphasis of the *vita* is not on her solitary internal life but on her public role in which the expected temptations of the devil are transformed into a saintly performance meant to attract and teach sinners.

The life of isolation was never complete for any recluse or hermit. As is seen in the *vitae* of Christina of Markyate and Godric of Finchale, those who followed a model of eremitic life had to have some degree of contact with a confessor. They also often attracted the attention of other religious, as well as curious non-religious, who sought access to their spiritual strength and insight. While Marie of Oignies and Christina Mirabilis shifted between life in the world and life as recluses, which is common among beguines, Yvette of Huy, unwilling wife, young widow and mother, was mostly a recluse who craved stability.

Yvette's "wilderness" and the diabolic attacks she faced were unlike those of Marie or Christina. Once freed from the constraints and responsibilities of marriage, she remained at home for five years, but then focused all her resources on a career of charity toward lepers and eventually lived as a recluse with a large community of men and women around her. As a young widow, she left the city for the "wilderness beyond" its walls.³¹⁴ Her life in the wilderness does not imply solitude; rather it was a space in which she could direct her life in a way that she could not as an urban widow. The nature of the devil's attacks on

³¹⁴ McNamara's introduction to the *vita* explains that as cities developed with clear areas of jurisdiction, the undesirable were sent to the "wilderness" outside the city. It was in these areas that leper colonies were built.

Yvette and her allies reflects her continued involvement in the world. These are not the bloody battles Marie of Oignies fought. Temptation came “by the world and by the flesh, cognates and domestics did her many injuries, blasphemies, contradictions, impediments, losses and opprobria. Thus she came to know Who sustained her.”³¹⁵

Yvette’s connection to the world is a constant in her *vita*. She does not refuse to marry because she has already found an eternal spouse in Christ; rather, she is reluctant to marry because she dreads the difficulties of marriage. She feared the responsibilities of marriage—sex, childbirth, household management—and, once married, her worst fears were confirmed. At thirteen, Yvette desired the freedom of her childhood and it was the memory of what she had lost that “tormented” her. This image is strikingly different from the expected introduction to the life of a young would-be saint. She is not a secret bride of Christ forced into a marriage that is presented as a test in which she will prove herself. And she is certainly not a happy bride, proud of her beautiful clothes, jewels, and home, who will one day abandon the material world upon the discovery of her true vocation. She is neither a saint nor a sinner. Yvette doesn’t want to abandon the world; she craves an independence that neither marriage nor a convent could provide.

The first challenge Yvette had faced was at thirteen when she was unable to resist her parents desire that she marry. In the five years of her marriage, Yvette was dependent on her husband and responsible for her home and

³¹⁵ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 37.

children. Without the strength of a religious calling, she had no foundation for a life in which her primary responsibility wasn't that of daughter, wife or mother.

Yvette accepted her lot in life with anger and desperation—so much so that when she looked to God she prayed not for comfort but for her husband's death. She does not seek salvation but is, nevertheless, saved by the God's grace. "With the darkness driven from her heart that had so obstructed her open eye that she could see nothing, the sun of justice shone in her face. She began to heed the Lord's call within herself and came to know by experience that without God's help there would be nothing in her mind but an inferno."³¹⁶ This is the first turning point in the *vita*. Once given the gift of grace, Yvette is given the opportunity to prove her worthiness and, by doing so, demonstrate the strength of God and the possibility of salvation. Her widowhood at eighteen provided her with the opportunity.

She resisted the pressure to obey her father and remarry and eventually found a supporter in the bishop of Liège.³¹⁷ This is presented as her earliest successful defeat of the devil. The bishop agreed to support her only once she began to explain that she wished to remain a widow not because she feared marriage but because she wished to "devote herself to Christ as long as she

³¹⁶ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 43.

³¹⁷ The decision to remarry was very difficult for many widows. Yvette's family's wealth would have attracted many men and a good marriage could strengthen two families. But Yvette, who resisted marriage from the start and was never comfortable as a wife, had strong arguments against marriage, especially if she insisted on dedicating her life to God by living chastely. For more on the challenges that medieval widows faced see note 319 below.

lived.”³¹⁸ Her public conversion guaranteed that she would be allowed to remain unmarried but it is also the moment that the devil takes notice of her. Her temptation—her devil—is constructed out of the public flaunting of her father’s desire for her to remarry.

Yvette remained in the city and visibly expressed her debt to God. The integrity of her commitment was challenged by the devil in a series of increasingly difficult encounters that began with the initial attempts to persuade her to remarry but eventually turned to sexual temptation. All of these are constructed out of the expected, ordinary life of a young widow. As a widow supported by the bishop, Yvette was able to prove that with the strength of faith she could rely on God alone. Once she proved that she was unshakable in her faith when challenged to remarry, the devil began to torment her.

The earliest attacks were in the form of terrifying visions of the devil in the shape of beasts and serpents. These visions are understood as being sent to keep her from traveling to church while it was still dark. But she recognized them as “figments of demons” and vanquished them simply with the sign of the cross. Unable to keep her from publicly displaying her newly found piety, the devil attacks in a way that fully displays Yvette’s vulnerability. Until this point, Yvette the widow had managed to defend her own interests and remain independent. An attempted sexual assault reminded her that she was constantly dependent on powers outside of herself.

³¹⁸ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 45.

A young male guest in her home, who had previously expressed interest in her, whose motives she feared but whose company she could not avoid, came to her “in the silence of the calm night, when the devil enters the hearts of men.”³¹⁹ Aware of his intentions, Yvette realized that there was nothing that she could do to protect herself. She had nowhere to hide, was weaker than the man, and could not scream for fear of destroying her reputation. In desperation, Yvette called on the Virgin Mary for mercy and, as the man approached her bed, she had her first vision and her would-be assailant was filled with fear and ran off.

Although Yvette had been saved by the gift of God’s grace as a young married woman, maturity, combined with the recognition that the devil’s attacks were increasing in intensity, led her to consciously convert to a life of good works. She did not crave the sort of freedom that she had lost in marriage because it was no longer possible. In addition to the responsibility of raising two sons, she was obligated to display her gratitude and newly discovered devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary. But, according to the standards accepted and expected by her family, Yvette could not be a good mother as well as a woman who was willing to give all of her wealth and energy in the name of God. The difficulties Yvette faced demonstrate the conflict that is inherent in an attempt at dual loyalties. This is seen in the events that mark the five years between her widowhood and her rejection of the world as a recluse nursing lepers.

When Yvette’s father saw “his daughter’s house gradually stripped, barer every day, he began to fear that she would waste the inheritance of her sons by giving away their goods. He took them from her mother, keeping them for some

³¹⁹ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 51.

while as in tutelage, so that she would have less under her control and could not unconscientiously sell things from their inheritance. But after a short while he restored them to her for their mother loved them tenderly and did not wish to be without them.”³²⁰ It is clear that no one—certainly not her father, whose perspective is presented in the above quote—believed that Yvette could act conscientiously for both her family’s material and spiritual well-being. It was impossible for Yvette to please both God and her family. Because she was at risk of losing her reputation as a mother for allowing her fatherless children to suffer the shame of poverty, Yvette chose to support her children with income from her dowry.³²¹ But in doing so, she profited from the usurious practices of

³²⁰ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 53. Her family’s concern over Yvette’s “control” of the household wealth is telling. In *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Caroline Walker Bynum analyzes the extreme ways in which women expressed their spirituality in the later Middle Ages. She finds that, for religious women, food was often a way of controlling their environments. By rejecting ordinary food in favor of the eucharist and by feeding the hungry, women could shape their own lives and move closer to God. They did this through food because they had control over that part of the household. As a widow, Yvette was not a dependent daughter or wife who was limited to expressing herself through food. She had legal control over money (although her father’s influence is constantly felt), as well as time to serve those in need. It is therefore not surprising that she expressed her will by showing that the wealth of the household (one of the things she dreaded most about marriage) was under her management.

³²¹ Clarissa Atkinson explains the recurrence of this theme in works of medieval female spirituality and the increase of mothers proposed as saints in the Later Middle Ages. See *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1991). To understand the attitude toward widows who ignore the needs of their children, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “The Cruel Mother: Maternity, Widowhood, and Dowry in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries” In *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1985), 117-131. Although she is discussing cases particular to fifteenth century Tuscany, a widow’s reliance on her dowry was common in medieval Europe and Klapisch-Zuber’s conclusions highlight the difficult decisions many widows faced. She finds that in a society in which the church did not want widows to remarry and much of male society did not believe widows could remain chaste, an unmarried widow was a threat to the honor of both her father’s and husband’s family. A widow who chose to remarry was a threat to the stability of the family and “cruel” to her children. This is because the orphaned children would often remain with their father’s family and would lose access to their mother’s dowry. The “cruel mother” would abandon her children by remarrying or choosing the desires of birth family over husband’s family since her dowry, which was returned to the woman upon her husband’s death, would be controlled by a second husband, who would most likely favor his own children. Although degree of control over dowry, remarriage, and businesses for later medieval widows often depended on region, it is clear that widows were part of public life in ways that they could not be as wives. For more on widow’s opportunities for economic and social

investors. By giving into the material world, Yvette is presented as pleasing the devil but, Hugh of Floreffe is quick to point out, Yvette recognized her sin and did penance by “restoring to God in the poor what she feared she had unjustly taken from others, keeping nothing for herself that she could give to others.”³²²

The only way that Yvette could give of herself freely was by leaving her family for a space beyond the city walls where she followed the model of Christ and the apostles by nursing the cast out lepers and drew a following of men and women. By her early thirties, Yvette’s life had stabilized and she was able to turn to a life of contemplation. Her father and oldest son had converted to the religious life and she was able to reject the world and enclose herself.

Once she was alone and determined to live as a recluse, the devil is described as attacking in ways that evoke both images of the Jews in the desert attacked on their way to the promised-land and of pilgrims or crusaders defeating enemies on the way to the Holy Land. “And when the devil saw the constancy of her purpose and how firmly she had turned her face that she might reach Jerusalem, he sought the help of Amalech which is interpreted in the vulgar tongue as the universe of evil thought and fleshly temptations and the whole flock

power as well as challenges faced see: Judith Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock Before the Plague* (Oxford, 1987); Louise Mirrer, ed., *Upon My Husband’s Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe* (Ann Arbor, 1992); and Sue Sheridan Walker ed., *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1993), esp. James Brundage’s on “Widows and Remarriage: Moral Conflicts and their resolution in Classical Canon Law: 1140- 1375” (17-33) and Barbara Hanawalt’s “Remarriage as an Option for Urban and Rural Widows in Late Medieval England” (141-165).

³²² *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 59. The idea of “restoring to God in the poor” is indicative of one line of thinking about the poor during the Middle Ages who were alternatively viewed as cursed potential criminals or as Christ-like in their humility. For a review of theoretical and every-day attitudes toward the poor see Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (New Haven, CT, 1986).

of vices that might impede the road to salvation.”³²³ Secure within her cell, Yvette had already overcome external resistance to her chosen lifestyle and had repented for her past sins. As a recluse, she symbolized internal fortitude, was trusted to successfully resist additional torment and temptation, and transmitted her wisdom to those who chose to listen.

Her battle with the devil was difficult. She could defeat the devil only by attacking her body—the most visible symbol of her weakness and of her early life. By tormenting her body, Yvette sought to control the main thing tying her to the material world and complete her separation. But she could never separate herself completely from her past as an unhappy wife who secretly wished her husband harm because it was the only way she could imagine being free. Yvette is finally freed from the torment of guilt after a vision of Mary interceding with Christ on her behalf.

Just as Yvette’s life seems to moderate—she is forgiven, is acknowledged as a holy woman, and, on the advice of concerned clerics, stops fasting excessively—her worldly past comes back to torment her. She was thriving as a recluse whose new life was affirmed by Mary’s merciful intercession with Christ, when she was troubled by her own son. “Seeing that he could make no progress against God’s saint, the devil cleverly turned to malicious and iniquitous arguments, rousing domestic and familiar evil in her through her own flesh, that is in her son who was still in the world with her friends.”³²⁴ With a son still at risk in

³²³ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 68.

³²⁴ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 76.

“the world,” Yvette could never fully immerse herself in a life of contemplation. Her son, described as a “bloody beast” when he is brought to his mother’s cell, is described (by Yvette? her hagiographer?) as “limb of the devil.”³²⁵

When animals approach saints, they are often seen as embodiments of the devil who attack and terrify hermits or recluses who are otherwise isolated and immune to torment or temptation from people.³²⁶ Yvette’s *vita* falls somewhere in between these two models of the devil attacking a saint. As a recluse, the imagery of a “beast” coming to the “handmaid of Christ’s cell window” is consistent with the visions recluses are expected to have.³²⁷ But Yvette is more than a recluse. As a mother, she suffers when she sees her son’s soul in danger and is forced to attend to his spiritual needs while temporarily, and to the delight of the devil, neglecting her own.

The difficulty of defeating the devil is highlighted in the saga of Yvette’s attempt to control her son’s behavior. Although he repents and is filled with fear when he sees his holy mother tormented, his return to the city corresponds with his return to sin. “And again she tormented herself as a martyr.”³²⁸ This battle is presented as the ultimate challenge of faith in which the soul of her son and her reputation as a mother is at stake. Yvette’s hagiographer focuses on the unbreakable connection between Yvette and her son and the reality that she

³²⁵ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 77.

³²⁶ Alternatively but not that differently, they are also often described as tamed by the saint.

³²⁷ See, for example, Christina of Markyate’s terrifying vision of a bull’s attack which combines elements of sexual temptation with the *topos* of an animal attack. In *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, 99. See also numerous examples in Athanasius’ *Life of St. Anthony*.

³²⁸ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 78.

cannot fully separate herself from her married life. This is troubling and could be an opening for critics who might argue that unlike a man, a holy woman's spiritual focus would always be in danger of being dragged down to her worldly emotional connections. Instead the hagiographer presents Yvette's concern for her son with Mary's connection with her own son and her constant power to intercede with her son on behalf of those in need.

When Yvette's son does not change his ways even when again summoned before his mother she takes strength from her faith and "ordered by virtue of Christ's name that either he totally and immediately renounce his evil ways or leave the entire country lest the same rumours find their way to her in the future."³²⁹ This display of power over her son—her ability to summon an unwilling visitor and exile him in the name of Christ— provides an interesting parallel to the expected commonplace of a saint summoning the devil and then vanquishing him, often with the sign of the cross. In the most difficult scenarios prayer and fasting might precede the battle but it always ends with the devil defeated. Exile as punishment is a serious consequence for a crime.³³⁰ Yvette's son's exile, paid for from his inheritance, is seen less as a way of teaching him proper behavior than as a way to make him disappear for tormenting his vulnerable mother. At this point in her career Yvette's social position is precarious and, in shaping her life's story, her hagiographer quickly moves past this uncomfortable episode in order to demonstrate that, in the end, society as a

³²⁹ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 79.

³³⁰ A sort of exile is also seen in the example of Marie of Oignies having the devil throw himself into hell for tormenting the vulnerable.

whole (including the wayward son) benefited when Yvette was not distracted by her family.

But, unlike the devil who could not benefit from his time in hell, Yvette's son's story is an example of the possibility of salvation even for the worst sinner. After a vision of himself being tortured by the devil, Yvette's son repents and learns that, as a result of his mother's prayers, he will only spend three years in purgatory if he honestly changed his life. Once he was back in his mother's and God's good graces, he turned to Christ and joined the Cistercian order.

With both of her sons settled in monasteries, Yvette could finally reach the height of her power as a visionary who was able to sense the evil in others and help them repent. She gained a following of men and women who gathered around her cell, continued to nurse lepers, and generally demonstrated her strength as a holy woman. While Yvette was no longer personally vulnerable to the devil's attacks³³¹— these ended with her successful rout of the devil in her son—a scandal in her community is blamed on the devil. As its founder and symbol of its goodness, she was responsible for maintaining peaceful relations when they were disturbed by diabolic interference. She kept order through her ability to see the workings of the devil in the sin of lust, especially among the chaste.

One example of her strength in recognizing and defeating the devil is seen in the attempted attack on a young woman whom Yvette had "adopted as a

³³¹ Unlike many *vitae*, the devil does not even come to torment her on her deathbed. Instead birds sing as Yvette's soul leaves her body.

special daughter in the years of her infancy.”³³² As a mother, Yvette had already been faced by the knowledge that her son had given in to the devil. Now, as a mother to a young woman whom she had nurtured in faith, she was faced with this danger once again. But this time, the devil took the form of a priest who “came as a wolf preying upon the lamb of Christ”³³³ and led the young woman away from Yvette by convincing her that he was working to save her soul. They traveled as husband and wife and the young woman would have been lost if not for her “mother’s” power. Yvette had blessed the young virgin and she remained unharmed and was restored to her community.

The devil can also take the form of a female tempter. In one episode, Yvette recognized that a young monk was struggling with sexual temptation. On a trip to visit his parents he was “ambushed by a certain young woman, hiding like a lion in her cave.”³³⁴ His memory of the young woman, and of the beautiful cloth she gave him as a gift to remember her by, tormented his otherwise pure conscience. But he did not confess his sinful thoughts until Yvette confronted him and revealed her power as a visionary to him. She knew exactly what had happened and was able to help him. Like Marie of Oignies, Yvette had powerful visions in which she saw both members of her community and townspeople unable to resist the devil’s temptations. By revealing them as sinners and describing her nightmarish visions of ultimate judgment, she saved them from that judgment by giving them time to repent.

³³² *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 90.

³³³ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 91.

³³⁴ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 107.

Yvette's life was never one of complete contemplation or isolation as a recluse. She was constantly drawn back into the world by family concerns as well as by actions of neighboring townspeople who knew of her reputation as a holy woman whose visions were powerful and formed a link between the material and spiritual worlds.

The one role that Yvette never seems to regret is that of mother and this is the role that marks her *vita*. She had conflicts with her parents over her desired independence both before marriage and as a widow, hated her marriage (if not her husband), but consistently shows her concern as a mother. As a young widow it was her love for her sons that kept her from giving all of her wealth to the poor. She tormented herself when her youngest son fell into the hands of the devil and appears to have sent him away out of a combination of shame and hurt at his behavior.

Yvette's experience as a mother is seen in her relationship with the young virgin tempted by the evil priest as well as in an episode in which she warns a young, confused, monk about the dangers of the devil's temptations. Her knowledge about the ways of the devil is summed up in her advice :

If it should happen, oh my beloved son, that excessively importunate temptations arise against you, like the action of a dart, so that it seems that you cannot resist them, then rise up boy, lest you fall asleep in death. Resume constancy, put on fortitude, forestall the diabolic tempters on the side of the Lord and his humble handmaid. That I may send you away in peace, he has conferred his spear upon me. I will fight for you, son, and if I win the victory over the enemy, the strength will be yours, yours the reward, the prize and the crown if only you act manfully, son, and your heart will find comfort in the Lord.

After describing this encounter in which Yvette keeps a vulnerable monk from falling into the hands of the devil, Hugh of Floreffe recognizes that Yvette's power over the young man and her wisdom in dealing with him came only as a result of her own struggles with the devil in his many incarnations. He explains that "He who is victorious will be crowned, not he who did not wish to fight. For he who does not wish to fight cannot win nor be crowned in victory because where there is no struggle, there is no victory and where victory is, there is the crown."³³⁵

For the earliest beguines, as for their supporters and those who were meant to be convinced of their sanctity, the struggle with the devil was real. As their hagiographers shaped the stories of their lives, the familiar (orphans, marriage, children, disease, the desire for solitude in the middle of a growing city) was constructed as a part of a landscape in which the devil roamed, looking for opportunities to weaken God's hold on the world. These women struggled to find supporters and justification for a life in which they shifted, sometimes uneasily, from wife to mother to recluse to nurse. The devil, it was understood, would take advantage of this tension—and the points where he enters their stories serve to highlight the instability. These women's lives were filled with danger, as well as incredible potential. The men who became their protectors and promoters sought to eliminate some of the threat by shifting the focus of their lives away from private diabolic temptations to public events that could be shaped as visible lessons for a Christianity which accepted the reality of a devil who could, and would, attack by any possible means. These *vitae* directly address the reality of

³³⁵ *Life of Yvette of Huy*, 100-101.

a group of women who remained connected to their earthly families and were not permanently enclosed as nuns and recluses. The unease that surrounded their semi-religious state diminished as their powerful role as demon fighters and healers of the sick was stressed by the men who championed their sanctity and shaped the narratives of their lives as lived for the public good.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have sought to interpret the roles of the devil in the narrative *vitae* of medieval holy men and women by situating the episodes of diabolic interference within specific social and cultural contexts. As is the case with all narrative, these texts are mediated through a range of voices—all male, a combination of theologians, confessors, friends, and champions of sometimes controversial would-be saints. Each text isolates the experience of one individual within—and at times against—a community and then structures that life as a model of sanctity, capable of and expected to overcome any stumbling block, external and internal. By moving the spotlight away from the devil in these encounters, my goal was to draw attention to the context in which the devil tempts and the way that the placement of temptation and torment served to shape the sanctity of saints.

I am left with the question of what did the Christinas and Maries and bishops and monks and theologians actually see—or believe they saw—when they described the devil's attacks. What did confessors imagine when told of visions of demons? How did difficult spouses or children or parents become transformed into agents of the devil? Is it constructive to fit these episodes into psychological or anthropological categories while at the same time taking the belief system—the faith—of the saint and the hagiographer seriously? While these questions fall outside the scope of this dissertation and, to some extent, outside the bounds of the historian's craft, it is exciting to consider how current trends and concerns in disciplines and scholarship outside of history, and even

beyond the humanities, might be adapted to expand our ability to understand and describe the past.

In an essay on the value of cognitive science to medievalists and historians of religion, Anne L. Clark reviews the ways that the methodology of this relatively new field can be used to make meaning of a complex web of actions and belief systems in cultures far removed—both in time and place—from those of the modern West.³³⁶ Clark, who has written about the visions of Elizabeth of Shönauf, acknowledges that “the medieval mind I know best still holds its mysteries for me” and wonders “how are the minds of medieval people brought into greater focus by considering the insights of cognitive theory?”³³⁷

Clark explains that “it is in the silence behind the texts for the literate or completely untextualized for the illiterate—that cognitive models can be helpful by accounting for the simultaneous stability of religious belief and the profusion of individual representations of belief.”³³⁸ Because there are a seemingly endless variety of ways for both cultures and individual minds to shape experience, a basic conviction, such as that of the devil as an incarnation of evil, must be placed within a particular context to be fully appreciated. For Clark, it is the inventiveness of visions within a stable world of ritual that highlights the role of the mind in the formation of the texts that build our historical memory. By paying attention to the science of how the mind works to fit the unexpected experience into a normative context, we can make meaning out of the process through which

³³⁶ See “Why All the Fuss About the Mind,” in *History in the Comic Mode*,” 170-181.

³³⁷ Clark, “Why All the Fuss About the Mind?” in *History in the Comic Mode*,” 171.

³³⁸ Clark, “Why All the Fuss About the Mind?” in *History in the Comic Mode*,” 173.

twelfth-century men and women worked to create a seamless narrative of their own lives.

This leaves us with the question of how can historians begin to understand the variety of individual mental responses, visions, and representations of self. How do we give these lives meaning and, at the same time, understand the process of creating narrative—both for the medieval hagiographer and the modern scholar of hagiography? Making meaning is at the heart of both history and cultural psychology. The multidisciplinary nature of understanding the creation of a narrative is the basis of cultural psychologist Jerome Bruner's *Acts of Meaning*.³³⁹ In locating the heart of his own field, Bruner recognizes the impact of anthropology and history on cultural psychology and begins with the premise that the "... self too must be treated as a construction that, so to speak, proceeds from the outside in as well as from the inside out, from culture to the mind as well as from the mind to the culture."³⁴⁰

The connection of the human mind to culture is at the nexus of an emerging field of scholarship that seeks to study the physical brain in order to uncover the mysteries of the mind. If neuroscientists and the science of brain imagery can enrich our understanding of how the brain creates visions and then describes the abstract in terms that are concrete, historians of religion may need to consider—in addition to the specificity of cultural and social context—the "how" of no longer living brains.

³³⁹ See Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning: Four Lectures on Mind and Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. 1990).

³⁴⁰ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 118.

Considering developments in historical methodology in the possible not-too-distant future is tenuous but necessary. It is less speculative to return to the twelfth century to look toward changes in the role of the devil as tempter of Christians. This overview of one aspect of the later Middle Ages leaves us on more stable ground but, like all of the past, is still filled with fissures that can appear to be chasms.

Understanding the appearance of the devil in the life of a saint involves recognizing and disentangling the particulars of religious belief, social reality, and cultural understanding. This is true for the investigation of any behavior in all societies at any point in time. Strikingly, by the later Middle Ages the devil became increasingly disassociated with individual temptation for the holiest in society, although that model never disappeared. For later medieval Christians the reality of the devil living, and even thriving, in public view became a source of fear and paranoia. With this shift the devil expanded his playing field beyond the grasp of saints. Saints, of course, struggle to model the life of Christ by overcoming diabolic torment and sometimes by exorcising the devil from possessed, but not evil, individuals. But even the holiest man or woman was incapable of crushing the Jews, heretics, and witches who were increasingly seen as the devil's willing partners (and sometimes as the devil incarnate). The intensity and depth of this persecution was unprecedented at the time. Beginning in the twelfth century and escalating over the course of the next several centuries, the focus of the Christian battle with the devil shifted from the model of an individual saint battling his or her demons (often on behalf of society)

to that of Christendom at war with groups who were understood and shaped as willing friends of the devil.

Guibert of Nogent's career signals the beginning of this transformation. Even as he framed the story of his own life as one of constant internal struggle against the devil, he argued for a special connection between the devil and the Jews working together, especially through the new money economy, to destroy Christian society.³⁴¹ As the centuries passed, saints alone would not—could not—be called upon to shatter this imagined conspiracy between the entrenched outsiders and the devil.

In the late twelfth century, as the earliest beguines began pushing the boundaries between wife and nun and between public and private sanctity, their champion, Jacques de Vitry, intensified the Church's battle with the Albigensian heretics. André Vauchez suggests that the willingness to accept new and unusual forms of religious life might be a response to the threatening appeal of heretical movements. If this is the case then Jacques de Vitry drew a line in battling the Albigensians while accepting the orthodoxy of marginal and potentially problematic women like the beguines. Once the battle lines were redrawn those who remained within the lines were capable of uniting to fight those left out. In the face of skeptics, the *vitae* of the beguines sought to prove heavenly support through dramatically violent battles with the devil. Unlike Gilbert of Sempringham or Hugh of Lincoln, their personal lives were so controversial that their reputations could only be secured through a focus on the devil's interest in them and their capacity to defeat evil.

³⁴¹ See R.I. Moore *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 64-65.

The trends that would come to mark the persecutions of the later Middle Ages appear in Guibert of Nogent's *Monodiae*: the blurring of lines between good and evil and the struggle to distinguish between true good and the devil in disguise, the danger of acting alone (especially in battling evil), and the multiple paths possible in a religious life. If we look at the role of temptation in the development of models of religious behavior in holy people, it is clear that sanctity came in many forms for twelfth-century Christians and that the most critical job for any saint—and perhaps, although not without great risk, for all Christians—was to be able to perceive demonic interference both in their own lives and in the lives of others. This is certainly true for the beguines who struggled to stabilize their own lives while protecting others more vulnerable than themselves. When Guibert of Nogent tells a series of stories of diabolic attacks on laypeople he shows how easy it is for the devil to go unnoticed when he shows up in seemingly ordinary situations. This heightened awareness elevated the role of the temptation and the fear of doubt.

If it is understood that the boundaries between saints and the wider Christian community were never (and could never be) absolute, it is important to recognize degrees of separation and influence in discussing the context and impact of battles between saints and the devil. It is logical that actions that are held up as exemplary might not only be admired—they may very well be imitated.³⁴² The risks involved in failing to distinguish between the two were clear

³⁴² The contrast between saints whose lives are to be admired but not imitated is clear in Jacques de Vitry's account of Christina Mirabilis' extreme actions. For a fuller discussion see André Vauchez, "Saints admirables et saints imitables: Les fonctions de l'hagiographie ont-elles changé aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge?" 161-172.

to medieval hagiographers and other promoters of holy men and women. Although self-abnegation was certainly a saintly trait to be emulated, *vitae* often stressed that saints were saints *because* of their unique ability to deny themselves ordinary human physical demands. They made up for this lack of material fulfillment with spiritual succor. The devil's interest in undermining their efforts was understood as a sign of their holiness. The underlying message is that while, for example, an ordinary person would benefit from an occasional fast and certainly must avoid the sin of gluttony, these limits simply don't apply to saints. A saint might bathe in a freezing pond (like Godric of Finchale) or live in the closest proximity to an object of sexual desire (like Christina of Markyate) and face no long-term ill effects. An ordinary person would likely die of pneumonia or face a very unwanted pregnancy.

I want to suggest what might occur when the lines between the saintly and the merely human blur even further. If the consequence of imitating the this-worldly sacrifices of saints might be an individual's fainting from dehydration or even dying of malnutrition, what could happen if the imitation extends to masses of ordinary men and women attempting to battle their own shared external demons? What if they moved beyond a special class of holy people who could fight on their behalf and in imitation of Christ, both in life and after death?

In the twelfth-century *vitae* I've discussed the presence of interior temptation was a sign of sanctity. Only the truly holy were seen as capable of proving themselves through inner battles with the devil. In the beginning they would face the obvious enemies—parents who opposed a religious calling,

slandorous gossips, the demands of children. Then, in the silence of their cells, after the skeptics were vanquished, doubt and despair might set in. These demons could remain hidden from outsiders as they tormented the bodies and souls of the saints. While the particulars of the devil's appearance changed based on social and cultural variables such as gender or age, the distinction between private and public battles is a shared part of this process. By analyzing this process we begin to understand the inner motivations and fears of some medieval men and women.

This was an exclusive group that could cut across boundaries of gender and language and nationality. For the vast majority of medieval Christians these terrifying inner battles were part of the world of imagination, as told about the lives of "their" holy people—the saints they venerated for their strength and ability to intercede with God. These more ordinary men and women and children focused on the devil in the details of their own lives—the demons of hunger and sickness, of famine and disease, of infant mortality and journeys on dangerous roads—and they expected their saints to fight for them in this world. But, when, over the course of the twelfth century and in the centuries that followed, Christians were increasingly convinced that their true enemies, and perhaps the source of all their suffering, were the Jews and the witches and the heretics who worked with the devil to bring evil to the world, they battled these external demons, on their own, with a vengeance.

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