

## 12 MONASTIC LIFE

BENEDICT OF NURSIA INTENDED THAT THE monastery should present an indivisible unity and an example of continuing communal life. All should be of one heart and one soul, as the apostolic community had been depicted. The reality was usually different, concerning both the *stabilitas loci* and the various groups with various ways of life within the monastery. The more numerous the members, the more difficult it was to establish an interpersonal bond among them.

The Burgundian Rodulf Glaber was taken into the monastery of Saint-Léger in Champagne around the age of twelve, left there not

entirely of his own accord, and found haven first in Moutier-Saint-Jean in the diocese of Auxerre and then in the monastery of Saint-Germain in Auxerre. There he experienced the conflict concerning the altar inscriptions mentioned in chapter 11 above. Later we find him in the Bèze monastery and then in the respected monastery of Saint-Bénigne at Dijon. The abbot of that monastery, William of Volpiano, took him along on a trip to Italy. After the death of his patron, Rodulf moved to Cluny, where he completed his historical work at the request of Abbot Odilo. William was an important reformer who had been trained in Cluny. Neither he nor Odilo was bothered by the unsettled life of this man. They were accustomed to placing and transplanting monks in different monasteries for the purpose of reform, and we have already seen that the papal privilege for Fleury allowed that monastery to accept reform-minded monks even without the approval of their abbots. Rodulf himself wrote that foreign monks were always accepted with respect in Saint-Germain.

We also hear of the departure of whole monastic communities, such as that of Chartres in 1004. The *vitae* of saintly monks often give the impression of instability. Outside the sphere of reform, we are told, for example, in the life of a monk from Saint Gall named Tutilo, that he was "a man who loved to travel and who knew all of the lands and cities for far around," and had been sent as far away as Mainz to purchase cloth.

According to the Rule of Benedict, anyone who, upon returning from a trip, told his brothers of his travels was to be punished. This was a requirement which later left no trace and was hardly ever followed. Benedict of Nursia also thought that traveling monks would stay in his monastery and would desire "a fixed location" there, that is, that they would enter his community. One could even try to convince exemplary monks to stay, since "everywhere one serves the same lord, fights for the same king." This sentence from the Rule could also justify moving from Benedict's monastery to another. In any case, even at that time *stabilitas* was not seen as a strict law. On the other hand, a change of residence was to be an exception and should not lead to a fluctuation of the monastic personnel.

### GROUP FORMATION: *NUTRITI* AND *CONVERSI*

Monks coming from abroad had to fit into a distinction that was made in the everyday life of the monastery between those who had served from childhood and those who had taken the vows late in life,

that is, between *nutriti* and *conversi* (in the old sense of persons who joined the community after adulthood). Here, people who were accustomed to following the direction of others interacted with noble or freeborn men who had lived a secular life before entering the monastery. On the one hand there were monks who had been educated in the monastery's "internal school," on the other those who were barely literate and knew no Latin. Relatively few of the great abbots but almost all of the monastic historians came from the former group. In everyday life the *nutriti* apparently formed a core group, which took a reserved attitude toward the latecomers. The opposition was obvious in many ways, particularly in a speech by an enemy of Ademar of Chabannes in the debate on Martial of Limoges. Benedict, prior of the monastery of San Michele della Chiusa (near Susa in the Piedmont), said in his clumsy Latin that he was the nephew of the abbot of that monastery and was his designated successor. If there had been no wicked monks, namely *conversi* with their churlish ways, he would long since have been abbot. This man, who behaved as a learned monk, was thus rejected by the *conversi* of his monastery. It is likely that these included influential people.

The entry of young monks, or rather the oblation (*oblatio*) of children to the saint, took place very early. Rather (of Verona) was brought to the monastery of Lobbes as a small child (*puerulus*) "along with bread and wine as an offering." William of Dijon had been given by his parents to a monastery near Vercelli at the age of seven. Thanks to his exceptional parentage he was looked after by a trustworthy woman who lived near the monastery, and there he was occasionally allowed to spend the night. Since children were not always baptized as infants, an unbaptized son might be given to a monastery by his father.

For the family it was reassuring if one of their members was a pious intercessor in a monastery. This was still more true of sick children, who in a monastery were nearer to God and out of the family's way. Gerald of Aurillac, later considered a saint, was often ill in childhood; so he was allowed to study. "Although little suited for worldly affairs, he was suitable for an ecclesiastical office." Saint Adalbert of Prague and others were said to have recovered their health after entering the monastery. In Cluny the number of *pueri oblati* was limited to six in the late eleventh century. Apparently this was to prevent the abuse whereby families with numerous offspring offered some of them, especially their blind, deformed, or leprous children, to the

monastery, "not to do God's will, but only to avoid the burden of their education and support."

While those who entered the monastery later, even those in clerical orders, had to spend a period as novices, in Cluny children were immediately given the scapular cowl and thus made full members of the community. After achieving their majority—that is, at an "appropriate age," usually fifteen years—the young monk had to show, by placing his charter of profession on the altar himself, that he wanted to belong to the community. The *consuetudines* did not provide for a situation in which a monk would request to leave at this time. Apparently such things hardly ever happened. If they did, the monastery would have had the unpleasant task of returning property that the parents had donated at the time of the oblation. In the ninth century, a situation of this kind, involving Gottschalk in the monastery of Fulda, had caused a scandal. Although the monastery immediately granted him his freedom, it did not wish to return his family property. A synod of Ingelheim in 948 ordered that children who had been brought to the monastery could no longer return to secular status. Of course this went against the intention of the Rule, and the promises of the monk in his charter of profession—*stabilitas loci*, moral conduct, and obedience—became mere formalities. A report of the Frankfurt synod of 1027 shows that the 948 order was being followed: A man named Gebhard was ordered to return to monastic status because he had fled from a Würzburg monastery when he was a child. It was of no help that he was a stepbrother of the emperor who was present at this assembly.

Along with sick children, old people, in monastic habit, awaited death in monasteries. That could take a long time or could be as fast as in the case of Count Odo I of Chartres, who fell ill, became a monk, and died, all in four days. At the critical moment when a sinful man stood before the tribunal of God, he needed helpers, and he found them if he was a monk. According to custom at Gorze, all the bells were rung and everyone hurried to the church to pray for a dying brother. The same was supposed to take place at the death of the king or other magnates, especially when the dying individual had been accepted into the prayer confraternity of the monastery. True, it was some time before word of their death reached the monastery. Perhaps judgment of the soul of the deceased had already taken place? In any case, dying in the monastery guaranteed that intercessory prayers would be offered at the proper time. Here one could die in peace.

This kind of death did not always occur as desired. Count Albert of Vermandois became ill, had himself tonsured, and took the cowl. Then he recovered and had to listen to the reproaches of his family, who considered it stupidity to have entered the monastery. So he “exchanged the cowl for the warrior’s clothing,” for which he experienced the punishment of God. The count fell ill once more, and this time he really did die.

Abbots were pleased when magnates wanted to end their lives in their monastery, for material reasons and also because such choices demonstrated the reputation of the community. For spiritual life, the presence of a pious outsider whose social status had to be taken into account was rather a burden. For example, Duke William III of Aquitaine, count of Poitou, whose daughter was later the wife of Hugh Capet, went to Saint-Maixent then back to Saint-Cyprian in Poitiers, where he died in 963. Was he really one monk among many, or had the monastery become a sort of court for him? It would have taken a great strength of will on both sides to make a duke conform to the Rule in every detail. Even the ascetically strict monastery of Gorze gave special treatment to a rich man of noble family who brought with him “a burden of gold and silver and other furniture (*supellectilem*) in great abundance.” Because he was an important person (*ampla persona*), he was treated more gently than the others and honored more than they.

The ideal situation, and a real advantage for the monastery, was that young men should decide of their own free will and with full awareness to enter the community. Romuald entered the monastery at the age of twenty as penance for a violent crime committed by his father. Odo of Cluny became a monk at thirty. Both became very important for the monastic life of their epoch. For adult monks it was more difficult than for *pueri oblati* to separate themselves entirely from their families. Such attachments could result in a monk’s being followed into the monastery by his family. John, a son of free parents, entered Gorze and convinced his two brothers to do the same. The mother, a widow and thus independent, later moved “with some of the people from her *familia*” to a place near the monastery and occupied herself as a servant (*serviens*) to the monks. In conjunction with her own servants she looked after the clothing of the Gorze convent. While an advantage for Gorze, this activity was considered questionable by some monks.

If we examine the most important groups of which the convent was composed, we find the monks raised in the monastery forming

the nucleus of its tradition, in full possession of spiritual education but without the worldly experience of latecomers. We can assume that the attitude of men like Rather of Verona vis-à-vis the realities of existence had its source in their background as *nutriti*. Apart from the *nutriti* and the latecomers there were arrivals from other monasteries: reformed monks, or restless souls with disciplinary problems. In addition there would be people of genuine late vocation, experienced in the world and thus capable of assuming positions of leadership after acquiring the necessary instruction and training. A strong hand was needed to lead such different kinds of people toward a common goal. One means to this end was the full occupation of all members through prescribed daily work.

#### PRIEST MONKS AND CRIMINALS

The Rule of Benedict dedicated a whole chapter to priest monks. At the time it was written, they were few in number and were selected by the abbot; Benedict ordered strict punishments for those priests who fancied themselves something special. In the tenth century things were different: priests formed a large minority or even a majority of the community, and many monks held minor orders as well. It is probably true that priest monks—like the former *pueri oblati*, with whom they were often identical—considered themselves the real notables of the monastery. This process of intellectualization pushed the simple *conversi* ever more to the periphery. Noble birth may have provided a certain balance to this elite, but a “boorish” monk, possibly from an unfree family that had taken refuge in the monastery, was not much respected. In the *consuetudines* the *conversi*, often in contrast to the *cantores* and the *pueri*, were charged with responsibilities marginal to the liturgical life. They carried candlesticks or the aspersorium and were allowed to swing the censer. A monk became more and more similar to a lay brother without profession, “who is not a monk but a tonsured layman.”

Another sort of marginality resulted from the fact that monasteries could be a refuge for criminals, who could not be thrown out when they sought asylum with signs of penitence. No one was surprised at a story told by Regino that one day (in 746) the former mayor of the palace, Karlmann, after his resignation, went incognito to Montecassino, knocked on the door of the monastery, and requested a meeting with the abbot. Karlmann told him that he was a killer and asked with all signs of penitence to be allowed to choose

that monastery as his place of penance. The second synod of Limoges in 1031 had to deal with the question of whether someone who had committed a murder and had then become a monk should be allowed to be ordained. The synod considered the case of a cleric who had murdered a bishop. Since he was taken in nowhere else, he was offered the possibility of penance in Cluny. Abbot Odilo inquired in Rome how to treat the man and was told that the sinner could neither be ordained nor receive communion. We cannot doubt that Abbot Odilo wanted to see this penitent criminal fully integrated into the monastic community. We do not know if many of the brothers found his presence in the dormitory and in the refectory sinister or even threatening. The fact that the pope imposed limitations may have prevented Cluny from becoming an asylum for more clerical criminals. Previously, Abbot Odo had brought a "very famous robber" (*insignissimus latro*) to Cluny, who was given the position of assistant to the cellarer and carried out his duties with one hand "while holding the psalter in the other." In this case the young man became a monk after a period of testing. Apparently he came from a good family and could have been one of those "younger sons" who either would not or could not wait to be released from their father's authority.

#### MONASTERIES GREAT AND SMALL

The communal life of men of such different origins and education created problems about which we know little. The situation was easier in small communities than in large ones, of course. We usually think of monasticism in connection with large abbeys rather than small dependent houses (*cellae, cellulae*). These small institutions were further differentiated into those with a dozen monks and those with even fewer. The average community—if we take into consideration the large ones (*monasteria*), the middle-sized (*coenobia*), and the small (*cellae, cellulae*)—must have included around thirty monks. At the time of new foundations and new settlements this was the number most frequently mentioned, along with the number twelve. Understandably, there were more small monasteries than middle-sized or large ones. The same image is presented in the (questionable) modern lists of houses associated with Cluny, or involved in the Cluniac reform.

Small communities were subject to the discipline of an abbot of a larger monastery and thus experienced temporary control. The life-

style might be strenuous, as we may suppose it was in the twelve "cells" of William of Dijon's monastery of Saint-Bénigne. In other cases the life of so small a group might have led in other, more relaxed directions. Such "cells" were often established on small properties of a monastery, sometimes because the donor of the property had requested that monks pray at that place for his soul. Possibly their presence was a guarantee against alienation, and in order to better oversee the exploitation of the property. When one of the large monasteries had too many members, founding of a "cell" was also a means of reducing the number of inhabitants. It is more likely that "boorish" monks who were experienced in agriculture would be sent to these cells than those who were important for the liturgy and spiritual level of the mother house.

At the other extreme stood the great monasteries. At one time there had been 300 monks in Corbie and in Centula-Saint-Riquier, 150 in Saint-Denis, 120 in Saint-Germain-des-Prés. There were 300 monks at Aniane under the great abbot Benedict, but after his departure the monastery quickly became insignificant. Centula had Abbot Angilbert to thank for its size, Corbie a cousin of Charlemagne's, Wala. Benedict of Aniane had all of the convents in the subkingdom of Aquitaine handed over to his monastery. Family connections with Charlemagne and the wealth of the highest elites, or the great personal influence on the young king, had caused this extraordinary growth. Elsewhere, less than one-half of that population was achieved. The cause was not a deficiency in rural property. That of the monastery of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, with around 30,000 hectares, was enormous. Nevertheless the number of monks was relatively small.

In the Ottonian period, proximity to the monarchy was lacking, as were the economic underpinnings for such communities. Huge monastic lordships had been replaced by smaller units. In the protocol concerning the election of Abbot Odilo of Cluny in 994, the names of 76 monks are listed, and the dormitory at Cluny contained at the most 100 beds, possibly only 64 (the second number might be too low). The Carolingian plan of a monastery in Saint Gall indicates 77 beds in the dormitory. In addition there were 8 in the abbot's house, 5 in the gatehouse, 2 in the living quarters of the external school, and 3 for the hospice personnel. Officers and monastic officials too may have been housed in these locations, and perhaps also their servants and those of the abbot. With a dozen novices, this could add up to as many as 110 religious. The plan came, according

to all indications, from Reichenau. By the year 940—that is, four generations after the copying of the plan—this monastery housed the abbot and 95 monks. The decline in number since the Carolingian period was less here than in many other communities.

Cluny, then, was not an exceptionally large monastery in the tenth century. We know this to be so, even if the often cited number of 64 monks who received books to read during Lent is not much to go on. In the German monastery of Prüm there were said to be 186 religious, 100 of them priests, in the second half of the tenth century. This is unusual, for even a large monastery such as Farfa had only half as many monks. In contrast to the Carolingian period there were no monasteries with as many as 300 monks. The elites had become poorer, and what the chronicler of Saint-Géry in Cambrai described was true of many communities: “Once there had been a greater number of brothers (in the monastery), now want had caused a reduction in number to 50.” In some cases there was a catastrophic drop, as in Hirsau in 988 when the number of monks fell from 72 to 12 because of an epidemic. The monastery of Bèze burned down in the year 937 for the fifth time, this time by arson, for which a Hungarian detachment was responsible. For fifty-one years it was impossible to reestablish the earlier standard (*statum*). Even without data on numbers, this is an impressive example of the situation at that time.

#### MONASTIC BUILDINGS: THE ROLE OF FIRE AND LIGHT

War and pestilence threatened only at specific times, the danger of fire was constant. It was, so to speak, a daily occurrence for a burning candle could set the bed straw on fire at night. This even happened once to some craftsmen who were working for the monastery as foundrymen and had learned to deal with fire. In the monk's dormitory a candle had to burn constantly according to the Rule, a command with a practical purpose. There were “eternal” lights for religious reasons, too. At Fleury, three candles burned day and night: one in the church, one by the tomb of Saint Benedict, one in the crypt oratory. Candles were the most dangerous form of lighting, but there was more than enough wax: Dependents were burdened with wax payments to ecclesiastical lords throughout the Middle Ages. The greatest danger was that of fire in the church. The transition to building with stone for this practical reason began first with church construction; fortifications and city walls came afterwards. However, even stone churches promised no absolute security: the cathedral

church of Chartres burned in 962, its replacement in 1020, and the renewed church, in part, in 1030 before its dedication.

In the secular sphere as well, people seem to have seen fire as an unavoidable danger, yet failed to do everything possible to reduce their risk. We know that walled fireplaces and Roman floor heating were not entirely forgotten. Nonetheless, a fireplace, in which logs were burned, was normally built in the middle of a room. The smoke exited through an opening in the ceiling, over which a small roof was erected as protection against rain and snow. This sort of heating is known from prehistoric finds, was still in use in English university colleges at the end of the Middle Ages, and existed in peasant dwellings as late as 1770. On the Saint Gall plan, where other forms of heating were used as well, the open fireplace in the center of the room was employed for the servants' buildings, for the “external school,” and for the guest house, in which important persons were housed. No doubt the monks wanted students and distinguished visitors to feel at home. The cost of fuel was merely the food and clothing of the servants who brought it from the forest, and thus was minimal.

Although people enjoyed gathering around the open fire in a large room, in small bedrooms the corner fireplace with semicircular chimney was the favorite form of heating. This was probably used at Reichenau (according to the Saint Gall copy) in the abbot's bedroom and also in the rooms intended for important guests. The disadvantage of this sort of heating was, as we still know today, that it heated the room unevenly. It may have been for this reason that the abbot's bed stood nearest the fireplace. For monks and novices, who had to spend many hours in the church, a warming room with floor heating had been prepared in Reichenau. Above the monks' warming room and at least indirectly heated by it lay their dormitory. Floor heating was also found in other monasteries and palaces, such as Werla (in Saxony), built between 920 and 930.

Such luxury seems to have been the exception in smaller monasteries and “cells.” In any case it was a hard life for those who did not tolerate cold, but few or no such people seem to have survived to adulthood. By comparison with servants, monks were better off: they wore underwear and a cowl which reached almost to the floor. They had furs and not only regular shoes but night footwear as well. Peasants, on the other hand, to judge from contemporary illustrations, went barefoot and wore only short tunics. They protected their feet as well as they could by wrapping them in rags. One wonders how people could survive for thirty or even forty years in such conditions,

but the answer is simple: their ancestors had lived like that since time immemorial and even less comfortably than in the tenth century.

We know from an ancient description of the Cluniac buildings, and in part also from the excavations conducted by the Medieval Academy of America, that there was a monastic building tradition extending from the plan of Saint Gall, through the reform of Benedict of Aniane, to Cluny. The description begins with the monastery's church, which also corresponds to the chronological development of the buildings. The church is "Cluny II," the work of Abbot Maiolus, dedicated in 981. His successor Odilo replaced the wooden roof with a stone vault, a daring construction which greatly increased the fire protection of the building.

William of Dijon did the same for his church of Saint-Bénigne at Dijon, and it is assumed that he introduced Lombard construction forms—and probably experts as well—into Burgundy. The description of Cluny II says nothing about this important improvement. Instead, it tells us that the church had 160 glass windows. This is certainly either an exaggeration or a later scribal error. But even if there were only 60, they must have been marveled at as an unheard-of luxury. And there were more windows of this kind: 97 in the dormitory alone, all as high as a man holding up his arm, and two and one-half feet wide. This was nothing essentially novel, since already in the ninth century churches such as those in Reichenau had glass windows, even glass pictures. In a poor monastery in the late tenth century, window openings were still covered with cloth, which admitted little light. We mentioned earlier how the monks in Tegernsee were delighted by the "extraordinary work" of stained glass windows.

In the Saint Gall plan one can see that the scriptorium had windows. For most of the other buildings, people were content with the light that came from the smoke opening in the roof. There were some windows in the rooms for important persons. Here the new construction of Odilo could be regarded as "modern," for he had procured the entry of light and sun. The concern for baths and toilets also suggested modernity. One would not have expected to find, next to the house for noble guests with 70 beds, that 70 toilets had been installed, which apparently corresponded to the standard of courtly comfort. The monks of the Saint Gall plan had had to manage with a total of 9 toilets next to the dormitory. In Cluny there were 45 in the corresponding space, each with its own window. One can imagine that each had two users, so that there was a total of 90 monks in the cloister dormitory. Perhaps they showed their latrines to visitors with

pride. Decorum and hygiene were two of the bases of the Cluniac system.

## THE CLOISTER AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Since Odilo built a guest house for 70 persons, he must have been thinking of royal visits. In two rooms, 40 men and 30 women could be accommodated. Accompanying personnel were given less comfort. They had to sleep and eat in a *solarium* over the horse stables, which meant in the open air, protected only by a roof. Here only the horses had separate stalls; their grooms had to arrange themselves as they wished. One must add that no one traveled in winter without urgent reasons.

There was a third group of travelers: those who came without horses and—it went without saying—received food and drink as alms. The description of the monastic buildings of Cluny reflects the usual dichotomy when it names nobles and "countesses" on one side and simple pedestrians on the other. A person traveling without being able to command horses and servants was, in the best case, a pilgrim, but he was more likely to be one of the crowd of tramps who had been set adrift by war or personal guilt. The borders between the two groups were indistinct: pilgrims often had to do penance for some crime; beggars wandered under the guise of pilgrims.

The description of the monastic buildings stops short with the dimensions of a house whose purpose is unknown. We learn nothing about many other important structures, such as the external school, nothing about the workshops of craftsmen except for those of the tailors, the goldsmiths, and the glaziers. Perhaps the whole complex was still under construction. The fact that the optative mood, "it should be built" (*construatur*), is used in the second section would support this hypothesis. In any case, the concept of the description was followed, since the excavations have not indicated any significant departures from it.

The organization of large monasteries demanded great skill on the part of the monastic officers and much discipline on the part of their inhabitants. There were large secular complexes too, which cannot be fully compared with the great monasteries; a royal court or a magnate's court, oriented toward the outside world, presented almost entirely material problems, while a monastery had both material and spiritual needs. In the monastic sphere, silence and compo-  
sure were to reign, and secular guests and the care of the poor in the

hospice were to be separated from it. Moreover, the monastery was the center of a complicated agricultural operation with mills, wine presses, and the personnel who worked the lord's reserve (*terra indominicata*). Finally, there were monasteries which served as centers for the veneration of saints by the common people. In the monastery of Sainte Foy (Fides) in Conques, monks as well as "educated laypersons" maintained vigils. The chanting of the psalms was disturbed one day by the noise and singing of peasant pilgrims. The church door was closed, but the pilgrims raised such a hue and cry that it had to be opened again. The pilgrims crowded into the church, so that the monks had hardly any room.

When important visitors came, they desired social contact with the monastic officers. For this reason there was sometimes a special table and kitchen for the abbot. The poor were cared for separately. In Fleury, as a reminder of the old institution of the *matricula*, there was a house for twelve paupers, who were lodged here permanently. The building had its own bakery and kitchen. The novitiate also formed a separate living circle. In Cluny each novice had his own protector or guard (*custodia*) during his first year and could speak only with him. Novices had their own house and special care. This was also true of the inmates of the hospital. In most of the monasteries there were, as in the Carolingian plan of Saint Gall, various kitchens as evidence of the various groups: monks, perhaps abbot (and guests), novices, the sick, important guests (those who arrived on horseback), the poor, pilgrims, etc. The secular monastic personnel did not form a specific group in the sense of having their own dining arrangements, since they probably took care of themselves in their own houses nearby.

Benedict of Nursia had instructed his monks to receive foreigners as though they were Christ himself, and he prescribed a specific ritual of reception. He had hardly imagined that there would be whole cavalcades of important men and women. This was not changed by any reform, either in Burgundy or, still less, in the lands of royal ecclesiastical lordship. Monks sometimes sighed under the burden of such quartering of guests, but they did not consider eliminating it. They did complain about the burden of caring for the poor, a responsibility more appropriate for the secular clergy than for monks.

The Benedictine Rule had prescribed a special table for the abbot because he was always to dine with his male guests. Therefore the monk's table had its own supervisor. In Reichenau and in Cluny things were different, and the abbot and monks dined together in the

refectory where laypersons were not allowed. Cluny had no abbot's house because the abbot slept among the monks. This was a symbolic return to the "familial model" without, however, eliminating the very marked lordly position of the abbot that was characteristic of Cluny. Neither here nor in smaller monasteries could the abbot spend much time in the role of father to the monks, for he was primarily the top administrator of a complex, multifarious institution. When the monk Wigo of Tegernsee was elected abbot provisor of the monastery of Feuchtwangen, he opened his heart in a letter to a hermit about the unaccustomed duties his new office had brought with it. All the brothers were either sick or excused by their manifold duties, so that Wigo could hardly catch his breath. "All the keys of the monastery hang on my belt. In addition I must look to the observance of the Rule, provide for necessary food, supervise the kitchen, sometimes take charge of the refectory (as *refectorius*), and I must constantly be at the service of all who live in the monastery and of guests who pass through it."

Nevertheless, an abbot had reason to be content when daily life went on in this manner. There could be significant economic problems, especially in years of bad harvests when an abbot had to write letters to magnates begging for grain, or when there were disputes over monastic possessions. Many holders of monastic offices seem to have been overburdened, like Wigo. In some monasteries, for example, the responsibilities of the cellarer expanded to include all storerooms, so that he was responsible for the distribution of shoes and even for the decoration of the cloister on feast days.

We know that in liturgical matters nothing was arbitrary or left to chance. So monks took written directions seriously, a "modern" tendency. In Cluny, bulletin boards displayed the schedule of the monk's kitchen duties, the schedule of celebrants of Masses for the dead, etc. Monks had to live according to a preestablished plan with precisely apportioned times, while the laity distinguished only between day and night, hours of work and hours of rest.

## CONTEMPLATION AND PRAYER

This active existence was difficult to reconcile with the requirement that monks needed calm for spiritual contemplation, a stillness that the hermit sought in isolation. A great silence had surrounded God—and the "divine" emperor—since late antiquity, and in silence one had to approach God. Moreover, controlling one's tongue at certain

times was a disciplinary exercise that was not easy in the midst of so many activities. There was therefore a wide variety of punishments, from loss of wine rations to beatings, for those who violated the times of silence. Since one could use a kind of sign language during these periods, the form rather than the purpose of this exercise was observed. Inward composure, not a strong point in tenth-century piety, was nurtured by external aids. In the monastery's cloister, the capitals confronted the monk with a stone gallery of symbols, which assisted him in achieving conviction: the temptation of Christ by the devil; Samson's fight with the lion (a symbol of evil); the tree of the world with its two opposed branches. The arcades of cloister formed the monks' spiritual home, especially for those who were illiterate. The literate too could here find silence and an aid to meditation.

Meditation and prayer were intended to help monks save their own souls. But the threat of judgment hung over the dead too. Therefore all had to help, concentrating on particular individuals so as to raise the chances of success. This activity too represented a triumph of organization. If we can believe Rodulf Glaber, the system of prayer for the dead was the real source of Cluny's fame, extending as far as Africa. On that continent a merchant from Marseille had learned from a hermit that in the domain of intercessionary prayer Cluny was far more successful than any other institution in the Roman Christian world. Hardly a day passed, the hermit continued, when no soul was freed from the power of the evil spirits through the Masses celebrated in Cluny.

Prayers of all religions were good, but the best were those offered in the Mass by priest monks. This was the main reason it was important to have such monks in the monastery, many more than necessary for the liturgical needs of the community itself. The number of priests was also important in negotiations with other monasteries with a view to entering prayer brotherhoods. Hence the organization of praying for souls grew even greater. Hundreds of deceased Christians were prayed for in the Mass, then thousands, and finally all. It was at Cluny that the feast of All Souls was conceptualized as an obligation for all priests to celebrate Mass on one specific day for all of the dead. Besides this, priest monks had to celebrate a special commemoration, four times a year, of every brother with whom they were bound in a *societas*, as though they were monks of Cluny. Commemoration of the dead was found everywhere, but nowhere was it developed so intensively, systematically, and with such economic consequences as in Cluny and in its priories. If a monk died, his name and date of

death were entered in the memorial book. On the anniversary of his death, a pauper who was to pray for his soul received a special ration of food appropriate to a monk. This fine thought, scrupulously executed, brought the monasteries increasing burdens. By the twelfth century it had developed so far that care of the poor on the anniversaries of the dead was as expensive as care of the monks themselves. The practice contributed to the decline of the reformed communities.

We indicated above that in Gorze and the monasteries reformed by it the brothers were supposed to be present when one of them died. At the same time, bells were rung with all possible force as an alarm, and not in gradual crescendo as before Mass. The immediate "attack" of all the monks was required in Cluniac monasteries too. They were to run to the dying brother as fast as they could and simultaneously sing the Credo. This was to be done even when they were at table. Reformed monks did not live lives of pleasure, but they died like kings.

## WORK

Their spiritual duties had already separated Benedict of Nursia's monks from the surrounding rural population. Yet they still had to perform physical work. In order to avoid idleness they had to perform four hours of manual labor per day during six months of the year. This work could be done in the fields, but only where it was necessary, as in poor monasteries or during harvest season. In fact, Benedict's command usually involved kitchen work or gardening, and only rarely did a particularly strict abbot require his monks to participate in agricultural work or even help in the fields himself. From the east came the story, already mentioned, of an abbot who attempted to become an angel. We can now further relate that after he returned, he was brought back to his senses by shame, and he began to work in the monastery's garden. Physical labor could have some spiritual purpose; a real necessity it was not, at least in most cases. Monasteries almost always had sufficient servants to do that kind of work.

Hence, in reformed monasteries, too, manual work became a traditional gesture. It was seldom mentioned in the *consuetudines* of the earlier period, and then only as a part of what is called "ritualism." According to the Benedictine Rule, the brother's work should begin the first hour of the day. In Cluny this canonical hour was celebrated first; then the monks had to sing seven psalms and a litany and to

assist in the early Mass. When they finally went to work, the work was accompanied by the singing of further psalms and the recital of sacred texts. We could also, of course, put it the other way around, and say that this spiritual activity was accompanied by traditional gestures such as working in the monastery's garden. Writing and decorating books was considered a part of physical labor.

Although Adalhard, a cousin of Charlemagne's, absolved the noble-born monks of Corbie from physical labor, this act cannot be interpreted as a purposeful rejection of work. Theologically such a rejection could not be justified, for Adam—the father of all mankind—was compelled to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow as fruit of his sin. "They are true monks if they live from the work of their hands like our fathers and the apostles"; this sentence in the Rule of Benedict could not be put aside. It required no ideological or social prejudices to regard physical labor as inconvenient and to wish to replace it by more important work: the obligation to save souls could not be done through service in the kitchen and garden. Monks saw these things as traditional, but rather secondary duties and accomplished them with the assistance of servants.

There is little in the sources to support Jacques Le Goff's opinion that monks regarded work as penance, since they saw themselves as sinners. Penance for personal guilt was imposed in the Benedictine Rule by separation from the community. The effects of Adam's original sin could not be removed or diminished by the community's manual work. For hermits and sometimes for secular clergy under the influence of hermits, iron chains, hair shirts, and such things served as means of individual penance. The Rule contains none of this, nor do the *consuetudines* of those reformers who stood outside of the influence of eremitism.

This brings us to a consideration of the attitude of monasticism toward things of the flesh. Of course, sexual asceticism was required; it was made simpler by the lack of women in monastic life. Homosexual temptations were occasionally reported. The public nature of the communal life provided some protection against such things, since everyone could observe everyone else. Written comments by monks showing their aversion to the human body were in the tradition of earlier patristic texts. Monasticism still had eremitism as its neighbor, which often continued the attitudes of the desert fathers taking the field against both their flesh and the devil. The Benedictine Rule and the *consuetudines* indicate hardly anything of such tendencies. The life of a monk was hard, but no harder than that of a Roman soldier.

He too had to obey orders rather than follow his own will, he was not always able to sleep during the night, and his conduct was always under the control of others. Benedict did not intend to harm his monks with his Rule. "We shall build a school of service to the Lord, in which we hope that nothing will be commanded that is harsh or burdensome."

As in the military sphere he "who wishes to serve (*militaturus*) Christ, the true king," should receive whatever he needs to remain healthy and able to carry out his duties: enough to eat, appropriate clothing, a bath. We must remember that many people did not have, or had not always had, such amenities. When members of the middle strata of society entered a monastery, they retained their previous standard of living rather than stepping down. One exchanged the bonds to one's family for those to the monastic community, the activities of this world and their dangers for an almost certain place in heaven. Living outside of an ordered community would have been a lot harder; individualists were few in that epoch. As for the family of the religious, it received both intercessory prayers and increased prestige. It was important that the monastery in which its member now lived was of good repute.

## MONASTIC FARE

Of course, much was different in the monk's life from that which he had known in the world. There was little room for independent activity. Monks had to obey the Rule, the *consuetudines*, and the commands of the abbot as long as they seemed reasonable. They gave up life in the open air and the taste of meat. Periods of fasting were hard, feast meals rich. At one time, prehistoric hunting had produced an oscillation between hunger and a superabundance of meat; then agriculture had introduced a certain balance, which was only disturbed by poor crops and, to a lesser extent, by Christian rules of fasting. For the monks, fasts were long, and they longed for them to be over. A tendency toward gluttony occasionally manifested itself in the monastery. Discipline apparently failed more often in this sector than in others. The enumeration of the seven deadly sins was sometimes extended to gluttony and drunkenness.

The prohibition against eating meat, not explained by Benedict, did not extend to fowl, which, however, was used mainly in the diet of the sick. Animal protein was supplied chiefly by eggs and cheese. During Lent, fish appeared as nearly the only food yielding animal

protein. The menu in the monastery of Lobbes does not seem to have offered much variety. From that monastery we have a record of the duties of one of its properties; it had to supply the monastery for one month in a year with the following foods: fish every Monday and Thursday, cheese and eggs every Tuesday, cheese or eggs on the other weekdays. In addition, the monastery cellarer provided fish on four weekdays from his supplies. There were also legumes, vegetables, and—except on fast days—lard. It is not surprising that there were monks, as Odo of Cluny says, whose appetite for meat led them to unholy activities.

The monastery of Lobbes, from which this menu has come down to us, had twelve manors and was thus well supplied. Here animal protein could play as great a role as in the meat consumption of the upper levels of lay society. In Lobbes we also have evidence of the “higher” cuisine of secular custom in the generous use of spices. These did not come all from the kitchen garden; some, such as pepper, which was treasured everywhere, had to be purchased at a high price from merchants. This was also true of the spices used in wines. In this manner the tickling of the palate that the prohibition of meat was supposed to have excluded crept back in. We may wonder whether, at least in the secular world, the motive of representation did not also play a role in culinary matters: among many ways of showing one’s superiority to the masses was the extravagant preparation of meals. Already at the court of Charlemagne, the *cibi pigmentati* had been praised by one of his poets. We read in the *Ruodlieb* poem that one did not pepper bad wine but rather the best.

There were other monasteries in which supplies were more meager. When the bishop of Orléans had seized most of the properties of the monastery of Saint-Mesmin in Micy in order to give them to his vassals, the monks’ daily ration was “a small bread and a handful of vegetables, seldom any wine.” In Tegernsee monks complained that even on the highest feast days they had only rye bread, which “fills the stomach but leaves one empty.” The troops that had to march into Hungary had consumed almost everything. When the economic basis was small, there was always a fear that the monastic elite would provide themselves with a greater proportion of food than that allotted to the rest. For a time this was the situation even in Saint Gall. Some of the brothers lived from their own labor and the charitable donations of their kindred. In this time of distress, all sorts of food, including meat, were welcome. The special cuisine of the abbot could become a stumbling block, and so Abbot John of Gorze was praised for

ordering that he should not have any better food prepared for himself than for the monks, that he should eat the same bread, and that he should not drink any better wine than that which he set before the monks. When such things were so greatly emphasized, they were probably unusual and even against custom, since “nobler” food was allotted to the lord, and also to the abbot, as an expression of his position.

On average, the monastic diet must have been generous in quantity but not so much in quality. For the ninth century, historians have attempted to determine the precise weight of the food consumed in certain monasteries and have come up with the following amounts: between 1.5 and 2 kilograms of bread per day, 70–110 grams of cheese, and 123–230 grams of legumes, for each monk. That is more than a modern person could eat, and it may be that the figures are too high. Characteristic are the high percentages of bread and legumes that are to be found in many records. The food of ecclesiastics seems to have differed little from that of the monastic *familia*, which received additional rations of meat or bacon but possibly less cheese. Someone engaged in physical labor all day could manage such portions better than clerics. That monks did not always maintain an ascetic figure is natural. It was not considered bad.

That beans and peas were cultivated in the tenth century not only in gardens but in field areas north of the Alps is said to have been one of the causes of an explosive rise in population at that time. In the late eleventh century—and probably earlier—beans were on the menu every day in Cluny, or a vegetable soup or a bean or vegetable dish on choice. Some have even thought that the word *fabae* (beans) must have been used to designate all vegetables, “because surely one cannot suppose that beans were served every day.”

At one time monasteries were founded near rivers or lakes because their fish resources were made available to the monks. By the tenth century these resources could no longer be relied on, even in large lakes. In Saint Gall there were hardly enough fish for the table of the abbot. Their price was so high that a single fish dinner cost the same as a man’s normal meals for an entire week. Raising fish in ponds offered only a partial solution and seems not to have been common. During strict fasts, fish were forbidden as well as cheese and eggs, so that only plant proteins were available. Bread and beans were the plainest fare that one could receive in a monastery, but in Saint Gall in times of crisis even these foodstuffs were not always available. In the late eleventh century the eighteen *praebendarii* (official pau-

pers) each received one pound of bread a day, beans four times a week, and vegetables three times a week. On the thirty-five feast days of the year they got meat instead of beans. They were given wine every day—next to bread it was the most important foodstuff.

Fortunately, Benedict of Nursia had written only about food for fasts, not for feasts. Their meals could compensate for Lenten fares, at least in wealthier monasteries. There it was normal to serve at least three warm plates instead of the two prescribed by Benedict. Moreover, an increasing number of days were declared feasts with two meals, although Benedict had prescribed only one daily meal for Lent and for the winter months. Eating between meals was forbidden, but drinking the amount of wine allowed by the Rule was possible at any time. Thus it became customary for brothers to gather for a drink in the refectory. That the normal drinking ration was not always all that was consumed can be explained by the *caritas* drink, the ritual drinking rounds to the honor of the saints. On particularly hard days—during Holy Week, for example—the *mixtum* was allowed as well as the *caritas* drinks. The *mixtum* was originally diluted wine, but then became a late breakfast of bread and wine; the sick, the elderly, and children received it too. Our present-day custom of beginning the day with breakfast was not common in the Middle Ages even among the laity. The first hours of the day were spent on an empty stomach.

We know that in Cluny and elsewhere, children drank wine, just as they do today in countries where Romance languages are spoken, and they had their own small cups (*vascula*) for this purpose. The measure of wine that Benedict prescribed for his monks, the *hemina*, was and is the object of much discussion. In the earliest period it seems to have been little more than half a pint. Later it grew, but we don't know by how much. Some have reckoned it at a pint or even more. Still, it did not always quench the brothers' thirst. For example, the reforming abbot Gauzlin of Fleury held an edifying discussion with one of his protégés late into the night. The protégé grew thirsty, and both monks went down to the closed monastic cellar. Without a key, only with the power of prayer, Gauzlin opened the locked door so that the monk could quench his thirst. The idea that under certain circumstances even water might have had the same effect seems not to have occurred to the two monks, as they were absorbed with their conversation. Later *consuetudines* contain recommendations on how to combat the evening's thirst; so this seems to have been a general problem.

In wine-growing regions, even monks of strict observance could

sincerely believe that water was bad for their health. Monks from Gorze complained about this to John, their model abbot, and were amazed at his ascetic strength, such that he was able to go two days without food or drink. John of Gorze was born on the Moselle and had given the monastery "a splendid number of vineyards." No wonder that in his earlier days, as he himself recounted, he fell ill from drinking water. He could not stand this sort of drink, for he was accustomed to "continual drinking of wine." When he had to make do with water for one day, he refused all nourishment.

Ecclesiastics, especially monks, practiced viticulture and introduced it into regions where it had not previously existed. Sacramental wine was a necessity, and at the same time a Roman tradition was continued. From Benedict's reluctant acceptance of wine rations, these became an integral part of monastic life. They helped the weak over the hard path and could also be used by the abbot as an educating device: removal of the wine ration was a punishment that no one willingly incurred. Here and elsewhere we see the middle course between strictness and permissiveness that is a characteristic of Benedictine monasticism. Eremitism had taken a stand against this lifestyle without finding many adherents in monastic communities. Abbot John of Gorze, who was influenced by this sort of free asceticism, amazed his monks, but they did not emulate him. It was a habit of John's never to bathe except after a serious illness. By contrast, we learn from the Gorze *consuetudines* that on the five major feasts of the year the brothers were to take a bath. While five may seem few, it probably corresponded to what was normal for free laypersons.

Was this moderation of the severity of the lifestyle only intended to increase the number of candidates for monasticism? Such a consideration was certainly an element in Benedict's thinking and in the directives of later monastic customs. The essential idea seems to have been that the brothers' energy should not be totally expended in the battle against the flesh. It is an entirely undramatic concept: the small steps leading to salvation from God's damnation. Spiritual athletics were replaced by the "construction" of a new personality in constant self-control and under the supervision of others. Thus every brother, even if not exceptionally talented for the monastic profession, could accomplish something in this direction. Few saints were to be found in the monastery; yet the monks did constitute an army of simple soldiers of Christ. They made a far greater imprint on their age than did the lone spiritual warriors of the eastern variety.