

They Hasten toward Perfection: Virginal & Chaste Monks in the High Middle Ages

by

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Abstract

As perennial Christian ideals, virginity and chastity were frequent themes in medieval religious discourse. Male religious were frequently virgins and were expected to cultivate chastity; however, women not men were usually the focus of such discussions. But some monastic writers did draw on those models when considering their own spirituality, and it is worth knowing how they were understood and enlisted in those instances. To this end, I investigate five eleventh- and twelfth-century monks who wrote about monastic virginity or chastity: Anselm of Canterbury, Guibert of Nogent, Rupert of Deutz, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Ælred of Rievaulx. In my analysis, I uncover each author's perception of virginity/chastity. Thus, I reveal that Anselm's *Deploratio* is not about lost physical virginity or even sexual sin per se; it is a spiritual meditation driven by his immense fear that sinners would be forever damned. Guibert's work exposes what a treatise on virginity could become in the hands of an adolescent struggling with sexual desire and steeped in lessons taught by his monastery. Rupert's tract on virginity and masturbation portrays male virginity as tangible and potent. In so doing, it erects a barrier defending Rupert's work as an exegete against detractors. For his part, Bernard teaches that what matters most is chaste humility. He also consistently links virginity

with pride and false holiness, a strategy possibly linked with a battle between white and black monks. Finally, Ælred produces a model of monastic perfection that is terrifically masculine, distinctively different from virginity, and perfectly suited for his audience. In addition to uncovering each monk's unique perception of virginity and chastity, I call attention to similarities and differences in their thought and make conclusions based on those observations. Overall, I have found not only that virginity and chastity did matter to some medieval religious men but also that the way they handle those ideals can be tremendously revealing.

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List of Abbreviations

General

ACW	<i>Ancient Christian Writers</i>
CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis</i>
CFS	<i>Cistercian Fathers Series</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
Geist	Geistesgeschichte
SS	Scriptores
PL	<i>Patrologia cursus completes... series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols.

Ch 1: Anselm of Canterbury

<i>Anselmi opera</i>	Anselm, <i>S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia</i> , 6 vols.
CDH	Anselm, "Cur Deus Homo," <i>Anselmi opera</i> , 1: 7-122. Anselm, "Why God became a Man," <i>Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury</i> , 295-389.
<i>De conceptu</i>	Anselm, "De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato," <i>Anselmi opera</i> , 2:137-73. Anselm, "The Virgin Conception and Original Sin," <i>Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury</i> , 427-65.
<i>Ep</i>	Anselm, <i>S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia</i> , vol. 3-5. Anselm, <i>The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury</i> , 3 vols.
<i>Med 1</i>	Anselm, "Meditatio ad concitandum timorem," <i>Anselmi opera</i> , 3: 76-79. Anselm, "A Meditation to Stir up Fear," <i>Prayers and Meditations</i> , 221-24.
<i>Med 2</i>	Anselm, "Deploratio virginitatis male amissae," <i>Anselmi Opera</i> , 3: 80-83. Anselm, "A Lament for Virginitly Unhappily Lost," <i>Prayers and Meditations</i> , 225-27.
<i>VA (Vita Anselmi)</i>	Eadmer, <i>The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury</i> .

Ch 2: Guibert of Nogent

<i>Mono (Monodiae)</i>	Guibert, <i>Autobiographie</i> . Guibert, <i>A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent</i> .
<i>Opusc</i>	Guibert, <i>Opusculum de virginitate</i> , PL 156: 579-608.

Ch 3: Rupert of Deutz

<i>Ad Jov</i>	Jerome, <i>Adversus Jovinianum</i> , PL 23: 205-384.
	Jerome, <i>Against Jovinianus</i> , Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 6: 346-416.
<i>Canticum</i>	Rupert, <i>In Canticum Canticorum de incarnatione Domini</i> , CCCM26.
<i>Ep 22</i>	Jerome, <i>Ad Eustochium, Ep. 22, Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistolae</i> , CCCM54, 143-220.
	Jerome, <i>To Eustochium, Ltr. 22, The Letters of St. Jerome, vol. 1, ACW 33</i> , 134-79.
<i>Iohannis</i>	Rupert, <i>In euangelium sancti Iohannis</i> , CCCM9.
<i>Laes</i>	Rupert, <i>De laesione uirginitatis</i> , PL 170: 543-60.
<i>Quaestio</i>	Wibald of Stavelot, <i>Quaestio de laesione uirginitatis, et an possit consecrari corrupta</i> , PL 170: 543-46.
<i>Reg Ben</i>	Rupert, <i>Super quaedam capitula regulae Benedicti, or Liber de Apologeticis suis</i> , PL 170: 477-538.
<i>Sancta Trin</i>	Rupert, <i>De sancta Trinitate et operibus eius</i> , CCCM21-24.
<i>Sup Mat</i>	Rupert, <i>De Gloria et honore Filii hominis super Matthaeum</i> , CCCM29.

Ch 4: Bernard of Clairvaux

<i>Ad Jov</i>	Jerome, <i>Adversus Jovinianum</i> , PL 23: 205-384.
	Jerome, <i>Against Jovinianus</i> , Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 6: 346-416.
<i>Asspt (1-7)</i>	Bernard, <i>Sermo in assumptione BVM</i> , SBO 5: 228-74.
<i>Div</i>	Bernard, <i>Sermones de diversis</i> , SBO 6-1: 73-406.
<i>Ep</i>	Bernard, <i>Epistolae</i> , SBO 7 & 8.
	Bernard, <i>The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux</i> .
<i>Ep 22</i>	Jerome, <i>Ad Eustochium, Ep. 22, Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistolae</i> , CCCM54, 143-220.
	Jerome, <i>To Eustochium, Ltr. 22, The Letters of St. Jerome, vol. 1, ACW33</i> , 134-79.
<i>Hom (1-4)</i>	Bernard, <i>Homiliae in Laudibus virginis matris</i> , Oevres, 20: 104-239.
	Bernard, <i>Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary</i> , CFS18a.
<i>In lab</i>	Bernard, <i>In labore messis</i> (formerly <i>Div 37</i>), SBO 5: 222-28.
<i>Letters</i>	Bernard, <i>The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux</i> .
<i>Mor</i>	Bernard, <i>Ep de moribus et officiis episcoporum</i> , SBO 7: 100-31.
	Bernard, "Letter 42: To Henry, Archbishop of Sens," <i>Bernard of Clairvaux: On Baptism and the Office of Bishops</i> , 37-82.
<i>Nat BVM</i>	Bernard, <i>Sermo in nativitate B.V.M.</i> , SBO 5: 275-88.
<i>O Asspt</i>	Bernard, <i>Sermo infra octavam assumptiones</i> , SBO 5: 262-74.

<i>Œuvres</i>	Bernard, <i>Œuvres complètes, Œuvres complètes</i> , 16 Vols.
<i>Par</i>	Bernard, <i>Parabola</i> , SBO 6-2: 261-303.
	Bernard, “The Parables,” <i>Bernard of Clairvaux: The Parables & the Sentences</i> , 11-112.
<i>SofS</i>	Bernard, <i>Œuvres</i> , vols. 10-14.
	Bernard, <i>On the Song of Songs</i> , 4 vols. (listed as <i>Song I, II, III, & IV</i>).
<i>SBO</i>	Bernard, <i>Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia</i> , 8 vols.
<i>Sent</i>	Bernard, <i>Sententiae</i> , SBO 6-2: 7-255
	Bernard, “The Sentences,” <i>Bernard of Clairvaux: The Parables & the Sentences</i> , 113-458.
<i>Song I, II, III, IV</i>	Bernard, <i>On the Song of Songs</i> , 4 vols.
<i>Works</i>	Bernard, <i>Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works</i> .

Ch 5: Ælred of Rievaulx

<i>CCCM2A</i>	Ælred, <i>Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Sermones I-XLVI</i> , CCCM2A.
<i>CCCM2B</i>	Ælred, <i>Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Sermones XLVII-LXXXIV</i> , CCCM2B.
<i>De Jesu</i>	Ælred, <i>De Jesu puero duodenni, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica</i> , CCCM1, 249-78.
	Ælred, “Jesus at the Age of Twelve,” <i>Ælred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer</i> , CSF 2, 3-39.
<i>De oneribus</i>	Ælred, <i>Ælredi Rievallensis: Homelie de oneribus prophetis Isaiæ</i> , CCCM2D.
<i>Ep 22</i>	Jerome, <i>Ad Eustochium, Ep. 22, Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistolae</i> , CCCM54, 143-220.
	Jerome, <i>To Eustochium, Ltr. 22, The Letters of St. Jerome, vol. 1, ACW33</i> , 134-79.
<i>Inst</i>	Ælred, <i>De institutione inclusarum, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica</i> , CCCM1, 637-82.
	Ælred, “Rule of Life for a Recluse,” <i>Ælred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer</i> , CFS2, 43-102.
<i>Lit Ser</i>	Ælred, <i>The Liturgical Sermons: The First Clairvaux Collection</i> , CFS58.
<i>Vita Ed</i>	Ælred, <i>Vita Sancti Edwardi</i> , PL 195: 737-90.
	Ælred, “The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor,” <i>Ælred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works</i> , CFS56, 125-243.
<i>Vita Æl</i>	Walter Daniel, <i>The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx</i> , 1978 ed.
<i>Spec</i>	Ælred, <i>Speculum caritatis, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica</i> , CCCM1, 3-161.
	Ælred, <i>The Mirror of Charity</i> , CFS17.
“Sermons”	Ælred, “Sermons on the Feasts of Saint Mary,” <i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i> 32.1(1997): 37-125.

Map



Though significantly altered, this map is adapted from: Angus MacKay, ed., *Atlas of Medieval Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 70.

Chronology of Lives & Works

1033	Anselm of Canterbury is born in Aosta
1055 or 64	Guibert of Nogent is born in northern France
1056	Anselm leaves his home in Aosta
1060	Anselm becomes a monk at Bec
1063	Anselm becomes prior of Bec
1067 or 76	Guibert's mother and tutor retire to Saint-Germer Guibert enters/becomes a monk at Saint-Germer shortly thereafter
1070	Anselm writes <i>Deploratio virginitatis</i>
1070-1075	Anselm writes other early prayers & meditations
1075 ca.	Rupert of Deutz born in or near Liège
1075-1078	Guibert and Anselm meet Guibert writes <i>Opusculum de virginitate</i>
1078	Anselm elected abbot of Bec
1082	Rupert becomes a monk at Saint Lawrence, just outside of Liège
1090	Bernard of Clairvaux is born in Burgundy
1093 ca.	Anselm writes letters to Gunhilda Anselm becomes archbishop of Canterbury
1099-1100	Anselm writes <i>De conceptu virginali</i>
1100	Rupert experiences first series of visions
1104	Guibert elected abbot of Nogent
1108	Rupert experiences second series of visions Rupert ordained as priest & begins writing
1109	Anselm dies
1109-1112	Rupert writes <i>De divinis officiis</i>

1109-1114	Eadmer completes his <i>Vita Anselmi</i> and <i>Historia Novorum</i>
1110	Ælred of Rievaulx is born in Northumberland Bernard becomes a monk at Cîteaux
1113-1115 ca.	Rupert's Eucharistic debate with Alger in Liège
1115	Bernard elected abbot of Clairvaux
1114-1116	Rupert writes <i>Commentary on John</i> Rupert's Predestinarian debate in Liège
1115	Guibert writes <i>Monodiae</i> Bernard elected abbot of Clairvaux
1116	Rupert on trial for heresy
1116-1117	Rupert in exile at Siegburg
1117-1118	Rupert's teaching about the angels attacked in Liège
1120	Rupert elected abbot of Deutz
1121-1124 ca.	Rupert writes <i>De laesione virginitate</i>
1121-1125	Guibert dies
early/mid 1120s	Bernard writes <i>Homilies in Praise of Mary</i> Bernard writes apologetic works: Letter to Robert of Châtillon <i>Apologia</i>
1124 ca.	Rupert's teaching attacked by Norbert, Rupert charged with heresy Ælred joins King David I of Scotland and his family at court
1125	Rupert writes <i>Commentary on the Rule</i> and <i>Commentary on the Song</i>
1125-1127	Rupert writes <i>Commentary on Matthew</i>
1129	Rupert dies
1134	Ælred becomes a monk at Rievaulx
1135	Bernard begins <i>Sermons on the Song</i> (unfinished at his death)

- 1142 Ælred becomes novice master at Rievaulx
- 1143 Ælred writes *Speculum*, at Bernard's request
- 1147 Ælred elected abbot of Rievaulx
- 1153 Bernard dies
- 1160-62 Ælred writes *Rule*
- 1163 Ælred writes *Vita Edwardi*
- 1167 Ælred dies

Introduction

“[W]e know that in the holy and universal Church there are three orders of the faithful in either sex, and if three orders, three grades.” None of these people are sinless, continues Abbot Abbo of Fleury, but the first, comprised of married men and women, is good; the second made up of the chaste (such as clerics) or the widowed is better; and the third, consisting of virgins, monks, and nuns, is the best.¹ The wisdom this late-tenth-century monk shared with the kings Hugh Capet and Robert the Pious was in step with a long and illustrious Christian tradition: Christian society was regularly divided into three orders, according to sexual status (the married, the chaste, and the virginal); those most detached from the sexual economy were the most revered and could anticipate the greatest heavenly reward.²

The Christian Church began promoting sexual renunciation as an ideal during its earliest years. And it continued to do so through to the Middle Ages and beyond. Virginity and chastity were meaningful because they entailed a permanent state of sexual purity, which brought human beings closer to God.³ According to Christian belief, Adam and Eve’s Fall had corrupted the human race terribly, causing alienation from God. The goal of the religious was to recover, through God’s Grace, that lost pure state and reestablish union with God, as far as humanly possible. Though Grace was understood to be a free and unmerited gift from God

¹ Abbo of Fleury, *Apologeticus ad Hugonem et Rodbertum*, PL 139: 463: “...ex utroque sexu fidelium tres ordines, ac si tres gradus, in sancta et universali Ecclesia esse novimus; quorum licet nullus sine peccato sit, tamen primus est bonus, secundus melior, tertius est optimus. Et primus quidem ordo est in utroque sexu conjugatorum; secundus continentium, vel viduarum; tertius virginum vel sanctimonialium. Virorum tantum similiter tres sunt gradus vel ordines, quorum primus est laicorum, secundus clericorum, tertius monachorum.”

² For an illuminating and detailed analysis of medieval classifications of society, see Giles Constable, “The Orders of Society,” *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 249-360.

requiring no individual action, men and women could make themselves worthy of it through intense renunciation and mortification. The more a person disassociated him- or herself from worldly desires, the more he or she prepared the body and soul for an intimate connection with God.⁴ For the religious, renunciation encompassed every facet of life—monks and nuns rejected sexuality, restricted diets, wore coarse and simple clothing, avoided daily comforts, and limited social relationships. Sexual renunciation was the most significant symbol of the ascetic's spiritual endeavor; however, all of these things were incorporated into the ideals of virginity and chastity.

As perennial Christian ideals, virginity and chastity were frequent themes in religious discourse; nevertheless, they were considered especially pertinent for the lives of religious women.⁵ Male religious were frequently virgins, and chastity was certainly a virtue they were

³ Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church," *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 427-28.

⁴ Jean Leclercq, *The Life of Perfection: Points of View on the Essence of the Religious State*, trans. Leonard J. Doyle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1961), 17-19. The exemplars for this type of ascetic striving were the desert Fathers and Mothers of late antiquity. For discussions the desert ascetics, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 213-40; David G. R. Keller, *Oasis of Wisdom: The Worlds of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

⁵ Any survey of works about virginity and chastity from the patristic and medieval periods would reveal this point. For a catalog of the early Christian treatises on virginity, see Thomas Camelot, "Les traités De virginitate au IV^e siècle," *Mystique et continence: travaux scientifiques du VII^e congrès international d'Avon* (Bruges: Desclée, De Brouwer), 273-92. Also, on the principle sources and patristic treatments of the ideal, see John M. Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 30-58; Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995), 156-81; Maud Burnett McInerney, "Androgynous Virgins and the Threat of Rape in the Fourth Century," *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 15-83; Roger Steven Evans, *Sex and Salvation: Virginity as a Soteriological Paradigm in Ancient Christianity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003); Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993). A rare exception was the treatise Gregory of Nyssa wrote for his brother Basil's community of monks some time before 371: Gregory of Nyssa, *Traité de la virginité*, ed. & trans. Michel Aubineau, Sources Chrétiennes; 119 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966)/Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," *Ascetical Works, The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation*; 58, trans. Virginia Woods Callahan (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967). Some were directed to a mixed audience of men and women. For example, see Augustine, "De sancta virginitate," *Augustine: De bono coniugali, De sancta virginitate*, Early Christian Texts, ed. & trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 66-147. In his masterful study of the early-Christian period, Peter Brown regularly addresses the topic

expected to cultivate, still the topic was rarely the preoccupation of early Christian and medieval religious writing for men.⁶ Ruth Evans has suggested several reasons for the materialization of this differentiated application of the ideals:

Partly because of increased devotion to Mary and the rise of women in monasticism; partly because virginity was a precious object to be guarded by the senses and the feminine was synonymous with the sensual; partly for economic reasons: within medieval systems of inheritance and land tenure, the woman's body is male property and the virgin wife guarantees the purity of the family line.⁷

Thus, patterns of devotion, concepts of gender, and economic commonplaces all contributed to a steady and rather eager fixation on women's sexuality.

The focus on female virginity and chastity and the relative disinterest in the topic as it related to religious men in the early-Christian and medieval centuries has been mirrored (until recently) in modern critical writing. Sarah Salih sums up well the scholarly rationale for discounting male virginity and chastity: "For men of the church, clerical status includes and trumps virginity, making virginity in itself relatively insignificant...." Often male saints are praised for their sexual renunciation, she continues, but:

with respect to both women and men. In so doing, he uncovers what the ideals meant for male spirituality at that time: Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Brown, "Notion of Virginity," 427-43, esp. 427-28. Cloke notes that even if a tract was addressed to a mixed audience it still spoke only of women's virginity: Cloke, *Female Man of God*, 60. Evans catalogues some of the key works on virginity from the medieval period in Ruth Evans, "Virginites," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, eds. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24-25.

⁶ Indeed, since all priests, monks, and canons were expected to be chaste, female virgins would have been greatly outnumbered by men who were chaste or virginal: Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 17.

⁷ Evans, "Virginites," 22-23. Also, see the discussion of the social value of virginity in Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 258-77.

...their sexual status is rarely the locus of their sanctity, as is often the case for women. A saint like John the Evangelist may be celebrated for his virginity, but virginity is only one of his many holy achievements. There are other things men can do to demonstrate their sanctity; women's choices are fewer.⁸

As Kathleen Coyne Kelly aptly puts it, “virginity by itself... is never enough to define a man, but is one attribute among many.”⁹ Thus, the dearth in early and medieval Christian discourse on the topic coupled with the modern perception that sexual status was ancillary to men's identities has meant that academic research has rarely concentrated on male virginity and chastity.

1 The Scope of my Research

Virginity and chastity *were* ideals for monks and some monastic writers *did* draw on the concepts when considering their own religiosity. These are the thoughts that inspired the research of this volume. For, even if virginity and chastity did not have the same import when applied to men, even if discussions of those ideals are significantly less prevalent in works about male religious, it is, nonetheless, worthwhile knowing what it meant for them when they did attach the ideals to their own spiritual pursuits.

To this end, I identified several monks who wrote at some length about monastic virginity or chastity: Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), Guibert of Nogent (ca. 1055-64-ca. 1121-25), Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075-1129), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), and Ælred of Rievaulx (1110-1167). Certain of these authors—Anselm, Guibert, and Rupert—wrote entire tracts on male virginity. Anselm penned a meditation on lost virginity that takes the perspective of a

⁸ Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 17.

⁹ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), 102. Also, see Eleanor McLaughlin, “Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Christ in Medieval Theology,” *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon

male religious; Guibert composed a traditional (except for its focus on men) treatise on virginity; and Rupert wrote a treatise in the form of a letter about the impact of masturbation on both male and female virginity. All of these men were traditional Benedictine monks¹⁰ from various regions of Western Europe: Anselm was born in northern Italy but made monasteries in Normandy and southern England his home for forty-five years; Rupert lived most of his life at a monastery just outside of Liège (in modern Belgium); Guibert spent his life in northern France near Laon. The other two authors of this study, Bernard and Ælred, were Cistercians—the former, a Burgundian who lived his adult years in monasteries located near Dijon, and the latter from northeastern England. Neither of these men wrote full texts on male virginity, but each, in his work, considers virginity and chastity sufficiently enough to provide insight into his perception of those ideals.

I focused my research on the eleventh and twelfth centuries because it was a period of great change for the Church in the West. For one, at this time the Church had begun to fervently enforce clerical celibacy. The Roman Church had prohibited marriage for the higher clergy and required chastity of married clerics of the major orders since the fifth century. However, these regulations were often ignored and infractions overlooked until the eleventh century when men of the so-called Gregorian Reform began to campaign in earnest against clerical incontinence.¹¹

and Schuster, 1974), 234–35; Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 28–34.

¹⁰ I use the term “traditional Benedictine” to distinguish this group of monks from those of the new religious communities (such as the Cistercians) who were also Benedictines. Both traditional and new monks followed the Rule of Benedict, but new monks had significantly altered traditional Benedictine practice (to their mind, they were following that Rule *more* strictly than the traditional monks). Traditional Benedictines are also known as “black monks” and their new/Cistercian monk counterparts “white monks”—this is with reference to their undyed robes.

¹¹ Critical scholarship on clerical celibacy and the Gregorian reform is vast. To name only a few, one might begin by looking at: Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates*

The goal of this reform effort was to ensure that all members of the higher clergy were both celibate (unmarried) and chaste (sexually abstinent). This meant these were no longer features that distinguished monks from other types of male religious.

There were other changes during this era as well. Among these were new monastic recruiting policies that altered demographics within monasteries.¹² Traditionally, monasticism's chief source of recruitment was oblation. According to this custom, parents handed their children over to monasteries and convents as religious offerings. However, in the twelfth century, this had begun to change, especially in new religious communities like those of the Cistercians. These new monastic communities had policies against admitting children; instead, they populated their foundations with adult men who took up that way of life voluntarily. Thus, the older traditional Benedictine monasteries were comprised largely of oblates who, given their age of entry, were also likely virgins. Conversely, Cistercian and other new religious communities were filled with monks who had grown up in the secular world. These men often had had some form of sexual experience before entering their cloisters. Since these new communities were no longer comprised primarily of sexually innocent virgins, I have sought to discover if men of these groups addressed and conceived of virginity and chastity differently than the virginal monks.

(Toronto: E. Mellen Press, 1982); Michael Frassetto, ed., *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); Charles A. Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church," *Church History* 57 Supplement: Centennial Issue (1988), 10-26. Jo Ann McNamara has famously argued that the imposition of these standards on the secular clergy precipitated a male identity crisis. See, for example, Jo Ann McNamara, "Chaste Marriage and Clerical Celibacy," *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), 22-33; Jo Ann McNamara, "Canossa and the Ungendering of Public Man," *Render Unto Caesar: The Religious Sphere in World Politics*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet and Donald W. Treadgold (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1995), 131-50; Jo Ann McNamara, "The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, eds. Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3-29.

2 Concepts and Methodologies

In my research, I carefully analyzed works written by monastic authors of the eleventh and twelfth centuries to uncover how they conceived of male virginity and chastity. But the terms “virginity” and “chastity” are not as straightforward as one might presume or hope. Virginity is a complex idea that has sustained diverse yet interrelated meanings over the course of the Middle Ages and earlier. Also, the words “chastity” and “virginity” have a complicated relationship with each other.

2.1 Physical & Spiritual Virginity

Since it first became an ideal to emulate in Christianity, notions of what constitutes virginity have been diverse but interwoven. Simply said, some understood virginity chiefly as a condition of the body, while others identified it primarily as a spiritual state. Clarissa Atkinson has written one of the classic works on this topic; in it, she offers an excellent description of these two forms or interpretations of virginity:

At one extreme, virginity is understood as a physiological state. The virgin is a person who has never experienced sexual intercourse: if the virgin is female, her hymen is unbroken. At the other extreme, virginity is defined as a moral or spiritual state—as purity, or humility, or that quality of spirit belonging to those whose primary relationship is with God.¹³

Thus, medieval writers who place primary emphasis on physical virginity look first to the body for evidence of a person’s virginal status. Those who stress this physical type of virginity are concerned with bodily integrity but not merely for the sake of the integrity. This physical

¹² Chapters 3 and 4 on Rupert Deutz and Bernard of Clairvaux take up this topic in detail.

interpretation is concerned with a physically pure body—both male and female—because it judges that virgins achieve spiritual perfection by transcending the limitations of body and materiality. In the view of those emphasizing physical virginity, virginity possesses an almost talismanic quality: physical purity restores the believer to humanity’s prelapsarian condition (as much as is possible); it also promotes him/her to the level of angels. One might think of Jerome as the patristic thinker who most clearly espouses this physical perspective.

Alternatively, spiritual virginity is concerned especially with the believer’s inner purity and his or her quality of character. Indeed, someone who emphasizes spiritual virginity would likely name someone a virgin if he or she were spiritually upright yet lacks physical virginity. The widowed or previously married could readily be deemed virgins under this model. A central image of this type of virginity is that of the virgin as spouse of Christ, and Augustine is usually recognized as promoting this perspective in his writing. These are the basic characteristics of the two types of virginity, which will be referred to throughout this volume as “physical virginity” and “spiritual virginity.”¹⁴

But it is not as simple as that; for, the two types of virginity are inextricably intertwined. They are tendencies rather than distinctively different ideas. Christian writers have always understood that virginity entails both physical and spiritual qualities. One would be hard-

¹³ Clarissa Atkinson, “Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass: The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages,” *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983), 133. For discussions of these two types of virginity, see Atkinson, “Precious Balsam,” 131-43; Newman, *WomanChrist*, 2-7, 30-31; Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 9-15.

¹⁴ The terms scholars have enlisted to describe these two forms of virginity have been various. In her work on figurations of female virginity, Sarah Salih lists many of them: physiological/spiritual, gnostic/feminist, anatomical/spiritual, virago/womanChrist: Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 8, 11. Each set of terms just given are associated, respectively, with the following scholars: Atkinson, “Precious Balsam,” 133; Bugge, *Virginitas*, 2, 6; Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 241; Newman, *WomanChrist*, 3. To the list compiled by Salih, can be added her own choice of terminology: militant/bridal. See, Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 12.

pressed to find an author who underscores spiritual virginity and sees no value in the physical aspect of virginity; and no writer emphasizing physical virginity would claim that the believer's internal state is meaningless. Also, some might seem to endorse one perspective at one point and the other elsewhere. Furthermore, those who highlight physical virginity often allow that certain pious people are still virgins even if physical integrity has been lost.¹⁵ Nonetheless, by looking carefully at a text, it is often possible to recognize that one or the other type of virginity is accentuated.

2.2 Virginity & Chastity

Virginity and chastity are both ideals espoused by the medieval Church. They are not the same, yet they defy attempts to make absolute distinctions between them. On the one hand, “*virginitas*” pertains to a person's sexual status. It suggests lifelong sexual abstinence for religious reasons. Thus, a virgin is a person who is sexually inexperienced and intends to maintain that condition until death. On the other hand, chastity (“*castitas*,” but also sometimes “*continentia*” and “*puclitia*”) connotes a permanent state of continence after an earlier period of sexual activity.¹⁶ Of course, both ideas—virginity and chastity—also have a spiritual component, which takes into account an individual's moral or spiritual state.

Complicating this seemingly simple distinction is the fact that, oftentimes, medieval authors use the terms “virginity” and “chastity” interchangeably, calling a person a virgin at one moment

¹⁵ See Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 9-15.

¹⁶ Payer notes that all of these terms are part of the “vocabulary of the virtues” concerned with sexual matters, but that they were used interchangeably and “resisted mutually exclusive definitions”: Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 154. For his analysis of all those terms in later medieval discourse, especially in the thought of Albert the Great (d. 1280) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), see Payer, *Bridling of Desire*, 154-78. Also, on the inconsistent use of these terms, see Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 2-3.

and chaste in the next.¹⁷ Furthermore, as the above discussion of physical and spiritual virginity has shown, authors might deem a person “a virgin,” who is technically only chaste, because he or she is morally or spiritually pure. Indeed, that person *is* a virgin according to this author’s definition. Hence, the terms “*virginitas*” and “*castitas*” (as well as “*continentia*” and “*pudicitia*”) are often transposable, and their definitions overlap.

For all these reasons, it can be a challenge to discern what exactly is under discussion in medieval works that consider virginity and chastity. Still, it is unwise to approach a medieval text with the notion that those ideas are synonyms or that it is not possible to distinguish the concept under discussion at any given time. To do so would be to impose rather large assumptions on an author’s thought and could restrict the type and quality of information gleaned from the text. If an author speaks in terms of chastity but not virginity to his monks, or if he speaks of virginity with respect to women but chastity with respect to men, this is meaningful. Thus, I approached the texts of this study with the supposition that virginity and chastity are ideals that do not necessarily share the same meaning, and I teased out how they were understood by each author by scrutinizing his word choices and language. Anselm, Guibert, and Rupert all wrote works specifically and obviously about the ideal of virginity. No matter whether they define virginity as a chiefly physical or chiefly spiritual ideal, they are speaking in terms of virginity. In other words, even if one of them defines virgins as those who are spiritually pure and holds little regard for sexual status, to him, these people are virgins and the concept he is considering is virginity, not chastity. Unlike those three, Bernard and Ælred did not write single works about virginity. They did however both write about virginity *and* chastity in various works. And they wrote about them in a manner indicating that, to their

¹⁷ Chastity was also used to refer to monogamous sexuality—appropriate sex within marriage: Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 3; Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 16. Since the focus of this study is cloistered men, whether “*castitas*” was

minds, the words conveyed different meanings. Thus, for them, I investigate both chastity and virginity. This methodology helped me extract elements of all these monks' thought that would otherwise have been missed.

Of course, as has by now become apparent, when a monk talks about virginity, he could be thinking in terms of spiritual virginity or physical virginity. Thus, I have allowed each author's unique definition be the guide for how I use the terms. For example, if my author's emphasis is spiritual virginity and he speaks of sexually experienced but spiritually pure people as virgins, then that is how I use the word throughout that chapter. At times, my discussions concentrate on physical intactness or the lack there of. On these occasions, I use terms such as "physical virgin" or "physically virginal" as opposed to "chaste" or "continent," and I describe people as "sexually inexperienced" or "sexually innocent" versus "sexually experienced." At all times, I have endeavored to make my meaning transparent.

3 The State of the Question

Male religious virginity and chastity during the Middle Ages has not been a popular subject for scholarly analysis. Nevertheless, some remarkable work has been produced on the topic. From historically based analyses, to investigations of virginity/chastity with respect to anatomy and physiology and gender, to studies comparing what was said to women and to men, the portrait of medieval male religious virginity has begun to fill out and take on interesting contours.

being used in this way was not a concern.

3.1 As Meaningful

Recognizing that virginity and chastity were in fact monastic ideals, various scholars have endeavored to determine how monks conceived of them and what role they played in the lives and thought of cloistered men. To this end, a number of scholars have identified and analyzed texts that take up that topic. For example, Catherine Cubitt has focused on the writing of the monk Ælfric of Eynsham (d. ca. 1010). As she sees it, virginity was central to the monastic reform movement and chastity and virginity were fundamental to Ælfric's theology. And for him, virginity was a virtue associated chiefly with men, not women.¹⁸ Another work, which has attracted quite a bit of attention of late, is Aldhelm of Malmesbury's late seventh-century virginity treatise. His work is of interest to those who study perceptions of monastic virginity because, within its pages, is a catalogue not just of female virgins but also of male virgins—this is something wholly unique to Aldhelm's treatise.¹⁹ The work is addressed to the nuns at Barking, and scholars have always assumed women religious were its intended audience, while also recognizing that, since Barking was a double monastery, it may also have considered men as potential readers. However, recently it has been forcefully argued (especially by Felice Lifshitz and Emma Pettit) that Aldhelm may have written his tract with a specifically male audience in mind.²⁰ In addition to investigating monastic virginity/chastity, some medievalists

¹⁸ Catherine Cubitt, "Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England," *Gender & History* 12.1 (2000), 1-32. Also, see Katrien Heene, *The Legacy of Paradise: Marriage, Motherhood, and Woman in Carolingian Edifying Literature* (New York: P. Lang, 1997), 118-19.

¹⁹ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 95; Michael Lapidge, "Introduction," *Aldhelm, The Prose Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael W. Herren (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979), 57. See Aldhelm, *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis Prosa de virginitate: cum glosa latina atque anglosaxonica*, ed. Scott Gwara, Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001)/Aldhelm, *Aldhelm, The Prose Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael W. Herren (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979).

²⁰ Some of the excellent scholarship on Aldhelm's treatise includes: Lapidge, "Introduction," 1-19; Felice Lifshitz, "Priestly Women, Virginal Men: Litanies and Their Discontents," *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 86-102; Carol Braun Pasternack, "The Sexual Practices of Virginity and Chastity in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*," *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, eds. Daniel Gillmore Calder, Carol Braun Pasternack, et al. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 93-120; Emma

have studied perceptions of royal virginity. This would not be immediately pertinent to the work of this volume, except that Ælred of Rievaulx (one of the authors of this study) wrote a *vita* in honor of King Edward the Confessor, which plays a role in my analysis. Thus, essays such as Joanna Huntington's—in which she argues that Ælred amplified virginity in his version of Edward's life—have been quite useful for my work.²¹

Besides those who have studied specific works focused on monastic virginity and chastity, others have approached the topic more broadly, investigating the ideals as handled on an institutional, rather than individual level. For example, in his 1958 article, M. -A. Lassus looks at the Cistercian perception of virginity and stresses the centrality of that ideal for that group's spirituality.²² More recently, Albrecht Diem has considered how chastity came to be fundamental to the self-definition of early medieval monks by probing, especially, monastic rules from the fifth and sixth centuries.²³ Finally, Isabelle Cochelin has explored how the monks of Cluny taught chastity to the young members of their communities.²⁴

Pettit, "Holiness and Masculinity in Aldhelm's *Opus Geminatum De virginitate*," *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 8-23; O'Sullivan Sinéad, "Aldhelm's *De virginitate*—Patristic Pastiche or Innovative Exposition?," *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 12 (1998), 271-95.

²¹ Joanna Huntington, "Edward the Celibate, Edward the Saint: Virginity in the Construction of Edward the Confessor," *Medieval Virginites*, eds. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 119-39. Also, see Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 113-31; Katherine J. Lewis, "Becoming a Virgin King: Richard II and Edward the Confessor," *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, eds. Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 86-100.

²² M. -A. Lassus, "Le mystère de la virginité dans la pensée cistercienne," *Collectanea ordinis cisterciensium reformatorum* 20 (1958), 3-15.

²³ Albrecht Diem, *Das monastische Experiment: die Rolle der Keuschheit bei der Entstehung des westlichen Klosterwesens* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2005). Also, see Godfrey's study of the rules and regulations about chastity presented in various monastic rules: Aaron W. Godfrey, "Rules and Regulation: Monasticism and Chastity," *Homo Carnalis: The Carnal Aspect of Medieval Human Life*, ed. H.R. Lemay (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1990), 45-58.

²⁴ Isabelle Cochelin, "Le dur apprentissage de la virginité: Cluny, XI siècle," *Au cloître et dans le monde: femmes, hommes et sociétés (IXe-XVe siècle)* (Paris: University Press of Paris-Sorbonne, 2000), 119-32; Isabelle Cochelin, "Besides the Book: Using the Body to Mould the Mind—Cluny in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Medieval Monastic Education*, eds. George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 21-34.

The work produced by all of these scholars who have in various ways endeavored to uncover what these ideal meant for medieval monks has begun to fill out the rather sparse landscape that is our current knowledge of monastic virginity and chastity. My own scrutiny of medieval texts and their authors contributes further to the exciting work they have begun.

3.1.1 *Chronological narratives*

Another historical approach to the study of virginity and chastity has been to trace the development of those ideals over the course of time. As discussed earlier, scholars have recognized two different but interlinked strands of virginity. In addition to noticing the presence of these two forms, some scholars who study the ideal have conjectured that each notion prevailed at a different period in history. Not all who adopt this perspective locate the transition from one type to the other at the same point. But, generally, the shift is thought to have occurred over the course of the twelfth or thirteenth century, with the physical type predominating in texts in the first period and spiritual virginity dominating after the thirteenth century until the fifteenth.²⁵ These scholars recognize that both models were present throughout the history of Christianity. Moreover, they do not believe the one was eradicated by the other. Nonetheless, they propose that in the later centuries the spiritual had come to prevail over the physical.²⁶

An important element of this argument is the conclusion that when the spiritual model came to the fore, virginity transformed into an ideal chiefly attributable to women. In his well-known

²⁵ See, for example, Atkinson, "Precious Balsam," 131-43; Bugge, *Virginitas*; Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 266-74; Newman, *WomanChrist*, 30-31; Thomas Renna, "Virginity and Chastity in Early Cistercian Thought," *Studia Monastica* 26.1 (1984), 43-51; Thomas Renna, "Virginity in the Life of Christina of Markyate and Aelred of Rievaulx's Rule," *American Benedictine Review* 36.1 (1985), 79-92; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "The Virgin's Tale," *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and all her Sect*, eds. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 166.

monograph on virginity, John Bugge formulates the thesis in the following manner. During the early-Christian period, virginity was gender neutral, active, and endorsed as an ideal for both men and women. Early Christian writers equated virginity with a renunciation of fallen materiality and saw it as a means to attain spiritual perfection. But in the later Middle Ages (between 1150 and 1250), it became an ideal specifically attributable to women. Theologians had always understood the virgin as *sponsa Christi* (the spouse of Christ), his argument continues, but, while in earlier centuries they characterized that relationship as a wholly spiritual union, at this transformational point they had begun to envision the virgin's role as spouse in terms that mirrored the passive role expected of women in human sexual relationships—thus, not *sponsa* as *soul* in *union* with Christ, but *sponsa* as *virgin wed* to Christ.²⁷ At this point, he says, the *sponsa* allegory “was used to celebrate the humanity of the Bridegroom and to express the spiritual relationship of the virgin woman to Christ in the explicit language of sexual passion....” The result was the “irretrievable identification of virginity with womankind.”²⁸ Generally speaking, scholars agree with Bugge that virginity became ‘feminized’ over time. However, many have questioned his methodology and some of his conclusions.²⁹

²⁶ See, for example, Atkinson, “Precious Balsam,” 133. Bugge acknowledges that the ‘older’ images of virginity appear in texts as late as the thirteenth century, but argues that their presence is a result of monasticism’s conservative nature and not because virginity was still perceived in that manner: Bugge, *Virginitas*, 132-33.

²⁷ Bugge, *Virginitas*, 2-4, 106, 134. For his thesis, see especially chapters 3 and 4.

²⁸ Bugge, *Virginitas*, 135. For his entire argument, see 90-96, 135-37. Bynum points out that medieval monks did not necessarily associate the feminine with female in the way people do today: Caroline Walker Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Constance H. Berman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 162.

²⁹ See, for example, Jean Leclercq, “Review of *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* by John Bugge,” *Medium Aevum* 46 (1977), 129-31; Joseph S. Wittig, “Review of *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* by John Bugge,” *Speculum* 52.4 (1977), 938-41. Also, see Bynum who takes issue with Bugge’s assumption that women, especially, were attracted to images of God as mother: Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” 141 and n. 9 on same page.

Thomas Renna is one such author who has questioned Bugge's conclusions. In his quick survey of monastic perceptions of virginity and chastity, beginning with the Greek Fathers and ending with Bernard of Clairvaux, Renna concurs that virginity gradually became an ideal associated specifically with women, but he disagrees with one of Bugge's central arguments: that virginity is central to the thought of Bernard of Clairvaux.³⁰ Renna objects, arguing instead that Bernard and the Cistercians were part of the trend to "internalize chastity"—to make it chiefly about purity and the contemplative life.³¹

Most scholars tend to agree with the idea of a twofold virginity that shifted in emphasis over the course of time and became especially attributable to women.³² But in recent years, they have begun to place more weight on the notion that virginity and chastity are organic and constructed. Scholars have always recognized that both concepts of virginity have existed since the early-Christian period. Of late, however, they acknowledge this concurrence without imposing a theory of progression upon it—they accept that either type might have received emphasis at any time during the medieval period, depending on the circumstances or the inclination of the medieval author. Furthermore, these scholars are mindful of the various ways the medieval audience may have understood these depictions of virginity. They see the ideals as less susceptible to overarching characterizations and study each example on its own merits.³³ As such, the clearly defined categories proposed by Bugge and others have given way to more

³⁰ Renna, "Virginity and Chastity," 53-54. This was also Lassus's central argument. Renna disagrees with his conclusions as well.

³¹ Renna, "Virginity and Chastity," 43-44. Also, see Renna, "Virginity in the Life of Christina," 79-92.

³² Although Sarah Salih argues, basically, that there are so many exceptions to these general observations and so much of it is subject to interpretation that it is more legitimate to approach virginity as always having had multiple forms and multiple implications for gender identity: Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 9-15.

³³ For scholars who stress this perspective, see Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, et al., eds., *Medieval Virginites* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Kelly, *Performing Virginity*; Salih, *Versions of Virginity*; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Chaste Bodies: Frames and Experiences," *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 25-42; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture, c. 1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorisations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

complex and pluralistic understandings of what virginity meant to the people of the Middle Ages.

I approached my research with the perspective modeled so well by scholars who look at virginity for its own sake and who stress the notion of virginity as multiple. I have assumed that virginity/chastity's definition is contingent on the concerns and life experiences of the individual composing the text, the audience for whom it is formulated, and the purpose for which the topic is addressed. Commenting upon his own approach to studying Ælred of Rievaulx, John Sommerfeldt has reflected: "A book requires an author, and I have tried mightily to make Aelred the author of this book. Aelred's teachings are, I believe, best presented by him, for Aelred understands himself far better than any commentator could."³⁴ His is the tack I have taken with my authors. Rather than seeking to discover how my author's perception fits into the box I have designed, I listened carefully to his words and waited to hear what he had to tell me about his understanding of virginity and chastity. I also assumed that each author's conception is unique and dependent upon the writer's background, audience, concerns, and culture. Thus, with each author I sought to uncover what influences may have shaped his portrayal of the ideals.

It was not my intention to trace the progression of these ideals over the course of time. However, the lives of the monks whose work I scrutinized span a broad period—from Anselm of Canterbury who was born in 1033 to Ælred of Rievaulx who died in 1167—and included members from diverse groups—traditional Benedictines and Cistercians. Thus, I have been able to take stock of any trends or patterns that emerged. Thomas Renna's work was helpful

³⁴ John R. Sommerfeldt, *Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness* (New York: The Newman Press, 2005), xvii.

for my own investigation. Like me, he handles “*virginitas*” and “*castitas*” as separate ideals.³⁵ Thus, although he touches only briefly upon each monk’s perception, his observations have been valuable. Additionally Renna, Bugge, and Lassus (discussed earlier) all focus on the Cistercians. Since two of the monks studied within these pages are Cistercians, those scholars’ analyses have been instructive, and I have had an opportunity to consider their conclusions about the centrality of virginity to Cistercian spirituality.

3.2 As Conceptually Problematic

Some modern critical writing has approached the topic of virginity and chastity from the perspective that male virginity was conceptually problematic for medieval writers because of male physiology and anatomy. For example, Pierre Payer has observed that thirteenth-century thinkers had trouble assigning one simple definition to virginity—is it characterized chiefly by spiritual purity, or is it a quality attributable to those who possess physical integrity? And he suggests several reasons for their complex understanding of the ideal. Among these, Payer argues, is male virginity’s lack of “meaningful physical integrity.” Men’s bodies have no anatomical marker to point to as a sign of virginity. This, he posits, may have encouraged medieval writers to differentiate different kinds of virginity, so they could emphasize the type that focuses on internal morality and purity.”³⁶ The implication of Payer’s comments is that without developing a definition of virginity that looked chiefly to moral and spiritual qualities, many medieval thinkers would have been hard-pressed to characterize men as virgins.

³⁵ Unfortunately, Bugge and Lassus both subsume “chastity” under the category of “virginity.” This has been one of the criticism’s launched at Bugge: Leclercq, “Review of *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* by John Bugge,” 130; Wittig, “Review of *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* by John Bugge,” 940. For Lassus’s work, see Lassus, “Le mystère,” 3-15.

³⁶ Payer, *Bridling of Desire*, 162.

Approaching the idea of ‘male virginity as conceptually problematic’ from a slightly different angle, Maud McNerney avers that unlike women, men have no ‘inside’ to be sealed or to contain the Divine.³⁷ Thus, she purports, for men the measure for virginity is not what is kept out but what is kept in: the criterion is non-ejaculation.³⁸ Since that is a practically impossible aim, she continues, chastity and virginity became interchangeable terms when applied to men. “What, after all,” she asks rhetorically, “is a male virgin?”³⁹ McNerney’s conclusion that there is ‘no such thing’ as a male virgin takes shape when she investigates the thought of Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179). Though Hildegard does refer to men in her discussions of virginity, McNerney argues, she hesitates to call them virgins and instead speaks of them as possessing virginal *qualities*. This, she claims, is because for Hildegard virginity is physical and inherently feminine—men cannot possess virginal integrity and therefore cannot fall under this classification.⁴⁰

³⁷ Maud Burnett McNerney, “Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr,” *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages*, eds. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 57. This statement was specifically with reference to the patristic period. But, elsewhere, she affirms that the same holds true for the Middle Ages: “...virginity implied a state of bodily integrity imagined, in the age of Abelard no less than in that of Origen, as both normative and definitive for women in ways that were deeply problematic for men”: Maud Burnett McNerney, “Pelagius, Rupert, and the Problem of Male Virginity in Hrotsvitha and Hildegard,” *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 144. However, she does note later in her essay that in the medieval period male virginity “was not quite so inconceivable” (14).

³⁸ This, she proposes, explains why medieval religious men expressed such anxiety about nocturnal emissions: McNerney, “Rhetoric, Power, Integrity,” 58; Maud Burnett McNerney, “Like a Virgin: The Problem of Male Virginity in the Symphonia,” *Hildegard of Bingen: A Book of Essays*, ed. Maud Burnett McNerney (New York: Garland Pub., 1998), 148. On nocturnal emissions, see Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 14–34; C. Leyser, “Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emission and the Limits of Celibacy in the Early Middle Ages,” *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 103–20; Jacqueline Murray, “Men’s Bodies, Men’s Minds: Seminal Emissions and Sexual Anxiety in the Middle Ages,” *Annual Review of Sex Research Mount Vernon* 8 (1997), 1–26.

³⁹ McNerney, “Rhetoric, Power, Integrity,” 57.

⁴⁰ See McNerney, “Like a Virgin,” 133–54; McNerney, “Pelagius, Rupert, and the Problem of Male Virginity,” 152–61.

For all the modern scholars in this group, male virginity has little power to signify and, consequently, little potency in medieval thought or writing.⁴¹ Obviously, the research of this volume focuses on men who wrote about virginity in relation to themselves and their fellow monks. As such, it contributes to this conversation about the tenability of male virginity.

3.3 ...and Masculinity

Of late, the burgeoning field of masculinity studies has yielded profuse analyses of medieval works focused on male virginity and chastity.⁴² Research on the topic especially revolves not just around monks but all members of the clergy—regular clergymen, such as monks, and secular clerics of the higher orders, such as priests.⁴³ This type of academic research also often focuses on the eleventh century and the centuries that followed. For, at this time, the Church had begun to fervently enforce clerical celibacy and chastity, and monks had begun to enter their cloisters as adults. Medieval clerical virginity and chastity during these centuries has attracted modern attention because the behavior expected of monks and priests (celibacy and chastity) was antithetical to activities typically associated with secular masculinity (marriage

⁴¹ McInerney, "Rhetoric, Power, Integrity," 57-58. For more on the topic of male virginity as conceptually problematic, see John H. Arnold, "The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity," *Medieval Virginites*, eds. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 103; Gillian Clark, "The Old Adam: The Fathers and the Unmaking of Masculinity," *Thinking Men: Masculinity and its Self-Representation in the Classical Tradition*, eds. Lin Foxhall and J. B. Salmon (London: Routledge, 1998), 180; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 126; McInerney, "Androgynous Virgins," 59-63.

⁴² A number of recent and valuable essay collections focus on medieval masculinity: P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, eds., *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); D. M. Hadley, ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999); Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, et al., eds., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Jacqueline Murray, ed., *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (New York: Garland, 1999).

⁴³ It should be assumed throughout this section that I am speaking of clerics of the higher orders. There was a time when monks were predominately laymen; however, by the eleventh century most monks were ordained: Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003), 106-07.

and procreation).⁴⁴ Secular clerics lived in the world but were expected to reject the world's values; monks who were adult converts grew up outside the cloister and learned their gender identity from the secular world. How, scholars wonder, did these men negotiate these conflicting ideals? What impact did their new lifestyles have on their own sense of manhood? How did the laity perceive these men—did they think of them as effeminate? The bulk of the research in this field focuses specifically on the secular clergy.⁴⁵ But some critical analyses consider the issue with respect to monks as well as secular clerics.

3.1.1 *A third gender*

Some scholars look at these major changes to the medieval church and suppose that they affected the gender identity of medieval religious men. Indeed, many believe it resulted in the creation of a new gender—the chaste and celibate were neither masculine nor feminine but instead comprised a third gender, were ungendered, or were (to use the term coined by R. N. Swanson) emasculate.⁴⁶

The idea here is that people who seem to deviate from the common gender roles assigned to men and women are outside the prevailing gender system and must comprise an alternative gender. Accordingly, in his essay “Angels Incarnate,” Swanson has argued that during the

⁴⁴ While there were multiple masculine ideals in the secular world (linked, for example, to social class), certain elements—namely, the expectation for marriage and procreation—were common to most and can be claimed as key components of medieval secular manhood: Jennifer Thibodeaux, “Man of the Church, or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy,” *Gender and History* 18.2 (2006), 380-99, here 380-81. Murray and McNamara place great emphasis on the notion of gender as a spectrum admitting multiple possible identities between the two extremes of masculine strength and feminine weakness: McNamara, “Canossa,” 131-50; Jo Ann McNamara, “City Air Makes Men Free and Women Bound,” *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, eds. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 143-44; Jo Ann McNamara, “An Unresolved Syllogism: The Search for a Christian Gender System,” *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray (New York: Garland, 1999), 1-24; Jacqueline Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders,” *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 40-48 and throughout.

⁴⁵ For some of the excellent scholarship on masculinity and the secular clergy, see note 49 below.

reform period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the clergy sought to create a second gender for men: in addition to the masculine model for laymen, they proposed a model of emasculation for the celibate clergy.⁴⁷ And, about a much earlier period, Jo Ann McNamara has argued that Gregory of Tours (d. 594) understood the sexually chaste as a third gender—not just the clergy but all who renounced sexuality and withdrew from the world.⁴⁸ And Jacqueline Murray posits that religious men and women formed not only a third gender but also a third sex. They were the ‘one flesh’ of Genesis 1: “God created humanity in his own image, male and female he created them” (1:27-28).⁴⁹ These are some of the approaches made by scholars who believe medieval monks and secular clerics comprised an alternative gender.

3.2.1 *A threat to masculinity*

Approaching clerical virginity and chastity from a different perspective, some scholars suppose that men who became clerics (whether monks or priests) were, in a sense, stripped of their identity and had to prove their masculinity to themselves and to others.⁵⁰ In this manner, Jacqueline Murray argues that celibate men asserted their manhood, not by literally engaging

⁴⁶ For a terrific overview of this perspective and some of the essential scholarship in this field, see Murray, “One Flesh,” 34-40.

⁴⁷ R. N. Swanson, “Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation,” *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 160-77.

⁴⁸ Jo Ann McNamara, “Chastity as a Third Gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours,” *The World of Gregory of Tours*, eds. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 199-209. For more on this, see McNamara, “Unresolved Syllogism,” 1-24.

⁴⁹ Murray, “One Flesh,” 34-51.

⁵⁰ This is frequently the angle taken by those whose studies focus on the secular clergy. Some argue that they asserted their manhood by flouting the rules—by fighting and by engaging in sexual activity: P. H. Cullum, “Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Later Medieval England,” *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 178-96; Maureen C. Miller, “Masculinity, Reform, and Clerical Culture: Narratives of Episcopal Holiness in the Gregorian Era,” *Church History* 72.1 (2003), 25-52; Thibodeaux, “Man of the Church,” 380-99; Daniel E. Thiery, “Plowshares and Swords: Clerical Involvement in Acts of Violence and Peacemaking in Late Medieval England, c. 1400-1536,” *Albion* 36 (2004), 202-22. Others argue that secular clerics constructed an extreme masculinity for themselves, which depicted their own group as more virile and manly than their lay-counterparts: Miller, “Masculinity, Reform, and Clerical Culture,” 25-52.

in restricted activities but by portraying their religious endeavor in those terms. Monks and priests could not fight (another behavior often associated with masculinity in the secular world) neither could they engage in sexual activity. However, they could co-opt that language to describe their religious endeavor. That, she argues, is what they did. They represented their struggle with temptation and desire—especially sexual temptation—as a manly battle. And, in so doing, they “transformed[ed] their chastity into something inherently masculine.”⁵¹ Therefore, they were able to demonstrate their masculinity while nonetheless abiding by the Church’s expectations for them.⁵²

3.3.1 *Multiple masculinities*

Ruth Karras disagrees with those who posit chastity as a third gender and with those (such as Murray) who take the view that chastity threatened the masculine identity of monks and the secular clergy.⁵³ Karras states her position in the following manner: “Rather than argue that the clergy were not masculine or were masculine only to the extent that they imitated secular behavior that was forbidden to them, it makes more sense to see an alternative model of masculinity as having existed from the early years of Christian monasticism.”⁵⁴ In her assessment, there were distinct models of masculinity in different segments of medieval society. One of these was the clerical model, which she calls “heroic chastity.” In this model, chastity (not wealth or power) is the object of constant struggle, and strength of will is the weapon

⁵¹ Jacqueline Murray, “Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity,” *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 36. Janet Nelson describes similar strategies in her study of the tenth century: Janet L. Nelson, “Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900,” *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 121–42.

⁵² Murray, “Masculinizing Religious Life,” 24–42.

⁵³ Also, see the numerous scholars referenced in note 49 above, who take positions similar with Murray but limit their analyses to the secular clergy.

⁵⁴ Ruth Mazo Karras, “Thomas Aquinas’s Chastity Belt: Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe,” *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 67.

required for success (but ultimately requiring God's assistance).⁵⁵ This model rejects violence and sexuality but calls upon the metaphor of aggression to explain the eradication of sexual activity. Thus, religious men, she argues, did not feel 'unmanned' by chastity; they had their own model and strove to be masculine in their own terms.⁵⁶ In general, she agrees with Murray's assessment of *how* the monks and secular clergy talk about their religious endeavor (as a manly struggle with desire), but she disagrees about *why* they speak of it in those terms. While Murray claims that they do so to *recover* masculinity by linking their way of life to the secular, Karras says that the language reflects *their own* model of masculinity—the secular model transformed to suit their spiritual ideals. These various theories about monastic masculinity have been helpful, in particular, in my investigation of Ælred of Rievaulx; for, he describes monastic chastity as a manly struggle.

3.4.1 *Masculinity: the ideal or the lived experience*

While the scholars discussed thus far look to medieval discourse to determine how medieval men conceived of virginity, others investigate how masculinity is represented in texts. In her study of literary sources from the tenth and fifteenth centuries, Kathleen Coyne Kelly argues that hagiographical writers were unwilling to represent men in a manner that might undermine the masculine ideal. This meant they never portrayed men in the object position for fear it would undercut the notion of masculine subjectivity. They protect the male virgin's subjectivity, she claims, by keeping him on the periphery: the writers either move the male virgin out of the picture by shifting the reader's focus to the woman seducing him; or, when the reader's gaze does remain on him, his virgin body is feminized (which preserves masculinity

⁵⁵ Karras, "Aquinas's Chastity Belt," 54.

⁵⁶ Karras, "Aquinas's Chastity Belt," 52-67.

from any real threat).⁵⁷ Ultimately, she avers, these texts represent male virginity as an assumed and innate quality. Thus, virginity could be tested, but this testing merely served as an affirmation of the male virgin's unassailable virginity and intrinsic manhood.⁵⁸ According to Kelly, then, the ideal is the only image of masculinity described in texts because to portray them otherwise would be to destabilize masculinity.

Like Kelly, John Arnold looks at textual representations of virginity and chastity; however, his conclusions differ from those of Kelly. After his close look at materials from the late twelfth to the early thirteenth century from the Christian West, Arnold has determined that stories of male chastity and virginity reveal more complexity than Kelly perceives.⁵⁹ He believes there are four basic narrative tropes about male virginity and chastity: two relate to the powers and actions of the virgin himself, and two others focus on outside intervention. As Arnold sees it, some of these tropes reveal investigations of inner struggle; thereby, they showed men not as innately in command but challenged by passions.⁶⁰ Others depict men who require outside assistance to preserve chastity. The inability of these men to 'save' themselves would certainly challenge the notion of masculine self-mastery.⁶¹ These narrative patterns identified by Arnold describe a masculinity that is assailable, fallible, and vulnerable: a man could struggle with lust, be fooled, or require assistance and not lose his manhood. They give a depth and richness to

⁵⁷ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 104, 93-104, and throughout. McInerney also discusses the feminized male-virgin body in her study of Hildegard of Bingen's thought: McInerney, "Like a Virgin," 146-51; McInerney, "Androgynous Virgins," 152-63. For McInerney, though, Hildegard perceives the "physical female as the ground of sanctity"; thus, in feminizing the male body, Hildegard bestows a kind of honorary sanctity/femininity upon the male subject: McInerney, "Like a Virgin," 150-51. For McInerney, the male virgin is not feminized to protect masculine subjectivity but because female virginity is the only kind of virginity, in Hildegard's thought.

⁵⁸ This point is especially emphasized in her earlier essay on the same topic: Kathleen Coyne Kelly, "Menaced Masculinity and Imperiled Virginity in Malory's *Morte Darthur*," *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages*, eds. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 104-05, 97-116.

⁵⁹ Arnold, "Labour of Continence," 103-04.

⁶⁰ Arnold, "Labour of Continence," 104-06.

⁶¹ Arnold, "Labour of Continence," 106-07.

the normative ideal of masculinity, which suggest masculinity was not just asserted by medieval writers but also investigated.

Though she wrote before Kelly and Arnold wrote their essays, Jacqueline Murray would likely have agreed with Arnold's position. In an article on male embodiment, she describes how the medieval promotion of men as supremely rational and in control was put to task by the vagaries of the male body. She argues that repeated warnings about controlling the flesh, stories of monks desperately attempting to overcome lust, tales that describe the sinfulness of nocturnal emissions, and descriptions of those who win relief through mystical castration all reveal a discomfort with the male body and an awareness of the disparity between the masculine ideal and their own experience of themselves.⁶²

Therefore, while Kelly argues that medieval texts only present masculinity in its perfected form, Arnold and Murray both argue that they offer a complex portrait of masculinity. However, Arnold suggests that the imperfect model of virginity was intentional; it was a means of investigating men and their ability to attain their goals. On the other hand, Murray (I believe) would argue that this multifaceted portrayal of virginity was 'slippage'. It was not included in the texts intentionally but emerged on the pages inadvertently. As such, she would purport, they reveal an uncertainty that lies beneath the ideal model intend to endorse. In my own analyses, I have considered Kelly's, Arnold's, and Murray's conclusions.

3.4 ...and Female Virginity

Some modern studies compare medieval perceptions of virginity and chastity for women and for men. These studies do not overtly focus on the topic of virginity and chastity but end up

addressing those ideals since they are so prominent in writing for religious women. Barbara Newman's contribution to this field of research is pivotal. In the chapter "Flaws in the Golden Bowl" from her book *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, she scrutinizes literature of formation⁶³ for monks, nuns, and solitaries between 1075 and 1225 to determine if there is a gender-based difference in the advice given. She notes that much of the advice is gender-neutral, especially when monastic virtues and practices are under discussion. Nonetheless, she isolates some key areas in which the counsel does differ according to the gender of the audience.⁶⁴ For women, she says, authors emphasize chastity and virginity. As virgins, women are assigned great eminence, but they are also presumed to be quite vulnerable to a fall—their precious virginity is fragile and irreplaceable. In contrast, the monk is not characterized with such a high-degree of reverence. He is represented as a sinner struggling mightily to attain virtue. Whereas religious women were to focus on preserving the virtue they already possessed, religious men were encouraged to strive for something they no longer had.⁶⁵ Overall, she notes, medieval writers promoted a piety for women that was self-contained and static rather than social and dynamic. For men they emphasized friendship, community, and the stages of spiritual progress.⁶⁶

⁶² Jacqueline Murray, "'The law of sin that is in my members': The Problem of Male Embodiment," *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, eds. Samantha Riches and Sarah Salih (New York: Routledge, 2002), 9-21. Also, see Murray, "One Flesh," 43-45.

⁶³ Literature of formation is a term coined by Barbara Newman. It is now commonly used by scholars to describe the body of writing concerned with "training professed religious in the spiritual life, the practice of virtues, and communal and private discipline": Newman, *WomanChrist*, 20-21.

⁶⁴ Newman, *WomanChrist*, 21. In contrast, see Leclercq's 1984 article, in which he concludes that Bernard of Clairvaux considered men and women equal heirs to the kingdom of God and thus offered them similar spiritual advice: Jean Leclercq, "Does St. Bernard Have a Specific Message for Nuns?," *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes*, vol. 1, Cistercian Studies Series; 71, eds. John Nichols and M. Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 269-78.

⁶⁵ Newman, *WomanChrist*, 29, 30-34, 44.

⁶⁶ Newman, *WomanChrist*, 8, 43-44.

In their own comparative studies, Elisabeth Bos and Janice Pinder acknowledge the significance of Newman's insights but argue that there was more dynamism to the depictions of women's spirituality than Newman recognizes.⁶⁷ One aspect of Pinder's research offers some significant insights about monastic perceptions of virginity. In her investigation of the spiritual advice offered to men and to women, she looks at the anonymous, *De modo bene vivendi (De modo)*.⁶⁸ *De modo* was originally written for a female audience but exists also in a version adapted for a male audience.⁶⁹ Thus, this treatise affords scholars a unique opportunity to discern what language and imagery was and was not deemed suitable for a male audience. In her analysis of the two documents, Pinder notes that the texts are quite similar: the adapted text does not omit any content, and it was largely modified simply by reversing the gender terms. For example, the male version addresses the reader as "brother" rather than "sister." After closely scrutinizing what was altered in the male text, she determines that "virginal rhetoric"—discussions of the fruitfulness of virginity, the language of childbirth, the image of the enclosed garden—could be considered just as suitable for men as for women. However, language that too pointedly suggested a gendered relationship between the soul and Christ required alterations. Thus, Christ is not "bridegroom" but "lord," and "bridal chamber" is (in one of two instances) changed to "kingdom." Also, the male reader is never addressed as "virgin."⁷⁰ The male religious, she

⁶⁷ Elisabeth Bos, "The Literature of Spiritual Formation for Women in France and England, 1080 to 1180," *Listen Daughter: The Speculum virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages, ed. C. J. Mews (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 201-20, esp. 208-14; Janice M. Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden: Gendered Images of Religious Life from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Listen Daughter: The Speculum virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages, ed. C. J. Mews (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 159-79, 170-73.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, *Liber de modo bene vivendi*, PL 184:1199-1306.

⁶⁹ Anonymous, "Liber admonicionis," Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional fol. 1v-142v, 1267. This copy of *De modo* (entitled "Liber admonicionis" in the Madrid manuscript) is addressed to a male audience and belonged to the Trinitarians (a religious order founded to free captive Christians): Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden," 173, 179 n. 46. The earliest extant copy is actually the version intended for men; nonetheless, it is apparent that the original was intended for women. For Pinder's reasoning on this matter, see Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden," 161.

⁷⁰ Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden," 173-74.

proposes, “could think of himself as a mother but not at the bride of Christ.”⁷¹ The general trends identified by Newman and the additional insights offered by Bos and Pinder are significant and have provided a useful basis for measuring the perspectives of the authors studied in this volume.

Having identified my own project, clarified significant terminology and distinctions between terms, and assessed the current scholarship on my topic, we can now proceed to my investigation of five monks of the eleventh and twelfth century and what they had to say about monastic virginity and chastity.

⁷¹ Pinder, “The Cloister and the Garden,” 174.

Chapter I

Anselm of Canterbury: A Friend of this World is an Enemy of God

You have begun, my dear friend, to taste that the Lord is sweet. Beware, therefore, that you are not so filled with the savor of the world which flows abundantly over you that you are emptied of the savor of God which flows quickly and secretly away from the careless. Consider very frequently, my brother, and know very certainly that eternal bitterness fills those whom the sweetness of the world allures, and perpetual bliss pervades those whom the sweetness of God attracts.... If therefore you do not wish to become God's enemy, fear with horror being a friend of the world.¹

“A friend of the world is an enemy of God”; “many are called but few are chosen”; “no person, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”: warnings such as these fill the pages of Anselm of Canterbury's letters to laypeople and religious.

Anselm was a man who did not take up the life of a religious until in his late twenties. He knew the ways of the world—its temptations and its dangers—and he was convinced that the line between salvation and damnation was razor thin, enigmatic, and hardly attainable outside the walls of a cloister. Sexual immorality (*fornicatio*), impurity, immodesty, excess (*luxuria*), idolatry, sorcery, hatred, discord, rivalries, wrath, strife, dissension, factions, jealousy, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things (Gal 5:19-21): all are enticements of the world and

¹ *Epistola (Ep)* 8; Anselm, *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: F. Frommann Verlag, 1984), 3: 110 (*Anselmi opera*)/Anselm, *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Walter Fröhlich, Cistercian Studies Series; 96, 97, 142 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 1: 89-90 (*Letters*): “Incepisti, mi carissime, gustare quoniam dulcis est dominus. Cave ergo ne sic implearis sapore saeculi, qui tibi opulenter affluit, ut evacueris sapore dei, qui cito et furtim incautis defluit. Pensa, mi frater, saepissime et scito certissime quia quos allicit dulcedo saeculi, eos occupat aeterna amaritudo; et quos attrahit suavitas dei, eos satiat perpetua beatitudo.... Si igitur non amas constitui inimicus dei, horre execrando esse amicus huius saeculi.”

all are sins because they are antithetical to God's will.² For any one of these transgressions (and so many others) the Christian might find him or herself alienated from God—indeed, God's enemy—and forever condemned to hell.

In his early years as a writer, Anselm wrote a woeful lament about lost virginity, *Deploratio virginitatis male amissae* (*Deploratio*, 1070). Yet, the presence of this text in his corpus belies the fact that virginity—as sexual status but also a spiritual condition—has little potency as an ideal or image for him. Indeed, the *Deploratio*—the work that stands at the center of this chapter—is of a piece with his other prayers and meditations of that early period. Like them, it reveals his utter terror that sins, any sins, might create an eternal rift between the believer and God.

1 Anselm's life

Anselm of Canterbury was born to a wealthy family in the northern Italian town of Aosta in 1033.³ His mother, Ermenberga, was a native of that city and his father, Gundulf, was originally a Lombard. Anselm probably had one sibling, a sister named Richeza. The two seem

² See Alexander, "Liber ex dictis Beati Anselmi," *Memorials of St. Anselm*, eds. R. W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 190.

³ The definitive modern biographies of Anselm were both written by R. W. Southern: *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c. 1130* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963). Also, see G. R. Evans, *Anselm* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989), esp. 1-26. For a work focused on Anselm as a statesman and administrator, see Sally N. Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). For the scholarly debate between Southern and Vaughn over Anselm's 'true character,' see R. W. Southern, "Sally Vaughn's Anselm: An Examination of the Foundations," *Albion* 20.2 (1988), 181-204; Sally N. Vaughn, "Anselm: Saint and Statesman," *Albion* 20.2 (1988), 205-20. For Anselm's medieval biographies, see the *Vita Anselmi* (*VA*) and *Historia Novorum*: Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. & trans. R. W. Southern, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) (Latin & English); Eadmer, *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia: et opuscula duo de vita Sancti Anselmi et quibusdam miraculis ejus*, ed. Martin Rule, *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores*; 81 (Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1965)/Eadmer, *Historia novorum in Anglia: Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, trans. Geoffrey Bosanquet (London: The Cresset Press, 1964). Eadmer was a monk of the cathedral church of Christ Church, Canterbury, who worked for Anselm mainly between 1093 and 1100. As Anselm's assistant and constant companion, he assiduously recorded what he saw and heard and eventually produced those two biographies. According to Eadmer, he wrote the *Vita Anselmi* to reveal Anselm as a person and the *Historia novorum* to show Anselm as a public figure: R. W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt, "Introduction," *Memorials of St. Anselm* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 2; R. W. Southern, "Foreword," *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia: et opuscula duo de vita Sancti Anselmi et quibusdam miraculis ejus* (Vaduz: Kraus

to have been close, and several of his letters to her survive today.⁴ Anselm received his early education from a private tutor, but because he was unable to endure his severe master and the long days and nights of solitary study, his parents allowed him to attend a nearby Benedictine school.⁵ At a young age he became a cleric at the local church—something R. W. Southern believes was the career his family had intended for him.⁶ Brian Patrick McGuire sums up his relationship with his parents well: “He loved his mother dearly, respected her, perhaps even adored her. He hated his father, passionately, intensely, and in the end, irreconcilably.”⁷ Given this, when Anselm was twenty-three and his mother died, he left his home and hometown in search of his future.

His departure from Aosta in 1056 was followed by three years of rather aimless travel: he headed first to the duchy of Burgundy, where some of his mother’s relatives lived; then to the Loire valley and further north where he spent some years lackadaisically attending various schools; and, in 1059, he arrived at Bec in Normandy where he sought out Lanfranc (prior of the monastery but also a renowned theologian and teacher of the liberal arts and the Bible).⁸ Finally, under Lanfranc’s tutelage, Anselm’s intellectual curiosity was inflamed; still, he was torn between seeking the intellectual fame of a scholar or the spiritual reward of a religious. At the age of twenty-seven, he made a decision: he would become a monk. As he saw it, the life he

Reprint, 1965), viii-x. For Eadmer’s comments about the intention behind the two biographies, see *VA* 1.1; Eadmer, *Life of Anselm*, 1-2. For more on Eadmer, see Southern, *Anselm and his Biographer*, 314-44.

⁴ *Ep* 211, 258, 264, 268; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 107-08, 170-71, 179, 183/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 159-61, 250-51, 262-63, 268-69.

⁵ Guibert of Nogent also suffered under a tyrannical master. Dissimilarly, Guibert opted to remain under his oppressor’s rule. Their stories also parallel in their deep affection for their mothers. More on this in chapter 2.

⁶ Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 5.

⁷ Brian Patrick McGuire, “Love, Friendship, and Sex in the Eleventh Century: The Experience of Anselm,” *Studia Theologica* 28 (1974), 113.

had been living as a student already required parsimony, discipline, and deprivation. If he became a monk, “he would not have had to put up with anything more severe than what he was now suffering, nor would he then lose the reward of his labour [salvation], which he was quite uncertain of retaining in his present state.”⁹ That rather practical decision was followed shortly by a fervent spirituality. To be sure, Anselm came to adore the monastic life and the rigorous devotion, prayer, and fasting it entailed.

Three years after Anselm donned monks’ robes, Lanfranc was chosen as abbot of a monastery at Caen, and Anselm replaced him as prior at Bec. Like Lanfranc, Anselm combined the office of prior with that of master of the school at Bec. Throughout the years, his fame as a teacher grew and enthusiastic students traveled from diverse regions to learn from him. Eventually, in 1078, he was elected as abbot of that same community. And after a fruitful and fulfilling fifteen years as leader of Bec, he succeeded Lanfranc as Archbishop of Canterbury (in 1093). Anselm’s years as archbishop were far from idyllic. He was at odds first with King William II and then with William II’s brother and successor, Henry I. It is telling that Anselm spent six of his sixteen years as archbishop in exile. Nevertheless, he held that position and undertook its responsibilities with zeal until, overcome by illness in 1109 at the age of seventy-six, he died.

2 Texts

Anselm began recording his thoughts, lectures, and sermons quite late in life. He left little mark until he was thirty-seven years old, ten years after he had become a monk. At that time

⁹ Bec was an unusual for a monastic school in that it had students from outside the monastery: G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 27.

he began writing and sharing his prayers and meditations with others. These early works are in a style uniquely his own and are notable for their personal passion, length, and emotional intensity.¹⁰ Written between 1070 and 1078 (before Anselm became abbot of Bec), they are “private revelations of his inmost thoughts and feelings.”¹¹ Despite their deeply personal nature, Anselm readily gathered and shared his prayers and meditations with others, especially fellow monks and pious noblewomen. Circulating as a group and swiftly gaining a vast readership, these works are what Anselm became most known for during his life and beyond.¹² So attractive was their style that they inspired imitators and imitations. And by the seventeenth century, the original and authentic group of nineteen prayers and three meditations had morphed into seventy-four prayers, twenty-one meditations, and sixteen homilies all presented as Anselm’s own productions.¹³ His *Deploratio virginitatis male amissae* is

⁹ VA 1.5; Eadmer, *Life of Anselm*, 8: “...venit ei in mentem quia si aliquo monachus ut olim proposuerat esset acriora quam patiebatur eum pati non oporteret, nec tunc sui laboris meritum perderet, quod nunc utrum sibi maneret non perspiciebat.”

¹⁰ Thomas H. Bestul, “Self and Subjectivity in the *Prayers and Meditations* of Anselm of Canterbury,” *Saint Anselm: Bishop and Thinker: papers read at a conference held in the Catholic University of Lublin, on 24–26 September 1996*, eds. Roman Majeran and Edward Iwo Zielifski (Lublin: University Press of the Catholic University of Lublin, 1999), 147. Southern and Ward both provide thorough discussions of Anselm’s style and offer historical context about the tradition from which he emerged: Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 91–112; Benedicta Ward, “Introduction,” *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), 27–59. Thomas Bestul discusses the possible influence of Augustine on these works: Thomas H. Bestul, “St. Augustine and the *Orationes sive Meditationes* of St. Anselm,” *Anselm Studies, II: An Occasional Journal*, eds. Joseph C. Schnaubelt, Thomas A. Losoncy, et al. (White Plains, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1988), 597–606.

¹¹ Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 91.

¹² Southern, *Anselm and his Biographer*, 47.

¹³ Southern, *Anselm and his Biographer*, 35. The task of unraveling the spurious texts from the authentic was undertaken by A. Wilmart. For the most important of his articles on this matter, see André Wilmart, *Auteurs Spirituels et Textes Dévots du Moyen Âge Latin* (Paris: Bloud and Gay, 1932). Schmitt’s edition of Anselm’s work reflects Wilmart’s labor and contains only Anselm’s genuine works: Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 3–91. The *Patrologia Latina* edition, on the other hand, contains the collection as it looked before Wilmart identified the inauthentic works: PL 158: 710–1016. Jean-François Cottier has published a critical edition of the spurious works that circulated alongside Anselm’s authentic creations. His book also provides a thorough description of the growth and character of twelfth-century devotional works: Jean-François Cottier, *Anima mea: prières privées et textes de dévotion du Moyen Age latin: autour des prières ou méditations attribuées à saint Anselme de Cantorbéry (XIe–XIIIe siècle)*, *Recherches sur les rhétoriques religieuses*; 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001).

one of the earliest of these original early writings.¹⁴ This rarely commented upon meditation is exceptionally intriguing because it is presented from the perspective of a male religious who has lost his virginity. It is discussed at length below.

Anselm also produced a vast corpus of letters.¹⁵ In his early correspondence, which began around 1070 with letters to fellow monks who had been relocated to other monasteries, and the myriad that followed, Anselm pours out his thoughts and counsel to Christians of every ilk. His nearly five-hundred extant epistles bear witness to each step of his monastic career: during his years as monk and prior at Bec he wrote passionate affective letters of love, friendship, and instruction; the years of his tumultuous career as Archbishop of Canterbury reveal a more sober and administrative side of the man.¹⁶ He addressed the bulk of his correspondence to fellow monks. Many letters, especially those from his later years as archbishop, were directed to Church officials. Some he wrote for women—religious women, but especially noble laywomen.¹⁷ In general, his correspondence has added perspective to my argument about Anselm’s conception of virginity. But two of his letters—those he dispatched to the lapsed nun Gunhilda just before he took office as archbishop in 1093—receive particular attention in the pages that follow.¹⁸ These two letters focus on Gunhilda’s departure from her convent and

¹⁴ *Deploratio virginitatis male amissae* (Med 2); Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 80-83/Anselm, *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), 225-27.

¹⁵ *Epistolae* (Ep); Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, Vols. 3, 4, 5/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, Vols. 1, 2, 3.

¹⁶ For accounts of how Anselm’s letters were preserved and circulated, see Walter Fröhlich, “Introduction,” *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 1: 5-52; Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 394-403, 458-81; Sally N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God: A Study of Anselm’s Correspondence with Women* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002). These three scholars disagree about how and why Anselm’s letters were collected and saved. Fröhlich and Vaughn believe Anselm preserved the letters himself and that he retained only those that portrayed him in a ‘proper’ light. Southern disagrees, believing Anselm only collected the letters that he wrote at Bec between 1089-90 and that his episcopal correspondence was gathered by others after his death.

¹⁷ Anselm’s correspondence consists of 475 letters (these include letters he wrote but also some written to him and about him). Seventy-three of them are to, from, or about women: Vaughn, *Anselm and the Handmaidens*, 36.

¹⁸ Ep 168, 169; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 43-50/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 64-74. Anselm’s letters to Gunhilda are discussed in various modern works. See Frank Barlow, *William Rufus* (London: Methuen London Ltd., 1983), 313-14; Southern, *Anselm and his Biographer*, 182-93; Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 262-64; Vaughn, *Anselm and*

urge her return by contrasting her spiritual marriage to Christ with her embrace of mortal men and a carnal life. In them, Anselm uses the language of human sexuality—lost virginity, marriage, adultery, et cetera. Since he seems to have perceived male and female virginity similarly, the Gunhilda letters serve as exceptional apparatus for testing my conclusions about the portrayal of lost male virginity in the *Deploratio*.

Another source for insight into Anselm's thought is a compilation of reports about what Anselm said to his monks in sermons and in chapter meetings. This text, "Liber ex dictis Beati Anselmi" (commonly referred to as the *Dicta*) was assembled by Alexander, his secretary from 1100 until 1109.¹⁹ Like Anselm's biographer and secretary Eadmer, Alexander was a meticulous record keeper. However, the fruit of Alexander's labors was this collection of Anselm's words as recorded by his disciples and companions.²⁰ Unlike other of Anselm's works, it is not certain that the words found within the pages of Alexander's volume are precisely Anselm's. As Southern and F. S. Schmitt explain, "Nothing... here is pure and perfect Anselm: it is Anselm incomplete, or as others heard or thought they heard him."²¹ Thus, it is not a source sufficient unto itself but serves as an excellent supplement to evidence gleaned from texts produced by his own hand.

the Handmaidens, 190-208; Sally N. Vaughn, "St. Anselm and Women," *The Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990), 84-94. Also, see Searle who stresses the political motivations that may have influenced the content of Anselm's letters: Eleanor Searle, "Women and the Legitimisation of Succession at the Norman Conquest," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 3 (1980), 159-70, esp. 167-69.

¹⁹ Southern and Schmitt, "Introduction," 2, 19-20. Alexander describes the sources for his volume in his prologue: Alexander, "Liber ex dictis," 107.

²⁰ Alexander, "Liber ex dictis," 105-270.

²¹ Southern and Schmitt, "Introduction," 2.

In addition to his early devotional works and letters, Anselm produced a number of treatises of a more theologically speculative nature.²² Among these are the *Monologion* and *Prosologion*, which he composed in 1076 and 1078, respectively.²³ The former is a discussion of God's essence, the latter an attempt to describe the Christian faith in one brief argument. The *Prosologion* contains Anselm's famous proof for the existence of God based on reason alone. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* (1098) proposes yet another ground breaking reformulation of Christian thought.²⁴ Anselm takes on a number of different issues in *De veritate*, *De libertate arbitrii* (both written between 1080-85), *De casu diaboli* (1085-90), *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* (1094), and *De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato* (*De conceptu*, 1099-1100). Of these, *De conceptu* has provided the most assistance for this analysis because, within its pages, Anselm articulates his thoughts about Mary and her virginity. He wrote his final work, *De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et Gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio*, in about 1107, just two years before his death.²⁵

Today, Anselm is generally acknowledged as the foremost philosophical and theological mind of the late-eleventh century. He was familiar with all of the Church Fathers as well as Aristotle's *On Interpretation* and *Categories*, as translated and commented upon by Boethius. He

²² Scholarship about Anselm is vast. For a detailed list of sources and works related to Anselm, see Jasper Hopkins' bibliography, which is continually updated and (when last accessed) contains references as recent as 2009: Jasper Hopkins, *Supplementary Anselm-Bibliography*, cla.umn.edu/sites/jhopkins/Anselmbibliography.pdf (Accessed June 1, 2009). Also, see Klaus Kienzler and Eduardo Brinacesco, *International Bibliography, Anselm of Canterbury*, Anselm Studies (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen, 1999).

²³ Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 1: 7-122/Anselm, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. & trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Warren Richardson (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 2000), 1-112 (Revised from the three Mellen volumes, now out of print. Published as a single volume. Available online at <http://cla.umn.edu/sites/jhopkins/>) (*Complete Treatises*).

²⁴ *Cur Deus Homo* (CDH); Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 42-133/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 295-389. For brief summaries of this text, see Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 197-227; Evans, *Anselm*, 71-83.

²⁵ *De veritate*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 1: 173-99/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 164-90. *De libertate arbitrii*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 1: 205-26/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 191-213. *De casu diaboli*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 1:231-76/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 214-61. *Epistola de incarnatione verbi*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 3-35/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 265-94. *De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato* (*De conceptu*); Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2:137-

was also well acquainted with Plato, probably by way of Augustine of Hippo. Indeed, Augustine was his major source.²⁶ However, where Anselm agrees with Augustine and others in his writing, he never mimics their thoughts; instead, he develops the topic to his own intellectual conclusion.²⁷ Anselm was thoroughly ensconced in the foundations of Christian thought, but he approached faith in a new way. Customarily, medieval Christian thinkers relied solely on Scripture and tradition to establish their conclusions—they called up statements by the Fathers and cited passages from Scripture to support their points. Conversely, Anselm sought to establish his position through reason alone (*sola ratione*).²⁸ He thought reason could and would prove the truth of Scripture.²⁹ In addition, he was certain that an argument developed by reason could turn a non-believer into a believer. This way of approaching Christian thought was not a method he reserved only for his theology. For Anselm, theological speculation, prayer, sermons, meditations, and even letters were all of a piece—they were expressions of a yearning and endeavor to know God. Thus, even the most theological of his works were for him no different from prayers or meditations. His aim was always to grasp more fully the truth of Scripture and to convert unbelievers to Christianity.³⁰

73/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 427-65. *De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et Gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio*, Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 245-88/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 531-74.

²⁶ Also, though, see Gasper's book, which describes the diverse theological and intellectual works that would have been available to Anselm: Giles E. M. Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury and his Theological Inheritance* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004). Brown discusses how Anselm may have come to know Plato's works in David Brown, "Anselm on Atonement," *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, eds. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 286-89. Southern outlines Anselm's influences in Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 52-87.

²⁷ Charles Hartshorne, "Introduction," *Saint Anselm, Basic Writings: Proslogium, Cur Deus Homo, Monologium, Gaunilo's In Behalf of the Fool* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1988), iv; Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 16, 27-28.

²⁸ For the quintessential overview of Anselm's philosophical religious thought, see Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm*.

²⁹ *VA* 7; Eadmer, *Life of Anselm*, 12.

³⁰ Ward, "Introduction," 44-46.

In the following pages, I argue that, despite what one might expect from a monk who wrote a meditation on lost virginity, virginity is not a particularly potent image for him. In fact, an analysis of how he handles certain Christian figures usually lauded as virgins—John the Evangelist, angels, and Mary—reveals the ideas that *do* possess a great deal of meaning for him. Furthermore, it demonstrates that this monk who composed a work about lost virginity did not understand that ideal in chiefly physical terms. To be sure, his *Deploratio* is about virginity and its loss, but he perceives virginity as a chiefly spiritual ideal and his language is metaphorical. His letters to Gunhilda use a similar set of images and confirm that intuition about his understanding of virginity. All who have analyzed Anselm's *Deploratio* would recognize that its language is symbolic. However many would propose that beneath the metaphorical veil lays a real sexual sin, a sexual sin committed by a guilt-ridden Anselm. In the final section of this chapter, I take up this topic and argue against that premise.

3 If Not Virginity, What?

I begin my analysis of how Anselm perceives virginity by describing what virginity does not mean to him. For, the truth is, the notion of preserved virginity (as opposed to lost virginity) rarely enters into Anselm's discourse. For example, the word "*virginitas*" and its derivatives appear only twenty (or so) times in four volumes of Anselm's writings. This is even more meaningful if one considers that a quarter of those (five) appear in the *Deploratio* and two in the Gunhilda letters—all works focused not on possessed virginity but lost virginity.³¹ Derivations of the word "*virgo*" make a better showing, with seventy-seven occurrences. Most of these, though, are linked with discussions of Mary.³² Indeed, to my knowledge, the only

³¹ G. R. Evans, *A Concordance to the Works of St. Anselm* (Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1984), 1165-166. Because I have found certain words in Anselm's writing that do not appear in Evans's concordance, these numbers cannot be taken as definitive; nonetheless, they are quite telling.

³² Evans, *Concordance*, 1165-166.

contemporary woman he calls a virgin or speaks to about virginity is Gunhilda—this, even though seventeen of his letters were either to or about religious women, several of whom were likely virgins.³³ From this, it is fair to say that intact virginity was not a particularly potent image for him. However, a consideration of his discussions of certain figures whose virginity is regularly underscored reveals the images he uses *instead of* virginity. In doing so, one senses what ideas and representations convey more meaning for him.

3.1 Christ's Friends and Intimates

On various occasions, Anselm *fails* to characterize his subject as a virgin when others likely would have. For instance, in the Gospel of John, John is called ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ and ‘the beloved disciple’ several times.³⁴ These designations led many a patristic and medieval writer to characterize John the Evangelist as a virgin—Guibert of Nogent, Rupert of Deutz, and Ælred of Rievaulx all do so and also call specific attention to his virginity.³⁵ For example, in his work on virginity, Rupert converses about the sexual status of various figures from the Bible. While engaging in that project, he determines that John is the most commendable of all those who remained virgins both in flesh and in mind.³⁶ Unlike these and so many other Christian writers, Anselm does not enlist that image of John—not even in the two long prayers

³³ The only reference he makes to a monk as a virgin is in the *Deploratio*. He also refers to the first man, Adam, as a virgin: *CDH* 2.8; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 102-06/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 357.

³⁴ See, for example, John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, and 21:20.

³⁵ In Rupert's work, see *De laesione virginitatis* 8; *PL* 170: 553B; *Commentaria in Evangelium Sancti Iohannis* pref, 1; *CCCM*9, edited by Rhabanus Haacke (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969), 6, 9. In Guibert's work, see *Opusculum de virginitate* 4; edited by J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 156: 585A-B. In Ælred's work, see *Vita Sancti Edwardi* 27, 31; *Vita Sancti Edwardi*, *PL* 195: 769A-770D, 775A-B/“The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor,” *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 56, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Jane Freeland (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 196-200, 211; *De institutione inclusarum*; Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, *CCCM*1, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 668/“Rule of Life for a Recluse,” *Ælred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 2, ed. M. Basil Pennington, trans. Mary Paul Macpherson (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 87. For an example from the Early Church, see Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.26; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, *PL* 23: 246B-C/Jerome, “Against Jovinianus,” *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series*, vol. 6, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 365.

³⁶ *De laesione virginitatis* 10; *PL* 170: 554D.

he addressed to that man.³⁷ These prayers virtually burst at the seams with accolades for the Evangelist, but virginity is never introduced as a reason for his enviable status nor is it listed as one of his admirable qualities. Instead, Anselm portrays John as God's friend and closest companion. About Anselm's depiction of John as Christ's friend, Benedicta Ward has mused, "Perhaps this is one of the earliest instances of this picture of Christ with the beloved disciple being detached from the whole setting of the Last Supper and being used as an instance of friendship."³⁸ For Anselm, John is Christ's friend not a virgin.

Anselm's treatment of angels echoes his handling of John. Christian writers of the medieval and early-Christian eras commonly envision angels as virginal or chaste, unencumbered by carnal passions, and able to maintain ceaseless contemplation of God. And, because of these characteristics, monks understood their own lives of sexual renunciation and continual prayer to be modeled on angelic existence.³⁹ In their writings, Guibert of Nogent and Bernard of Clairvaux both revere angels for their chastity. Comparing monks to angels and considering what makes angels extraordinary, Bernard enthuses:

Who would fear to call a life vowed to celibacy heavenly and angelic? And why should you not be, even today, what all the elect will be some day after the resurrection, like to the angels of heaven, since like them you are unmarried? Ah my brethren, guard this pearl carefully. Embrace that holiness of life which makes you similar to the blessed and which puts you in God's house, according to the words of the Scripture: "Purity brings man [humanity] close to God" (Wis 6:20).⁴⁰

³⁷ Or 11, 12; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 42-49/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 157-71.

³⁸ Ward, "Introduction," 67.

³⁹ Brown, "Notion of Virginity," 427-43; Leclercq, *Life of Perfection*, 26-33.

⁴⁰ 3 *In Labore Messis* 5; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia*, eds. Jean Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, et al. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-80), 5: 225/trans. in Leclercq, *Life of Perfection*, 30: "Quis enim caelibem vitam, vitam caelestem et angelicam dicere vereatur? Aut quod in resurrectione futuri sunt omnes electi, quomodo non iam nunc estis, sicut angeli Dei in caelo, a nuptiis penitus abstinentes? Amplectimini, fratres, pretiosissimam margaritam, amplectimini sanctimoniam vitae, quae vos efficit sanctorum similes et domesticos Dei, dicenti Scriptura: 'Incorruptio facit proximum Deo' (Wis 6:20)." For Guibert's references to angelic purity, see *Opusculum de virginitate* 5; PL 156: 585B-586A.

Anselm also posits angels as models for monks: the conversation of angels is always pure and about God.⁴¹ But, to my knowledge, Anselm does not connect the angels' steadfast focus on God with their virginity or chastity. In his *De humanis moribus*, he does liken oblates and adult recruits to angels and saints, respectively. But when speaking of the difference between angels and saints he says only that angels did not suffer any temptation.⁴² Indeed, for Anselm, angels (like humans) are rational beings, and his discussion of them turns almost exclusively on the will. Good angels are good because they forever uphold justice: they are those who "remain standing in the truth" (*stant in veritate*) and those "in whom there is no sin" (*in quibus nullum est peccatum*).⁴³ While Anselm does not characterize angels as virgins, he does, on at least one occasion, portray them as God's intimates: "Do not love the intimacy of those in the world because the more you are friendly with them of your own will the less you will be friendly with God and his intimates, the angels."⁴⁴ On the whole, Anselm's handling of John and of the angels—portraying them as cherished intimates rather than as virgins—suggests that the language of human relationships better portrays spiritual union with God, in Anselm's mind, than does virginity.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Ep* 230; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 135/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 199.

⁴² Anselm, "Liber Anselmi Archiepiscopi de humanis moribus," *Memorials of St. Anselm*, eds. R. W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 68: "Sed nec angeli sanctos despiciunt, quia tentationibus aliquando victi sunt, nec sancti angelos, quia nullam quam vincerent tentationem passi sunt."

⁴³ D. E. Luscombe, "Anselm on the Angels," *Rivista di Storia Della Filosofia* 3 (1993), 537-45. *CDH* 1.17; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 75, 3: 86/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 326, 232.

⁴⁴ Trans. mine. *Ep* 405; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 5: 350/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 3: 171: "Noli amare familiaritatem saecularium, quia quanto magis illis eris propria voluntate familiaris, tanto minus eris deo et familiaribus eius angelis familiaris."

⁴⁵ About Anselm's concept of friendship, Southern writes: "...Anselm saw the pleasures of friendship... as a foretaste of the pleasure to be experienced at a higher degree of excellence in Heaven" (Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 151); "When every worldly aim has been renounced, and Man [humanity] appears before God as a delinquent servant who has lost all claim to his Lord's rewards, there remains one pleasure which belongs to this world but survives in Heaven: this is the pleasure of friendship" (Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 161).

3.2 Mary's Virginity

In Anselm's treatment of Mary, it again becomes apparent that virginity is not especially potent as an image, and, here too, it is possible to detect the imagery that holds more meaning for him. Of course, Anselm admires Mary for both her virginity and her motherhood—that goes without saying. But her virginity holds little fascination for him: it neither inspires rich symbolism nor triggers an awe of virginity in general.

It is interesting to look at his philosophical speculation about the fittingness and necessity of Mary's virginity. In his judgment, Mary's virginity was appropriate but not necessary. In book two of *Cur Deus Homo*, he demonstrates why her virginity is fitting. Humanity fell through a woman (Eve); therefore, it was fitting that humanity won redemption through a woman (Mary). And if a virgin was the cause of all the evil to the human race (Eve), then it was fitting that a virgin would be the cause of all the good for the human race (Mary).

Furthermore, if the woman (Eve) created from a man (Adam) without a woman was created from a virgin (Adam), then it was especially fitting that the man (Jesus), who would be made from a woman (Mary) without a man, be made from a virgin (Mary).⁴⁶ As Anselm sees it, it was appropriate that a woman was chosen to bear the son of God, and it was also proper that God chose a virgin for the birth of God's son—both provide a certain sense of balance for salvation history.⁴⁷

Yet, he also insists that while Mary's virginity was apposite, it was not necessary. Mary, he reasons, did not need to be a virtuous virgin in order for her son Jesus to be exempt from Original Sin. Jesus's exemption derives from the miraculous aspect of his conception, not from

⁴⁶ *CDH* 2.8; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 102-06/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 355-57.

⁴⁷ Irven M. Resnick, "Anselm of Canterbury and Odo of Tournai on the Miraculous Birth of the God-Man," *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996), 78.

any quality possessed by Mary.⁴⁸ So detached was her virginity and virtue from Jesus's freedom from Original Sin, Anselm posits, that Jesus could have been born from a sinful woman and still have been free of taint.⁴⁹ Moreover, contrary to what some of his contemporaries had begun to suggest, Anselm is certain that Mary was not exempt from Original Sin.⁵⁰ This is a point made via his conversant, Boso, in *Cur Deus Homo*:

For although the conception of this man [Jesus] was clean and was free from the sin of carnal delight, nevertheless the virgin [Mary] from whom He was assumed was conceived in iniquities, and her mother conceived her in sins (Ps 50:7); and this virgin was born with original sin, since she sinned in Adam, in whom all have sinned (Rom 5:12).⁵¹

This is a significant detail for Anselm; for, as Southern explains, Anselm believed that if it were possible for a human to be exempt from Original Sin, it would destroy the necessity of the Incarnation.⁵² Therefore, Mary was a virgin, and that was fitting. But her virginity was not necessary (neither the physical nor the spiritual aspect of that ideal) for the salvation of humanity.

If Mary's virginity fails to enthuse Anselm, the same cannot be said with respect to her motherhood. For Anselm, Mary is captivating for her role as mother and bearer of the god-

⁴⁸ *De conceptu* 11; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 153-54/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 443-45. In this assessment, Anselm is following Augustine: Kevin A. McMahon, "Anselm and the Guilt of Adam," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 2.1 (Fall 2004), 88.

⁴⁹ *De conceptu* 18; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 159/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 450.

⁵⁰ For studies of Anselm on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, see John Janaro, "Saint Anselm and the Development of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: Historical and Theological Perspectives," *Saint Anselm Journal* 3 (2006), 48-56; Alberic Stacpoole, "The English Tradition of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception," *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1983), 217-31. Ironically, after Anselm's death, Eadmer (his disciple and biographer) wrote a tract espousing Mary's freedom from Original Sin, which for a long time was ascribed to Anselm. For a brief discussion of Eadmer's treatise, see Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 432-36.

⁵¹ *CDH* 2.16; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 116/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 370: "Nam licet ipsa hominis eiusdem conceptio munda sit et absque carnalis delectationis peccato, virgo tamen ipsa unde assumptus est, 'in iniquitatibus' concepta est, 'et in peccatis concepit' eam 'mater' eius (Ps 50:7), et cum originali peccato nata est, quoniam et ipsa in Adam peccavit, 'in quo omnes peccaverunt' (Rom 5:12)."

⁵² Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 435.

man who brought salvation to humanity.⁵³ Just look at the words he lavishes on her as mother: “Mother of the life of my soul, nurse of the redeemer of my flesh, who gave suck to the Savior of my whole being... My tongue fails me, for my love is not sufficient.”⁵⁴ Concerning his amplification of Mary’s motherhood, Atria Larson has commented that “Anselm does not ignore her [Mary’s] purity or her virginity, but it is her role as Christ’s mother that necessitates praise of her, not her own personal morality.”⁵⁵ Mary’s motherhood conveys what Anselm finds spiritually significant about her. Indeed, he saw motherhood—nurturing, guiding, loving, consoling—as a quality attributable to God, the saints, and the behavior of women and men.⁵⁶

What has become apparent in all of this is that virginity was not an especially compelling image for Anselm. Other representations better conveyed his perception of union with God. He was far more interested in images that described union in terms other than that of virgin and bridegroom. When he wrote of people usually heralded as virgins, he described their association with God in terms of intimate but non-marital relationships. Friendship and ‘intimacy’ is a predominant theme in Anselm’s writing—it is a keynote of the letters he wrote

⁵³ On Anselm’s perception of Mary’s role in human redemption, see Atria A. Larson, “Passive Instrument and Active Intercessor: Anselm’s View of Mary’s Role in Redemption,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 41.1 (2006), 31-49.

⁵⁴ *Or* 7; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 19/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 116: “Genetrix vitae animae meae, altrix reparatoris carnis meae, lactatrix salvatoris totius substantiae meae!... Lingua mihi deficit, quia mens non sufficit.”

⁵⁵ Larson, “Passive Instrument,” 43.

⁵⁶ Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” 113-15. His prayer to Paul elaborates extensively on images of both Paul and Jesus as mothers: *Or* 10; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 33-41/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 141-56. The application of maternal imagery to God and Christ became popular especially in the twelfth century with Cistercian monks. Ælred of Rievaulx and Bernard of Clairvaux were among the Cistercians who used the imagery in such a way. It may very well be that the Cistercians developed the idea of Jesus as Mother by way of Anselm and his writings: Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” 112. Furthermore, Sally Vaughn has concluded that Anselm saw the role of wife and mother as women’s principal function in society and honored that role as “far superior in importance to that of nun or abbess, to which he actually gave little attention”: Vaughn, “Anselm and Women,” 83-94; Vaughn, *Anselm and the Handmaidens*, 257; also, see 66-115.

to fellow monks.⁵⁷ Given this, it is not surprising that he used the language of human bonds most relevant to him to describe the spiritual bond between humanity and God.

4 Lost Virginity

While the concept of virginity does not intrigue Anselm, *lost* virginity does (to a greater degree). Indeed, the only works in which the idea of virginity predominates are those focused on virginity's absence. These are his *Deploratio* and the two letters he wrote to the nun Gunhilda. In the one, the male narrator is dolefully lamenting lost virginity—virginity lost, he says, through fornication. In the other, he is rebuking a lapsed nun for abandoning her status as a virgin. However, in the pages that follow I show that in spite of this apparent concern with sexual status, Anselm's real focus is the condition of the soul or will. Indeed, physical integrity, in his estimation, has little bearing on a person's ability to excel spiritually, and sexual passions are not singled out as especially problematic. A close reading of the *Deploratio* reveals this point, and scrutiny of his letters to Gunhilda reinforces it.

⁵⁷ Anselm's letters are, perhaps, best known for their innovative language of religious friendship. Discussions of Anselm's unique handling of monastic friendship are vast. See, especially, H. M. Canatella, "Friendship in Anselm of Canterbury's Correspondence: Ideals and Experience," *Viator* 53.2 (2007), 351-67; A. Fiske, "Saint Anselm and Friendship," *Studia Monastica* 3 (1961), 259-80; J. P. Haseldine, "Love, Separation and Male Friendship: Words and Actions in Saint Anselm's Letters to his Friends," *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 238-55; Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship & Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*, Cistercian Studies Series; 95 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1988), 210-27; Southern, *Anselm and his Biographer*, 67-76; Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 138-65. The effusive words of love and longing expressed by Anselm in his correspondence with fellow monks have led some scholars to speculate about Anselm's sexual identity. See most notably, John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 218-21. Several years before Boswell wrote his groundbreaking book, McGuire concluded that Anselm's relationships were homoerotic rather than homosexual: McGuire, "Love, Friendship, and Sex," 111-52. But see his later amendment of that position, in which he determines that, in the end, Anselm is an elusive figure who defies characterization: McGuire, *Friendship & Community*, 211. Boswell's claims about Anselm have inspired an enthusiastic response from scholars: Glenn Olsen, "St. Anselm and Homosexuality," *Anselm Studies, II: An Occasional Journal*, eds. Joseph C. Schnaubelt, Thomas A. Losoncy, et al. (White Plains, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1988), 93-141; Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 138-65. Also of interest is an article in which the life experiences of two key modern figures in this debate (Boswell and Southern) are factored in: Bruce O'Brien, "R. W. Southern, John Boswell, and the Sexuality of Anselm," *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, ed. Mathew Kuefler (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 167-78.

4.1 Meditations & Prayers

To properly grasp Anselm's meditation, *Deploratio*, one must first be familiar with the genre to which the work belongs. Anselm composed a number of prayers and meditations all of which circulated quite widely during his lifetime. He intended them to be read privately and deeply.⁵⁸

He states this himself:

The purpose of the prayers and meditations that follow is to excite the mind of the reader to the love or fear of God, or to self-examination. They are not to be read in a turmoil, but quietly, not skimmed or hurried through, but taken a little at a time, with deep and thoughtful meditation.⁵⁹

They are to be mulled over and internalized—progress through the text is only to be as rapid as the reader's spiritual progress. Their aim, as Benedicta Ward aptly explains, "is to stir the mind out of its inertia to know itself thoroughly and so come to contrition and the love of God."⁶⁰ Written in the first person singular, they were meant to sweep the reader into the text—while perusing a meditation or prayer the reader becomes the sinner, interrogating his or her own misdeeds and intentions, prayerfully and woefully seeking self-knowledge, or pleading to God and the saints for help. In that way, the reader, as sinner, prepares for his or her journey back to God.⁶¹ Though sharing a similar intent and mental process—transforming

⁵⁸ For the forthcoming paragraphs, I have consulted and relied on Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 77-87, 91-112; Ward, "Introduction," 43-44, 51-56. McMahon's discussion of medieval meditative ascent has also been extremely illuminating: Robert McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, & Dante* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ *Orationes sive meditationes* prol; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 3/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 89: "*Orationes sive meditationes* quae subscriptae sunt, quoniam ad excitandam legentis mentem ad dei amorem vel timorem, seu ad suimet discussionem editae sunt, non sunt legendae in tumultu, sed in quiete, nec cursim et velociter, sed paulatim cum intenta et morosa meditatione."

⁶⁰ Ward, "Introduction," 51.

⁶¹ During the Middle Ages, monks and nuns did not just read with their eyes (as modern readers do) but, also, spoke the words of the text aloud; therefore, reading involved many of the senses. Jean Leclercq paints a vivid picture of the process, explaining: "they read usually, not as today, principally with the eyes but with the lips, pronouncing what they saw, and with the ears, listening to the words pronounced, hearing what is called 'the voices of the pages'": Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 15; also, see 16-17. Also, on the matter of oral and silent reading, see Paul Saenger, "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society," *Viator* 48 (1982), 367-414.

knowledge of the mundane into knowledge of God—Anselm’s prayers and meditations differ slightly from each other. The prayers are directed toward and seek assistance from individual saints. Prayers are for those who are already aware of their depravity—recognizing their own dire situation, they cry out for the saint’s help. Meditations, on the other hand, are more introspective. They focus on the soul and stress the sinner’s dreadful state. For, only after recognizing his or her desperate condition could the sinner begin to cultivate virtue and progress toward God. Anselm’s words about how he expects his meditations to be used, illuminate this point: “the soul of the sinner briefly contemplates itself; contemplating, it despises itself; despising, it humiliates itself; humiliating, it agitates itself by the terror of the last judgment, and through this agitation it breaks down in groans and tears.”⁶² Such, then, was the purpose behind the emotionally charged meditation on lost virginity produced by the thirty-seven-year-old monk/prior some ten years after entering the monastery at Bec.

4.2 A Lament for Virginity Wickedly Lost

We may now investigate Anselm’s *Deploratio* to determine what it reveals about Anselm’s perception of virginity. In so doing, I will argue that Anselm understood virginity in profoundly spiritual terms. I will also demonstrate that beneath the sexualized language is an anxiety, not about a corrupted physical condition or a particular sin but about the state of the soul.

The *Deploratio* takes the form of a soliloquy—the narrator is himself the sinner, whose virginity has been ruined, and over the course of the meditation, he speaks to his soul, to virginity and

⁶² *Ep* 10; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 113/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 1: 93: “Quarum prima non tantum *Oratio* quantum *Meditatio* dicenda est, qua se peccatoris anima breviter discutiat, discutiendo despiciat, despiciendo humiliet, humiliando terrore ultimi iudicii concutiat, concussa in gemitus et lacrymas erumpat.”

fornication, to sorrow and grief, to himself, and to God.⁶³ As the meditation opens, the reader hears the narrator cry out to his soul, aghast at his depraved condition. His soul has sinned terribly and now no longer retains the honor of a betrothal to Christ.⁶⁴ He laments:

My soul, my miserable soul, wretched soul of a wretched little man, cast off your torpor, strike down your sin, rouse your mind. Recall to your heart the enormity of your transgression and cry out from your heart with a tremendous groan. Increase, unhappy one, increase the horror of your wickedness and prolong a horrified terror and terrified anguish. You, I say, once washed in the whiteness of heaven, endowed with the Holy Spirit, pledged to the Christian profession were a virgin, betrothed to Christ.

...Now [Christ is] not the benign bridegroom of my virginity but the terrible judge of my impurity. Ah memory of lost delights, why do you add to the weight of my unhappiness? How wretched the lot of a wicked person, for whom both good and evil cause anguish equally! For my bad conscience and its agony, in which I fear I am bound to burn, torture me; the memory of a good conscience and its rewards, which I know I have lost and can no longer recover, tortures me. Oh how miserable, how grievous to lose irrecoverably that which ought to be preserved interminably!⁶⁵

⁶³ In Leclercq's judgment, Anselm's *Deploratio* concentrates first on the author's soul and then on sinning humanity in general: Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1979), 45.

⁶⁴ Anselm's repeated depiction of the soul as Christ's bridegroom contrasts with the pattern Pinder noticed in her study of a medieval text originally penned for women but adapted for a male audience. In her essay, she notes that certain gendered images were suitable for describing the monk while others were not. Among the unsuitable, was language that too pointedly suggested a gendered relationship between the soul and Christ: Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden," 173-74. Anselm is obviously content to apply such imagery to a man's soul. However, there is a suggestion that he may have preferred to attach that label to a man's soul rather than the man per se; for, the narrator never directly calls himself a virgin or a bride in the text. And, in one instance when the narrator is the subject, he refers to himself in terms of chastity: "If I have destroyed my chastity, have I destroyed your compassion?" (*Si mihi castitatem meam ademi: numquid tibi misericordiam tuam peremi?*) (*Med 2*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 82-83/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 228). This is intriguing, but it must be recognized that the technique of a meditation was to focus on the sinful soul. Thus, the repeated reference to the soul and its relationship with Christ rather than to the narrator himself are to be expected. For the adapted text studied by Pinder, see Anonymous, "Liber admonicionis," fol. 1v-142v. For the version penned for women, see Anonymous, *PL* 184: 1199-1306.

⁶⁵ Benedicta Ward has published an elegant translation of Anselm's meditations and prayers. However, unless otherwise noted, I will use my own more literal translations of the *Deploratio* because they more aptly demonstrate various points of my analysis. *Med 2*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 80/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 225-26: "Anima mea, anima aerumnosa, anima, inquam, misera miseri homunculi, excute torporem tuum et discute peccatum tuum et concute mentem tuam. Reduc ad cor enorme delictum et perduc de corde immanem rugitum. Intende, infelix, intende sceleris tui horrorem et protende horrificum terrorem et terrificum dolorem. Tu, inquam, quae quondam candidata caelesti lavacro, dotata spiritu sancto, in Christiana professione iurata, virgo fuisti, Christo desponsata. ...Utique non iam benignum sponsum virginitatis meae, sed terribilem iudicem immunditiae

As the text progresses, it is revealed that the sin committed is fornication, and the result is a painful separation between the soul and God caused entirely by the soul's willful behavior.

Listen to Anselm's words:

For you my soul, unfaithful to God, false to God, adulterous to Christ you of your own will were miserably cast down from the sublime heights of virginity into the abyss of fornication. You, once betrothed to the King of Heaven, have eagerly become the tormenter of hell's whore. Oh soul, you were cast off from God and handed over to the devil; no rather, you have cast off God and embraced the devil! For you, my most wretched soul, perverse harlot, impudent fornicator, first proposed divorce to your God, your lover and creator, and willingly handed yourself over to the devil, your ensnarer and destroyer.⁶⁶

As the meditation continues, the narrator slowly comes to terms with the appalling reality of his situation and the penalty he rightly deserves, and he begins to perceive a glimmer of hope. Here, for the first time, the narrator begins to speak to God reminding him (God) of his merciful nature. God is forgiving, the narrator resolves, so there must be a chance that even so great a sinner as himself might attain redemption and reconciliation. So ends this meditation on virginity so wickedly lost.

Anselm's resolutely spiritual perception of virginity can be gleaned from the excerpts cited above. In them, Anselm's judgment that virginity is a condition of the soul can be plainly

meae. Heu memoria perditae iucunditatis, cur sic superaggeaves pressuram possidentis infelicitatis? Quam misera sors flagitiosi hominis, cui et bonum et malum pariter sunt in tormentum! Torquet enim me mala conscientia et cruciatus eius, in quibus timeo me arsurum; torquet me bonae conscientiae et praemiorum eius memoria, quae scio me perdisse nec amplius recuperaturum. Vae miserum perdere, dolendum perdere, id perdere irrecuperabiliter quod servari debet interminabiliter! Heu inconsolabile perdere, quod non solum est damnosum bonorum, sed insuper est lucrosus tormentorum!"

⁶⁶ *Med 2*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 80/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 225-26: "Tu namque, anima mea perfida deo, periura dei, adultera Christi, libenter de sublimitate virginitatis miserabiliter es dimersa in baratrum fornicationis. Tu illa olim desponsata regi caelorum, ardentem facta es scortum tortoris tartarorum. Heu abiecta a deo, proiecta diabolo; immo abiciens deum, amplectens diabolum! Tu enim, tu miserrima mea, meretrix obstinate,

recognized. A virginal soul is one that enjoys spiritual union with God, as if a bride bound to her beloved spouse. The way the soul maintains that status is by remaining loyal to God and God's will. Conversely, virginity is lost by the soul's willful rejection of what is godly. This point is affirmed in other texts written by Anselm. For example, the *Dicta* reports Anselm as having remarked that in paradise the human soul was prosperous and virginal because it was unaware of corruptibility.⁶⁷ Thus, Adam and Eve had virginal souls because they willed only God's will—they knew nothing else.

Taken as a whole, it is clear that the concern of the *Deploratio's* narrator is not the loss of physical integrity but the loss of his righteous will and the reward (the union with God) that accompanied that upright condition. What has been destroyed and what caused the destruction are both internal: "Oh fornication, defiler of my mind, destroyer of my soul: you crept in, you cast me down from such a glorious joyous state into misery!"⁶⁸ There are no allusions in Anselm's meditation to a pure soul overtaken by a damaged body, no carping about sexual desire and unruly passions; these things are not the cause of the virgin's fall. Indeed, according to Anselm sin resides entirely in the will, not in the flesh or the appetites—his focus is not unruly, carnal drives or fallen human nature but the will's disobedience.⁶⁹ To be sure, the governing metaphor is that of sexual promiscuity; nevertheless, throughout the meditation the

fornicatrix impudens, tu prior amatori et creatori tuo deo repudium obtulisti, et ad insidiatorem et perditorem tuum daemonem te sponte contulisti."

⁶⁷ Alexander, "Liber ex dictis," 192: "Anima humana in paradiso dives et virgo fuerat, quia nihil corruptibilitatis noverat, sed mox ut inde exclusa est, pauper et corruptibilis facta est." Also, see *De conceptu* 1, 2; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 140-42/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 429-31.

⁶⁸ *Med 2*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 80/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 225: "Oh fornicatio sordidatrix mentis meae, perditrix animae meae: unde misero subrepsisti, de quam nitido, de quam iucundo statu me praecipitasti!"

⁶⁹ Evans, *Anselm*, 84-86; W. F. Ewbank, "Anselm, on Sin and Atonement," *Church Quarterly Review* 146 (1948), 61-67; Janaro, "Saint Anselm and the Development of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: Historical and

reader's gaze is continually directed toward the soul and its voluntary rejection of God. As Jean Leclercq eloquently states: in the *Deploratio*, the soul "has been unfaithful, not so much because she has given way to solicitations coming from the flesh, nor because she has been accomplice to an *affaire* between a man and a woman, but because she has let herself be seduced away from God to the Demon, away from the state of grace to sin."⁷⁰

To portray the broken bond between God and the soul, Anselm describes a human relationship ruined by wanton acts of sexual promiscuity—he speaks of the soul as having committed acts of fornication and adultery. He was by no means the first or last person to use sexual language as a metaphor for spiritual concepts. Indeed, this technique is well attested in the Bible. For example, in Ezekiel, God berates Jerusalem, saying, "But you trusted in your beauty, and played the whore because of your fame, and poured out your fornications on any passer-by" (16:15).⁷¹ As well, it was a method adopted by many in the Middle Ages. For medieval writers, "*fornicatio*," "*adulterium*" (adultery), "*adulter*" (adulterer), "*prostibulum*" (prostitute), and other terms denoting sexual immorality or sexually immoral people could refer to any spiritually sinful thing or person and by no means implied only offenses of a sexual nature.⁷²

Thanks to the *Dicta*, it is possible to discern what Anselm meant when he used the word *fornicatio* metaphorically. In two different chapters of that work, Anselm portrays the soul as

Theological Perspectives," 48-56; P. J. Toner, "St. Anselm's Definition of Original Sin," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 3 (1908), 425-28.

⁷⁰ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 45.

⁷¹ Also, see 2 Chr 21:10, Ez 16:25, 29, Num 15:39, Ps 72:27. On these metaphors in Scripture, see Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 160-67.

⁷² James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 205-07, 246.

Christ's bride and describes its (or her) relationship with God in sexual terms.⁷³ For instance, he tells how the soul fornicates from her spouse Christ when she associates with fornicators and adulterers. Presuming "fornicators and adulterers" is an allusion to sinful or immoral people, this would indicate that a person fornicates spiritually when he or she associates with sinners. Anselm further intones: "In as much as one is allied [to vice], so one fornicates from God, one's true bridegroom."⁷⁴ Again, then, a person is a spiritual fornicator when he or she chooses to sin (when allied to vice). And in a different passage, Anselm avers that "reason" is like man (*vir*), "will" is like the bride (*sponsa*), and "appetite" an adulterer (*adulter*). If this formula is plugged into the *Deploratio*, we recognize "the *narrator* who rebukes the *bride* for being an *adulterer*" as a metaphor for "*reason* chastising the *willful soul* for yielding to its *appetites*."⁷⁵ So described, "lost virginity" is a will that has succumbed to personal desires. Thus, though depicted in terms of fornication and lost virginity, the *Deploratio* is not a scathing attack of sexual misconduct but a gut-wrenching lament about alienation from God, God's judgment, and God's mercy.

4.3 Gunhilda

A close reading of Anselm's letters to Gunhilda supports the idea that Anselm's perception of virginity is chiefly spiritual and focused on the soul's relationship with God. It also shows how little his interpretation of virginity has to do with the condition of the body. What follows is a consideration of Gunhilda's story and the words Anselm composed for her.

⁷³ Alexander, "Liber ex dictis," 176-78, 189-93.

⁷⁴ Alexander, "Liber ex dictis," 191: "Illis etiam, qui aliquam societatem cum istis meretriculis coeperunt, nullam habeat communionem sponsa dei, quoniam quidem 'corrumpunt bonos mores colloquia mala' (1 Cor 15:33). Omnis etenim immundus, avarus, ebriosus, iracundus, sive alii vitio deditus, societatem et amicitiam quodam modo cum illo vitio accipit, cum quo delectatur per consensum mentis. Cui in quantum sociatur, in tantum a deo, qui suus est verus sponsus, fornicatur."

⁷⁵ Alexander, "Liber ex dictis," 176: "Est ergo ratio sive spiritus quasi vir, voluntas ut sponsa, appetitus interdum quasi adulter."

Gunhilda was the daughter and only remaining descendent of King Harold, the last Anglo-Saxon king. She was cloistered at Wilton Abbey.⁷⁶ At some point, she had taken refuge there for protection from the Norman invaders. However, in 1093, the thirty-year-old nun abandoned her convent at the side of Count Alan Rufus of Brittany.⁷⁷ It is unknown whether the two were ever lawfully married. But what is certain is that the couple only lived together for a few months before the count died unexpectedly. In a surprising turn, when Count Alan died, Gunhilda did not return to her cloister; instead, she resolved to marry his brother, Alan Niger. Her decisions and situation troubled Anselm to no end, and he wrote two pointed letters charging her to return to Wilton.⁷⁸

Gunhilda had worn the habit while a nun at Wilton but had never taken vows nor received consecration by a bishop. According to a ruling made by Lanfranc, nuns who had taken refuge in convents from the invaders and who had not made formal religious commitments had every right to depart from their cloisters and marry.⁷⁹ If, indeed, she left the convent of her own

⁷⁶ Gunhilda's story is known today only through Anselm's letters: *Ep* 168, 169; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 43-50/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 64-74.

⁷⁷ The circumstances of the nun's departure are uncertain—either she left of her own accord to marry the count or he abducted her. Fröhlich, Searle, and Southern propose the former theory: Fröhlich, "Introduction," 68 n. 5; Searle, "Women and the Legitimation of Succession," 167; Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 262. O'Keefe and Vaughn argue for the latter: O'Keefe, "Leaving Wilton: Gunhild and the Phantoms of Agency," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 106.2 (2007), 203-23; Vaughn, *Anselm and the Handmaidens*, 191.

⁷⁸ It seems likely that Gunhilda did return to Wilton, since she is mentioned in William of Malmesbury's *Vita Wulfstani* as having been healed by Wulfstan: Southern, *Anselm and his Biographer*, 188. See William of Malmesbury, *The Vita Wulfstani of William of Malmesbury*, ed. Reginald Ralph Darlington, Camden Third Series; 40 (London: Camden Society, 1928), 34. There are two widely divergent perspectives about why Anselm sought to convince Gunhilda to return to her convent. Those who see Anselm as a perceptive politician believe he opposed her marriages to the two Alans because King William Rufus, whose favor Anselm was courting, was against it. For a lucid presentation of this position, see Vaughn, *Anselm and the Handmaidens*, 190-92. On the other side of the spectrum are those, such as Southern, who believe Anselm was motivated by a concern for her spiritual welfare. For this view, see Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 262-64. My endeavor is not to determine the motivation behind his words but to look at the language he employs to convince her.

⁷⁹ *Ep* 53; Lanfranc, *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. & trans. V. Helen Clover and Margaret T. Gibson, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1979), 166-67: "Concerning the nuns about whom you wrote to me, dearest father, I give you this reply. Nuns who have made profession that they will keep a rule or who, although not yet professed, have been presented at the altar, are to be enjoined, exhorted and obliged to keep the rule in their manner of life. But those who have been neither professed nor presented at the altar [as oblates] are to be sent away at once without change of status, until their desire to remain in religion is examined more

accord, this is probably how Gunhilda saw her situation. Anselm perceived things another way: in his opinion, she had declared herself a nun by living in the monastery and wearing the habit. By those acts, she had made a promise to God and had become his bride. These are his words on the matter:

Even though you were not consecrated by the bishop and did not read your vows in his presence, nevertheless these vows were evident and cannot be denied since you wore the habit of your holy intention both in public and in private and through this you affirmed to everyone who saw you that you were dedicated to God no less than if you had read out your vows.⁸⁰

To further his argument, he adds that in the past, before profession and consecration had become common, men and women showed their intention simply by taking up the habit. And if any threw off their robes, they were judged apostates.⁸¹ She had no right or excuse to leave Wilton Abbey. Moreover, he has no doubt that when she abandoned her convent she dishonored God and destroyed her bond with him. In his assessment, unless she returns to Wilton, eternal damnation is all she can expect for her future. “For it is impossible for you to be saved in any way,” he writes, “unless you return to the habit and the way of life you

carefully. As to those who as you tell me fled to a monastery not for love of the religious life but for fear of the French, if they can prove that this was so by the unambiguous witness of nuns better than they, let them be granted unrestricted leave to depart. This is the king’s policy and our own” (*De sanctimonialibus de quibus dulcissima michi paternitas uestra ad me litteras misit hoc uobis respondeo. Sanctimoniales quae de seruanda regula professionem fecerunt, uel quae quamuis adhuc professae non sint ad altare tamen oblatae fuerunt, secundum mores et uitas earum ad seruandam regulam moneantur, increpentur, constringantur. Quae uero nec professae nec oblatae sunt, ad praesens sic dimittantur, donec uoluntates earum de seruando ordine subtilius exquirantur. Quae uero non amore religionis sed timore Francigenarum sicut uos dicitis ad monasterium confugerunt, si hoc firmo meliorum sanctimonialium testimonio probare possunt, libera eis recedendi concedatur potestas. Et hoc est consilium regis et nostrum*).

⁸⁰ *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 44-45/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 66: “Quamvis enim ab episcopo sacrata non fueris nec coram ipso professionem legeris, hoc solum tamen est manifesta et quae negari non potest professio, quia publice et secrete habitum sancti propositi portasti, per quod omnibus te uidentibus deo dicatam te esse non minus quam professionem legendo affirmasti.” Also, see *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 44/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 65; *Ep* 169; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 48-50/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 71-73.

⁸¹ *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 45/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 66.

rejected.”⁸² And in even stronger words in his second letter, he warns: “either Christ will draw you to the heights of paradise if you hold on to the life of a nun, or—God forbid!—the devil [will draw you] into the depths of hell if you abandon it.”⁸³ All of this shows that the key to the alarm Anselm conveys in his letters is not lost physical virginity. The concern he expresses is spawned by her broken promise to God and the punishment she will reap if she does not return to her convent.

To illustrate his position, Anselm enlists the language of human sexual relationships—more pointedly, he draws on the genre of the *molestiae nuptiarum* or “woes of marriage.” Tracts written in this rhetorical style encourage women to preserve virginity by warning them of oppressive husbands and cautioning that even good spouses die, and by reminding them about the perils of pregnancy and childbirth, the aggravation of children, and the burdens of running a household.⁸⁴ They also draw on the metaphor of the ascetic as a bride of Christ. Since the fourth century, the virgin’s consecration ceremony had been seen as a marriage ceremony between the virgin and Christ, and by the eleventh century it had long been a commonplace to designate the consecrated virgin or nun as “*sponsa Christi*.”⁸⁵ This designation served as a perfect tool to encourage virginity by contrasting carnal marriage with a spiritual marriage to Christ. Alan of Lille (d. 1202) employs this motif in his preaching manual, the *Ars praedicandi*.

⁸² Trans. mine. *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 44/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 66: “Impossibile namque est te ullo modo posse salvari, nisi ad habitum et propositum abiectum redieris.”

⁸³ *Ep* 169; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 50/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 73: “...aut Christus te trahet ad altiora paradisi, si sanctimoniam vitam tenueris; aut—quod deus avertat!—diabolus in inferiora inferni, si eam deserueris.”

⁸⁴ For the quintessential work written in this vein, see Anonymous, *Hali meidhad*, ed. Bella Millett (New York: Published for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1982), 12–20/Anonymous, “Holy Maidenhood,” *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrone Wisse and Associated Works*, trans. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 234–40. On the *molestiae nuptiarum* topos, see Bella Millett, “The Theological Background,” *Hali meidhad* (New York: Published for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1982), xxx–xxxviii; Newman, *WomanChrist*, 32–34; Katharina M. Wilson and Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 44–60.

⁸⁵ Heene, *The Legacy of Paradise: Marriage, Motherhood, and Woman in Carolingian Edifying Literature*, 114, 128.

In it, he reminds women that mortal husbands will die while their bond with Christ is eternal. He also underscores the ephemeral nature of wealth, good looks, noble ancestry, and worldly honor compared with Christ's eternal possession of all that is desirable.⁸⁶ Anselm's technique has much in common with that of Alan (of course, only incidentally since Anselm wrote long before the Alan). In his epistle to Gunhilda, Anselm focuses largely on the great disparity between a relationship with the Divine and one with a mortal man: "Consider now, dearest daughter, how far apart are the embraces of men and the pleasure of the flesh from the embraces of Christ and from the pleasure of chastity and purity of heart." Consider, he continues, the difference between the two pleasures: the one, spiritual, delightfully awaiting Christ, secure and consoling in this life; and the other, carnal, fearful of judgment, shameful in this life.⁸⁷ The language of the *molestiae nuptiarum* fills the pages of his letters to Gunhilda.

Indeed, it is in this light that Anselm's words about Gunhilda's lost virginity should be read. "Noble woman, how shall I say it? You, a virgin, were chosen to be the spouse of God and marked out for him by your habit and way of life. What shall I say you are now?"⁸⁸ And, "[Christ] is still waiting for you and calling you back so that you may be his lawful bride, and if not a virgin at least chaste."⁸⁹ When he intones these phrases, he is not chastising her for lost physical virginity and sexual misconduct; he is contrasting her former holy way of life with the carnal life of the world she has chosen. She has abandoned her eternal spouse for mortal men;

⁸⁶ *Ars Praedicandi* 47; *PL* 210: 194/Alanus de Insulis, *The Art of Preaching*, trans. G. R. Evans, Cistercian Fathers Series; 23 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 168.

⁸⁷ *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 44/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 65: "Considera igitur iam nunc, carissima, quantum distent viriles amplexus et carnalis delectatio ab amplexibus Christi et a delectatione castitatis et cordis munditia.... Considera, inquam, quanta sit in spirituali delectatione munditia, quanta sit in carnali immunditia; quid spiritualis promittat et quid carnalis minetur; quanta sit in spirituali spes et quam delectabilis expectatio Christi, quanta etiam in hac vita securitas et consolatio, quantus sit in carnali timor iudicii dei, quanta etiam in praesenti vita confusio." It should be noted that he does not think people who are legally married can expect damnation. His premise is that she cannot marry a mortal man because she is already married to Christ.

⁸⁸ *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 44/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 65: "Femina nobilis, quomodo dicam? Sponsa dei virgo fueras electa et deo habitu et conversatione assignata. Quid dicam modo te esse?"

she was a nun, a virgin, and now she is not. The language of virginity sets up a counterpoint between her life as a religious—a nun, bound eternally to Christ—and her life in the world—carnal and mortal. Virginity, for him, has a chiefly spiritual meaning that connotes union with God. The narrator of the meditation lost his virginity by willfully rejecting God, Gunhilda by abandoning her promise to God. Both are spiritual fornicators; both have destroyed the bond between Christ and the soul.

Anselm's correspondence with Gunhilda offers one other piece of evidence indicating just how little physical virginity affected spiritual status in Anselm's perception. Anselm's reprimands about Gunhilda's lost virginity (cited above) are followed with an assurance that she can still return to her convent and to God with honor: "For we know of many holy women who, having lost their virginity, were more pleasing to God and were closer to him through penitence in their chastity than many others, even though holy in their virginity."⁹⁰ She may have relinquished her relationship with God, but he has no doubt that she can reestablish it and achieve the pinnacle of holiness if only she would resume her life as a nun. If this comment is read as a comparison between nuns who are virgins and those who are not—between her former physical virginity and her current lack of physical integrity (after she presumably engaged in intercourse with one or both of the Alans)—then it shows that, in his judgment, physical virginity does not add an essential value to a person's spiritual state. It does not bestow any special status upon the religious here on earth or later in heaven. Indeed, the

⁸⁹ *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 45/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 66: "...adhuc te exspectat et revocat, ut sis legitima sponsa eius, et si non virgo, saltem casta."

⁹⁰ *Ep* 168; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 45/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 66: "Scimus enim plures sanctas mulieres, quae post amissam virginitatem plus placuerunt deo et magis illi familiares fuerunt per paenitentiam in castitate, quam plures aliae, quamvis sanctae, in virginitate."

chaste (spiritual virgins) can even hope to attain a higher spiritual level than those who have preserved physical virginity.⁹¹ The body's physical condition is not what matters to Anselm; what matters is the relationship between the soul and God.

5 Fornicatio

So far, I have focused exclusively on Anselm's conception of virginity and lost virginity and the spiritual message conveyed by his meditation and letters to Gunhilda. I have shown that the fornication and loss of virginity described in the *Deploratio* can (indeed, must) be understood spiritually. It describes a person who has sinned, who has failed to surrender to God's will, and the loss of spiritual union with God caused by that negligence. The fornicator is a spiritual sinner: he or she is a person whose soul has willingly rejected God. In the following pages, I consider whether the *Deploratio* should also be understood on a more literal level: is it possible that Anselm's meditation on lost virginity is a confession of a personal sexual sin cloaked in symbolic language? In other words, ought we believe that Anselm wrote the meditation as an expression of grief over his own sinful sexual activity and a concomitant loss of spiritual union and/or physical virginity? It is a question worth investigating, in part, because it has been considered and answered differently by scholars over the years but, also, because the answer has direct bearing on my analysis. If we conclude that the language of the meditation is more than metaphorical—that is, if we determine that the sin causing the narrator's alienation from God and represented metaphorically as fornication was actually a sexual sin—and if the loss mourned was a literal physical virginity, this could indicate that male physical virginity was a substantive idea/ideal for him. And if the lament concerns an actual sexual sin but not

⁹¹ Resnick has also noticed this point: Resnick, "Miraculous Birth of the God-Man," 79.

necessarily lost physical virginity, this would still suggest that matters of sex and the body are important to his definition of virginity.

In speculating about the potentially autobiographical content of the *Deploratio*, it is relevant to begin with an assessment of Anselm's sexual status when he took up the religious life. Did Anselm enter his religious community as a virgin, possessing a physical virginity he would soon mourn? From what is known about Anselm's life that is unlikely. For one, he did not put on monastic robes until he was twenty-seven, more than a decade after the typical age when medieval men might be expected to become sexually active.⁹² And there is no reason to suppose that he piously observed chastity in the years before his conversion. Not even his medieval biographer endeavors to represent Anselm as a precociously virtuous youth, who sought to preserve virginity even before becoming a monk. Instead, Eadmer portrays Anselm's spirituality as appearing in fits and starts and maturing over time. He describes how Anselm sought to become a monk as a fifteen-year-old youth but how his zeal later dissipated.⁹³ Even as late as 1059 when Anselm arrived at Bec, his determination was to study under Lanfranc not to become a religious.⁹⁴ If, then, the *Deploratio* were inspired by a loss of physical virginity, the loss he grieves would have occurred years before he wrote the work. It hardly seems likely that a long-ago sexual encounter would prompt such passionate prose. The other option is that the work was motivated by an illicit sexual act or sexual thoughts that occurred after he had become a monk (when he was no longer a physical virgin). In that instance, the virginity

⁹² Fourteen was the age when medieval males might typically have their first sexual experience. On this matter, see James A. Brundage, "Carnal Delight: Canonistic Theories of Sexuality," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law, Salamanca, 21-25 September 1976*, vol. 5, eds. Stephan Kuttner and Kenneth Pennington (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1980), 378-79; Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 101. Also useful, are: Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 11-12; Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 84; Joseph H. Lynch, "The Cistercians and Underage Novices," *Cîteaux: Commentarii cistercienses* 24 (1973), 283-84; Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 100-02.

⁹³ VA 1.4; Eadmer, *Life of Anselm*, 6.

destroyed would have been spiritual not physical—what would have been ruined was his relationship with God. At this point, then, it is at least possible to assert that even if illicit sexual behavior or thoughts were what motivated Anselm to write the *Deploratio*, the lost virginity it mourns would likely have been spiritual. In other words, if there was a sexual sin, it did not destroy physical virginity; it destroyed spiritual virginity. This scenario corresponds well with my conviction that for Anselm virginity was chiefly a spiritual ideal and had little to do with the condition of the body.

But I am not convinced that there was a sexual sin. Thus, it remains for me to consider the arguments made by various scholars for understanding the text literally (that it relates to an actual sexual transgression committed by Anselm) and to demonstrate that there is not enough evidence to support that reading.

5.1 The Hell Prepared for Fornicators

Benedicta Ward is one scholar who has considered the question of what motivated the *Deploratio*. She is of the opinion that the sexual language should be understood literally: “there seems to be no reason for not taking it in its natural sense, as the lament of someone... who has in some way sinned sexually.”⁹⁵ To support her supposition, she points to similarities she notices between Anselm’s *Deploratio* and his second letter to Gunhilda. In her assessment, both works contain illustrations of the hell that God has prepared for fornicators. Based on that, Ward surmises: since the letter to Gunhilda is dealing with a literal act of fornication, and

⁹⁴ Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 15.

⁹⁵ Ward, “Introduction,” 74-75. Similarly, Tomas Bestul has remarked that it seems reasonable to accept that the work “contain[s] at least a core of biographical truth”: Bestul, “Augustine and the Orations,” 599.

since the letter and the *Deploratio* portray hell similarly, the meditation must also be about a literal act of fornication.⁹⁶

Her logic is sound; however, I believe she has misinterpreted the passages. Firstly, of the hell described in the *Deploratio*, Anselm says, “Are these truly the things, O great God, that are prepared for fornicators *and those who spurn you*—of whom I am one?”⁹⁷ His words indicate that the punishments he describes are for all sinners, not just sexual sinners. Secondly, the passage she refers to in the letter does not describe sexual sinners and the punishments meted out them. To her mind, the following passage describes Alan rotting in a hell prepared for fornicators:

You loved Count Alan Rufus and he you; where is he now? What has become of the lover you loved? Go and lie now with him in the bed where he lies; gather his worms into your bosom; embrace his corpse; kiss his bare teeth from which the flesh has fallen. He does not now care for your love in which he delighted while he lived; and the flesh which you desired now rests.⁹⁸

But this is not a description of a punished fornicator. Rather, it conveys the illusory and transitory nature of worldly attachments (and, thus, is very much part of the *molestiae nuptiarum*

⁹⁶ Ward, “Introduction,” 74–75. Southern also comments on the similarity. He mentions a likeness in the imagery: Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 263.

⁹⁷ Italics mine. The entire passage from the *Deploratio* on hell is as follows. *Med 2*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 82/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 227–28: “Oh the confusion of shrieks, the commotion of gnashing teeth, the disordered multitude of groans. Oh, oh, too much, too much!! The sulfurous flame, the hellish flame, the gloomy coils, I see you whirl round with a terrifying sound! Worms living in the fire: is it any wonder that the greediness of gnawing so inflames you, whom the flames of fire do not burn? Demons burning with us, breathing fire, gnashing teeth in fury: why are you so cruel to those who wallow among you? Torments of every kind, meted out according to justice not by what can be borne, will no action, no remedy, no limit restrain you? Are these truly the things, O great God, that are prepared for fornicators and those who spurn you—of whom I am one?” (*Heu confusio ululatum, tumultus dentibus stridentium, inordinata multitudo gemituum. Vae, vae; quot et quot et quot vae, vae! Ignis sulphureus, flamma tartarea, caliginosa volumina, quam terrifico rugitu video vos rotari! Vermes in igne viventes: quae mira aviditas rodendi sic vos accendit, quos ille ignis ignium non incendit? Daemones coardentes, frementes ardore, frendentes furore: cur sic crudeles estis iis qui volutantur inter vos? Omnimoda tormenta, iustitia moderata, ad sustinendum immoderata: siccine nullus modus, nullum remedium, nullus finis temperabit vos? Haecine sunt, magne deus, quae parata sunt fornicatoribus et contemptoribus tuis, quorum unus ego sum?*). Ward does not specify the exact passage from the *Deploratio* about which she refers, but this must be it.

⁹⁸ *Ep* 169; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 47–48/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 70: “Amasti amantem te comitem Alanum Rufum. Ubi nunc est? Quo devenit ille amatus amator tuus? Vade nunc, soror, colloca te cum eo in lecto in quo nunc iacet; collige vermes eius in sinu tuo; amplectere cadaver eius; osculare stricte nudos dentes eius, nam labia

strategy he enlists throughout his letters to Gunhilda). The sentences immediately preceding the above passage confirm this assessment:

Consider: what is the glory of the world, what is it that you love? You were the daughter of the King and the Queen [King Harold and Queen Ealdgyth]. Where are they? They are worms and dust. Their exalted rank, their pleasures, their riches neither preserved them nor went with them.⁹⁹

Here, Anselm depicts Gunhilda's deceased parents (the king and queen) as worms and dust, just as he does Alan Rufus. But her parents were surely not engaging in illicit sexual activities—they were lawfully married. Instead, they represent the transience of wealth and power. Anselm introduces the topic by instructing Gunhilda to 'consider the glory of the world; consider what it is she loves'. Her parents symbolize worldly glory and Alan is the one she loves: wealth is fleeting, mortal love is fleeting, and they all end up buried, rotting, and food for worms. Anselm is plainly contrasting the spiritual and eternal world Gunhilda has abandoned with the carnal and transitory world she has embraced. Therefore, the meditation and letter excerpts deal with two different points. The passage in the meditation describes the hell every sinner—every spiritual fornicator—can expect to endure. The illustration in the letter reveals just how fleeting is the way of life Gunhilda has chosen. Hence, each passage conveys the central message of its text. But neither (separately or in comparison with each other) supports the supposition that the fornication of the meditation should be understood in its literal sense.

iam putredine consumpta sunt. Certe non curat nunc amorem tuum quo vivens delectabatur, et tu horres putridam carnem eius qua uti desiderabas."

⁹⁹ *Ep* 169; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 47/Anselm, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 71: "Considera: quid est gloria mundi, quid est quod amas? Filia regis et reginae fuisti. Ubi sunt? Vermes et pulvis sunt. Altitudo illorum, voluptates illorum, divitiae illorum nec illos servaverunt nec cum illis abierunt."

5.2 The Intensity of Emotion

R. W. Southern and Brian Patrick McGuire have also weighed in on the question of whether Anselm's meditation was motivated by and refers to an actual sexual sin. About the *Deploratio* and its meaning, Southern has commented that to understand it in *merely* spiritual terms would be to do Anselm a disservice: its contents "are not the words of a man whose mind had always been the placid mirror of sweetness and light. To explain them in any but their natural sense would be, though a false delicacy, to say that the writer was not a sinner but a trifler."¹⁰⁰

McGuire, who takes up the question of the *Deploratio's* subject matter at greater length than does any other modern writer, makes a similar point. Is Anselm, McGuire wonders, writing about sexual intercourse, masturbation, impure thoughts, or

...is Anselm just an overscrupulous saint-in-the-making who wants to tell us he is a great sinner in order to establish his holiness? If this final possibility is the case, then the meditation is just a youthful attempt at mastering a difficult rhetorical style.

McGuire continues, saying that the last option is not plausible because of the "strength of conviction in the language" and "too many direct indications of personal experience of sin" for the message of the text to be ignored.¹⁰¹ We may not know the exact sin Anselm has committed, McGuire avers, but we can be relatively certain that it was a sexual sin "of which Anselm has immediate knowledge, probably from his own experience."¹⁰²

Southern's and McGuire's statements suggest that one possible (but I believe wrong) way to comprehend the fornication spoken of in the meditation is as something *purely* or *merely* spiritual, something totally divorced from substantive thoughts or deeds. Read this way, the narrator would be understood to represent 'sinful humanity'—no act, no deed, no sins per se

¹⁰⁰ Southern, *Anselm and his Biographer*, 46. Also, see Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 152.

¹⁰¹ McGuire, "Love, Friendship, and Sex," 118.

would be involved, just the idea that as humans, men and women cannot but be sinners. Humanity is strapped with Original Sin and unable to follow God's will unfailingly. Indeed, this seems to be precisely how Jean Leclercq reads the text.¹⁰³ However, Anselm's definition of spiritual fornication precludes this way of interpreting the meditation. In Anselm's assessment, spiritual fornication *is* sin (both intellectual and physical). It is not merely or purely spiritual, not simply a description of fallen humanity.¹⁰⁴

I described Anselm's understanding of spiritual fornication above, telling how he deems anyone "allied to vice," a spiritual fornicator. But Anselm provides even more detail. He clarifies just what *fornicatio* and *adulter* mean to him in one of the *Dicta*. There, taking his lead from a list Paul provided for the Galatians, Anselm intones that someone is a spiritual adulterer or fornicator when he/she commits the sins of "sexual immorality (*fornicatio*), impurity, immodesty, excess (*luxuria*), idolatry, sorcery, hatred, discord, rivalries, wrath, strife, dissension, factions, jealousy, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things' (Gal 5:19-21)."¹⁰⁵ As Paul explains, these are the sins of a corrupted soul, and, in Anselm's assessment, the person who embraces any of them commits spiritual fornication. A spiritual fornicator is a person who lets in sinful desire and so becomes a sinner. Indeed, it could be said that for

¹⁰² McGuire, "Love, Friendship, and Sex," 119.

¹⁰³ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 45-47.

¹⁰⁴ E. B. Pusey, a nineteenth-century translator of Anselm's meditation, would seem to agree with me. To make his point (and probably to protect his readers' sensibilities) he substituted the text's definitive title with what he considered a more apt title from an alternative manuscript: "How to Arouse the Soul from Listlessness to Amend its Sins." He supports his interpretation with the claim: "Sin is continually in Holy Scripture spoken of as adultery against God": Anselm, *Meditations and Prayers to the Holy Trinity and our Lord Jesus Christ* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1856), 31 n. a. Both his choice of title and comment about the representation of sin in Christian Scripture suggest that Pusey believes the fornication in the meditation connotes actual sin not just 'humanity as sinful by nature'.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander, "Liber ex dictis," 190: "Ceterum cavendum est ne fornicatores et adulteri se immisceant qui sponsam dei alicuius labe criminis obfusando corrumpant. Quorum de familia haec sunt: 'fornicatio, immunditia, impudicitia, luxuria, idolorum servitus, veneficia, inimicitiae, contentiones, aemulationes, irae, rixae, dissensiones, sextae, invidiae, homicidia, ebrietates, comessiones et his similia' (Gal 5:19-21)."

Anselm spiritual fornication is the equivalent of sin, any sin. Therefore, it would seem that the appropriate question to ask of the *Deploratio* is not whether the fornication of the lament is *purely* or *merely* spiritual, but whether the spiritual fornication referred to in the meditation was a *sexual* sin rather than some other sin. In other words, might there not be a middle ground between ‘no sin at all’ (sinful humanity) and ‘sexual sin’?

5.3 Sin

At the heart of Southern’s and McGuire’s comments is the idea that the raw emotion that bursts forth from the *Deploratio* is so intense that it must have been related to remorse over a literal act of fornication. To be sure, the anguish communicated through his *Deploratio* certainly indicates that Anselm was deeply troubled about his own state of salvation. Yet, to appreciate the depth of emotion found in the meditation, one need not interpret the work literally but simply give full justice to Anselm’s conception and experience of sin.

Anselm talks about sinning in *Cur Deus Homo*. There, he explains that sin is the failure to render to God what is owed. What humanity owes God is absolute obedience: “The will of every rational creature ought to be subordinate to the will of God.” Furthermore, failure to offer full submission to God’s will is a violation of God’s honor and constitutes a sin.¹⁰⁶ But what does that mean? As John McIntyre explains it, Anselm conceives of sin as:

the orientation of the total personality [mind, will, and inclinations] away from God. It is a radical alienation of man [humanity] from that Person.... There is no question of a sinless intellect being betrayed by lustful flesh; both intellect and body express the rebellion of the will which refuses to pay the debt due to the God Who created them for obedience.

¹⁰⁶ *CDH* 1.11; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 2: 68/Anselm, *Complete Treatises*, 318: “B. Quo dist debitum quod deo debemus? A. Omnis voluntas rationalis creaturae subiecta debet esse voluntati dei....”

Sin, McIntyre sums up, is the failure of the whole human being to subject the will to God's will.¹⁰⁷ Sin, in Anselm's conception, is not merely a regrettable peccadillo. Sin is a direct and grievous offense against God, which creates a nearly insuperable chasm between the believer and God. One need only read Anselm's words to understand just how gravely he apprehended sinning: "[a] rotting dog smells more tolerable to men and women than the sinful soul smells to God...."¹⁰⁸

And there is every reason to suppose that Anselm took his judgments about sin and its consequences earnestly and quite literally. Both Southern and Eadmer—his modern and medieval biographers—describe Anselm as keenly conscious of sin, especially in his early years as a monk (the years in which he wrote his prayers and meditations). They describe a man who could very well have reacted acutely to whatever transgression, even if it were not sexual in nature. To be sure, Eadmer sets aside a whole chapter to convey Anselm's horror of sin. "For," he discloses,

[Anselm] was more afraid of sinning than of anything else in the world. We have often—and, upon my conscience, this is no lie—heard him solemnly protest that if he should see before his very eyes the horror of sin on the one hand and the pains of hell on the other, and was obliged to plunge into one or the other, he would choose hell rather than sin....¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ John McIntyre, *St. Anselm and his Critics: A Re-Interpretation of the Cur Deus homo* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1954), 68. For his entire discussion of Anselm's conception of sin, see McIntyre, *Anselm and his Critics*, 68-76. Brown and Collinge also discuss Anselm's notion of sin and what is owed to God: Brown, "Anselm on Atonement," 290-95; William Collinge, "Monastic Life as a Context for Religious Understanding in St. Anselm," *American Benedictine Review* 35.4 (1984), 383-85. Collinge insightfully links the notion of total submission to God to the perfect obedience required of a monk, arguing that monks and nuns, in their utter submission of will to the abbot or abbess and fellow religious, are those most able to render God his due—no wonder why Anselm saw monastic life as the surest way to salvation.

¹⁰⁸ Trans. mine. *Meditatio ad concitandum timorem* (*Med* 1); Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 76/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 21: "Quam tolerabilius canis putris foetet hominibus quam anima peccatrix deo!"

¹⁰⁹ *VA* 15; Eadmer, *Life of Anselm*, 84-85: "Nil enim in mundo quantum peccare timebat. Conscientia mea teste non mentior, quia sepe illum sub veritatis testimonio profitentem audivimus, quoniam si hinc peccati horrorem, hinc inferni dolorem corporaliter cerneret, et necessario uni eorum immergi deberet prius infernum quam peccatum appeteret...."

And Southern's treatment of the topic reinforces Eadmer's interpretation. He observes that Anselm's fear that "many are called but few chosen," his dread that "whoever does not live as one of the few" will be damned, is something that characterizes Anselm's earliest letters and continues to surface in his writing throughout his life. Moreover, he speculates that Anselm "could not escape from the expectation of widespread damnation.... There was no moderation, no sense of security in Anselm's thought."¹¹⁰

A look at the whole body of Anselm's prayers and meditations shows Anselm confessing a dread and horror of sin and portraying his own sins as utterly vile and despicable. Listen to the way he describes his sinfulness and depravity in a prayer to Saint Peter: "I show you my soul, the strength of its virtue dissolved, bound by the chains of sin, weighed down by a burden of vices, stinking and dirty with misdeeds, torn by the wounds of devils, festering and filthy with the ulcers of crimes."¹¹¹ Likewise, he confesses to the Virgin Mary:

My soul is so defiled with filth and stink that it fears you [Mary] might turn your merciful face away from it.... My sins, my wickedness, if you [my sins and wickedness] consider my soul destroyed by your poison, why do you make it so dreadful with your foulness that compassion cannot gaze upon it.

In the same prayer, he continues: "My sins cannot be cured without confession, but they are not revealed without shame. If they are concealed, they are incurable; if they are seen, they are abominable. They scorch me with anguish, they frighten me with fear. They crush me with their bulk, they oppress me with their weight, and confound me with shame."¹¹² These excerpts plainly show Anselm's profound experience of sin.

¹¹⁰ Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 85.

¹¹¹ Or 9; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 32/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 139: "...coram te exhibeo animam meam nervis virtutum dissolutam, catenis vitiorum ligatam, pondere peccatorum aggravatam, delictorum sordibus foedatam, discissam vulneribus daemonum, putridam et foetidam ulceribus criminum...."

¹¹² Trans. mine. Or 5; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 13, 14/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 107-08, 109: "Sic sordibus et foetore foedatur, ut timeat ne ab ipsa misericors vultus tuus avertatur.... Peccata mea, nequitiae meae, si habetis

Brian Patrick McGuire would argue that the sins so preoccupying Anselm (such as those reflected in the above examples) are sexual in nature. In an article he wrote nearly forty years ago, he commented that “Anselm’s revulsion for sexual matters... was never too far from the surface of his consciousness,” and that he had a “neurotic obsession with sexual sin” at the time he wrote his *Deploratio*. To support that powerful contention, he enlists three witnesses: 1) Anselm’s *Deploratio*; 2) his letters to Gunhilda; 3) a vision Anselm related to Eadmer.¹¹³ I have already argued that his *Deploratio* is a lament over the condition of the soul and that his letters to Gunhilda were focused on her broken promise to God not her sexual sin. However, even if anxiety about sexual sins motivated both (and I believe they did not), two isolated cases hardly demonstrate a “neurotic obsession” or “revulsion” for sexual matters. The third piece of his argument—Anselm’s vision—also fails to convince. The vision Anselm describes to Eadmer is of a swift, turbulent, and filthy river—*turbida et immunda, et omni spurciciarum sorde horrida*—which Anselm understood as signifying the torrent and turmoil of worldly concerns that sweep up and carry along secular men and women. As Anselm tells it, the vision underscores the difference between the world and the cloister and induces him to redouble his efforts to flee the one and embrace the other.¹¹⁴ A consideration of Anselm’s description and assessment of its meaning suggests that the vision is not best interpreted as a commentary on the horrors of sexuality. Southern (the work’s translator) would seem to agree since his English rendering of

animam meam vestro veneno peremptam: vel cur sic facitis eam vestra foeditate horrendam, ut miseratio non possit aspicere illam?”; “Non sanantur sine confessione, nec produntur sine confusione. Si celantur, sunt insanabilia; si videntur, sunt detestabilia. Urunt me dolore, terrent me timore. Mole me obruunt, pondere me premunt, pudore me confundunt.” Also, see *Or* 8; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 28/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 130-31.

¹¹³ McGuire, “Love, Friendship, and Sex,” 119-21. Brundage makes a similar sort of observation about Anselm, but his comment is based on a prayer that is no longer considered authentic: Brundage, *Law, Sex, Society*, 184. The prayer is *Or* 4; PL 159: 870.

¹¹⁴ *VA* 21; Eadmer, *Life of Anselm*, 35-36.

the text contains no sexual undercurrent. Therefore, McGuire's case that Anselm was fixated on sexual sins is not persuasive.

Anselm's other meditations and prayers offer further evidence that Anselm's focus was not on sexual sin. In many of these works, the monk describes the sort of sins that so agitate his conscience, and, in these passages, sexual sin has no particular prominence. Observe Anselm's train of thought in his first meditation: "Whatever then is found in you that has not been directed according to the will of God, whether in work or leisure, speech or silence, to the smallest thought, even all your living, will be condemned."¹¹⁵ Witness too, the litany of sins he confesses in his prayer to Saint Benedict: "It would be too long a story to tell of all the gluttony, sloth, inconstancy, impatience, vainglory, detraction, disobedience, and all the other sins which my wretched soul commits, deriding me each day."¹¹⁶ In these and other examples, Anselm bewails his condition and delineates particular sins, but there is no special emphasis on sexual transgressions. They show a person who experiences himself as a true sinner, a person who has looked at himself only to see reflected back the image of someone who (in his own judgment) has amassed an array of sins so vast that he can hardly imagine anything but damnation for his future.

Anselm's early devotional works do not reveal a preoccupation with matters of a sexual nature; rather, they expose an overwhelming fear, a terror, that he would be judged a sinner and condemned to hell. In his view, the eternal gloom and torture of hell is the punishment for

¹¹⁵ *Med 1*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 77-78/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 222: "Tunc quippe condemnabitur quidquid fuerit inventum in te operis vel otii, sermonis et silentii, usque ad minimam cogitationem, etiam quod vixisti, si non fuerit ad dei voluntatem directum. Vae, quot peccata prouent ibi ex improviso quasi ex insidiis, quae modo non vides! Certe plura et fortassis terribiliora his quae nunc vides."

¹¹⁶ *Or 15*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 62-63/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 197-98: "Nimis, inquam, longum et enumerare gastrimargiam, somnolentiam, levitatem, impatientiam, cenodoxiam, detractionem, inoboedientiam et caetera vitia, quibus facta est infelix anima mea cotidianum ludibrium...." Also, see *Or 11*; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 42-43/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 158-59.

every sin not just, or even especially, sexual sin: “Alas for me, here are sins accusing me—there is the terror of judgment. Below the horrible chaos of hell lies open—above is the wrath of the judge.... and thus overtaken, where can a sinner turn.”¹¹⁷ To his mind, he has committed a variety of individual sins, each of which is damnable. But those sins, whatever they may have been, are not the central problem for Anselm. *What* he did or thought is not what so traumatizes him. The anticipated *effect* of those transgressions is what fills him with dread. For while Anselm imagines union with God as a profoundly intimate relationship, he conceives of lost union as utter isolation, separation, and alienation. This judgment that a person might be rejected (justifiably) by God for any willful transgression is Anselm’s real fixation because it meant that those who fail to subject their will to God’s will, those who succumb to the lures of the world, those who have lost virginity through spiritual fornication might be forever judged as God’s enemies.

¹¹⁷ *Med* 1; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 78/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 223: “O angustiae! Hinc erunt accusantia peccata, inde terrens iustitia; subtus patens horridum chaos inferni, desuper iratus iudex.... peccator sic deprehensus in quam partem se premet?” Also, see *Or* 14; Anselm, *Anselmi opera*, 3: 58/Anselm, *Prayers and Meditations*, 189.

Chapter II

Guibert of Nogent: When I Was in My Tender Adolescence

On the day before Easter, in rural northern France, some time between 1055 and 1064,¹ a woman of the minor nobility went into labor. What seemed at first to be an ordinary delivery soon became complicated and dangerous: the child was emerging feet first (a breech birth), and the life of both baby and mother hung in the balance. Evrard, the woman's husband and the unborn child's father, was nearby. Though surrounded by family and friends, he was unable to quell the dreadful fear that he might soon be burying two loved ones. With hopes that he might obtain Divine assistance, he rushed to his local church and pleaded for the Virgin Mary's intervention. Evrard swore to her that if only she would save the life of his wife and unborn baby, he would dedicate his child to the Church—if a boy, he would be consecrated as a cleric; if a girl, she would be offered to a convent. At that very moment, the story goes, the newborn

¹ Though he wrote an autobiography of his life, Guibert did not record the date or even the precise location of his birth. There has been much scholarly debate over his year of birth—dates as early as 1053 and as late as 1064 have been posited—and, still, no decisive conclusion has been reached. Mabillon first suggested 1053: Jean Mabillon, *Annales Ordinis s. Benedicti*, ed. Lucca (Paris: 1739-1745), 4: 497. Ever since Jan Dhondt's 1939 article, it has been generally acknowledged that 1053 is too early: Jan Dhondt, "Les relations entre la France et la Normandie sous Henri I," *Normannia* 12 (1939), 465-86. John Benton argues for a 1064 birth date: John F. Benton, "Appendix I," *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 229-33. Labande, the most recent editor of Guibert's memoirs, disagrees with Benton and opts for 1055: Edmond René Labande, "Introduction," *Autobiographie* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981), ix-x, 89-90 n. 6, 100-01 n. 2. Garand sides with Labande (1055) but without adding additional insights or arguments: M. C. Garand, *Guibert de Nogent et ses secrétaires*, Corpus Christianorum. Autographa Medii Aevi (Turnholt: Brepols, 1995), 11-12. R. I. Moore believes Benton's argument deserves more credit than it has been given: R. I. Moore, "Guibert of Nogent and his World," *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis*, eds. R. H. C. Davis, Henry Mayr-Harting, et al. (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), 114 n. 36. Jay Rubenstein, Guibert's most recent biographer, believes "we know so little about it [his date of birth] as to make speculation pointless." Therefore, he uses 1060 (the median of the various suggested dates) as Guibert's date of birth: Jay Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 17. On Guibert's place of birth, see Benton, "Appendix I," 233-35; Leon Dautheuil, "Où est né Guibert de Nogent?," *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société Archéologique et Historique de Clermont de l'Oise* années 1933-1937 (1938), 28-35.

was delivered safely into his mother's waiting arms. The infant was Guibert of Nogent, and that is the account he tells of his own entrance into the world.

It is fitting to have begun this chapter with a story Guibert relates of his childhood because the pages that follow focus on the first decades of his life, in particular on his experience of sexuality while an adolescent. They focus on a treatise about virginity, *Opusculum de virginitate*, that Guibert sat down to write in 1077 or so.² He wrote it at the request of a fellow monk, but what emerged from his quill was more than just a panegyric on a sublime spiritual ideal; what surfaced as well was an extraordinarily personal manifestation of a teenage boy's struggle with sexual lust. The treatise reveals how one medieval monk understood his own sexuality, what he judged might imperil virginity, and the strategies he hoped would help him and others achieve and safeguard that religious state. In it, Guibert attends persistently and rather shrilly to issues of sexuality and sexual desire. But, rather than deem Guibert obsessed with sexuality and sexual sin or judge his focus unhealthy, one must recognize that when he penned it, he was an adolescent dealing with the vagaries of puberty. Sexual drives were a relentless trial for him, and that affected the treatise's tone, imagery, intellectual speculations, and conclusions. Furthermore, the concerns he expresses and methods he suggests for deflecting sexual pitfalls reflect not his own idiosyncratic perspective but the guidance given to him as a novice monk.

1 Guibert's Life

Almost all that is known about Guibert comes from his memoirs, which he called *Monodiae* and wrote in 1115, some ten years before his death.³ He was born in northern France and lived in

² For the dating of the *Opusculum*, see below section 2.1. Guibert, *Opusculum de virginitate*, PL 156: 579-608 (*Opusc*). Hereafter, references to the *Opusculum* will include only chapter and column number (e.g. *Opusc* 1; 580A).

³ Guibert, *Autobiographie*, ed. Edmond René Labande (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1981) (Latin & French). The best English translation of his memoirs is Guibert, *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, trans. Paul J. Archambault (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). Benton's earlier translation is

that region all of his life. His family was of the minor nobility and both his older brother and father were warriors. His father, Evrard, was in the army of King Henry I of France and fought against Duke William of Normandy at the battle of Mortemer. Sadly, he died in Guibert's eighth month.⁴ Guibert's mother was undoubtedly the most important figure in Guibert's life: while living, she involved herself in all his major life decisions; after death, she seems to have become the voice of his conscience.⁵ According to Guibert, she was a beautiful, strong-willed, independent woman, who ran her household and directed Guibert's intellectual development with verve.⁶ These qualities became crucial when Evrard died, leaving her to raise her infant son alone and fulfill her husband's vow for Guibert's future. To this end, she sent Guibert to a public school. But, when the lessons proved ineffective, she hired a private tutor (unnamed by Guibert) who lived in their home. The man was exceedingly authoritarian. He restricted Guibert's interaction with other children and disciplined him severely with canings that left the young boy bruised and swollen.⁷ Moreover, Guibert had little respect for

especially valuable for its introduction, notes, and appendices: Guibert, *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*, ed. John F. Benton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Guibert's autobiography is also referred to as *De Vita Sua* and *Memoirs*. Following Guibert's lead, I will use *Monodiae* as its title. He calls it his *monodiae*, 'songs from a solo-singer,' in Guibert, *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus*, CCCM127, edited by R. B. C. Huygens (Turnholt: Brepols, 1993), 99. For modern biographies of Guibert, see Benton, "Introduction," 7-33; Rubenstein, *Guibert*.

⁴ Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 17-18.

⁵ Guibert speaks of his mother repeatedly and at great length but never mentions her name. Duby comments that "Guibert clung to her apron strings: the first time he was separated from her was when he was made abbot of Nogent": Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 146. For analyses of Guibert and his mother's relationship, see Chris D. Ferguson, "Autobiography as Therapy: Guibert de Nogent, Peter Abelard, and the Making of Medieval Autobiography," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13.2 (1983), 187-212; Moore, "Guibert and his World," 112; Nancy F. Partner, "The Family Romance of Guibert of Nogent: His Story/Her Story," *Medieval Mothering*, eds. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 359-79.

⁶ For this period of his life, see *Monodiae* (*Mono*) 1.4-6; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 24-42/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 13-21.

⁷ Medieval education frequently involved corporal punishment, but Guibert's description of his mother's reaction upon seeing his bruised body suggests that the tutor's discipline was excessive: Benton, "Introduction," 15; Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 19. On educational methods during the Middle Ages, see Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the*

his master's proficiency as an educator—he thought the man both incompetent and unlearned. Despite all of this, when Guibert's mother threatened to fire the tutor for brutalizing her son, Guibert protested vehemently. He was determined, he tells his readers, to pursue his clerical career.

When Guibert was just a baby and his father still alive, his mother had a vision that convinced her to dedicate her life to God.⁸ Later, when Evrard died, she acted upon that vision and resolved to remain a widow in God's service. And, over a decade after that, she withdrew from the world to a cell adjacent to the church at the abbey of Saint Germer de Fly (a traditional Benedictine institution for men). In so doing, she left her twelve-year-old son behind and bereft: “[s]he knew that I would henceforth be an orphan, and that I could no longer count on any form of support.”⁹ That feeling of abandonment must have been compounded when, shortly thereafter, Guibert's tutor—the man who had taught and guided him for six years—followed her lead and entered the monastery at Saint-Germer. Guibert reacted to their departure and his newfound freedom with defiance. He describes that period himself:

I therefore took hold of my perverse freedom and began, without restraint, to abuse my power, to deride the churches, and to abhor the schools. I tried to gain the company of young lay cousins of mine who were devoted to knightly pursuits by cursing the

Middle Ages (New York: Routledge, 1990), 172-79; Janet L. Nelson, “Parents, Children, and the Church in the Earlier Middle Ages,” *The Church and Childhood: Papers Read at the 1993 Summer Meeting and the 1994 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 86.

⁸ For this period of his life, see *Mono* 1.14-15; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 98-122/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 43-53.

⁹ Trans. mine. *Mono* 1.14; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 102/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 45: “...et cum sciret me prorsus orphanum, et nullam omnino habere sub qua niterer opem.” Mulder-Bakker and Partner discuss Guibert's mother and her manner of life: Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, trans. Myra Heerspink Scholz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 24-50; Partner, “Family Romance,” 370-76.

outward sign of my clerical state, all the while telling myself that my sins would be remitted.¹⁰

The rebellion does not seem to have lasted long. His mother was horrified when reports of his doings made their way to her cell. So, hoping to redirect his focus, she convinced the abbot and brothers at Saint-Germer to let her son resume his lessons with his former tutor, now a monk there. They consented, and, when Guibert was twelve or thirteen, he moved into the monastery to continue with his schooling.¹¹

It was never his mother's or his own intention that he become a monk, he reports, but, once living in the monastery and observing that holy way of life, he knew it was his calling. About his religious awakening, he enthuses: "the moment I entered the church of that monastery and saw the monks sitting side by side, there welled up within me at the sight of this spectacle such a yearning for the monastic life that my fervor could not be abated nor my soul find peace until its prayer was granted."¹² Despite ardent objections from both his mother and tutor, he followed his own aspirations and began his journey as a religious behind the walls at Saint-Germer. One of the highlights of Guibert's life as a monk was his relationship with Anselm of Canterbury. The two became acquainted some time between 1075 and 1078 when Anselm, still prior of Bec, began visiting Saint-Germer and teaching its young residents.¹³ Guibert lived in

¹⁰ *Mono* 1.15; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 106/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 47: "Prava ergo libertate potitus, coepi intemperantissime meo abuti imperio, ridere ecclesias, scholas horrere, consobrinorum meorum laicorum, qui equestribus imbuebantur studiis, affectare sodalitia, execrando clericatus signum, remissionem criminum polliceri...."

¹¹ Benton does not give a precise timeline but believes Guibert was a monk by the age of thirteen: Benton, "Introduction," 16-17. Labande states only that Guibert was a monk at Saint-Germer for over thirty years. That allows for Guibert to have entered Saint-Germer within a year of his mother's departure or as much as five years later: Labande, "*Autobiographie*," x. Rubenstein comments that it could have been as brief as a few weeks or as long as a year: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 19.

¹² *Mono* 1.15; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 108/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 48: "...ex quo basilicam monasterii ipsius intravi, et monachos consistentes pariter vidi, et ex eorum contuitu tantum monachiae concepi desiderium, ut nullatenus defervesceret, nec sub quiete animus ageret, donec sui voti sortiretur effectum."

¹³ Southern, *Portrait in a Landscape*, 282-83. Saint-Germer was about fifty miles from Bec. Guibert proudly describes his association with the renowned monk in his memoirs: *Mono* 1.17; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 140/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 661.

this monastery for thirty or forty years, until 1104 when he was elected as abbot of small Benedictine abbey of Nogent, about twenty miles west of Laon. His abbacy was active: in addition to his duties as the monastery's superior, Guibert engaged in regional ecclesiastical business in Laon and composed several ambitious texts. This was his manner of life until his death some time after 1121 and before 1125.¹⁴

Since this chapter has everything to do with Guibert's encounter with his own sexuality, it is worth considering his sexual status. Was he a sexually inexperienced virgin when he composed his virginity treatise? Historians know that he moved into the monastery when he was quite young—both his mother and teacher left him when he was twelve years old. After their departure, he spent some time with his cousins, but this seems to have been a short-lived adventure.¹⁵ Following this period of independence, he entered the monastery as a student, probably when he was twelve or thirteen. Since fourteen was the typical age for medieval boys to become sexually active,¹⁶ it is reasonable to suppose that he was still sexually inexperienced when he entered Saint-Germer.

There is, however, that rebellious stage after his mother and tutor left him (described above) that Guibert speaks of so remorsefully. Ought one suppose that the boy's rowdy antics included sexual experimentation? According to his depiction of that time, he consorted with his knightly cousins, wore fine clothes (provided by his mother for his participation in Church processions), behaved impertinently, mocked the churches, hated school, and overslept.¹⁷ All of this would have felt like outlandish behavior for a boy who grew up under the extreme

¹⁴ Like the year of his birth, the date of his death is uncertain. See Benton, "Appendix I," 239; Labande, "*Autobiographie*," xi.

¹⁵ See note 11 above.

¹⁶ For references, see note 92 in chapter 1 on Anselm of Canterbury.

¹⁷ *Mono* 1.15; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 108/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 47-48.

discipline of an ever-present master, isolated from other children, and excluded from the blithe pleasures of childhood. True, his mother was appalled and alarmed by his activities, but she had planned for her son to become a cleric, and many of his activities showed disrespect to the Church. This surely would have been enough to send her into a tailspin—prurient behavior need not have been included in the reports she heard. Overall, Guibert’s exploits with his lay cousins sound more like boyish revelry than lascivious carousing.¹⁸ For all of these reasons, it is likely that Guibert was physically a virgin when he became a monk.

How then ought the confession he makes at the beginning of his treatise be understood? He introduces the work by proclaiming that he himself is deficient in the virtue he is about to espouse: “But I should not be reproached by you or by anyone else if I lack the virtue about which I am about to discuss, since I have been compelled to write this.”¹⁹ Was this merely a humility trope? Should it be taken literally? It is more probable that he was sincere and that the statement was true based on his own perception of virginity. As I show shortly, Guibert conceives of virginity as a chiefly spiritual ideal. Thus, what was at issue when he wrote those words was not his physical condition but his internal state. He is not confessing that he lacks physical virginity but acknowledging that he has not yet learned to curb carnal desire and achieve the spiritual state of virginity he so desperately seeks.

¹⁸ Benton agrees: Benton, “Introduction,” 16.

¹⁹ *Opusc nunc*; 579B: “...sed a te, seu a quibuslibet nobis exprobrandum non est, cum ea de qua cupimus tractare virtute vacui reperti fuerimus, cum idem coacti fecerimus.” The treatise has two prefaces, the *Nuncupatoria* (579A-580C), which Guibert wrote contemporaneously with the treatise, and the *Praefatiuncula* (579C-580C), which he composed several years later, probably when he was preparing the work for circulation. D’Achery, the treatise’s original editor, arranged the prefaces counter-intuitively, placing the original preface first and the appended preface second. Migne’s version maintains that organization: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 224 n. 33.

2 Texts

Guibert had great confidence in his intellectual abilities. Indeed, he thought his superior knowledge and learning were so intimidating that they were to blame for the strained relationship between himself and his brethren.²⁰ Undoubtedly, this self-assurance is what compelled him to pen such a vast array of works in a variety of genres. It also probably encouraged the somewhat independent character of his writing. As G. R. Evans has pointed out, Guibert thought he had something new to add to the Fathers' pronouncements. This, she says, was the intention behind all his literary productions. Thus, rather than obsequiously following his predecessors by quoting and reiterating what had already been said, Guibert "tries to write in the manner of the Fathers, adding to their work in the same spirit and on the same principles, but with his own hand."²¹ Sometimes his writing includes perspectives clearly in keeping with reform ideology—and he did live in a milieu of passionate reform—but Guibert was not a reformer. According to Jay Rubenstein, he generally regarded the reform movement with ambivalence.²²

Guibert's *Monodiae* (ca. 1115) is the most well known of his works. Seemingly taking its lead from Augustine's *Confessions*, Guibert's twelfth-century composition offers a rare example of medieval autobiography and reveals an intriguing portrait of the man who produced it. The book describes Guibert's childhood, his aspirations, and his career, as well as various events that occurred in the world outside his cloister. Fascinated with both the historical perspective

²⁰ *Mono* 1.16; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 124-26/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 55. On his relationships with others, see Moore, "Guibert and his World," 112-17.

²¹ G. R. Evans, "Guibert of Nogent and Gregory the Great on Preaching and Exegesis," *The Thomist* 49.4 (1985), 536.

²² Jay Rubenstein, "Principled Passion or Ironic Detachment? The Gregorian Reform as Experienced by Guibert of Nogent," *The Haskins Society Journal* 10 (2001), 129-41; Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 88-95, 148-49, 192-93. Constable agrees that Guibert "was no reformer," but does not elaborate: Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 26. Most scholars have assumed Guibert held strong reform convictions because of his frequent statements that seem

and the personal revelations it exposes, scholars have expended a great deal of well-deserved energy on this aspect of Guibert's corpus.²³ His literary productions also include a book about the first Crusade (*Gesta Dei per Francos*, ca. 1108), a critical piece on the veneration of relics (*De pigneribus sanctorum*, ca. 1125), and a tract against the Jews (*Tractatus de incarnatione contra Judaeos*, ca. 1111).²⁴ Additionally, he wrote several commentaries on the minor prophets including Hosea, Amos, and Jeremiah, and a number of spiritual and theological treatises. These include his *Moralia Geneseos* (ca. 1083-86) and the text fundamental to this chapter, the *Opusculum de virginitate* (*Opusculum*).²⁵

in keeping with the reform agenda. See, for example, Benton, "Introduction," 24; Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*, 152.

²³ Many scholars have approached the *Monodiae* from a psycho-historical perspective. See especially, Benton, "Introduction," 7-33; John F. Benton, "The Personality of Guibert of Nogent," *Psychoanalytic Review* 57 (1970-71), 563-86; Jonathan Kantor, "A Psycho-Historical Source: The *Memoirs* of Abbot Guibert of Nogent," *Journal of Medieval History* 2.4 (1976), 281-303; Partner, "Family Romance," 359-79. For a summary and assessment of those works, see M. D. Coupe, "The Personality of Guibert of Nogent Reconsidered," *Journal of Medieval History* 9.4 (1983), 317-30. Coupe's essay seeks to uncover Guibert's personality from a non-psycho-historical angle. For a critique of the psycho-historical approach, see Paul J. Archambault, "Introduction," *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), xix-xxiv. Rubenstein discusses the various ways Guibert has been portrayed by modern authors, from the seventeenth century to today: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 1-10. In his close reading of the text, Seth Lerer analyzes its literary representations: Seth Lerer, "Transgressio Studii: Writing and Sexuality in Guibert of Nogent," *Stanford French Review* 14 (1990), 243-66.

²⁴ Guibert, *Dei gesta per Francos*, CCCM127A, edited by R. B. C. Huygens (Turnholt: Brepols, 1996)/Guibert, *The Deeds of God through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert de Nogent's Gesta Dei per Francos*, trans. Robert Levine (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1997). Guibert, *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus*, CCCM127, edited by R. B. C. Huygens (Turnholt: Brepols, 1993). Guibert, *Tractatus de incarnatione contra Judaeos*, PL 156: 489-528. Guibert's *De pigneribus* has inspired some modern readers to marvel at Guibert's critical acuity because they thought he positioned himself against standard beliefs of his day. See Benton's summation of the various reactions the work has elicited: Benton, "Introduction," 8. Rubenstein shows that Guibert's issue in *De pigneribus* was not with relics per se but with the veneration of fantastical inauthentic relics; thus, his position was not at odds with that of his contemporaries: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 124-30. A recent book by Karin Fuchs discusses signs and wonders in Guibert's thought: Karin Fuchs, *Zeichen und Wunder bei Guibert de Nogent: Kommunikation, Deutungen und Funktionalisierungen von Wundererzählungen im 12. Jahrhundert*, Pariser historische Studien; Bd. 84 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2008). Anna Sapir Abulafia has discussed Guibert's perception of Jewish people in a number of works. In particular, see Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Theology and the Commercial Revolution: Guibert of Nogent, St. Anselm and the Jews of Northern France," *Christians and Jews in Dispute: Disputational Literature and the Rise of Anti-Judaism in the West (c. 1000-1150)* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1998), 23-40; Anna Sapir Abulafia, "Twelfth-Century Humanism and the Jews," *Christians and Jews in Dispute: Disputational Literature and the Rise of Anti-Judaism in the West (c. 1000-1150)* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1998), 161-75.

²⁵ Guibert, *Tropologiae in Osee, Jeremiam, et Amos*, PL 156: 337-488. Guibert, *Moralia Geneseos*, PL 156: 19-338. Guibert, *Opusculum de virginitatis*, PL 156: 579-608.

2.1 Opusculum ad Virginitatem

Guibert's *Opusculum* is a rarity. It is a treatise on virginity directed to a specifically male, monastic audience. It was Guibert's first treatise. He wrote it as a teenager, after a fellow monk named Solomon—probably his master at Saint-Germer—asked him to do so.²⁶ Guibert writes that Solomon had previously requested some poetic pieces from him, but now he wanted something on the topic of virginity.²⁷ One wonders if Solomon asked him to write such a work because maintaining virginity was proving to be such a trial for the teen-aged monk—the sort of speculation it involved might have helped him internalize the importance of *virginitas*.²⁸

The work is short—filling less than thirty columns in the *Patrologia Latina*—and is at once an encomium on the ideal of virginity and a practical guide for attaining and preserving that state. Within its pages, the influence of both Gregory the Great and Augustine are discernible; it is also apparent that Guibert is familiar with some of Jerome's work.²⁹ Throughout, Guibert supports his points by enlisting the authority of the Fathers and examples from Christian Scripture and the classics.³⁰ In the treatise's seventeen chapters, the young monk touches on many of the themes one would expect from a tract on virginity: virginity is the supreme way of

²⁶ Jay Rubenstein believes that Solomon was none other than Guibert's childhood tutor. Lending strong support to his argument is a seventeenth-century document containing a list of Saint-Germer's most renowned brothers. Listed there is a man named Solomon who is described as 'monk, prior, and Guibert's teacher'. Of course, as Rubenstein points out, the text was written after the publication of Guibert's *opera omnia*. Thus, the person making the list may have read the *Monodiae* and the *Opusculum* and made an educated guess that Solomon was Guibert's tutor, just as Rubenstein has. On the other hand, Rubenstein notes that the author had access to a larger archive than is now extant and may have come across other substantiating documents: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 19. For his full argument, see Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 18-21. That Solomon was his master is indicated by the fact that he requested various works from Guibert. Furthermore, Guibert writes elsewhere that his fellow monks also produced work for Solomon: *Opusc* 17; 608C.

²⁷ *Opusc* praef; 579C.

²⁸ Rubenstein suggests that Solomon asked him to write the treatise as a remedy for his masturbating: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 22, 204.

²⁹ Guibert makes specific reference to Gregory's opinion in chapter 14 (602C-D) and to Augustine in chapter 8 (592D). On Gregory's influence, see Evans, "Guibert and Gregory," 534-50. Without naming his source, Guibert offers advice using the same words Jerome used to counsel a young widow in the year 409. Compare *Opusc* 16; 605A with *Ep* 123.13; Jerome, *Ad Geruchiam de Monogamia*, *Ep.* 123, Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistolae, *CSEL* 56/1, edited by Isidorus Hilberg (Vindobonae: F. Tempsky, 1910), 88.

life; marriage is a licit but less admirable lifestyle; virginity cannot be had without humility. In spite of its, in some ways, unsurprising contents, the formulations and arguments it offers are Guibert's own, unmistakably rooted in his personal experiences and monastic training, and driven by what most concerned him.

Unfortunately, it is not known with any degree of certainty when Guibert wrote the *Opusculum* or how old he was when he wrote it.³¹ In the treatise's second preface, written years after he wrote the body of the treatise, Guibert explains: "When I was thoroughly in my tender adolescence (*tenera adolescentia*), I completed the work that follows."³² During the Middle Ages, *adolescentia* was usually understood to begin at the age of fifteen.³³ Thus, it is easy to imagine that he composed the tract when he was in his mid-teens. Based on his reference to himself as an adolescent and another comment in the preface—that his mind was used to poetry and was challenged by the "seriousness of prose"—M. C. Garand has opined that Guibert may have written the work toward the end of his *trivium* studies, which she supposes was during the years he studied with Anselm (between 1075 and 1078).³⁴ If Garand's proposal is accepted, it is

³⁰ On the sources and influences evident in the *Opusculum*, see Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 22-23.

³¹ It is only certain that it was written before 1119: R. B. C. Huygens, *La tradition manuscrite de Guibert de Nogent*, Instrumenta Patristica; 21 (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1991), 55.

³² *Opusc* praef; 579C: "Subjectum valde in tenera adolescentia positus peregi Opusculum." Certain passages in the *Monodiae* seems to refer to this same period. In these passages, Guibert speaks of himself at that time as "adolescens," "juvunculus," and most often, "puerulus." He also applies adjectives such as "puerarius," "puerilius," and "puerilis" to himself and his behavior. This phrasing supports the *Opusculum's* statement that he was a "tender adolescent" when he wrote it. However, Labande has argued that the references Guibert makes to his youth in the *Monodiae* were rhetorical and should not be taken literally: Labande, "Autobiographie," ix. For the *Monodiae* passages that seem to refer to the time in which the *Opusculum* was written, see *Mono* 1.17; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 134/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 58-59. Others have also noticed the *Monodiae's* allusions to that period: Labande, "Autobiographie," 134 n. 2; Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 21.

³³ Pierre Riché, *Ecoles et enseignement dans le haut Moyen Age* (Paris: Picard, 1989), 200.

³⁴ Garand, *Guibert de Nogent et ses secrétaires*, 21. Guibert's comment about being unaccustomed to weighty matters is as follows: "Quod opificium, utpote insolitum, metuculosus [*al.*, meticulosus] aggrediens biformiter horruui, dum et lusibus versuum mens dedita, seria prosaicae gravitatis minus attigerat, et res, quae tractanda proponebatur,

still uncertain how old Guibert was when he wrote the treatise because his birth date is unknown.³⁵ Labande has argued for 1055 and Benton 1064.³⁶ *If* he wrote the text between 1075 and 1078, and *if* he was born in 1064, then Guibert was as young as twelve and as old as fourteen when he wrote the treatise. *If* he was born in 1055, then he wrote it when he was between twenty and twenty-three. Although none of these possible ages preclude the hypotheses of this chapter, the contents of the text support a later birth date—I would suggest that he wrote it in his mid-teens.³⁷

Whatever the uncertainties about the text's provenance, the analysis that follows demonstrates that Guibert's status as a young adult had everything to do with the contents of his virginity treatise. His perception of virginity, his discussions of sexual desire, and his florid language all reflect the fact that, as he wrote his little treatise, he himself was undergoing the trials of lust and struggling to attain virginity. In the forthcoming pages, I look carefully at Guibert's *Opusculum* to determine precisely how he understands virginity and to explore what factors may have influenced his conclusions. As I show, Guibert's assessment is tricky. He absolutely considers virginity a spiritual state: a virgin is a person whose mind, body, and soul long harmoniously for only godly things. However, the greatest obstacle for attaining that state is sexual desire. Thus, virginity is spiritual, yet it hinges on a person's ability to repress and redirect sexual urges. After unpacking Guibert's perception of virginity, I scrutinize the

difficilis etiam grandaevis intellectibus erat" (*Opusc praef*; 580B-C). Rubenstein believes he wrote it in the 1070s but does not offer his rationale: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 131.

³⁵ See note 1 above for references to the various arguments about the year of his birth.

³⁶ Both are plausible, but scholars tend to opt for Labande's date. However, as noted above, R. I. Moore believes Benton's argument should be taken more seriously. There is no clear obstacle to Benton's later date, he contends, and 1064 works much better with the various stages of Guibert's life: Moore, "Guibert and his World," 114 n. 36.

imagery he uses to depict the endeavor for virginity. On those pages, I show that the tone and content of the treatise has much to do, not with any irrational fear of sexuality he may have had but with the concerns of his monastic community. To begin, however, let us look at how the teen-aged Benedictine conceives of the human condition—for, humanity’s condition is what makes virginity a labor rather than something innate.

3 Their Bodies, Free of Unruly Desire

In Guibert’s judgment, virginity is a religious state achieved when the believer has learned to eschew all carnal (especially sexual) desires. It is a state in which mind, body, and soul all long only for what is licit. This was humanity’s original status and the condition enjoyed by Adam and Eve, until they defied God’s commands. And it is the condition human beings must endeavor, as much as humanly possible, to restore.

God created the first couple in his own image: with a single-mindedness that was integral to their nature, they longed only for godly things, and their bodies, free of all unruly carnal passions, were companions in that enterprise.³⁸ Because of their exclusively spiritual desire, the two enjoyed an effortless similitude with God. Procreation at that time would have been entirely free from the stain of lust or sin. Adam and Eve would have moved their sexual organs with complete rational control, just as a person now moves a foot, hand, or any other limb.³⁹

³⁷ Duby posits twenty as his age when writing the *Opusculum*: Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*, 146. Benton does not include the work in his chronology of Guibert’s writings but does state elsewhere that he wrote it as a teen: Benton, “Introduction,” 18 and “Appendix I,” 236-39.

³⁸ *Opusc* 7; 590C: “...in ea hominis parte, cui proprie Dei imago impressa est, integritas quaedam et angelica manet sinceritas....”

³⁹ For Guibert’s discussion of Adam and Eve and the consequences of the Fall, see *Opusc* 7; 589B-591B. Guibert’s handling of the Fall is very Augustinian. See, for example, *De civitate Dei* 14.23-24; Augustine, *De civitate Dei: Libri I-XXII*, eds. Bernhard Dombart and Alfons Kalb, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina; 48 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1955), 444-48/Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York:

Indeed, their sexual intercourse would have been so controlled, Guibert posits, that afterwards they would have remained virgins.⁴⁰ Regrettably, Adam and Eve forfeited all of that for themselves and for future generations by rebelling against God's commands. Now, dissonance reigns where harmony once dwelled, leaving humanity eternally distracted by carnal desires and alienated from God.

That condition enjoyed by prelapsarian humanity is the state men and women seek to restore by the practice of virginity. In its most perfected form, virginity connotes an accord of body and mind, in which the body follows the dictates of the mind, and the mind longs only for what God wills. Listen to his words on the matter:

Let the interior rule of the mind approach everything with such subtle foresight that it is not allowed to divert from the path of peacefulness by any listlessness. Therefore, none of those things, which the flesh longingly tends toward, ought to be admitted within the gates of the mind and neither should the gaze of the eyes be turned to those desires, which are illicit for Christians.⁴¹

As virgins, Christians resemble prelapsarian humanity because Adam and Eve enjoyed that condition naturally. Virgins are also closer to the angels, for what sets the angels above human beings is their freedom from fleshy desires.⁴² And finally, in their virginity, men and women reestablish similitude with God:

Penguin, 1977), 585-89. For an assessment of Augustine's position on the matter, see Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), 35-49; Brown, *Body and Society*, 387-427, esp. 400-08.

⁴⁰ *Opusc* 7; 589C-D. Augustine makes a similar claim: *De civitate Dei* 14.26; Augustine, *De civitate Dei: Libri I-XXII*, 449/Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, 590-92.

⁴¹ *Opusc* 11; 598D: "Supra omnia interior animi regula tam subtili provisione incedat ut nullo ab aequitatis ordine permittatur derivare torpore. Ergo nihil eorum, quae caro desideranter intendit, intra mentis portas admittendum est, nec ad illa oculorum intorquendus est tuitus, quorum cordi Christiano constat prohibitus appetitus." Also, see *Opusc* 9; 595C.

⁴² *Opusc* 5; 585D.

These are the first signs of this holy virtue [virginity] that just as his or her own creator, the essence of power, is known to be free from any movement and superfluous thought so integrity gives immunity from any inordinate attack to anyone zealous of it.⁴³

In a sense, virginity represents an escape from the human condition—from unruly carnal drives. Indeed, as he claims, it “almost exceeds humanity’s powers of imitation [of God].”⁴⁴

When Guibert talks about progress in virginity, he talks of increasing in similitude. But what he imagines, or at least what he describes, is not a sublime, esoteric union of soul with God. To read his text, virginity sounds akin to being *like* God rather than being *with* God. As the monk learns to refocus desire, his similitude with God increases. When he is successful, he is *like* God, *like* the angels, and *like* prelapsarian humanity because he is not torn by carnal desires. At root, he seems to be expressing the idea of a union of souls—the spiritual bond between perfected humanity and God—but his language is quite prosaic. Perhaps what this reveals is a window into a teenager’s grasp of an extremely abstruse idea. In sum, in Guibert’s perception, virginity is a religious state in which the most notable characteristic is the absence of disruptive desire. By attaining virginity, the believer in a very literal sense reestablishes his or her likeness to God.

4 The Bridle of Restraint

To achieve the idyllic state of virginity a person must bridle desire, and that is no easy feat. Adam and Eve’s lapse wounded the whole of the human being—interior and exterior, mind and body. However, despite its fallen state Guibert believes the mind or will is chiefly responsible for guiding the religious toward virginity. The language Guibert enlists to describe this

⁴³ *Opusc 2*; 583B: “Haec sunt sanctae hujus prima excogitamenta virtutis, ut sicut suus auctor essentialis potentia ab omni motu, et superflua cogitatione dignoscitur exsors, ita quemque sui studiosum integritas....”

⁴⁴ *Opusc 1*; 580C: “...suum, modo satis arduo, et pene vires excedenti imitatione, auctorem sectari contendat.”

struggle is vivid and can appear dualistic, but, in what follows, I show that this impression is misleading.

Adam and Eve's sin damaged the whole human being. Internally, the will or mind no longer inclines naturally toward God alone: the postlapsarian will is just as prone to pursue carnal desires as to yearn for spiritual delights. And, externally, the body is no longer absolutely responsive to the will. Guibert describes humanity's fallen condition in terms reminiscent of Augustine:

...one resists the irritation of natural heat and the jabs of innate titillation by struggling unceasingly, not against another but against one's very self, which is more difficult.... For, no one holding oneself before oneself, nay rather baring oneself in oneself, can be divided into two in such a way that part turns against part because no one is other than what one is.⁴⁵

Fallen humanity must engage in an internal battle. Guibert continues in this vein when he tells how the fallen mind and body both long for carnal delights: mind and body have "collapsed into one," both searching for pleasures of the flesh. Since this is the case, the pursuit of virginity has become an internal war: "It is truly astonishing," he marvels, "that in a war against oneself there is any part of the will that can arise and restrain a person from what he or she wants most; namely, that one can order oneself not to do it."⁴⁶ In other words, men and

⁴⁵ *Opusc* 1; 581A-B: "...contra naturalis irritamento caloris, et ingenitae titillationis acumina, non in alterum, sed in semetipsum de certando, quod difficilius est, sempiterno conamine refragatur.... Se enim quisque penes se habens, imo se in se ferens, quia aliud quam quod est quisque non est, nec in duo dividi, ut pars parti adversetur, potest." Also, see *Opusc* 9; 594C. For Augustine's analysis of the human condition, see *Confessiones* 8.9; Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James Joseph O'Donnell, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 97-98/Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 147-48. For scholarly analyses of Augustine's thought, see Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979); Margaret R. Miles, *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 62-78.

⁴⁶ *Opusc* 1; 581B-C: "Cum igitur voluntarie quidpiam mens ambiat (de his cupiditatibus loquor, quae nos originaliter afficiunt) et universi illico corporis amor voluntati mentis comes assistat, cum flagrent venae, cum cordis robur elanguet, cum ignis intus viscera lassa resolvat, cum caro et animus in unum miserabiliter ruant, quaeso, in uno illo tunc homine tot ictibus obruto, quae pars remedium aliunde delatura remansit, unde ad reprimendum mentis rogam vel minimam stillam eliciet, qui totus est flamma? mirum nempe unum aliquid contra

women must continually stop themselves from seeking what they most yearn for: things of the world. This is the plight of fallen humanity.

In spite of the mind's corrupt condition, Guibert expects it to guide the believer to a state of virginity. He reasons that humanity retains a vestige of God's image (the soul), which gravitates unceasingly toward its maker.⁴⁷ The mind must follow that pure spark back to God. To do so, it must rebuff the body's yearnings as well as its own impure cogitations.⁴⁸ This is Guibert's point when he reflects:

The mind wickedly aware... is always disturbed by its own stings.
But anyone pious, zealous of purity, cuts away the rubbish of such
filthiness from the inside, since he or she has already begun to
rule the bodily movements.⁴⁹

It is also the message conveyed by his interpretation of a story from the Song of Songs (3:7-8). Imagine sixty well-trained soldiers with swords at their hips, standing guard around a bed upon which Christ peacefully rests. There stand the soldiers, valiant and strong, swinging at and incapacitating everything that creeps near their ward. In this story, the bed rested upon by Christ represents the soul (the unstained image of God that perseveres in all human beings); the soldiers signify the fallen but pious mind (the determined virgin); and whatever assails the soldiers are carnal temptations and wandering thoughts. As Guibert describes the situation, the soul is utterly free of internal and external cares and shares an intimate and unceasing bond

se in bellum suae propriae voluntatis posse consurgere, ut in cuius desiderio praecipue defecerit, id ne agat sibi imperet.”

⁴⁷ *Opusc* 7; 590C.

⁴⁸ For example, see *Opusc* 1, 6, 7; 581B-D, 588C, 590D.

⁴⁹ *Opusc* 16; 605A: “*Et mens male conscia, ut alter ait, propriis semper agitur stimulis. Sed pius quisque puritatis studiosus talis spurcitiae ab intimis rudera discutiens, cum corporeis jam regnare motibus coeperit*” (italics mine). I have not been able to identify the “*alter*” Guibert speaks of in this passage. However, the unknown author of the

with the Divine. All that remains, and this is no small order, is for the human mind or will to beat away all improper thoughts and carnal temptations with its very skillful judgment (*magnis acuminibus discretionis*).⁵⁰

It is noteworthy just how much emphasis he places on the role and responsibility of the mind or will. For, in contrast, many patristic and medieval Christians who wrote about virginity underscore a connection between virginal perseverance and bodily chastisement.⁵¹ This is apparent in the words of advice Ælred of Rievaulx offers to his sister (a recluse) about virginity. He warns her and her fellow recluses against conversations and relationships with others but, also, rather stridently admonishes her to limit bodily stimuli: “In food and drink, in sleep, in speech let her always be on her guard against a threat to her chastity, lest by allowing the flesh more than its due she may increase the enemy’s strength and nourish the hidden foe.”⁵² Ælred undoubtedly believes that physical deprivation is essential for preserving virginity: when the body is chastened, its urges are subdued.

thirteenth-century *Liber de modo bene vivendi* enlists the same wording as Guibert: “Nunquam reus homo securus est: *mens enim male sibi conscia propriis agitur stimulis*” (italics mine): 29.89; Anonymous, *PL* 176: 1254C.

⁵⁰ *Opusc* 17; 606D-607A.

⁵¹ It was commonly held that bodily discipline molds the mind. See Cochelin, “Besides the Book,” 21-34. In her article, Cochelin describes how the education of oblates in Cluniac monasteries was mostly physical—the body was used to shape the mind.

⁵² *Inst* 2.15; Ælred, *De institutione inclusarum*, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, CCCM1, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 651/ Ælred, “Rule of Life for a Recluse,” *Ælred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 2, ed. M. Basil Pennington, trans. Mary Paul Macpherson (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 64: “In cibo, in potu, in somno, in sermone, semper timeat dispendium castitatis, ne si plus debito carni reddiderit, vires praebeat aduersario, et occultum nutriat hostem.” Ælred’s thought on this matter has much in common with that of Jerome. See, for example, *Ep* 22.7-10; Jerome, *Ad Eustochium*, *Ep.* 22, Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistolae, CSEL54, edited by Isidorus Hilberg (Vindobonae: F. Tempsky, 1910), 152-58/Jerome, *To Eustochium*, *Ltr.* 22, The Letters of St. Jerome, vol. 1, *ACW*33, edited by Johannes Quasten and Walter Burghardt (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1963), 139-43.

Guibert may have agreed, but he offers no such advice in his virginity treatise. In it, there are similar discussions about comportment—to preserve virginity monks must avoid potentially problematic behavior and conversations. But, for him, the monk’s successful perseverance is due chiefly to his strength of will and right decision-making (and, of course, God). A person, he says, ought not ask how far one can stray (and remain a virgin) but what ought to be avoided. Thereby, when harassed by any itch of temptation, one must refuse to consent.⁵³ Elsewhere, Guibert enlists the language of bodily discipline to discuss the internal workings of the mind. When improper loves develop, a monk must rebuff the object of his desire so severely that no hope of reconciliation remains:

For, the wife, prone to lust, must not be flattered with charming words, but her back should be scourged with the severest of floggings. So it is for the mind, when it lowers itself with perverse affections or when it is brought down with ease.... Not only must the mind not assent, but also these things must be spurned by setting aside all perverse conduct—it must immediately administer the bridle of such a restraint to the libido that it keeps the whole body from succumbing to all of its impure desires.⁵⁴

If the mind is awash with dissolute thoughts, it must be rigorously restrained as if it were a woman being for lashed for her immorality. Although here he likens the monk’s course of action to a severe scourging, what Guibert is advocating is not physical but a function of the intellect. And in a different passage, Guibert tackles the conundrum of why some are not able to preserve virginity even though they fast and practice other bodily austerities. He has an easy answer: they fail because they have gradually allowed in attitudes that are detrimental to virginity and, as this happens, “the mind begins to soften gradually from its rigor” (*mens a suo*

⁵³ *Opusc* 14; 602C-603A.

⁵⁴ *Opusc* 9; 595B-C: “Non enim uxori ad lasciviam prona, lepidis sermonibus palpandae sunt aures, sed dorsum verberibus severissime abradendum; sic menti cum perversis affectibus se inclinat, seu cum inclinata facile cum voluerit se erecturam pollicens emendari procrastinat, non solum non assentiendum est, sed etiam spretis omnium

rigore paulatim laxari).⁵⁵ For Guibert, sexual drives are powerful and culpable, but the mind is chiefly responsible for the believer's spiritual advancement.

Though charged with such a weighty task, the mind by no means labors alone. To be sure, God guides and assists the believer every step of the way, especially when temptation is most trying. Taking his lead from the Song of Songs, Guibert describes how the kiss of contemplation draws the virginal lover back to God.⁵⁶ In Guibert's judgment that kiss—the experience of God enjoyed by the virgin—comes to the monk's rescue in his time of need. When his mind begins to wander toward the memory of a human kiss, the memory of “[God's] saliva restores the healing taste of the whole divine Word in our mind.”⁵⁷ Moreover, when the mind drifts to thoughts of a former lover, God sends out his own hand to reclaim the wanderer: “With that hand always as our companion,” Guibert reassures his listener, the mind “is constantly fortified and counters any weaknesses.”⁵⁸

Thus, virginity is a spiritual state achieved when the believer successfully suppresses the carnal in favor of the spiritual. To do so, the monk must take mental charge of the situation forcing

odiis, tantae frenum illico cohibitionis ejus libidini imprimendum ut totius corporis obsequium impuris ipsius voluntatibus omnimodis debeat denegari.” Also, see *Opusc* 9; 595D-596A.

⁵⁵ *Opusc* 11; 598A-C.

⁵⁶ *Opusc* 17; 606B. Like so many other Christians who endeavored to express the inexpressible, Guibert turns to the love story of the Song of Songs to describe the contemplative experience. Over the centuries, Christians interpreted “the bride” of the Song, variously, as “the Church,” “the Virgin Mary,” or “the individual Christian soul.” Similar to Origen long before him, Guibert interprets “the bride” as “the individual human soul.” This understanding of “bride” as “soul” saw its heyday during the twelfth century and was most famously elaborated by Bernard of Clairvaux. On this topic, see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 28-41, 111-26; G. R. Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 111-16. As chapter 3 on Rupert of Deutz shows, Rupert offered an innovative interpretation of the Song: for him Mary is the bride of the Song.

⁵⁷ *Opusc* 17; 606C: “...et ubi omni favo gratiori saliva ejus tingimur, quae totius divini verbi salutiferum nostra innovat in mente saporem.”

⁵⁸ *Opusc* 17; 606C-D: “Sed quando tactus impudice lenis et inhoneste delectans menti nostrae suggeratur, non illi desit nec vitio aliquo oppiletur illius foraminis apertura, per quod dilectus suam possit immittere manum, ad cujus

both mind and body to turn away from illicit desires. And when that effort overwhelms him, God is there to assist. One should not be fooled by these relatively optimistic assessments though. The religious is waging a ferocious battle. Just how much so is manifest in Guibert's language.

4.1 An Epic Battle

Often in the *Opusculum*, Guibert portrays the struggle to attain virginity as if it were a dualistic contest between body and soul. In these instances, he depicts the pure unstained soul as a prisoner trapped inside the flesh and forced to participate in the body's disgraceful exploits, and the body appears to be the source of humanity's ills. Indeed, about this, Jay Rubenstein has claimed:

[t]he central theme of Guibert's treatise is not classical but purely monastic. The most basic fact of human existence is a sharp binary division between Spirit and Flesh, between *animus* and *caro*. In a Christian these two halves are continually in conflict....⁵⁹

tactum venter, id est nostrae carnalitatis fragilitas, intremiscat (Sg 5:4), et cum Ezechiele, eadem manu nobis semper facta comite, assidue confortetur et mollia quaeque refutet (Ez 3:14)."

⁵⁹ Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 23. Also, see Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 44-49, 180. It is Rubenstein's contention that Anselm was responsible for all psychological speculation in Guibert's thought and that, before the two met, Guibert's thought was severely dualistic. Thus, when he analyzes Guibert's views, he contrasts the dualism he sees in Guibert's early work with the internal and multidimensional focus that he believes is characteristic of Guibert's later perspective: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 38-82, 180; Jay Rubenstein, "St. Anselm's Influence on Guibert of Nogent," *Anselm, Aosta, Bec and Canterbury: Papers in Commemoration of the Nine-Hundredth Anniversary of Anselm's Enthronement as Archbishop, 25 September 1093*, eds. D. E. Luscombe and G. R. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 563-86. Benton notes the significance of the battle between spirit and flesh in Guibert's early work but does not characterize it as dualistic. He points to concupiscence, not the body, as the key culprit in Guibert's belief system: Benton, "Introduction," 14.

To be sure, this is the impression given when Guibert describes fallen human beings as people “clothed still in their own destruction and moaning from the heap of this decaying body.”⁶⁰ The impact is similar when one reads Guibert’s description of how the corrupt body and earthly existence weigh down the human soul and his observation that flesh does not shackle angels as it does humanity.⁶¹ Likewise, the soul seems an innocent victim of the dissolute body when the young monk laments: “If the soul had not fallen because of a weakness of the flesh, and if it had been allowed to always be outside the body, how would it have differed from the angels?”⁶² Also, in a paragraph about the fruits of virginity, Guibert imagines wistfully that as a reward for its struggles the spirit will be given “a peaceful and solid little dwelling away from the insolence of any assault of the flesh.”⁶³

This kind of imagery is laced throughout the *Opusculum*. Still, these passages ought not be read as evidence of a severely dualistic understanding of the human condition. Indeed, an examination of his words on the matter shows that, in his thought, mind and soul/spirit are not the same thing and that mind and body are intertwined. It further reveals that the battle being waged is not one of body against soul but of body *and* mind against desire. Finally, scrutiny of his text shows that, in his assessment, the body is integral to the struggle for virginity.

⁶⁰ *Opusc* 1; 580C: “Quid mirum, si illud felix integritatis nomen adeo gloriosas in humanis moribus possidet laudes, cum per homines suo adhuc cinere amictos, et cadaverosi hujus corporis de fasce gementes, suum, modo satis arduo, et pene vires excedenti imitatione, auctorem sectari contendat?”

⁶¹ *Opusc* 7; 590C: “quod in ea hominis parte, cui proprie Dei imago impressa est, integritas quaedam et angelica manet sinceritas, quam licet corpus, quod corrumpitur, aggravet, et terrena inhabitatio deprimat, nihil tamen est quod eam a corpore suo liberam tentet aut ad vitia carnis ulterius inflectat”; *Opusc* 5; 585D: “Non autem eos carnali praepeditos condidit gravedine, quibus colluctatio adversus carnem esset et sanguinem, et violentia diuturna belloque nimio tandem sicuti nos ad impassibilitatem pertingerent.”

⁶² *Opusc* 7; 590D: “Anima nempe nisi carnis mollitiae laberetur, et extra corpus semper esse liceret, in quo ab angelis distaret?” Also, see *Opusc* 1, 7; 581D, 590C.

⁶³ *Opusc* 11; 599D-600A: “Post tot et tam graves carnis spiritusque congressus, post tumultus et desideriorum levium voces importunissimas, quae cum tanto sudore comprimi solent, justum sane est ut, post tot praelia, Deo annuente pacem, sileat omnis terra a facie victoris spiritus, et quasi pro cujusdam belli optime exacti praemio, quietum et solidum, absque insolentia cujuspian incursus carnis habitatorulum rector spiritus obtineat, et totius conquiescat incendium passionis, quam adeo copiosa represserit confligendo unda sudoris.”

In his thought, the mind is not the same thing as the soul, and the mind is inextricably bound up with the body. His judgments on this matter are not especially surprising, but they are integral to his perspective on virginity. The idea that the soul and mind are distinct was common during the Middle Ages—it is a remnant of Aristotle’s thought, which carried into the medieval period. Describing Aristotle’s understanding of the soul, Mary Carruthers explains: “*Soul* is the whole complex of organization and function of a human being; *mind* is invoked to explain that aspect of its function relating to its ability to understand and to acquire wisdom.”⁶⁴ Guibert’s particular comprehension of the distinction is far from transparent. In the *Opusculum*, he does not enlist the thought of either of his two major influences. The work contains no evidence of Anselm’s three- or fourfold division of the mind.⁶⁵ Neither does the trinitarian structure posited by Augustine come into play within its pages.⁶⁶ Thus, the paradigms of those thinkers are not instrumental for understanding Guibert’s point of view. Furthermore, Guibert’s language is imprecise and inconsistent making interpretation difficult. To describe humanity’s inner being, Guibert uses the words “*mens*,” “*animus*,” “*spiritus*,” and “*anima*.” He employs “*mens*” and “*animus*” most frequently. According to my reckoning, the former appears

⁶⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49–51, esp. 49. For a discussion of the mind/body problem and the creation of that problem during the early-modern period, see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 38–69; Wallace I. Matson, “Why Isn’t the Mind-Body Problem Ancient,” *Mind, Matter, and Method: Essays in Philosophy and Science in Honor of Herbert Feigl*, eds. Paul K. Feyerabend, Herbert Feigl, et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 92–102.

⁶⁵ Guibert describes Anselm’s model the mind in *Monodiae* 1.17; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 140/Guibert, *A Monk’s Confession*, 61: “His teaching was to divide the mind three- or fourfold, to treat the operations of the entire inner mystery under the headings of appetite, will, reason, and intellect” (*Is itaque tripartito aut quadripartito mentem modo distinguere docens, sub affectu, sub voluntate, sub ratione, sub intellectu commercia totius interni mysterii tractare...*). Neither the structure nor the words he attributes to Anselm’s schematic—*affectus, voluntas, ratio, intellectus*—play a role in the *Opusculum*. Also, see *Mono* 1.17; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 144/Guibert, *A Monk’s Confession*, 63. For Anselm’s influence on Guibert, see Jaroslav Pelikan, “A First-Generation Anselmian, Guibert of Nogent,” *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, eds. F. Forrester Church, George Huntston Williams, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 71–82; Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 38–60; Rubenstein, “Anselm’s Influence,” 296–309.

⁶⁶ Augustine thought the mind was comprised of three parts, *intellegentia, memoria*, and *voluntas*. See Benton’s note in Guibert, *Self and Society*, 89 n. 9. For Augustine’s theory of the mind, see Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 101–13.

in the *Opusculum* forty-six times and the latter, thirty-one. In his treatise, these two words regularly connote the internal component of humanity charged with decision making and controlling a person's religious trajectory—what I have called the mind or will. This aspect of humanity is charged with moral responsibility, but it is torn between spiritual and carnal desire. The words “*spiritus*” and “*anima*” also appear in his text. Together they appear just over thirty times. Now and then, they have a similar connotation as “*mens*” and “*animus*.” But at other times, they mean something like “soul”—the incorrupt part of humanity that retains a similitude to God and is drawn only to godly things. For Guibert, the soul seems to be the internal component that retains the image of God, while the mind or will is the part corrupted by the Fall. Thus, the soul functions as a sort of guiding principle but does not participate in humanity's daily spiritual struggle. Although Guibert's perception of the interior being is vague, it is evident that, for him, mind and soul are not the same.

Furthermore, in Guibert's thought the mind is connected with the body in a way that bars easy distinctions between the two. Like most medieval people, Guibert viewed mental processes largely as somatic experiences: sense perception is gathered through the stimulation of the five senses to become the basis for most of human knowledge.⁶⁷ Thus, the body is not the only part of the human being injured by the Fall: like the body, the sensate part of the mind also craves human passions. Throughout this chapter, much has been said about Guibert's perception of the mind and its role in the endeavor for virginity and all of it has demonstrated Guibert's view of the mind as fallen. In his judgment, the human mind is not a helpless victim of the body's desires; the mind itself is regularly willing to participate in sin.

⁶⁷ Bundy calls this the empirical tradition. For a description of this tradition's most common theories see Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (Urbana: The University of Illinois, 1927), 177-98. Also, see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 46-79; G. R. Evans, “Two Aspects of *Memoria* in Eleventh and Twelfth Century Writings,” *Classica et Mediaevalia* 32 (1971-80), 263-78; Matson, “Why Isn't the Mind-Body

It is also essential to recognize where Guibert draws the battle lines in this war for virginity. It is true that he presents the soul as a pure beacon of light within all human beings. However, when he describes the struggle for virginity, the central conflict is not between the pure soul and a corrupted body. The clash is internal and pits body and mind against desire. The virgin's mortal enemy is not the body per se but improper, fleshy *desire*—that is, all the desires associated with debased, fallen humanity including a yearning for power, wealth, and creature comforts, pride and other vices, hunger, and sexual lust.⁶⁸ Thus, when Guibert longs for a time when the soul will be given “a peaceful and solid little dwelling away from the insolence of any assault of the flesh,” one can see beyond the binary language and recognize his hope that mind and body will someday forsake illicit desires and hunger only for the Divine. When this happens, the entire being will be in harmony and the soul at peace. And, when he speaks of the despoiled body and earthly existence weighing down the soul, one realizes that he is not thinking of the physical body impeding the soul but, instead, of worldly desires of mind and body hindering progress toward God (progress of mind, body, and soul).

Finally, careful inspection of the *Opusculum* shows that rather than functioning primarily as an instrument of evil, the body is integral for attaining the ideal of virginity. The virgin's aim is to integrate mind and body, directing both the intellectual and the physical aspect of the self

Problem Ancient,” 92-102; Harry A. Wolfson, “The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophic Texts,” *Harvard Theological Review* 28.2 (1935), 69-133.

⁶⁸ On the meaning of “flesh” in the Middle Ages, see Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 29; Caroline Walker Bynum, “‘...and woman his humanity’: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages,” *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 12-13; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 226-27.

toward the divine.⁶⁹ To be sure, in his judgment, the fact that virginity involves mind and body is what makes it the highest of virtues. He writes:

And so, while all virtues portend some likeness to their creator... integrity [virginity] preserves the mind of its owner and fully purifies the body; with a dual function, it seeks a similitude to its own creator. And this, as far as I am concerned, is more special compared to the rest [of the virtues].⁷⁰

Virginity demands participation of mind and body; thus, virgins who turn toward God with their whole being bear the greatest similitude to God.

In sum, Guibert judges that fleshy desires are violent and formidable and affect the entire being. The virgin's aim is to reform mind and body: to free both from the itch of carnal appetites. But it is not a battle of pure soul versus evil body; it is combat waged against desire involving mind and body. When successful, mind, body, and soul will be at peace and the virgin will have recovered (as much as possible) similitude with God. Guibert's language is colorful and forceful, but his vivid personifications reveal not a dualistic perception of the human condition but instead illustrate just how insidious and unruly is the adolescent Guibert's encounter with desire and, in particular (as I show shortly) sexual desire.

⁶⁹ Ware describes this idea in Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?," *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-15. In it, he distinguishes between unnatural and natural asceticism and explains that, whereas unnatural ascetic practices seek to mortify or torment the body, natural asceticism reduces material life to the utmost simplicity in order to transform the body into a "willing instrument of the spirit": Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics," 9-10. Also, on these two strains of ascetic attitudes toward the body, see John M. Dillon, "Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonist Asceticism," *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80-87, esp. 80-82.

⁷⁰ *Opusc 2*; 582B: "Omnes itaque virtutes, cum, ut dicere coeperamus, simile quid suo portendant datori, haec, de qua loquimur, integritas mentem sui hominis servans, et corpus integre purificat, geminoque quodam officio similitudinem sui Conditoris affectat. Et haec quantum reor caeteris specialius." Also, see *Opusc 8*; 592D-593A.

4.2 Impassibility

The human condition is dire but not doomed. In fact, Guibert infers that the religious has every reason to be optimistic. This is so because humanity can attain a state in which carnal desires will be laid to rest. In his judgment, it is possible for virgins to experience the rest and tranquility that God enjoys by nature and that the saints achieve through their filiation with God.⁷¹ Listen to how he imagines this condition:

Someone reaching for the glory of impassibility, with a soul constricted up to this point by its own flesh, is drawn to the complete integrity of purity by such overflowing love that not only does it seem something naturally delightful but it seems to the soul a paradise or an unequalled pleasantness and what earlier seemed unbearable now has become light beyond all estimation.⁷²

This extraordinary condition is a state of *integritas* so well realized that the body and mind are in perfect accord and no longer yearn for anything carnal. Also about this quest, Guibert writes: “Truly fruitfully emulating [God], admitting nothing extraneous into oneself, fleeing whatever corrupts, the virgin pursues impassibility of spirit and flesh.”⁷³ Therefore, through steady and unrelenting effort, the virgin can achieve a rarified state of impassibility. It is surely a way of being rarely attained; nevertheless, Guibert imagines it as possible.

Guibert’s thought often reflects the influence of Augustine; however, his judgment that respite from the libido is a real option is a level of achievement Augustine could and would never have endorsed. For the Bishop of Hippo, the utter contumaciousness of concupiscence is emblematic

⁷¹ *Opusc 2*; 583A.

⁷² *Opusc 11*; 600A: “Ad impassibilitatis itaque gloriam anima suo etiam adhuc corpore angustata perveniens, tanto tamque affectuoso ad omnem puritatis integritatem amore contrahitur, ut non modo quasi naturaliter aliquid voluptuosum, sed veluti paradisus amoenitasve incomparabilis quaedam sibi videatur, et quod prius pene importabile, nunc leve supra omnem aestimationem fiat.”

⁷³ *Opusc 2*; 582D: “Vere feliciter aemula, nil in se extraneum admittens, quidquid corrumpit fugiens spiritus et carnis impassibilitate prosequitur.” Guibert’s depiction of impassibility sounds much like what John Arnold defines as the state of virginity (based on his analysis of medieval texts): a condition in which lust is absent. He contrasts this with chastity, which is a state of constant struggle: Arnold, “Labour of Continence,” 111.

of the human condition, so it is something humans must endure as long as they remain earthbound. To his mind, men and women cannot but suffer this alienation because, as essentially damaged beings, they have no ability to alter their condition. Guibert's suggestion that the virgin can achieve a state of impassibility shares more with John Cassian's assessment of humanity's situation. Cassian is convinced that there is a direct correlation between a Christian's spiritual state and how often and powerfully he or she is overcome by carnal appetites. Thus, in his judgment, the strength and frequency of fleshy urges diminish as the ascetic progresses spiritually—freedom from uncontrollable carnal passion is a sign that one has mastered single-mindedness.⁷⁴ This is the sort of hope Guibert clings to for himself and for other monks.⁷⁵ While this is not the only instance in which Guibert differs from Augustine, this particular divergence is significant because it so suits Guibert's needs as a young monk struggling to achieve virginity. If he had followed Augustine's thought to its logical conclusion, Guibert would have had to accept the idea that carnal (especially, as I show next, sexual) passions were going to beleaguer him until death. So, instead, he imagines an attainable state of liberation in which he would be free from those maddening, disorderly urges.

5 The Primacy of Sexual Desire

For Guibert, virginity is a state that hinges on one's capacity to restrain and retrain desire; however, his chief concern is not *desire* in general but *sexual desire* specifically. In late antique and medieval Christian thought, virginity and chastity were concerned with sexual

⁷⁴ For discussions of Augustine's and Cassian's perspective, see Brown, *Body and Society*, 420-23; McInerney, "Androgynous Virgins," 59-63. For Cassian in particular, see Joyce E. Salisbury, "When Sex Stopped Being a Social Disease: Sex and the Desert Fathers and Mothers," *Medieval Sexuality: A Casebook*, eds. April Harper and Caroline Proctor (New York: Routledge, 2008), 46-58. Also, see *Conlationes* 7.2, 12.16; John Cassian, *Cassiani Opera: Collationes XXIII*, ed. Michael Petschenig, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum; 13 (Wien: Verlag, 2004), 180-81, 358-60/John Cassian, *The Works of John Cassian*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Edgar Gibson, vol. 11, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 361-62, 433.

renunciation but also regularly signified a broader rejection of all worldly passions: family, property, political and community involvement, food, sleep, et cetera. Indeed, my analysis of Ælred of Rievaulx, in chapter 5, demonstrates that this broader perception greatly informs his idea of chastity for monks. In Guibert's treatise, there are certainly elements linking virginity more generally to the repudiation of all worldly temptations, but those themes are muted and supplanted by his persistent focus on the trials of sexuality. His discussions of memory and relationships offer clear evidence that, in Guibert's perception, *sexual* desire is the critical issue for monks.

5.1 Memories

One key impediment in the struggle for virginity is memory. Like most medieval and classical thinkers before him, Guibert believes a person can only recall what he or she has already known, what is familiar.⁷⁶ Given that, memory presents a particular challenge for the sexually experienced because images from the past fill their minds. About this, Guibert postulates:

For however much someone experiences carnal things, by that much more does he or she experience the very fickle crises of the corporal appetite: for what is more dangerous than the memory of past desire?⁷⁷

Conversely, the sexually innocent, “in whom the sweet taste of deadly bait has not yet wickedly inhaled”—are well equipped for success because memories of past encounters do not harass

⁷⁵ Rubenstein has also noticed this optimistic note in Guibert's *Opusculum*: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 25-26.

⁷⁶ Evans, “Two Aspects of *Memoria* in Eleventh and Twelfth Century Writings,” 275. The process is similar to that of mental processes described earlier. See above, note 64 for references. For more on how memory was understood in medieval thought, see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 46-121.

⁷⁷ *Opusc* 13; 601C: “Quanto namque aliquis experitur carnalia, eo leviora corporalis appetitus patitur discrimina: Nam quid periculosius quam praeteritae voluptatis memoria?” For other examples of how memory threatens those who are chaste, see *Opusc* 6; 587B.

them.⁷⁸ Carnal temptation does not beguile the consciousness of sexually inexperienced monks because they are familiar only with spiritual desire. When the mind of someone with no sexual experience is pricked with the thorn of temptation, Guibert surmises, “you find nothing there, except what is learned from God.”⁷⁹ Therefore, for them, carnal temptation is easily defeated: if they do face divisive attacks, they triumph immediately because “no flame from the experience of pleasures excites the virginal affection.”⁸⁰ Even so, the sexually innocent must exercise tremendous caution. Though not molested by memories of the past, lustful thoughts implanted by demons and evil spirits can savage them.⁸¹ Moreover, as I show below, they must guard their behavior with fellow monks so as not to *introduce* memories that will *later* stimulate their libidos and torment their minds.⁸²

Bernard of Clairvaux also discusses memory’s role in spiritual progress, and his view offers an interesting contrast to that of Guibert. Like Guibert, Bernard considers memory a thorny matter. In his judgment, the cloister literally provides walls that help monks shut out sensory stimulation; however, to use Suzannah Biernoff’s phrasing, memory brings the world into the cloister.⁸³ Bernard and Guibert both see memory as an issue, but, while Guibert can only recognize it as an enemy hampering spiritual growth, Bernard imagines a way for it to become a companion in spiritual advancement. Bernard seeks not to eliminate memory but to make use of it. Biernoff explains Bernard’s solution in this way:

⁷⁸ *Opusc* 13; 601C: “Talibus plane, quibus escae mortiferae necdum male dulcis sapor inhaesit, si seductorii collegae lenocinium aspernentur, si vagos visus contegant, si ad viam cogitationum revocare sciant errores, leve fit quidquid tentationis ingruerit.”

⁷⁹ *Opusc* 6; 588D: “Cum enim cujuslibet mens adeo sincera crebro compungitur, nihil invenias ubi tantum de Deo discatur.”

⁸⁰ *Opusc* 6; 589A: “Impugnationum discrimina si contigerint, ad felicem illico perveniunt tanta alacritate triumphum, quantum nulla virgineum flamma excitat de experientia voluptatis affectum. Etsi bella frequentia, rara omnimodis ibi damna, nulla murmuris memoria.”

⁸¹ *Opusc* 6, 13; 589A-B, 602A.

⁸² *Opusc* 9; 594C-D.

⁸³ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 119.

If our memories can be disarmed... then our past, including our past sins, 'will work together for good' rather than presenting the opportunity for further sin.... God's pardon 'wipes out sin, not from the memory, but in such a way that what before was both present in the memory and rendered it unclean is now, although it is still in the memory, no longer a defilement to it'.⁸⁴

Bernard deems memory invaluable because when people remember their sins they develop humility and gratitude (humility for sins committed, gratitude for their remission).⁸⁵ Guibert could never have imagined a way for memory to be constructive in the way that Bernard has, for there is a critical difference between the two men's perceptions of virginity/chastity. In Bernard's assessment, the problematic fleshy desire or weakness is pride. Thus, he can find a use for memory: by remembering sin, a person is humbled. For him, memory combats the monk's central challenge: pride. On the other hand, in Guibert's judgment, sexual urges are the critical problem. Clearly, it would have been impossible for him to envisage memories of sexual experiences and titillations as having any function other than stimulating more of the same!

When Guibert talks of memories—when he considers the trial they pose to the sexually experienced, and when he explains why their absence makes the lot of the sexually innocent less onerous—it becomes quite clear that sexuality is the carnal desire that most worries him.

5.2 Relationships

That sexual desire is the primary obstacle for a person seeking virginity is further attested by Guibert's preoccupation with relationships, deportment, and interaction within the monastic

⁸⁴ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 120. Here she is drawing from Bernard's *On Conversion* 15.28; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia*, eds. Jean Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, et al. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-80), 4: 102-04/Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on Conversion*, trans. Marie-Bernard Saïd, Cistercian Fathers Series; 25 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 88. For her entire discussion of Bernard's assessment of memory, see Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 114-20.

⁸⁵ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 119.

community. Guibert and the monks he wrote for lived within the walls of a monastery, largely shielded from women. But he still thinks he and his brethren are tremendously vulnerable. This is because his trepidation is not about women and the fires of temptation they might ignite—he makes scant reference to women in his treatise. Instead, he is anxious that encounters with fellow monks will stoke the flames of lust.

In his judgment, interactions between monastic brethren—especially between adolescent members of the community—pose an enormous threat to virginity.⁸⁶ Because of this, Guibert is of the opinion that the only safe relationship is no relationship at all, and he counsels extreme detachment. Scintillating interactions between brothers may only be brief, he cautions, but their impact on the mind will be prolonged and ruinous.⁸⁷ Since relationships can be so dangerous, he believes the very youngest members of his community should avidly guard their behavior and keep fellow monks at arm's length. Desire may not be an issue in their prepubescent days, he speculates, but later, when passions swell, good habits acquired in childhood will serve those monks well. For, as he says, “In these boyish beginnings we often acquire what later becomes harmful to the whole life.”⁸⁸ Detachment is of the utmost importance because even innocent relationships can transform into something more. This concern is at the heart of the admonishment he offers in chapter 9 of his *Opusculum*:

For, when the delight in words increases through a light-hearted discussion, babbling becomes joking. Then, with stories of base tales pouring out, the rigor of the mind grows warm (nay rather is relaxed). Through this alluring activity and by an unforeseen and now utterly unconquerable pleasure, the mind cannot resist thinking about those things that it willingly listened to and discussed. Thus, when pleasant conversations that can be resisted

⁸⁶ Guibert was not the only monk concerned about the potential pitfalls of interaction between monks. More on this below. Newman discusses Guibert's anxiety about relationships in Newman, *WomanChrist*, 39-40.

⁸⁷ *Opusc* 9; 595A-B.

⁸⁸ *Opusc* 13; 601C: “Primo in ipsis puerariis rudimentis... colligi solet quod toti postmodum noceat vitae.”

easily are enjoyed in a wrong manner, a death quite logically follows, which neither the mind nor reason can eliminate.⁸⁹

So, it seems, an innocent exchange of pleasantries might develop into an indecent discourse that is nigh impossible to banish from the mind.

The passion ignited by titillating banter between young monks, though, is nothing compared to the nearly unquenchable longing generated by looks, touches, and loving relationships. On this grave matter, he muses:

Sometimes it happens that although the things seen move the one seeing to no harmful heat, the touch performed impudently casts one into so great a furnace of lust, even with the mind resisting in vain, that one is scarcely or not at all able to set the conceived flames right without infection. While the mind ineffectively struggles to quench, the hand is willingly sent out to inflame.⁹⁰

Once touching ignites passion, Guibert presages, it is nearly impossible to avert further touching. Guibert's meaning is oblique. Is he warning that touches lead inexorably to sexual activity between monks, or is he suggesting that touches between monks will lead to masturbation? Or perhaps both? There is no way to know for sure, but either way, inappropriate relationships cause the trouble—they ignite desire.⁹¹

Once a disastrous outcome, such as the one just described, has occurred, all associations between the errant monks must be unceremoniously and decisively severed. “Not only must

⁸⁹ *Opusc* 9; 594D-595A: “Nam cum per hilarem collationem verborum multiplicatur jucunditas, sensim accedit jocularia garrulitas, inde concurrentibus turpium narrationum historiis, per blanda ludicra tepefactus, imo laxatus animi rigor, ad ea, quibus aurem linguamque sponte attribuit, cogitanda, insperata et jam pene invincibili delectatione mollescit. Sic, inquam, dum male dulcia, quibus facile tamen resisti posset, colloquia praelibantur, mors, cui eliminandae neque mens, neque ratio sufficit, et merito satis consequitur.” He offers a similar cautionary tale in his *Monodiae: Mono* 1.17; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 134-38/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 59-60.

⁹⁰ *Opusc* 13; 602B: “Et contingit aliquoties, ut cum visa ad nullum calorem noxium videntem moveant, tactus procaciter praesumptus in tantam libidinis fornacem, etiam mente inaniter renitente, praecipitet, ut vix aut neutiquam absque contagione conceptos digerere queat ignes. Inaniter, fateor, tunc mens renititur ut exstinguat, cum manus sponte emittitur ut incendat.”

⁹¹ As demonstrated in chapter 5, Ælred of Rievaulx also warns his brethren about potentially improper relationships, but his discussions are far less strident and much more practical.

vision of each other be prevented and touch be avoided more than any fire,” he counsels, “but propinquity and intimate conversation must be utterly precluded.”⁹² When improper loves develop, a monk must rebuff the object of desire so severely that no hope of reconciliation remains. This is because, “[w]hen he strives to break free from the one he loves, peacefully, honorably, without ire, and without separating from that person, he becomes bound to him in a way that is miserable and worse in every way.” Thus, he must ‘scourge the back of the lustful wife’ with the ‘severest of floggings’ and ‘administer the bridle of restraint’.⁹³ Furthermore, Guibert warns that any attempt to reinstate the formerly innocent rapport will simply rekindle the sexual passion: “without any delay, love badly recalled bubbles up in such a way that he falls passionately into the depth of the deepest abyss.”⁹⁴ Relationships and interactions are severely problematic within the cloister because they stimulate sexual lust.

If memory is the issue that most impedes the spiritual progress of the continent, relationships present a special challenge for the sexually innocent. In Guibert’s estimation, those who possess physical virginity could be exceedingly arrogant about their spiritual status, making them vulnerable to lapses—pride, as they say, comes before the fall. He was certainly not alone in this judgment: Christian writers regularly warned virgins of this eventuality, and it is a point Bernard returns to repeatedly (as chapter 4 on Bernard reveals).⁹⁵ As Guibert tells it, those who have never succumbed to the experience of sexual desire (*in mente eorum ea voluptatis*

⁹² *Opusc* 13; 602B: “Non solum denique visus arcendus, tactus plus omni igne vitandus, sed ipsa perquam maxime vicinitas allocutioque cavenda.” He makes the same point at *Opusc* 9; 595C-596A.

⁹³ *Opusc* 9; 595B-C: “Sed cum quasi pacifice et honeste ab eo quod amat, sine ira et motione personae se abrumperentur, fit modo miserabili ut pejus omnimodis obligetur.” For the entire passage, see above page 90 and note 54.

⁹⁴ *Opusc* 13; 601D-602A: “Sed ne perfidiae probrum apud eam cui perpetuitatem amoris promiserat personam incurrat, admonetur a sua mente ut quasi sobrie jam cum ea acturus usum colloctionis non deserat. Unde fit ut absque ulla cunctatione amor male repetitus in tantum efferveat, ut ad imum abruptissimae profunditatis avidissime ruat.”

⁹⁵ Anselm also reports on the pride oblates had in their superior purity: Anselm, “Liber Anselmi Archiepiscopi de humanis moribus,” *Memorials of St. Anselm*, eds. R. W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 68-70.

experientia incognita est) will often regard the continent with disdain, thinking themselves so much better. However, he warns, if they are not careful, the very behavior they deride will topple them: “They adopt an arrogance of boundless pride, when they raise their own purity above the profligate behavior of those ones. And without delay they will succumb to the very ruin they have condemned.”⁹⁶ Overconfident in their own state, these monks allow themselves to turn their gaze inappropriately toward fellow monks. As he explains it, they

...slacken their gaze from what is right, of their own free will.
And when they seek other faces—when they too rashly withdraw
the shield of the eyelid from their eyes—they hurl the arrow of
cruel stimuli of the heart into the eye toward which they
improperly gaze.

As a result, he continues, these smug ones find themselves in an abyss of absolute wickedness.⁹⁷ He delivers a similar message in his exegesis of the passage “I am a flower of the field and a lily of the valleys” from the Song of Songs (2:1). There, Guibert proposes that those two flowers signify the two types of physical virgins: those who ‘try,’ and those who ‘just are’. The natural virgins—those who have cold bodies and have an innate self-control (*qui frigidi sunt corporis, et temperantia ingenita his motibus minus urgentur*)—are far less tested by sexual desire and so become careless in their vigilance. “Hardly any of this type are found to pay attention to perfection,” Guibert tells the reader, “whence a certain carelessness has been known to deflect even eunuchs to the heat of their own mind.”⁹⁸ Of course, the chaste have to protect themselves from amorous relationships too. However, it appears that their past failures have made them

⁹⁶ *Opusc* 8; 591D: “Infiniti tumoris fastum concipiunt, dum suam sanctimoniam ex illorum flagitiosa conversatione sustollunt. Nec mora ei quam contemnebant ruinae succumbunt.”

⁹⁷ *Opusc* 13; 601C-D: “Solent tamen hi ex nimia sui fiducia, quadam curiositate videndarum specierum, plerumque liberius aequo laxare intuitum, et dum alienas aucupantur facies, dum clypeum palpebrarum nimium temere ab oculis amovent, cordis lumini quae improbe contuentur crudelis stimuli jaculum intorquent. Trahuntur igitur per id saepius ad totius mali voraginem.”

⁹⁸ *Opusc* 8; 593A-B: “Sed talium vix quisquam perfectioni operam dare invenitur, unde et spadones, quaedam sui securitas ad teporem animi deflectere dignoscitur.” Guibert levels a similar criticism against oblates (the sexually inexperienced) in his *Monodiae*. *Mono* 1.8; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 50/Guibert, *A Monk’s Confession*, 25.

especially wary of unsuitable relationships. Precisely because of their earlier surrender to sexually pleasurable delights, they are that much more determined to succeed in their spiritual pursuit.

In the end, Guibert views each group's ability to achieve and preserve virginity with an equal level of suspicion. The sexually innocent and the sexually experienced are both, in different ways, susceptible to sexual desire. Memory can unhinge both: memories of the past perturb the continent; memories created within the monastery or implanted by wicked spirits unseat the physically virginal. Whether a monk is sexually innocent or amongst the chaste, if he allows in these memories, they will invade the mind, enervate it, and draw it away from its spiritual resolve. Additionally, while physical virgins have less carnal baggage, their self-assurance generates a strong potential for failure. Guibert's own example demonstrates this point. Though he was physically a virgin when he became a monk, he struggled to stifle wrongly admitted memories and to recover from the wounds of improper interactions.⁹⁹ As a result, he found that he lacked virginity. The above has shown plainly Guibert's judgment that for monks of every ilk the central challenge in the endeavor for virginity is sexual desire.

5.3 The Impact of Sexuality on Spiritual Progress

Not only is sexuality the monk's greatest trial, but also, his sexual history has direct bearing upon the spiritual heights he can attain. Guibert's thoughts on various biblical figures demonstrate this point. It is also manifest in his handling of different types within his monastic community—the physical virgins and the chaste. However, although physical status (whether a monk is or is not sexually experienced) affects the level of perfection a religious can reach,

⁹⁹ This is apparent in his *Monodiae* when he discusses his unseemly poetry: *Mono* 1.17; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 134/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 58-59. It is also intimated throughout his *Opusculum*.

this is because of the mind and what it ‘knows’ not because of physical integrity or a lack there of.

The sexually experienced and sexually innocent are different in Guibert’s judgment—the above analysis has made this point abundantly clear. But he also envisions them as attaining different levels of spiritual perfection. Signs of this determination appear in his handling of various physical virgins and non-virgins in the Bible. For example, in a discussion of Christian iconography, he avers that Paul garnered Jesus’s favor because he possessed physical virginity. Certain pieces of artwork depict Paul not Peter on Jesus’s right side, and some people, he remarks, have suggested that the placement of the two is inappropriate. Guibert thinks those people are wrong: Paul was physically virginal and Peter was not; thus, the arrangement with Paul on Jesus’s right, which bestowed the highest honor upon Paul, is entirely correct.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, through allusions to the Gospel of John, Guibert demonstrates that God chooses physical virgins to be his closest companions. Imagining what Jesus would have said to humanity about the significance of virginity, Guibert wrote: “I chose all of those people, whom I admitted to the school of my instruction, for my love and companionship, but particularly that man [John] who was a Virgin.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, in the *Opusculum*, he considers the chaste only after first lauding Mary, angels, and physical virgins. The discussion is explicitly arranged hierarchically and makes plain that Mary is the most perfect and revered, followed by angels, virgins, and finally, the continent.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Opusc* 5; 586C-587A.

¹⁰¹ *Opusc* 4; 585A-B: “...et inter eos, quos mei magisterii scholae asciveram, omnes quidem praecipue, sed illum specialius, qui Virgo fuerat, meae charitudini familiariusque allegeram. Quos ergo privilegiis me honoratoribus donare videtis, quanti apud me sint eorum sinceritatis merita caeteris clariora pensare debetis. Sufficere possent haec virginitatis exempla.”

¹⁰² For discussions of Guibert’s Marian doctrine, see John Moorhead, “Three Devotees of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” *Parergon* 25 (1979), 9-17; Pelikan, “First-Generation Anselmian,” 71-82.

Final evidence for his view that the physically virginal and the continent achieve different levels of perfection can be found in Guibert's uncharacteristically lucid handling of the biblical figures Joshua and Moses. In his discussion of the two, Guibert likens Joshua and Moses to two different types of religious—physical virgins and the continent. Because Joshua never married, he symbolizes the sexually innocent—those who “keep baptismal purity,” and “who are strong in integrity of body and mind.”¹⁰³ On the other hand, Moses, who had two wives, signifies “the life of those tested by the sins of the flesh”; that is, those who preserve chastity after marriage or a lapse.¹⁰⁴ What distinguishes the two is the presence or absence of physical virginity. In Guibert's estimation, both types are praiseworthy and have special relationships with God; yet, they receive different recompense. Moses climbed the mountain and observed the Promised Land but was not allowed to live there. Joshua's life had a better ending: he was able to enter and dwell within the Promised Land. In this allegory, the Promised Land symbolizes contemplation; therefore, his point is that chaste Moses could achieve the perfected contemplative state but could not maintain it permanently. Alternatively, virginal Joshua was both able to contemplate God and preserve that state.

It is not obvious how Guibert locates his contemporaries in these categories. It is possible that he is equating all monks with the figure of Joshua and the secular clergy with Moses. But, instead, I maintain, he is speaking of types within his own monastic community. Additional statements in the treatise, in which Guibert uses a similar criterion when speaking of monks, support this reading. For instance, in chapter 13, he comments that there are two types of monks, the oblates and the adult converts: “The order of those living in such a way in the holy

¹⁰³ *Opusc* 6; 588B: “Josue eos qui baptismalem candorem conservarunt indicat. Et Josue, qui in Dei tabernaculo, id est militia mansitans, sub quadam virginali reverentia Mosaicae disciplinae indivisus semper inhaesit, et nulli obligatus conjugio caelebs mansit, horum, qui integritate corporis, et animi pollent, gestare mihi creditur formam.”

Church is not large. But who are they? They are either offered to God by others from an early age or they offer themselves to him.”¹⁰⁵ And elsewhere, he says that members of religious communities are those who have professed either virginity or continence.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, Joshua and Moses represent the types of monks in Guibert’s community: Joshua signifies the sexually inexperienced (oblates and others who maintain physical and mental integrity); Moses symbolizes the sexually experienced (adult converts and monks who succumb to sexual urges).¹⁰⁷ Given this, it is clear that, like Moses looking on but not residing in the land of promise, the chaste are able to enjoy moments of contemplation but cannot maintain that state. Despite having left “the ugliness of his actions” and the world behind and despite having guided his every thought toward God and weeping copious tears of penance, the chaste monk, like Moses, is still attacked by errant thoughts (*cogitationum importunitates*). Indeed, only frequent prayer will help him withstand the onslaught of temptations.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, Joshua’s example demonstrates that the sexually innocent can anticipate a true and lasting contemplation of God because no memories of prior sexual experience hold them back.¹⁰⁹ Both types of religious can achieve contemplation (the height of virginal perfection), but they are not equally able to maintain that state.

His portrayals of Joshua and Moses, Paul and Peter, John, and Mary all could be understood to suggest that Guibert considers physical virgins more worthy of reward than those who are

¹⁰⁴ *Opusc* 6; 587B: “Moysen ergo, quem duarum conjugem mulierum novimus, peccata carnis expertorum vitam significare credamus....”

¹⁰⁵ Rubenstein agrees: Rubenstein, *Guibert*, 23-24.

¹⁰⁶ *Opusc* 11; 598A; “cujuslibet sexus persona continentiam virginitatemve professa.”

¹⁰⁷ *Opusc* 13; 601B-C: “Ordo illorum qui ita vivant in sancta Ecclesia non plurimus est. At qui sunt? Aut ab aliis ineunti aetate Deo offeruntur, aut se ipsi offerunt.”

¹⁰⁸ *Opusc* 6; 587B-D.

not—that physical integrity is necessary for spiritual perfection, or that sexual activity pollutes a person, making him or her less suitable in God’s eyes. But this is not the case. To be sure, sexual history does affect spiritual development, but only because it impinges on a person’s ability to expel sexual desire. Knowledge and experience of sensual, especially sexual, pleasures make the pursuit of perfection burdensome and ultimately less successful because they continually lure the believer back to the carnal. In Guibert’s estimation, physical virgins and the chaste are different, and their spiritual endeavors are tested in different ways. Nonetheless, both strive to achieve and maintain the same state of virginity and both can be successful.

6 Virginity’s Caretakers

Thus far, I have argued that the mind is responsible for the virgin’s success in Guibert’s judgment. I now consider the language he uses to illustrate that endeavor showing that images of supervision and discipline predominate in his discussions of virginity’s trials.¹¹⁰ This coupled with his various warnings about interactions between monks suggest that the contents of his treatise reflect not his own particularly fearful view of sexuality but what he was taught within the walls of his cloister.

Throughout his *Opusculum*, Guibert depicts the endeavor for virginity in terms of wardens and wards, masters and students, discipline and growth. He conjectures that the monk seeking virginity is like a child or adolescent (*infans, puer, adolescens*) in need of discipline and oversight—chapters 8, 9, and 11 of the treatise all touch on this idea. For example, in chapter

¹⁰⁹ *Opusc* 6; 587B-589B.

¹¹⁰ Of course, that is not the only type of metaphor he uses. For instance, in chapter 8 “reason” is the hoe that breaks up terrestrial thoughts and sins (*terrenas cogitationes ligone rationis discutiens, et culpas aliunde contractas*): *Opusc* 8; 593C.

8, humility cultivates and guides virginity like a nanny or nurse (*nutrix*) nurtures a child (*proles*). She restrains and rules over her ward, fostering virginity by oppressing fleshy desires and reining in the mind's bad intentions.¹¹¹ Ultimately, the nurse/humility is effective because “the pious mind aware of its own worthlessness” is more readily able to “subdue itself to itself.”¹¹² However, the nurse is not enough to cultivate proper behavior in this child, this fragile virginity. Just as people employ slave girls or petty vassals (*grandiusculae ancillulae, seu clientuli*) to raise noble infants (*infantes*), so too should monks employ caretakers such as modesty and circumspection to help virginity mature properly.¹¹³ Gravity of conduct (*morum gravitas*) must follow the young monk's every movement—it must be his constant companion like a babysitter and caretaker (*gerula ac procuratrix*). Under its guidance, the youthful religious will learn to check “unsuitable behavior and anything juvenile.”¹¹⁴ Listen to the way Guibert describes the *gerula's* role in fostering virginity:

...this virtue [virginity], encircled and supported from a sudden fall by the arms of holy gravity and drawn away from advancing trouble, can progress on its own beyond its still tender strength, but it cannot subsist through itself. Thus, just as it attained a more advanced state when it was strengthened by leadership in its early stages, now more robust in every way, having become habitual through pious practice, it thrives through itself.¹¹⁵

As he progresses spiritually and proper behavior becomes ingrained, the young monk's own strength of mind will grow rigorous enough to sustain a godly focus, to stand (as it were) on its

¹¹¹ *Opusc* 8; 594B.

¹¹² *Opusc* 9; 594C: “Postquam itaque mens pia suae conscia vilitatis, et accidenti injuriae tam subjecta quam parata subjici, semet sibi subdidit....”

¹¹³ *Opusc* 8; 594B.

¹¹⁴ *Opusc* 9; 594C: “...morum sibi gravitas semper comes, quasi gerula ac procuratrix, motus incongruos et quidquid est juvenile, contineat....”

¹¹⁵ *Opusc* 11; 599A: “Sub tali igitur gerula, optimo, fateor, omnium provisoro sanctae hujus virtutis provehitur honestas, et quae per se progredi prae tenero adhuc robore, nec per se subsistere sufficit, sanctae gravitatis quasi circumcincta sustentaque brachiis repentino casui, et ingruenti molestiae subtrahatur, sicque veluti ab ineunte aetate ejus solidata ducatu cum ad proveciorem devenerit statum, tracto in naturam pio usu, per se jam firmior ubique vigeat.”

own two feet without being cradled in the arms of nursemaids. But, Guibert admonishes, just as wardens help raise and nurture virginity in its earliest stages, a *magister* must exert control when the budding virtue begins to mature: “any instructor must suppress the pubescent young adolescent (*pubescens adolescentula*) [maturing virginity] pulsating with lust or pride, and he must put something in between or in the way and turn it back to what is beneficial.”¹¹⁶ The master must either hinder or redirect lust and pride. Like caretakers, all of these virtues will guide and condition the young monk to resist the burning itch of desire.

In the end, Guibert hopes that the lessons taught by these metaphorical custodians will become habitual, enabling virginity to mature and thrive on its own. Men and women’s intractable bodies and wandering minds are like children or adolescents, and they will remain that way until taught to behave. As monks learn to exercise firm and unyielding control over temptation, their unruly minds and bodies become more responsive to their wishes. Indeed, Guibert optimistically suggests that after those pedagogues (*paedagogi*) “break the neck of that adolescent (*adolescens*)” by a learned law, virginity may very well feel a measure of security in this world.¹¹⁷ As he sees it, monks can only master carnal temptation with the constant assistance of correction and monitoring. In literal terms, this function is carried out by self-control (a vigilant mind), the cultivation of monastic virtues, and adherence to a strict code of behavior. However, figuratively, monks win success under the watchfulness of metaphorical caretakers, and the self that must be controlled and guided—the self that is comprised of mind and body—are children or young adults.

¹¹⁶ *Opusc* 11; 599A: “Sed quia nutricem ac gerulam pro nostra facultatula distribuimus, pubescentem adolescentulam lascivia superbiave pulsatam, quis magister deprimat, et intermisso, objectove subjiat, remancipetque operi, parce dicendum.”

¹¹⁷ *Opusc* 11; 600A-B: “Isti ergo post illos praelibatos paedagogos, qui ejus adhuc adolescentis, discipulari jure, fregere cervicem, isti, inquam, quasi perpetuo marito nectitur virginitas, ut etiam praemulta vi dilectionis, securitatem de sua in hoc saeculo perseverantia praesumat....” Typically, *paedagogi* were not teachers but slaves who escorted their wards to school and monitored their behavior: Clark, “Old Adam,” 171.

Guibert's imagery aptly describes the mental process he underscores as crucial for achieving virginity: a monk must learn to curb illicit desire. However, the images his language calls to mind and his various recommendations for forestalling the lust caused by memories and relationships indicate that he is communicating what he learned within his monastery. In an article investigating eleventh-century Cluniac customaries and a group of monks known as *iuniores sub custodia*, Isabelle Cochelin details the disciplinary program Cluny implemented to teach chastity to monks. What she describes is strikingly similar to what I have drawn attention to in Guibert's text. *Iuniores sub custodia* were newly professed monks between the ages of about fifteen and twenty, who lived under the watchful eye of a guardian for an undetermined length of time.¹¹⁸ According to Cochelin, the *iuniores* were shadowed day and night. If for some reason the custodian could not remain with his charge, he made sure that another mature brother or a group of brothers was on hand to keep watch. The authors of the customaries expressed concern with both the verbal and physical exchanges between the supervised monks: they could not help each other dress or shave; they could not speak with each other, unless charged with monastic business; they could not sit side by side (their guardians sat between them).¹¹⁹ One customary makes a clear association between the outlawed (because potentially sexual) touching of children (*pueri*) by older monks and the touches shared between the surveilled adolescents. Young monks were not to touch each other, "just as all of the brothers had to keep from touching the children."¹²⁰ Clearly, the fear was that simple touches would kindle desire and initiate unseemly behavior. Not only were the writers of the

¹¹⁸ Cochelin, "Dur apprentissage," 119-32. For more on the training of youths in monasteries, see Patricia A. Quinn, *Better than the Sons of Kings: Boys and Monks in the Early Middle Ages* (New York: P. Lang, 1989), 164-70; also, 45-67, 105-34, 155-89.

¹¹⁹ Cochelin, "Dur apprentissage," 126-30.

¹²⁰ Bernard of Cluny, "Ordo Cluniacensis," *Vetus disciplina monastica*, ed. M. Herrgott (Paris: 1726), 212. Quoted in Cochelin, "Dur apprentissage," 129: "Hoc quoque cauendum est omnibus illis inuicem, ne unquam ullo modo alter contingat alterum."

customaries wary of how adolescent monks behaved with each other, but also they were anxious about the youths' solitary activities. An adolescent under supervision could not enter the dormitory or the bathroom unaccompanied. If he needed to relieve himself in the middle of the night, he was to light a candle and wake his guardian, who would both accompany him and carefully monitor his activity. Nor was the *iunior* left to his own devices while in bed—his custodian slept in an adjacent bed.¹²¹ The Cluniacs imposed all these regulations on the *iuniores sub custodia*, Cochelin concludes, to curb their libidos and train them in the practice of chastity.

The parallels between the Cluniacs' concerns and methods and what Guibert describes in images and with practical advice are unmistakable. The constant surveillance and correction, the techniques of hindering behavior by 'getting between' or redirecting, and the hyper-vigilant concern with relations between monks are only some of the obvious similarities. When considering Guibert's treatise in light of the Cluniac program, it seems plausible that Saint-Germer may have had a similar system of discipline to train its adolescent monks in the practice of virginity and chastity.¹²² If so, much of the tone and advice offered in the pages of the *Opusculum* would have been reflections of what he had been taught as a young intern within the cloister walls.

Many scholars who have analyzed Guibert's later works, especially his *Monodiae*, have commented that he had a generalized revulsion for sex and the body. Pointing to his childhood as the source of his problems, they aver in no uncertain terms that he abhorred and feared the

¹²¹ Cochelin, "Dur apprentissage," 127-28.

¹²² In his *Monodiae*, there is another suggestion that he was subject to such a program. There, he tells a story indicating that his master slept in an adjacent bed. He explains that when he had nightmares as a young monk, his master was there to calm him down. *Mono* 1.15; Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 114/Guibert, *A Monk's Confession*, 51: "[I] was so terrified by these apparitions that there were nights when I could have neither remained in bed nor prevented myself from crying out had it not been for the vigilance of my tutor" (...*tantis spiritum somno solutum speciebus exterrebat, ut noctibus, nisi me praedicti magistri vigilantia mei communiret, neque lecto cohiberi, neque a clamoribus arceri...*).

body and everything to do with sexuality. A quotation from James Brundage demonstrates well the scholarly consensus:

Guibert of Nogent... seems obsessed with the filthiness of sex.... We are burdened and doomed, according to Guibert, by sexual fantasies that spring unbidden to our minds, even in sleep; sordid desires subvert our efforts to attain chastity and plunge us into ever-deeper despair. Sex is a vice and a disease, Guibert believed; it taints and befouls every living person. Even when death finally delivers us from the grasp of lust, it is likely to pitch us into hell.¹²³

While this may very well portray the attitude expressed in Guibert's memoirs, it is not the prevailing message of his *Opusculum*, the work he wrote as an adolescent. Certainly, one recognizes in it a person for whom sexual renunciation does not come easily. One can even sense what may have been his greatest trials: masturbation and possibly a sexual attraction to other monks. Indeed, his difficulty with renouncing sexual desire appears to have had some bearing on every aspect of his treatise. The work's "how to" quality, the accent on sexual urges as the virgin's principal obstacle, the graphic personifications of body and soul, the use of self-control as the primary metaphor for success, and the ultimately hopeful message of the treatise all tie into his troubled relationship with his own sexual passions.

The anxiety about sexual desire Guibert expresses in his *Opusculum* often appears strident and excessive; however, when considered in context, his words seem reasonable if not necessarily appealing. When one peruses his treatise with the knowledge that the author was an adolescent, it becomes apparent that he was wrestling with unruly sexual passions while at the same time seeking to attain virginity. As such, it becomes clear that sexual desire is presented as the critical challenge in the endeavor for virginity because that is what most agitated him.

¹²³ Brundage, *Law, Sex, Society*, 185. Also, see Benton, "Introduction," 13-14, 65-67; Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*, 139-56; Kantor, "A Psycho-Historical Source," 281-303.

Reading his treatise in context also explains the text's anxious and dramatic language. Furthermore, Guibert's metaphorical language and the advice he offers both suggest that, as a youth growing up within Saint-Germer, Guibert was subject to the monastery's pedagogical program for training monks in chastity and virginity. This would have informed his perspectives about what matters ought to be regarded as problematic and how best to check sexual desire. While Guibert no doubt considered, reconsidered, and revised his work on virginity, he was still in the throes of the challenges he was addressing as he did so. Thus, there is no separation in this treatise between the "young Guibert" and the older "enlightened Guibert." There is only a young man struggling to become what is expected of him and what he expects of himself. And that, for him, was a momentous undertaking.

Guibert's *Opusculum* demonstrates just how recalcitrant and insidious sexual passions were for him and how challenging he found the endeavor for sexual renunciation. Nonetheless, his insistence that the mind is responsible for preserving virginity is, in a sense, quite positive—it means that a monk could advance spiritually by the force of his own will; it implies that he could succeed, if he set his mind to it, and if the mind is well trained. Additionally, his chiefly spiritual understanding of virginity shifts the focus from the body and its physical condition and redirects it toward the believer's internal state. This means a monk could recover from missteps and that virginity is possible for all striving to achieve it. Guibert even imagines that avid perseverance could result in a state of impassibility—a state in which the virgin rests peacefully at God's side. Indeed, I am convinced that when Guibert wrote his *Opusculum*, he anticipated eventually conquering the sexual appetites that so frequently molested him. He believed he could obtain virginity. Perhaps the utter contumaciousness of sexual temptation was what finally drove the much older Guibert to reach the bitter conclusions about sex and the body noticed by so many investigators of his memoirs. Maybe year after year of failure

magnified the problem of sexual desire so radically that anxiety about his ability to curb the libido transformed into a deep and unrestrained loathing of the body and sexual activity per se.

Chapter III

Rupert of Deutz: God has Truly Opened His Book to Me

Are monks and nuns still virgins after they have masturbated? That is the problem the monk, Rupert of Deutz, sought to address in the treatise he composed sometime between the years 1121 and 1124.¹ By his own admission, the subject matter had taken Rupert aback—initially, he thought the matter small and shameful. Nonetheless, a fellow monk, Wibald of Stavelot, had posed the question, and Rupert felt compelled to tackle the topic as best he could. And, as he began to formulate his response, Rupert quickly recognized that the offense in question (masturbation) was of greater consequence than he first realized because it was connected to and potentially affected virginity. Therefore, he determined to address the question assiduously.

As Rupert's response unfolds, it becomes evident that it contains much that is unexpected. For one, Rupert does not use Wibald's question as a touchstone for a traditional medieval exhortation of virginity. The treatise is bereft of many of the standard tropes regularly found in such works—for example, dire warnings about the ramifications of lost virginity are absent from it. Also, to the reader's great surprise, it attends to both male and female virginity. Indeed, as I argue in this chapter, an alternative agenda lurks beneath the surface of the text: his appraisal of virginity is linked to a contentious and prolonged conflict between Rupert and various schoolmasters and students of his region. Because of the clash and the threat that fracas posed to his career as an exegete, male virginity emerges on the pages of his treatise as

something incredibly substantive and potent. As such, it serves both to legitimize his right to interpret God's Word and to authenticate the accuracy of his evaluations.

1 Rupert's Life

Time has largely obscured Rupert of Deutz's formative years. Though he left behind voluminous writings, they do little to enlighten the modern reader about his childhood. The same is true for other extant sources that reference Rupert. Even the date and place of his birth are estimations: he was born in or near the city of Liège, in modern Belgium, sometime around 1075.² It is known, however, that as a child of about seven Rupert's parents offered him as an oblate to the Benedictine abbey of Saint Lawrence (a monastery nestled on a hill above the city of Liège).³ This cloister, with its population of thirty or so monks, was home to Rupert (apart from three brief interludes) until he was forty-four years old.⁴ At that point, in 1119, Archbishop Frederick of Cologne transferred him to a monastery in Deutz, just across the Rhine from the city of Cologne. Within a year, he was elected abbot of that community, where he lived until his death in 1129.

Rupert was a staunch supporter of the reform movement that had so vivified the Church in the West. In fact, his reform ideals inspired his only three absences from his Saint Lawrence abbey.

¹ Rupert, *De laesione virginitatis*, PL 170: 545-60 (*Laes*). Hereafter references to *De laesione* will only include chapter and column numbers (e.g. *Laes* 1; 545).

² What is known of Rupert's childhood comes primarily from autobiographical passages strewn throughout his works. For the best and most recent biographical study, see John H. Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). Wanda Cizewski also gives a brief but helpful biographical overview: *The Doctrine of Creation in the First Half of the Twelfth Century* (Ph.D., University of Toronto, 1983), 15-22.

³ Rupert, *Super quaedam capitula regulae Benedicti*, PL 170: 477-538 (*Reg Ben*): "a puerilibus annis monachus et coenobii claustrus fui contentus, sive detentus...."

In one instance, for example, Rupert and a number of his confreres went into a three-and-a-half-year exile to support their beloved abbot, Berengar. Berengar had been deposed by the schismatic and imperialist Bishop Otbert and replaced with a man who had certainly paid for that appointment.⁵ Rupert and his brethren were not willing to overlook such a corrupting act of simony and remained in exile until 1095. Rupert's rigorous reform ideology was also linked to his hesitancy to be ordained as a priest. Initially, the idealistic monk refused ordination from the excommunicated Bishop Otbert because he believed that man to be impure (due to his status as an excommunicant) thus unable to perform that sacrament faithfully or efficaciously. But, even after Otbert had reconciled with Rome, Rupert continued to put off priestly ordination. This too was likely because of his reform beliefs: he had high standards for those who would be priests, and he considered himself unworthy.⁶ He finally relented around 1108, after a series of visions imbued him with confidence. Indeed, these visions marked a turning point in Rupert's life in many ways; for, at this time he took up his career as a theologian and writer of scriptural commentaries.

⁴ Given that he lived most of his life in a Liège monastery and that Rupert identified that city and region as his home, his less-common moniker, Robert of Liège, is probably more appropriate. Nonetheless, I will follow custom and refer to him as Rupert of Deutz.

⁵ See Van Engen, *Rupert*, 26-35. This first exile was in northern France from 1092 through 1095. His second exile was in Siegburg, near Cologne, probably from the end of November 1116 to mid-1117, and his third in Cologne in April of 1119. The date of his Siegburg sojourn is uncertain and controversial. On this matter, see V. I. J. Flint, "The Date of the Arrival of Rupert of Deutz at Siegburg," *Revue Bénédictine* 81.1-2 (1971), 317-19; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 158-80.

⁶ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 59. For more on this matter, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 38-52, 53-55.

2 Texts & Controversy

As a young man in his mid-twenties, probably around the year 1100, Rupert experienced the first of a series of life-altering dreams and visions.⁷ In the last of this set of visions, he saw an aged man, who told him, “in eight years, you will be conquered.”⁸ Rupert thought this meant he was to die within the decade. As time passed and that momentous eighth year approached, he dedicated himself evermore to prayer and suddenly began, again, to experience visions. From these, he learned that he had misinterpreted the words of that old man from his vision. He realized he was not destined to die but, instead, had been called to clearly discern the depths of the mysteries of Christ. As mentioned already, these visions showed him that he was finally ready for ordination (probably in 1108); they also set in motion his career as a writer. “From that time on,” he reports after his final vision, “I have opened my mouth’ (Ps 118:131), and I have not been able to stop writing.”⁹

And write he did. Though his literary career lasted only eighteen or so years, by his death he had produced more work than had any other twelfth-century author.¹⁰ He composed primarily

⁷ On Rupert’s visions, see Walter Berschin, “Visione e vocazione allo scivere. L’autobiografia di Ruperto di Deutz,” *Schede medievali* 19 (1990), 297-303; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 309-14, 315; Rhabanus Haacke, “Die mystischen Visionen Ruperts von Deutz,” *Sapientiae doctrina: mélanges de théologie et de littérature médiévales offerts à Hildebrand Bascour* (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1980), 68-90; Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 328-33; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 51-53, 349-52, 363-64; Abigail Ann Young, “Mission and Message: Two Prophetic Voices in the Twelfth Century,” *Essays in Medieval Philosophy and Theology in Memory of Walter H. Principe, CSB: Fortresses and Launching Pads*, eds. James R. Ginther and Carl N. Still (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005); Abigail Ann Young, “‘The Fourth Gospel in the Twelfth Century: Rupert of Deutz on the Gospel of John,’ a revision of ‘The Commentaria in Iohannis Euangelium of Rupert of Deutz: A Methodological Analysis in the Field of Twelfth Century Exegesis,’” Unpublished Ph.D. diss. (University of Toronto, 1984) <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~young/rdintro.html> (accessed March 30, 2009).

⁸ Rupert, *De gloria et honore filii hominis super Matthaum* 12, CCCM29, edited by Rhabanus Haacke (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969), 374 (*Sup Mat*): “...octo annos uicturus es.” For this whole series of dreams, see *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, CCCM29, 370-74.

⁹ *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, CCCM29, 384: “...ego autem extunc ‘os meum aperui’ (Ps 118:131), et cessare quin scriberem nequaquam potui....”

¹⁰ Robert E. Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” *Speculum* 67.1 (1992), 35.

exegetical works but also letters, hymns, and saints' Lives.¹¹ The monk's first major tract was a lengthy commentary on the liturgical year, *De divinis officiis* (*De divinis*).¹² Completed in 1112, this, the book he was most known for during the Middle Ages and the only of his writings to have been popular outside the German Empire,¹³ contains his controversial doctrine of the Eucharist.¹⁴ That doctrine, which he develops further in his expansive commentary on the whole of Scripture, *De sancta Trinitate et operibus eius* (1112-16), ignited a prolonged quarrel with Alger, the leading master in Liège, and a group of Alger's loyal and fervent students.¹⁵ While still penning *De sancta Trinitate*, Rupert wrote his *Commentaria in evangelium S. Johannis* (*Commentary on John*, 1114-16).¹⁶ His next major works, *De voluntate Dei* (1116) and *De omnipotentia Dei* (1117), both focused on the question of God, Free Will, and Predestination. They, like so much of what Rupert wrote, were also associated with an imbroglio: the first, intended as a refutation of Anselm of Laon's similarly titled tract, drew attacks from that man's students and followers; the second, Rupert offered as a record of the defense he waged against those men.¹⁷ It is largely thanks to Rupert himself that historians know what went on between him and his detractors. He offers a lengthy description of his confrontation with the masters and students in his *Commentary on John*, the prefatory letter that accompanied that commentary

¹¹ For example, Rupert, *Vita Heriberti*, ed. Peter Dinter (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1976).

¹² Rupert, *Liber de divinis officiis*, CCCM7, edited by Rhabanus Haacke (Turnholt: Brepols, 1967).

¹³ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 66.

¹⁴ For thorough discussions of the Eucharistic controversy, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 135-80; Guntram Gerhard Bischoff, *The Eucharistic Controversy between Rupert of Deutz and his Anonymous Adversary* (Thesis, Th.D., Princeton University, 1965).

¹⁵ Rupert, *De sancta Trinitate et operibus eius*, CCCM21-24, edited by Rhabanus Haacke (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971-72) (*Sancta Trin*).

¹⁶ Rupert, *Commentaria in Evangelium Sancti Iohannis*, CCCM9, edited by Rhabanus Haacke (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969) (*Iohannis*).

¹⁷ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 161. Rupert, *De voluntate Dei*, PL 170: 437-54; Rupert, *De omnipotentia Dei*, PL 170: 453-78. For the details of this debate, see Cizewski, *Doctrine of Creation*, 68-76; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 181-220.

(1114–16), and, again, in the first book of his *Commentary on the Rule of Benedict* (1125).¹⁸ These conflagrations are of particular interest for this chapter (and are discussed at greater length below) because his treatise on virginity, I argue, served as a tactic in his struggle with these men.

Rupert was at the center of another heated debate as well. This conflict was between black monks,¹⁹ Cistercians, and regular canons over what constituted the perfect communal religious life and which group was superior.²⁰ As a participant in this dispute, Rupert wrote several works in defense of his own community.²¹ Another notable work from Rupert's oeuvre is his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Produced during the last years of his life, this tract was the first of its kind to see the figure of the bride in the Song as representing the Virgin Mary and to

¹⁸ *Iohannis* 6-7; Rupert, *CCCM*9, 329-83; Rupert, *Epistula Ruperti Abbatis Tuiciensis ad Abbatem coenobii Sigebergensis Cunonem*, Commentaria in Evangelium Sancti Iohannis, *CCCM*9, edited by Rhabanus Haacke (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969), 1-4; *Reg Ben* 1; Rupert, *PL* 170: 477D-498B. Also, see *Sancta Trin* 3.18-25; Rupert, *CCCM*24, 1925-34.

¹⁹ "Black monk" is a term used to distinguish traditional Benedictine monks from other cloistered groups. Traditional Benedictines wore black robes, whereas new monks, like the Cistercians, wore undyed, 'white' robes; thus, the former are called black monks and the latter, white monks.

²⁰ Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 131-35. For scholarship on the controversy, see D. Ursmer Berlière, "L'exercice du ministère paroissial par les moines dans le haut Moyen Âge," *Revue Bénédictine* 39 (1927), 227-50, esp. 246-50; Jay T. Lees, *Anselm of Havelberg: Deeds into Words in the Twelfth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 129-63; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 126-34, 323-34. Also, see Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 88-137; Christopher N. L. Brooke, *Churches and Churchmen in Medieval Europe* (London: Hambledon Press, 1999), 213-31. Scholars disagree about what, if anything, distinguished the regular canons from the monks. On this matter, see Brooke, *Churches and Churchmen in Medieval Europe*, 213-31; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 22-58. The best source for any investigation of the regular canons remains Charles Dereine, *Les chanoines réguliers au diocèse de Liège avant saint Norbert*, Academie royale de Belgique: Classe des lettres..., *Memoires*; 47 (Brussels: 1952). Also on the regular canons, see Cristina Andenna, "Studi recenti sui canonici regolari," *Dove va la storiografia monastica in Europa?: temi e metodi di ricerca per lo studio della vita monastica e regolare in età medievale alle soglie del terzo millennio: atti del convegno internazionale Brescia-Rodengo, 23-25 marzo 2000*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2001); J. C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), 1-223; Brooke, *Age of the Cloister*, 153-65; Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1978), 99-112.

²¹ Rupert, *Altercatio monachi et clerici, quod liceat monacho praedicare*, *PL* 170: 537-42; Rupert, *Epistola ad Everardum Abbatem Brunwillarensis*, *PL* 170: 541-42; Rupert, "Questio utrum monachis liceat predicare," *Honorius Augustodunensis*, ed. J. A. Endres (Munich: 1906), 145-47; *Reg Ben* 3, 4; Rupert, *PL* 170: 511-538B. On the ascription of "Questio utrum monachis" to Rupert, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*, *Harvard Theological Studies*; 31 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979), 109 n. 10.

interpret the whole Song from the perspective of Mary's relationship with Christ.²² Perhaps it should not be a surprise that this commentary did not receive unanimous acclaim by contemporaries.²³ However, in spite of the criticism it received, the innovative tract enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages—it survives in over forty medieval manuscripts.²⁴

The work central to this chapter is the little-studied treatise, *De laesione virginitatis* (*De laesione*), which Rupert wrote around 1121 to 1124 in response to Wibald of Stavelot's inquiry about the impact of masturbation on virginity.²⁵ Compared with Rupert's other compositions, *De laesione* is extraordinarily short, filling just fifteen columns of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*.²⁶ It consists of seventeen chapters and a prologue—the prologue and the first fourteen chapters deal with the question of masturbation and its bearing on virginity; the final three treat Wibald's second question about the consecration of virgins. Rupert's handling of the first topic will occupy the bulk of this chapter's attention, but I also draw on the final chapters to substantiate some of my arguments. From this unusual work (it is not often historians come across an exchange between monks about masturbation or male virginity), I uncover how Rupert conceives of virginity, and why he considers it significant. From it, I also argue that his perception

²² Rupert, *Commentaria in canticum canticorum*, CCCM26, edited by Rhabanus Haacke (Turnholt: Brepols, 1974) (*Canticum*). For scholarly discussions of Rupert's Song commentary, see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 61-71; Rachel Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs," *Viator* 27 (1996), 85-116; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 309-50; Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 159-63; Richard A. Norris, *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, Church's Bible; 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), throughout; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 291-98.

²³ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 341-42.

²⁴ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 291. For the various manuscripts, see Rhabanus Haacke, "Einleitung," *Liber de divinis officiis* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1967), xv-lx.

²⁵ *Laes*; Rupert, *PL* 170: 545-60. Van Engen's study includes a two-page analysis of the treatise: Van Engen, *Rupert*, 236-37.

²⁶ The *PL* version of the treatise is a reprint from an eighteenth-century Venice edition of Rupert's works; there is no modern critical edition of this particular treatise. There are two extant manuscripts of the letter. One is a twelfth-century version from the St. Lawrence Abbey: Rupert, "De laesione virginitatis et an possit consecrari corrupta," Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique 9578-80 fol. 133-39, 12th cent. The other is from the thirteenth century: Rupert, "De laesione virginitatis et an possit consecrari corrupta," Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique 10038-53 fol. 19-26, 13th cent.

validated his own occupation as interpreter of Scripture. To begin, however, let us explore the contents of *De laesione*—why he wrote it, what topic was under consideration, and who were his subjects when he spoke of virginity.

3 De Laesione Virginitatis

Rupert wrote his treatise, *De laesione virginitatis*, in response to a missive by Wibald of Stavelot, a monk from a neighboring Benedictine community.²⁷ Wibald poses his question on the matter of masturbation and virginity succinctly and in a relatively straightforward manner:

I beg, by the Son of the Virgin, that you deign to write back and explain whether a man or a woman who elicits seed with his or her own hand, or someone else's hand, or in any way other than by natural sexual union, loses the prize of virginity.²⁸

He is asking if there are other ways to destroy virginity other than through “natural” sexual union. He wants to know if masturbation (whether solitary or mutual) and other sexual acts that elicit orgasm destroy virginity.²⁹

Rupert is willing to respond to Wibald's query. However, as he sees it, the final clause of Wibald's question—“or in any way other than by natural sexual union”—allows for a variety of

²⁷ The letter of inquiry is still extant: Wibald of Stavelot, *Quaestio de laesione virginitatis, et an possit consecrari corrupta*, PL 170: 543-46 (*Quaestio*).

²⁸ *Quaestio*; Wibald, PL 170: 544B-C: “Precor ergo vos per Virginitatis Filium, ut nobis rescribere dignemini, si virginitatis amittat palmam, qui, vel quae propriis aut alienis manibus, vel qualibet alia arte praeter naturalem coitum sibi semen elicuerit. Vel si in proposito virginitatis corrupta consecrari debeat vel possit.” In his reply, Rupert repeats Wibald's question with precision, changing only one word. Instead of Wibald's “vel qualibet alia arte,” Rupert wrote “vel quolibet alio modo” (*Laes proli*; Rupert, PL 170: 545C-D).

²⁹ No Latin word or expression refers unambiguously to the English term “masturbation”: Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 46. On the possible roots of the English term and the Latin words used most often to designate the act in question, see Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 96-99; Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Sin, Sickness & Sanity: A History of Sexual Attitudes* (New York: Garland: New American Library, 1977), 55-56.

contingencies.³⁰ This troubles him. So, his first order of business is to clarify just what behavior he is about to discuss. To Rupert's mind, that final phrase signifies something entirely more sinister than masturbation. It refers to sexual activity with members of the same sex or with animals, and he refuses to consider those abhorrent acts in his response. With a suggestion of reprimand in his tone, Rupert wonders why Wibald would even ask if those more baleful sexual acts destroy virginity. That answer, he pronounces, is obvious. Both Paul and Old Testament law definitively revile same-sex acts and bestiality: those behaviors are "unnatural," and the penalties connected with them are unequivocal. Offenders undoubtedly lose virginal status and are condemned to eternal death. Having made his point, Rupert concedes to having understood the gist of Wibald's inquiry; namely, that he is curious about the effects of masturbation, not those other more egregious sins against nature.³¹ This objectionable yet common human temptation is a matter Rupert is prepared to discuss.

Rachel Fulton evaluates Rupert's appraisal of masturbation's relationship to the other sins differently. In her judgment, he "condemned not only masturbation but also sodomy [same-sex acts] in uncompromising terms...."³² The passage in Rupert's work that leads her to that conclusion, is the following: "How is it still possible for you to doubt whether the prize of virginity is lost through that kind of fornication? Indeed, not only is the prize of virginity lost, but the very nature of human dignity is destroyed and eternal death reaped."³³ When looked at in isolation, Rupert certainly does appear to denounce masturbation without qualification. However, the quoted statement arises amidst Rupert's clarifications (described in the previous

³⁰ *Quaestio*; Wibald, *PL* 170: 544B-C: "Precor ergo vos per Virginis Filium, ut nobis rescribere dignemini, si virginitatis amittat palmam, qui, vel quae propriis aut alienis manibus, vel qualibet alia arte praeter naturalem coitum sibi semen elicuerit."

³¹ *Laes* 1; 546C-547B.

³² Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 339.

paragraph) about the topic he is about to consider: masturbation, not sexual acts with animals or between members of the same sex. The contents of the paragraph as a whole belie the impression made by that uncontextualized sentence pointed to by Fulton.³⁴ In fact, what Rupert is doing is making a clear demarcation between masturbation and those other significantly more problematic sexual behaviors. He is willing to discuss masturbation (because he sees it as excusable) but is concerned that Wibald's question, with its final phrase "in any act other than natural sexual union," might lead readers to misunderstand the topic at hand. He says so himself:

³³ *Laes* 1; 5547A: "Num, inquam, de isto quoque genere fornicationis dubium tibi est, utrum per illud palma virginitatis amittatur? Imo non solum palma virginitatis amittitur, sed et ipsa naturae humanae dignitas destruitur, et mors aeterna conquiritur."

³⁴ The entire discussion is as follows. *Laes* 1; 546C-547B: "Although there are many types of pollution that can contaminate or soil human frailty, you seem uncertain whether a man or a woman who engages in any act other than natural intercourse loses the prize of virginity. For, you inquired whether a man or woman, who elicits seed with his or her own hand or someone else's or in any other way except by natural sexual union, loses the prize of virginity. But, I ask you, have you forgotten or do you still doubt, what the Apostle says about this kind of fornication: 'For, their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and, similarly, the men abandoned natural relations with women and burned with their lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with men and received in themselves the payment they deserved for their error' (Rom 1:26-7). How is it still possible for you to doubt whether the prize of virginity is lost through that kind of fornication? Indeed, not only is the prize of virginity lost, but the very nature of human dignity is destroyed and eternal death reaped. That same Apostle said, 'For, those who practice such things deserve death' (Rom 1: 32). And in the law, God himself says, 'A man who lies with a man in the way one lies with a woman shall be put to death' (Lev 20:13). This is also the case for another type of fornication, about which the Lord, the Judge, and Avenger, said: 'Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal shall be put to death' (Ex 22:19). And, again, 'Any woman who lies down under an animal shall be put to death' (Lev 20:16)" (*Cum multa sint genera pollutionum, quibus humana fragilitas contaminari vel sordidari potest, de omnibus praeter naturalem coitum dubitare videris utrum qui vel quae in illa incidit palmam amittat virginitatis; dixisti enim si virginitatis amittat palmam qui vel quae propriis manibus vel alienis, vel qualibet alia arte praeter naturalem coitum sibi semen elicuerit. Sed, rogo te, nunquid illud oblitus es, aut de illo quoque dubitas, quod Apostolus commemorat genere fornicationis dicendo: 'Nam feminae eorum immutaverunt naturalem usum, in eum usum, qui est contra naturam; similiter autem et masculi, relicto naturali usu feminae, exarserunt in desideriis suis in invicem, masculi in masculos turpitudinem operantes, et mercedem quam oportuit, erroris sui in semetipsis recipientes'. Num, inquam, de isto quoque genere fornicationis dubium tibi est, utrum per illud palma virginitatis amittatur? Imo non solum palma virginitatis amittitur, sed et ipsa naturae humanae dignitas destruitur, et mors aeterna conquiritur. 'Qui enim talia agunt, digni sunt morte', ait idem Apostolus. Et in lege loquitur ipse Dominus: 'Qui dormierit cum masculo coitu femineo morte moriatur'. Item est et aliud fornicationis genus, de quo ibidem iudex et vindex idem Dominus: 'Qui coierit, inquit, cum jumento, morte moriatur'. Et rursum: 'Mulier quae succubuerit cuilibet jumento morte moriatur'. Ex abundanti mihi videtur esse ista commemorare, nisi ita dixisses [aut qualibet alia arte praeter naturalem coitum]. Verumtamen arbitror te taliter interrogantem de illis tantum cogitasse, quos et quas 'tentatio non apprehendit nisi humana', id est quibus ita interdum per appetitus suos molesta est natura, ut non tamen ad illa trahantur quae sunt naturae inconvenientia).*

It would seem unnecessary for me to mention these things, except that you used the words: “in any act other than natural sexual union.” Nonetheless, I think, when you asked in that way you were thinking about those men and women “who have only been seized by temptation that is common to humanity” (1Cor 10:13); that is, those in whom nature is disturbed now and then by their own desires; yet, not to the extent that they are drawn to those things not suited to human nature.³⁵

Therefore, when he makes his claim that “not only is the prize of virginity lost, but the very nature of human dignity is destroyed and eternal death reaped,” he is speaking about the “in any act other than natural sexual union” aspect of Wibald’s question. The censure does not include masturbation. Indeed, the bulk of Rupert’s treatise is an investigation of masturbation and its impact on virginity; if it were something he had adamantly condemned in the first paragraphs of his treatise, he would have had no need to consider the topic any further.

Hence, Rupert will consider the topic of masturbation because he deems it a minor peccadillo. And he is not alone in his appraisal. Penitential writers from the sixth through the eleventh centuries often classified sexual acts with animals and between members of the same sex together and judged them with the highest severity. On the other hand, they consistently treated masturbation as the least dire offense and gave it the lightest penance. Masturbation usually fell at one end of a continuum, followed by fornication (unmarried sexual intercourse), adultery, bestiality, anal intercourse, and oral sex (the gravest of all these sins).³⁶ Typical is Burchard of Worms’s (d. 1025) appraisal of masturbation and seminal emissions. With the penitentials as his guide, he determines that these sins are matters for confession and penance

³⁵ *Laes* 1; 547A-B: “Ex abundanti mihi videtur esse ista commemorare, nisi ita dixisses (aut qualibet alia arte praeter naturalem coitum). Verumtamen arbitror te taliter interrogantem de illis tantum cogitasse, quos et quas ‘tentatio non apprehendit nisi humana’ (1 Cor 10:13), id est quibus ita interdum per appetitus suos molesta est natura, ut non tamen ad illa trahantur quae sunt naturae inconvenientia.”

³⁶ Brundage, *Law, Sex, Society*, 165-68, 174, 600. Also, see Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 46-47. For more on medieval perceptions of masturbation, see Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, 83-183. For discussions of “unnatural” acts, see Bullough and Bullough, *Sin, Sickness & Sanity*, 24-35; Vern L. Bullough, “The Sin against Nature and

and are not criminal offenses.³⁷ It is worth noting that Rupert, unlike these other writers, does not seem to categorize masturbation as unnatural. This is the implication of the passage cited above, in which he refers to those who masturbate as “those in whom nature is disturbed now and then by their own desires; yet, not to the extent that they are drawn to those things not suited to human nature.”³⁸ Thus, it might be that he understands the offense to be even less problematic than did many of his fellow churchmen. Peter Damian is a unique exception to the usual medieval perception of masturbation just described. He claims fervently that manual stimulation and other “unnatural” sexual acts are equally abhorrent and should be severely punished—this is plainly not Rupert’s position.³⁹

3.1 Qui vel Quae

The question Wibald posed to Rupert and Rupert’s response clearly demonstrate that virginity is something these monks consider both relevant to and significant for men. The exchange between the two is pointedly about the virginal status of men and not just women. For example, Wibald’s query explicitly asks about virginity with respect to both sexes by unambiguously using the words “*qui vel quae*”: “I beg, by the Son of the Virgin, that you deign to write back and explain whether a man or a woman (*qui vel quae*)... loses the prize of

Homosexuality,” *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982).

³⁷ Brundage, *Law, Sex, Society*, 214. *Decretum* 17.41 17.43, 19.5; Burchard of Worms, *Decretorum libri viginti*, PL 140: 927-28, 968.

³⁸ *Laes* 1; 547B: “...id est quibus ita interdum per appetitus suos molesta est natura, ut non tamen ad illa trahantur quae sunt naturae inconvenientia.”

³⁹ Brundage, *Law, Sex, Society*, 212-14. On Peter Damian’s perspective, see Pierre J. Payer, “Introduction,” *Book of Gomorrah: An Eleventh Century Treatise Against Clerical Homosexual Practices* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982).

virginity....”⁴⁰ And Rupert replies with equal transparency by pairing up masculine and feminine pronouns and nouns throughout the pages of his treatise. For instance, when he wonders, “If judged without mercy, how many men or women could be said to retain the prize of virginity?,” he uses the words “*quotus vel quota*” for the sentence’s subject.⁴¹ Beyond his use of gender inclusive grammar, Rupert considers male and female virgins in tandem throughout *De laesione*. Even in the final three chapters of the treatise, when the question under consideration is female consecration, he introduces the male side of the picture, paralleling lost female virginity with lost male virginity (or, more precisely, chastity). Just as priests who have lapsed in secret can still efficaciously perform the sacraments, he reasons, so too should women who have sinned similarly be permitted to be consecrated as virgins.⁴² His own straightforward statements serve as further evidence that Rupert believes virginity—physical and spiritual—is attributable to and meaningful for monks and nuns alike: “[i]ndeed, virginity is precious and extraordinary in both sexes.”⁴³ And, again, at greater length:

[The Word] revealed powerfully the proper wholeness of flesh
with his own body... only after that did the Holy Spirit judge and
inspire the minds of many that it was noble for the sons and

⁴⁰ *Quaestio*; Wibald, *PL* 170: 544B: “Precor ergo vos per Virginitatis Filium, ut nobis rescribere dignemini, si virginitatis amittat palmam, qui vel quae propriis aut alienis manibus, vel qualibet alia arte praeter naturalem coitum sibi semen elicuerit.”

⁴¹ *Laes* 2; 547B-C: “Si remota misericordia iudicentur, quotus vel quota est, cui virginitatis palma remaneat in manibus?”

⁴² *Laes* 16; 558D-559D. This differentiated treatment of secret sins versus public sins appears also in Anselm’s work. See Anselm, *Ep* 65; *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: F. Frommann Verlag, 1984), 3: 181-85/ *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Walter Fröhlich, Cistercian Studies Series; 96, 97, 142 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 1: 183-84. Rupert and Anselm are likely drawing on the *Rule of Benedict* for their judgments. There, in a section treating the confession of faults, Benedict writes, “If someone commits a fault... he must at once come before the abbot and community and of his own accord admit his fault and make satisfaction.... If it is made known through another, he is to be subjected to a more severe correction. When the cause of the sin lies hidden in his conscience, he is to reveal it only to the abbot or to one of the spiritual elders, who know how to heal their own wounds as well as those of others, without exposing them and making them public: Benedict of Nursia, *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English*, ed. & trans. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 46.68.

⁴³ *Laes* 12; 556A: “Et quidem in utroque sexu speciosa et pretiosa est virginitas....” It should be noted that this sentence introduces a discussion of why virginity is especially relevant for women—he answers: because of Mary’s virginity. Still, this by no means undermines my point that Rupert believes virginity is significant for both women and men.

daughters of so great a bridegroom to preserve not only virginity of the mind but also virginity of the body.⁴⁴

Rupert unmistakably considers virginity an ideal relevant to male and female religious alike.

Now that the scene has been properly set—by Rupert but also by me—I can begin to probe the particulars of his answer. Does masturbation destroy virginity? And most important for this investigation: what does his response reveal about how he imagines that religious ideal?

4 Lifelong Sexual Abstinence

Rupert understands virginity to be a spiritual state characterized by an intimate relationship with the Divine. But, in his estimation, it is a status that can only (with little exception) be maintained through physical virginity; that is, through lifelong abstinence from sexual intercourse. Accordingly, for him, physical virginity is the crucial element in virginity. While it is true that virginity establishes a spiritual link between the believer and God, the way that link is broken—most significantly because irrevocably—is through consensual sexual intercourse. Indeed, that link is only *established* through the possession of physical and spiritual virginity. For Rupert, virginity entails physical and spiritual integrity. In what follows, I first demonstrate the truth of the above assertions; I then uncover what it is that sexual intercourse destroys and why this has such resonance in his own life.

Rupert thinks virginity is something attributable only to those who maintain physical virginity.⁴⁵ This is apparent in his assessment of masturbation's impact on virginity. In Rupert's judgment, manual stimulation causes no detriment to physical virginity.

⁴⁴ *Laes* 9; 553D: “[Verbum] seque maxime dignam carnis integritatem indicaret... tunc demum iudicavit Spiritus sanctus, multorumque inspiravit mentibus dignum esse ut filii vel filiae talis sponsi cum virginitate mentis, virginitatem quoque custodirent corporis.”

⁴⁵ He makes two telling exceptions to this rule: for Peter and for victims of rape. These exceptions are discussed later in this chapter.

Masturbatory acts are “grave and disgraceful” but “do not destroy the wholeness of the body.”⁴⁶

Virgins who have masturbated are just like people who ‘commit adultery in their hearts’ (Mt 5:28): “this sort of virgin... is similar to the woman who looks at a man with lust or the man who looks at a woman with lust...”⁴⁷ Such behavior does not damage physical integrity but does bring about a spiritual loss of virginity. Nevertheless, a sincerely contrite person can receive God’s forgiveness and recover that lost state of spiritual virginity. It is Rupert’s contention, then, that penitent masturbators are virgins because they have retained physical virginity and have recovered spiritual virginity.⁴⁸ Thus, Rupert’s entire argument about masturbation and its impact on virginity turns on the idea that virginity is essentially physical.

His judgment that the physical aspect of virginity is critical is further revealed in his reply to Wibald’s second question: Can a woman be consecrated after losing her virginity?⁴⁹ The question, as Rupert interprets it, is whether a woman who has left her spouse to become a nun can be consecrated. Rupert’s answer is “yes and no.” She is not a virgin, so she may not be consecrated as such. She may however take the veil in the manner of widows.⁵⁰ “This type of consecration [of widows],” he states, “differs somewhat from the case where she has preserved

⁴⁶ *Laes* 3; 548C-D: “...virginitatis palma reservatur in hujusmodi lapsibus, qui, quamvis graves sint et turpes, non tamen consque [eo usque] perveniunt, ut corporis integritas frangatur....” In Migne’s edition, this sentence includes the word “*consque*,” which is not a Latin word. Both medieval manuscripts have, instead, the words “*eo usque*.” Migne’s “*consque*” would seem to be a typographical error. For these passages, see *Laes* 3; 548C; Brussels, Bibl. Roy. 9578-80 fol. 133-39; Brussels, Bibl. Roy. MS. 10038-53 fol. 19-26.

⁴⁷ *Laes* 4; 549C-D: “At illa quaecunque ejusmodi est, cujus caro quamvis aliquatenus polluta non tamen rupta vel patefacta est, potuit femina videre virum ad concupiscendum eum, et vir feminam ad concupiscendum eam, et idcirco virginitatis palmam perdidit, si, sicut jam dictum est, sine misericordia judicetur secundum veritatem Dei.”

⁴⁸ *Laes* 2-3; 547B-550B.

⁴⁹ Rupert deals with this question in *Laes* 15-17; 558B-560B. Resnick briefly treats his handling of the question in Irven M. Resnick, “Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent Theory and the Case of Joseph and Mary,” *Church History* 69.2 (June, 2000), 357-58.

⁵⁰ This is a matter upon which Guibert would have disagreed. When his mother sought to receive that honor, Guibert counseled against it, claiming Church law did not support the veiling of widows and that it was something Anselm of Bec had already denied her once. See Guibert, *Autobiographie*, 2.4, 244-46/Guibert, *A Monk’s Confession*, 109-10. In the end, she did take the widow’s veil. On Guibert’s mother and veiling, see Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses*, 29-31. For the Church law to which he refers, see *Decretum* VII, 55; Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum*, PL 161: 557A.

the seal of her virginity.” He elaborates by explaining that whereas virgins are veiled with their heads bare, receive a ring, and vow eternal devotion to Jesus Christ, their groom, women who convert after marriage put on the holy veil but with their heads covered and without receiving ring.⁵¹ These women deserve great praise, but, no matter how pious, they are not virgins. Therefore, in his assessment, virginity is fundamentally corporeal; conversion of life is not enough to restore virginity once it is gone.⁵² This, one may recall, stands in stark contrast with Anselm of Canterbury’s conclusions in a similar situation. In that monk’s letter to Gunhilda, he urges her to return to her cloister and assures the lapsed nun that lost virginity poses no obstruction to attaining spiritual perfection. Indeed, he asserts that many among the chaste are more pleasing to God than are those who have maintained physical virginity.⁵³ While Anselm deems virginity a chiefly spiritual quality with little to do with the body’s condition, Rupert considers it a spiritual state maintained chiefly through physical integrity. Just as Rupert reasons that women must retain physical virginity to maintain their relationship with God, he judges the same to be true for men. The black monk’s deliberation of the apostles Peter and John demonstrates this point.⁵⁴ Peter was a married man and clearly not physically a virgin. Peter’s virginal status is important to Rupert though (we will examine the reason for

⁵¹ *Laes* 15; 558C-D: “Differt tamen nonnihil ipse ordo consecrationis, quae virginitatis sigillum custodivit, dum sacrum velamen suscipit nudato capite et revelata facie ad speculandam gloriam Domini assistit, signumque primae fidei annulum accipit, et voce publica dicit: Annulo suo subarrhavit me Dominus meus Jesus Christus, et tanquam sponsam decoravit me corona. Item: Posuit signum in faciem meam ut nullum praeter eum amatorem admittam. Ejusmodi insignia non aguntur illi quae, postquam in saeculo conversata, virum cognovit, veniens ad conversionem, sacrum velamen accipit, sed operto capite et absque annulo sacrum velamen superinduit gratiam sortita saeculi, id est vidualis ordinis. Quae in sancto proposito corrupta est, non parum consequitur, si revertens ad virum suum Christum taliter suscipitur.”

⁵² John Bugge has commented on this aspect of Rupert’s *De laesione* in his book *Virginitas*. There, he claims that Rupert takes a conciliatory position compared with the traditional view that only a virgin can be a nun. He continues by proposing that for Rupert “the criterion of physical integrity is far less important than the interior, psychological disposition of the candidate for profession”: Bugge, *Virginitas*, 132. To be sure, Rupert is willing to admit non-virgin women as nuns, but in his determination, those women cannot receive consecration as virgins unless the ‘lapse’ was a secret sin shared only with a confessor. On the matter of secret sins, see page 31 and note 42 above).

⁵³ *Ep* 168; Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselmi opera*, 4: 45/ Anselm of Canterbury, *Letters of Anselm*, 2: 66.

this shortly); thus, he is compelled to prove that God rewarded Peter as a virgin in heaven even though he lacked physical integrity. Since he defines virginity as fundamentally physical, he cannot establish Peter as a virgin by simply pointing to the apostle's pure and virginal soul. He must instead argue that Peter's virginity was in some way restored. To do so, he makes a rather convoluted argument. He maintains that because Peter was lawfully married, his virginity was *lost* but not *corrupted*: since marital sex is licit, it forfeits virginity but does not pollute the practitioner. Thus, he concludes, Jerome's statement that God cannot crown a corrupted virgin does not apply in this case— if he so chooses, God can restore virginity in those who have engaged in *lawful* sexual intercourse because their virginity is lost but not corrupted.⁵⁵ God is not in the habit of exercising this choice, but that is precisely what he did for Peter. Yet, Rupert does not reach this conclusion because he thinks Peter's lack of physical virginity is insignificant or because he thinks Peter's spiritually-pure state makes him a virgin. Rather, he believes God honored Peter *in spite of* his obvious lack of virginity. Peter received a crown similar to the virgin John's by a special dispensation from God, who recognized Peter's exceptional nature and virginal *soul*, not because the two shared equivalent virginal states.⁵⁶ Thus, here again, Rupert's estimation that virginity hinges on sexual innocence is apparent—

⁵⁴ *Laes* 10-11; 555A-56A.

⁵⁵ In his famous Letter to Eustochium, Jerome declares, "...although God can do all things, He cannot raise up a virgin after she has fallen. He has power, indeed, to free her from the penalty, but He has no power to crown one who has been corrupted" (...*cum omnia deus possit, suscitare uirginem non potest post ruinam. ualet quidem liberare de poena, sed non ualet coronare corruptam*): *Ep* 22.5; Jerome, *CSEL*54, 150/Jerome, *ACW*33, 138. Chapter 5 on Ælred of Rievaulx shows that he presents virginity's irreplaceability in much the same way as Jerome. Unlike Rupert, he does not find the need to temper Jerome's rather inflexible judgment.

⁵⁶ In his letter against Jovinianus, Jerome also addresses Peter's non-virginal condition. Like Rupert, he believes John's spiritual and physical virginity was superior to Peter's spiritual virginity, but he does not seek to rewrite Peter as a virgin. Instead, he sees Peter's married state as having diminished his status. He intimates this variously throughout the treatise: Peter was only chosen above the virgin John because he was the elder of the two; "Peter is an Apostle, and John is an Apostle—the one a married man, the other a virgin; but Peter is an Apostle only, John is both an Apostle and an Evangelist, and a prophet"; John, the virgin writer, "expounded

once a person consents to sexual intercourse (licit or not), that person is no longer a virgin and should not expect to be honored as such. There can be exceptions, such as in Peter's case—God is merciful and can do as he chooses in instances of uncorrupted sexual intercourse. But Peter is the exception that proves the rule. No matter how pious, Peter was not a virgin until God chose to restore what had been lost through sexual intercourse.

The argument Rupert levels against those who privilege spiritual virginity offers additional evidence that Rupert believes bodily virginity is the determining factor in virginity. There are some fastidious men, he explains, who claim that physical virginity is insignificant unless there is also virginity of the mind.⁵⁷ To make their claim, those men employ the passage from Matthew, “But I say to you, that any man who looks at a women with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (5:28). According to that verse, they say, merely imagining a sinful act is tantamount to actually carrying out that imagined deed; that is, thinking about intercourse is the same as engaging in it. Therefore, those men argue, people who have sinned in their hearts are no longer virgins, even though they retain physical integrity.⁵⁸ Rupert disagrees. As he sees it, God is merciful and forgives the contrite their sins of the heart. However, God does not extend his Grace to those who have engaged in sexual intercourse. For, while the sin of masturbation (which he considers to be merely a mental transgression) only “puts virginity to sleep,” sexual intercourse “causes its death”:

...in the case where virginity is corrupted by the act of
intercourse, or where intercourse is a frequent occurrence, God,

mysteries which the married [Peter], could not” (*Ad Jov* 1.26; Jerome, *PL* 23: 247A-248B/Jerome, “Against Jovinianus,” 366).

⁵⁷ Here, he is arguing against the general consensus of patristic writers. See Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 5.

⁵⁸ *Laes* 3; 548C-D, 549B.

the just judge, would by no means declare that virginity is not dead; he would only do this in the case where only the mind is corrupted but the flesh remains whole.⁵⁹

He continues: “[i]t is one thing for a piece of cloth to be rotten and split open because of decay; it is another for it to be defiled by a stain but remain whole.”⁶⁰ In Rupert’s opinion, lost physical virginity is permanent—both the spiritual and physical elements are important, but after physical virginity has been wracked, no act of penance can mend it.

Finally, to further prove that physical virginity is the critical factor in maintaining virginal status, Rupert cites a story from Deuteronomy (22:13-19).⁶¹ The account begins with a man, newly married, who has vociferously claimed that his wife was not a virgin when they were married. Upon hearing his lie, her enraged parents commandeered the bloodied sheet from the couple’s marriage bed and carried it to the town elders for a judgment on the matter. Based on the evidence of the soiled sheet, the elders declared that she was a virgin when she married her husband. In Rupert’s judgment, this biblical story proves that physical integrity is the key to virginity because at no point did the elders inquire about the purity of the woman’s mind. They concluded that she was a virgin based solely on the evidence that she was physically intact when she and her husband first had sexual intercourse.⁶² Therefore, in numerous ways, Rupert illustrates that physical integrity is the component essential for preserving virginity.

⁵⁹ *Laes* 4; 549D-550B: “Sic ubi virginitas opere commistionis corrupta est, sic ubi ipsum commistionis opus in consuetudinem tractum est, nequaquam dicit justus iudex Deus quia virginitas mortua non est, sed ibi tantum, ubi sola mente corrupta caro, adhuc integra perseverat.”

⁶⁰ *Laes* 4; 550A: “Aliud est vestem esse putridam, et prae putredine discissam, aliud aliquolibet macula foedatam, tamen integram.”

⁶¹ He employs this same story to a different end in his treatment of Deuteronomy, in *Deut* 1.19; Rupert, *CCCM*22, 1038-40. In fact, Rupert references this other discussion of the story in his tract on virginity: *Laes* 3; 549B.

⁶² *Laes*; 3; 548D-549C.

4.1 The Seal of Virginitas

When Rupert talks about virginity—not just female virginity but male virginity too—he depicts it as if it has some sort of physical manifestation. The reader may have noticed evidence of this in some of the examples offered above; now, I will sharpen this aspect of his depiction. Examples are plentiful in *De laesione*. Masturbation inflicts no harm upon virginity, he avers, because it does not damage “the wholeness of the body.”⁶³ Also, speaking of the masturbator’s condition, his language clearly implies that virginity has a physical element: “virginity of this kind, in which the flesh has been somewhat polluted but is not broken or laid open....”⁶⁴ Here, he depicts virginity as marked by a physical quality, something that survives an act of manual stimulation but is destroyed by sexual intercourse. He also employs the metaphor of fabric, torn and whole, to compare how sexual acts and mental transgressions affect virginity: “It is one thing for a piece of cloth to be rotten and split open because of decay; it is another for it to be defiled by a stain but remain whole.”⁶⁵ According to this image, intercourse decomposes and damages what was previously in one piece. Moreover, he sometimes portrays the virgin body as possessing a *sigillum*, a word that means mark or sign but also refers to a signet ring and the waxen seal made by such a ring. For example, in the passage just cited, Rupert clarifies his point about the stained but whole cloth by elaborating: “That is, the private part (*genitale secretum*), where nature placed the seal of virginity (*virginitatis sigillum*), is not violated.”⁶⁶ Here, then, he suggests that this *sigillum* is located and kept safe in an unseen part of the body

⁶³ *Laes* 3; 548C-D: “...virginitatis palma reservatur in huiusmodi lapsibus, qui, quamvis graves sint et turpes, non tamen consque [eo usque] perveniunt, ut corporis integritas frangatur....”

⁶⁴ *Laes* 4; 549C: “At illa quaecunque ejusmodi est, cujus caro quamvis aliquatenus polluta non tamen rupta vel patefacta est....”

⁶⁵ *Laes* 4; 550A: “Aliud est vestem esse putridam, et prae putredine discissam, aliud aliquolibet macula foedatam, tamen integram.”

⁶⁶ *Laes* 3; 548C-D: “...ipsa est, per quam virginitatis palma reservatur in huiusmodi lapsibus, qui, quamvis graves sint et turpes, non tamen consque [eo usque] perveniunt, ut corporis integritas frangatur, id est, genitale secretum, ubi natura virginitatis sigillum posuit, violetur.”

(*genitale secretum*). Consider also the rebuttal he offers those who would oppose his position about physicality as virginity's essential element. Some, he states, believe men and women who masturbate to the point of orgasm are no longer virgins, "even though the seal of virginity (*virginitatis sigillum*) is not lost."⁶⁷ Additionally, he describes that *sigillum* as something that can be broken (*frangere*) and injured (*violare*),⁶⁸ something that can be destroyed (*rumpere*) and opened up or exposed (*patefacere*).⁶⁹ With such language, intact virginity appears to be, in some manner, marked by a seal. Overall, there is a sense that Rupert believes virgin bodies possess an anatomical element that one would not find in or on the bodies of non-virgins.

Precisely what Rupert means when he writes of virginity in such terms is unclear. On the one hand, his portrayal of male and female bodies sharing a physical sign of virginity is consistent with his comprehension of human physiology and anatomy. For him, both men and women produce semen, something evidenced by the very question his treatise seeks to answer: "[does] a man or a woman who elicits seed... lose the prize of virginity."⁷⁰ Therefore, he likely shared the viewpoint of Galen (the chief authority on medicine during the Middle Ages and up to the seventeenth century) and others who deemed male and female bodies essentially similar in structure and function.⁷¹ Further to this, studies of ancient and medieval medical texts demonstrate that medieval people likely had a nonspecific conception of the physical mark of

⁶⁷ *Laes* 2; 548A: "...profecto liquet quia quicumque vel quaecunque tactu proprio vel alieno semen elicit, palmam virginitatis amisit, quamvis virginitatis ejusdem sigillum non amiserit."

⁶⁸ *Laes* 3; 548C-D.

⁶⁹ *Laes* 4; 549C.

⁷⁰ *Laes* 2; 548A: "quicumque vel quaecunque tactu proprio vel alieno semen elicit." He also refers to male and female seminal emissions in the tract's prologue: "...alicui viro sive feminae, propter aliquas sordes, propter aliquem contractum seminisque effusionem concidat, non peracto commisionis opere sive coitu..." (545C).

⁷¹ For scholarship on the medieval idea that women produce sperm and the transmission and influence of these beliefs, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 30-37, 54-70; Danielle Jacquart and Claude Alexandre Thomasset, *Sexuality and*

Medicine in the Middle Ages, trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 22, 66; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 35-52. Also, see Galen, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May

female virginity (no known medieval or ancient work contains a description of the male virgin body). They did not necessarily imagine virginity's physical marker as a membrane (hymen) covering the entrance of the vagina.⁷² Given all of this, Rupert's depiction of men's and women's bodies sharing an anatomical mark of virginity is not beyond the realm of possibility. But I suspect the answer lies in a less literal direction.

His discussion of consent and its impact on lost and retained virginity indicates what may lie at the heart of his assessment. At a certain point in *De laesione*, Rupert turns to investigate various types of sin—sins of ignorance, sins of weakness, and sins of consent.⁷³ In his view, if a person sins out of ignorance to God's will, God offers assistance through a vision or through Scripture. Alternatively, if a person succumbs to “the law of sin in one's members” out of weakness, God overlooks the sin in order to allow that person to repent. In both of these instances, God aids the sinner because she/he did not intentionally disdain God's will. Yet, if people sin knowingly (out of arrogance or contempt), God angrily rejects them and allows them to wallow in the filth of corruption: “On account of this, God hands them over to their shameful passions” (Rom 1:26). As he sees it, sins of consent are unforgivable and cause a permanent separation between God and the sinner.

Having established these guidelines, Rupert turns to consider the question of rape: is a person still a virgin after being raped? In an acknowledged departure from Jerome's conclusions about

(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968); Paul Delany, “Constantinus Africanus' *De Coitu*: A Translation,” *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970), 55-65.

⁷² Giulia Sissa, *Greek Virginity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *Revealing Antiquity*; 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 109-113. Indeed, an intact hymen probably did not come to be thought of as the sign of female virginity until the early-modern period: Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, 18-28.

lost virginity, Rupert determines (as did Augustine) that a female virgin who is raped will not be punished by God and can be consecrated as a virgin: “[t]he body can never be polluted without the consent of the mind.”⁷⁴ Because she did not consent to the act, she is not blameworthy and the seal of virginity remains intact. Sexual activity without consent does not damage virginity. Therefore, while Rupert insists that virginity is essentially physical—a person is not a virgin without physical virginity—this telling exception reveals that consensual sexual intercourse corrupts not a phantom body part but the seal, the bond, connecting the virgin and God. Consensual intercourse causes estrangement from God not physical ruination.⁷⁵

If all of this is true (as I am convinced it is), then Rupert’s depiction of physical virginity as embodied is ‘only’ metaphorical but so much more potent. To use Thomas Laqueur’s insights on a different matter, Rupert’s idea of a physically tangible male virginity seems implausible if viewed as a literal statement about the body; however, if it is instead understood as a bodily illustration of a cultural truth (or, in this case, Rupert’s truth) “purer and more fundamental than biological fact” then it all seems much more congruous.⁷⁶ Physical virginity is essential in his judgment, but, in reality, that physicality is not an anatomical element; rather, it is a state of bodily purity. However, it takes on corporeality because the state of virginity is so crucial to

⁷³ For what follows, see *Laes* 14–15, 17; 557C–558D, 559D–560A. This was a distinction made by Anselm of Canterbury and taken up in the first half of the twelfth century by all the major schools: Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 213–14.

⁷⁴ *Laes* 17; 560A: “Nunquam inquinatur corpus nisi de consensu mentis.”

⁷⁵ Rupert, more than any other author of this study, proves Sarah Salih’s point that “virginity is never perceived as a purely bodily state.” For, as much as he insists on physicality being its essential component, it is not the physicality that matters to him. See Sarah Salih, “When is a Bosom Not a Bosom? Problems with ‘Erotic Mysticism,’” *Medieval Virginites*, eds. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 13.

⁷⁶ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 55.

him. As the following pages demonstrate, the “truth” that these corporeal images illustrate is the bond between the virgin and God, which grants the virgin pure discernment of God’s will for humanity.

5 Virgins as Conduits

Virgins are conduits for the Word of God. As Rupert sees it, that unbroken seal maintained by means of virginity (the intimate relationship between the virgin and God) enables the virgin to understand God’s will for humanity. Furthermore, he believes the virgin has a responsibility to disseminate what he/she has learned. He reveals and reiterates these convictions repeatedly in *De laesione*: “the reward of that prize [virginity],” he writes, “is the Word of the Father.”⁷⁷ Again, “For truly, the Word of the Lord is the special inheritance of holy virginity, and this good adorns that soul, in which virginal grace flowers, in order that it might discuss extensively and discern more clearly the Word of the Lord.”⁷⁸ In other words, the true inheritance of virginity is the ability to discern and discuss the Word of God. In another passage, Rupert acknowledges the quality of the message delivered by all the New Testament writers who wrote down and spread God’s Word, but he attributes a special skill to those who were virgins in soul *and* body:

Although the Holy Spirit uttered clear and profound testimonies of the Word of God through all of their mouths, obviously [these testimonies] were even more clear and profound when the Holy Spirit uttered them through those men who remained virgins both in flesh and in mind.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Laes* 7; 552A: “Fructus autem palmae hujus verbum Patris est...”

⁷⁸ *Laes* 8; 553B: “Nam revera verbum Domini propria sanctae virginitatis est haereditas, et illam animam decet hoc bonum, ut maxime tractet, et clarius agnoscat verbum Domini, in qua floret gratia virginalis.”

⁷⁹ *Laes* 10; 554D: “Cumque per omnium illorum ora Spiritus sanctus lucida et alta locutus sit verbi Dei testimonia, manifestum est, quia lucidiora, et altiora sunt ea, quae per illos locutus est, qui mente, et carne virgines permanserunt...”

God's paradigmatic messengers, in Rupert's judgment, are those who possess virginity of flesh and of mind.

His depictions of John the Evangelist, Paul, and Mary offer extraordinary examples of the power he associates with virginity. There is no finer model, he avers, of lucid discernment than John's inspired New Testament writings.⁸⁰ And, then, there is Paul: Paul was God's "chosen vessel" (*vas electionis*), another virgin of flesh and spirit whose delivery of God's message was matchlessly lucid.⁸¹ Those two virginal men conveyed God's Word faultlessly, in Rupert's estimation, but the Virgin Mary took 'delivering God's Word' to a completely new level.⁸² Mary received and delivered God's Word in two forms: "the Holy Spirit entered into the blessed Mary, and, in this same action, the marvelous Virgin received the whole substance of the good Word—namely the Holy Spirit—in her mind and in her womb."⁸³ She literally delivered the Word to the world by giving birth to Christ; also, by her actions and words, she delivered the Gospel to humanity. Elsewhere, Rupert elaborates on this point: Mary is the "mother of the Church" (*mater ecclesiarum*), the "sacristy of all the holy Scriptures" (*secretarium omnium Scripturarum sanctarum*),⁸⁴ and "the teacher of the apostles" (*magistra magistrorum*).⁸⁵ Indeed, though Mary desired to be with Christ, he left her behind so that she might give witness to his deeds, teach his doctrine, and fight heresy.⁸⁶ Clearly, in Rupert's estimation, virgins are conduits for God's Word.

⁸⁰ *Laes* 8; 553B. He makes a similar point about John elsewhere: *Iohannis* pref; Rupert, *CCCM*9, 6.

⁸¹ *Laes* 10; 554D.

⁸² For the importance of Mary as a model for male and female religious, see Lifshitz, "Priestly Women," 87-102.

⁸³ *Laes* 12; 556C-D: "in beatam Mariam Spiritus sanctus supervenit, et operatione ejusdem Spiritus sanctus totam verbi boni substantiam, mirabilis Virgo mente et utero concepit."

⁸⁴ *Canticum* 4; Rupert, *CCCM*26, 89.

⁸⁵ *Canticum* 1.6; Rupert, *CCCM*26, 24.

⁸⁶ *Canticum* 1, 4, 5, 7; Rupert, *CCCM*26, 24, 27-28, 95, 104, 111-12, 117, 163. For this discussion, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 295-97.

And this is not a point he makes in passing. It is so central to *De laesione* that he seeks to prove all of the writers of the Old and New Testaments were virgins, even those who obviously were not. I have already shown how he reestablishes Peter as a virgin by claiming that God restored his physical virginity. He also administers correctives for the non-virgin men of the Old Testament. He determines, for instance, that men like Moses and David, though married, were nonetheless virgins:

But if anyone should carelessly pronounce that... [Moses and David and the other Old Testament saints and prophets] were not *virgins in flesh*, this person would surely be wrong. For they were all truly virgins according to the expectations of their time; that is to say, they were as much virgins as the Word of God required them to be.⁸⁷

Before Christ's incarnation, God asked only that believers maintain virginity of the soul. Given this, Rupert concludes: "all of those men who wrote down the holy canonical Scriptures were virgins because 'they were not defiled by women' (Rev 14: 4); that is, with idols or statues of the neighboring peoples..."⁸⁸ When these men lived, God had not yet encouraged people to preserve virginity of the flesh; thus, having obeyed all of what God did require, they were virgins *for their time*. Notice how he insists not *merely* that they were virgins, nor that they were *spiritual* virgins, but that they were "virgins in flesh" (*corpore virgines*).

In all of these instances, Rupert's point is evident: virgins perceive God's Word with crystal-clear precision, and God expects them to communicate their knowledge to others. During the Middle Ages and earlier, physical virginity was often seen as a quasi-magical possession and

⁸⁷ Italics mine. *Laes* 9; 553C: "Quod si quis abjiciat sanctos antiquos conscriptores veteris Instrumenti, Moysen et David non fuisse *corpore virgines*, caeteros quoque patriarchas atque prophetas, ad quos sine dubio verbum Domini factum est, quorum omnis Scriptura canonica est, quia non ab homine didicerunt, sed Spiritus sanctus per eos locutus est; hoc certe aliud est. Illi namque omnes revera virgines secundum tempus illud exstiterunt, id est taliter virgines, qualiter eos esse debere poscebat Dei verbum."

the source of spiritual power. In the words of Margaret Miles, sanctity served as a sort of “lightning rod to collect and communicate God’s power.”⁸⁹ Further to this, Barbara Newman has noted that the virgin’s magical quality was often conveyed in images of “the precious balm, the golden bowl, and ubiquitous allusions to ‘the seal of maidenhood.’” However, she further claims that this talismanic quality of virginity “pertained only to the female body.”⁹⁰ The one exception she has encountered is in portrayals of Galahad, the romantic hero of the quest for the Holy Grail. His success, she explains, depended on his virginity.⁹¹ The above analysis makes evident that in Rupert’s work we have another exception. Certainly, his writing incorporates ‘that ubiquitous allusion’ to the seal of maidenhood, which Newman refers to as an image of the virgin’s magical quality. Additionally, it is plain that the virgins of Rupert’s treatise—all men, except Mary—have virginity to thank for their perfect reception of God’s Word.

5.1 Rupert as Conduit

Unfortunately, Rupert never (to my knowledge) directly speaks of himself or his brethren as virgins. Nonetheless, it is fair to presume that 1) he was a virgin, and 2) he thought of himself as such. It is probable that Rupert was physically virginal. He was an oblate—his parents had given him to his Saint Lawrence monastery as a religious offering when he was a child. Thus,

⁸⁸ *Laes* 9; 553D: “Et ita revera virgines fuerunt omnes, qui sanctam Scripturam canonicam conscripserunt, quia ‘cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati’ (Rev 14:4), id est, cum idolis sive cum sculptilibus vicinarum gentium....” It is intriguing, also, to look at how he deals with the question of Solomon’s virginity: *Laes* 9; 554A-C.

⁸⁹ Miles, *Fullness of Life*, 82. Also, on this matter, see Atkinson, “Precious Balsam,” 135-36. Fulton has astutely noted that Rupert enlists a number of corporeal experiences (such as kisses, embraces, tastes, weights, and breaths) as the basis for his ability to interpret Scripture: Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 338. Thus, he conveys this direct transfer of knowledge between himself (a virgin, as will be argued shortly) and God with a variety of tangible, embodied images.

⁹⁰ Newman, *WomanChrist*, 31.

⁹¹ Newman, *WomanChrist*, 257 n. 56.

he likely did not engage in sexual activity before entering his cloister. Of course, we can never be certain that he maintained that state throughout the years, but there is no evidence to indicate that he did not. If we, further, factor in his belief that spiritual virginity can be recovered if lost, there is no obstacle to supposing that Rupert was, by his definition, a virgin when he wrote his *De laesione*.

But did he think of himself as such? Although he does not attach that label to himself or to his confreres, this need not give pause. It is easily conceivable that he and his fellow monks' status as virgins was implicit—that their virginity was a given and did not require articulation.

Wibald and Rupert's exchange suggests as much: their dialogue about whether monks and nuns destroy virginity when they masturbate intimates that the people in question were virgins in the first place. It also suggests that they saw themselves as virgins. That virginity would be an understood element of black monks' self-perception makes sense because so many of them were oblates and, therefore, probably virgins.⁹² During Rupert's lifetime, a great deal of traditional Benedictine monks entered their monasteries as oblates.⁹³ This practice was

⁹² This is a point Catherine Cubitt and Maeke De Jong both make in their works about traditional Benedictine monks from the tenth through the eleventh centuries and the ninth century, respectively. They believe there is a link between child oblation and virginity. They aver that due to the high numbers of oblates in traditional monastic communities during those centuries, monks appropriated virginity as a central virtue. See Cubitt, "Virginity and Misogyny," 10-11; Mayke De Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 137. Heene makes the same point: Heene, *The Legacy of Paradise: Marriage, Motherhood, and Woman in Carolingian Edifying Literature*, 135.

⁹³ For the typical age of entry, see Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, 191, 192. For lucid discussions of the practice of monastic oblation, see John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), esp. 228-55, 296-321; Marcus Graham Bull, *Knightly Piety and the Lay Response to the First Crusade: The Limousin and Gascony, c. 970-c. 1130* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 116-25; De Jong, *In Samuel's Image*; Joseph H. Lynch, "Monastic Recruitment in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: Some Social and Economic Considerations," *American Benedictine Review* 26 (1975), 425-47; Joseph H. Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry into Religious Life from 1000 to 1260: A Social, Economic, and Legal Study* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 36-50; Nelson, "Parents, Children," 81-114; Greg Peters, "Offering Sons to God in the Monastery: Child Oblation, Monastic Benevolence, and the Cistercian Order in the Middle Ages," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38.3 (2003), 285-95. The foundational work on the evolution of the practice of oblation from its beginnings to the twelfth century is the vast work by Deroux. It appeared in 1927, in a series of articles in several issues of the *Revue Mabillon*: M. -P. Deroux, "Les origines de l'oblature Bénédictine (étude historique)," *Revue Mabillon* 26/66 (Ap-Jn 1927), 81-113; 27/67 (Jl 1927), 193-217; 28/68 (Oct 1927), 305-49. Sutura's 2001 article briefly summarizes the contents of Deroux's work:

monasticism's primary means of recruitment from the eighth to the early twelfth century.⁹⁴ During the twelfth century, when Rupert was writing his tract on virginity, attitudes about who could enter monastic communities had begun to transform. This new outlook had an extraordinary effect on the contours of new monastic communities;⁹⁵ however, it only gradually affected traditional Benedictine monasteries like that of Rupert. Summing up the general scholarly opinion about changes within communities of black monks, Christopher Brooke explains: "In older monastic houses, so far as we can tell, the number of boy recruits remained fairly steady, or only slowly declined in the twelfth century."⁹⁶ On the same matter, Jean Leclercq conjectures that while the older Benedictine system did begin to transform, "it did so slowly and in a way which did not greatly modify the psycho-sociological framework of the communities."⁹⁷ While recruitment patterns did evolve within traditional communities, the conversion was slow. Plus, of course, for quite some time, the adults in those monasteries would still largely have been 'grown-up' oblates. Accordingly, it is safe to suppose that in the first quarter of the twelfth century, Rupert's community and others like his would have been largely comprised of oblates. And given their age of entry and the expectations for chastity within the cloister, most oblates would have been virgins. In communities such as these, where

Judith Sutura, "The Origins of Benedictine Oblation in the Research of the Abbé Deroux," *American Benedictine Review* 52.1 (2001), 24-34.

⁹⁴ Bull, *Knightly Piety*, 117; Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry*, 37-39.

⁹⁵ For more on the changes in Cistercian communities, see section 4.1.1 "Chastity versus virginity" in chapter 5 on Bernard of Clairvaux. Shahar notes that while the twelfth century saw male religious institutions begin to question the wisdom of accepting boys at such a young age and instituted age requirements, the age at which girls were accepted remained relatively static over the course of the medieval centuries: Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, 191-92. Also, on the difference between male and female oblation practices, see De Jong, *In Samuel's Image*, 64-66; Nelson, "Parents, Children," 110.

⁹⁶ Brooke, *Age of the Cloister*, 111.

⁹⁷ Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 10. Berend, De Jong, Lynch and most other scholars concur with Brooke's and Leclercq's assessments: Nora Berend, "La subversion invisible: la disparition de l'oblation irrévocable des enfants dans le droit canon," *Médiévales* 26 (1994), 125 n. 8; De Jong, *In Samuel's Image*, 295; Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry*, 36-39.

most inhabitants shared this characteristic, it is reasonable to suppose virginity was a taken-for-granted aspect of their religiosity; as such, Rupert would not have needed to point out ‘the obvious’.

Furthermore, though he fails to attach the label of “virgin” to himself, he undoubtedly sees himself as a conduit for God’s Word—an ability he manifestly attributes to virgins. The fundamental message he takes away from his visionary experiences of 1100 and 1108 is that he has been made a conduit.⁹⁸ The vision he experienced on the evening of Ash Wednesday, around 1108, while lightly sleeping, demonstrates this well. In it, heaven opened and a shining talent (*talentum lucidum*) descended, rested upon his breast, and filled him with a substance like liquid gold. After some time, the substance poured out of his side like a river.⁹⁹ Also, in another vision, he sees himself standing before an altar, which holds an image of Christ. Shortly, Rupert finds himself holding, embracing, and finally kissing Christ deeply with mouth open. Upon waking, he realizes that he now perceives the depths of Christ’s mysteries with utter clarity.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, in his final visionary experience, Rupert, having just closed his eyes, sees the figure of a man sink down into him and fill his soul “impressing me in a way that I cannot describe with words, more swiftly and deeply than the softest wax is able to receive the seal (*sigillum*) impressed strongly.” At this, he awoke, but the weight of that presence remained so intensely that his soul melted and almost broke loose from his body. That nearly

⁹⁸ For discussions of Rupert’s visionary experiences, see Berschin, “Visione,” 297-303; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 309-13; McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 329-33; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 50-53, 349-51, 363-64; Young, “Mission and Message,” 19-30.

⁹⁹ *Sup Mat* 12, *CCCM*29, 378-79.

¹⁰⁰ *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 382-83. Also, see *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 369. For an analysis of this intriguing passage and what it reveals about his interaction with the crucifix, see Sara Lipton, “‘The Sweet Lean of His Head’: Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 80 (2005), 1172-1208, esp. 1172-91. Rachel Fulton and Stephen Jaeger treat the same passage but in the context of, respectively, Rupert’s Marian devotion and the role homoeroticism played in his life: Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 309-10; C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 134.

uncontainable force soon ebbed, but ever since, he says, he has not been able to stop writing or be silent.¹⁰¹

Not only does he claim the role of conduit for himself, but also, in making that claim, he sometimes links himself to the two paradigmatic virgins, Mary and John. I have already described how Rupert depicts Mary as conceiving and giving birth to the Word. He also attaches that metaphor to John:

Behold, Truth... was begotten from John's virginal soul and was dressed with his bodily voice to fight for us against all heretical perversity. ...with chaste embrace he himself [God] by the same Word impregnated the beloved John's soul, which he had laid claim to, so that the inexpressible Word might come forth through John's voice and writing as audible and intelligible.¹⁰²

And he uses precisely the same imagery to discuss his own experience of Christ. In his final vision, Rupert undergoes what sounds very much like a mystical pregnancy:

...I had scarcely closed my eyes in sleep, when he came down from above in the likeness of a man prone and uniformly extended, hiding only his face. And sinking into me, he filled the whole substance of my soul....

Next, his "soul melted" it "almost broke loose, almost poured out of his body."¹⁰³ Elsewhere this imagery is even more vivid. For example, in a vision that occurred on Ash Wednesday, probably in 1108, he beheld a golden mass, which descended and entered his breast. That

¹⁰¹ *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 383-84: "...eo modo mihi impressa, quem uerbis exprimere nullatenus possum, multo citius atque profundius, quam cera, quamuis mollissima, sigillum fortiter impressum admittere possit"; "...ego autem extunc 'os meum aperui' (Ps 118:131), et cessare quin scriberem nequaquam potui, et usque nunc, etiam si uelim, tacere non possum." Notice how the "seal" language of this vision coincides with my argument (above) about Rupert's understanding of the seal of virginity.

¹⁰² *Iohannis* 1; Rupert, *CCCM*9, 9: "Ecce ueritas... eadem de uirginali Iohannis anima generatur, uocem corpoream induens, ut pro nobis contra omnem haeticam prauitatem dimicet. ...ipse castis complexibus suis ascitam dilecti Iohannis animam eodem Verbo impraegnauit, ut Verbum ineffabile per uocem litteramque eius audibile et intelligibile procederet."

¹⁰³ *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 383: "...cum ecce iacente me in lectulo, fere clauso iam die, cum uix oculos in somno clausissem, uenit desuper quasi similitudo uiri proni et aequaliter extensi, solam quam maxime faciem suam

substance began moving in “the womb of the interior person, the womb of the soul” (*uterum interioris hominis, uterum animae*). It circulated completely throughout his internal self, until this golden substance finally poured forth from Rupert’s side.¹⁰⁴ Thus, he depicts his own, John’s, and Mary’s visionary encounters with Christ in terms of conception and birth. With reference to Rupert’s metaphorical pregnancy, McGinn has claimed: Rupert is positing himself typologically as “a new Mary who gives birth to the golden reality of the christological meaning of the biblical text.”¹⁰⁵ To this I would add that he also posits himself as a ‘new John’. Rupert never declares himself a virgin, but he understood himself as such. And by linking himself to these quintessential virgin conduits, he presents himself in the line of those virgins who bring God’s Word to the world.

In the last few pages, I have shown that Rupert dwells on the efficaciousness of Mary’s, John’s, and Paul’s virginity and that he lingers over the sexual status of various Old and New Testament figures to prove they were all virgins who lucidly conveyed God’s Word. I have also argued that he links himself to those virgins and their role as conduits. When he does all of this, he is not idly speculating. Indeed, as the following pages prove, his emphasis on virginity’s essentially concrete nature and his focus on these various virgins and their role as God’s messengers served a decidedly personal end. *De laesione*’s depiction of virginity was a tool that served to legitimize Rupert’s work as an exegete in the face of great animosity.

occultans, et in me demissa totam compleuit animae meae substantiam...”; “Anima mea liquefacta est’ (Sg 5:6); anima mea, Domine, paene defecit, paene de corpore effusa est.”

¹⁰⁴ *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 378-79. For another example, see *Reg Ben* 1; Rupert, *PL* 170: 497A-98B. On mystical pregnancy, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 256-58. On Rupert’s mystical pregnancy, in particular, see McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 332.

¹⁰⁵ McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 332.

6 Who is This Man?

The reader might recall from my introduction to this chapter that Rupert wrote! And what he wrote, for the most part, were scriptural commentaries, which regularly drew fire from his contemporaries. In the pages that follow, I discuss these controversies in greater detail. I show how he defended himself and contend that his treatise on virginity should be understood as part of that defense—it was written to bolster his authority as an exegete.

When Rupert began producing scriptural commentaries, such work was no longer a typical monastic pursuit.¹⁰⁶ Commentaries were a staple in monastic study, but monks had not commonly produced original and lengthy commentaries on Scripture since the early tenth century.¹⁰⁷ More frequently, monks of his time turned to Scripture in prayerful worship and meditation and for moral guidance, without seeking to extract new meanings from its pages. Meanwhile, in the cathedral schools, students and schoolmasters focused on investigating the Bible in a new way: they studied it systematically and gleaned knowledge from it using the liberal arts as tools. Additionally, they turned to the commentaries of the Fathers and the great

¹⁰⁶ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 315-16; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 56-58. This was starting to change; shortly, monks began writing extensive commentaries. But, when Rupert began this undertaking, it was still a novel practice: Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 316. For what follows, I have consulted G. R. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 57-79; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 315-16; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 96-103; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 82. Leclercq's chapter on monastic theology is also terrifically informative: Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 233-86. But notice that he sees Rupert as a supreme representative of traditional monastic theology (Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 218). In contrast, more recently, scholars have come to recognize that although he was engaging in a traditional practice, he was nonetheless doing something innovative because the practice had stagnated (cf. Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 315-16; Van Engen, *Rupert*).

¹⁰⁷ On the efforts of commentators during the Carolingian period, see Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 37-44. The focus, Smalley argues, shifted from study to liturgy during the monastic reforms of the tenth century: Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 44-45.

masters of their own time, seeking to extract select insights and compile a running commentary on the whole of Scripture (the *Glossa Ordinaria*).¹⁰⁸

Rupert grew up behind monastery walls, but he was hardly isolated or uninformed. He was well educated—he was thoroughly versed in Christian Scripture, the works of the Fathers, and the classics.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, several modern scholars claim that Rupert may have been a master at Saint Lawrence (his monastery just outside of Liège), where he would have taught the liberal arts and possibly Christian Scripture.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, with his abbey situated between the German and French empires, Rupert was firmly ensconced in the intellectual currents of both those worlds.¹¹¹ And Liège itself was home to the well-reputed master, Alger of Liège, and was, itself, a city renowned for its schools. Thus, though Rupert had not attended the new schools and had rarely ventured far from his monastery, he was well aware of the developments within the schools and had a grasp of the intellectual tools necessary for engaging in exegesis. Not only was he aware and able, but also he agreed with the schoolmen that the arts could be used to gain a better understanding of Scripture. However, unlike them, he thought the arts produced a knowledge that was inferior to the wisdom gained through the Bible itself.¹¹² His endeavor to write scriptural commentary was not a typical practice for monks at that time, and his approach and background differed from the men who had been trained in the secular schools; thus, by choosing to produce commentaries and develop innovative theological positions, Rupert drew censure.

¹⁰⁸ On this new approach to studying the Bible, see Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline*, 8-56. On the *Glossa Ordinaria*, see Evans, *Language and Logic*, 37-47; Margaret T. Gibson, *'Artes' and Bible in the Medieval West* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993), 232-44; Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 44-66.

¹⁰⁹ On Rupert's education, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 43-48.

¹¹⁰ Bischoff, *Eucharistic Controversy*, 17, 227, 290, 360-62; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 103.

¹¹¹ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 14, 17. Also, see Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," 35.

¹¹² Evans, *Language and Logic*, 14. Rupert illustrates the way in which he believes the arts should be used in *Sancta Trin* 7.2-6, 8, 10; Rupert, *CCCM*24, 2039-44, 2046-47, 2048-49. For his comments about the arts as inferior, see

It is not necessary for the purposes of this chapter to provide a detailed narrative of what went on between the schoolmen and Rupert; however, illustrating the level of vitriol these disputes reached and how menacing they were to Rupert's way of life is vital. His two most momentous and protracted clashes were with Alger of Liège and (especially) Alger's students over Rupert's doctrine of the Eucharist (1113-15) and with the French schoolmasters Anselm of Laon and William of Champeaux and their loyal followers concerning the doctrine of Predestination (1114-16).¹¹³ On these two theological issues and so many others, Rupert's pronouncements were novel, and this caused indignation. Anselm's students questioned Rupert's intellectual ability, claiming he was simply not up to the task of exegetical work. "Who is this man?" they demanded. "How can he understand scholarship when he has never learned?"¹¹⁴ He has been cloistered since he was a boy, they taunted, and has not been trained by any of the renowned schoolmasters. Unlike themselves, these men further derided, he had not studied the eminent poets and philosophers before turning attention to the Christian Scriptures. Because he was not educated in 'modern' theology, they thought him wholly unqualified to interpret Scripture.¹¹⁵ Indeed, in his lengthy treatise refuting Rupert's Eucharistic theology, Alger of

Sancta Trin 2-3, 7; Rupert, *CCCM*24, 1862-937, 2039-73. On Rupert's method of study, see Evans, *Language and Logic*, 14-17; Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline*, 57-79.

¹¹³ For the controversy over the Eucharist, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 135-80; Bischoff, *Eucharistic Controversy*. For the predestinarian controversy, see Cizewski, *Doctrine of Creation*, 68-76; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 181-220.

¹¹⁴ *Iohannis* 7.16; Rupert, *CCCM*9, 394: "Quis est hic, vel 'Quomodo litteras scit, cum non didicerit?'" See the following footnote for the many other places in which phrasing such as this appears.

¹¹⁵ *Reg Ben* 1; Rupert, *PL* 170: 480A-C: "Locutus sum enim et quia locutus sum dixerunt: Quis est hic. Quid locutus sim tu scis, et locutiones meas libenter amplecteris, verumtamen et hoc ipsum 294 dicam posthac, nunc dicere praestat, unde, vel apud qualium cogitationes, pauper ego fuerim vel simul. Ex eo pauper ego reputatus sum, apud cogitationes illorum, quod a puerilibus annis monachus et coenobii claustris fui contentus, sive detentus, et non circuiui mare et aridam, sicut divites negotiarores illi quorum apud cogitationes pauper sum, quorum quilibet forte parabolam illam sibi congruere praesumit, quam Dominus dicit: 'Simile est regnum coelorum homini negotiatori quaerenti bonas margaritas' (Mt 13:45), etc. Ierunt enim in longinquum, et apud magistros inelytos peregrinati sunt, et post multas margaritas, quae bonae esse videbantur, margaritas poetarum atque philosophorum, unam vere bonam et vere pretiosam, sanctae ac divinae Scripturae margaritam invenerunt, eamque magno pretio vigilantiae ac sollicitudinis emerunt, et utinam invenerint ad perfectum, et habeant in aeternum! Hoc ego non feci,

Liège calls him an utter fool (*insipientissimus*).¹¹⁶ Furthermore, they thought Rupert's attempt to write a commentary on the whole of Scripture (*De sancta Trinitate*) was presumptuous—it was not permitted to add anything to what the Fathers had already thoroughly and superbly said. Worse, they argued, he neglected even to reference the Fathers' wise words.¹¹⁷

But the disputes entailed more than just verbal affronts. Rupert had so raised the indignation of Alger's students that they accused him of heresy and had him brought to trial during the Fall of 1116.¹¹⁸ In charging him with heresy, they sought to have him silenced (*omnis mihi licentia scribendi tolleretur*) and demanded of the archdeacon who presided over Rupert's district that Rupert be barred from preaching, teaching, and writing.¹¹⁹ In the end, he was exonerated of the charge of heresy but only by the closest of margins and a stroke of good luck.¹²⁰ Yet, even though the trial ended in Rupert's favor, Rupert's trials were not over. After the hearing, the atmosphere in Liège was so malevolent that Rupert grew anxious and fled the area, taking refuge for several months (November 1116–May 1117) in Siegburg under Cuno's protection.¹²¹ And the aggression did not end there. During the Fall of 1117 to 1118, Rupert's teaching on the creation of angels was attacked, and, at the end of 1124, he was again charged with heresy—this time by Norbert of Xanteen who alleged that *De divinis officiis* contained heretical

sed tanquam simplex Jacob cum matre Rebecca domi habitavi (cf. Gen 25:27). Hinc ego apud cogitationes illorum pauper et contemptibilis, et dixerunt: Quis est hic? Scribit enim et loquitur, loquitur et scribit, qui magistros et praeceptores nostros saltem videre nunquam dignus fuit." Obviously, this charge affected him enormously—he references it multiple times: *Iohannis* 7.16-17; Rupert, *CCCM9*, 393-96; *De omnipotentia Dei* 22-23; Rupert, *PL* 170: 472A-73D; *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM29*, 385-86.

¹¹⁶ Alger of Liège, *De sacramentis corporis et sanguinis Dominici*, *PL* 180: 743D. On Alger, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 168-73.

¹¹⁷ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 315; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 218-19. Rupert reports these charges in *In Apocalypsim* prol; Rupert, *In Apocalypsim*, *PL* 169: 825-27.

¹¹⁸ On the trial and exoneration, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 158-80.

¹¹⁹ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 162. *Reg Ben* I; Rupert, *PL* 170: 495D-496B.

¹²⁰ Abbot Cuno discovered that before Rupert wrote down his ideas, Hilary of Poitiers had taken the same position. This proved that Rupert's judgments were not heretical: Van Engen, *Rupert*, 166-67.

ideas about Mary.¹²² During this same period, he was challenged on yet another front. Black and white monks alike were confronted by regular canons who opposed their right to collect tithes and perform pastoral services (celebrating public mass, baptizing, preaching, etc.); they also championed the superiority of their own way of life. Rupert was threatened, and, in defense, he penned several treatises: the first two in the early 1120s and the last around 1128.¹²³ Moreover, sometime between 1125 and 1128, his novel approach to the Song of Songs drew notice. And, again, he was accused of false teachings.¹²⁴ There were some fairly peaceful years for him between 1120 and 1124,¹²⁵ but it should by now be apparent that Rupert's exercise as a scriptural interpreter repeatedly involved him in heated controversies, which jeopardized his career as an exegete and would have perturbed even the staunchest of spirits.

6.1 Rupert's Defense

Rupert's exegetical compositions comprise ninety percent of his oeuvre; they were, in Van Engen's words, "the very pride and purpose of Rupert's life."¹²⁶ Thus, when his critics lambasted him, and when they sought to silence him, Rupert fought back. In prologues and letters accompanying his works, Rupert regularly stated his right to express independent interpretations of Scripture. So, in the prologue to his first major work, *De divinis officiis* (1109-12), he writes: "it was permitted and always will be permitted for anyone to say, within the

¹²¹ Cuno, Rupert's primary patron, was Abbot of Siegburg from 1105-26 then Bishop of Regensburg from 1126-32.

¹²² For the skirmish over his position on angels, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 216-18. For the troubles with Norbert, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 336-41. Rupert describes the episode with Norbert himself in *Reg Ben* 1; Rupert, *PL* 170: 490A-92D.

¹²³ *Altercatio monachi et clerici*; *PL* 170: 537-42; Rupert, *Epistola ad Everardum*; *PL* 170: 541-42; Rupert, "Questio utrum monachis liceat predicare," *Honorius Augustodunensis*, 145-47. I suspect his struggle with these men also contributed to *De laesione's* portrait of virginity; however, there is less solid evidence to link the two.

¹²⁴ He alludes to this in his last major work, written in 1128: Rupert, *De glorificatione Trinitatis et processione Spiritus*, *PL* 169: 155. See Van Engen, *Rupert*, 341-42.

¹²⁵ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 336.

bounds of faith, what he perceives.”¹²⁷ And again, in his prologue to *In Apocalypsim* (1121), he claims for himself the “right to turn over the field of Scripture with the ploughshare of his own genius.”¹²⁸ Additionally, as I have indicated over the course of this chapter, he continually answered his detractors’ criticisms and defended his theological positions in his writings. The best example of this is the first book of his *Commentary on the Rule* (1125). In it, he details four major incidents between himself and his critics and, for each, describes the event in question, reiterates his theological interpretation, and anticipates and answers critiques.¹²⁹

Furthermore, when his situation got quite dire (during the crisis with Norbert), he finally disclosed what he believed to be the source of his authority: God. God came to him in a series of visions and commissioned him to interpret Scripture.¹³⁰ Rupert’s visions have already been described. What have not been mentioned are the circumstance under which he revealed them. His visions occurred in 1100 and eight years later in 1108, but he remained silent about them until pressure from his enemies motivated him to divulge what he had experienced. He first

¹²⁶ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 329-30.

¹²⁷ *Liber de divinis officiis* prol; Rupert, *CCCM7*, 6: “Sed licuit semperque licebit cuique dicere salua fide quod senserit.” He makes the same claim, using almost identical words, in the last of his major works, *De glorificatione Trinitatis* (1128): Rupert, *PL* 169: 11. The phrase that appears in both of these works, “licuit semperque licebit” is from Horace: Van Engen, *Rupert*, 54.

¹²⁸ *In Apocalypsim* prol; Rupert, *PL* 169: 827: “Nimirum sanctarum spatiosus ager Scripturarum, omnibus Christi confessoribus communis est, et tractandi illas nulli jure negari potest licentia, dummodo salva fide, quod sentit, dicat aut scribat.”

¹²⁹ Van Engen, *Rupert*, 347. *Reg Ben* 1; Rupert, *PL* 170 477D-98B. For a detailed analysis of the contents of Book 1, see Van Engen, *Rupert*, 346-49.

¹³⁰ That Rupert revealed his visions to shore up his authority as an exegete has been well recognized by scholars. For example, see Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 315; McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 329; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 349-52. This was a novel use of the visionary experience but a technique that would appear later, especially amongst ascetic women. For similarities between his visionary experiences and that of later ascetic women, in particular Hildegard of Bingen, see Young, “Mission and Message,” 19-30. Also, see Berschin, “Visione,” 302. Newman recognizes the similarities between Rupert’s and Hildegard’s claim to authority through encounters with God, but she believes Rupert’s visions served a less significant purpose because he was a man working in a traditional field: Barbara Newman, “Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation,” *Church History* 54.2 (1985), 172-73. On the other hand, Lerner aligns Rupert’s experience not with later female visionaries but with men such as

told Abbot Cuno (probably around 1123) who insisted he reveal his source of knowledge and authority to others. He finally did so at great length in 1125, in the twelfth book of his *Commentary on Matthew*.¹³¹ To remind the reader of just how plainly his visions (as he describes them) validate his work as an exegete I will recount one more. In this vision, Rupert is approached by the three aspects of the Trinity in human form. These three men lift him up and set him upon a large and open book. One of the men tells him, “Fear not, you will be greater than these.”¹³² Reflecting later on that encounter, he explains that it meant God would open the Bible to him so that his exegetical works would be superior, even to those of the Fathers.¹³³ Clearly, his visions served to legitimize his work as an exegete.

Rupert’s *Commentary on the Song* may have also helped bolster Rupert’s claim to interpretive authority. In her book, *From Judgment to Passion*, Rachel Fulton offers an intriguing and convincing interpretation of that commentary. She argues that when Rupert claims to have composed a mystical reading of the Song of Songs in “history,” he did not simply mean he had written a chronicle of Mary’s life.¹³⁴ Rather, she avers, “the life of the Virgin became, in Rupert’s hands, an apologia for his own work as a scriptural commentator.”¹³⁵ In her judgment, Rupert understood the Song not only as a prophetic history of Mary’s life but also “as the

Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202) who enlisted what Lerner calls the “ecstasy defense” to support exegetical innovations: Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” 23-57.

¹³¹ He alludes to his visionary experiences in *Reg Ben* 1; Rupert, *PL* 170: 477-538; Rupert, *CCCM*26, 110-11. But, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, he describes them in detail: *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 366-86.

¹³² *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 372: “Adhuc enim, ait, eris melior quam ista sunt.”

¹³³ *Sup Mat* 12; Rupert, *CCCM*29, 372-73: “De apertione libri et de ratione quam persona illa dixit aureas ostendens sanctorum memorias siue phylacteria non opus est, ut interpretationem faciam tuae caritati, cuius de me iudicium saepe audierunt et secuti sunt multi, quod uere Deus librum suum, id est Scripturam sanctam mihi aperuit, et multis sanctorum Patrum sententiis, quorum in sancta ecclesia digne celebris est memoria et uelut aurum rutilat, aliquanta meliora dixerim: Quid deinde dicam?”

¹³⁴ For her argument, see Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 325-44. Also, see Fulton, “Mimetic Devotion,” 85-116. Scholars have posed various theories about what “history” means for Rupert in this context: Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 159, 162; Van Engen, *Rupert*, 294.

exegetical history of her—as well as his own—awakening from contemplation in order to speak.”¹³⁶ If Fulton’s interpretation is correct, then the sustained link he makes between himself and Mary as bearers of God’s Word in the *Commentary on the Song* would surely have further legitimized his authority (at least in his own mind) as an exegete.

Over and again in his writing, Rupert defends his authority and skill as an interpreter of Scripture. In so doing, he harnesses several lines of defense: he affirms that all Christians have the right to express their beliefs; he reiterates and emphasizes his theological positions against his detractors; he shares with others his visions that divinely mandate his work as an exegete; and, less overtly, he parallels his own journey as an exegete with Mary’s. In the midst of all this—probably between 1121 and 1124—Wibald and Rupert corresponded about masturbation’s impact on virginity. To be sure, Rupert does answer Wibald’s question, but that is not all he does. He also fills much of the parchment—six of the treatise’s seventeen chapters—with words espousing the significance and potency of physical virginity and establishing the virginal status of all those who brought God’s Word to humanity.

Masturbation, he says, does not destroy virginity because it does not damage the body’s integrity. For, as he asserts forcefully in the pages that follow, virginity is more than just a spiritual ideal; it entails a physical purity as well. And those who possess both of these qualities have a profound ability and a responsibility to deliver God’s word to humanity. Given the claims he makes for virgins within the treatise and the association he makes between himself and those efficacious virgins and knowing how actively he engaged in his own defense against those who would see him silenced, *De laesione* must be read as part of his effort to shore up his

¹³⁵ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 327.

right and ability to interpret Scripture. By depicting male virginity as significant and insisting that physical virginity is the essential element of virginity, Rupert transforms a Christian ideal that was usually amorphous and impotent with respect to men into something powerful and meaningful. In his hands and in his mind, male virginity was so consequential that it took on the weight of something tangible and could be enlisted as proof of his own efficacy as an interpreter of God's Word.

¹³⁶ Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 327.

Chapter IV

Bernard of Clairvaux: Virginity is Praiseworthy but Humility Necessary

In 1147, the monk William of Saint-Thierry, wrote the following words about the Cistercian abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, whom he knew and loved so well:

His greatest desire was for the salvation of all mankind.... All the time there is a conflict in his heart between his great desire for souls and the desire to remain hidden from the attention of the world, for sometimes in his humility and low esteem of himself he confesses that he is not worthy to produce any fruitful increase for the Church, whilst at other times his desire knows no bounds and burns so strongly within him that it seems that nothing can satisfy it, but the salvation of all mankind. And so it was that his love for God and His creatures gave rise to an unfaltering trust and faith in God, although this too was held in check by his humility.¹

This portrait of Bernard in his early years at Clairvaux illuminates much of what concerned Bernard most as a religious man, a monk, and an abbot: fruitfulness, love, and humility. These ideals were at the heart of Bernard's conception of the perfect monastic life, and they lie at the core of the monk's perceptions of chastity and virginity. For Bernard, both ideals were inextricably linked to and reliant upon the cultivation of virtue and both had an end in charity, an overflowing of love towards others.

¹ William of Saint-Thierry, *Vita prima, Liber primus*, PL 185: 242A/William of Saint-Thierry, *St. Bernard of Clairvaux: The Story of his Life as Recorded in the Vita prima Bernardi by Certain of his Contemporaries*, William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonnevaux, Geoffrey and Philip of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 45 (These sources—the Latin and the English—divide the work differently; therefore, chapter/section references are not included in the citations): “Summa ei sollicitudo de salute multorum.... Erat ergo vehemens in praecordiis ejus, sancti desiderii, et sanctae humilitatis conflictus. Modo enim seipsum deiciens, fatebatur indignum, per quem fructus aliquis proveniret: modo oblitus sui, aestuabat flagrantissimo ardore, ut nullam nisi ex multorum salute consolationem posse admittere videretur. Sane fiduciam charitas pariebat, sed eamdem castigabat humilitas.”

1 Bernard's Life

Bernard of Clairvaux was born around 1090 to an influential family in northern France.²

Though he was the son of a knight, Bernard was the third of six boys and fated for a career in the Church. To that end, his parents sent him to be educated by the canons of Saint Vorles de Châtillon. At the age of twenty-three, Bernard decided to become a monk. Such was his charisma and rhetorical skill, that he persuaded a large group of kinfolk and friends to enter the Cistercian monastery of Cîteaux with him. In 1115, just three years after making his profession, Bernard was elected as abbot of Clairvaux, a newly formed Cistercian abbey. He maintained that position for thirty-eight years, until his death in 1153. Despite his dedication to the monastic life, Bernard spent much of his time outside the walls of Clairvaux and had limited time to tend to his brethren.³ He was a major figure in the secular world: he preached

² The classic biography on Bernard's life remains Elphège Vacandard's work from 1895: Elphège Vacandard, *Vie de Saint Bernard* (Paris: 1895). For more recent biographies, see G. R. Evans, *Bernard of Clairvaux* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5-21; Evans, *Mind of Bernard*; Brian Patrick McGuire, *The Difficult Saint: Bernard of Clairvaux and his Tradition*, Cistercian Studies Series; 126 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1991). E. Rozanne Elder adds depth and dimension to the image of Bernard by considering Bernard's 'flaws,' as described in the *Vita prima*: E. Rozanne Elder, "Making Virtues of Vexing Habits," *Studiosorum Speculum: Studies in Honor of Louis J. Lekai, O. Cist*, Cistercian Studies Series; 141, eds. Francis R. Swietek and John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1993), 75-94. In 1953, a volume containing what was then known about Bernard's life was published: *Commission d'histoire de l'Ordre de Cîteaux, ed., Saint Bernard de Clairvaux* (Paris: Editions Alsatia, 1953). For his medieval biographies, see Alain of Auxerre, *Vita secunda s. Bernardi*, PL 185: 469-524; *Vita prima*; William of Saint-Thierry, PL 185: 225-66/William of Saint-Thierry, *Story of his Life*. For a more recent but less available translation of William's *Vita prima*, see William of Saint-Thierry (Vol. 1) & Geoffrey and Others (Vol. 2), *Bernard of Clairvaux: Early Biographies*, trans. Martinus Cawley (Lafayette, OR: Guadalupe Translations, 1990). A problem with Bernardine scholarship has been the tendency of some to read the *Vita prima* uncritically and take its historical accuracy for granted. For works that seek to extract fact from fiction from the *Vita prima* see Adriaan Hendrik Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History*, 1st English ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996); Adriaan Hendrik Bredero, "The Canonization of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Commemorating the Eighth Centenary of his Canonization*, Cistercian Studies Series; 28, ed. M. Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 63-100; Adriaan Hendrik Bredero, "St. Bernard and the Historians," *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Commemorating the Eighth Centenary of his Canonization*, Cistercian Studies Series; 28, ed. M. Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 27-100; Michael Casey, "Toward a Methodology for the *Vita Prima*: Translating the First Life into Biography," *Bernardus Magister*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 55-70.

³ This was something Bernard was well aware of, and something to which he does not seem to have been completely reconciled. See, for example, the words he penned to a Carthusian prior: "I am a sort of modern chimaera, neither cleric nor layman. I have kept the habit of a monk, but I have long ago abandoned the life." See *Epistola (Ep)* 250 (327); Bernard, *Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia*, eds. Jean Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, et al. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-80), 8:147 (*SBO*)/Bernard, *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James, ed. & trans. Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), 402 (*Letters*). James has renumbered Bernard's

frequently, traveled extensively, and wrote prolifically. Moreover, he was enmeshed in papal politics, and was instrumental in battling heresy, launching a crusade, and reforming monasticism.

2 Texts

Bernard's deep involvement in contemporary political and social events resulted in voluminous treatises and letters addressed to some of the most powerful secular and religious rulers of his time. However, Bernard's worldly involvements did not eclipse his spiritual interests: he found plenty of time to write letters of advice, encouragement, and admonition to myriad abbots, abbesses, and ordinary religious.⁴ He also composed various treatises, sermons, and other less formal minor works.⁵

His treatises were multiple. His first was a tract *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* written before the mid-1120s at the request of Godfrey of Langres, Bernard's former prior at Clairvaux.⁶ In truth, a treatise about pride rather than humility, the work documents the

letters in a roughly chronological order and according to subject. References to this text include the traditional *SBO* numbers with James's numbers in parentheses.

⁴ *Epistolae (Ep)*; Bernard, *SBO*, vols. 7-8/Bernard, *Letters*. Bernard wrote very few letters to religious women. See *Ep* 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 366 (116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 390); Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 287-97, 323-24/Bernard, *Letters*, 174-82, 459-60. For studies of women and gender in Bernard's work, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 110-69; Bos, "Literature of Spiritual Formation," 201-20; David Damrosch, "Non Alia Sed Aliter: The Hermeneutics of Gender in Bernard of Clairvaux," *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, eds. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Klara Szell (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 181-95; Shawn Madison Kraemer, "Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the Works of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37.1 (2002), 3-12; Shawn Madison Kraemer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Church History* 69.2 (2000), 304-27; Jean Leclercq, *Women and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, Cistercian Studies Series; 104 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989); Leclercq, "Does St. Bernard Have a Specific Message," 269-78.

⁵ On Bernard's theology, see Evans, *Bernard*; Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (London: Sheed and Ward, 1940); McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 158-224; Leclercq, *Love of Learning*; John R. Sommerfeldt, *The Spiritual Teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux: An Intellectual History of the Early Cistercian Order*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 125 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991).

⁶ *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 13-59/Bernard, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 99-143. There has been much scholarly discourse about the dating of

downward descent into the conceit of pride—a path he believes religious men and women so often follow. Around the same time, when he was about twenty-five, Bernard composed four homilies in praise of the Virgin Mary: *Homiliae in laudibus virginis matris* (*Homilies in Praise of Mary*).⁷ Focused on the Annunciation scene in the first chapter of Luke (1:26-35), these works boast a rich mixture of devotional writing, exegesis, and discourse on the proper exercise of monastic life. Bernard had a keen affection for Mary—in particular for her fecund virginity—consequently, these homilies are significant sources for this chapter. They are also helpful in that they often consider not just Mary’s virginity but also that of the ‘typical’ virgin of his time. Two other treatises, *Liber de gratia et libero arbitrio* and *Liber de diligendo Deo*, written during the second quarter of the twelfth century, both treat the relationship between God and humanity and were useful for my investigation of Bernard.⁸

As abbot, Bernard was responsible for cultivating his community’s faith, prayer, and monastic life by the preaching of sermons. His extant sermons are vast and were crucial for this chapter’s analysis. The *Sermones de diversis* and the *Sermones per annum* are both collections of

Bernard’s earliest works. Christopher Holdsworth presents the key issues, the commonly accepted view, and offers an alternative position: Christopher J. Holdsworth, “The Early Writings of Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Cîteaux: Commentarii cistercienses* 45 (1994), 21-60. Also, see Jean Leclercq, “Introduction,” *A la louange de la Vierge Mère* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1993), 33-35; Damien Van den Eynde, “Les Débuts Littéraires de Saint Bernard,” *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis* 19 (1963), 189-98.

⁷ *Homiliae in Laudibus virginis matris* (*Hom*); Bernard, *Œuvres complètes*, trans. Pierre-Yves Emery and Françoise Callerot, Sources chrétiennes; 367, 380, 390, 393, 414, 425, 431, 452, 457, 458, 472, 480, 481, 496, 511, 518 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1990-), vol. 20/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. Marie-Bernard Saïd, Cistercian Fathers Series; 18a (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1993). A French translation of all Bernard’s works, based on the *SBO* edition of his *opera* but with minor additional editing, is slowly being published. Where all volumes of one of Bernard’s works are available (such as all volumes of his sermons on the Song of Songs or of his homilies on Mary) these more recent and more available editions have been used and referenced. Otherwise, references are to the *SBO* edition: Bernard, *SBO*, 8 vols.

⁸ *Liber de gratia et libero arbitrio*; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 165-203/Bernard, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Treatises III*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 19 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 51-111. *Liber de diligendo Deo*; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 119-54/Bernard, *Works*, 173-205.

the sermons Bernard composed for his fellow Cistercians.⁹ His commentary on the Old Testament's Song of Songs, *Sermones super Cantica canticorum* (*Sermons on the Song*), written over the course of eighteen years (beginning in 1135 and still unfinished at his death in 1153), are the most celebrated of his corpus.¹⁰ These eighty-six sermons focus on the soul and its spiritual pursuit of union with God. They portray the ways of the contemplative.¹¹ Though composed in sermon form, they are eloquent polished literary works likely intended for reading and study within the monastery not for preaching.¹² Any look at Bernard's *Sermons on the Song* would plainly reveal that Bernard's monks are its intended audience—he frequently and consistently inserts references to them throughout. Nevertheless, Jean Leclercq has opined that Bernard

⁹ *Sermones de diversis (Div)*; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 73-406. Some of these sermons are translated in Bernard, *St. Bernard's Sermons for the Seasons & Principal Festivals of the Year*, trans. a priest of Mount Melleray (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1921), 3: 397-552 (*Sermons for the Seasons*). *Sermones per annum* (referred to by title of individual sermons); Bernard, *SBO*, 4: 161-492, 6-1: 9-55/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*. When this translation is relied on for English citations, the English has been silently altered making it gender inclusive and modernizing it where appropriate. More recent translations of some of Bernard's sermons for the seasons are now available, and they are used whenever possible: Bernard, *Sermons for Advent and the Christmas Season*, ed. John Leinenweber, trans. Irene M. Edmonds, Wendy Beckett, et al., Cistercian Fathers Series; 51 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007); Bernard, *Sermons on Conversion*, trans. Marie-Bernard Saïd, Cistercian Fathers Series; 25 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981). In addition to his sermon to clerics, this edition also translates Bernard's seventeen sermons on Psalm 91 (known to Bernard as Psalm 90).

¹⁰ *Sermones super Cantica canticorum (SofS)*; Bernard, *Œuvres*, vols. 10-14/Bernard, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh, Cistercian Fathers Series; 4 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981); Bernard, *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh, Cistercian Fathers Series; 7 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976); Bernard, *On the Song of Songs III*, trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds, Cistercian Fathers Series; 31 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979); Bernard, *On the Song of Songs IV*, trans. Irene Edmonds, Cistercian Fathers Series; 40 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980). When this translation is relied on for English citations, the English has been silently altered to make it gender inclusive. For more about Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs and about the Song of Songs in religious works more broadly, see Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*; Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies Series; 77 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1988); Damrosch, "Non Alia Sed Aliter," 181-95; Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 27-61; Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*; Norris, *Song of Songs: Interpreted*; Thomas Renna, "The Song of Songs and the Early Cistercians," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 27.1 (1992), 34-49.

¹¹ M. Corneille Halfants, "Introduction," *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), ix.

¹² The highly refined nature of these works has led some scholars to wonder if they were ever preached in chapter. Jean Leclercq has argued that while the abbot may have spoken on these themes and topics to his community at Clairvaux, these sermons were, at base, literary works always intended for reading and study: Jean Leclercq, "Were the Sermons on the Song of Songs Delivered in Chapter," *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976), vii-xxx; Jean Leclercq, "The Making of a Masterpiece," *On the Song of Songs IV* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), ix-xxv. In contrast, Christopher Holdsworth has concluded that the text of the sermons would have been an outgrowth of what he actually said in chapter: Christopher J. Holdsworth, "Were the Sermons of St. Bernard on the Song of Songs ever Preached?," *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 295-318.

was well aware that they would reach a much wider audience of both men and women, religious and secular.¹³ Conversely, Bernard's *Sentences* and his *Parables* seem to be records of actual sermons preached by Bernard and differ considerably from the more refined and frequently reworked sermons encountered in his other collections.¹⁴ As such, they provide another perspective with which to gain insight into Bernard's thought.¹⁵

In the following pages, I investigate Bernard's perception of monastic chastity and virginity. I argue that, in Bernard's estimation, chastity connotes both a particular virtue and a state in which one's only desire is spiritual. This is a traditional enough perception, and it certainly causes no great surprise. However, when I then scrutinize how he handles the idea of virginity, a much more idiosyncratic depiction can be discerned. In one sense, chastity and virginity share similar meanings, but virginity is clearly a more loaded term for Bernard. As I show, Bernard's appraisal of virginity is rather lukewarm—he respects virginity 'in theory' but suspects that most virgins are corrupted with vice. And beyond those hesitations, I argue, he does not present virginity as the ideal his monks should emulate. Instead, he speaks of chastity as a commendable virtue and encourages them to focus on humility. In this chapter's final pages I consider how realities inside and outside the walls of his cloister might have affected what he had to say and how he said it.

¹³ Leclercq, "Does St. Bernard Have a Specific Message," 275. The question of audience also occupies Stiegman's essay in Emero Stiegman, "The Literary Genre of Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermones Super Cantica Canticorum*," *Simplicity and Ordinariness*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 68-93.

¹⁴ *Sententiae (Sent)*; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 7-255/Bernard, "The Sentences," *Bernard of Clairvaux: The Parables & the Sentences*, Cistercian Fathers Series, 55, ed. Maureen M. O'Brien, trans. Francis R. Swietek (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 105-458. *Parabolae (Par)*; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 261-303/Bernard, "The Parables," *Bernard of Clairvaux: The Parables & the Sentences*, Cistercian Fathers Series, 55, ed. Maureen M. O'Brien, trans. Francis R. Swietek (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 11-102. Robson explains that the designation *Sententia* is a subset of the genre *sermo* and commonly refers to brief outlines of sermons that were written down before or after an oration: Stephen Robson, *With the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1,17): The Prophetic-Reforming Spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux as Evidenced Particularly in his Letters*, *Analecta Gregoriana*; 293 (Rome: Pontificia università gregoriana, 2004), 146.

3 Chastity

Chastity is a quality closely linked for Bernard with the monastic goal of contemplative union with God. He associates it with the recuperation of similitude. The idea, in his judgment, is for the monk to progress from humility, to love, to contemplation—in each step, he grows ever more similar to and increasingly closer to God. And the monk is to progress toward this end through the cultivation and accumulation of virtue. What follows is a consideration of Bernard's perception of chastity: first, I demonstrate just how vital virtue is for the monastic goal of union with God and position chastity within that scheme; then, I flesh out what chastity means to him.

3.1 Chastity Cultivates Union with God

In Bernard's judgment, the only way a person can hope to grow closer to God in contemplation is by acquiring virtue—the greater the possession of virtue, the higher the degree of contemplative satisfaction. According to Christian Scripture, God created the first human couple in his own image (*imago*) and likeness (*similitudo*) (Gen 1:26). As such, Adam and Eve enjoyed a perfect union with God. However, when they disobeyed God, they destroyed irreparably that natural similitude. As a result, humans yearn for temporal, carnal delights rather than spiritual fulfillment.¹⁶ As long as things of this world are desired, men and women

¹⁵ Analyses of Bernard's sermons have shown that the more Bernard reworked his sermons, the less he dealt with daily life (daily life outside the monastery but within as well): Beverly Mayne Kienzle, *The Sermon*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental; fasc. 81-83 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 272.

¹⁶ On Bernard's anthropology, see *Liber de gratia et libero arbitrio* 7, 9; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 182, 185/Bernard, *CFS* 19, 79, 84. For scholarship on the matter, see Casey, *Athirst*, 131-89; Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, 168-74; Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings*, 3-44. Bernard describes humanity's fallen condition in *SofS* 11.3.5; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 1: 108-10/Bernard, *Song I*, 73.

will continue to be separated from God; however, if they properly channel desire, they can (with God's assistance) regain similitude.¹⁷

Bernard often expresses the path to perfection (to union with God and the recovery of similitude) as a three-step progression from humility, to love, to contemplation.¹⁸ And, as he understands it, people advance through these steps by the cultivation of virtue.¹⁹ In fact, Bernard equates *similitudo* with virtue: "Humanity was made to God's image and likeness, to the image of God in his powers of understanding and free-choice, to the likeness (*similitudo*) of God in his endowment of virtues."²⁰ Impressing the significance of virtues on his readers,

Bernard writes:

¹⁷ Bernard continually reminds his listeners that there is no progress toward God, which is not first initiated by God. See, for example, *SofS* 48.1.2; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 12: 312/Bernard, *Song III*, 12; *SofS* 85.2.5; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 14: 380/Bernard, *Song IV*, 200; 3 *In labore messis* (formerly *Div* 37) (*In lab*); Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 225.

¹⁸ Bernard depicts the process of perfection in a number of different ways and with a variety of numeric combinations, but he enlists the three-step model most frequently: McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 183-85; Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings*, 45-52. Also, on the three stages, see M. Basil Pennington, "The Three Stages of Spiritual Growth According to St. Bernard," *Studia Monastica* 11 (1969), 315-26. Reprinted in M. Basil Pennington, "The Three Stages of Spiritual Growth According to St. Bernard," *The Last of the Fathers: The Cistercian Fathers of the Twelfth Century* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1983). Bernard uses a threefold scheme in *Hum* 2.4-5, 6.19; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 19-20, 30-31/Bernard, *Works*, 104-05, 116; *SofS* 4.3.4; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 116-20/Bernard, *Song I*, 23-24. On the language of love in Bernard's work, see Casey, *Athirst*, 88-94; Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, 37-43, 52-54. On Bernard's perception of contemplation, see John R. Sommerfeldt, "Bernard as Contemplative," *Bernardus Magister*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 73-84; John R. Sommerfeldt, *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Life of the Mind* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 22-29. Bernard describes the experience of contemplation in *Dil* 10.27; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 142/Bernard, *Works*, 195; *SofS* 4.1; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 112-14/Bernard, *Song I*, 21-22.

¹⁹ Halflants, "Intro to *Song I*," xiv, xxviii; Giles Constable, "The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ," *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 167, 188-90; Emero Stiegman, "Action and Contemplation in Saint Bernard's Sermons on the Song of Songs," *On the Song of Songs III*, trans. Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), vii-xxv. In his book *Virginitas*, John Bugge writes that for Bernard the essence of the mystical union of the soul with God is the idea that virginity (defined as "ontological asexuality" and "a sexless state of existence") restores the image of God in the soul. For this argument: Bugge, *Virginitas*, 92. For his definitions of virginity: Bugge, *Virginitas*, 2, 80. Clearly, Bugge's judgment contrasts with my conclusion that similitude is attained through the cultivation of virtue. On the significance of virtue in Bernard's thought, see William O. Paulsell, "Virtue in St. Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*," *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Commemorating the Eighth Centenary of his Canonization*, Cistercian Studies Series; 28, ed. M. Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 101-17.

²⁰ 1 *In annunciatione Domini* 7; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 19/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 143: "Ad imaginem nempe et similitudinem Dei factus est homo, in imagine arbitrii libertatem, virtutes habens in similitudine." Rupert of Deutz also distinguishes between image and likeness, but, for him, *similitudo* is equivalent to God's goodness: Constable, "Imitation of Christ," 167, 188.

what are they [virtues] but pearls in the jeweled raiment of the bride, shining with unceasing radiance? I say unceasing because they are the basis, the very foundation of immortality. For there is no place for immortal and blissful life in the soul except by means and mediation of the virtues.²¹

In this same sermon, he elaborates that a person seeking union with God does so by clothing him/herself in virtue and, in so doing, regains similitude:

Hence she [the soul of the religious] strives more and more to resemble her who came from heaven, learning from her to be modest and prudent, learning to be chaste (*pudica*) and holy, to be patient and compassionate, and ultimately to be 'meek and humble of heart' (Mt 11:29). By these virtues she endeavors, even while absent, to be pleasing to him (2 Cor 5:9) on whom the angels long to look (1 Pt 1:12). With a love angelic in its fervor she shows herself to be a fellow-citizen with the saints and a domestic of God (Eph 2:19), she shows that she is beloved, that she is a bride.²²

Anyone who seeks contemplation, he advises, must take care to surround him- or herself "with the flowers of good works, with the practice of virtues, that precede holy contemplation as the flower precedes the fruit."²³

It is important to recognize that Bernard does not understand the process of accumulating virtue as something *merely* at the service of contemplation—virtue does not simply prepare the monk for contemplation. The endeavor itself is an inseparable part of the contemplative

²¹ *SofS* 27.2.3; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11: 320/Bernard, *Song II*, 76-77: "...quid nisi margaritae quaedam sunt in sponsae ornatu, splendore perpetuo coruscantes? Perpetuo, inquam, quia sedes et fundamentum perpetuitatis. Nec enim perpetuae beataeque vitae omnino locus in anima est, nisi mediis interiectisque virtutibus."

²² *SofS* 27.4.7; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11: 330/Bernard, *Song II*, 80-81: "Unde magis magisque conformari satagit formae, quae de caelo venit, discens ab ea verecunda esse et sobria, discens pudica et sancta, discens patiens atque compatiens, postremo discens 'mitis et humilis corde' (Mt 11:29). Et ideo moribus huiusmodi 'contendit' et 'absens placere ei' (2 Cor 5:9), in quem 'angeli prospicere concupiscunt' (1 Pt 1:12), ut dum desiderio fervet angelico, probet se perinde 'civem sanctorum et domesticam Dei' (Eph 2:19), probet dilectam, probet sponsam."

²³ *SofS* 46.2.5; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 12: 282/Bernard, *Song II*, 244: "En forte appetis et ipse contemplationis quietem, et bene facis; tantum ne obliviscaris flores, quibus lectulum sponsae legis aspersum. Ergo cura et tu tuum similiter circumdare bonorum floribus operum, virtutum exercitio, tamquam flore fructum sanctum otium praevenire." For more on the importance of virtues see *SofS* 57.3.5; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 13: 160-62/Bernard, *Song III*, 99-100; *SofS* 85.3.8; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 14: 386-88/Bernard, *Song IV*, 203-5; *In purificatione B.V.M.* 2; Bernard, *SBO*, 4: 338-40/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 94-97; *Par* 7; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 300/Bernard, "Parables," 96.

process. As Bernard sees it, contemplation is achieved by degree. Described by Bernard with imagery from the Song of Songs as the ‘kiss of the kiss of the mouth,’ contemplation is the apex of the monk’s spiritual journey in this life. However, this ‘kiss of the kiss of the mouth’ is actually a delight enjoyed by comparatively few who seek it. Still, there are smaller encounters with God to be had all along the path to perfection. At the beginning of his spiritual journey, a monk cannot expect, should not even ask for, the ‘kiss of the kiss of his mouth’. He must begin by kissing Jesus’s feet (when he converts) and progress to kissing Jesus’s hand (as he grows in love). Only after that, if ever, can he exchange kisses with Jesus, the Bridegroom.²⁴ It is essential to recognize here that, in his scheme, contemplation begins at the very earliest step. When the monk kisses Jesus’s feet in humility, God is already present. Therefore, the love that grows in the monk’s soul bit by bit—as he replaces vice with virtue, carnal love with spiritual love—is of a piece with the quintessential love experience felt at the moment of contemplation. Growth in virtue is itself a sort of a growth in contemplation. In Emero Stiegman’s words, the cultivation of virtue and contemplation are a continuum of Christian maturing.²⁵ Therefore, a person is not made capable of or suitable for receiving God through the accumulation of virtue; it is an essential part of the process.

Not only is virtue necessary for spiritual advancement, but, too, this virtue must be cultivated with the proper sentiment. On this matter, Bernard insists:

continence will gain you no credit before God if you flaunt it for the praises of men. Consequently there is the greatest need too for that uprightness of intention by which you will both strive to please God alone and find the strength to adhere to him.²⁶

²⁴ *SofS* 3; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 100-11/Bernard, *Song I*, 16-20.

²⁵ Stiegman, “Action and Contemplation,” xii-xvii.

²⁶ *SofS* 7.5.7; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 168/Bernard, *Song I*, 43: “Porro continentia non habet meritum apud Deum, quae gloriam requirit humanam. Ideoque maxime opus est etiam puritate intentionis, qua soli Deo mens vestra et placere appetat, et valeat inhaerere.” Also, on the importance of intention, see *SofS* 18.1.2; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11:

Indeed, this is the whole point of the Cistercian abbot's second sermon for the Feast of the Assumption. God will not enter a person's soul, he warns, when "there is no true and solid virtue but only an appearance, a quality as it were without a substance." Without doubt, Bernard continues, God "will flee and remove Himself far from the body where sins lie concealed, covered with the simulation of virtue."²⁷

Virtues are necessary for the reorientation of love toward God, and chastity is one of the essential virtues in this process. Accordingly, the Cistercian writes: "Whoever wishes to please God perfectly should exhibit chastity as well as charity."²⁸ It must be said that chastity is not a major theme in Bernard's work; still, its relevance to progress in perfection is apparent enough.²⁹ Often Bernard lists chastity as one of many virtues (including humility, charity, obedience, patience, poverty, and thanksgiving) necessary for spiritual advancement and fundamental to the monastic life.³⁰ For example, he places the following words in the mouth of an imaginary brother, describing his zealous efforts to achieve contemplative union: "Don't you see that by his grace I have been for many years now careful to lead a chaste and sober life, I

90/Bernard, *Song I*, 134; *SofS* 25.5.8; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11: 330-34/Bernard, *Song II*, 81; *SofS* 71.1.1; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 14: 80/Bernard, *Song IV*, 48-49; *Ep* 107 (109); Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 268/Bernard, *Letters*, 158.

²⁷ 2 *Asspt* 5; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 235/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 229-30: "Virtutis enim species, et non veritas, quasi qualitas est, non substantia. Neque vero ingressum eius exterioris potest conversationis tenuis superficies sustinere, quoniam omnia penetrat, et in intimis cordibus habitatio eius. Quod si nequaquam spiritus disciplinae subditum manifeste peccatis corpus inhabitat, fictum utique non modo declinat, sed effugit, atque elongatur ab eo."

²⁸ 1 *Sent* 38; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 19/Bernard, "Sentences," 133: "Quicumque volunt perfecte placere Deo, tam castitate quam caritate splendere debent."

²⁹ Thomas Renna has determined that the word "*castitas*" and its adjectival forms appear one-hundred times throughout Bernard's corpus. Renna did not include "*continentia*" in his survey: Renna, "Virginité and Chastité," 49 n. 37. Sommerfeldt has suggested that Bernard and his readers are so convinced of the value of chastity that the theme needed little exposition: Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings*, 161. Thomas Renna calls chastity the *sine qua non* for the soul's advancement in Bernard's thought: Renna, "Virginité and Chastité," 49. Sommerfeldt makes a similar inference in Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings*, 162.

³⁰ See *SofS* 40.3.4; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 12: 178-82/Bernard, *Song II*, 201-3; *SofS* 71.2.3; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 14: 82-84/Bernard, *Song IV*, 49-50; *SofS* 79; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 14: 258-72/Bernard, *Song IV*, 137-44; *Div* 111; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 387.

concentrate on spiritual studies, resist vices, pray often; I am watchful against temptations, I recount all my years in the bitterness of my soul.” The frustrated orator continues by expressing more of the myriad virtues he has cultivated in his endeavor for perfection—patience, obedience, and generosity of spirit.³¹ Elsewhere, Bernard portrays Jesus as a model for his monks and, in so doing, espouses numerous virtues, including chastity, which are essential for religious perfection: “For when I name Jesus I set before me a man who is meek and humble of heart, kind, prudent, chaste, merciful, flawlessly upright and holy in the eyes of all.”³² And, in one of his sermons on the seasons, the renowned abbot counsels that to warrant the company of angels human beings must cultivate “sobriety, chastity, voluntary poverty, frequent sighs to God, prayers offered up with contrite tears and a pure intention of the heart” because they are all virtues in which angels delight.³³

In addition to being one of several virtues to be acquired, chastity is frequently named as one of three virtues—*castitas*, *humilitas*, and *caritas*—crucial for monastic perfection. This trinity of virtues has a prominent place in Bernard’s sermon, “De tribus panibus.” There, Bernard posits three “loaves” by which a person can regain *similitudo*—the first loaf is chastity, the second humility, and the third, love.³⁴ Similarly, in a different sermon, he speaks of the monastic order as ascending through the triple virtue of *humilitas*, *castitas*, and *caritas*.³⁵ In sum, Bernard

³¹ *SqfS* 9.2; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 198/Bernard, *Song I*, 54: “En gratia ipsius multis iam annis caste sobrieque vivere curo, lectioni insisto, resisto vitiis, orationi incumbo frequenter, vigilo contra tentationes, ‘recogito annos meos in amaritudine animae meae’ (Is 38:15).”

³² *SqfS* 15.4; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 342/Bernard, *Song I*, 111: “Siquidem cum nomino Iesum, hominem propono ‘mitem et humilem corde’ (Mt 11:29), ‘benignum, sobrium’ (Ti 1:8), castum, misericordem, et omni denique honestate ac sanctitate conspicuum. . . .” For more examples, see *Post octavam Epiphaniae* 2: 7-9; Bernard, *SBO*, 324-26; Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 2: 50-54; *Par* 5.3; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 283; Bernard, “Parables,” 64; *Ep* 142 (151); Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 340; Bernard, *Letters*, 220.

³³ 1 *In festivitate S. Michael* 5; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 297; Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 320-21: “Sunt autem plurima quae eis placent et quae in nobis invenire delectant, ut est sobrietas, castitas, paupertas voluntaria, crebri in caelum gemitus, et orationes cum lacrimis, et cordis intentione.”

³⁴ *Div* 59; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 289. Also, see *Div* 64; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 297-98; *Div* 91: 3; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 342-43.

³⁵ *Div* 91; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 342-43. Also, see *Div* 47: 2; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 297.

comprehends chastity as a virtue necessary for union with God. But what exactly does chastity mean to him?

3.2 Chastity—A Virtue and a Way of Life

Bernard's conception of chastity is far less transparent than one might wish. The uncertainty begins with the words he uses and their meaning—do “*castitas*” and “*continentia*” share a similar definition in his thought, or do they imply different things? Once that problem is dealt with, his perception remains rather obscure. This, I argue, is because chastity has a sort of dual meaning for Bernard: on the one hand, it represents self-control; on the other hand, it denotes the spiritual life in which the only desire is for God, a way of life epitomized by the angels. Chastity is both the endeavor to accumulate virtue and the state enjoyed once virtue has been accrued.

To begin, let us consider Bernard's handling of the words “chastity” (*castitas*) and “continence” (*continentia*). I aver that he uses the words interchangeably; therefore, different meanings cannot be assigned to the words. In contrast, Gillian Evans claims that Bernard understands those two words in unambiguously distinct ways. In her estimation, Bernard links continence with other virtues of self-denial and avers that it is “in that self-denial that its virtue consists.”³⁶ Conversely, she believes he considers chastity a virtue “of its essence”: chastity itself fosters

³⁶ While Evans essentially equates Bernard's conception of continence with self-discipline, John Sommerfeldt consigns self-discipline and continence to clearly distinct categories (and seems to understand *castitas* and *continentia* as equivalents). According to Sommerfeldt's assessment, Bernard understands self-discipline as an exercise of the will that allows the soul to progress in virtue. Self-discipline keeps the soul from being distracted, so it may progress in virtue; it is not itself a virtue but a means of recruiting virtue: Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings*, 134, 141. Therefore, Sommerfeldt's understanding of self-discipline matches Evans's understanding of continence. Furthermore, and in contrast with Evans, Sommerfeldt believes Bernard sees continence as, itself, a virtue. This concurs with my assessment: I believe continence and chastity share a similar meaning for Bernard and that they represent a virtue—the virtue of withdrawal from the world and self-control (more on this in the paragraphs that follow). Sommerfeldt devotes a section of his book to continence: Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings*, 161-64.

renewal.³⁷ Thus, she supposes that continence refers to self-control and is not a virtue, while chastity is a virtue and has positive value in itself. Though it would be useful if the terms could be so neatly differentiated, a close look at her argument and the evidence she uses to support it quickly dismantles her rationale. This is so, because she repeatedly blends terms and definitions, establishing points about chastity with passages that use the word “*continentia*” and vice versa. For example, Evans describes “chastity” in Bernard’s thought as a virtue characterized by hiding “itself away, not seeking glory from human approval but only from that of God.” But the passage she references actually refers to continence, not chastity: “*Porro continentia non habet meritum apud Deum, quae gloriam requirit humanam.*”³⁸ In addition to a certain shortage of supporting data, Evans’s paragraphs on this topic are somewhat unclear. But even if her argument had greater lucidity, Bernard’s inconsistent use of the two words makes assigning distinct definitions to them untenable and also suggests that he himself did not see a clear distinction between the two terms. Look at the similarity between the following two interpretations:

A most excellent wall is the virtue of continence (*continentia*), which so encompasses us and protects us on all sides that death can gain no admission either through the windows of the eyes or through the avenues of the other senses.³⁹

Chastity (*castitas*) moreover, is fivefold: it pertains to the senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch.⁴⁰

³⁷ Evans, *Bernard*, 31.

³⁸ *SqfS* 7.5.7; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 168-70/Bernard, *Song I*, 43: “Nevertheless, continence will gain you no credit before God if you flaunt it for the praises of humanity. Consequently there is the greatest need too for that uprightness of intention by which you will both strive to please God alone and find the strength to adhere to him.”

³⁹ 3 *In dedicatio ecclesiae* 1; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 379/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 2: 401-02: “Bonus continentiae murus, qui sic undique circumdat et circumcingit, ut nec per oculorum fenestras, nec per ceteros sensus detur ingressus morti.”

⁴⁰ 1 *Sent* 38; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 19-20/Bernard, “Sentences,” 133-34: “Castitas autem quinquepartita est, videlicet in auribus, in oculis, in odoratu, in gustu et in tactu.”

The latter description of chastity concludes by referring to it as a virtue. In these two passages, Bernard represents both continence and chastity as pertaining to the senses and both as virtues; there seems to be little distinction between the two. Parallels in his depiction of the two terms occur often enough to suggest Bernard used the words “*castitas*” and “*continentia*” interchangeably and did not perceive them as distinctly different in meaning. A statistical analysis of the various occurrences and his application of these words might show Bernard tending to use each word in one way more than another. In fact, I suspect that he enlists *continentia* more often than *castitas* when speaking of self-control (discussed in the next section). Nevertheless, since he does not consistently handle the words differently, it would be unsound to treat them as if he did.

3.1.1 *Self-control*

Rather than search for a tidy distinction between the two terms, it makes more sense to consider “*castitas*” and “*continentia*” as equivalent. But, even then, Bernard’s conception remains fairly obscure. This is because, for him, chastity (and its synonym, continence) has a twofold meaning: one practical and one spiritual.⁴¹ In the first practical sense, chastity is a virtue associated with self-control.⁴² Chastity is the rejection of all temporal allurements—the urges of the body and the enticements of the world—with the aim of reorienting love toward the purely spiritual.⁴³ Here is how he describes chastity in his lengthiest examination of the concept:

⁴¹ My assessment has much in common with that of Thomas Renna, who sees in Bernard’s understanding of chastity, the same twofold meaning I have suggested: chastity is control of desire; chastity implies a life dedicated to God, a life like that of the angels: Renna, “Virginity and Chastity,” 49, 51-52.

⁴² I use “chastity” and “continence” as synonyms.

⁴³ Chastity has no value unless it is inspired by love: *SofS* 27.5.8; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11: 330-32/Bernard, *Song II*, 81; *Ep de moribus et officiis episcoporum (Mor)* 3.9; Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 108/Bernard, “Letter 42: To Henry, Archbishop of Sens,” *Bernard of Clairvaux: On Baptism and the Office of Bishops*, eds. Martha G. Newman and Emero Stiegman, trans. Pauline Matarasso (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004), 48.

Chastity keeps in the interim the fragile vessel which we bear—source of frequent temptation—as holy as the Apostle would have it kept, acting like the fragrant balm which preserves dead bodies from corruption. Chastity keeps a restraining and bracing hold on senses and limbs, lest leisure should relax them and desire corrupt, till abandonment to physical pleasures results in a total decomposition like that of the people we read about who “rotted on their dunghill” (Jl 1:17).⁴⁴

Chastity also clearly takes on this practical meaning in the two passages cited earlier, in which Bernard presents chastity and continence as virtues that pertain to all the senses. The sentences that follow the first of those two passages make quite clear what Bernard is thinking of. After describing the “wall of continence” that keeps sin from entering through the eyes and other senses, Bernard proffers Christ as an exemplar of continence: “He is set as a wall, I say, in the example of His life, abstaining from all the delights of the flesh and the world....”⁴⁵ The implication is that a bulwark must be erected against all worldly enticements. Making the same point in another sermon, Bernard equates holiness with continence and details what must be rejected: “...scriptural usage identifies continence or cleanliness with holiness.... what else were those frequent rites of sanctification decreed by Moses but purifications consisting of abstinence from food, from drink, from sexual intercourse and similar things?”⁴⁶ In another

⁴⁴ *Mor* 3.8; Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 107-08/Bernard, “Ltr 42,” 47-48: “Vas interim fragile quod portamus, in quo et crebro periclitamur, tenet castitas, ut monet Apostolus, in sanctificationem, et instar odoriferi balsami, quo condita cadavera incorrupta servantur. Sensus ipsa et artus continet et contingit, ne dissolvantur otiis, ne corrumpantur desideriis, ne carnis voluptatibus putrescant, quemadmodum legitur de quibusdam quia ‘computruerunt ut iumenta in stercore suo’ (Jl 1:17).” Bernard wrote this letter to a bishop not a fellow monk. Still, I enlist it here as an example because Bernard does not seem to have understood clerical and monastic chastity differently. It is noteworthy, though, that, for the cleric, the end of chastity is active charity in the world, whereas for the monk it is contemplation: Renna, “Virginitas et Chastitas,” 50.

⁴⁵ *3 In dedicatio ecclesiae* 1; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 379/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 2: 401-02: “Murus, inquam, ponitur in conversatione, antemurale in passione, ab omnibus carnis et saeculi praesentis illecebris abstinens....”

⁴⁶ *SofS* 22.5.10; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11: 194/Bernard, *Song II*, 23: “Ad quod respondetur primum, id esse continentiam, quod temperantiam. Deinde usitatum in Scripturis sanctificationem pro continentia seu munditia poni. Denique quid illae apud Moysen tam crebrae sanctificationes aliud erant, quam quaedam purificationes hominum temperantium se a cibo, a potu, a concubitu hisque similibus? Sed audi ipsum praecipue Apostolum, quam familiare habebat vel uti, vel usurpare sanctificationem in hoc sensu: ‘Haec est’, inquit, ‘voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra, ut sciat unusquisque vestrum suum vas possidere in sanctificatione, et non in passione desiderii’ (1 Thes 4:3-4); item: ‘Non enim vocavit nos Deus in immunditiam, sed in sanctificationem’ (1 Thes 4:7). Liqueat quod sanctificationem pro temperantia ponit.”

place, a similar impression is made: Christ gave his bride two testaments to strengthen the bride's affections, so they do not cleave to the earth—one of these is continence and the other charity. Continence, he elaborates, is directed to the affections of the flesh, and it is a restraint imposed under discipline.⁴⁷

But to define chastity as self-control is not to diminish it or to take away its status as a virtue. Indeed, the Cistercian refers to virtue itself as self-control: “virtue is characterized by strength of mind”; to possess virtue is “to stand firm, to resist, to meet forces with force”; virtue is “hard work”; it is “defending your honor with toil”; “it looks to virtue to sustain tribulations with fortitude”; “to strengthen your heart and to wait upon the Lord (Ps 26:14)—that is virtue.”⁴⁸ This affirms the point I made earlier: as a virtue, chastity does not merely prepare the soul for contemplation; it is an indispensable element in the soul's advancement.

Certain of Bernard's writings do suggest that chastity is specifically concerned with sexual drives rather than the broader definition I have been advancing. For example, in a brief passage from his *Sententiae*, Bernard enlists the metaphor of sacrifice to denote the meaning of chastity: “[t]he kid, which is foul-smelling, signifies lust. We overcome it through chastity, thereby sacrificing the kid to God.”⁴⁹ John Sommerfeldt subscribes to the idea that Bernard's construal of chastity is specifically sexual: continence (for Bernard) is “the regulation by the

⁴⁷ *Par* 6; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 290/Bernard, “Parables,” 77: “...duo Testamenta, quibus affectus sponsae, ne terram tangant, muniuntur, vel continentiam et charitatem, quae duos affectus, quorum alterum ad carnem suam, alterum ad vitia olim sponsa habuit, calciant. E quibus ille qui ad carnem est continentia sive districtione disciplinae munitur...”

⁴⁸ *SofS* 85.3.7, 9; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 14: 384-86, 390/Bernard, *Song IV*, 203, 205: “vigor virtutem, sapientiam placiditas animi”; “Igitur stare, resistere, vim vi repellere, quae utique in partibus virtutis deputantur, honor quidem, sed labor est. Non est enim idipsum, honorem tuum laboriose defendere, et quiete possidere”; “Itaque ad virtutem spectat tribulationes fortiter sustinere, ad sapientiam ‘gaudere in tribulationibus’ (2 Cor 7:4)”; “Confortare cor tuum et sustinere Dominum’ (Ps 26:14), virtutis est.”

⁴⁹ 3 *Sent* 10; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 71/Bernard, “Sentences,” 197: “Per haedum, qui foetidus est, luxuria designatur. Hanc per castitatem superamus, et sic Deo haedum in sacrificio offerimus.” Bernard enlists the same metaphor in 3 *Sent* 116, 121; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 209-12, 225-29/Bernard, “Sentences,” 390, 418.

will of the legitimate sexual impulses of the body.”⁵⁰ However, a close look at Bernard’s discussions of chastity (such as in the above paragraph), reveals that his definition is not simply, or even especially, confined to sexual passions. No doubt, sexual drives are among the many bodily passions that must be quelled when redirecting the will to God, but they do not have prominence in Bernard’s handling of chastity. Clearly, Bernard’s assessment stands in stark contrast to that of Guibert of Nogent, for whom virginity had everything to do with sexual drives. Unlike that youthful Benedictine, Bernard is not fixated on the problem of sexual desire, probably because those drives did not haunt Bernard as they did Guibert.

3.2.1 *The angelic life*

Now, while Bernard often speaks of chastity in practical terms as a sort of self-discipline that reorients love, chastity also has a more spiritual meaning. In this sense, chastity connotes a spiritual life unfettered by the desires of fallen humanity, a way of life that anticipates heavenly existence. When used in this sense, chastity retains the meaning described above (self-control and the rejection of sensual pleasures), but the focus is not on what is being cast off but on what has been achieved; it focuses less on the practical issue of self-restraint and more on the soul and its orientation toward God. In these cases, Bernard puts forth chastity as characteristic of the monastic life and underscores the correspondence between monasticism and the angelic life.

This more spiritual sense of the word is evident when Bernard characterizes monks by their chastity. In his exegesis on the turtledove, Bernard heralds the turtledove for its chastity and presents it as an exemplar of the monastic life. Live, he exhorts, like the turtledove, which is content to live alone. By this, the monk would understand that he should withdraw from the world in body and, especially, in spirit: “O holy soul, remain alone, so that you might keep

⁵⁰ Sommerfeldt, *Spiritual Teachings*, 161. Although Sommerfeldt uses the word “continence” in his definition, I

yourself for him alone whom you have chosen for yourself out of all that exist”; “you must withdraw, mentally rather than physically, in your intention, in your devotion, in your spirit.”⁵¹ But that is not all a monk should learn from the turtledove’s chastity. He ought also recognize that to live like the turtledove means to withdraw from gossip and intrigue and “reject what everybody covets, avoid disputes, make light of losses, and pay no heed to injuries.”⁵² Thus, the turtledove’s chastity should show the monk the beauty of solitude: not estrangement from others but mental retirement from all the worldly intrigues captivating the mind and drawing it away from God.⁵³ Bernard also characterizes the monastic vocation by its chastity in a sermon he preached before a group of Cistercian abbots at Cîteaux. There, he applies the images of Noah, Daniel, and Job to Christian society. Noah represents the leaders of the Church, Daniel, the monastic order, and Job, the married. About those typified by Daniel, he explains: “Daniel, ‘a man of desires’ (Dan 9:23), distinguished for his fasting and chastity (*castimonia*), represents the order of the continent and the penitent, who live to God alone.”⁵⁴ Chastity and fasting exemplify the monk’s existence: his desire is ever turned to God.

Bernard’s handling of this ternary representation of the social order deserves a bit more attention—we should look not just at what it does claim for monks but also at what it does not.

believe he considers “continence” and “chastity” to be synonyms.

⁵¹ *SofS* 40.3.4; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 12: 180/Bernard, *Song II*, 202: “O sancta anima, sola esto, ut soli omnium serves teipsam, quem ex omnibus tibi elegisti”; “Secede ergo, sed mente, non corpore; sed intentione, sed devotione, sed spiritu.” *SofS* 40 draws on Song 1:9, “your cheeks are beautiful as the turtledove’s.” *SofS* 59 also deals with the turtledove but, in this case, with Song 2:12, “the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land”: Bernard, *Œuvres*, 13: 202-20/Bernard, *Song III*, 3: 120-29.

⁵² *SofS* 40.3.5; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 12: 182-84/Bernard, *Song II*, 202-03: “Solus es, si non communia cogites, si non affectes praesentia, si despicias quod multi suspiciunt, si fastidias quod omnes desiderant, si iurgia devites, si damna non sentias, si non recorderis iniuriarum.”

⁵³ M. -A. Lassus emphasizes this aspect of Bernard’s thought. In his judgment, virginity/chastity is virtually equivalent to solitude: Lassus, “Le mystère,” 3-15.

Over the centuries, Christian authors commonly associated this triad of men with the three orders of society, delineated according to sexual purity—Daniel, Noah, and Job represent virgins, the continent, and the married, respectively. Origen and Jerome both employed that scheme in their work, as did later tenth- and eleventh-century monastic authors.⁵⁵ Not so, Bernard. In his handling of the three figures, Noah represents preachers and prelates (with no reference to sexual status), Daniel the continent monk, and Job the married.⁵⁶ Martha Newman has astutely wondered if Bernard (and other Cistercians) may have dropped the category of virgin because they themselves were not necessarily virgins.⁵⁷ I think she is correct. Indeed, in the final section of this chapter, I suggest that the Cistercians' lack of virginity had much to do with Bernard's construal of that ideal.

Hence, Bernard characterizes monks by their chastity. Additionally, he underscores the correspondence between monasticism and the angelic life. To do so, he usually begins with the premise that monks are celibate (unmarried). "Who would fear to call a life vowed to celibacy heavenly and angelic?" he wonders,

And why should you not be, even today, what all the elect will be some day after the resurrection, like to the angels of heaven, since like them you are unmarried?⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Ad abbates*, Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 288-89/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 306: "Daniel, vir desideriorum, abstinentiae et castimoniae deditus, ipse est soli Deo vacans paenitentium et continentium ordo...." He makes a similar comparison in *Div* 9.3; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 119. See Constable, "Orders of Society," 296-99.

⁵⁵ Newman, *Boundaries of Charity*, 110. Also, see Constable, "Orders of Society," 264; Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 81-92.

⁵⁶ In his characterization of Noah, Daniel, and Job, Bernard is following Gregory the Great. See Constable, "Orders of Society," 270-72.

⁵⁷ Newman, *Boundaries of Charity*, 110.

⁵⁸ *In lab* 5; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 225/trans. in Leclercq, *Life of Perfection*, 30: "Quis enim caelibem vitam, vitam caelestem et angelicam dicere vereatur? Aut quod in resurrectione futuri sunt omnes electi, quomodo non iam nunc estis, sicut angeli Dei in caelo, a nuptiis penitus abstinentes?"

And again,

Chastity alone, in the here and now of our mortality, mirrors in some degree the state of immortal glory. It alone, over against the generality of the marriage bond, vindicates the custom of that blessed country where ‘there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage’ (Mt 22:30), offering in some measure to the world an experience of that heavenly mode of life.⁵⁹

But the monastic life of chastity is much more than not marrying; his accent on the unmarried condition should be understood to echo Paul’s reflections on marriage:

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided (1 Cor 7:32-34).

This is how Bernard perceives monastic chastity; it connotes a life lived only for God, a way of life achieved by the self-denial that comprises the practical aspect of chastity. Emero Stiegman has written that in Bernard’s thought “*castus*” means “unselfish.”⁶⁰ His assertion goes far in fleshing out my point. Unselfishness is truly what lies at the heart of Bernard’s understanding of chastity as a characteristic of the monastic life: chastity is the rejection of all personal, mortal desires for the sake of loving only what God loves. When a monk remains unmarried, when he turns always from the temporal goods of food, sex, clothing, wealth, housing, and

⁵⁹ *Mor* 3.8; Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 107/Bernard, “Ltr 42,” 47-48: “Sola est castitas, quae in hoc mortalitatis et loco, et tempore, statum quemdam immortalis gloriae repraesentat. Sola inter nuptiarum sollemnia morem beatae illius vindicat regionis, in qua ‘neque nubunt, neque nubuntur’ (Mt 22:30), praebens quodammodo terris caelestis iam illius conversationis experientiam.” Sometimes he simply correlates the two ways of life without emphasizing celibacy. For example, *Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem* 10.24; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 101/Bernard, “An *Apologia* to Abbot William,” *Bernard of Clairvaux: Treatises I*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 1, trans. Michael Casey (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 59: “The monastic Order was the first order in the Church.... In all the earth there was nothing more like the angelic orders, nothing closer to the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother, because of the beauty of its chastity and the fervor of its love” (*Heu me miserum qualemcunque monachum! cur adhuc vivo videre ad id devenisse Ordinem nostrum, Ordinem scilicet qui primus fuit in Ecclesia, imo a quo coepit Ecclesia; quo nullus in terra similior angelicis ordinibus, nullus vicinior ei quae in coelis est Jerusalem mater nostra, sive ob decorem castitatis, sive propter charitatis ardorem...*).

⁶⁰ Stiegman, “Action and Contemplation,” xi.

familial ties, he can begin to love only what is Good. In so doing, he is chaste and lives an angelic existence here on earth.

Bernard's fellow monks are all unmarried, but that is not the crux of their spiritual endeavor; that state alone does not transport them into God's embrace. Beyond this, what a monk must do is strive to live a life of chastity, a life of worldly renunciation in which his own will becomes God's will:

Ah, my brethren, guard this pearl [of chastity] carefully!
Embrace that holiness of life which makes you similar to the
blessed and which puts you in God's house, according to the
words of the Scripture: "Purity brings man close to God" (Wis
6:20).⁶¹

This perspective is also plainly illustrated by his comment that the restraining influence of chastity "washes clean whatever self-indulgence has previously stained."⁶² In a similar fashion, in his twenty-seventh sermon on the Song of Songs, Bernard avers that those who embrace modesty, prudence, chastity, holiness, patience, compassion, and humility all demonstrate their heavenly origin because their lives are centered in heaven.⁶³ Consider also, how the Cistercian abbot describes the soul of the contemplative:

She [the soul or bride] adores and worships one God, just like the
angels; she loves Christ above all things, just like the angels; she
is chaste, just like the angels, and that in the flesh of a fallen race,
in a frail body that the angels do not have. But she seeks and
savors the things that they enjoy, not the things that are on the
earth. What can be a clearer sign of her heavenly origin than that
she retains a natural likeness to it in the land of unlikeness, than

⁶¹ 3 *In lab 5*; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 225/trans. in Leclercq, *Life of Perfection*, 30: "Amplectimini, fratres, pretiosissimam margaritam, amplectimini sactimoniam vitae, quae vos efficit sanctorum similes et domesticos Dei, dicente Scriptura: 'Incorruptio facit proximum Deo' (Wis 6:20). Ita ergo non vestro quidem merito, sed gratia Dei estis quod estis: quod ad castitatem et sanctimoniam spectat, angeli quidam terreni, aut potius caeli cives, sed in terra interim peregrini."

⁶² 2 *In Dominica prima post octavam Epiphaniae 7*; Bernard, *SBO*, 4: 324/Bernard, *Sermons for Advent*, 191: "Prima siquidem hydria, continentia est castitas, qua diluitur quidquid ante luxuria inquinavit."

⁶³ *SofS 27.5.8*; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11: 330-32/Bernard, *Song II*, 81.

that as an exile on earth she enjoys the glory of the celibate life,
than that she lives like an angel in an animal body.⁶⁴

The soul of the contemplative is turned always toward God. In all of the above examples, this more spiritual connotation of chastity comes to the fore. Chastity is still a rejection of bodily and temporal desire, but the emphasis is on the achieved state, on the notion that monastic existence is a life of love ordered for God alone.

In sum, chastity connotes the rejection of worldly desire. Sometimes, Bernard expresses this idea negatively—to reorient love to God, one must exercise self-control and accrue virtue.

Other times, he expresses it positively—chastity is similar to angelic existence because, like the angels, the chaste gaze unceasingly at God. Bernard’s comment in his seventh sermon on the Song of Songs says it all: “Her love is surely chaste when it seeks the person whom she loves and not some other thing of his. It is a holy love, the impulse of an upright spirit rather than of carnal desire.”⁶⁵

4 Virginit

Until now, I have been writing about Bernard’s perception of chastity as a virtue that connotes self-control, a rejection of worldly desires, and a way of life reflective of the lives of angels. I have also demonstrated that it is a quality necessary for union with God. In doing so, I have made little mention of virginity, even though in many ways Bernard seems to hold similar conceptions of the two notions. I have avoided speaking of the two in tandem for two reasons.

⁶⁴ *SofS* 27.4.6; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 11: 326/Bernard, *Song II*, 2: 79: “Unum Deum adorat et colit, quomodo angeli; Christum super omnia amat, quomodo angeli; casta est, quomodo angeli, idque in carne peccati et fragili corpore, quod non angeli; quaerit postremo et sapit quae apud illos sunt, non quae super terram. Quod evidentius caelestis insigne originis, quam ingenitam et in regione dissimilitudinis retinere similitudinem, gloriam caelibus vitae in terra et ab exsule usurpari, in corpore denique paene bestiali vivere angelum?” Also, see 3 *In lab* 5; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 225.

⁶⁵ *SofS* 7.3; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 158/Bernard, *Song I*, 39: “Amat profecto caste, quae ipsum quem amat quaerit, non aliud quidquam ipsius. Amat sancte, quia non in concupiscentia carnis, sed in puritate spiritus.” Also, see *SofS*

For one, as the following discussion will bring to light, when Bernard speaks of virginity and of virgins, it is apparent that he is thinking of people who possess *both* physical integrity and spiritual purity. Thus, the two terms are not identical. Furthermore, Bernard exhibits a certain tentativeness towards virginity not apparent in his discussions of chastity, which suggests he sees virginity in a different light than chastity.

In what follows, I investigate Bernard's handling of virginity. I show that when Bernard speaks of virginity without reservation, it is usually with reference to Mary. However, when he calls on Mary as an exemplar, her virginity is significant for monks not as a symbol of untainted integrity but as a model of fertility, of overflowing virtue. Furthermore, when he considers the virginity of the 'average' religious (that is, not Mary), he enlists the idea to call attention to vice—to alert his brethren to the hazards of pride and false piety. To begin, let us look at what Bernard has to say about Mary's virginity.

4.1 The Virgin Mary

Virginity is nowhere more prominent in Bernard's writing than when he considers Mary.⁶⁶ In that context, he employs many of the same themes observed in his handling of chastity. Chastity is a virtue to be cultivated, signifies the sublimation of temporal desire for spiritual goods, and mirrors the lives of angels. "Virginity" connotes all of these things as well. But there is a difference: more often than not, when Bernard summons the word "virginity" instead

7.2.2; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 10: 156-58/Bernard, *Song I*, 39; *Liber de diligendo Deo* 10.28; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 143/Bernard, *Works*, 196.

⁶⁶ In addition to the four homilies, Bernard's major works on Mary are: a letter to the canons at Lyon about her conception, his sermon on her Nativity, and seven sermons on her Assumption: *Ep* 174 (215); Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 388-92; Bernard, *Letters*, 289-93; *Sermo in nativitate B.V.M. (Nat BVM)*; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 275-88/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 281-305; 1-7 *In assumptione B.V.M. (Asspt)*; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 228-74/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 224-80.

of “chastity,” he is speaking of Mary not the ordinary monk.⁶⁷ For instance, just as chastity is one of three virtues necessary for perfection, so too is virginity. In this way, he frequently names virginity, humility, and charity as a triune of essential virtues. But when he includes virginity instead of chastity in the triune, his subject is Mary. For example, in his analysis of how Mary “penetrated the heavens,” Bernard sums up: “Charity burned brightly in her seeking after grace, virginity shone resplendent in her flesh, while humility appeared in her ministrations.”⁶⁸ *Virginity*, humility, and charity are *Mary’s* three virtues. This same tendency appears when Bernard links virginity with the angelic life. Whereas Bernard presents the chastity of monks as emblematic of angelic existence, *virginity* regularly serves that purpose when he speaks of Mary. In this fashion, he correlates virginity with the hierarchy of angels in one of his acclamations of Mary’s holiness:

O wise virgin! O dedicated virgin! Whoever taught you that virginity is pleasing to God? What law, what justice, what page of the Old Testament either commands or counsels or urges you to live in the flesh yet not according to the flesh, to live on earth an angelic life?⁶⁹

And, elsewhere, also with respect to Mary, he extols:

And, after all, what wonder is it that the Angel should show himself to you who are already living an angelic life?... For undoubtedly to live as a virgin is to lead an angelic life; and (*et*)

⁶⁷ This is not to say that Bernard never links virginity, humility, charity and never connects virginity with the angelic life, unless speaking of Mary. He does, for example, link virgins with angelic purity in one of his *Sententiae*: 2 *Sent* 18; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-2: 29/Bernard, “Sentences,” 144. Nevertheless, what I have called attention to is certainly a trend, and one worth noting.

⁶⁸ Trans. mine. *Nat BVM*; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 281/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 291-92: “Fervebat siquidem in quaerenda gratia caritas, splendebat in carne virginitas, humilitas in obsequio eminebat.” For another example of Bernard’s linking of humility, virginity, and charity, see *Div* 47; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 266.

⁶⁹ 3 *Hom* 7; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 186/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 38: “O Virgo prudens, o Virgo devota, quis te docuit Deo placere virginitatem? Quae lex, quae iustitia, quae pagina Veteris Testamenti vel praecipit, vel consulit, vel hortatur in carne non carnaliter vivere et in terris angelicam ducere vitam?”

they who neither marry nor are given in marriage “shall be as the angels of God” (Mt 22:30).⁷⁰

In both these passages, Bernard draws a parallel between virginity and angelic existence; in both instances, he is writing of or to Mary not his brethren.

Might it even be plausible that the final sentence of the last example actually makes a distinction between Mary, the virgin, and those who are chaste but not virginal? To clarify, the final sentence contains two clauses separated by an “*et*”: to live as a virgin is to live an angelic life; those who are celibate live angelic lives. It is conceivable that the first half of that clause is a reference to Mary, a virgin, while the second half is a nod to the monastic order more generally. Certainly, as demonstrated in the earlier discussion of chastity, Bernard regularly enlists the unmarried state to signify the monastic life. If this reading is correct, then it offers a fine example of Bernard’s inclination to refer to virginity when considering Mary, but chastity (or the unmarried state) with respect to his monks. Perhaps I am making too much of the sentence; maybe Bernard is simply repeating the same idea for emphasis or artistry. But, even discounting this as evidence, Bernard clearly links virginity to angelic existence when referring to Mary not the monastic life. And, overall, Bernard regularly reserves the word “virginity” for discussions that involve Mary.

4.1.1 *Fertile virginity*

Even though he often writes of Mary as a virgin, his interest in her virginity is not for its own sake. Her virginity intrigues him because she was a virgin and a mother at the same time.

⁷⁰ *Nat BVM*; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 280/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 290: “Ne mireris Angelum Domini: et Dominus Angeli tecum. Postremo quidni videas Angelum, cum iam angelice vivas?... Angelica plane vita virginitas, et qui non nubent, neque nubentur, ‘erunt sicut angeli Dei’ (Mt 22:30).”

Indeed, motherhood is what truly enlivens his discourse on Mary and what draws his attention to her virginity.⁷¹ The following passages are fine illustrations of his approach:

“Mary,” said the Lord, “has chosen the best part.” Oh, truly “the best part,” because although conjugal fecundity is good, and virginal chastity better, more excellent than either is virginal fecundity, or should I call it fecund virginity?⁷²

And again:

...her virginity derived a great increase of glory from her fruitfulness and her fruitfulness in like manner was enhanced by her virginity.... For it is doubtless a grand thing to be a virgin; but to be a virgin and a mother at once—that is something far greater and grander in every way.⁷³

Mary is a fertile virgin—this combination is what tantalizes. Thanks to Mary’s virginity, she was worthy to give birth to God’s son and take part in the redemption of humanity.⁷⁴ Virginity made Mary’s conception of Christ possible. “[H]e had to create someone whom he knew would be worthy (Wis 6:6) to be his mother,” Bernard muses,

someone in whom he was sure he could delight. That was why he wanted her to be a virgin, someone unstained from whom he himself could be born stainless, for he was to wipe away all our

⁷¹ Leclercq, *Women and Bernard*, 107; M. B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 148; Renna, “Virginity and Chastity,” 46. In his introduction to Bernard’s homilies on Mary, Chrysogonus Waddell points out that Bernard rarely praises Mary on her own but usually discusses Mary and her son together: Chrysogonus Waddell, “Introduction,” *Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1993), 19–20. Also, see Frederick M. Jelly, “The Christocentric Devotion to Mary in Saint Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 34.1 (1999), 89–105. Bynum discusses Bernard’s application of mothering imagery to male figures: Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” 256–84, esp. 115–19.

⁷² 4 *Asspt* 5; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 248/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 253: “Optimam partem elegit sibi Maria’. Optimam plane: quia bona fecunditas coniugalis, melior autem castitas virginalis, prorsus autem optima est fecunditas virginea seu fecunda virginitas.”

⁷³ *Sermo infra octavam assumptiones* (*O Asspt*) 9; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 268–69/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 269–70: “Merito proinde et illam meruit benedictionem, et hanc non amisit, ut longe gloriosior fiat et virginitas ex fecunditate, et ex virginitate fecunditas.... Magnum enim est virginem esse; sed virginem matrem esse, longe amplius per omnem modum.” For more examples of Bernard’s coupling of virginity with fecundity, see 3 *In vigilia nativitatibus Domini* 9–10; Bernard, *SBO*, 4: 218–19/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 339–42.

⁷⁴ For his perception of Mary’s role in the redemption of humankind, see *Nat BVM* 6; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 278–79/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 286–87; 2 *Hom* 3; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 134–36/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 16–17; 4 *Hom* 8; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 224–28/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 53.

stains. He wanted her to be humble as well, someone of whom he could himself be born “gentle and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29)....⁷⁵

Again, “So that she might conceive and give birth to the Holy of Holies, she was made holy in her body by the gift of virginity and she accepted that gift of humility to become holy in spirit too.”⁷⁶ Therefore, Bernard regularly links Mary’s virginity with her fertility.

Often, when he highlights Mary’s fertile virginity, he does so to encourage monks in the cultivation of virtue. Mary’s virginal fecundity is a marvel but an exception whose example can be admired but never literally imitated—on that, Bernard has no doubt.⁷⁷ Monks, he says explicitly, cannot imitate Mary in her fertile virginity; therefore, they should imitate her virtues. For example, in one sermon, Bernard acknowledges that his monks could never receive Mary’s heavenly blessings, which include her fertile virginity, but encourages them to imitate her humility, modesty, faith, and martyrdom.⁷⁸ Furthermore, in his second *Homily in Praise of Mary*, he describes her as a shining example, “warming our hearts far more than our bodies, fostering virtue and cauterizing vice.”⁷⁹ He makes a similar point when he enlists “lilies” as a metaphor for “virtue” in one of his Song of Songs sermons:

Dearest brethren, let us take care to have our souls adorned with lilies; let us hasten to root out the “thorns and thistles” (Gen 3:18) and to plant lilies in their place; perchance then the Beloved will

⁷⁵ 2 *Hom* 1; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 130-32/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 15: “Proinde factor hominum, ut homo fieret, natus de homine, talem sibi ex omnibus debuit deligere, immo condere matrem, qualem et se decere sciebat, et sibi noverat placituram. Voluit itaque esse virginem, de qua immaculata immaculatus procederet, omnium maculas purgaturus; voluit et humilem, de qua ‘mitis et humilis corde’ (Mt 11:29) prodiret...”

⁷⁶ 2 *Hom* 2; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 132/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 16: “Ut igitur quae Sanctum sanctorum conceptura erat pariter et paritura, sancta esset corpore, accepit donum virginitatis; ut esset et mente, accepit humilitatis.”

⁷⁷ On Mary’s inimitability see 4 *Asspt* 5; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 248/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 253-54; 1 *Hom* 7; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 122-24/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 10-11; 2 *Hom* 1, 3; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 130-36/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 15, 17; *Nat BVM* 12; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 283/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 295-96.

⁷⁸ *O Asspt* 7-15 in Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 266-74/*Seasons*, 3: 266-80. Also, see *Nat BVM* 12-19; *SBO*, 5: 283-88/*Seasons*, 3: 295-305; *Hom* 2.17; *SBO*, 4: 34-35/*Homilies*, 30-31.

⁷⁹ 2 *Hom* 17; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 168-70/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 30: “...cafaciens magis mentes quam corpora, fovet virtutes, excoquit vitia.”

sometime show Himself so condescending as to come to feed even
in us.

Mary's lily, he maintains, was the brilliance of her virginity, humility, and charity; monks possess lilies too, albeit of an inferior nature. When undertaken with heartfelt devotion, the various monastic practices and disciplines appear as lilies in the monk's soul.⁸⁰

Therefore, I have shown that when Bernard considers virginity, Mary is typically the topic. He often highlights Mary's virginity, but, when he does so, virginity is regularly associated with motherhood. Furthermore, when he elevates Mary as a model for monks, they are not encouraged to emulate her virginity but her virtues (her fertility).

4.2 The Trouble with Virgins

Mary was unique: not only was she a virgin who gave birth to a child (to the savior of humankind, no less), but also she was a virgin in perfect possession of humility and every other virtue. Bernard knew no one could replicate Mary's virginal motherhood; neither, he suspected, would people have much success emulating her humble virginity. Indeed, in his assessment, if Mary's virginity is noteworthy for its fertility, the virginity of his contemporaries is remarkable for its failings. Bernard does not often speak of virginity with respect to his fellow religious, but when he does, it is with notable hesitation. This tentativeness surfaces in the way he continually qualifies the term "virgin," in his consistent linking of virginity with the vice of pride, and in his regular mobilization of the "foolish virgin" metaphor.

⁸⁰ *Nat BVM* 17-18; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 287-88/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 303-05: "Curemus habere lilia, fratres, extirpare spinas et tribulos, et inserere lilia festinemus, si quando forte et ad nos pascendus dignetur dilectus descendere.... Annon lilia virginitatis decus, humilitatis insigne, supereminencia caritatis? Erunt tamen et nobis lilia, quam inferiora valde!" For another example, see *O Asspt* 7-15 in Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 266-74/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 266-80.

4.1.1 *If, indeed, you are a virgin*

Bernard repeatedly destabilizes virginity by inserting asides into his prose, which remind the reader that not all virgins are ‘true’ virgins. For instance, in his third *Homily in Praise of Mary*, he explains: “It is usual for virgins—those who really are virgins—always to be timid and never to feel safe.”⁸¹ In so phrasing, he makes plain that virginity is fragile and complex—a physical quality and a difficult-to-maintain internal state—but he also implies it is a condition many so-called virgins do not truly possess. Similarly, in Sermon 47 on the Song of Songs, he analyzes the metaphor of virginity as an enclosed garden and a sealed fountain. There, he cannot resist reminding his reader that virginity is only meaningful if it is possessed in body *and* in spirit: “In the virgin it [virginity] seals up the doorway of chastity, the safeguard of untainted holiness, provided however that she is one who is holy both in body and spirit” (1 Cor 7:34).⁸² Bernard also draws attention to virginity’s instability in a letter he addressed to a nun: “Either you are one of the foolish virgins (if indeed you are a virgin) or you are one of the wise” (Mt 25:1-13).⁸³ Additionally, Bernard’s subtly implies that ‘true’ virgins are quite rare when he declares: “But if you are both a virgin and humble, whoever you are, you are great.”⁸⁴ A passage from Bernard’s sermon on the Nativity also insinuates that authentic virginity is a rarity. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (7:34), Bernard explains in that sermon, Paul declares Mary a virgin “‘holy in body and in spirit’ so that there might be no room for suspicion with regard to our Aqueduct [Mary]. Exceedingly high though it is, it has preserved its

⁸¹ 3 *Hom* 9; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 190/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 40: “Solent virgines, quae vere virgines sunt, semper pavidae et numquam esse securae....”

⁸² *SofS* 47.2.4; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 12: 300/Bernard, *Song III*, 6: “Quod utique claustrum pudoris signat in virgine, et inviolatae custodiam sanctitatis, si tamen talis fuerit, quae sit sancta corpore et spiritu.”

⁸³ *Ep* 115.2 (118); Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 295/Bernard, *Letters*, 180: “...aut de fatuis virginibus una es, sit tamen virgo es, aut de prudentibus.”

⁸⁴ 1 *Hom* 6; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 122/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 10: “Quod si et virgo, et humilis es, quisquis es, magnus es.”

integrity inviolate.”⁸⁵ Mary, he implies, has not succumbed to the haughtiness one might expect of a virgin, especially one so exalted. She has preserved both physical *and* spiritual integrity.

Though he does not always state overtly what makes virginity so problematic, the implication is clear enough. Virgins (and it is apparent that he is speaking of people who possess physical virginity) become arrogant about their physical state, and that corrodes their holiness. The trouble lies with virginity’s spiritual component. It is easy enough for people to claim to be virgins because they are physically intact, but virginity is also a quality of character characterized by humility and other virtues. And that estimable character is what a great many so-called virgins lack.

4.2.1 *The haughty virgin*

Pride is of particular concern for Bernard when he considers virginity. In his estimation and to his dismay, pride is virginity’s regular companion. Bernard connects virginity and pride vividly in his first *Homily in Praise of Mary* when he opposes Mary’s perfect virginity and humility with the haughty virgin’s corrupted virginity. After emphasizing that Mary’s virginity was pleasing precisely because she was humble, he immediately turns to and sternly berates the proud virgin. How, he asks, can a person think humility is not necessary if even Mary had to be meek and unassuming in order to please God?! In fact, Bernard censures: “It is better for you not to be a virgin than to be puffed up over your virginity. Not everyone is a virgin, but there are still fewer who to virginity join humility.”⁸⁶ Likewise, it is difficult to read the Cistercian’s praise of

⁸⁵ *Nat BVM* 9; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 280/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 291: “‘Sancta’, inquam, ‘corpore et spiritu’ (1 Cor 4:13), ne quid forsitan super hoc dubites aquaeductu. Sublimis equidem valde, sed nihilominus integerrimus.”

⁸⁶ The haughty virgin is not named; she is character Bernard invented to demonstrate ‘the problem with virgins’. 1 *Hom* 6; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 122/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 10: “Alioquin expedit tibi virginem non esse, quam

Mary in his sermon for the Feast of the Nativity without sensing a subtle censure of those who are arrogant about their own religious state: “Mary did not presume on her merit but solicited grace. Indeed she depended so much upon grace and was so far from being ‘high-minded’ (Rom 11:20) that the Angel’s salutation alarmed her.”⁸⁷

In the end, in Bernard’s judgment, pride is the great equalizer: virginity may be a purer state, but it is brought low by pride. In his words:

A defiled but humble person can follow the Lamb as can a haughty virgin, but neither follows him wherever he goes. The one cannot reach up to the purity of the spotless Lamb and the other will not deign to stoop.... Moreover the sinner’s path of humility is safer than the haughty virgin’s way. Making amends humbly purifies the one’s impurity, while pride defiles the other’s chastity.⁸⁸

A comparison between Bernard’s handling of this scriptural passage and that of other churchmen who wrote on the topic, further underscores the point being argued here. For early Christians, such as the writer of a fifth-century letter on virginity (possibly Sulpitius Severus) and Augustine, the passage from Revelations, “It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (14:4) shows that virgins

de virginitate insolescere. Non omnium quidem est virginitas; multo tamen pauciorum est cum virginitate humilitas.”

⁸⁷ *Nat BVM* 8; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 280/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 290: “Maria non praetendit meritum, sed gratiam quaerit. Denique usque adeo fidit gratiae, et non altum sapit, ut salutationem angelicam vereatur.”

⁸⁸ *1 Hom* 8; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 124/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 12: “Si non potes forsitan sequi eum quocumque ierit, dignare vel sequi quo tibi condescendit. Hoc est: si non potes sublimem incedere semitam virginitatis, sequere vel Deum per tutissimam viam humilitatis, a cuius recitudine si qui etiam de virginibus deviauerint, ut verum fatear, nec ipsi sequuntur Agnum quocumque ierit. Sequitur quidem Agnum coinquinatus humilis, sequitur et virgo superbus, sed neuter quocumque ierit, quia nec ille ascendere potest ad munditiam Agni, qui sine macula est, nec is ad eiusdem mansuetudinem descendere dignatur.... Attamen salubriorem elegit sequendi partem in humilitate peccator, quam in virginitate superbus, cum et illius immunditiam sua humilis satisfactio purget, et huius pudicitiam superbia inquinat.”

are Christ's constant companions.⁸⁹ It has no such meaning for Bernard: for him neither the virgin nor the humble chaste person can follow Christ *wherever he goes*—neither may claim status as Christ's ever-faithful companion.

All of this shows that while Bernard has nothing but praise for Mary's fertile virginity, he sees mostly drawbacks when he looks at how virginity is executed in 'the real world' of the cloister. Although he deems virginity a praiseworthy state, it is not something he values in itself. It is only meaningful when accompanied by humility and the other virtues, and this, he judges, is an appallingly infrequent occurrence.

4.3.1 *Foolish virgins*

Bernard's doubts about humankind's ability to maintain a state of authentic virginity means that instead of enlisting virginity as a stable image of religious piety for his monks, he often turns to it as an object lesson in false holiness. This is nowhere more apparent than when he calls upon the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. The scriptural story reads as follows:

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

Now, it took a while for the bridegroom to arrive, and, while they waited, all the virgins fall asleep. Upon waking, they notice the bridegroom approaching in the distance. At this point, the foolish virgins realize their lamps are growing dim, so they ask their wise companions if they can borrow some oil. The wise reply that they only have enough for themselves and

⁸⁹ Sulpitius Severus, "Letter 2, Concerning Virginity," *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Second Series*, vol. 11, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 58; *De sancta virginitate* 27; Augustine, "De sancta virginitate," 100-03. On early Christian approaches, see Evans, *Sex and Salvation*, 114-15.

suggest a place where the others can purchase their own. Unfortunately for the foolish virgins, while they are away, the bridegroom finally arrives:

...those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour (Mt 25:1-13).

Bernard uses this parable quite often to express just how vital is the acquisition of virtue for spiritual perfection. A sermon for the Feast of Saint Victor demonstrates well his handling of the images:

For to aspire to glory without first practicing virtue... betrays not an upright but a perverted heart.... It is vain for a person to endeavour to raise him- or herself to the summit of glory who has not yet begun to shine with the splendour of virtue. It is vain for the foolish virgins to rise to meet the Bridegroom when their lamps are extinguished. And they are called foolish virgins for no other reason, as it seems to me, than because they glory in their empty lamps, having in them none of the oil of virtue.⁹⁰

The lamp represents the virgins' bodies (their beings) and the oil is virtue. If they do not cultivate virtue, if they do not fill themselves with the goodness that is God, they will not receive God's favor.⁹¹

Bernard's warnings against behaving like foolish virgins are regularly accompanied by an inventory of the sort of virtues monks should cultivate. In one sermon, the reader learns that the lack of humility alone is responsible for keeping the foolish virgin—that is, the monk—

⁹⁰ 1 *In natali Sancti Victor* 1; Bernard, *SBO*, 6-1: 29-30/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 103: "Non recti plane, sed perversi est animi, ante quaerere gloriam quam exercere virtutem.... Frustra ad celsitudinem nititur gloriae, qui prius non claruit virtute. Frustra fatuae virgines sponso obviam surgunt, quarum lampades exstinguuntur: et ideo fatuae, quod vacuis glorientur lampadibus, virtutis oleum non habentes." Also, see *Div* 109; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 383; *De conversione* 10.21; Bernard, *SBO*, 4: 94/Bernard, *Sermons on Conversion*, 56; 2 *Asspt* 9; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 237/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 234; *Nat BVM* 9; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 281/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 291.

from the wedding feast.⁹² However, in most, Bernard offers a list of qualities crucial for perfection. In this fashion, he warns that a monk will be judged foolish if he is remiss in his monastic discipline, including chastity, fasting, manual labor, vigils, and silence.⁹³ Bernard also offers a detailed description of various virtues to be cultivated in one of his sermons for the Feast of Saint Victor. On those pages, Bernard counsels monks not to aspire to glory but to cultivate virtue. To make his point, he parallels “improper striving” with the “foolish virgins who rose to meet the Bridegroom with empty lamps.” And he encourages his brethren to fill their own lamps with oil by imitating Victor’s virtues.⁹⁴ Spiritual progress is a matter of inner growth. Practices such as virginity or chastity, prayer, liturgy, silence, and solitude are all fundamental, but they are external activities that can potentially be performed in the absence of internal integrity. And, without the fullness of virtue, all of it is worthless.

Bernard regularly utilizes examples of ‘failed’ virgins to warn his monks about superficial piety. He does so, not because his brethren are physically virgins but because of what the terms “virgin” and “virginity” suggest to him. In Bernard’s judgment, the true virgin, exemplified by Mary, is filled with virtue, but most virgins lack this quality. For him, the idea of virginity calls to mind pious pretense and, especially, the vice of pride. The haughty virgin, the foolish virgin: in his assessment virgins become proud, they bask in the admiration won through their virginal status, and they fail to cultivate virtue. In short, no matter how pristine the outer package may be, they are empty vessels, unworthy of God’s presence. The images Bernard

⁹¹ Notice, too, the allusion to pride and inauthentic virginity: “And they are called foolish virgins... because they glory in their empty lamps, having in them none of the oil of virtue.”

⁹² 2 *In Dominica I novembris* 3-5; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 308-10/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 2: 350-54.

⁹³ 2 *Dominica prima post octavam Epiphaniae* 7; Bernard, *SBO*, 4: 324-25/Bernard, *Sermons for Advent*, 191-92.

⁹⁴ 1 *In natali Sancti Victor* 1; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 29-30/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 105.

enlists are powerful and entirely suited for instructing his brethren about the hazards of pride and false holiness. And, plainly, these are two of his fixations. But, in the next section, I argue that spiritual instruction was not the only reason he enlisted such rhetoric. I show that, for his monks, he encourages humility and excuses a lack of virginity and explain my suspicion that Bernard's handling of virginity was connected to the grappling between Cistercians and traditional Benedictines over which group was superior.

4.3 As for Those Who are Not Virgins

More than any other author discussed so far, Bernard pays close attention to monks who have lost virginity and repeatedly evokes their situation. And his solution for them is to cultivate humility. In his view, humility is far more important and sufficient than virginity. Virginity may be admirable, but humility is indispensable for spiritual growth. In his first homily on Mary, the white monk points to Christian Scripture to support his own especial commendation of humility:

Virginity is a praiseworthy virtue, but humility is by far the more necessary. The one is only counselled; the other is demanded. To the first you have been invited; to the second you are obliged. Concerning the first he [Jesus] said, "he who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Mt 19:12); of the second is said, "Truly I said to you, unless you become like this little child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). The first is rewarded; the second is required. You can be saved without virginity; without humility you cannot be.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ ¹ *Hom 5*; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 116-18/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 9: "Laudabilis virtus virginitas, sed magis humilitas necessaria. Illa consulitur, ista praecipitur. Ad illam invitatis, ad istam cogitis. De illa dicitur: 'Qui potest capere, capiat'; de ista dicitur: 'Nisi quis efficiatur sicut parvulus iste, non intrabit in regnum caelorum'. Illa ergo remuneratur, ista exigitur. Potes denique sine virginitate salvari; sine humilitate non potes."

Bernard could not have sent a more straightforward message to his monks: they need not worry if they lack virginity; their obligation is to progress in humility.⁹⁶ He further advances this point when he maintains that even Mary's virginity would have been unacceptable if it had lacked humility:

The Lord says, "Upon whom shall my Spirit rest, if not upon him that is humble and contrite in spirit" (Is 66:2). 'On the humble', he says, not 'on the virgin'. Had Mary not been humble, then, the Holy Spirit would not have rested upon her. Had he not rested upon her, she would not have become pregnant.⁹⁷

Hence, the salvation of humanity was contingent on Mary's humility not her virginity. Clearly, Bernard unconditionally endorses humility as the essential quality in the pursuit of perfection.

In his admiration of humility, Bernard is following Augustine.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the twelfth-century Cistercian carries the point far beyond that of his predecessor. In his treatise on virginity, *De sancta virginitate*, Augustine warns his readers that God only guards the virginity of those who are humble. Virginity cannot survive without humility, he says. Therefore, he continues, readers of his text ought not be surprised when he addresses humility amidst a dialogue on virginity. His belief in the greatness of virginity, he states, is matched by his fear of the pride that might defeat it.⁹⁹ For this reason, humility is necessary in order to protect virginity. Augustine does not exalt humility above virginity. Rather, he sees humility as important *for the sake of* virginity. It is worth mentioning that the Benedictine from Liège,

⁹⁶ It is interesting to contrast Bernard's handling of these biblical passages with that of some of the Church Fathers. Whereas Bernard is intent on showing just how essential is humility, John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine are all concerned to explain precisely *why* virginity is *not* demanded. For Bernard, the passages serve as authorities that prove his point; for the early thinkers they are statements that need to be rationalized. Evans discusses Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine in Evans, *Sex and Salvation*, 38-39. For examples from Jerome's writing, see *Ep* 22.20; Jerome, *CSEL*54, 170-71/Jerome, *ACW*33, 152-53; *Ad Jov* 1.12; Jerome, *PL* 23: 227A-29B/Jerome, "Against Jovinianus," 355-56.

⁹⁷ 1 *Hom* 5; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 118/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 9-10: "Super quem', inquit, 'requiescet spiritus meus, nisi super humilem et quietum'? Super humilem dixit, non super virginem. Si igitur Maria humilis non esset, super eam Spiritus Sanctus non requievisset. Si super eam non requievisset, nec impraegnasset."

Rupert of Deutz, would have stood in absolute agreement with Augustine and in opposition to Bernard. Rupert thought humility helped to quell the yearnings of the flesh: “Hence virginity, in many bodies wearied by frequent yearnings, is in danger because it does not bear the sweet burden of holy humility.”¹⁰⁰ For him, like Augustine, humility is at the service of virginity. Conversely, Bernard reveres humility in and of itself, and he acknowledges virginity as a worthy but unnecessary adornment.

Over and again, Bernard advises the cultivation of humility and pardons the absence of virginity. This tendency is apparent in his examination of a passage from Luke. The verse on which he focuses appears just after the story about the twelve-year old Jesus remaining in Jerusalem without his parents’ permission. It reads: “Then he [Jesus] went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them” (Lk 2:51). For Bernard, the passage’s message is that if the Lord was able to subject himself to mere mortals, surely human beings can learn humility. “Maybe you can no longer follow him wherever he goes,” the monk urges, “but condescend at least to follow him where he stooped for you. That is to say, if you cannot follow the high road of virginity, at least take the sure road of humility.”¹⁰¹ Look, too, at Bernard’s first homily in praise of Mary. There, he portrays Christ’s mother as a perfect combination of humility and virginity, but advises his brethren, who may not be virgins, to emulate Mary in humility: “If you are not able to imitate the virginity of this humble maid,

⁹⁸ Joyce E. Salisbury, “The Latin Doctors of the Church on Sexuality,” *Journal of Medieval History* 12.4 (1986), 286.

⁹⁹ *De sancta virginitate* 52-57; Augustine, “De sancta virginitate,” 138-47.

¹⁰⁰ *Laes* 5; 550C-D: “Idcirco virginitas, in multis corporibus crebris turbinibus fatigata, periclitatur, quia non tulit super se sanctae humilitatis dulce pondus.” Also, see chapters 6 and 7 (551A-552C) where he pursues this theme, explaining that virginity is only maintained through the presence of humility.

¹⁰¹ 1 *Hom* 8; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 124/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 12: “Si non potes forsitan sequi eum quocumque ierit, dignare vel sequi quo tibi condescendit. Hoc est: si non potes sublimem incedere semitam virginitatis, sequere vel Deum per tutissimam viam humilitatis....”

then imitate the humility of the virgin maid.”¹⁰² In another section of the same homily, he assures his fellow monks that “[n]ot everyone is a virgin, but there are still fewer who to virginity join humility. So if you can do no more than admire Mary’s virginity, try to imitate her humility and for you this will be enough (2 Cor 12:9).”¹⁰³ In all of this, it is evident that Bernard advocates the path of humility for his monks and is unworried about their potential lack of virginity: humility will guide them steadily and securely ever closer toward perfection.

4.1.1 *Chastity versus virginity*

In his concluding remarks about Bernard’s conception of virginity, Thomas Renna has made the perceptive claims that Bernard, “was part of a trend which demystified virginity as a virtue and *a fortiori* as a state of perfection” and that he “undermined the intellectual foundation for virginity as a special status in the church.”¹⁰⁴ Everything I have disclosed about Bernard’s conception of virginity and of chastity in this chapter points to the veracity of Renna’s comments. But I would take his assertions one step further and claim that Bernard’s demystification and undercutting of virginity were directly related to the sexual status of Bernard and his fellow Cistercians and to the competitiveness that characterized the relationship between black and white monks.

As explained in chapter 3 on Rupert of Deutz, sexual status was one feature that distinguished white and black monks from each other. Black monks enlisted oblation as a key form of recruitment; as a result, their communities were largely comprised of virginal men. Even when attitudes had begun to change, the number of oblates in traditional Benedictine monasteries

¹⁰² 1 *Hom 5*; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 116/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 9: “...si non potes virginitatem humilis, imitare humilitatem virginis.”

¹⁰³ 1 *Hom 6*; Bernard, *Œuvres*, 20: 122/Bernard, *Homilies in Praise*, 10: “Non omnium quidem est virginitas; multo tamen pauciorum est cum virginitate humilitas. Si ergo virginitatem in Maria non potes nisi mirari, stude humilitatem imitari, et sufficit tibi.”

only gradually declined over the course of the twelfth century. In contrast, the Cistercians and other new monastic groups had resolved not to receive children within their walls.¹⁰⁵ For example, a statute from the Cistercian General Chapter of 1134 pronounces that young men must be older than fifteen before joining the order, and, in 1157, another ruling lifted the minimum age to eighteen.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, even though no written legislation on the issue appeared until 1134, Joseph Lynch has argued that the Cistercians had discouraged the reception of children since their emergence in 1097/98.¹⁰⁷ Cistercian communities accepted oblates only as an exception; thus, white monks were generally adult converts—men who had likely had some form of sexual experience before becoming monks.

Current knowledge of Bernard's life and that of his earliest converts affirms the broad characterization of Cistercian communities just given. Bernard himself did not enter the cloister until he was twenty-three. Like Anselm and Ælred of Rievaulx (whom I consider in the next chapter), when Bernard entered his monastery he was well beyond the age when

¹⁰⁴ Renna, "Virginity and Chastity," 52.

¹⁰⁵ Though, there is evidence that there were exceptions to even the Cistercians' policy against receiving children. For examples and a thorough discussion of the matter, see Lynch, "Cistercians and Novices," 283-97. Nora Berend analyzes the legal factors that affected oblation and the changes they underwent over the course of the medieval centuries: Berend, "La subversion invisible," 123-36. For the refusal of various reformers to accept oblates, see Pierre Riché, "L'Enfant dans la société monastique au XIIe siècle," *Pierre Abélard-Pierre le Vénérable* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975), 693. On the Cistercians' changing attitude toward the reception of children, see Lynch, "Cistercians and Novices," 283-97; Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry*, 37-39.

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, *Statuta capitulorum generalium ordinis Cisterciensis: Ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, ed. Joseph Maria Canivez, vol. 1 (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1933), 78.31, 28.62. A child could still ostensibly enter the community; he simply could not make a formal profession until reaching the designated age: Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 297-98 n. 4. The Carthusians and Grandmontines enacted similar requirements, both designating twenty as the minimum age for entry into their orders. For each group's statute, see Guigo, "Consuetudines Carthusiae," *Coutumes de Chartreuse*, Sources Chrétiennes; 313, ed. & trans. Anonymous (Les Éditions du Cerf: 1984), 27.220; Anonymous, *Scriptores Ordinis Grandimontensis, CCCM8*, edited by Iohannes Becquet (Turnholt: Brepols, 1968), 44.88. The impact the new perspective had on communities of canons is less documented. On the composition of regular canons' communities, see Dereine, *Les chanoines réguliers*, 106-37, 163-66, 169-215 esp. 202-03; Anonymous, *Annales Rodenses*, SS 16 MGH, edited by Georg Heinrich Pertz (Stuttgart: 1859), 700A, 704A, 699B, 704-05B (There is an error in the MGH pagination: page numbers 699-706 appear twice in the text; therefore, I label them "A" and "B").

medieval men typically had their first sexual experiences. This suggests Bernard was probably not physically virginal when he became a monk. He implies this himself in a sermon addressed to his brethren. Reflecting on his condition at the time of his conversion, he confesses:

There was a time when the wicked one had subjected this citadel of mine to his tyrannical sway, ruling its members with the authority of a master. Its present desolation and misery bear witness still to the severity of its sufferings during that period. Alas! there is left in it neither the wall of continence nor the bulwark of patience.¹⁰⁸

Some modern thinkers have hypothesized that this self-deprecating testimonial is a pious exaggeration and that Bernard preserved a state of purity throughout his entire life.¹⁰⁹ To be sure, Bernard's medieval biographers were at pains to present Bernard as a paradigm of virtue (even as a child) and as a life-long virgin.¹¹⁰ In fact, they go so far as to present his extraordinary religious career as pre-ordained.¹¹¹ However, hagiographical sources were written to support the canonization of their subjects and do not depict their subjects' lives with historical exactitude but, instead, follow certain conventions.¹¹² Thus, those writing about Bernard would likely not have advertised their subject's sexual exploits. Given what is known about him, there is really no barrier to accepting Bernard on his word—that prior to becoming

¹⁰⁷ Lynch, "Cistercians and Novices," 285.

¹⁰⁸ *2 Asspt* 3; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 233-34/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 227: "Fuit enim aliquando, cum hoc meum castrum tyrannidi suae impius ille subiecerat sibi, potestative membris imperans universis. Quantum eo nocuerit tempore, praesens adhuc indicat desolatio et egestas. Heu! Nec continentiae murum in eo, nec patientiae antemurale reliquit."

¹⁰⁹ The translator of Bernard's *Sermons for the Seasons* was clearly convinced of Bernard's sexual inexperience. See Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 3: 227, trans. note. In contrast, Michael Casey suggests that the passage in question is either a true statement and something his fellow monks already knew about him (that he was not a virgin) or a rhetorical tool to give voice to his listeners' perspective: Casey, "Toward a Methodology," 68 n. 26.

¹¹⁰ For an example of how Bernard was portrayed in his *vitae*, see *Vita prima*; William of Saint-Thierry, *PL* 185: 228B-C, 230B-31B/William of Saint-Thierry, *Story of his Life*, 16-17, 20-22.

¹¹¹ *Vita prima*; William of Saint-Thierry, *PL* 185: 227D-28B/William of Saint-Thierry, *Story of his Life*, 14-15.

¹¹² On the problems with using *vitae* as historical sources, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17-57.

a monk, he had fully enmeshed himself in the delights of the world—and supposing that he was not a virgin when he entered Cîteaux.

Medieval sources also offer evidence about Bernard's brethren. These texts suggest that, before becoming monks, they too had enjoyed the experiences of the average lay Christian and were not necessarily virgins. Witness Bernard's first sermon on the dedication of a church, in which he offers praise and encouragement to his fellow monks:

Without doubt, many amongst you have manfully left behind their sins and vices, in which they had rotted like beasts in their own filth (Jl 1:17), and powerfully resist the daily onslaughts.... How marvelous is it, when one who before was hardly able to restrain himself for two days from excess, gluttony, drunkenness, fornication (*cubilibus*), immodesty, and all other similar and dissimilar vices (Rom 13:13), now abstains from these things for many years, indeed, his whole life?¹¹³

Here he addresses not men who have lived lives sheltered by cloister walls but men who had cut their teeth in the world before donning monks' robes. Further confirmation that Bernard's brethren were men of the world before converting, comes by way of William of Saint-Thierry and his *Vita prima*. In that work, William draws a vivid portrait of men, not youths, entering Cistercian communities. He writes of the many who converted under Bernard's influence. Among them were Bernard's brothers (the only one who did not enter Cîteaux was "too young to be eligible yet for conversion"), his companions, his uncle, and various knights. Some of those named by William had previously been married; none were children.¹¹⁴ All of these illustrations support what medievalists already know about Cistercian communities in general: they were comprised largely of men who converted as sexually experienced adults.

¹¹³ Trans. mine. 1 *Ded* 2; Bernard, *SBO*, 5: 371/Bernard, *Sermons for the Seasons*, 2: 386: "Multi certe ex vobis a peccatis et vitiis, in quibus computruerant tamquam iumenta in stercore suo, exiere viriliter, et quotidie impugnantibus eis potenter resistunt.... Quid mirabilis, quando is qui prius vix per biduum poterat continere a luxuria, a crapula et ab ebrietate et cubilibus et impudicitis, ceterisque similibus et dissimilibus vitiis, nunc ab eis continet multis annis, tota utique vita sua?"

It reasonable to presume that Bernard and his group's sexual status would color the language he used to characterize their way of life.¹¹⁵ Since physical virginity was not a noteworthy characteristic of his order, and he associates virginity with both physical and spiritual integrity, virginity would plainly not have been the most apt way to represent holiness and religious perfection to his listeners. Bernard's treatment of chastity and virginity bear out this supposition. In general, the two ideals share many of the same characteristics, but chastity (not virginity) is plainly the ideal he promotes as an element of the monk's religious endeavor. Chastity is a virtue that connotes self-control, a rejection of worldly desires, and a way of life reflective of the lives of angels. Chastity promotes union with God and monastic perfection; it is characterizes the monastic life. Indeed, for Bernard, the Old Testament figure of Daniel represents monks who are typified by their continence not their virginity. Mary's virginity is extraordinary but largely in connection with fertility not in and of itself. Furthermore, Bernard wastes precious little ink praising 'authentic' virgins or extolling that way of life. Though he certainly acknowledges virginity as commendable, he speaks mostly of its shortcomings when considering the average religious. To be sure, he insists that humility, not virginity, is necessary for spiritual perfection. Accordingly, he takes the time to assure non-virgins that their humility is sufficient and, in fact, essential. These characterizations would all have been fitting for spiritual guidance offered in a milieu of adult converts.

All of that explains his enlistment of chastity, not virginity, when describing the monk's spiritual endeavor and Bernard's promotion of humility as the virtue essential for holiness. But

¹¹⁴ *Vita prima*; William of Saint-Thierry, *PL 185: 232A-237B*/William of Saint-Thierry, *Story of his Life*, 25-35.

is it possible to say something more about the shadow he casts on virginity when he underscores its connection to pride? Fundamentally, his judgments about the vice of pride seem appropriate—pride would surely undermine a person’s holiness. But might he also have highlighted the connection between pride and virginity because most of his monks were not virgins and could not compete with virginal black monks? In other words, might his handling of virginity have been an attempt to downplay the holiness of the black monks, who may have been crowing a little too loudly about their status as virgins?¹¹⁶ His words certainly assert rigorously that the chaste monk was in no way limited by his status and could ‘follow the Lamb’ just as well as the virgin.

For Bernard, the monastic life is characterized by chastity. Chastity is both what a monk *does* to attain union with God and what a monk *is* when he has attained that union. In the first sense, chastity is a virtue. It is one of the central virtues necessary for recovering similitude and achieving union. Chastity also connotes a state of being. It is the spiritual life in which the only desire is for God. Virginity is both the same as and different from chastity in his judgment. Spiritually, it conveys a similar message—it is a virtue and a state—but generally, in his writing, he looks more toward virginity’s drawbacks than its advantages. He admires

¹¹⁵ Both Leclercq and Newman examine ways in which the Cistercians’ cultural background may have influenced their interpretations of Christian thought and monastic tradition: Leclercq, *Monks and Love*, 86-105; Newman, *Boundaries of Charity*, 21-41.

¹¹⁶ This is a debate in which Bernard participated. In the early or mid-1120s he penned a scathing letter to his cousin Robert of Châtillon, who had begun to find the austerities at Clairvaux trying. And during that same period, he authored an *Apologia* to William of Saint-Thierry of Cluny to defend of the Cistercian way of life. *Ep* 1 (1); Bernard, *SBO*, 7: 1-11/Bernard, *Letters*, 1-10; *Apo*; Bernard, *SBO*, 3: 81-108/Bernard, “*Apologia* to William,” 3-69. Constable notes that Bernard’s *Apologia* is not aimed primarily at the Cluniacs but was probably a response to a criticism made by other black monks: Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 134 n. 32. It is also worth noting that the bulk of Bernard’s references to the “haughty virgin” appear in his four homilies on Mary, which were composed around the same time he was writing his two apologetic works. It has been difficult for scholars to date these early works, but currently most scholars agree that they were written between 1121 and 1125. On the dating of Bernard’s earliest works, see note 6 above.

Mary's virginity and the fecundity associated with it, but, for his monks, he excuses a lack of virginity and praises humility. He respects virginity but suspects it is often a hollow virtue—it is deficient in the oil of true virginity and filled, instead, with pride.

Bernard and his monks would not predominantly have been virgins. Since he defines virginity as a physical and spiritual state, chastity was much more suitable as an image for their way of life. But more than that, Bernard's interrogation of virginity might very well have been aimed at a target much more corporeal than the vice of pride. He may have been reacting to the attitude and behavior of other monks—virginal monks from traditional Benedictine communities. If so, Bernard's emphasis on the pitfalls of virginity would surely have scuffed some of the guilt off the group of monks most characterized by that ideal.

Chapter V

Ælred of Rievaulx: They were Men, Girt with Virtue

“They were men because, girt with virtue, they did manfully in all things.” These words, delivered by the Cistercian abbot Ælred of Rievaulx to his monastic community, are the first of several in his exegesis of the biblical passage, “They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven?’” (Acts 1:11). Continuing, he writes:

They were Galileans because, having crossed from one place to another, they had trampled everything that was in the world under their feet. They were standing because they had roused themselves against their foes. They were gazing up at heaven because they were seeking what was on high not what was upon the earth.¹

Here, Ælred assesses the key elements of the monastic pursuit in a manner that terrifically encapsulates so much of what the following pages claim about Ælred’s perception of monastic chastity. To him, the monk’s spiritual journey is like a strenuous and testing journey. Monks do battle with vice as if against a bitter adversary, and they look to God, not the world of ephemeral delights, for happiness. For Ælred, the paradigmatic monk is a man who has fallen prey to the world and its allurements. The paradigmatic monk is chaste. Though fallen, he now strives tirelessly to become free of carnal desires. To reclaim his place at God’s side, he rallies virile strength, dynamism, and intellectual control.

¹ *Sermo in assumptione*, Ælred, *Sermones inediti B. Ælredi Abbatis Rievallensis*, ed. C. H. Talbot, Series Scriptorum S. Ordinis Cisterciensis; 1 (Romae: Apud Curiam Generalem Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis, 1952), 173-74: “Viri erant, quia precincti virtute, viriliter in omnibus agebant. Galilei erant, quia omnia que in mundo erant, transmigracione facta sub pedibus rotaverant. Stantes erant, quia contra adversarios suos se erexerant. In celum aspiciabant, quia que sursum sunt querebant et non que super terram. Item, per stantes active vite deditos, per aspicientes in celum, contemplationi intentos intelligimus.”

1 Ælred's Life

Ælred of Rievaulx was born in 1110 to a parish priest and his wife at Hexham in Northumberland.² He had two brothers and, it seems likely, a sister. He was not of noble birth, but when he was about fourteen, King David I of Scotland took him in and raised him alongside his own son and two stepsons.³ It is probable that Ælred received some education, but scholars are uncertain as to how much or its nature.⁴ Historians do know with certainty, however, that at court a young Ælred became King David's chief steward, a job that entailed overseeing the royal table. In 1134, Ælred was dispatched to York on court business. While there, he stopped in at the newly formed Cistercian abbey at Rievaulx (the second Cistercian monastery in England). According to Ælred's medieval biographer Walter Daniel, his visit to that monastery profoundly moved Ælred and ignited a religious conversion. Thus, rather than return home, he remained at the monastery and began his yearlong novitiate as a Cistercian

² Ælred Squire's book is still considered the best authority for Ælred's textual and biographical history, Aelred Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx: A Study*, 2nd ed., Cistercian Studies Series; 50 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981). Also invaluable are Charles Dumont, "Aelred of Rievaulx: His Life and Works," *The Mirror of Charity* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 11-67; Marsha Dutton, "The Conversion and Vocation of Ælred of Rievaulx: A Historical Hypothesis," *England in the Twelfth Century: Proceedings of the 1988 Harlaxton symposium*, ed. Daniel Williams (Wolfeboro, N.H: Boydell Press, 1990), 31-50; Marsha Dutton, "Introduction," *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx (new edition)*, trans. F. M. Powicke (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994), 7-88; Douglass Roby, "Chimaera of the North: The Active Life of Aelred of Rievaulx," *Cistercian Ideals and Reality*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1978), 152-69. For Ælred's medieval biography, see Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, trans. F. M. Powicke (New York: Clarendon Press, 1978) (Latin & English) (*Vita Æl*). Powicke's translation has also been published more recently without the Latin text: Walter Daniel, *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx*, trans. F. M. Powicke, Cistercian Fathers Series; 57 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994). Within this chapter, references are to the Latin/English edition. Over the last several decades, there has been a scholarly debate about Ælred's sexuality. On this aspect of his life, see Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance*; Marsha Dutton, "Ælred of Rievaulx on Friendship, Chastity, and Sex: The Sources," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 29 (1994), 121-96; Marsha Dutton, "The Invented Sexual History of Ælred of Rievaulx: A Review Article," *American Benedictine Review* 47.4 (1996), 414-32; Brian Patrick McGuire, "Sexual Awareness and Identity in Ælred of Rievaulx," *American Benedictine Review* 45.2 (1994), 184-226; Douglass Roby, "Early Medieval Attitudes Toward Homosexuality," *Gai Saber* 1 (1977), 67-71; Katherine M. Yohe, "Sexual Attraction and the Motivations for Love and Friendship in Ælred of Rievaulx," *American Benedictine Review* 46.3 (1995), 283-307. Sommerfeldt provides a brief survey of this scholarly debate in Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 8-9.

³ Scholars do not know why King David decided to foster Ælred. Dutton discusses this matter in Dutton, "Conversion and Vocation," 38.

⁴ On Ælred's schooling, see Chrysogonus Waddell, "The Hidden Years of Ælred of Rievaulx: The Formation of a Spiritual Master," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 41.1 (2006), 57-63.

monk.⁵ Clearly, becoming a monk was the right decision for the twenty-four year old.⁶ He thrived in his new vocation: he became novice master at Rievaulx in less than ten years (in 1142); was chosen to be the abbot of Revesby, a daughter-house of Rievaulx, a year later; and, in 1147, was elected abbot of Rievaulx.

Ælred was infinitely successful within his cloister as an abbot, monk, preacher, writer, mentor, and administrator. But his life extended beyond the monastery walls, as well: he traveled regularly outside the cloister on monastic business and to meet with friends and relatives, and he advised and corresponded with powerful secular and religious leaders.⁷ He was quite ill during the last decade of his life, and, though continuing to fulfill his abbatial duties as best he could, he spent his final years in a cell near the monastery's infirmary. He died in January of 1167, when he was nearly sixty years old.⁸

2 Texts

Ælred had been a monk for almost ten years before he took up his pen to write, but once he started, he was quite prolific and composed a plethora of both spiritual and historical works.⁹ His spiritual works include sermons, treatises, meditations, and a Rule. He also wrote many letters, but, sadly, they are no longer extant. His first work, written around 1143 at the behest

⁵ *Vita Æl* 5-7; Walter Daniel, *Life of Ailred*, 10-16.

⁶ On his conversion, see Dutton, "Conversion and Vocation," 41-49; Marsha Dutton, "Aelred's Historical Works: A Mirror for Twelfth-Century England," *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 4-5.

⁷ Dutton, "Conversion and Vocation," 31.

⁸ Gron analyzes the hagiographical elements in Walter Daniel's depiction of Ælred's death in, Ryzard Gron, "The Death of Ælred of Rievaulx: Between Theory and Reality," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 43.2 (2008), 131-45.

⁹ Ælred wrote a number of historical works. For these, see Ælred, "Ailredi Abbatis Rievallensis Historia de bello standardii tempore Stephani Regis, Genealogia regum Anglorum, Vita et miraculis Edwardi Regis et Confessoris, De quodam miraculo mirabili," *Historiae Anglicanae Scriptores X*, eds. Roger Twysden and John Selden (London: Cornelius Bee, 1652)/ Ælred, *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Jane Freeland, Cistercian Fathers Series; 56 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005).

of Bernard of Clairvaux, is the treatise *Speculum caritatis* (*Speculum*).¹⁰ Written for a monastic audience while he was still novice master, the *Speculum* addresses the challenges monks encounter when embarking on the life of a religious. The Cistercian way of life was harsher than that of traditional Benedictine communities and, in asking Ælred to compose this text, Bernard hoped it would help those transferring from other communities to adapt.¹¹ Its key message to all those who might be feeling the burden of the monastic life to be too heavy, is that only love can make that load lighter but in turn, only the cross fosters love.¹² The *Speculum* has been of particular value for this study, as it presents important elements of Ælred's theology and contains bountiful evidence about the sort of spiritual advice Ælred offered the monks of his community. Ælred's other two major treatises, *De anima* (1163–66) and *De spiritali amicitia* (1164–67), are essentially continuations of the key teachings presented in the *Speculum*.¹³

Sometime between 1160 and 1162, Ælred wrote *De institutione inclusarum* (*Rule*)—a letter of instruction and guidance for his sister and her fellow recluses.¹⁴ She was a recluse and

¹⁰ *Speculum caritatis* (*Spec*); Ælred, *Speculum caritatis*, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, CCCM1, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 3–161/ Ælred, *The Mirror of Charity*, trans. Elizabeth Connor, Cistercian Fathers Series; 17 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990). When this translation is relied on for English citations, I have silently altered the English to make it gender inclusive.

¹¹ Dumont, “Life and Works,” 50.

¹² Dumont, “Life and Works,” 32; Squire, *Aelred*, 32–34.

¹³ Dumont, “Life and Works,” 32–33. Ælred, *De Anima*, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, CCCM1, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 685–754/ Ælred, *Dialogue on the Soul*, trans. C. H. Talbot, Cistercian Fathers Series; 22 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981). Ælred, *De spiritali amicitia*, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, CCCM1, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 287–350/ Ælred, *Aelred of Rievaulx. Spiritual Friendship: A New Translation*, trans. Mark F. Williams (Scranton, NJ: University of Scranton Press, 1994).

¹⁴ *De institutione inclusarum* (*Inst*); Ælred, *De institutione inclusarum*, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, CCCM1, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 637–82/ Ælred, “Rule of Life for a Recluse,” *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 2, ed. M. Basil Pennington, trans. Mary Paul Macpherson (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 43–102. It is likely that Ælred's *Rule* was strongly influenced by Jerome's well-known letter to the virgin Eustochium: Squire, *Aelred*, 119–20. See *Ep* 22; Jerome, *CSEL*54/ Jerome, *ACW*33.

apparently had been asking him for advice for some time.¹⁵ Approximately one third of the *Rule* deals with the basics of the anchoritic life—rules for eating, sleeping, speaking, praying, et cetera. This portion of the text also speaks of the various character and behavioral flaws of some recluses and admonishes the reader not to follow those examples. The rest of the work consists of teachings on the virtues and a meditation; it is intended to help the anchoress attain union with God. Ælred's *Rule* plays a vital role in my analysis of Ælred's thought, for it allows me to juxtapose the advice he gives men about spiritual perfection with the advice he offers women.

Ælred also wrote hagiographies. Among them is the *Vita Sancti Edwardi*, which he wrote in 1163 in honor of Edward the Confessor at the request of Laurence, the abbot of Westminster.¹⁶ Though this work focuses on a royal figure, it spotlights virginity (male virginity, no less). As such, it provides the reader with a valuable perspective about who can and cannot be considered a virgin, in his judgment, and how virginity for men compares with virginity for women.

Another intriguing, if somewhat random, piece of writing from Ælred is a report he wrote some time before 1166 about a nun of the monastery of Watton.¹⁷ In it, he tells of the nun's

¹⁵ Little is known about Ælred's sister. At the beginning of the *Rule*, Ælred declares that he is her brother "in flesh and in spirit" (*Ego certe qui tibi et carne et spiritu frater sum...*): *Inst* 1; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 637/Ælred, *CFS*2, 43. Squire has observed that Ælred's description of the relationship between himself and the recluse might only imply a shared spiritual devotion; however, most scholars accept that the addressee of the *Rule* was likely his biological sister: Squire, *Aelred*, 118. John Sommerfeldt investigates Ælred's perception of the solitary life as depicted in the *Rule* in, John R. Sommerfeldt, *Aelred of Rievaulx: on Love and Order in the World and the Church*, The Newman Press (New York: Newman Press, 2006), 69-81. Also, see Squire, *Aelred*, 118-28.

¹⁶ *Vita Sancti Edwardi (Vita Ed)*; Ælred, *Vita Sancti Edwardi*, *PL* 195: 737-90/Ælred, "The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor," *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, Cistercian Fathers Series; 56, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Jane Freeland (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 125-243. For an alternative translation, see Ælred, *The Life of Saint Edward: King and Confessor*, trans. Jerome Bertram (Southampton: St Austin's Press, 1997). For two other *vitae* written by Ælred, see Ælred, "De sancti ecclesiae Haugustaldensis," *The Priory of Hexham: Its Chroniclers, Endowments, and Annals*, ed. James Raine (Durham: Andrews and Co., 1864); Ælred, "Vita Niniani ab Ailredo," *Vitae antiquae sanctorum qui habitaverunt in ea parte Britanniae nunc vocata Scotia vel in ejus insulis*, ed. Johannes Pinkerton (London: Johannis Nichols, 1789). Both are translated in *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Lives of the Northern Saints*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Jane Patricia Freeland, Cistercian Father Series; 71 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006).

¹⁷ Ælred, *De sanctimoniali de Watton*, *PL* 195: 789-96/Ælred, "The Nun of Watton," trans. Jo Ann McNamara, *Magistra* 1.1 (1995), 122-37. Also, translated under the title "A Certain Wonderful Miracle," in Ælred, *Lives of*

rape by a lay brother of her monastery,¹⁸ the sexual affair that eventually developed between the two, the nun's pregnancy, and the miracle associated with those unseemly events. Though not central to my analysis, it does shed some light on Ælred's perception of female virginity.

Not only did Ælred compose numerous treatises, but also he wrote a considerable number of sermons.¹⁹ In addition to a lengthy and still extant series of homilies on Isaiah 13-16,²⁰ several other collections of his sermons survive.²¹ Most of these would have been written for a specifically Cistercian audience. Indeed, he would have preached them to his entire community on certain key days of the liturgical year. We do not know when he delivered them, but it is

Northern Saints, 109-22. For a careful analysis of Ælred's report, see Giles Constable, "Aelred of Rievaulx and the Nun of Watton: An Episode in the Early History of the Gilbertine Order," *Medieval Women*, Studies in Church History: Subsidia; 1, eds. Derek Baker and Rosalind M. T. Hill (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 205-26; Marsha L. Dutton, "A Mirror for Christian England," *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Lives of the Northern Saints*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Jane Patricia Freeland, Cistercian Father Series; 71 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006), 20-26. Other essays on this text include Elizabeth Freeman, "Nuns in the Public Sphere: Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Sanctimoniali De Wattun* and the Gendering of Authority," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 27 (1996), 55-80; Salih, "When is a Bosom Not a Bosom?," 152-65.

¹⁸ Marsha Dutton is unique in having recognized that Ælred plainly describes the first sexual encounter between the two as an occasion of sexual assault: Dutton, "A Mirror," *Lives of Northern Saints*, 22.

¹⁹ For a study of Ælred's sermons as they relate to his theology, see Philippe Nouzille, *Expérience de Dieu et théologie monastique au XIIe siècle: Étude sur les sermons d'Ælred de Rievaulx* (Paris: Cerf, 1999). Unlike many of his contemporaries, Ælred did not publish a standard version of his sermons. Thus, the multiple collections can be somewhat unwieldy and confusing; however, the various redactions they contain do differ and are worthy of notice: Bernard McGinn, "Review of Ælredi Rievallensis Sermones I-XLVI: Collectio Claraevallensis Prima et Secunda," *Church History* 59.3 (1990), 393.

²⁰ Ælred, *Ælredi Rievallensis: Homelie de oneribus prophetis Isaias, CCCM2D*, edited by Gaetano Raciti (Turnholt: Brepols, 2005) (*De oneribus*). For analyses of Ælred's commentaries on Isaiah, see Thomas Renna, "Ælred of Rievaulx and Isaiah," *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq*, Cistercian Studies Series; 160, eds. Jean Leclercq and E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 253-68; Lewis White, "Bifarie itaque potest legi: Ambivalent Exegesis in Ælred of Rievaulx's *De oneribus*," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 42.3 (2007), 299-327.

²¹ See Ælred, *Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Sermones I-XLVI, CCCM2A*, edited by Gaetano Raciti (Turnholt: Brepols, 1989) (*CCCM2A*). For English translations of some of the sermons contained in *Sermones I-XLVI, CCCM2A*: Ælred, *The Liturgical Sermons: The First Clairvaux Collection*, trans. Theodore Berkeley and M. Basil Pennington, Cistercian Fathers Series; 58 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2001) (*Lit Ser*); Ælred, "Sermons on the Feasts of Saint Mary," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 32.1 (1997), 37-125 ("Sermons"). Other collections of Ælred's sermons include Ælred, *Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Sermones XLVII-LXXXIV, CCCM2B*, edited by Gaetano Raciti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001) (*CCCM2B*); Ælred, *Sermones inediti*.

likely that he composed most during his years as abbot of Rievaulx (1147-67).²² These compositions are central to this chapter; for, as works of spiritual guidance, they help me formulate a picture of what Ælred expected of his fellow monks.

In the pages that follow, I show that like Bernard of Clairvaux, Ælred associates the monastic pursuit of perfection with chastity not virginity. But Ælred, much more so than Bernard, actively promotes chastity as the model for the monk's way of life. His portrait of the chaste monk is one of a fallen man who endeavors fervently to regain his place at God's side. It is a portrayal, I demonstrate, that describes the monastic endeavor as arduous and extremely masculine. And it stands in great contrast with the ideal he promotes for women. Despite the disparate models he upholds for the male and the female religious, he does not reject virginity as an option for men. In the end, I argue that while virginity is an ideal he accepts as attributable to men, it does not convey the message he thought would best support them in their endeavor for perfection. My investigation of Ælred's thought begins with a consideration of his anthropology; this will illuminate how he situates virginity and chastity in the pursuit of monastic perfection.

3 Union with God

The goal of the religious life, according to Ælred, is to achieve unity with God—to reform the image of God in the human soul.²³ He describes this unity in terms of love: the aim of the religious is to transform carnal love into a spiritual love of God. The cultivation of virginity or chastity supports this endeavor.

²² In his close reading of various sermons from the first Clairvaux collection (Ælred, *CCCM2A*), Waddell posits that several are from the period between 1144-47 when Ælred was Abbot of Revesby: Waddell, "The Hidden Years," 51-54.

Ælred believes humans were created with the natural inclination toward God—originally body and soul alike possessed natural faculties that reflected those of God. In their original state, human beings were wholly oriented toward God. The three aspects of God’s image in the soul—memory, understanding, and will (or love)—were all turned toward and attuned to God and his wishes.²⁴ For Ælred, Aelred Squire explains, humanity’s “original dignity consisted in freedom, power, and happiness; not just the capacity for them, but their exercise.” Prelapsarian Adam and Eve’s engagement with the world brought them only more happiness, Squire further clarifies, because conflicting desires did not fetter them.²⁵ However, by their own free will the first human couple rejected God, loving a transient good instead of God’s infinite goodness. In so doing, they lost likeness to God for themselves and for all of humanity. In Ælred’s words: “the image of God became disfigured in humanity without becoming wholly destroyed. Consequently humanity has memory but it is subject to forgetfulness, understanding but it is open to error and, none the less, love but it is prone to self-centeredness.”²⁶ This is the condition of postlapsarian humanity—a situation that can be remedied only by the soul’s reorientation to God.²⁷ Listen to Ælred’s words on the matter:

²³ Gerhart Ladner argues that reforming God’s image in the soul is the chief spiritual focus of twelfth-century Christian thinkers: Gerhart B. Ladner, “Terms and Ideas of Renewal,” *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, eds. Robert Benson and Giles Constable (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 1-33.

²⁴ *Spec* 1.3.9; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 16/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 91-92.

²⁵ Aelred Squire, “Aelred of Rievaulx and the Monastic Tradition Concerning Action and Contemplation,” *The Downside Review* 72 (1954), 295. See, for example, *Sermo* 65.5; Ælred, *CCCM2B*, 171. For Ælred’s anthropology, see *Spec* 1.3-5; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 16-19/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 91-96. Also, Damien Boquet, *L’ordre de l’affect au Moyen Âge. Autour de l’anthropologie affective d’Aelred de Rievaulx* (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2005); Amédée Hallier, *The Monastic Theology of Aelred of Rievaulx: An Experiential Theology*, trans. Columban Heaney, Cistercian Studies Series; 2 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), 10-18; Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*.

²⁶ *Spec* 1.4.12; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 17; Ælred, *Mirror*, 93: “Corrupta est itaque in homine Dei imago, non abolita penitus. Proinde habet memoriam, sed obnoxiam obliuioni, scientiam quoque sed subditam errori, nihilominus et amorem, sed pronum cupiditati.”

²⁷ For Ælred’s doctrine of charity, see Hallier, *Monastic Theology*, 26-33; Shawn Madison Krahmer, “Loving ‘in God’: An Examination of the Hierarchical Aspects of the *Ordo Caritatis* in Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx,” *American Benedictine Review* 50.1 (1999), 74-93.

Our love, infected by the venom of self-centeredness and wretchedly ensnared in the birdlime of pleasure, was by its own weight being dragged down ever lower from vice to vice. But when charity, flowing in from above, by its warmth melts our inborn sloth, our love lifts itself to higher levels, sheds its oldness for newness, and is given the silvered pinions of a dove, to fly to that pure and sublime Goodness....²⁸

Charity—love properly ordered—is the key to the soul’s ascent but misguided love is the obstacle.²⁹ When humans are unhampered by worldly desire and passion, they are free to experience the love that unites them with God in contemplative tranquility.

Here, then, is where chastity and virginity enter the equation. For the religious, passions include every desire not oriented toward God—this includes food, sleep, worldly comforts, and sexual passion. By embracing chastity or virginity and other virtues, the religious throws off the shackles of misdirected love and readies him- or herself for unity with God.

4 Monastic Chastity

In the texts Ælred composed for his fellow monks, he characterizes their way of life as chaste. In his assessment, chastity has a central function in the monastic endeavor for perfection: in book three of the *Speculum* he refers to renunciation of the world, chastity, and austerity as the three sacrifices of the monastic profession;³⁰ elsewhere in the *Speculum*, temperance (chastity’s virtue) is both one of six and one of four virtues leading to charity;³¹ and in one of his sermons on the Assumption of Mary, chastity and humility are the two qualities that lead to unity with

²⁸ *Spec* 1.8.25; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 22/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 100: “Amor quippe noster ueneno cupiditatis infectus, tenacique uoluptatis uisco miserabiliter irretitus, qui in ima semper, id est, de uitio in uitium proprio pondere ferebatur, caritate desuper influente, ac innatum torporem suo calore dissolvente, ad altiora se surrigit, sicque exuens uetustatem, ac induens nouitatem, sortitur pennas columbae deargentatas, quibus ad illud sublime et purum bonum euolet....”

²⁹ *Spec* 1.8.24; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 22/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 100.

³⁰ *Spec* 3.34.80; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 144/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 278: “Itaque saeculi abrenuntiatio, castitatis propositum, cuiuslibet arctioris uitae professio, inter uoluntaria sacrificia computantur.”

³¹ *Spec* 1.31-32; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 51-54/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 139-44.

God.³² The account of chastity included in his sermon on John the Baptist is his most detailed and is worth quoting at length:

Although it [chastity] is of little or no use without the other virtues, just as they are of little or no use without it, still the absence of any other is easier to bear for a time than the absence of chastity. Indeed, it has a prerogative which gives it a special luster among the other virtues: not only is it, like them, concerned with a quality of the soul but it invests the corruptible flesh itself with a real incorruptibility. It gives it a foretaste of some of the delights of the future resurrection.... Among all the other virtues this is the one which merits the company of the angels, the approach of Holy Spirit and, even more intimately, the embrace of “the fairest among the sons of men” (Ps 44:3 [45:2]).³³

Here, he makes clear that chastity is one of many virtues. Yet, like Guibert in his consideration of virginity, Ælred deems chastity paramount because it alone involves the whole being—body and soul—in its yearning for happiness and God’s Grace. Ælred’s thought is not systematic; still, these examples reveal that for him, chastity has a fundamental role in the monastic life.

Overall, in Ælred’s perception, monastic chastity seems to connote both renunciation of the world and sexual renunciation.³⁴ For example, after naming the three voluntary sacrifices of the monastic profession—worldly renunciation, chastity, and a stricter life—he says about chastity: “no defilement of the flesh is licit after a promise of chastity.”³⁵ Since this trinity of sacrifices includes both worldly renunciation and chastity, “no defilement of the flesh” would

³² *Sermo* (*Ser*) 19; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 147-54/ Ælred, “Sermons,” 45-50.

³³ *Ser* 14.20-21; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 119/ Ælred, *Lit Ser*, 225: “Praeter miseram paene zonam illam pelliceam, quae uirtutem significat castitatis. In cuius uirtutis excellentia puritas cordis maxime consistit. Quae quamuis, sicut aliae uirtutes sine illa, ita illa sine aliis aut parum aut nihil prosit, tolerabilius tamen est ad tempus alia qualibet quam illa carere. Inter ceteras denique quodam speciali priuilegio fulget, quae non solum, ut ceterae uirtutes, circa animae se habet qualitatem, uerum ipsam carnem corruptibilem ad quandam transfert incorruptionem, faciens eam futurae illius resurrectionis quandam praegustare dulcedinem.... Haec est illa quae inter ceteras uirtutes angelicum consortium, Spiritus Sancti accessum et familiarius ‘ipsius speciosi forma prae filiis hominum’ (Ps 44:3 [45:2]) meretur amplexum.” Also, see *Ser* 65.18, 20; Ælred, *CCCM2B*, 175.

³⁴ Sommerfeldt believes Ælred chiefly understands chastity as renunciation of the world: Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 98-100.

³⁵ *Spec* 3.34.80; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 144/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 278: “...post uotum castitatis illicita sit quaelibet carnis corruptio....”

appear to refer specifically to sexual renunciation. Of course, what is expected of monks is not merely physical; chastity requires that he cultivate virtue internally as well as externally. This is the message in one of his sermons on Isaiah. There are three kinds of chastity, he tells his listeners: chastity of the flesh, chastity of the senses, and spiritual chastity. Chastity of the flesh entails restraint from illicit behavior (*coinquatio*). Chastity of the senses requires the body's sense organs to reject illicit pleasure. Spiritual chastity means that the eyes and heart expel unclean attachments and impure thoughts before they 'lay hold of the flesh'. The laity, he says, must only concern itself with chastity of the flesh. But monks must temper all of the senses, interior and exterior.³⁶ Though not entirely self-evident, one might take these statements as examples of chastity as 'renunciation of the world,' a rejection of all things that draw the senses away from God. Similarly, he writes elsewhere in plainer words: "Above all, it is necessary that one imitate the nakedness of Christ through the renunciation of worldliness, and so through chastity prepare the soul and body that they might be worthy to be the dwelling place of Christ."³⁷ In these different ways, Ælred speaks of chastity as the virtue that involves a rejection of all transient pleasures including (and sometimes especially) sexuality. He calls upon that ideal to remind monks that their trek back to God cannot progress without bodily and spiritual discipline. And a trek it is.

³⁶ *De oneribus* 6.13-14; Ælred, *CCCM2D*, 63: "Sciendum autem est quia est castitas carnalis, castitas sensualis, castitas spiritalis. Castitas carnalis est si homo uoluntatem suam ab omni illicita coinquatione cohibeat. Castitas sensualis si membrorum omnium sensus ab omni illicita delectatione contineat. Castitas spiritalis si omnes affectiones immundas cogitationesque impuras a cordis sui oculis abigens, eas priusquam carnem affectumque perstringant eiciat. Eia carissimi, carnali illi populo, cui sola carnalia sapiebant, temporalis quaedam sanctificatio indicebatur, illam quae solius carnis est a membris tantum inferioribus libidinem arcens; nobis non modo illa perpetua praecipitur, sed omnium insuper sensuum castigatio sacratori lege imponitur, ut mundemur etiam 'ab omni inquinamento carnis et spiritus' (2 Cor 7:1), et sic perficiatur in nobis sanctificatio, non unum corporis nostri membrum castitatis legibus subdens, sed omnes interioris extiorisque hominis sensus perpetuo sibi iure submittens." For another example of chastity as worldly renunciation, see *Ser* 9.22; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 75/ Ælred, *Lit Ser*, 162-63.

³⁷ *Ser* 65.20; Ælred, *CCCM2B*, 175: "Primum quippe necesse est ut per mundi abrenuntiationem imitetur nuditatem Christi, et sic per pudicitiam praeparet animam et corpus et mereantur esse habitaculum Christi."

4.1 Father I Have Sinned

In Ælred's perception, chaste monks are fallen men whose spiritual journey entails a humble and arduous return to God. For them, Ælred constructs a rocky religious path that makes central and almost glorifies the individual's potential or actual fall from Grace (including the possibility of lost virginity). According to Ælred's anthropology, human beings were created in dignity but willfully retreated from God and plunged into wretchedness. Only then did they recognize their error and turn back to God to find redemption through Christ.³⁸ This is Ælred's outlook on the human condition, but it is also how he views his own religious journey, and it is the path to religious perfection that he champions for his brethren.

To be sure, Ælred was himself the paradigmatic chaste sinner. Indeed, it appears that he and his contemporaries all acknowledged that Ælred was not a sexually innocent virgin. In the *Rule* he penned for his sister, Ælred claims that he had lost his purity before becoming a monk.³⁹ And his medieval companions tell a similar story about Ælred's life experience before entering the cloister. When his medieval biographer, Walter Daniel, depicted Ælred as "living like a monk" even while residing at King David's court, other monks rebuked him. They claimed that Ælred had occasionally "deflowered his virginity" (*uirginitatem suam... deflorauerit*) before entering Rievaulx and should not be characterized in that manner (as "living like a monk"). In his rebuttal, Walter Daniel plainly agrees with their assessment of Ælred's sexual state, but explains that he was merely speaking metaphorically.⁴⁰ The monks who chastised Walter Daniel unmistakably revered and admired Ælred, but they did not think

³⁸ Hallier, *Monastic Theology*, 10-18.

³⁹ *Inst* 18, 32; Ælred, CCCM1, 653-54, 673-76/ Ælred, *Ælred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer*, ed. M. Basil Pennington, trans. Mary Paul Macpherson, The Cistercian Fathers Series; 2 (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 66-67, 92-95. More on this in the paragraphs that follow.

⁴⁰ For Walter Daniel's original statement about Ælred's early piety, see *Vita Æl* 2; Walter Daniel, *Life of Ailred*, 2, 4. For his description of the criticism and his rebuttal, see *Ep ad Mauricium* 4; Walter Daniel, *Life of Ailred*, 75-76.

portraying him as a virgin was the proper way to lionize him. Clearly, Ælred's sexual status was integral to how he understood himself and how his contemporaries saw him. And this is the image—that of the chaste sinner—that he upholds as a model of the exemplary monk.

Ælred's description of himself in the *Rule* best reveals the characteristics of the chaste monk's religious endeavor.⁴¹ Ælred began his mortal journey with every opportunity; he had the same advantages as his sister. However, like Adam in the Garden, Ælred rejected God; he chose a transient good instead of eternal Goodness. In so doing, he fell out of fellowship with God and found himself wallowing alone in the morass of his fleshly desires. “The words of the wicked men prevailed over me’ (Ps 64:4),” he confesses:

They gave me the poison of wantonness to drink in the sweet cup of love. The combination of the sweetness of affection and the impurity of desire destroyed my still inexperienced age by the steep descent of sins, and engulfed me in the whirlpool of debauchery.⁴²

At a certain point, Ælred further explains, with God inspiring and helping he realized what he had become, dragged himself out of the mire, and began his march back to God.

The disparity between his chaste spiritual condition and that of his sister (the recluse and quintessential virgin) is immense. In the *Rule* he refers repeatedly to the gulf that divides him and his sibling: “[God] separated you from me as he divided light from darkness, keeping you for himself, abandoning me to myself;”⁴³ “As often as you were tempted... your chastity was preserved, while I willingly embraced all that is base, I amassed material for the fire to burn

⁴¹ *Inst 32*; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 673-77/Ælred, *CFS2*, 92-97.

⁴² Trans. mine. *Inst 32*; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 674/Ælred, *CFS2*, 94: “Verba’ enim ‘iniquorum praeualuerunt super me’ (Ps 64:4), qui in suaui poculo amoris propinabant mihi uenenum luxuriae, conuenientesque in unum affectionis suauias et cupiditatis impuritas rapiebant imbecillem adhuc aetatem meam per abrupta uitiorum atque mersabant gurgite flagitiorum.” Also, see *Spec* 1.28; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 46-48/Ælred, *Mirror*, 133-36.

⁴³ Trans. mine. *Inst 32*; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 674/Ælred, *CFS2*, 93: “Diuisit enim inter te et me quasi inter lucem et tenebras, te sibi conseruans, me mihi relinquens...”

me, for stench to stifle me, for worms to gnaw me;”⁴⁴ “...how much more happy is the man whose ship, full of merchandise and loaded with riches, is brought to a safe homecoming by favorable winds than he who suffers shipwreck and barely escapes death with the loss of all?”⁴⁵ Unlike the ever-pious virgin, the chaste sinner is desolate and bereft—a daunting chasm separates him from God.

To rectify his dire condition, the monk must strive to gain what he has lost. To do so he requires God’s inspiration and assistance in a dynamic spiritual journey. Ælred sees no better way to portray the repentant sinner’s spiritual endeavor than through the images of the prodigal son and the lost sheep of Jesus’s parables.⁴⁶ In the story of the prodigal son, the younger of two brothers claims his inheritance from his father only to leave home and squander it on bad living. However, the money quickly runs out, and he is forced to live in squalor and filth. At that point, he realizes the error of his ways and returns to his father to beg forgiveness. Upon arriving home, his father welcomes him warmly and organizes a grand celebration in his son’s honor. This enthusiastic reception disturbs the older son who had remained always at his parent’s side. In response to that son’s anger, the father replies: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found”

⁴⁴ Trans. mine. *Inst 32*; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 674/Ælred, *CFS2*, 93-94: “Quotiens tentata...tua tibi est castitas reseruata, cum ego libens in turpia quaeque progrediens, coaceruauī mihi materiam ignis quo comburerer, materiam foetoris quo necarer, materiam uermium a quibus corroderer.”

⁴⁵ *Inst 32*; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 675/Ælred, *CFS2*, 95: “...quam felicior ille est cuius nauim plenam mercibus et onustam diuitiis flatus mitior integram reuexit in portum, quam qui passus naufragium, uix nudus mortem euasit.”

⁴⁶ Hallier has made a similar observation: Hallier, *Monastic Theology*, 10. For an analysis of Ælred’s treatment of the prodigal ideal in the *Rule*, see Marsha D. Stuckey, “A Prodigal Writes Home: Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De institutione inclusarum*,” *Heaven on Earth*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 35-42.

(Lk 15:31-32). Not only is the repentant sinner forgiven, but too his homecoming is marked by an especial fête.⁴⁷

For Ælred and other Christians, the parables of the prodigal son and the lost lamb show that God extends his Grace with singular joy to the wanderer who returns. And these are precisely the images Ælred enlists to depict the chaste monk (with himself as that type of seeker *par excellence*). Look at how the white monk writes of himself in the *Speculum*:

I became a place of gloom and misery for myself, a place of horror and a region of destitution. “I shall arise, therefore, and go to my Father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you” (Lk 15:18).⁴⁸

And in his treatise, *Jesus at the Age of Twelve*, he laments: “I, yes I, am that prodigal son who took to himself his share of the inheritance, for I did not wish to preserve my strength for you and set out for a distant land.... There I squandered all I owned in riotous living and so I began to feel want.⁴⁹ And in the *Rule*: “Where could a stray sheep go, where could it hide, when it had lost its shepherd? Sister, a wild beast devoured your brother.”⁵⁰ When he portrays the monk’s journey in this way, he implies that, even though the monk is a sinner who has rejected God, with God helping, he can make the laborious journey back to the loving embrace of his Father.

⁴⁷ This same sentiment is expressed by the parable of the lost sheep: Mt 18:11-13, Lk 15:4-6.

⁴⁸ *Spec* 1.7.23; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 21-22/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 99-100: “...factus sum mihimet locus miseriae et tenebrarum, locus horroris et regio egestatis. ‘Surgam ergo et ibo ad Patrem, et dicam ei: Pater, peccaui in caelum, et coram te’ (Lk 15:18).”

⁴⁹ *De Jesu* 1.3; Ælred, *De Jesu puero duodenni*, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, *CCCM1*, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), 251/ Ælred, *CFS2*, 6: “Ego, ego prodigus ille filius, qui accepi ad me substantiam meam, nolens custodire ad te fortitudinem meam, profectus sum in regionem longinquam.... Ibi dissipavi omnia mea uiuendo luxuriose, et sic coepi egere.”

⁵⁰ *Inst* 32; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 674/ Ælred, *CFS2*, 93: “Quo iret uel ubi lateret ouis erronea, suo destituta pastore? O soror, fera pessima deuorauit fratrem tuum.” For another example, see *Ser* 34.16; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 282/ Ælred, “Sermons,” 109-10.

By conceptually identifying monks with certain wanderers of the Gospel, Ælred numbers cloistered men amongst those who might be saved. Christian theologians, drawing on their Greco-Roman predecessors, had consistently linked men with spirit and divinity.⁵¹ However, the Bible explicitly promises redemption for the humble and meek. This posed a problem for the male religious: how could they hope for salvation, if they shared such striking similarities with the Divine? Frequently, monastic writers dealt with this problem by applying characteristics to monks that typically were identified as feminine.⁵² Women were linked conceptually with weakness, the sensible world, and flesh; therefore, Christian writers sought to bring men closer to humanity by attributing feminine traits to them.⁵³ For his part, Ælred identifies monks as amongst those who would be saved by portraying them as self-effacing sinners who have strayed but have turned back to God in earnest.

Ælred's treatment of the chaste sinner's fall and return is intriguing. For, when one reads his *Rule*, there is a sense that the monk's way of life may be more laudable and more appreciated by God than that of the monk's anchoritic counterpart. For instance, after making a series of comparisons between her exalted state and his own wretched lot, Ælred says that in a certain respect, she should emulate him. She is adorned with riches, while he must struggle to repair all the damage he has wrought; thus, she might become negligent of her spiritual state, whereas he will diligently soldier on. About this, he says:

⁵¹ Medieval perceptions of gender and sex difference will be taken up at greater length below. On this linking of man with spirit and divinity, see Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26-58; Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 81-102.

⁵² See Bynum, "...and Woman His Humanity," 268-73; Caroline Walker Bynum, "Men's Use of Female Symbols," *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, eds. Barbara H. Rosenwein and Lester K. Little (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 277-84; Newman, *WomanChrist*, 25-26.

⁵³ Martha G. Newman, "Crucified by the Virtues: Monks, Lay Brothers, and Women in Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Saints' Lives," *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, *Medieval Cultures*; 32, eds. Sharon A. Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 193.

How you would have to blush if after all my sins I were found equal to you in the next life. The glory of virginity is often tarnished by vices... while the reformation of a man's life and the replacement of vices by virtues can cancel the infamy of his former behavior.⁵⁴

She must imitate him, if she does not want to lose her status.

Furthermore, as I have shown, one of Ælred's techniques in the *Rule* is to foil his own spiritual condition with that of his sister. The virgin recluse has never fallen out of fellowship with God while he is a destitute sinner:

As I, who have destroyed my chastity, am wretched, so you, whose virginity God's grace protected, are blessed. As often as you were tempted, as often as you were assailed, your chastity was preserved for you....⁵⁵

In so doing, he lavishes unbounded praise upon the virgin and expresses obvious shame for the choices he made in his own life.⁵⁶ Yet, his portrayal also brings to mind the stories of the prodigal son and the lost lamb. For, if the monk is the younger son who departed but returned in humility, the virginal recluse is surely the older brother—she is the loyal child who never left her father's side. If monks are the sheep that strayed, recluses are those that remained at

⁵⁴ *Inst 32*; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 675-76/Ælred, *CFS2*, 95-96: "Verumtamen et me nolo aemuleris, ualdeque putes erubescendum, si post tot flagitia, in illa uita tibi fuero inuentus aequalis, cum saepe uirginitatis gloriam... quaedam uitia minuant, et ueteris conuersationis opprobrium morum mutatio et succedentes uitiis uirtutes oblitterent."

⁵⁵ Trans. mine. *Inst 32*; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 674/Ælred, *CFS2*, 93-94: "Quam miser ego tunc qui meam pudicitiam perdi, tam beata tu, cuius uirginitatem gratia diuina protexit. Quotiens tentata, quotiens impetita, tua tibi est castitas reseruata...." The contrast Ælred makes between the monk's dynamic religious endeavor and the recluse's passive responsibility to preserve her virginity is a characteristic Barbara Newman noticed as one of the key distinctions between religious advice offered to monks and to religious women during the eleventh and twelfth centuries: Newman, *WomanChrist*, 8, 29, 44-45. Dutton argues that in Ælred's *Rule*, preservation is not the recluse's only 'job'. From her privileged position, she should meditate and strive to achieve contemplative union with God: Marsha Dutton, "Christ our Mother: Aelred's Iconography for Contemplative Union," *Goad and Nail*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 21-45. Also, see Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, "Ælred of Rievaulx: The Recluse and Death According to the *Vita Inclusarum*," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 34.2 (1999), 192-96. For an alternative view, see Sommerfeldt, who argues that Ælred does not refer to contemplation (in the sense of mystical union) with reference to recluses but refers only to meditation (meaning spiritual activity involving human effort): John R. Sommerfeldt, "The Vocabulary of Contemplation in Aelred of Rievaulx's *On Jesus at the Age of Twelve*, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, and *On Spiritual Friendship*," *Heaven on Earth* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 75-76. Also, see Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 120-37.

their shepherd's side. By extension, as wanderers who have returned, Ælred and his monks can anticipate a particularly joyous welcome from God, while the pious virgin will be received as one who has never lost her way. Though she has always retained her Father's love, she will be denied that distinctive celebration reserved for the repentant sinner.

According to Ælred's understanding of Christian society, it is likely he understood the spiritual merit of the recluse and the chaste sinner as 'separate but equal'. He imagines society divided according to three orders: the natural order (the married), the necessary order (clerics), and the voluntary order. The voluntary order is comprised of members of monastic groups who choose to reject what is natural and commit to renunciation of the world, chastity and a stricter life.⁵⁷

Therefore, recluses and monks both belong to the voluntary order. However, he compartmentalizes each group's way of life:

There is... a specific and most excellent room readied [in heaven] for monks, and the standards to which monks ought to adhere, if they wish to attain that room, are written out. Solitaries have their own room—if they hold to the law which is established for those who direct their path toward that room.⁵⁸

Monks and solitaries follow different paths to spiritual perfection, which entail a different set of rules and expectations. Both can also look forward to a heavenly dwelling prepared by God especially for that particular state of life: monks and recluses each have a 'specific and most

⁵⁶ *Inst* 32; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 673-77/Ælred, *CFS2*, 92-97.

⁵⁷ *Spec* 3.32-34; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 141-45/Ælred, *Mirror*, 273-79. On his treatment of the three orders, see Constable, "Orders of Society," 299-300. This may have been Ælred's way of asserting the superiority and distinctiveness of monks and other regular religious in the face of the new adamantly celibate and chaste status expected of all members of the higher clergy. For, according to his description, although both groups are chaste and celibate, only the regular religious take on that ideal *voluntarily*.

⁵⁸ *Ser* 43.3; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 336/trans. in Sommerfeldt, *On Love and Order*, 32-33: "Nam et monachis excellentissima quaedam mansio praeeparata est, et scripta est mensura quam oportet monachum tenere, si ad illam

excellent room' readied for them in heaven. Accordingly, their religious endeavor is one of complementarity. Monks and solitaries lead different lives, and God will honor each in heaven according to his or her manner of life. In spite of all of this (his great praise of his sister's religious state, and his belief that each will be given a 'special room'), I cannot escape the sense that the chaste sinner not the ever-pious believer is the one whose religious endeavor captures God's particular notice.⁵⁹

Like Bernard of Clairvaux, Ælred's portrayal of the monastic pursuit was affected by his own and his community's life experience. Ælred, like Bernard (his older contemporary), was a Cistercian abbot responsible for a group of men who were probably, for the most part, not virgins.⁶⁰ Also, like Bernard, Ælred himself was probably not a sexually inexperienced virgin when he became a monk. Both men endorse chastity not virginity as a monastic ideal. And (as I show shortly), much more than Bernard, Ælred proffers chastity as a model for the monastic pursuit. Central to the ideal he upholds for them is the monk's fallen state—monks were repentant sinners. In her analysis of the reaction caused by Walter Daniel's depiction of Ælred as perpetually pious, Jacqueline Murray has commented that Ælred's lack of virginity enhanced the value of his monastic chastity rather than detract from it.⁶¹ She is right. Ælred embodied the ideal he promoted to his fellow monks. His own status as a chaste sinner coupled with the model of the chaste monk he espouses to his monks would have been appealing, comforting, and inspiring for a group of men themselves quite familiar with the pleasures of the world.

mansionem uoluerit ascendere. Habent et solitarii suam mansionem, si tenuerint legem quae stabilita est illis qui tendunt ad illam mansionem." Also, see *Ser* 3.5; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 28/Ælred, *Lit Ser*, 92-93.

⁵⁹ Bos has also noticed this implication: Bos, "Literature of Spiritual Formation," 208.

⁶⁰ See chapters 3 and 4 on Rupert of Deutz and Bernard of Clairvaux for more thorough discussions of the Cistercians and their sexual status.

⁶¹ Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life," 35.

4.2 They Did Manfully in All Things

Ælred's depiction of the monk as the wanderer who returns had the effect of positioning monks alongside those who might be saved. But it also gave monks an opportunity to demonstrate their masculinity in their journey back to God. In the following pages, I investigate the words and metaphors that Ælred utilizes when considering the monk's religious endeavor. I show that he associates the monastic way of life with strength, agency, and authority. These are characteristics I have chosen to call "masculine," given Ælred's own tendency to use the term *virilis* in these contexts. He also applies a set of ideas to women, which he explicitly opposes to the masculine terms, and I refer to these as "feminine." Before delving into Ælred's texts, it will be useful to lay bare some of the behaviors and qualities medieval people typically identified as appropriately male or appropriately female.

During the Middle Ages, gender was constructed in a variety of ways and in a number of different discourses. Thinkers within and across the various fields did not present a single homogenous model for each sex; however, it is possible to broadly characterize the gender expectations underwritten by many of them. Medieval theological constructions of masculinity and femininity were largely based on explanations and interpretations offered by patristic writers, who themselves had fused the Greco-Roman worldview with their own Christian perspective. As noted earlier, Christian thinkers typically thought men represented the mind and belonged to the spiritual realm whereas women, carnal and sexual by nature, were of the physical realm. Furthermore, they thought the social roles of each sex were reflective of this division.⁶² They considered men rational (dominated by mental activity) and strong and

⁶² Salisbury, "The Latin Doctors," 280. Also, see Jacqueline Murray, "Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 126-27.

believed these characteristics gave men authority and power—moral power and power to act.⁶³ Conversely, they thought women naturally passive and submissive.⁶⁴ These theological and canonical perceptions of sex difference were supported by medieval medical theories, which relied heavily on the thought of Aristotle and of Galen. The theories of these two men were different, but both supported a gender construction that evaluated men as active and dominant and women as passive and subordinate. For example, Aristotle claimed that man is closer to perfection, and, as such, is properly the dominant, active force in social and sexual relationships.⁶⁵ Medieval humoral theory further promoted these perceptions of gender and sex difference. According to this theory, human dispositions differed depending on how the four qualities of hot, cold, moist, and dry came together in each individual. Different combinations of the four qualities gave rise to different character types, which were connected to different sexes and different social expectations. For example, women were most commonly associated with cold and moist, which in humoral theory supported the idea of woman as sedentary. Men were thought to be hot and dry, and that defined them as active.⁶⁶ In sum, during the Middle Ages, certain characteristics were seen as attributable to men; these masculine qualities included being active, dominant, rational, and authoritative. Other characteristics were associated with women; among these feminine qualities were passivity, subordination, and being dominated by the senses and the passions of the body. Ælred summons most of these qualities—masculine and feminine—in his characterizations of recluses and monks. But the masculine qualities are those that merge to form his portrait of the exemplary monk and his religious endeavor.

⁶³ Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 82-86.

⁶⁴ Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 87-88.

⁶⁵ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 20-25. For Galen’s perspective, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 33-34; Murray, “Universal Man,” 127.

⁶⁶ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 184.

4.1.1 *He gives birth to a boy*

According to Ælred, success as a monk requires virile strength. He makes this point lucidly in Sermon 33, which takes its lead from the Leviticus verse, “a woman who receives seed and bears a male shall be unclean seven days” (*mulier quae suscepto semine parit masculum*) (12:2). “Woman” in this passage, he explains, should be understood spiritually. In its spiritual sense, he continues, “woman” can negatively signify indecisiveness, tenderness, and weakness (*mollitiem et teneritudinem et infirmitatem*); it can also positively denote fruitfulness and the love women have for their children. He then takes these ideas and applies them to the life experiences of cloistered men. Ruminating on the birthing imagery of the verse (she “bears a male”), he determines that the soul engenders either a male (*masculum*) or a female (*feminam*) depending on the way of life a person chooses to live. Some, whose way of life is weak and imperfect, give birth to a female; others, whose work is strong and perfect, give birth to a male (*femina significat infirmum et imperfectum opus; masculus, forte et perfectum*). The soul that gives birth to a male, he concludes, is the soul who follows the way of evangelical perfection.⁶⁷ Thus, the pious monk gives birth to a male. Likewise, he enlists the verse “and women rule over them” (3:12) from Isaiah, to depict his brethren’s condition, before they entered the cloister. At that time, they were like “women” in the negative sense of that word: “[w]hen you were in the world, when you had a taste for nothing but the flesh, when you were fond of fleshly softness (*mollitiem carnis*), tenderness (*teneritudinem*), and vices, then your soul was a woman, and an immoral woman....” They were like “women” negatively understood, he explains, because “‘women’ signifies those who were easily movable (*molles*), delicate (*delicati*), and had nothing manly (*uirile*) about them.”⁶⁸ From this, it can be inferred that monks who successfully reject

⁶⁷ *Ser* 33.9-14; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 268-70/ Ælred, “Sermons,” 98-99.

⁶⁸ *Ser* 33.8; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 268-69/ Ælred, “Sermons,” 98: “In mala significatione ponitur in Isaia, ubi dicitur de Iudaeis: ‘Et mulieres dominabuntur eis’ (Is 3:12). Significant enim hic ‘mulieres’ illos qui molles erant et delicati et

the world and its lures are manly or masculine. Indeed, he makes this conclusion apparent in his “Sermon for All Saints,” amidst a consideration of the biblical passage “[t]hese are the men of mercy” (Sir 44:10). There, he writes:

This word ‘man’ (*vir*) means a certain strength of soul and the good zeal that ‘men of mercy’ have, which leads them to punish sins in themselves and others. By this strength of soul and good zeal, the saints trample underfoot all that is earthly....⁶⁹

He makes a similar point in a different place when he avers that those who “seek nothing but the things that pertain to the body” and think only about “how to be idle, be satiated, and be at rest” are not human beings but beasts. Furthermore, they are not oxen or bulls; they are cows. That is, they are not animals that are gendered masculine in Latin—*boves* and *tauri*—but the femininely gendered *vaccae*. “[b]ecause by soft living they lost whatever is manly in a person, they are rightly called by a feminine, not a masculine name.”⁷⁰ This is apparent, too, in another sermon in which he refers to the chastity of philosophers and other non-Christians: “There were some who without faith in Christ thought that by their own strength they could be justified and approach God.... They brought forth sons, namely, by doing manly works (*uirilia*

nihil uirile in se habebant. Sic quando eratis in saeculo, quando nihil nisi carnem sapiebatis, quando mollitiem carnis et teneritudinem et uitia amabatis, utique mulier erat anima uestra, et ‘mulier’ uitiosa....”

⁶⁹ *Ser All Saints*; Paris, B.N. *ms. nouv. acq. lat.* 294, ff. 108-9^v/Gaetano Raciti, “L’option préférentielle pour les faibles dans le modèle communautaire aelrédien,” *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 55 (1993), 191 n. 9 (Latin)/Gaetano Raciti, “The Preferential Option for the Weak in the Ælredian Community Model,” trans. Giles Conacher, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 32.1 (1997), 9 (Trans.): “Hoc nomen vir robur quoddam significat animi et zelum bonum quem habent ‘viri misericordiae’, quo in se sua et in aliis aliena peccata puniunt. Hoc robore animi et zelo bono sancti terrena calcant....”

⁷⁰ *Ser 34.9*; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 281/Ælred, “Sermons,” 108: “Qui igitur sic uiuit, qui nihil aliud tota die nisi de uentre cogitat, quomodo possit otiari, saturari, requiescere, utique non dici potest de eo, sicut dicitur de sancto Simeone, quod scilicet homo sit, sed potius uacca aut sus, sicut quosdam uocat propheta: Audite me, inquit, uaccas pingues. Non sane his uerbis irrationales uaccas ad se uocat audiendum, sed illos qui more uaccarum de nulla alia re nisi de uentre cogitant. Quos noluit uocare boues aut tauros, sed uaccas. Quia enim molliter uiuendo quidquid in homine uirile est perdidierunt, merito non masculino sed feminino nomine appellantur.”

opera) such as abstinence, scorn of the world, and continence of the flesh.”⁷¹ And let us not forget the quote with which this chapter began: “They were men (*vir*) because, girt with virtue, they did manfully (*viriliter*) in all things.”⁷² Plainly, Ælred thinks monasticism is an arduous way of life requiring virility, strength, and self-governance—all qualities opposite of the spiritual understanding of ‘woman’ in its negative sense.

4.2.1 *A wall utterly strong*

In addition to the language he uses, which contrasts the virile behavior proper to the monastic pursuit with feminine behavior that is not, Ælred’s treatises and sermons for men regularly use images of might and power to describe both the soul and the practice of monastic observances. For example, he warns: “Indeed you know, brother that from the day you came here and began to serve Christ, you entered a place of battle. That is why Solomon says: ‘...be strong and prepare your soul for temptation.’”⁷³ And, in the *Speculum*, he explains that everything about the monastic pursuit of perfection requires a demonstration of vigor: inward strength is that by which a monk combats temptation with daily practice, and with outward strength, he endures physical toil with an even temper.⁷⁴ Likewise, Sermon 19 on Mary’s Assumption takes a fortress or castle as its central metaphor.⁷⁵ Jesus entered a certain fortress, he explains, and that stronghold is the soul. To ensure that Christ will enter the soul, the monk must prepare it spiritually with three things: a moat, a wall, and a tower. The moat is humility, the wall

⁷¹ *Ser* 5.9; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 48/ Ælred, “Sermons,” 40: “Fuerunt nonnulli qui sine fide Christi propria uirtute se putabant posse iustificari et uenire ad Deum.... Generabant filios, id est uirilia opera faciebant in abstinentia, in contemptu mundi et continentia carnis.”

⁷² *Sermo in assumptione*, Ælred, *Sermones inediti*, 173-74: “Viri erant, quia precincti uirtute, uiriliter in omnibus agebant.”

⁷³ *Ser* 17.2; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 134/ Ælred, *Lit Ser*, 245-46: “...sta fortiter et praepara animam tuam ad temptationem.”

⁷⁴ *Spec* 3.35.81; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 145/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 278-79: “Vires dico interiores, quibus contra tentationum bella exercitatione quotidiana confligat; uires exteriores, quibus corporalium laborum onera infatigabili longanimitate toleret.”

⁷⁵ *Ser* 19; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 147-54/ Ælred, “Sermons,” 45-50.

chastity, and the tower charity. About chastity, he writes: “That spiritual wall is chastity. The wall that preserves the flesh integral and undefiled is truly strong.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, these are not qualities already enjoyed by the monk but edifices he must secure for himself with his fortitude—they are characteristics that the monk must prepare (*praeparare*), make (*facere*), dig (*fodere*), and build (*aedificare*).⁷⁷ When a monk strives for spiritual perfection, when he builds a wall of chastity, he enlists and demonstrates his interior strength. Again, in a sermon for the Feast of Peter’s Chair, Ælred describes the different types of monks and the nature of their religious practice. Monks have different levels of grit: some are weaker, some stronger, and others perfect. God gives constant affection to the weaker, but he expects more of those who are stalwart and those who are perfect. He orders the strong and the perfect,

...to stand up to difficulties, to contend against enemies far and near, against the vices of body and soul and against the powers of darkness that stir up their vices and call them to account for their faults. Thus they may labor like strong men and fully fit athletes, manfully fighting the Lord’s battles for themselves and their younger and weaker brethren.⁷⁸

The weak monk, Ælred explains in a different sermon, is “the undisciplined and wandering brother who, oppressed by weakness of the flesh, is not capable of bearing the full rigor of the discipline of the Rule.”⁷⁹ Chastity and the monastic pursuit require tremendous might; indeed, that way of life is so demanding that not all can bear up to what is required.

⁷⁶ *Ser* 19.10; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 149/Ælred, “Sermons,” 46: “Murus iste spiritualis esset castitas. Murus omnino fortis, qui seruat carnem integram et incontaminatam.”

⁷⁷ *Ser* 19.6, 7, 8; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 148/Ælred, “Sermons,” 46.

⁷⁸ *Ser Peter*; Paris, B.N. *ms. nouv. acq. lat.* 294, f. 42^{r-v}/Raciti, “L’option préférentielle,” 189 n. 8 (Latin)/Raciti, “Preferential Option for the Weak,” 7 (Trans.): “Iubet eos adversa sustinere, studiose dimicare contra inimicos domesticos et remotos, contra vitia carnis et animae, contra principes tenebrarum, incentores et accusatores vitiorum, ut velut viri fortes et athletae robusti laborent pro se et fratribus suis iunioribus et infirmioribus, viriliter proeliantes bella Domini.”

⁷⁹ *Ser All Saints*; Paris, B.N. *ms. nouv. acq. lat.* 294, ff. 108-9^v/Raciti, “L’option préférentielle,” 191 n. 9 (Latin)/Raciti, “Preferential Option for the Weak,” 9 (Trans.): “‘Bos lasciviens’ (1Chron 13:9) frater est indisciplinatus et vagus qui, infirmitate carnis oppressus, regularis disciplinae rigorem non patitur.”

4.3.1 *Be kings*

Chastity's masculine nature is also demonstrated by the intellectual rule Ælred encourages his monks to wield over their passions.⁸⁰ In Sermon 4 for the Epiphany of the Lord, he refers to Sheba as the desires of the flesh, which hold the soul in captivity.⁸¹ Monks are prisoners of their bodily movements; thus, he tells them, "control the movements of the flesh in yourselves, lest 'sin reign in your mortal body' (Rom 6:12)" and pledges that in doing so, they will be kings and their souls queens.⁸² Elsewhere, drawing once more on Paul's guidance to the Romans, Ælred again emphasizes ruling improper urges with the intellect: "They rule who check their unruly appetites, who govern their members so well that 'sin does not reign in their mortal body' (Rom 6:12), and they are masters of their own confusion and not servants."⁸³ Finally, in one of his sermons on Mary, he describes Herod as a slave because "he could not or did not know how to rule his own self." In contrast, another man was a "true king" because "he kept his body in holiness, knew how to rule himself well." The latter, Ælred continues, was "king over his whole body."⁸⁴ In order to preserve chastity successfully and advance in their religious endeavor, monks are to summon and assert intellectual authority.

4.4.1 *Jesus entered this fortress*

That Ælred understands chastity and the successful pursuit of monastic life as expressions of masculine strength can also be gleaned from the metaphors he frequently uses to describe

⁸⁰ Sommerfeldt explains that the intellect and mastery over the will are central to Ælred's perception of humanity: Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 41-43.

⁸¹ *Ser 4.29-35*; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 43-45/ Ælred, *Lit Ser*, 115-18.

⁸² *Ser 4.35*; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 44-45/ Ælred, *Lit Ser*, 117: "Sed carnales in uobis ipsis comprimate motus 'ne regnet peccatum in uestro mortali corpore' (Rom 6:12), et reges estis et anima uestra regina Saba."

⁸³ *Ser 24.38*; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 200/ Ælred, *Lit Ser*, 341: "Illi imperant, qui ipsas concupiscentias comprimunt, qui 'membra' sua bene regunt, ut 'non regnet peccatum in eorum mortali corpore' (Rom 6:12) et sint magistri confusionis suae et non serui."

⁸⁴ *Ser 34.6*; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 280/ Ælred, "Sermons," 108: "...et tamen Herodes nequissimus seruus erat, et iste utique uerus rex erat. Ille propter superbiam suam et cupiditatem non potuit nec sciuit se ipsum regere; iste, quia

Mary.⁸⁵ Often, when he foregrounds Mary's virginity, he describes her with images of virility and might and encourages his monks to imitate the strength demonstrated by her perfect virginity—not, it should be noted, the virginity per se. In the sermon described above, which takes the castle as its central metaphor, Ælred upholds Mary as an exemplar. Monks are to build a fortress in their souls modeled after that edifice found within Mary's soul. Her soul, in possession of a perfect humility, chastity, and charity, is a paradigm of strength:

This closed gate was closed and well fortified. An enemy finds no entry, no opening whatever. It was closed and signed with the seal of chastity, which was not broken by the Lord when he entered, but rather was made more solid and strengthened. For he who is the reward of virginity did not cast virginity off by his presence, but rather strengthened it. Therefore into this fortress Jesus entered.⁸⁶

Mary's soul is well protected and sealed from the threat of any incursion—hers is a strong, solid soul comprised of a deep moat of humility, a stalwart wall of chastity, and a tall sturdy tower of charity. This is the sort of soul Christ consents to enter. Ultimately, monks must strive to erect this fortress within their own souls. In another sermon on Mary's Assumption, Ælred considers how Solomon's query, "who shall find a strong woman," pertains to the perfect soul.⁸⁷ The strong soul (*fortis anima*), he expounds, is one that leaves the secular life, conquers

membra sua in sanctitate seruabat, se ipsum utique bene regebat et ideo ille seruus uitiorum, iste rex omnium membrorum suorum."

⁸⁵ For an excellent analysis of Ælred's marian sermons, see Shawn Madison Krahmer, "Ælred of Rievaulx and the Feminine in the Marian Sermons for the Feasts of the Assumption and Purification," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 35.4 (2000), 459-78.

⁸⁶ *Ser* 19.17; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 150/Ælred, "Sermons," 48: "Porta haec clausa erat et bene munita. Nullum accessum inuenit inimicus, nullum omnino foramen. Clausa erat et signata signaculo castitatis, quae per ingressum Domini non fracta, sed potius magis solidata et firmata est. Quia ille, cuius muneris est uirginitas, per praesentiam suam non abstulit uirginitatem sed magis confirmauit. Ergo in hoc castellum intrauit Iesus."

⁸⁷ *Ser* 21.1-7; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 165-66/Ælred, "Sermons," 59-60.

the desires of the flesh, and spurns worldly glory—Mary is the exemplar for this strong soul.

Listen to his words:

This strength shone forth exceptionally in the most blessed Mary, Mother of God, who without the example of another despised the delights of this world, abhorred the filth of the flesh, and, something no other woman before her had done, chose the purity of virginity.... This strength, brothers, imitate; this purity emulate!⁸⁸

In fact, he continues, monks already follow her lead by their way of life: “For how great is your strength, who have despised the secular life, who are enduring this harsh way of life, who have most fully cut off the love for you of fathers....”⁸⁹ Here as above, the strong soul is something possessed by the ideal monk who rejects all the world’s delights.⁹⁰

In the above examples, Ælred instructs his brethren to imitate Mary—a female figure and, potentially, a model for what might be considered feminine traits. However, such an interpretation collapses under the weight of Ælred’s portrayal. As Shawn Krahmer has noted: in these sermons, Mary is a paradigm of virtue, but she is represented as neither “a quintessential mother who might teach us to birth Christ in our lives, nor... a quintessential bride whom we are to imitate in our love. Mary is, instead, a virtuous monk, laboring in this life, hoping for the next.”⁹¹ Mary does not embody the characteristics Ælred describes as attributable to “woman” in the positive sense (described earlier). Rather, she is a monk toiling to achieve religious perfection; she is an exemplar of the chaste monk’s strength and virility.

⁸⁸ Trans. mine. *Ser* 21.6; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 166/Ælred, “Sermons,” 60: “Haec fortitudo praecipue relucebat in beatissima Dei genitrice Maria, quae sine exemplo alterius mundi illecebras contempsit, carnis illuuiem horruit et, quod nulla altera ante eam fecit, uirginitatis puritatem elegit.... Hanc fortitudinem, fratres, imitamini, hanc puritatem aemulamini.”

⁸⁹ *Ser* 21.7 Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 166/Ælred, “Sermons,” 60: “Quanta est enim fortitudo uestra, qui saeculum contempsistis, qui hanc pauperem et arduam conuersionem subiistis, qui uobis patrum... affectum plenissime abscidistis?”

⁹⁰ Krahmer, “Ælred and the Feminine,” 475-76.

⁹¹ Krahmer, “Ælred and the Feminine,” 473.

When Ælred addresses his monks about their manner of life, he uses language that would have been quite familiar to many of them. The men living in Cistercian communities had left behind careers as clerics and knights and relinquished relationships with families, wives, and children. The monastic world had different expectations of them; they had to reject what they had previously been encouraged to embrace: power, ambition, family, and progeny. And they had to learn to control sexual desires.⁹² When Ælred spoke to them in terms of castles, fortresses, moats, towers, stalwart battles, and the rule of kings, his language would have been recognizable and evocative and would have helped them translate old habits, ideals, and patterns of thought into actions and dispositions more appropriate for their new spiritual lives. Ælred was not the only Cistercian to have enlisted such language to counsel his brethren. The image of monk as soldier was an age-old association in Christianity. However, in earlier centuries (and during the twelfth century in non-Cistercian communities) monks' corporate prayers were seen as weapons in a battle with evil. For Ælred and other Cistercian leaders, the militaristic language applied to the individual monk and his personal struggle with chastity and salvation.⁹³ The Cistercians' language differed because they were communicating to a different breed of monk: monks who were familiar with the world outside the cloister who may have found renunciation of sexuality and all worldly desires much more formidable than did their oblate counterparts.

⁹² Newman, *Boundaries of Charity*, 84-85; Jean Leclercq, "Aggressiveness or Repression in St. Bernard and in his Monks," *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1979), 88-90.

⁹³ Newman, *Boundaries of Charity*, 29-30, 35-37. Also, see Leclercq, "Monks and Love," 86-108, esp. 97-98, 103-04. In his essay, Leclercq argues that Cistercians use images of aggression and human love to help monks sublimate aggression and sexual desire. About Ælred's use of militaristic language, Jacqueline Murray would posit that he enlisted such language to assure his brethren that they were still masculine. She would see him as using the secular model of masculinity as a means to preserve his fellow monks' (and his own) self-identity: Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life," 24-42. In contrast, Ruth Karras would argue that Ælred and his fellow monks were following a different, spiritual model of masculinity: Karras, "Aquinas's Chastity Belt," 16-33.

4.3 God Give me Strength

The chaste monk is virile and his monastic practice challenging and rigorous, but his success is not a given. Failure is an option. One might recall the metaphor of the castle (described above), which Ælred utilizes to depict the monk's soul. That image certainly implies that retaining chastity requires constant vigilance. Indeed, in this Cistercian's judgment, the opportunity and possibility of failure is very real. In the most personal of all his works, the *Oratio Pastoralis*, Ælred confesses that he himself is still beleaguered by carnal desires and beseeches God to give him strength. "Vices and malicious passions still attack my soul," he laments. Perhaps they attack,

...because of my long-standing and so very bad habits, or the infinite things that I should do but choose not to do every day, or the fundamental weakness of my corrupt and depraved nature, or the surreptitious tempting of evil-minded spirits.

Whatever the reason for his susceptibility, one thing is certain: he needs God's assistance to defeat desire. "Pour your sweet grace upon me," he supplicates, "and give me the strength and fortitude to withstand these vices and malicious passions."⁹⁴ With God helping, he will

⁹⁴ *Oratio pastoralis* 5; Ælred, "Oratio pastoralis," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38.3 (2003), 305-06/ Ælred, *For your own People: Aelred of Rievaulx's Pastoral Prayer; Critical Edition*, ed. Marsha Dutton, trans. Mark DelCogliano (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008), 463: "Et contra uitia et passiones malas que adhuc impugnant eam—siue ex antiqua consuetudine mea pessima, siue ex cotidianis et infinitis negligentis meis, siue ex infirmitate corrupte et uitiate nature mee, siue ex occulta malignorum spirituum temptatione—uirtutem et fortitudinem administret michi dulcis gratia tua, ut non consentiam neque regnent in meo mortali corpore, neque praebeam eis membra mea arma iniquitatis...." The Latin and English texts just cited are (respectively) the new critical edition of the *Oratio* and a translation based on that edition. The same translation is also available in, Ælred, "The Prayer of Venerable Ælred, Abbot of Rievaulx," trans. Mark DelCogliano, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37.4 (2002), 463. Prior to the release of the new critical edition and translation, the standard sources for the *Oratio* were: Ælred, *Oratio pastoralis*, Ælredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia: Opera Ascetica, CCCM1, edited by Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971)/ Ælred, "Pastoral Prayer," *Aelred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer*, The Cistercian Fathers Series; 2, ed. M. Basil Pennington, trans. R. Penelope Lawson (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1995). The *Oratio* is preserved in a single manuscript. While it has been attributed to Ælred with certainty, little else known about it: Ælred, *CFS*2, xii. Dutton discusses her edition and the manuscript on which it is based in Marsha Dutton, "Ælred of Rievaulx's *Oratio pastoralis*: A New Edition," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38.3 (2003), 297-303. She analyzes the work itself in Marsha Dutton, "Aelred and his Prayer: An Introduction to Aelred's *Pastoral Prayer*," *For your own People: Aelred of Rievaulx's Pastoral Prayer; Critical Edition* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008), 1-33; Marsha Dutton, "Ælred of Rievaulx: The Pastoral Prayer," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37.4 (2002), 753-59.

(hopefully) be able to muster the strength and fortitude required to preserve his chastity. But his success is not a given, and he does not necessarily possess the wherewithal required for this endeavor. Indeed, some monks (as he reports in his discussion of ‘weaker, stronger, and perfect’ monks) will never be able to achieve the monastic ideal. God will give them continual affection, but they will require the assistance of their more stalwart brethren. Elsewhere, Ælred is adamant that monks who achieve a state of contemplation must be wary and fearful of their spiritual state. To these fortunate men, he admonishes:

Blessed are all who imitate him, who so learn to be righteous that they never cease to fear. Scripture says: ‘Blessed is the one who is always fearful’ (Prv 28:14). Brothers, for however long we are in this mortal body, we can sin, and as long as we can sin, we must fear lest we sin.⁹⁵

At no point should a monk feel secure in his own ability to succeed spiritually.⁹⁶ He should beseech God for help, he should take practical steps to shore up his success, and he should be ever wary.

The monk is a chaste sinner. To close the bitter gap that separates him from God, he must struggle manfully, he must be strong, and he must exercise intellectual authority. But he is not innately all of these things. It is a challenge for every monk: many will falter and need additional assistance from God; all must be perpetually vigilant; and some will simply never

⁹⁵ *Ser 34.14*; Ælred, *CCCM2A*, 282/Ælred, “Sermons,” 109: “Beati sunt omnes qui eum imitantur, qui ita discunt iusti esse ut numquam desinant timere. Dicit enim Scriptura: Beatus homo qui semper est pauidus. Fratres, quamdiu in isto mortali corpore sumus, peccare possumus et, quamdiu peccare possumus, semper timendum nobis est ne peccemus.”

⁹⁶ References such as these are the type that have led Murray to her conclusion that men’s bodies challenged medieval notions of masculine self-governance. See, Murray, “Problem of Male Embodiment,” 11-12 and throughout. The question introduced by her assessment is whether men actually thought of themselves as embodying the masculine ideal or if they saw the depictions as just that: ideals. If the former, then discussions such as Ælred’s might indicate that men’s bodies destabilized their self-perception; however, if the latter such discussions merely reveal weaknesses they recognized as part of themselves.

triumph in their spiritual undertaking.⁹⁷ Thus, Ælred's portrait of the chaste monk's endeavor for perfection—the fallen man battling to return to God by summoning a range of masculine skills—is not merely an assertion of what he believes men are by nature or an opportunity for them flaunt their innate capabilities. Rather, it is a model of what Ælred thinks monks can and should strive to be.

4.4 Enfeebled and Effeminate

Thus far, I have argued that, in his writing for men, Ælred tells of monks whose very way of life, when executed effectively, identifies them as quite masculine. But his treatment of monastic chastity is as interesting for what it excludes as for what it includes. For, largely missing from his works addressed to men are frequent or overt references to the challenges presented by specifically sexual desires. Indeed, there are certain images it seems he would rather exclude as models for his monks. Could it be that he associates overwhelming sexual desire with weakness and effeminacy?

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, chastity certainly connotes both sexual and worldly renunciation for Ælred. But the sexual aspect of the ideal is not emphasized. Quite regularly, his discussions of chastity are either oblique, making it difficult to determine what chastity entails, or clearly include all worldly desire when describing what ought to be renounced.

About this, John Sommerfeldt has commented that for Ælred, “chastity is a virtue that encompasses much more than restraining the body’s sexual urges.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ My conclusion that Ælred's portrait of masculinity admits the possibility of failure and even allows that monks will attain different levels of perfection, concurs with John Arnold's thesis about representations of male virginity: Arnold, “Labour of Continence,” 102-18. It stands in contrast with Kelly's argument: Kelly, “Menaced Masculinity,” 97-116; Kathleen Coyne Kelly, “Oxymoronic Bodies: Male Virgins in Hagiography and Romance,” *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), 91-118.

⁹⁸ Sommerfeldt, *Pursuing Perfect Happiness*, 98-100. My argument differs from findings suggested by Martha Newman in her study of Cistercians in general. According to her conclusions, although sexual desire was only one

There are two obvious exceptions to this tendency in his writing for men, both from the first book of the *Speculum*.⁹⁹ The exceptions appear amidst a discussion of physical attachments (friendships). There, he warns monks who have not yet seized control of their carnal urges to avoid friendships because “[f]or them to experience it without some titillation of vice is extremely rare.”¹⁰⁰ Here, Ælred is manifestly embarking upon a discussion of sexual matters. Next, he describes how relationships between male and female religious can spiral into licentiousness. Mutual respect between a monk and a nun can lead to frequent correspondence and the exchange of gifts. That intimate connection may then blossom into flattering compliments and, even worse, “that physical attachment which is more dangerous than the others.”¹⁰¹ Friendships between monks and nuns can stir up sexual desire and monks must be aware of this in order to avoid a potential disaster.

He follows that illustration of the problems associated with physical attachments with warnings about same-sex relationships. He tells of chaste holy men, who become sexually attracted to the promising young novices they have taken under their wings. He writes, “As they ceded to them more influence over themselves, and with increasing pleasure found repose at the sight of them (and I might say, their embrace), they have very often been quite insidiously tormented by a vice-prone attachment.... [they] could scarcely keep company with

among the many yearnings monks sought to control, it was the central image for the life of monastic renunciation: Newman, *Boundaries of Charity*, 84.

⁹⁹ Of course, these are not the only exceptions. For another example, see *De oneribus* 29.19; Ælred, *CCCM2D*, 260.

¹⁰⁰ *Spec* 3.27.65; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 136/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 265: “Ab his tamen, qui adhuc carnalibus uitii appetuntur, consulte affectus iste respuitur, a quibus rarissime sine uitii titillatione sentitur.”

¹⁰¹ *Spec* 3.28.66; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 136-37/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 266-67: “Deinde affectus iste dum ad quaedam blandimenta se porrigit, etiam carnalis ille qui caeteris perniciosior est, uitio tentante, subrepat.”

them without some titillation of vice.”¹⁰² The moral of this and the above story about attachments is that monks should avoid people who might stimulate them sexually; otherwise, even the most pious amongst them might be seized by sexual desire.

But this sort of discussion and advice is quite rare in Ælred’s writing for men. This observation is not especially meaningful until these findings are compared with the contents of the *Rule*. That relatively short work written for women is filled with overt discussions of virginity as sexual renunciation and advice for its preservation. For instance, with language suggesting a worry about masturbation Ælred advises the potentially aroused recluse to consider Saint Agnes, the saint who turned a brothel into an oratory: “if you wake up suddenly and either through the effect of sleep or by the machination of the devil you experience some bodily heat... call to mind the blessed virgins who... triumphed over their godless foe. Think of St. Agnes....”¹⁰³ Elsewhere, he admonishes the anchoress to avoid frequent conversations with a spiritual advisor because, “[l]istening frequently to the same man’s voice can be a cause of great danger to many people.”¹⁰⁴ She should never exchange messages or gifts with a man, even for upright reasons, because “this only fosters illicit affections and can cause great harm.”¹⁰⁵ Too, her meetings with a priest must be infrequent, and he should be elderly and well regarded. However, even then she must be mindful of letting him touch or stroke her hand.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² *Spec* 3.28.67; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 137/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 266-67: “Quibus dum sui copiam pronius indulgerent, ac in eorum aspectu et, ut ita dicam, amplexu suavius requiescerent, uitioso quodam affectu subtilius irrepente plurimum fatigati sunt.... uix sine quadam uitii titillatione frequentari potuerint.”

¹⁰³ *Inst* 16; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 652/ Ælred, *CFS2*, 65: “Si uigilanti subito, aut ex quiete soporis, aut arte tentatoris calor corporis fuerit excitatus, et in somnium callidus hostis inuexerit... veniant tibi in mentem beatae uirgines, quae... reportarunt de impiissimo hoste triumphum. Cogita Agnetem beatissimam....”

¹⁰⁴ *Inst* 7; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 642/ Ælred, *CFS2*, 52: “Nam eadem uiri uocem saepe admittere, quibusdam periculosum esse non dubito.”

¹⁰⁵ *Inst* 7; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 643/ Ælred, *CFS2*, 52-53: “Nunquam inter te et quem libet virum quasi occasione exhibendae caritatis, uel nutriendi affectus, uel expentendae familiaritatis aut amicitiae spiritalis discurrant nuntii, nec eorum munuscula litterasque suscipias, nec illis tua dirigas, sicut plerisque moris est, quae zonas uel marsupia, diuerso stamine uel subtegmine uariata et caetera huiusmodi adolescentioribus monachis uel clericis mittunt. Quod fomentum est amoris illiciti, et magni material mali.”

¹⁰⁶ *Inst* 6; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 642/ Ælred, *CFS2*, 51-52.

Finally, the work includes two lengthy stories of men who are overwhelmed by carnal desire.¹⁰⁷

Ælred presents all of these examples to his sister and her fellow anchorites to help them conquer sexual urges, avoid situations that might trigger sexual lust, and preserve virginity. Plainly, when Ælred describes virginity in works for women, he regularly links virginity to sexuality.

That is not the case in his writing for men. Indeed, I find it striking that two lengthy stories about *men* who have been engulfed by sexual passions are included in a tract addressed to *women* but not in any of the works composed for monks. As noted above, in his *Rule* Ælred recounts two stories about monks who are awash with lust and struggle against it with severe bodily mortification. One narrative, reads as follows:

I know a monk who at the beginning of his monastic life was afraid of threats to his chastity... and so declared war on himself, was filled with savage hatred for his own flesh and sought nothing more than what would afflict it. Accordingly he weakened his body by fasting, and by depriving it of its lawful due suppressed its simplest movements. But when he was forced by weakness to allow himself more, the flesh came to life again and upset the tranquility which he thought he had acquired. Often he plunged into cold water and stayed there for some time singing psalms and praying. Frequently too when he felt forbidden movements he rubbed his body with nettles and so, by inflaming his bare flesh, overcame the inflammation of lust.

When all this proved of no avail... he prayed, wept, sighed, implored, besought, insisted that he either kill him or heal him.... He was granted some temporary relief but refused lasting tranquility. For while the irregular movements of the flesh died down for a little, his heart was beset with forbidden affections.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Inst* 18, 22; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 653-54, 655-56/Ælred, *CFS*2, 66-67, 69-70.

¹⁰⁸ *Inst* 18; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 653-54/Ælred, *CFS*2, 66-67: "Noui ego monachum, qui cum in initio suae conuersionis... pudicitiam suam periclitari timeret, erexit se contra se, et aduersus carnem suam immanissimum concipiens odium, nihil magis quam quod eam afflitteret expetebat. Itaque inedia macerabat corpus, et quae ei de iure debebantur subtrahens, etiam motus eius simplices comprimebat. Sed cum iterum nimia debilitas sibi plus indulgere compelleret, ecce caro rursus caput erigens, acquisitam, ut putabatur, infestabat quietem. Plerumque uero acquisitam, se frigidis aquis iniciens, tremens aliquandiu psallebat et orabat. Saepe etiam illicitos sentiens motus, urticis fricabat corpus, et nudae carni apponens incendium incendio superabat. Et cum haec omnia non

In this passage, the reader encounters a man overwhelmed by lust, who seeks to tame his sexual urges by first chastising his body and then begging for God's assistance. Even then, he only experiences sporadic relief from those desires.

The other story included in the *Rule* but not in texts written for men is quite similar in theme and tone. The young man of this narrative was "unable to contain himself." In an attempt to win his battle with lust, he declared war upon his body and abstemiously refused its needs. He was finally successful, but only because he developed stomach troubles and could hardly eat.¹⁰⁹ John Sommerfeldt has noticed that Ælred links eating and sexual stimulation;¹¹⁰ thus, we should understand that statement to mean that the monk was no longer overwhelmed with passion because his illness stopped him from eating. Both stories demonstrate Ælred's obvious awareness that men can be perturbed and thoroughly trounced by sexual desire.¹¹¹

Nonetheless, neither of these stories (nor anything similar) appears in Ælred's writing for religious men; he tells them only in his *Rule* for women.

sufficerent... orat, plorat, suspirat, rogat, adiurat, obtestatur, ut aut occidat, aut sanet.... Praestatur ad horam refrigerium, sed negatur securitas. Quiescentibus enim paulum carnis stimulis, affectionis illicitae pectus inuadunt." Some scholars suppose the story is autobiographical. For problems with this assumption, see Dutton, "The Sources," 188-91; Dutton, "Invented Sexual History," 420-21. Other potentially autobiographical elements of his work include *De oneribus* 22.17; Ælred, *CCCM2D*, 202; *De Jesu puero duodenni (De Jesu)* 1.3; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 258/Ælred, "Jesus at the Age of Twelve," *Ælred of Rievaulx: Treatises & Pastoral Prayer*, The Cistercian Fathers Series; 2, ed. M. Basil Pennington, trans. Theodore Berkeley (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 6-7; *Spec* 1.28.79-82; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 46-48/Ælred, *Mirror*, 132-36.

¹⁰⁹ *Inst* 22; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 655-56/Ælred, *CFS2*, 69-70.

¹¹⁰ In Sommerfeldt's words, Ælred considers the connection "a biological fact": Sommerfeldt, *On Love and Order*, 59. See, for example, *Ser* 53.1, 4; Ælred, *CCCM2B*, 58, 59; *Inst* 2.16; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 652/Ælred, *CFS2*, 66.

¹¹¹ In fact, according to Walter Daniel (Ælred's medieval biographer) Ælred built a device for himself over a river, which enabled him to immerse his body in the frigid water and quash his sexual urges: *Vita Æl* 16; Walter Daniel, *Life of Ailred*, 25. Also, see *Ser* 47.31, in which he says about continence, "What could be more laborious, what more difficult? What is preserved with more peril, what more easily lost?" (*Quid in labore continentiae? Quid laboriosius, quid difficilius, quid periculosius seruatur, quid facilius amittitur?*): Ælred, *CCCM2B*, 12.

Another depiction of monks unable to control sexual passion is suppressed in his writing for men in a different way. In this case, Ælred does discuss overwhelming carnal desire but only obliquely and in an abridged form. And, even then, he makes apparent the discomfort it causes him. The passage in question appears amidst several paragraphs about the proper manner of “rest” for the religious seeker. The pleasure of the body (*corporis voluptas*), he says, is *not* among the licit forms of rest.¹¹² Here, pleasure of the flesh includes gluttony and sexual lust—in his words, “yearnings of the belly and what is under the belly” (*in uentris eorumque quae sub uentre sunt uoluptate*). His discussion of these two vices fills a few paragraphs, and they are basically treated in tandem (for, as noted above, food and sexual desire are directly linked in Ælred’s perception). The paragraphs plainly reveal Ælred’s abhorrence for these fleshy pleasures. Anyone swallowed up in this sort of debauchery, he says, “rots in the filth of his flesh as if wallowing in excrement.” Not only is this person “deprived of life or engulfed” but also he rots, “festering and reeking like an entombed cadaver with puss oozing from once-itching sores.”¹¹³ The precise nature of ‘pleasure of the body’ is not clear, though it strikes me that he may be thinking of masturbatory acts. What *is* evident is that this is something he does not want to discuss.

Especially intriguing about these passages is the utter mortification and discomfort he expresses about having deal with the topic at all. Indeed, he brackets his dialogue on the matter with apologies for having even broached the subject. Accordingly, he introduces the

¹¹² For what follows, see *Spec* 1.26.72-76; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 43-45/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 128-31.

¹¹³ *Spec* 1.26.74; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 44/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 130: “...eum quem luxuria Charybdis absorbit, carnis suae colluione quasi proprii stercore egestione assens esse corruptum, ut eum non modo extinctum aestimes, uel absorptum; sed instar sepulti cadaueris immundissimi pruritus sanie profluente putrescentem sentias et fetentem.”

theme by saying: “We are obliged to insert into this work a blemish, as it were. I mean a discussion about yearnings of the flesh.”¹¹⁴ And, as he concludes, he confides:

I pass over in silence many arguments suggested to my mind against this vile plague, through respect for your [Bernard of Clairvaux’s?] modest eyes.... At what I have written, I seem to imagine a blush, that mark of modesty, spreading over your features and the gentlest lowering of your eyes summoning me to be silent. I know that your chaste breast, so filled with gentle charity... breathes such a heavenly and divine aroma that it would be burdensome even to hear of the stench of this filth.¹¹⁵

In fact, he says, he would have avoided the subject entirely if it were not for the many novices who have given themselves over to these vices. One can virtually see him cringing in embarrassment as he writes the words that fill this section of the *Speculum*. In it, he raises the subject of problematic sexual desire only hesitantly, does little more than decry it, and states explicitly that he is omitting details. And he certainly offers no practical advice. Taken as a whole, it seems Ælred would prefer to avoid talking about foiled chastity and overwhelming sexual drives in his writing for men.

Might it be that Ælred associates lustfulness and overwhelming sexual passion with femininity and weakness? This would not be surprising. Various scholars have noticed the special emphasis on sexuality in medieval works written for women. For example, in her assessment of writing addressed to women religious, Eleanor McLaughlin has noted that when men wrote for women, they focused on their sexuality, not their spiritual state. She contends that they did not deal with the woman as “a soul who has, by free will and grace, put away the life of the

¹¹⁴ *Spec* 1.26.72; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 43/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 128: “Compellimur quasi naeuum quemdam huic operi inserere, de carnali scilicet uoluptate sermonem....”

¹¹⁵ *Spec* 1.26.76; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 44–45/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 131: “Supprimo multa silentio, quae mihi contra hanc immundissimam luem animo suggeruntur, verens nimirum pudicissimos oculos tuos.... Videor enim mihi quasi cernere pudoratam faciem tuam ad haec quae scripta sunt, honestae uere cundiae nota perfundi, ac suauissimo oculorum nutu mihi silentium imperare. Noui enim illud castissimum pectus tanta caritatis suauitate perfusum... tam caelestem ac diuinum spirare odorem, ut huius colluionis fetorem saltem audire onerosum sit.”

senses, but rather she is still regarded as a sexual animal, a peril to herself, and especially to men.”¹¹⁶ Such a focus in medieval writing for women is in keeping with gender perceptions of the period. As explained above, during the Middle Ages (and earlier) religious thinkers associated women with the flesh. As such, women were regularly considered exceptionally lustful, sexually voracious, and highly susceptible to the body’s unruliness.¹¹⁷ In contrast, men were expected to have a superior rationality and authority that would help them resist such desires.

But we can do more than look to general medieval constructions of gender to support suspicions that Ælred linked sexual desire with weakness and femininity. For, Ælred himself makes explicit connections between those qualities and failed chastity.¹¹⁸ On these occasions, he employs words such as *enervare* (to enervate, weaken, render effeminate), *dissolvere* (to weaken, to soften), *effeminare* (to make womanish, effeminate, to enervate), and *mollis* (soft, effeminate, unmanly, weak).¹¹⁹ For example, in the passages about the ‘pleasure of the body’ discussed above, he asserts that this failing, “enfeebles (*effeminare*) the mind” and “overthrows and destroys everything honest, decent, and vigorous (*virilis*) in the soul.”¹²⁰ Moreover, while reflecting on the biblical King David’s adultery, Ælred comments that yielding to lust

¹¹⁶ McLaughlin, “Equality of Souls,” 245.

¹¹⁷ On this matter, see Jantzen, *Power*, 53-54; Murray, “Universal Man,” 125-27; Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 82-88.

¹¹⁸ His perception may have been tied to medieval medical perceptions of sperm and masculinity. Both ancient and medieval medical writers considered sperm the essence of masculinity. Therefore, they believed discharging it or losing too much of it could render a man effeminate or weak. On this topic, see Murray, “Men’s Bodies, Men’s Minds,” 1-26; Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 82-84.

¹¹⁹ English translations are from Jan Frederik Niermeyer, C. van de Kieft, et al., *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002); Perseus Digital Library Project, *Lewis and Short*, ed. Gregory R. Crane, Tufts University, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> (Accessed February 5, 2009).

¹²⁰ *Spec* 1.26.72; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 43/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 129: “...haec sordidissima lues et carnem contaminet, et mentem effeminet, ac quidquid in animo honestum, quidquid decorum, quidquid denique uirile est obruat pariter et euertat.”

weakened (*enervare*) David.¹²¹ As for the historical King Edward, Ælred mentions that that king's wife "did not weaken (*dissolvere*) him with lust."¹²² Too, he warns his brethren not to follow the habits of those giving pastoral care who have yielded to sexual drives and become "fornicators, adulterers, effeminate men (*molles*), men who sleep with men..."¹²³ Therefore, Ælred links susceptibility to sexual desire with images of weakness and effeminacy.

If we can suppose that Ælred associated contumacious sexual urges and failure to overcome desire with weakness, this could explain his hesitancy to focus on sexual matters in the works he wrote for men. He had to have known his brethren would benefit from guidance on such troubling issues (especially since he himself seems to have suffered from such worries, and since he knows the novices are falling prey to 'bodily pleasures'). Yet, when men are his audience, he only rarely proposes practical strategies for maintaining chastity and reports that he is embarrassed to talk of men who have surrendered to lust. In his writing for men, he presents an exemplar for his brethren to follow. I have shown that he does not portray monks as unassailable or innately able to succeed within those pages. However, it would seem that to include frequent discussions of monks unable to control sexual desire would have been to undercut, too much, his model of monks who at best are strong, active, and authoritative. All of this has led me to speculate about the *Rule* and to wonder just who Ælred *really* had in mind when he wrote it.

¹²¹ *Spec* 3.15.38; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 123/ Ælred, *Mirror*, 246: "Contrarioque modo quem in alienae uxoris illicitum eneruauit amplexum, in proprii militis crudelem armauit interitum."

¹²² *Vita Ed* 8; Ælred, *PL* 195: 748B/ Ælred, "Life of Ed," 148: "...et quasi nova quaedam Abisac regem calefacit amore, nec dissolvit libidine, mulcet obsequiis, sed desiderii non emollit."

¹²³ *De oneribus* 28.19; Ælred, *CCCM2D*, 260: "...nolite 'aemulari in malignantibus' (cf. Ps 36:1), qui cum sint 'fornicatores, adulteri, molles, masculorum concubitores' (1 Cor 6:9-10)..."

4.1.1 *My sister, you have been asking*

I cannot help but wonder if, perhaps, Ælred wrote his *Rule* knowing (intending even) that his brethren would read it; thereby, counting on it to assist them with the challenges of sexuality. There is evidence to support this theory.

To be sure, Ælred's *Rule* does begin with a precise statement of audience and rationale: "For many years now, my sister, you have been asking me for a rule to guide you in the life you have embraced for the sake of Christ, to provide spiritual directives and formulate the basic practices of religious life."¹²⁴ It states straightforwardly that he wrote it for his sister to assist her spiritual pursuit. And elsewhere he mentions her fellow anchorites who will also peruse the text. Yet, the *Rule* contains more than a few hints that Ælred may have had more than just his sister and other recluses in mind when he wrote it. Susanna Greer Fein makes exactly that point in her article on medieval mothering. As she indicates, several passages in the work seem to assume an audience other than recluses.¹²⁵ Often it appears he is imagining a male readership: he mentions "virgins of both sexes"; men who consort freely with young women; men who live chastely with women (to Ælred's displeasure) and who in their old age are still disturbed by "nocturnal imaginings, and the stirrings of the flesh"; and "monks of the cloister" (*claustrales*).¹²⁶ Moreover, he is presumably thinking of monks not recluses when he worries that familiarity with women and effeminate men (*feminarum et effeminatorum familiaritatem*) might cause a downfall.¹²⁷ Also of great relevance here are the pages in the *Rule* that tell of

¹²⁴ *Inst* 1; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 637/Ælred, *CFS*2, 43: "Iam pluribus annis exigis a me, soror, ut secundum modum uiuendi quem arripuisti pro Christo, certam tibi formulam tradam, ad quam et mores tuos dirigere et necessaria religioni possis exercitia ordinare."

¹²⁵ Susanna Greer Fein, "Maternity in Aelred of Rievaulx's Letter to his Sister," *Medieval Mothering*, eds. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 142, 152-53 n. 22. Renna notices this as well: Renna, "Virginité in the Life of Christina," 88-89.

¹²⁶ *Inst* 15, 17, 19, 28; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 651, 653, 654, 661/Ælred, *CFS*2, 64, 66, 67-68, 76.

¹²⁷ *Inst* 23; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 656/Ælred, *CFS*2, 70.

monks harassed by sexual desire.¹²⁸ Hence, the text makes frequent references to religious men; this suggests he thought men would be reading the *Rule*.¹²⁹

Furthermore, Marsha Stuckey has commented that, in spite of the work's explicit statement about its audience and intention, the *Rule* is not principally for or about a person like the recluse. It is not targeted toward the person who has never wandered from God's side, she avers. Rather, it focuses on the sinner, the prodigal son who has transgressed but returns to God in humility.¹³⁰ Since this is the image Ælred associates with the chaste monk, it is plausible that Ælred's *Rule* would have resonated more with chaste monks than to virginal recluses. Further to this, in her 1990 essay about Ælred, Marsha Dutton suggested that the abbot invented his anchoritic sister to justify writing a work of religious guidance for women. There, she proposes, "Ælred's frequent apparent forgetfulness as to the identity of his audience suggests [just such a creation]." ¹³¹ I am not arguing that his sister was a fabrication; I am, however, averring that he knew the work would be read by monks as well as recluses and this awareness caused the "apparent forgetfulness as to the identity of his audience" of which Dutton speaks. All of this supports my premise that Ælred intended his monks to read the *Rule*.

If I am correct, the *Rule* would have been quite a useful tool for Ælred. While he may have felt it inappropriate to delve deeply into issues of sexuality when addressing men, the *Rule* would have served as an ideal platform for such matters. They are problems he associates with

¹²⁸ *Inst* 18, 22; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 653-54, 655-56/Ælred, *CFS*2, 66-67, 69-70.

¹²⁹ Notably, Ælred's *Rule* has been found in a number of male religious houses: Charles Dumont, "Introduction," *La Vie de recluse* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1961), 34-36. But this is not necessarily unusual. For example, all known manuscripts of the *Speculum virginum*, a thirteenth-century work penned for women and emphasizing virginity, have been discovered in the libraries of male religious houses: C. J. Mews, "Virginity, Theology, and Pedagogy in the *Speculum Virginum*," *Listen Daughter: The Speculum virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. J. Mews (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 21.

¹³⁰ Stuckey, "Prodigal," 35-42, esp. 35-36.

weakness and femininity—they are difficulties he correlates with ‘women’ in the negative sense of the word. With women as his subject matter and as his purported audience, he is free to tackle the subject of sexuality head on, knowing all the while that his fellow monks would reap the benefits of the guidance it provided.

5 King Edward, the Virgin

Given Ælred’s depiction of the chaste monk in such adamantly masculine terms, one might suppose he also considers virginity inappropriate as an ideal for men. However, the *vita* he wrote on behalf of King Edward the Confessor belies that suspicion. There, he characterizes King Edward as a virgin and, to do so, calls upon many of the same images and ideas that he enlists to depict the recluse.¹³²

Ælred’s *Vita Edwardi* clearly demonstrates that the idea of male virginity is not conceptually problematic for Ælred. To write his *vita* he relied on earlier prototypes that depicted Edward as a virgin—his main source was a work written by Osbert of Clare.¹³³ However, he does not simply copy Osbert’s hagiography. Instead, he makes the story his own and, in so doing, not only preserves but also amplifies King Edward’s virginity. That is what Joanna Huntington argues in her thorough analysis of Ælred’s *vita*. According to Huntington, whenever Osbert refers to Edward’s virginity, it is with reference to his death or the incorruption of his lifeless

¹³¹ Dutton, “Conversion and Vocation,” 32 n. 3.

¹³² Ælred, *PL* 195: 737-90/Ælred, “Life of Ed,” 125-243.

¹³³ Osbert of Clare, “La vie de S. Edouard le Confesseur par Osbert de Clare,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 41 (1923), 5-131. To some extent, he also uses William of Malmesbury, *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis monachi De gestis regum Anglorum libri quinque: historiae novellae libri tres*, ed. William Stubbs, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores*; No. 90 (Nendeln, Lichtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1964), sections 196-228/William of Malmesbury, *The Church Historians of England*, trans. Joseph Stevenson, vol. 3 (London: Seeleys, 1853), 183-216. For Ælred’s reliance on these prototypes, see Katherine M. Yohe, “Ælred’s Recrafting of the Life of Edward the Confessor,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38.2 (2003), 178.

body. Consequently, Osbert's Edward is primarily a virgin *corpse*. On the other hand, for Ælred, Edward's is a *lived* virginity—he does not just write of Edward's virginity in death but also in life. Ælred effects this change in a number of ways: he scatters small comments throughout the text that allude to Edward's chastity; he excludes certain ambiguities about Edward's virginity that were part of the earlier text; he stresses various aspects of Edward's chaste marriage; he ascribes power to Edward's virginity; and he emphasizes Edward's devotion and connection to John the Evangelist, the archetypal male virgin of Christian Scripture.¹³⁴ In all of these ways, Ælred magnifies Edward's virginity. Ælred's Edward is no longer the virgin corpse of Osbert's narrative; he is a living, breathing virgin king.¹³⁵ Clearly, in Ælred's perspective, a man could be a virgin.

Moreover, in Ælred's depiction, Edward's virginity 'looks' very much like that of the recluse. For one, Ælred utilizes many of the same images and metaphors to describe Edward's and the recluse's virginity. For both, virginity is a precious treasure in a fragile vessel;¹³⁶ each, as a virgin, follows the lamb wherever it goes;¹³⁷ and both are linked conceptually with the virgin,

¹³⁴ Huntington, "Edward the Celibate," 125-32. For a different perspective, see Yohe, "Ælred's Recrafting," 177-89. For analyses of Ælred's portrayal of ideal kingship, see John P. Bequette, "Ælred of Rievaulx's *Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor*: A Sainly King and the Salvation of the English People," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 43.1 (2008), 17-40; John Lawyer, "Ælred of Rievaulx's *Life of St. Edward the Confessor*: A Medieval Ideal of Kingship," *Fides et Historia* 31.1 (1999), 45-65; Katherine M. Yohe, "Ælred of Rievaulx on Holy Royalty: A Twelfth-Century View of Lay Spirituality," *Studies in Spirituality* 13 (2003), 169-98. Elliott discusses the development of the cult of the virgin king, in Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 113-31. Eric John addresses the historicity of Edward's perpetual celibacy in Eric John, "Edward the Confessor and the Celibate Life," *Analecta Bollandiana* 97 (1979), 171-78.

¹³⁵ In a recent article, Peter Jackson argues convincingly that a manuscript freshly discovered in the Central Library at Peterborough may contain a "lost" sermon, said to have been written by Ælred during the same period in which he composed his *Vita Edwardi*: Peter Jackson, "In translacione sancti Edwardi confessoris: The Lost Sermon by Ælred of Rievaulx Found?," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 40.1 (2005), 45-64. The sermon and its English translation have been published in Ælred, "In translacione sancti Edwardi confessoris," trans. Tom Licence, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 40.1 (2005), 65-83. In his article, Jackson explains that the sermon especially highlights three of Edward's virtues: humility, chastity, and justice (Jackson, "The Lost Sermon," 59). Thus, Edward's sexual purity is central in this work too.

¹³⁶ See *Vita Ed* 8; Ælred, *PL* 195: 747A/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 145; *Inst* 14; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 650/Ælred, *CFS*2, 63.

¹³⁷ See *Vita Ed* 27, 31; Ælred, *PL* 195: 770C, 775B/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 199, 211; *Inst* 15; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 651/Ælred, *CFS*2, 63-64.

John.¹³⁸ Also, their virginities convey similar meanings. In the *Rule*, the virgin is cautioned to be extremely fearful because her virginity is fragile and irreparable.¹³⁹ Edward's virginity is fearful in much the same way as that of the recluse. For example, Ælred describes how Edward, compelled to marry by his advisors, is struck with fear that the treasure of his virginity would be destroyed by marriage.¹⁴⁰ Later, after agreeing to take a bride, he beseeches God's assistance in preserving his virginity, praying: "help me undertake the marital bond in such a way that no danger befalls my chastity."¹⁴¹ There are other parallels, as well. Like Ælred's virginal sibling, Edward is a pious believer who has remained always at God's side—he is not the sinful prodigal son but the ever-faithful elder sibling. Making this point, Ælred tells how at an early age, with God's guidance, the child Edward shunned all the vices that usually overtake adolescents and instead behaved maturely, keeping his "body chaste, his conversation restrained, his actions straightforward, his affections pure." Furthermore, he insists that, even as a boy, this future king "took pleasure in going often to church, in frequently devoting himself to prayer, in attending the holy solemnity of Mass, and in visiting monasteries...."¹⁴² Edward was perpetually virginal. A final resemblance between the two representations of virginity is the idea that virginity grants privilege to its possessor. In the *Rule*, virgins enjoy their privileged relationship with Christ precisely *because* they are virgins: the reward for virginity is

¹³⁸ See *Vita Ed* 27, 31; Ælred, *PL* 195: 769A-70D, 775A-B/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 196-200, 211; *Inst* 31; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 668/Ælred, *CFS*2, 87.

¹³⁹ Though monks were instructed to be wary, the danger confronting the virgin's virginity is decidedly more acute. See *Inst* 14, 15; Ælred, *CCCM*1, 650, 651/Ælred, *CFS*2, 63, 64. On the fragility of virginity in works for religious women, see Newman, *WomanChrist*, 28-34; Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden," 159-79. Kelly discusses the theme of testing in works about female virginity in Kelly, *Performing Virginity*.

¹⁴⁰ *Vita Ed* 8; Ælred, *PL* 195: 747A/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 145.

¹⁴¹ Trans. mine. *Vita Ed* 8; Ælred, *PL* 195: 747A-C/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 146: "...succurrite, quatenus sic maritalae suscipiam sacramentum ut pudicitiae periculum non incurram."

¹⁴² *Vita Ed* 3; Ælred, *PL* 195: 742C/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 135: "...corpore castus, sermone rarus, simplex actu, purus affectu..."; "Agebat parvulus quemdam honestis ac maturis moribus senem, corpore castus, sermone rarus, simplex actu, purus affectu, quo mira benevolentia officiisque gratiosis omnium sibi coetaneorum conciliaret affectum. Jam in illa aetate frequentare ecclesiam dulce habuit, crebrius orationi incumbere, sacris missarum interesse solemnibus, visitandis monasteriis operam dare...." This is a typical trope in hagiographical literature; however, the point remains that for Ælred Edward was ever pious and never lost God's Grace.

a continual relationship with God.¹⁴³ Edward is also granted special abilities *because* of his virginity. Because of his virginity, he receives the gift of healing and an uncanny prescience.¹⁴⁴

The recluse's and the king's dispensation clearly differ from one another; still, the king has these powers *because* of his virginity just as the recluse enjoys union *because* of her virginity.

There are, no doubt, differences in how Ælred depicts each virgin. To be sure, virginity takes center stage in the work written for the recluse, and it is depicted as integral to her being and her daily life. This is not the case in the portrait of the king. For example, even though Edward and the recluse both cling to virginity with fear, the tragedy that will befall Edward if he fails is less pronounced. Ælred emphatically warns the recluse that a loss of virginity is irreparable but includes no such caution in the *Vita Edwardi*.¹⁴⁵ Hence, Edward is fearful because he may be driven to abandon his pious resolve; the anchoress should be anxious because that which defines her is at stake. What is more, the recluse's existence is to be so charged with trepidation that every facet of her life should revolve around guarding her virginity.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, Edward's fear arises at the advent of his marriage and does not resurface.¹⁴⁷ Finally, they receive different rewards for virginity—the one contemplation, the other various quasi-magical powers. But since the two virgins had such dissimilar vocations and since Ælred's *Vita Edwardi* includes stories from the earlier *vitae*, it might be presumptuous to attribute this difference to perceptions of gender. In spite of these dissimilarities, Edward's virginity looks very much like that of the recluse. This indicates that Ælred is content to depict a man as a virgin—not just in body but in character as well. The similarities also suggest that, for Ælred, certain images and characterizations were embedded in the ideal of

¹⁴³ See *Inst* 31; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 668/Ælred, *CFS2*, 87.

¹⁴⁴ See *Vita Ed* 8, 20; Ælred, *PL* 195: 748C, 762B-C/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 149, 181.

¹⁴⁵ *Inst* 14-15; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 649-51/Ælred, *CFS2*, 63.

¹⁴⁶ *Inst* 15-23; Ælred, *CCCM1*, 650-56/Ælred, *CFS2*, 63-70.

virginity.¹⁴⁸ To his mind, a virgin is ever pious, fearful, somewhat static or passive (since virginity had to be maintained not achieved), and rewarded for virginity's preservation.

In Ælred's perception, a man can be a virgin. But virginity calls to Ælred's mind a certain set of characteristics not well suited to his vision of the monastic endeavor. Thus, in his efforts at guidance and teaching within the monastery, he enlists an alternate model. He provides a model of renunciation that makes central and even glorifies the monk's fallen state. The cloistered monk is a chaste sinner—he plunged into sin, saw his failings, and, with God initiating, has begun his journey back to his Father. In his embrace of transient pleasures, in his departure from God, he was weak and effeminate. Now, duly humbled and with God as a guide, he must overcome those deficiencies. Fortunately, his monastic way of life enables just such a reversal. In his victorious battle against all the temptations of the world, in his chastity, the monk demonstrates that he is active, strong, and in control. In his successful pursuit of perfection, he is no longer the weak and lowly sinner; he is a man who can recover his rightful place at God's side.

¹⁴⁷ *Vita Ed* 8; Ælred, *PL* 195: 747A-48C/Ælred, "Life of Ed," 145-49.

¹⁴⁸ In 1983, Gaetano Raciti announced the discovery of a collection of sermons. Among these is a homily on Saint Katherine presumably written by Ælred: Gaetano Raciti, "Deux collections de sermons de saint Aelred—une centaine d'inédits—découvertes dans les fonds de Cluny et de Clairvaux," *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium reformatorum* 45 (1983), 165-84. The collection is still unpublished. The manuscript is in the Bibliothèque nationale de France: *Ms. nouv. acq. lat.* 294. In her 1998 article, Marie Anne Mayeski includes an abstract of the Katherine sermon. A close look at her analysis shows that the work depicts virginity with many of the same images found in the *Rule* and the *Life*. This further supports the idea that, for Ælred, there is a certain cluster of meanings embedded in the concept of virginity. See Marie Anne Mayeski, "The Right Occasion for the Words Situating Aelred's Homily on Saint Katherine," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 33 (1998), 45-60.

Conclusion

My approach to uncovering how medieval monks perceived religious virginity and chastity during the eleventh and twelfth centuries was to handle each author individually. I chose this methodology because, as I delved into my research, it became evident that while all the authors of my study clearly drew on similar themes and tapped into the same fount for insights, their portrayals were unique. To have parsed their thought thematically would have been to obscure each thinker's particular emphasis and the distinctiveness of his conception. To have proceeded in that manner would have been to forego the idiosyncratic contours of each portrayal. Accordingly, we would not have recognized that Anselm's *Deploratio* is not about a loss of physical virginity or even sexual sin per se. Rather, it is a supremely spiritual meditation driven by his immense fear that the profligate would be forever separated from God. Guibert's treatise would not have been recognized for what it is: a somewhat traditional tract on virginity personalized and intensified at the hands of an adolescent steeped in the training provided by his monastery and beleaguered by his own taxing struggle with sexual desire. Moreover, we would not have been able to follow Rupert into the center of a heated debate between churchmen or witness the role his portrayal of male virginity as incredibly tangible and potent played in that contest. And, while Bernard's message of humility would surely not have been missed, we might have failed to note his subtle destabilization of virginity and the possible link between his handling of that state and the acrimony between white and black monks. Finally, we would not have been privy to Ælred's detailed portrait of the monastic endeavor—a model that was extremely masculine, distinctively different from virginity, and perfectly suited to the needs and mores of his monastic audience. Still, there were notable

similarities and differences in what these monks had to say about virginity and chastity, and, in what follows, I consider some of these.

In my introduction, I explained that there had always been two different but interrelated ways of understanding virginity—physical and spiritual. And, as part of my individual analyses, I uncovered where each of my authors stood on this matter. In the end, it became clear that nearly every monk comprehended virginity in chiefly spiritual terms. They recognized physical virginity as an admirable state but did not stake spiritual perfection on the possession of bodily integrity. Rupert was the exception. While he would never have opined that physical integrity is meaningful without spiritual virginity, he expended great energy demonstrating that bodily purity (for women and men) is virginity's critical component—while spiritual virginity is recoverable, physical integrity once lost is irreparable. He further made plain that what destroys this integrity is consensual sexual intercourse. His view of virginity stood out from all the others. Yet, I have argued that there was a concrete reason for him to articulate such a distinctive portrait of virginity. Threatened with impotency—the silencing of his pen and the staunching of his voice—he imagined a virginity charged with power and available not to all who claimed piety or purity for themselves but only to those like himself who possessed integrity of mind and body.

Rupert's argument would not have been persuasive to most of the monks studied within these pages. Anselm's steady focus on the condition of the will and the soul's relationship with God illustrated that physical integrity was not paramount in his conception. Also, his words to Gunhilda (that many among the chaste were holier than those who had preserved physical virginity) further underscored that, in his estimation, physical virginity was not required of those seeking spiritual perfection. Anselm was anxious about the condition of the will not the condition of the body. Likewise, Guibert surely would not have agreed with Rupert that

virginity was synonymous with spiritual *and* physical integrity, but he may have conceded to that monk's idea that a person who is a virgin in mind and body has superior access to God. Guibert was of the opinion that the chaste are often torn from their spiritual heights because of past carnal experiences, whereas sexually innocent virgins can contemplate God more consistently. Thus, he might have agreed that physical virgins are better placed to discern and interpret God's will.

Guibert and Rupert also had in common a certain magnification of the link between virginity and sexuality. For all of the other monks studied within these pages, sexuality was a component of but not central to the definition of male virginity/chastity. But for these two, virginity hinged on the rejection of sexuality. However, there is a difference. Guibert's focus was sexual *desire*—desire is the principal impediment to spiritual progress. Conversely, Rupert's concern was sexual *activity*, or more precisely, the spiritual status associated with the lifelong rejection of sexual activity. The issue of desire was comparatively minor in Rupert's assessment because it was fixable—spiritual and mental sins could be remedied through sincere penance.

Rupert's definition of virginity would have failed to convince Bernard and Ælred, as well: that physical integrity cannot be rebuilt would have been of no concern to these monks. In Bernard's judgment, spiritual perfection is tied chiefly to virtue, a quality not dependent upon physical integrity. Indeed, while Rupert imagined virginity (physical and spiritual) as bestowing a special Grace upon its bearer, Bernard apprehended it more as a hindrance. For Bernard, access to the Divine most essentially requires humility—something of a challenge (he argued) for virgins. As well, Ælred's promotion of the ideal monk as a chaste sinner manifestly exposed his judgment that physical integrity does little to advance the monk's spiritual status. The comparisons he made between himself and his sister revealed his perception: the one is a

virgin and the other a chaste sinner, but both have access to spiritual heights. Furthermore, for both Cistercians there was a sense that the lack of physical virginity is a somewhat of a boon for monks, not a limitation. For Ælred, the monk is made lowly by his fall, and he proves his worth by his return. The monk's status as a chaste sinner locates him alongside those who are meek and who might be saved. In Bernard's case, the monk who may not possess virginity need not worry, for he is much better placed to cultivate humility (the most essential religious virtue) than his virginal counterpart.

Although both white monks chiefly called upon chastity not virginity in discussions of the monastic endeavor, they did not handle it in the same way. Bernard did characterize the monastic way of life as chaste and included chastity as one of the central virtues necessary for perfection, but he did not actively promote chastity instead of virginity. Rather, he excused the absence of virginity and encouraged what he saw as more important: humility. On the other hand, in Ælred's hands chastity becomes an integral part of the monastic life and what monastic perfection looks like. For him, chastity took on dimension: it was not just as an important quality or way of being but a model comprised of certain characteristics that, upon scrutiny, can be recognized as distinguishing the chaste monk from the virgin.

In Ælred's case there is yet another dimension. For, his depiction of virginity (as opposed to chastity) had much in common with that of Rupert. In his discussions of King Edward's and the recluse's virginity, there was certainly a sense (as there was with Rupert) of virginity possessing some sort of talismanic quality. It bestows extraordinary gifts upon its possessors. Given this, I suspect he would have been amenable to Rupert's claim that virgins were conduits for God's word. Also similar with Rupert in Ælred's writing on virginity was the intimation that physical integrity is an essential element of that ideal. I showed how he continually reminded the virgin (especially the female virgin) that her status was fragile and, if broken,

irreplaceable. He also cautioned that if she were not careful, the chaste sinner could very well surpass her in piety and attain greater spiritual honor. As he made plain, the virgin's central responsibility is to maintain the state she already enjoys while also progressing in virtue. And that esteemed status was associated not just with spiritual purity but also physical integrity. Thus, though Ælred's treatment of chastity clearly demonstrated that physical virginity is not a requirement for spiritual perfection with respect to monks, one wonders if this judgment would have applied to the virgin recluse. How might he have counseled the anchoress if she had lost her physical virginity? Would he have been willing to re-imagine her as one of the wanderers who returns in humility to the Father?

While only one of the five authors of this study put great stock in the physical aspect of virginity, none seem to have had trouble with the idea of men as virgins. In other words, there is little to suggest that these monks avoided such language because they saw male virginity as conceptually problematic. Most, at some point, wrote of men as virgins—whether physical or spiritual. This was especially true of the three black monks who all wrote entire tracts with male virginity (or its loss) as a central theme. Anselm's male narrator lamented lost virginity and called his soul a virgin. Guibert understood virginity as a spiritual ideal not contingent on the state of the body; however, he also saw the male body as meaningfully virginal. There were, in his perception, both physically virginal and chaste monks in his community, and the virgins were manifestly distinct from the chaste. Finally, Rupert saw virginity as essentially physical and handled male and female virginity in tandem, making no apparent distinction between the two. Neither Rupert nor Guibert had to wrestle with the idea of what qualified a man as a virgin. Rupert knew exactly what virginity entailed: a person is a virgin if he or she has not engaged in consensual sexual intercourse. Guibert's answer was different: those possessing sexual and spiritual innocence are virgins and, so too are the spiritually upright but sexually experienced. But, as with Rupert, it was not a concept he approached as if it were a

conundrum because of the vagaries of men's bodies. None of these black monks found virginity for men to be a conceptual obstacle.

This also seems to have been the case with the Cistercians of this study. In their work, both Ælred and Bernard wrote of men as virgins, and the men they referred to in this manner were not just spiritual but also physical virgins. While Ælred rejected the ideal as a model for his monks, he described King Edward as a virgin in much the same terms as he depicted the virginal anchoress. This was true for Bernard, as well. He saw little reason to promote virginity for his monks, but when he wrote of the haughty virgin, he may have been responding, at least in part, to the attitudes of virginal monks from other communities. This indicates that he did not find virginity and men incongruous. The evidence gleaned from the work of all these monks implies that the idea of men as virgins—whether physical or spiritual virgins—was not a conceptual impediment.

Moreover, there is some suggestion that virginity (physical and spiritual integrity) still carried a certain dignity in the monastic world, even in the later period when Bernard was writing. In both Guibert's and Anselm's work there was a clear awareness that there were different types of men residing within monastic communities: the oblates and the adult converts. And both writers made plain that the virginal oblates saw themselves as spiritually elite.¹ Rupert's and Bernard's writings further indicated that virginity was bound up in questions of status and superiority. Rupert was a black monk engaged in a battle with the secular clergy. Their attacks on him and his work inspired him to call attention to the special distinction associated with virgins. In contrast, Bernard's words were written by a white monk for his community of monks, many of whom were likely not virgins. And, in his case, physical virginity was

problematized and its significance deemphasized. I have argued that his discourse may have been directed at communities of virginal black monks who had been using their status as virgins to promote their own pre-eminence. If true, this suggests that virginity still carried some clout within monastic circles during Bernard's lifetime. Thus, my study of these monks hints that the possession of virginity (virginity of mind and body) continued, to some degree, to be a meaningful distinction throughout the period under my scrutiny.

Nonetheless, there is an indication that the ideal was less relevant for religious men who did not themselves possess physical virginity. Guibert and Rupert were both likely physically virginal and both wrote tracts about male virginity. Anselm did pen a meditation on lost virginity even though he was probably not a virgin. Given his audience of traditional black monks many of whom would have been virgins, the tract would have resonated well with its readers. Overall, however, I showed that virginity had little resonance in his thought and that physical integrity was not central in his assessment of spiritual perfection. The two white monks wrote no extended works about male virginity; indeed, they spoke in terms of chastity not virginity when modeling a way of life for their brethren. The pattern uncovered in the monks studied here hints that the ideal of virginity was more evocative when it was a quality possessed by the author himself or/and his audience. Given this, we can imagine that as the years progressed and fewer monks entered monastic communities as sexually innocent virgins, the ideal would have continued to diminish in importance for religious men.

¹ For Anselm's reference to the distinction between types of monks and the oblates' sense of superiority, see note 95 in chapter 2 on Guibert of Nogent.

Though the evidence of my research intimates that the significance of virginity as an ideal was linked with the actual possession of that physical state, one ought not overlook the obvious. Virginity never predominated in Christian religious writing for men. And the analyses of the preceding chapters (in particular those on Anselm and Ælred) may indicate, at least in part, why this was so. My investigations showed that the images embedded in virginity did not aptly depict those monks' perceptions of spiritual perfection. In the chapter on Anselm, I demonstrated his preference for representations of friendship and intimacy to those of virginity. For him, they all connoted union with God, but apparently the language of friendship/intimacy better conveyed his experience of union. Similarly, Ælred too called upon alternate imagery in his work. To describe the life of perfection for monks he enlisted the idea of the fallen sinner not the ever-pious believer and the journey back not diligent preservation. His monks were likely not predominantly virgins, but even if they had been, the images he connected with virginity would have failed to communicate the dynamic stalwart way of life he associated with the monastic profession. These men did not uphold virginity as a central ideal for their brethren because the images it conveyed were incompatible with their perceptions of monastic perfection. Perhaps this was the case with other medieval monks as well. If so, it might account (in part) for the general scarcity of discourse about male virginity. Religious men were frequently virgins and virginity was a monastic ideal, but the concepts associated with virginity did not aptly describe how monks understood themselves and their religious endeavor.

The above discussion about monks' self-perception tangentially brings up the question of monastic masculinity. Did sexual abstinence, as some scholars have argued, pose a threat to medieval monks' identity as men? Both Guibert and Rupert wrote at length about male virginity, and in their work, there is no sense of a troubling association between it and their masculine identity. However, in general, modern theories on this matter posit that monks' confidence in their own masculinity became tenuous only once monasteries were populated

with men who had grown up in the secular world. Rupert was an oblate and Guibert joined his monastery when he was twelve or so. If we suppose that Guibert's youthfulness enabled the monastery's religious ideals to readily replace the secular ones of his childhood, then we might not expect either Rupert or Guibert to be insecure about their manhood. Of the monks studied here who converted as adults, only Ælred provides grist for this mill. Certainly, he was determined to depict the monastic way of life as extraordinarily masculine—monks were strong, authoritative, and in control. As part of this endeavor he avoided linking monks overmuch with overwhelming, uncontrollable sexuality—associations he saw as weak and effeminate, which would have impeded his message of monks as self-governing. But I also showed that he did not portray monks as invulnerable and innately able to succeed. In his work, there was clearly a potential for failure and a recognition that not all could live up to the expectations of monasticism—indeed, this was a key component of his portraiture of the monk as sinner. In his works for men, Ælred was not proposing a model of what monks are *naturally* but of what they could *become* with diligent effort and God's Grace. It is apparent that he did not want uncontrolled sexuality to figure largely into this prototype. However, to suppose he was driven to paint the successful monk in such masculine terms because of insecurity about his own or his community's manhood is more than the evidence allows. In general, then, my research does not support the theory that chastity undermined monks' self-identity; nor, however, does it refute that supposition.

Chastity and virginity meant differently to medieval thinkers. When the monks studied here wrote of virginity, they were thinking of spiritual union between the soul and God. But the way they expressed this abstruse concept took shape differently from author to author. In Rupert's judgment, virginity implied a bond between the soul and God. But he did not concentrate on the nature of that relationship; his attention was fixed on the consequence of that intimate connection. His virgin was not a contemplative removed from the world, in

meditative union with God. His virgin is fruitful and engaged in the world; he/she is a person who contemplates God through meditation on Scripture and shares that knowledge with others. Conversely, Anselm's idea of virginity focused almost exclusively on the ineffable connection between soul and God, construed as a marital bond. Guibert too understood virginity as union, but his treatment of that esoteric concept was rather simplistic—'union with God' in his hands sounded much like 'becoming like God'.

Virginity could also pertain to the ascetic practice—the purification and preparation—required for attaining union. This connotation of virginity had more in common with the perceptions of chastity described by Bernard and Ælred. Virginity as an ascetic process was especially evident in Guibert's work. In his estimation, virginity is a longed for state of union. But in his estimation, the endeavor to reach that state was so fraught with snares, so treacherous that deliberations about the ascetic endeavor predominated in his work. Bernard and Ælred wrote of the monastic pursuit largely in terms of chastity not virginity. When they considered chastity, they spoke largely of this process of ascetic growth and purification. For them, chastity did not describe a union of God and soul; instead, it was one of the central qualities necessary for achieving union. For both men, chastity was more than merely an ascetic practice—it was part of the contemplative process and a key virtue required before union is possible. For Bernard, it also connoted the spiritual life free of all carnal desire. Yet, neither comprehended it as the end, as the perfected state of loving union with God. In general, virginity and chastity were defined differently by the monks researched here—by and large, virginity implied spiritual union with God as well as the method for attaining that state; chastity referred more to the process.

In the sixth century, Benedict of Nursia wrote a *Rule* for monks living in coenobitic communities. That work concluded with a chapter reminding all those who hasten toward

perfection that living according to its guidelines is only a first step. The next stage, as they advance toward the “heavenly country,” he advised, are the loftier heights of doctrine and virtue expressed by the Fathers.² Each monk of this study wrote about virginity and chastity differently. Their premises were similar, rooted in the wisdom of the Fathers—just as Benedict proposed—and in the erudition offered by Benedict himself. But they all enlarged upon the ideals in a manner that suited themselves, their communities, their circumstances, and their life experiences. Still, no matter what picture emerged from the pages of these monks’ texts, it can surely be said that all were ruminating on the pinnacle of the spiritual endeavor, and all were men who hastened toward perfection.

² *RB* 73; Benedict of Nursia, *RB*, 294-97.

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