

5-2012

The lure of lucre and the hurdle of poverty: the Cistercian fusion of spirituality and monastic business

Lindsey Smith
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/histuht>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Citation

Smith, L. (2012). The lure of lucre and the hurdle of poverty: the Cistercian fusion of spirituality and monastic business. *History Undergraduate Honors Theses* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/histuht/2>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History at ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact scholar@uark.edu, uarepos@uark.edu.

**The Lure of Lucre and the Hurdle of Poverty: the Cistercian Fusion of Spirituality and
Monastic Business**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Honors Studies in
History

By

Lindsey Smith

Spring 2012

History

J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences

The University of Arkansas

Acknowledgements:

I offer many thanks to my advisor on this project, Dr. Lynda Coon, who provided insight and guidance through all stages of my research and writing. Her comments and encouragement helped me extend myself as a historian and were instrumental in refining and focusing my ideas. It was her dedication to teaching and to her students that inspired me to enter the historical field, and for that I cannot overstate my gratitude.

My great appreciation also extends to the University of Arkansas' Honors College, whose commitment to original student research made this project possible. In addition, the Honors College Research Grant allowed me to visit one of the premier medieval collections in the country at the Hesburgh Library of Notre Dame University. The opportunity to study the unique holdings in that collection enabled me to improve this thesis immensely and uncover material that was essential in this research.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3-14
Chapter One: Into the Howling Waste: the Story of the Cistercians	15-31
Chapter Two: “Go to Your Cell”: Cistercian Sermons and Inner Purity	32-52
Chapter Three: Trampling Down the Devil: Hagiography and <i>Conversi</i> Spirituality	53-74
Chapter Four: The Master Craftsmen and the “New Jerusalem”: Monastic Business and Cistercian Lands	75-94
Epilogue	95-99
Appendix	100-101
Works Cited	102-105

Introduction

Religious reform movements have long attracted the attention of scholars of world religions. My thesis will focus on the development of the Cistercian monastic order, founded around 1098 CE within the contexts of the burgeoning of a new kind of monastic business, moneylending, usury, and mercantilism of the high Middle Ages. In this honors thesis I argue that the immense anxieties of the Cistercian Order concerning the practices of moneylending and participation in the larger economic system, particularly regarding grants of land, arose primarily from the order's preoccupation with ritual purity, both of the individual monk and of the monastery as a physical space. The intersection of monastic practice and involvement with the world outside the cloister resurfaces again and again as a source of anxiety through each wave of monastic reform, from the first monks to live in a community with one another to the Cistercian order and beyond. The economic realities faced by each successive reform movement forced monks to articulate a method of combating the intrusions of worldly necessity and to re-examine the protocol for the interaction between the cloister and the secular community.

In order to examine this theme, my research probes moneylending and profit economics with an eye toward Cistercian monastic culture through three different types of sources: charters, hagiography, and sermons. Each genre offers its own unique vantage point from which to view the problem of monastic business. Traditionally business, or *negotium* (Latin, "absence of leisure"), was in direct opposition to the scholarly contemplation of the monk, *otium* (Latin, "leisure"). Commercial enterprises were off-limits to the contemplative monk. Indeed, the involvement of the monastery in everyday business negotiations and exchanges was often seen

as incompatible with cloistered life. Charters are records which detail land grants, leases, and other property transactions between monasteries and the external communities, both religious and secular. The examination of charters can give insight into the everyday workings of a monastery and the ways in which Cistercian monks dealt with the reality of economic involvement with the outside world. In contrast, sermons, which are religious discourses usually for a liturgical service, present the ideal relationship that monasteries and individual monks should have with money, property, and the desire for wealth and profit. Sermons sometimes contain within their narratives the art of biblical exegesis. Exegesis is the critical interpretation and expansion upon scripture. Exegetical texts represent an excellent source for understanding the ideal of the Cistercian monk as well as the Cistercian paradigm of monastic interaction with outside society. These documents were primarily written by and for monks, although some examples were distributed to a wider audience. The sermons of nobleman turned monk and Cistercian spiritual and political leader Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 CE) on the Song of Songs are a particularly salient example.

To bridge the gap between the ground level of the charters and the lofty idealizations of the sermon or exegetical text, I will look to hagiography, or the written lives of saints, which forms a critical link between the real and the ideal. Through hagiographical representations of saintly protagonists and their lives historians may uncover how the Cistercians conceived of the space between the heavens and the earth. These texts also shed light on one of the more liminal sectors of the Cistercian monastic system, the *conversi*. *Conversi* were laymen bound to the monastery and leading a form of ascetic life, but they were not considered full monks and were primarily used to further the order's agricultural work. As the reach of Cistercian houses

expanded, the lay brothers were also heavily involved in trade and profit-garnering ventures of which the monastery was a part.

It is thus imperative to understand the place of the Cistercian order within the context of the development of the medieval profit economy and the subsequent evolution of the role of the monastery within that system. The Cistercian order finds its origins at the end of the eleventh century in the area of modern France known as Burgundy. The order was characterized by austerity and a drive for simplicity in contrast to the prominent monasteries of the time, such as the reformed Benedictine house of Cluny also located in Burgundy and known for its visual and spiritual opulence. The Benedictine tradition was based on the Rule of St. Benedict (ca. 550), which outlined a system of regulated life for monastic communities. Cluny was a part of the Benedictine system, but followed a modified version of the Rule like many other communities of the period. The nucleus of what would develop into the Cistercian order was a reform group of Christian ascetics, led by Robert of Molesme who settled at Cîteaux around 1098 CE. The early Cistercians were characterized by an ideology of austerity in both their personal habits and surroundings. The monks wore white, unbleached robes to emphasize their status as “the poor of Christ.” The unbleached cloth was much less expensive and of a lesser quality than the luxurious black gowns with their extravagant and costly dye made famous by the monks of Cluny. Bernard of Clairvaux criticized the Cluniacs for their failure to show proper humility in their effort to obtain the highest quality cloth for their clothing. Bernard writes: “You turn the merchant’s premises upside down...rejecting anything coarse or faded. But if something takes

your eye with its quality...you will pay any price.”¹ In an effort to return their monastic practice to the spirit of the fourth-century Egyptian desert, where small communities worked to grow food to sustain themselves, the Cistercians also engaged in extensive manual labor.² They restricted the amount of time a brother could spend reciting the liturgy or praying in an effort to make sure each monk performed physical work, a reminder of Christ’s suffering and man’s sinful nature and a contrast to the intense and complex liturgical requirements of the Cluniac system which conceived of prayer as the ultimate work of God.

Largely because of their roots as a radical reform movement, the Cistercians, especially in the early years, were insistent upon operating through small and self-sufficient units. The reformers who followed Robert of Molesme to Cîteaux in 1098 CE were convinced that communities such as Cluny had strayed too far from the spirit of Christian asceticism and were determined to bring the emphasis of their new community back to the original spirit of the Benedictine Rule by means of a concentration on austerity, poverty, and manual labor. Bernard of Clairvaux states: “I wonder indeed how such intemperance in food and drink, in clothing and bedding, in horses and buildings can implant itself among monks.”³ The reality of professional poverty, however, rapidly rendered the small community of early Cistercians insolvent. Indeed, they were unable to support themselves from the products of the fringe lands on which they had settled. In order to keep the order afloat, a certain amount of participation in the local economy was necessary.

¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, “From An Apologia for Abbot William” in Pauline Matarasso, trans., *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 54.

² Norman Russell and Benedicta Ward. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications: USA, 1980), 13.

³ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Apologia” in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 54.

In the late eleventh century, just before the Cistercian order was formed, the whole of Latin Christian Europe began to move more toward a profit economy. This system depended on the use of coinage as “a system of market exchange where money served as a standard of value for items to be exchanged.”⁴ Traditionally, the accumulation of land by a monastery was a representation of the relationships between that monastery and the donor. Exchanges of property were rituals using the medium of exchange as a way to affirm relationships and status between individuals.⁵ In donations of land to Cluny, for example, the land itself acted as a ritual object in a sacred exchange. Through the process of giving and taking, the lay donor and the monks were united in a ritualized relationship. Through gifts of land, women and men could become “virtual” participants in the monastic liturgy, a solemn rite in which the laity would otherwise take no part. Because Cluny also had a standing association with Rome and was constructed “in honor of the holy apostles Peter and Paul,” donating to Cluny had the additional benefit of making the individual a neighbor of St. Peter himself.⁶ The exchange of property was not about the material profit to be made, but rather the communal relationships and spiritual associations that resulted from that give-and-take.⁷ The charters of Cluny themselves show this relationship clearly when multiple donors mention “eternal rewards” that will come from their association with Cluny. These kinds of exchanges between the monastery of Cluny and the world however

⁴ Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 8.

⁵ Barbara H. Rosenwein., *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 45.

⁶ Foundation Charter of Cluny in Barbara Rosenwein, “Cluniac Charters.” In *Readings in Medieval History*, ed. Patrick J. Geary (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 315-317.

⁷ Charters 802, 1845 in Barbara Rosenwein, “Charters of the Grossi Family.” In *Medieval History*, Geary, 314, 316-17.

are not characteristic of what would develop by the twelfth century, that is, a system of exchange in which financial gain was the ultimate goal.

As Cistercian monks gained more followers, most notably Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 CE), who would become one of the most renowned Cistercian thinkers, their influence expanded greatly. With notoriety and power came more entanglement with the burgeoning profit economy. The Cistercians at their peak owned massive tracts of land and transformed into a truly international order that established daughter houses in Italy, Spain, Germany, and England and Wales along with further expansion in France. The total population of the “white monks” was perhaps over 20,000 monks and lay brothers around 1251.⁸ The latter group engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry to support the monastic brothers. The order became increasingly involved in the clearing and cultivation of marginal lands such as bogs and forests and was heavily immersed in the wool trade, which afforded them extreme wealth.

My research centers on this intersection between the cloistered monastery and the outside world. The ultimate reality of the profit economy forced the monks to participate if they were to succeed.⁹ The grants of land through charters still held their relationship and community building associations, and land was still an important ritual object to establish a connection with the monastery, but these contracts began to include many more instances of outright payment for a layman’s gift of land than are seen in the charters of Cluny.¹⁰ Church thinkers found money to be an illicit medium through which to make a living. As early as the fifth century, Saint Jerome

⁸ L. J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality*. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977), 44-46.

⁹ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 93.

¹⁰ Charters #8b, 7, 26, 61 in William Thomas Lancaster. *Abstracts of the charters and other documents contained in the chartulary of the Cistercian Abbey of Fountains in the West Riding of the county of York* (Leeds: J. Whitehead & Son, printers, 1915), 4, 16, 29, 38.

and Pope Leo state that usurers were “seized with the desire for filthy lucre.”¹¹ With this association, there was obviously a conflict of interest that had to be addressed by the Cistercians who were becoming increasingly enmeshed in the profit system. The involvement of a monastery with the dangers outside the cloister: greed, the lure of profit, and the comforts and excesses bought with money was an incredible concern for many Cistercian thinkers, especially with the expansion of the Order’s power and influence.

The medieval church’s general anxieties over wealth and authority in this world manifest themselves strongly in the struggles of the Cistercian Order of the Central Middle Ages. Yet historians have paid little attention to the importance of the Cistercians to the history of economics. For example, in his influential work on the medieval profit economy, historian Lester Little gives surprisingly slim attention to the importance of the Cistercian Order. His book situates the Cistercians as an ascetic stepping stone to the more prominent urban orders of the later Middle Ages, the Franciscans and Dominicans, who actively recruited new members from the mercantile class. In many ways, however, the Cistercian Order presents a prime research opportunity because the Cistercians were the bridge between the gift economy of the old order monasteries and the new commercial economy embraced by the mendicant orders. In the same way, the Cistercian order propelled forward the agricultural system that influenced much of Western Europe for centuries to come, especially with their involvement in agriculture and the wool trade.

Economic involvement pulled monks out of the monastery and directly into confrontation with the world with its potential for corruption, sin, and pollution. It seems incredibly unlikely

¹¹ Roy C. Cave, *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1965), 170.

that the order was unaware of this, but the tension between the necessity of that involvement and the danger of excessive entanglement in worldly matters led to an intense anxiety about monastic purity that would heavily influence the Cistercian worldview. This concern with the purity of the monastery reaches back even into the fourth century Egyptian desert and later to the Benedictine Rule where the *schola*, the community of monks, is portrayed as a fortress of holy warriors working to make their hearts and bodies ready “for the battle of holy obedience.”¹² The notable figures of the order such as Bernard of Clairvaux, a nobleman turned monk, were extremely influential in areas of Christian thought and set the stage for many of the spiritual issues that predominated the later Middle Ages. The cultivation of spiritual purity through asceticism was a way for the monks to arm themselves against the dangers of temptation and turpitude inherent in monastic business. By establishing a strategy to combat this temptation that incorporated this sense of spiritual warfare, the Cistercians armed the minds and bodies of their adherents to face the arrows of unrighteous impulses, particularly when they concerned interactions with material wealth and commerce.

The emphasis of Cistercian sources changes according to the intended audience, though the topic of money and the dangers of doing business with the outside world are consistent themes. In many ways, the journey through sermons, exegesis, hagiography, and charters is similar to the path from the cloister through the various portals of the monastery, access to each layer carefully controlled, until the boundary is finally breached and the outside world, with all its temptations and dangers, is reached. The organization of my thesis leads the reader both into

¹² Prologue 40 in Timothy Fry, (trans.), *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 18.

the realities of monastic business as well as the rhetoric produced by Cistercian leaders concerning the purity of the cloister and the disciplined bodies of the monk-warriors.

The first chapter provides a short introduction to the Cistercian order itself, its history, and some of the particularly important aspects of its monastic system. This brief narrative history will serve to give essential background from which any analysis of an overarching Cistercian strategy to combat the contaminating danger of money and monastic business must proceed. The history of the order illuminates the roots of some Cistercian anxieties about money, particularly within the context of the Cluniac monastic empire to which it was so closely located. Additionally, key concepts when discussing the Cistercians, such as the institution of the grange system of agriculture, a system which relied upon the use of small landed estates run entirely by lay brothers, enabling the Cistercians to expand their geographic reach, and the use of *conversi* for these particular tasks require an introduction.

The second chapter will investigate the ideals of the Cistercian Order. Through analysis of sermons and scriptural exegesis I delve into how Cistercian writers fashioned the soul of the monk, the most important part of the monk's identity. Because the mind was so critical to monastic practice, its purity was paramount. The monk was encouraged to spend time in contemplation and create mental barriers to temptation through the ordering of the mind. Sermons and exegesis, written primarily by and for monks, presents a prime source base from which to construct a Cistercian ideology of purity which will inspire my examination of the theme of money.

The third chapter will center on hagiography, a source bridging the sacred environment of the monastery and the dangerous and sordid atmosphere of the world. In this chapter, I

investigate the Cistercian use of *conversi*, laymen who were not full monks but still led an ascetic life. The lay brothers were employed in the agricultural work of their house and were also instrumental in transporting goods from the monastery grounds to markets or other venues for sale or trade. Their liminal status, caught between the cloister and the influence of the outside world through their participation in the monastery's trade and business engendered much unease about the purity of these lay brothers, particularly of their bodies. Those anxieties are well represented through Cistercian hagiography, where protagonists like Arnulf of Villers (1180-1228 CE), a lay brother, show their spiritual commitment through physical acts of asceticism. The focus on the lay brother's body illustrates Cistercian worry about *conversi* mobility and places their spiritual advancement squarely in the realm of the corporeal self. Hagiographies of other saints including women and hermits, similarly liminal figures in medieval spirituality, also illustrate a Cistercian paradigm that focused on bodily purity when faced with the problem of worldly interaction in potentially troublesome segments of the community.

The fourth chapter addresses the ground level of the business of running a monastery. While the ideology of the secluded cells and quiet cloister is a powerful one, it does not negate the reality that monasteries had to be involved in the give and take in a community in order to survive and expand. This chapter focuses on Cistercian charters and the rituals of giving and taking. Through their conception of land donations, wherein the donor permanently ceded their claim to the abbey, the Cistercians changed the paradigm of granting common at Cluny. Within the Cluniac system, land was given to a monastery and sometimes returned to the donor in order to be exchanged again at a later time. This continued and reinforced the relationship between Cluny and its community and established a kind of "eternal" tie between the monks, the donors,

and the saints to which the land ultimately belonged. The Cistercian model, however, focused on the monastery's acquisition of land as a reclaiming of the secular, transforming it through labor and associating it fully with the monks. The order envisioned itself as craftsmen whose work could be justly compensated with profits as a return on their labor which created spiritual space out of what had been purely secular. The increase in sales and exchange of currency in Cistercian charters also shows a shift in the order's association with money, where its gain was not inherently problematic as long as the money was subsequently turned to a righteous use.

My analysis concludes with an investigation of the larger implications of Cistercian purity ideology as it applies to moneylending and the profit economy. This section of my thesis includes the role of the Cistercian Order in the emergence of the Western European economic machine and the development of the mendicant orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, which continue the development of monastic thought in the face of increased urbanization and commerce. For the Cistercian Order, the only ideal way to participate in the outside world was through maintaining the perfect order and balance of the mind, soul, and body of the monk. I address the sources in succession beginning with sermons, which focusing heavily on the mind and soul, through the themes of bodily purity in hagiography, and finally the practical concerns with implementation of this Cistercian paradigm in the charters. Through this vehicle, I follow the metamorphosis of the ideology of purity and contamination from its roots in the ideals of the order into the ground level of monastic business.

Because of their emergence as an economic power in their own right, controlling large amounts of trade goods, providing cardinals and even some monks who went on to become popes, and influencing the political sphere, the success of the Cistercians is vital to the history

both of Western Christianity and the wider economic development of areas in which the Cistercians settled, particularly those who thrived on the wool trade and institution of grange agriculture, a Cistercian innovation that created estates of land run and cared for by the lay brothers.¹³ Through the institution of the grange system and its increased participation in moneyed economic exchanges, the Cistercian order represents a critical link in the transition from the gift economy of earlier monastic systems to the commercial world. The economic nature of their monastic experience provoked unease in the Cistercians but also led to their immense success, even contributing to individuals fighting in Jerusalem in the Crusades.¹⁴ However, the monetary might of the order signaled its decline in many ways as Cistercians became increasingly identified with corruption and greed and the emerging mendicant orders ascended to prominence. Though the success of the order did result in censure from many parties, the Cistercians were successful overall in establishing a strategy through which their own communities could address the problems of monastic involvement with business and a spiritual impetus that embraced radical poverty, creatively meshing both and enabling the monks to react to their particular situations in ways that were consistent with Cistercian interpretations of their own mission.

¹³ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 26-27.

¹⁴ Charter #44 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 11.

Chapter One:

Into the Howling Waste: The Story of the Cistercians

The evolution of the Cistercian order as a unique monastic discipline finds its roots in the ascetic reform movement of the eleventh century. Eleventh century monks witnessed increased dissatisfaction from those within the monastic system as well as from secular clergy. The drive to purify monastic practice became a key point of debate during the papacy of Gregory VII (c. 1073-1085) whose administration questioned and probed nearly every detail of Christian life.¹⁵ The fabric of society was shifting, moving toward increased urbanization and a moneyed economy.¹⁶ Yet influential monastic houses such as Cluny were slow to adapt and address the changing place of the monastery and asceticism. Increasing unease with the standards of monastic practice gave rise to nostalgia for older forms of ascetic life. The concept of extreme poverty gained ground, spawning charismatic poor movements among the laity and even inspiring Peter Damian, a high-ranking monk of the papal Curia, to urge his followers to be satisfied with the absolute minimum in all things.¹⁷ The flowering of multiple Christian sects focused on a more physically demanding spiritual practice hearkened back to a monasticism of the historical imagination focused on a romanticized vision of the austere lifestyle of the desert fathers. This nostalgia for an imagined past reflected anxieties about the transition from a rural

¹⁵ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 3.

¹⁶ Lester K. Little "Pride goes before avarice: social change and the vices in Latin Christendom." *American Historical Review* 76 (1971): 16.

¹⁷ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 5.

society largely based upon monastic centers into a more urban environment that was increasingly organized around trade and business centers.

The Cistercian order emerges out of this tension between the austerity of the hermit revival and the (seemingly) opulent lifestyles of the monks of Cluny. Desiring to found a monastic community devoted to a more exact observance of the Benedictine Rule (ca. 550), Robert of Molesme and a small number of followers established the ill-fated settlement at Molesme, also in the region of Burgundy, in 1075. Through generous donations, Molesme grew large enough to expand and spawn a number of daughter settlements, but this growth led the community ever closer to the imitation of Cluniac practice. By the 1090s the abbey had acquired churches, serfs, lay brothers, and even individuals who donated their possessions to the community in exchange for lifetime room and board.¹⁸ This divergence from the original vision of the settlement, though not unusual for monastic communities of the time, caused many quarrels and disagreements, resulting in the development of a group of reformers determined to carry out another settlement where the monks could “pursue heavenly studies rather than to be entangled in earthly affairs.”¹⁹ That foundation envisioned for this “heavenly pursuit” was the monastery of Cîteaux would form the nucleus of the early community that would expand into an organized monastic order persisting to the present-day.

One of the most critical influences on this small group of reformers was the Egyptian desert ascetic movement of the fourth century. These early ascetics, bounded by the rich Nile delta and a seemingly never-ending expanse of sand, “made the desert a city.”²⁰ A city it was,

¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹ Exordium Cistercii I, in Appendix I of Lekai, *Cistercians*, 443.

²⁰ Peter Robert Brown, “The Desert Fathers: Anthony to John Climacus,” in *The Body and Society: men, women and sexual renunciation in early Christianity*. (1988), 216.

but an alternative city to the one offered by the ancient pagan world because the “urban spaces” of the desert were places where the sweetness of the solitude of the multitude of monastic cells urged spiritual discipline and contemplation.²¹ The monks of the desert as portrayed in sources such as the *Historia monachorum* (c. 400-410) were solitary or coexisted in small communities, gathering together only for the building of new cells and for the celebration of the Eucharist.²² In the larger monasteries, such as the one in the city of Nitria, the monks were involved in agriculture, an absolute necessity even for ascetics living fairly close to the fertile land of the Nile. The environment of the Nile Delta visualized the contrast between the stark life of renunciation and the allures of the secular world. The Egyptian monks lived right at the point where the inhospitable plain of the desert met the lush, green strip of cultivated land watered by the Nile. Therefore, the body of a monk was suspended dangerously between God’s world, personified by the desert, and the human world embodied in settled agricultural communities.²³

The eleventh century image of the desert monk, in many ways a product of nostalgia for an imagined ascetic utopia of the lives of Egyptian ascetics, also offered a different interpretation of Christian asceticism than the one that was being practiced by many reformed Benedictine communities such as Cluny. The Benedictine tradition developed from the *Life* of Benedict of Nursia by Gregory the Great (d. 604) as well as the *Rule for Monks*, traditionally considered the work of the sixth-century ascetic Benedict. These texts fostered a great tradition of Christian monasticism that, by the time of the Cistercian order’s appearance, was the most prominent rule

²¹ Ibid., 217.

²² Ward, *Desert Fathers*, 26.

²³ Brown, “The Desert Fathers”, 221-22.

of Christian ascetic practice.²⁴ The ninth century Carolingian efforts to reform monasticism and institute a vision of *una regula, una consuetudo*, “one rule and one custom,” promoted the Benedictine Rule as the proper guide for monastic life, and though the reform efforts were perhaps not as all-encompassing as their instigators would have preferred, the previous ninth century effort to compel such widespread unity was surely in the minds of the twelfth century church leaders during the Gregorian reform period.²⁵

Despite efforts to unite ascetic practice under a consistent interpretation of the Rule, there were many areas of practice not addressed in the text of Benedict’s *Regula*. Monks of later traditions, such as the houses of the Carolingian Empire or the votaries of Cluny, had to re-interpret the *Rule* within the context of present-day concerns. Because of these difficulties and the changes Christian monasticism had undergone through the centuries between the writing of the Rule and the vast expansion of the ascetic life, monastic leaders saw the Rule as a guide and not a law-book. The use of customary rules, or a set of monastic practices that were particular to one monastery and its daughter houses, was widespread and literal interpretation of the Rule was not considered vital as long as the spirit of the words was fulfilled through the monks’ work. By the time of the exodus of Robert of Molesme and his monks, following the “spirit of the rule” had become an excuse, at least in the minds of the potential reformers, for ostentation, overindulgence, and the shirking of monastic duties within the community, particularly those of manual labor. The reformers considered these deviations abuses of ascetic tradition that

²⁴ Martha G. Newman. *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 21.

²⁵ Lynda L. Coon. *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 51-52.

provided brothers too much leisure and excess and sought to rectify those things they felt were out of balance.

In the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153 CE) and other Cistercians, the lifestyles of the monks of Cluny symbolized the corruption of the purity of the ascetic tradition. As Bernard writes, habits and practices of the so-called “Black Monks,” as the Cluniacs were called because of their luxurious black robes, were “largely superstitious, contrary to Church decrees...even to the holy Rule.”²⁶ The program of Cistercian reform was to imitate the Rule of St. Benedict more strictly and to take its injunction its precepts were “for beginners” to heart, encouraging even more rigorous emulation of the poverty and simplicity of those “great fathers” of the desert. Complete and utter solitude, however, was impossible for the reformers following Robert as it had been for the monks of the desert, who were eternally beset by travelers and tourists who visited their cells. Monasteries tended to attract many of these visitors, whether travelers or potential converts, which made the ideal of the solitary monastic community fairly impossible. In an effort to isolate their burgeoning communities, the reformers planted their foundation in the forest, and later would expand into many areas of remote or difficult terrain.

The dangers that could beset the reformers were well illustrated by the outcome of Robert’s first community at Molesme, which gained large amounts of property and deviated its monastic practice from the founders’ original concept, focusing on the liturgy and not on physical ascetic exercises. Thus, even the most stringent intent of the reformers to stay out of the realm of secular involvement was fraught with difficulty and anxiety. Indeed, it was impossible for the small community at Cîteaux to sustain itself purely from the labor of the monks even in

²⁶ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 25.

the earliest years of the reform experiment. The hardships of the community at this time were many, including the loss of Robert, who was forcibly called back to Molesme in 1099 by the Papal legate at the request of his abandoned brothers.²⁷ This exodus also included quite a few monks, perhaps some of the founding group, who were more attached to Robert as abbot than to Cîteaux. Alberic, Robert's successor abbot, led the effort to make the "howling waste" of Cîteaux habitable for the monks. Likely because of its location, a boggy clearing deep in the forest, the land of Cîteaux was not sufficient to farm and meet the needs of the community. The possibility of the failure of their experiment in reform led the early Cistercians of Cîteaux to accept grants allowing them the use of the forested land around their settlement as well as the gift of the vineyard of Meursault from the Duke of Burgundy.²⁸

Within the limitations of their location, the monks of Cîteaux brought many aspects of their imagined desert community of the fourth century into their standard of practice. The brotherhood shunned the expensive dyed cloth that the monks of Cluny used for their garb and instead wore unbleached robes, thereby visualizing their commitment to poverty to anyone who saw them. The Cistercian concept of the monastery also reveals a shift in attitude from that of the Cluniac system. With their incredibly lengthy and complex liturgy, the custom of Cluny left little time for the brothers to do physical work, something to which the Cistercians objected in their own practice, but this was a product of the Cluniac concept of *opus Dei* (Latin: "work of God"). The primary purpose of the monks of Cluny was to conduct intense spiritual warfare for the salvation of their own souls and those of their patrons. This warfare was carried out every hour of every day through the recitation of the mass. Thus, the image of the warrior monk was

²⁷ Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, xii. Newman, *Charity*, 47.

²⁸ Lekai *Cistercians*, 15-16

maintained but modified for the particular environment of the monks of Cluny and their surrounding community. Similarly, the needs of the Cistercians and their concept of the ideal monastic life influenced the idea of the *schola* (Latin: “school”) that developed in Cistercian communities.²⁹ Instead of the massive social and corporate responsibility held by the monks of Cluny for their patrons, the Cistercians made an effort to minimize their debts to the community around them. The role of the monastery shifted and came to be perceived more in the vein of the Egyptian cell, the space of contemplation where the individual monk undertook the spiritual battle on an individual level for the improvement of his soul.³⁰

In a further effort to distance themselves from the web of social responsibilities that tended to encroach upon a monastery’s solitude, the order was adamant that new monks be adult converts and not children. This initiative eliminated some of the entanglements that could be forged between the monastery and the secular community because it removed the transactions for receiving a child oblate which usually included substantial gifts of land from the parents, thereby creating a strong link between that family and the monastery. Especially in their early stages, the Cistercians were likely completely unequipped to take in children in the first place. The small community would not have the manpower or other resources to take on children either as oblates or simply as pupils to teach. The substantial decrease in the content of the liturgy provided a similar outlet for the order to minimize unnecessary contact with the outside community.³¹

In spite of these innovations in monastic practice concerning children and the liturgy, the papal bull issued by Paschal II (1099-1118) in 1100 legitimized the abbey at Cîteaux and the

²⁹ The monastic concept of the *schola* also connoted a school for military training, particularly for spiritual warfare.

³⁰ Newman, *Charity*, 33-35.

³¹ Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, xiii.

lifestyle of its inhabitants in the eyes of the church, enabling the monastery to continue to develop its system of monasticism and to address how the monks would deal with the notoriety that they were almost sure to garner as a center for reform and austerity in the midst of the vast Cluniac empire. The approval of the Charter of Charity by Pope Callistus II in 1119 evidences the process of organizing and unifying the Cistercian community. This document addressed many of the issues concerning administration and organization, including appropriate conduct for monks and lay brothers as well as stipulating that each abbey affiliated with the Cistercians should be independent and under the rule of its own elected abbot. The order's unity would come not from allegiance to a central abbot in control of many daughter houses but through unity of practice and unity of custom, bringing echoes of the ninth century Carolingian reform into their own twelfth century context. This requirement that all Cistercian monasteries follow the rule as it was deployed at Cîteaux created a center for all Cistercian practice and interpretation of the appropriate ascetic life. To allow each abbot to fulfill his duty to his monks, the Cistercians instituted the novel general chapter, a yearly gathering of all Cistercian abbots, stating that "every abbot must visit it [Cîteaux] once a year at the same time...to tend to the affairs of the order."³² Administrative innovation coupled with a commitment to assure that the chapter continued gave the order the flexibility to expand but also controlled and contained changes within the collective standard of practice. Even into the later years of the fifteenth century, approval of the general chapter was necessary to make major alterations in practice, such as the absorption of a small or struggling abbey into a larger and more profitable one.³³

³² Early Cistercian Documents, Summa Cartae Caritatis III in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 445.

³³ Charters #19-22, 25 in Duiske Abbey (Graiguenamanagh, Ireland). *The Charters of the Cistercian Abbey of Duiske in the county of Kilkenny*. (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1918), 43-48.

The organization of the Cistercian monastery was built around the concept of diversity within the unity of the order as a whole. The monastery housed the full monks, that is Cistercians who were not part of the lay brotherhood and who were unified through their vows, through the common duties of the liturgy, and through the physical work mandated by the Rule. These same “full monks” were also diverse in their position on the ladder of humility and spiritual enlightenment. Each individual was embroiled in his own battle for spiritual wholeness, but all the monks were engaged in this mêlée which created a harmonious brotherhood who existed “like jewels in a necklace” connected to each other through the bonds of love. The monks were bound to their monastery through the Rule of St. Benedict, but also through the order’s Charter of Charity which forbid monks from living outside the monastery. The unity of the many Cistercian houses was mandated through the general chapter and through the Charter. The Charter outlined the procedure for founding a new abbey very specifically and it is easy to see the anxiety the order had about its expansion and the fear that daughter houses out of the direct reach of Cîteaux would be difficult to control. The particularity of the Charter’s regulations for new foundations compelled each monastery to be in unity with the rest of the order. The Charter required the presence of an abbot and at least twelve monks along with specific books, thereby ensuring that basic practices and organizational structures would be in line with the rest of the order.³⁴

The organization of the lay brothers and the regular monks represents a similar meshing of unity and diversity within the Cistercian community. The lay brothers, *conversi*, were part of the monastery and undertook an ascetic lifestyle but followed a modified rule that allowed them

³⁴ Early Cistercian Documents, Summa Cartae Caritatis IX, XVI in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 448-49.

more interaction with the secular world. This was a way for the Cistercians to maintain their ideal of monastic contemplation because, in theory, both the lay brothers and the full monks were united and assured “the same gift of redemption” through their obedience.³⁵ The *conversi* lived in their own version of the monastery away from that of the regular monks, with separate dormitories and dining halls, but they did join the regular monks, that is, those under the full authority of the *Rule*, for certain important liturgical ceremonies - though there were many that were considered the purview of the choir monks alone.

With papal approval and some protection from the attacks of Cluny upon Cîteaux’s legitimacy as well as the modest prosperity gained through small donations of land, the developing order began expanding outward from its original settlement. In 1113, a young nobleman named Bernard entered the monastery at Cîteaux. Only two years after his entrance, the twenty five year old Bernard was sent to found the monastery of Clairvaux, where he would become abbot.³⁶ It is through Bernard that the Cistercian order became a major force of Christian ascetic practice and political influence on a higher level. The early twelfth century was an age of ascetic controversy and competition, with the proliferation of monastic orders with similar values of austerity and poverty that the Cistercians professed, but these other orders were only moderately successful. How, then, did the Cistercians attract enough members that they could boast 647 foundations, reaching as far as England, Poland, and even Portugal by the mid thirteenth century?³⁷ Bernard was undoubtedly a great thinker of the Cistercian order and also a prolific writer. Even his early works earned him great fame throughout France, and his

³⁵ Newman, *Charity*, 103-105.

³⁶ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-44.

popularity enabled the message of Cîteaux to spread way beyond the immediate vicinity of Burgundy.

Such ardent interest in the practices of the order led to new anxieties about the expansion of monastic holdings and about Cistercian life especially as its star member Bernard emerged more and more into the public eye. Fairly early in their existence, the monks had developed a system to allow the monastery to manage its property gained from grants without tearing the monks themselves away from their sacred cloister. These individuals, the *conversi*, cared for monastic lands and engaged in the necessary transactions with the secular world outside the cloister. The lay brothers could never become full monks of the cloister, but they represent a way for secular men to enter into the purifying and constructive space of the Cistercian desert even if in a modified manner.

The use of the *conversi* has its roots in the ancient monastic ideas of *otium* (Latin, “leisure”) and *negotium* (Latin, “absence of leisure; business”), which correspond to the inner work of contemplation that takes place within the silence of the cloister and the business of the world, whether it be selling ones wares as a merchant or negotiating an exchange of land.³⁸ In traditional monastic thought, these two concepts were mutually exclusive. The job of the monk was the immersion of the soul in the divine, forsaking the demands of the physical world and retreating into the cell of the mind, where he could wrestle with God and strive to attain the perfection that humanity had once possessed. The cares of the world melded the mind and body in a way that was immensely dangerous, even fatal to the spirit. Monks in the Egyptian desert were harshly warned of the temptations and dangers of leaving their spiritual fortresses, and the

³⁸ Jean Leclercq. *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982),26.

Benedictine Rule's author is vehement in his criticism of "gyrovagues," that is, monks who wander about without the stability of a community or a monastery, described in the *Rule* as living "a disgraceful life" and being hardly worth mentioning.³⁹

This anxiety about the intermingling of *otium* and *negotium* was only exacerbated by the looming presence of Cluny, with its many daughter houses, representing the dangers of improper entanglement with worldly business and concerns. To the early Cistercians, many of whom had come from houses where the Cluniac system of ascetic life prevailed, the Cluniac juxtaposition of *otium* and *negotium*, which favored liturgical practice over manual labor, must have seemed stunningly out of order. The Cluniac system rested upon the idea that the duty of the monk was to engage in spiritual warfare through the liturgy.⁴⁰ It was through the speaking of holy words and scriptures that the ascetics fought their adversaries and ensured the salvation of their souls and those of the patrons who supported them. In the eyes of the Cistercians, however, the responsibilities that Cluny held to their supporters had shifted the balance and had torn many of the monks away from their true duties as spiritual men, capturing them fully in the web of monastic-secular entanglement.

Because the Cistercian order was undergoing an expansion during the twelfth century and had experienced a great surge in secular interest during Bernard's lifetime especially, this conflict came into stark relief. In the early years, the monks had a few interested donors, but were not by any means key players in the give and take of the Burgundian economy. As Bernard's fame spread, and with it the name of his order, the prestige of having an association with the

³⁹ Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 1.10-12, p. 21.

Cistercians grew and the monks were faced with a horde of interested donors and patrons eager to link their families with the organization that had produced such an influential figure. It is in the face of this expansion and assault upon the cloister that the Cistercians were forced to develop a cohesive strategy for their interaction with the secular. The world would not be relegated to the margins of Cistercian existence as it had been before when the scale of the order was limited, consisting only of a small outpost among Cluny's vast empire. As the order expanded and entanglement with the outside world became inevitable, the Cistercians were determined to orchestrate a balance between the spheres and not to tip the scale like their rivals at Cluny had done.

The expansion of the order and their immense concern about the resulting unity of the body of numerous Cistercian communities illustrates the larger anxieties that continually plagued the monasteries as the secular world encroached more and more upon the solitude of the cloister. The desert roots of the order's ideal of monastic practice informed the monks' concept of the ascetic house. Within the Cistercian monastery, there should have been no liminal space. Every part of the structure was a fortress against the evils of the outside, and every space within the monastery was a spiritual place. Because the spiritual battle of the Cistercian monk was an individual one, every inch of the monastery where he walked could become holy ground, the site of intense religious warfare between his soul and the forces of Satan. The Cistercian monastic concept took this battle out of the confines of the mass (where it rested in Cluny) and expanded it into the monastery itself. Even the granges and fields could be sites of spirituality. Wulfic of Haselbury, a hermit, but one who represented much that was good about Cistercian ideology in the mind of his biographer, John of Ford, is described as "working the salvation of others in the

midst of the earth.”⁴¹ Though the monastery was in many ways a battleground, it was not a space that should be allowed to become contaminated by evil. The battle of the monks was for the purity and salvation of their souls, and that war was like the Biblical cleansing fire that purifies instead of consuming and destroying.

It was thus imperative that the spiritually refining space of the monastery be kept as pristine and protected from the evils and contaminating nature of outside influence as was possible. The lay brothers thus presented both a protection and a source of anxiety for the monks. Ideally, the *conversi* stayed mostly separate from the choir monks, forming a barrier to the contemplative space of the monastery; their primary role according to the Charter of Charity was to deal in the business outside the cloister and maintain the grounds that the order acquired that were too extensive for the choir monks to properly care for and still retain their liturgical and contemplative practice.⁴² In their very nature, the *conversi* were liminal figures, representing both a barrier to the outside world and a portal through which it could enter the cloister and disrupting the ideal of a fully partitioned, divided, and defined monastic space.

The dangers of worldly influence upon the monastery were many, but none aroused Cistercian concerns in the same way as the activities with which the *conversi* were intimately associated. Along with their work in the granges and fields, the lay brothers undertook the economic work of the monastery and negotiated with the laypeople interested in making donations or financial arrangements with the monastery.⁴³ Money itself was regarded as a suspicious and likely evil substance by many great minds of the church, including Augustine of

⁴¹ “From *The Life of Wulfric of Haselbury*” in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 248.

⁴² Lekai, *Cistercians*, 26, 31.

⁴³ Early Cistercian Documents, Summa Cartae Caritatis XX in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 450.

Hippo (c. 354-430) who expressed anxiety about the portability of currency, stating “what is so uncertain as something that rolls away? It is appropriate that money is round, because it never stays in one place.”⁴⁴ Additionally, the Benedictine Rule expressly prohibited the owning of anything by individual monks, declaring that “no one may...retain anything as his own, nothing at all...not a single item.”⁴⁵ In the late eleventh century also, the economic system of Western Christendom was changing, relying more upon currency, which was creating a rising class of merchants and others who made their living from the exchange of money.⁴⁶

In the midst of this economic evolution, it cannot be forgotten that Cîteaux and Clairvaux, the heart of the Cistercian system, were located in the middle of Cluny’s monastic empire, the internal economy of which was still very land-based and incredibly powerful even into the twelfth century. The origin of the Cistercian order as an organized system of ascetic practice was rooted in opposition to most of the practices of the Cluniac tradition, especially when money and land were involved. They opposed the acceptance of tithes, churches, and human property, all of which Cluny accepted. It is no wonder, then, that the increasing interest of laypeople in donating and establishing a link to the monastery in the same way they would with Cluny, through gifts of land and even other property such as serfs and tenants, was a source of intense unease for the Cistercians. The system of the *conversi* helped mitigate some of their worry, but the lay brothers themselves were also problematic because of their necessarily liminal state betwixt and between the solemnity of the cloister and the impurities of the outside world.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, 83, 3, *CChr.SL*, 39, p 1147. as cited in Diana Wood. *Medieval Economic Thought*, (Cambridge University Press 2002), 88.

⁴⁵ Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 33.2-3.

⁴⁶ Lester Little, *Religious Poverty*, 23-24.

In their effort to create a new “desert city” in Burgundy, the Cistercians, especially with their iconic preacher Bernard, merged with the larger trend of increased interest in more austere forms of spirituality which made their order appealing to laypeople, who wanted to cement their association with these “poor of Christ.” With their grange system and settlement in marginal lands which required clearing and cultivation to become habitable, the Cistercians “plunged headfirst” into the new agricultural system of Europe.⁴⁷ With the expansion of Cistercian houses across Europe and even into the east, the possibility of becoming another Molesme or Cluny must have been close in the mind of Cistercian leaders. This preoccupation with keeping the practice and the physical space of the monastery uncontaminated by the necessary business of the monastery with the outside world manifests itself through Cistercian writings.

The item of first importance in ensuring the purity of the monastery was the virtue of the monks within its walls. Each monk was responsible for his own spiritual practice, though the community of brothers provided a space of community, brotherhood, and also correction. The mind of the monk was his sword and his battlefield, and it would be useless for the order to endeavor to protect a house divided that would only come to ruin.⁴⁸ Common love united the monks and made “their society as terrible as an army with banners,” the monastery that was the “spiritual wrestling school” where the monks honed their skills and weapons.⁴⁹ The beginnings of the Cistercian strategy to face the continual merging of the spiritual and business spheres is seen very clearly through the writings of the order’s great minds in their sermons and exegetical

⁴⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁸ Mark 3:25.

⁴⁹ “From *The Life of Aelred* by Walter Daniel” in Matarasso, Pauline, trans. *The Cistercian World*, 153-54.

texts, and it is those texts that further illuminate the Cistercian concept of *otium* and *negotium* and their melding into the system of monastic business.

Chapter Two:

“Go to Your Cell”: Cistercian Sermons and Inner Purity

To further understand the ways in which the Cistercian order created barriers and layers of protection from the contaminating influence of monastic business, I shall now turn to the spiritual writings of the order and investigate the vision of monastic practice that is presented in these works. This analysis of the Cistercian concept of the ideal monastic spirit will include an exploration of the virtual cell of the monastic mind, that is, the “true cell” that “lay within the heart and mind of the monk,” as well as the use of ascetic practice to create mental defenses against corruption, and the dangers posed to ascetic practitioners.⁵⁰ Cistercian anxiety about mental purity was rooted in the conflict between business and the contemplative life that was inescapable for all monks. This anxiety influenced the development of the ideal spiritual mentality as a defensive strategy against assaults of the secular. Cistercian writings clarify the ways in which concerns of purity, especially when tied to material gain, were nevertheless integrated into Cistercian practice.

The sermon is one of the most relevant genres to probe when investigating Cistercian monastic culture. Sermons were written for recitation in a religious service, and were deployed to instruct and correct the religious who heard them. Monastic sermons were usually composed by a fellow monk for the rest of his congregation. These texts are immensely rich in scriptural references, drawing from all parts of the canon in order to persuade, instruct, or encourage the audience to perceive the sermon’s message in a certain way. Bernard of Clairvaux, who bequeathed to posterity the majority of Cistercian sermons available today, was masterful in his

⁵⁰ Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom. “The Geography of the Monastic Cell in Early Egyptian Literature”. *Church History*. 78:4 (American Society of Church History, 2009), 762.

construction and employed the sermon as a starting point from which to expound three major subjects on a number of topics: problems arising between individuals in the monastery, biting social commentary, and lamentations concerning the state of the twelfth century church.⁵¹

Because these treatises address many topics outside of the realm of purely monastic practice, they allow for insight into the Cistercian view of the outside world and the proper way in which the monastery and its members were to relate to it. Exegetical texts such as these more strongly reflect the imagination of Cistercian leadership and the ideal of Cistercian monastic culture than to the realities of everyday practice. Through the sermons that were primarily addressed toward the monastic community itself, it is possible to construct a more complete vision of the various ways the monks were encouraged to understand themselves and their role in the world as those who were set apart from the world to live the pure, “angelic” life of the ascetic.⁵² These texts provide an entry point from which to analyze Cistercian monastic culture and the tensions that arise when the ideal of practice is juxtaposed with the uncomfortable reality of the monastic existence. Because of the idealism inherent in many sermons, the aim of which was to urge audiences to move closer to absolute spiritual perfection, these texts illuminate constructions of perfect monkhood, at least from a Cistercian perspective. Some sermons were also written for the personal pleasure of an individual monk, such as Bernard’s homilies on the Virgin Mary (c. 1115-20). Despite their often lofty and esoteric language, homilies such as this one reveal some sense of the realities and demands of monastic life as well as the areas where

⁵¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, in Marie-Bernard Saïd, trans. *Sermons on Conversion* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 12, 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14.

there were tensions that seemed at times to be irreconcilable.⁵³ In his exegetical writings on the Song of Songs, written from 1135 to 1153, Bernard addresses some of the most prominent problems of the monastery, lamenting “people who, having scorned the pomp of this world, learn greater pride in the school of humility...and swamp themselves in greed for earthly goods.”⁵⁴ These individuals had entered the monastery but scorned the true duty of their newfound profession, that of contemplation and the labor of spiritual advancement, thus defiling the body of the monastery with their greed for worldly gain and power. Instead of learning humility as the *Rule* encouraged, they were practicing the pride of avarice, leading to conflicts when the cloister clashed with the world outside.

These tensions, between the cloister and the world, and most of all between the purity of the sacred, angelic life of the monk and the corruptive forces of avarice, the sin of choice in the high Middle Ages, are inseparable from the writings of Cistercian leaders. There was a recognition in their writings that the world was changing; commercial and material success was increasing and even the monks were not immune to the lure of lucre as power and prestige became attached to wealth and commercial success. Pride, that capital sin of the ancient world and the early Middle Ages, had been replaced by a particular incarnation of pridefulness which was embodied through avarice.⁵⁵ Instead of the somewhat reciprocal arrangements between monasteries and laypersons under a gifting system where the display of a monastery’s wealth through fine liturgical instruments or vestments was a way of showing both the prestige of the donor and the social status of the monastic community, the rise of the urban-commercial center

⁵³ Grace Perigo and Marie-Bernard Saïd, trans. *Magnificat: Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), xii.

⁵⁴ Homily 4.10., *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁵⁵ Little, “Pride”, 16.

in some ways placed power in the mere possession of wealth and money. Power was now seated in the currency itself instead of its use to glorify God through the splendor of His temple in the church, as these gifts had been employed for generations.⁵⁶ The Cistercians were placed squarely in the middle of this shift, and their liminal position can best be gauged by their efforts to develop a spiritual strategy that maintained some sense of the relational ties built with the secular community through donations and gifts of money. This drive is also evident in their forceful condemnation of the monk who contaminates the purity of his soul and the sanctity of the whole Cistercian monastic impetus toward simplicity and poverty when he corrupts himself by “considering godliness a means to gain.”⁵⁷

The nature of the monastery, betwixt and between its identity as a place of intense spirituality and contemplation and the reality that the cloister could never truly be separated from the outside world just as the desert fathers could never truly exist in a completely eremitical lifestyle, gave rise to intense anxieties in the Cistercian mind about how to best protect the monks from the intersection and contaminating ability of interaction with the secular. One of the most important ways in which monks could protect themselves was to build up and maintain a holy state of mind. The discipline of contemplation was a crucial component of the ascetic lifestyle and the battle for spiritual excellence was centered first and foremost within the monk’s soul. From the chronicles of the early desert fathers of the fourth century the Cistercians borrowed the concept of the mind as the seat of spiritual improvement. According to the wisdom of those early ascetics, the contemplative monk that practiced self-denial “stands unimpeded in the presence of God” and the hermits advised their visitors to “ceaselessly train [themselves] for

⁵⁶ Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 44-45.

⁵⁷ “Lentern Sermons on the Psalm ‘He Who Dwells’” 14.5 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 234.

contemplation.”⁵⁸ On the hierarchy between the physical and spiritual, the mind was undoubtedly in a more supreme position. It was through meditation that the small voice of the divine presence was perceived, and it was within the spiritual realm of the mind that demons were encountered and thrown down.⁵⁹

Because the realm of reason was so critical to the spiritual battle in which monks were always engaged as the soldiers of Christ and also because the mind, closer to the spiritual realm than the body, exerted control over the physical and influenced its actions for good or ill, it was the first area in which the monk was encouraged to build up defenses to fight temptation and maintain the purity of his practice. Within the sermons of the Cistercian fathers, there emerges a sense of a careful balance that must be kept in order for the mind to remain pure. Isaac of Stella (1110-1169), abbot of Stella and a contemporary of Bernard of Clairvaux, illustrated this point in his writing as well, urging his congregation to be careful and “keep the keenest watch” because they had “chosen a yet remoter solitude.” Contemplation was the highest calling, but the monk had to make sure that he was attentive, keeping Christ active in his heart. “If Christ is inactive,” states Isaac, “he cannot keep watch for us.” Using the scriptural illustration of Jesus calming the storm, the abbot warns of the “surge of a thousand temptations” that could assault the slothful individual because his mind was dulled and spiritually asleep.⁶⁰

Similarly, Bernard expressed anxiety about the balance between the active and contemplative life in the monastic community, urging the brothers not to believe that by their efforts at “fasting and other such labors” they had become spiritually pure and thus begun to be “less careful about

⁵⁸ Ward, *Desert Fathers*, 1.62-63.

⁵⁹ “Sermons on the Song of Songs” 74.2 in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 78.

⁶⁰ “Second Sermon for the Fourth Sunday After Epiphany” in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 204.

the fear of God.”⁶¹ This necessary equilibrium and watchfulness encompassed all aspects of the monastic life, from the organization of thoughts and emotions to the avoidance of overindulgence in the contemplative side of spiritual practice as well as keeping involvement in the worldly affairs of the monastery and outside of it to a minimum. These balances were, like much of Cistercian practice, individualized. The appropriate amount of involvement in business would be different for a lay brother than for a novice, and an abbot would carry his own unique responsibilities and, presumably, mastery over the self which would enable him to shift the balance further toward the world without being influenced or corrupted by its frame of mind.

The sermons of Bernard illustrate this individualized approach to the balance between the inner and outer atmosphere of the monk. He had very different advice for his congregation of regular monks than that which he gave to the first Cistercian pope Eugenius III (1145-53).⁶² Because they were the full-time residents within monastic walls, regular monks held an intense responsibility for the health of their community. The monastic community, like the Church, was conceived of as a body of which the individual monks were the parts, just as Paul states in his letter to the Corinthians.⁶³ Any part of the monastic body corrupted by the influence of worldly desires could have disastrous consequences for the entire community. The early Cistercians had seen the danger of inattention to collective purity in their first effort of settlement at Molesme, where the relatively rapid influx of wealth and prestige consumed the brothers, who did not have the proper mental reinforcement. Therefore, the community at Molesme mutated the original vision of the monastery into a mirror of Cluniac practice.

⁶¹ “He Who Dwells” 1.1 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 120.

⁶² George Lewis, trans. *On Consideration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 4-5.

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Dale B. Martin. *The Corinthian Body*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 131-32.

The Cistercians of Cîteaux and Clairvaux must have been conscious of this first failure of the reform ascetic experiment and determined that their own effort represent that city on the hill, providing a pure and spiritual center that Molesme and Cluny had begun well but which atrophied when the balance of the monastic life swung too far afield from its original purpose. Additionally, the community of monks was considered a representation of the bride of Christ, united in a uniquely intimate relationship with the Bridegroom which could not be attained by the *conversi* or the crowds of lay believers. The intimate language of these exegetical texts deploys the imagery of a spiritual marriage between the monk and Christ, personified through the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs as well as in Revelation.⁶⁴ Because of this privileged status, the monks were able to access the higher spiritual mysteries of the faith through their ascetic practice, but only if they maintained their purity as befitted the sanctified bride of Christ.

It was therefore incredibly important for regular monks to keep a tight rein upon their emotions and desires to wage spiritual warfare effectively against the forces that sought to corrupt them and the whole monastic community. Cistercian sermons express this anxiety in a clear manner with their concentration, especially in Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs, with the ordering of the mind, setting up a very specific hierarchy that, when fully implemented, made a fortress of the monastic mind just as the walls of the monastery enclosed the physical space for ascetic practice.⁶⁵ These layers and barriers created a virtual representation of the monastic cell in the mind of the monk. Moreover, the correct ordering of the emotions and whims of desire prepared and purified the inner cloister for the work of asceticism. Cistercian intellectuals conceived of asceticism as forming a ladder from the world of the body (the lower

⁶⁴ Song of Songs 2:8-17, Revelation 19:6-10.

⁶⁵ Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 65.

rungs) to the celestial heights of the soul (the upper rungs). High status monks successfully made the ascent.

Physical space in the Cistercian abbey was constructed with an eye to monastic purity as well. For example, the abbey of Rievaulx, located in the North Yorkshire region of England, organized itself largely in a style recognizable to practitioners of the Rule of Benedict, at least from the late eighth century, once the community gained enough funding to construct in stone. The cloister was central to the movement of monks to and from the church and into other rooms such as the refectory where the community ate and the chapter house where the monks met and discussed abbey business. The cloister of Rievaulx, in its remodeling around 1160-65, the nucleus of spiritual activity in the monastery, acted much like the mind of the individual monk.⁶⁶ Though many “secular” spaces such as the kitchens or chapter house were accessible from the cloister, their population was regulated by their position in the monastery.⁶⁷ Guest spaces in many Cistercian abbeys were usually located outside the claustral nucleus and laypeople were not likely to be allowed into the inner sanctum of the monastery.⁶⁸ The rooms of the cloister, therefore, were populated by monks and *conversi*, who also occupied separate spaces within the cloister. The lay brothers had their own dormitories and refectories as well as segregated space within the church.⁶⁹ Especially in the later twelfth century, this segregation of lay brothers and choir monks became much more pronounced in an effort to maintain the ritual purity of space and the monastic mind.

⁶⁶ Appendix Figure 2, p. 100

⁶⁷ Fig. 17 in Peter Fergusson and Stuart Harrison. *Rievaulx Abbey: community, architecture, memory*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 52; Christopher Norton and David Park. *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 170.

⁶⁸ Fig. 139 in Fergusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx*, 165; Appendix Figure 3, p. 101.

⁶⁹ Fig. 18 and 34 Fergusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx*, 52, 76; Appendix Figure 1, p. 100.

The physical enclosure, in addition to regulating access and mirroring Cistercian mental barriers, was also conceived of as a series of military stations, outposts of a sort, in the case of Rievaulx, where Bernard referred to its founding party of monks as “men from my army.”⁷⁰ The Rule of St. Benedict itself also spoke of the monastery as a *schola*, a term that implied a school for military service and training for battle.⁷¹ The cloister was the seat of monastic spiritual life, the space in which the brother contemplated God and augmented his physical labor. The efforts of Cistercian communities to create physical isolation for the cloister speak to the importance of that space for training the soul. Some communities even went so far as to try and wall off the rooms used by regular monks from dormitories and other spaces inhabited by *conversi*. The importance of the cloister’s purity was obvious, but its complete isolation was never possible, much as the community might try to define and separate it spatially.

Therefore, to increase in spiritual knowledge and to continue the refining work that was begun with the entrance of the novice into the monastery, the monk had to set about creating a mental cell just as the desert fathers had built their individual cells out of bricks, immuring themselves from the prying eyes of even other ascetics.⁷² The small cells in which the desert fathers had “practiced silence” which, in settlements such as Cellia were said to be divided so that “no one can see his neighbor,” creating a space of “huge silence and great quiet” were thus translated into a “virtual cell” in the twelfth century.⁷³ The mind was in many ways the ultimate vision of the solitude of the monk’s cell. Unlike the physical spaces both of the ancient Egyptian fathers and their heirs in the Cistercian order, the mind was difficult to overrun with the physical

⁷⁰ Dugdale 1846, V, 280 cited in Fergusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx*, 37-38

⁷¹ Prologue 45 in Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 18.

⁷² “On the Monks of Nitria” XX.9 in Ward, *Desert Fathers*, 106.

⁷³ “Additions of Rufinus” XX.5-8, VI.1, in Ward, *Desert Fathers*, 148, 68.

presence of outside visitors eager to learn or simply watch the monks in their practice. Lay brothers or the noise of business, sometimes conducted in rooms quite close to monastic dormitories, could not penetrate the well-constructed mental cloister. The mind was open to those spiritual forces that sought to pull even the most righteous man off the path of holiness, however. This virtual cell should be ordered just as the physical cell was, with the monk “always ready to...arrive at the work of God.”⁷⁴ This organization of the mind was for its protection, but also constituted an ascetic practice in itself. The monk progressed through different stages of mental order, beginning with the untamed spirit until they reached the pinnacle, that mind which was so focused upon God that all of his actions were righteous by virtue of his intimate knowledge of the Creator’s will.⁷⁵

The ordering of a monk’s mind was achieved through spiritual labor, focusing it upon the eternal instead of the physical and immediate desires of the flesh. The way in which this labor is described by Bernard is through different levels of love. This concept of “love,” however, was not conceived as an emotion. Attainment of the fullness of emotional love was not a possibility for the flawed soul of humanity, and Bernard is explicit about this distinction, saying “who would dare to claim for himself what Paul...had not attained?” The apostle himself understood that spiritual excellence was a continuous work that required the individual to “press on” toward the ultimate goal of unification with the divine.⁷⁶ Emotional love, because it could not be purely felt while one was still an earthly and sinful creature, weakened the rest of the self-mastering work of asceticism. Thus, the monk had to learn to place each type of love in its proper setting.

⁷⁴ Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 22.6, p. 49.

⁷⁵ “Sermons on the Song of Songs” 50.6 in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 69-70.

⁷⁶ Philippians 13:12-14.

The ordering of love was work, “a command to be carried out” which showed itself through the actions of the one who loved.⁷⁷ The monk was in a unique position, because of his renunciation of many worldly goods and desires, to “work out his salvation” through understanding of the hierarchy of the work of love.⁷⁸ Each level, when attained, showed itself through the closer relationship the monks had with the divine. This deepening of the understanding of what it meant to love and carry out the commandments of the monastic life focused the soul on the divine, creating barriers and purifying it from the influence of the outside world. Spiritually, the soul of the monk cleaved to the solid rock of Christ, whose word cleansed the mind through continual contemplation and provided the armor and weaponry with which the monk could journey prepared into spiritual battle.

Bernard’s hierarchy of love began with those desires of the flesh and the physical with which every individual is born. The beginnings of the ascetic mindset were rooted in recognizing the futility of fulfilling those baser instincts and wants because they were not reflections of true spiritual love.⁷⁹ The first step was presumably begun when the monk entered the monastery. He then entered a period of trial, from which some were in fact turned away, and then was officially accepted into the monastery as a full brother. At that point, the work of removing the stains of the previous life began. The conversion to the monastic life represents a turn away from the desires of the flesh, the “angelic life” of celibacy of antiquity. Traditionally, those who foreswore sexual contact and pleasures of the flesh were seen to be embodying the spirit of Adam in the Garden of Eden, bringing their bodies closer to the state of original human

⁷⁷ “Sermons on the Song of Songs” 50.2 in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 66-67.

⁷⁸ Homily 3.14. in Perigo and Saïd, *Magnificat*, 44.

⁷⁹ “The Life of Anthony” 55 in Athanasius, Robert C. Gregg, (trans.), *The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980), 72-73.

perfection through their asceticism. Conversion to the monastic life, in addition to physical ascetic practice, was also the commitment to illuminating even the darkest recesses of one's soul with the active and living light of the word of God.⁸⁰ This love, the keeping of the commandments of God and the continual journey toward that level of spiritual perfection that is attainable on earth, was the "active love" of which Bernard spoke at length.⁸¹

Active love was a process and a work in itself, but that work occurred within the mind where no one but the individual and God could truly oversee it. How, then, were the abbot and monastic community to know that their brothers were likewise employed in the purification of their minds and the search for ever higher spiritual understanding? The progression of the monks in the work of love was made manifest in their physical bodies. The mind exerted its will on the body, whether for good or evil. The mind preoccupied with the physical and fleeting clamored for food, shelter, and fine clothing, while the one focused upon its own purification reflected the active love of God through deeds. Faith without works was dead, after all, in the words of scripture, and Gilbert of Hoyland who continued Bernard's work on the Song of Songs after his death in 1153, warns that such a "multiplicity of desires is in itself bad." The correct balance of contemplation and necessary labor, however, would render the outer man, represented through the stormy sea, calm just as the inner soul became still and cleaved to God to "become one spirit with him."⁸² The work of man in the world was the basis of his eternal reward, "scattered like temporal seeds of eternity."⁸³

⁸⁰ "On Conversion" 15.28 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 22.

⁸¹ Matthew 19:17

⁸² "Sermon II On the Song of Songs" and "Second Sermon for the Fourth Sunday After Epiphany" in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 204, 219.

⁸³ "On Conversion" 8.17 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 51.

One can see the practice of active love in what concern the monks did pay their bodies, making sure they were appropriately, though not lavishly covered, with the most care taken for the “weaker parts.”⁸⁴ This active love, concerned for the wellbeing of one’s neighbor, urged the monk to leave contemplation more often than might be advised in order to care for others. The administrative duties of the monastery caused friction between the secular and the religious spheres, but safeguarded the actions of the community, particularly individuals who were more advanced in their monastic practice. Bernard lamented the frequent occasion where “we forego celebrating mass to attend to administrative duties.” The same man, though, stated that “piety is...leaving time for consideration.”⁸⁵ This involvement, then, was not necessarily always a sinful thing; with proper motivation and a mind centered upon heavenly matters, the regular monk could negotiate with outside parties and protect the contemplative surroundings of more spiritually advanced members of the community. As long as the monk left himself time to seek God quietly and to listen to the still soft voice of the Lord in his mind then he could acceptably deal with the administrative duties that might come with his position.⁸⁶

As monks progressed in building an ordered mind, they came to the state of “affective love.” Through affective love, the Cistercian mind ordered all things according to their heavenly worth, not the earthly as in the state of active love. Affective love allowed the monk the fullest experience of the divine that could be obtained in this world. These glimpses of the “paradise of pleasure” that was found in contemplation served to urge the monk to continue inhabiting the mental space of affective love, being careful not to open the barriers and fall back into the ways

⁸⁴ “Sermons on the Song of Songs” 50.5 in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 68-69. 1 Corinthians 12:21-25.

⁸⁵ “On Consideration” 1.7.8 in Lewis, *Consideration*, 4-5.

⁸⁶ 1 Kings 19:11

of active love.⁸⁷ Though the ideal monastic life was one spent in that heavenly paradise of contemplation, too often they were required to descend back down the spiritual ladder and attend to earthly matters.⁸⁸ This ordering of the mind gave the Cistercians a spiritual concept that allowed monks to participate in the economy without necessarily polluting themselves. Similarly, the descent away from affective love and into the more active love was unfortunate, but only understandable as monks were human and imperfect. The abbots or more spiritually advanced monks could inhabit the mental space of affective love for longer periods of time, but even they could not completely transition into those spiritual heights. The existence in a completely pure state of contemplative bliss, the new Eden described by Bernard, was reserved for the next life, after the race was won and the battle against spiritual evil and corruption was over.⁸⁹

Especially as the order gained power and prestige, its activities within the secular world came under greater scrutiny from both internal and external sources. The writings of the order belie the monks' obvious disquiet about the involvement of Cistercians in outside affairs. In his advice to Eugenius III, written around 1149, Bernard focused heavily on the necessity of finding time to spend in contemplation, even with the massive responsibilities involved in holding the papal seat.⁹⁰ He thoroughly advocated balance, admonishing Eugenius "not to give yourself up altogether...to the active life, but to set apart some portion of your heart and of your time for consideration."⁹¹ The cloistered monk was somewhat protected through the physical space of the

⁸⁷ "On Conversion" 12.24, 13.25 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 58-59.

⁸⁸ "On Conversion" 13.25 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 59.

⁸⁹ Acts 20:24, 1 Corinthians 9:24.

⁹⁰ "On Consideration" 5.6 in Lewis, *Consideration*, 21-22.

⁹¹ "On Consideration" 7.8 in Lewis, *Consideration*, 26; Gregory the Great and Henry Davis, (trans.), *Pastoral Care*. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950), 25-29.

monastery, though the defenses of his mind were still immensely important as a part of the system of physical and mental barriers to contamination. The pope, however, was continually taken away from spiritual matters in order to deal with the administrative duties of the church as a whole and to negotiate among the various monastic orders, approving grants of land and giving immunities in addition to many other duties.⁹² Even the pope, who would ideally be the most spiritually advanced member of the whole Cistercian order, was urged to remember to partake of the joy experienced in the presence of the divine Bridegroom so that he would be able to appropriately discharge his responsibilities and not to fall into corruption amid the splendors and dangers of the papal court, particularly involvement with “filthy lucre” which Bernard cautioned should be used only to “meet the necessities of the time.”⁹³ Constant vigilance was required for all monks in order to maintain their purity of mind. The path of unrighteousness, if travelled upon too far, would begin to look like the route to heaven to the deluded mind taken too far from its home in the divine.⁹⁴

Even the fact that a Cistercian sat in the *sedes* of Peter seems to be an anxiety-provoking development. Bernard is incredibly careful to specify that he did not under any circumstances believe that Eugenius had desired the position of authority, saying that it “has not been sought by you.”⁹⁵ This standard disclaimer was necessary in order to emphasize Eugenius’ continued identity as a monk and an individual that was yet centered upon the spirit, not the world. To desire openly the papal seat [*sedes*] would betray a mind focused on power and worldly prestige, not the spiritual well-being of the body of Christ’s church. In addition, the pope was in many

⁹² “On Consideration” 3.4 in Lewis, *Consideration*, 17-18.

⁹³ “On Consideration” 2.6, in Lewis, *Consideration*, 47.

⁹⁴ “On Consideration” 2.2 in Lewis, *Consideration*, 15-16.

⁹⁵ “On Consideration” Prologue in Lewis, *Consideration*, 12. Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 7.1-25, p. 33-34.

ways the epitome of secular-spiritual entanglement. Indeed, the majority of Eugenius' time seemed to center on the disputes of men, and many of these did not necessarily have a religious connotation. The quick rise of the order and its members to such heights of power required precise action in order to make sure even the pope was following the lead of his order, represented through Bernard as spiritual advisor. If the pope, as a Cistercian, were to fall into corruption and spiritual bankruptcy his decline would reflect even more harshly on their order, precisely because of their roots in a more extreme strain of reform monasticism. Thus, the pope was urged to heed the tenets of his order and of his God and to tend to his virtual cell, ensuring that his behavior could be considered spiritual work and not the misguided efforts of a monk too entangled in the secular world.

Neglect in keeping the mental cloister in good repair would lead any individual monk and even the entire order into disarray and disaster, though through the best intentions. This possibility, that the unity of the Cistercian community would be shattered and marred beyond repair, stemmed from the danger of too much involvement of the monks in the world. One of the primary concerns of the order was the increase in monastic participation in business, particularly for profit, and the danger that it posed for individuals involved as well as the community as a whole. In the beginning, the process of monastic business, negotiations between the cloister and the world, and the necessary economic transactions needed to keep the order going, seemed unbearable, as with the monks of the early Cîteaux.⁹⁶ As the monks understood that some involvement was in fact necessary, the duties of those secular-monastic relationships became less undesirable as the brothers acclimated to them as part of the real business of running a

⁹⁶ "On Consideration" 2.2 in Lewis, *Consideration*, 15.

monastery. The danger of this, for Eugenius in his papal position as well as for the monks of all the regular Cistercian monasteries, was too much acclimation and toleration. Eventually, the monks ran the risk of being “slaves of men in their acquisition of filthy lucre,” being contaminated by those “avaricious, simoniacal...human monsters” instead of fishers of men, the bondservants of all, in the service of the Church to bring more individuals into the arms of God through the spiritual life, not through the granting of “ecclesiastical distinctions” or preferential treatment because of a family’s donations to a monastery, as many communities were wont to do.⁹⁷

The contemplative life of the Cistercians was augmented by their manual labor, which mirrored the actions of the ordering of the mind, clearing the ground and sowing seed in order for the physical and spiritual fruit to grow and be harvested. Much as the balance between monastic business and contemplation needed to be maintained, the balance between work and leisure or contemplation also needed to be considered and carefully guarded against tipping in an undesirable direction. The perfect monastery was one in which all the monks were employed in work that would sustain their settlement, but wherein each one also had ample time for study, reflection, and spiritual activities and all were unified through one rule, gently correcting the faults in their brothers and being careful not to succumb to the dangerous sin of pride, especially the pride of avarice. Bernard’s advice to Eugenius as well as his sermons to Parisian students reflected the paradisaic view of the contemplative life, urging that the monk make time for quiet thought and meditation to “studiously cultivate” their spiritual practice.⁹⁸ Gilbert of Hoyland urged the brothers to “dwell together in unity,” enabled through love, which “inclines and unites

⁹⁷ “On Consideration” 4.5 in Lewis, *Consideration*,

⁹⁸ “On Consideration 7.8 in Lewis, *Consideration*, 26.

the human spirit to God.”⁹⁹ Gueric of Igny (d. 1157), a canon turned monk of Clairvaux, urged his brothers to use the “lamp in heart and hand and mouth” of “helpful and strengthening words” to strengthen themselves and their neighbors in Christ.¹⁰⁰ From the numerous complaints of Bernard as well as other influential ascetics of his day, however, who advocated their audiences enter the “treasury” of the Lord and lust after those “unsearchable riches” as opposed to the “insatiable love” of worldly goods which was the “sign of a degenerate soul,” the balance in the twelfth century was swinging too far into the realm of business, leaving less time for the monks to tend to their spiritual cells.¹⁰¹

There seems to have been the development of a spiritual system through which to create mental barriers and obtain a sense of spiritual advancement that served to separate the monks from the lay brothers and secular individuals with which they were required to be involved. Even so, tension was obvious between the ideal of monastic life and what reality likely prevailed in the world of the monastery. According to the ideal spiritual template set out in many of Bernard’s sermons, the monk inhabiting the realm of affective love would always have righteous motivations for his actions and would continually be focused upon the heavenly realm. Even when such a monk was required to abandon his cloister for negotiations with secular people and high ranking individuals such as kings, as was the perpetual scourge of even many higher ranking monks such as abbots and priors, he would be shielded from sordid temptation. This template, however, because it was an exhortation to higher spiritual practice and a more angelic way of life, did not necessarily reflect the reality of ascetic practice within the Cistercian

⁹⁹ “Sermon II” in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 218.

¹⁰⁰ “The First Sermon for the Purification” in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 133.

¹⁰¹ William of S. Thierry, “Meditation VI” in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 119 “On Conversion” 8.14, 8.16, 19.33 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 48, 50, 71-72.

monastery. With the construction of this ideal of monastic practice, however, there was a certain amount of material by which to justify the position of the monks if they were involved in business practices or other work outside the monastery. Though the spiritual strategy of the Cistercians in the face of an ever increasing involvement with the secular world was to stress balance, the ordering of the mind, and a renewed emphasis on finding time for contemplation to all those in the order, from the regular monks to even the pope, the reality of the monastery still remained. There was continual and unrelenting anxiety in relation to the harmony of *otium* and *negotium* and their proper places in the Cistercian life.

The twelfth century brought new demands upon an ever expanding order, which only increased these anxieties. According to Cistercian sources, though these documents can be somewhat problematic in their effort to impose a mythical unity onto the past where it might not have existed, there were as many as sixty five abbeys under the authority of Cîteaux after the death of Stephen Harding, Cîteaux's third abbot, in 1134.¹⁰² The order only continued to grow, with over three hundred monasteries established during the abbacy of Bernard. The widening of its geographic scope also made it much more difficult for the strictness of practice envisioned by its leaders to be truly effective. The institution of the authority of the General Chapter helped these matters, but there were obvious tensions concerning the practices of monks as well as the direction the church as a whole was taking. The Chapter would not likely have been able to completely control all the monasteries in the Cistercian system. Expansion and the introduction of Cistercian forms of asceticism into other abbeys that had their roots in different organized monastic traditions likely made all of these activities and anxieties about unity and purity even

¹⁰² Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*. in *The New Monastery: texts and studies on the earliest Cistercians*, ed. Rozanne E. Elder, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications 1998), 193.

more important in the minds of the order's leaders. In addition, the twelfth century economic shift toward a more urban and commercialized system also placed the traditional modes of monastic donation, wherein gifts were part of a reciprocal relationship and the display of the splendor those gifts had provided was only appropriate, in a precarious position for the Cistercians whose monastic theology was heavily built upon ideals of self-sufficiency and austerity.

The strong rhetoric of Cistercian exegetical texts against greed, money, and especially contamination that comes from too close a relationship with the community outside the monastic enclosure suggests that these were massive and real problems in the twelfth century for the order. Cistercians were certainly involved in many land negotiations with members from outside society, and many of those contracts came with stipulations by the donors for various benefits. The burial of the grantor on monastic grounds, prayers for departed family, and even economic security for family members, which usually took the form of entrance into some religious community, were common themes in the charters of Cistercian abbeys. The monks of one house even congregated at the deathbed of one of their donors, the wife of a knight, and promised her burial on their grounds if she would gift to them a particularly useful piece of land.¹⁰³ The monks were also involved in activities associated with these land grants that could have come perilously close to being called simony, the practice of buying and selling religious offices or, in this case, entrance into the ranks of the monks or the *conversi*. The language of the charters themselves treads carefully around this issue by phrasing all donations as “gifts,” usually given

¹⁰³ Constance H. Berman. *The Cistercian Evolution: the invention of a religious order in 12th-century Europe*. (Philadelphia: Univ of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 163.

“in free and perpetual alms” by the donor.¹⁰⁴ Any forthcoming spiritual benefits, therefore, were gifts in return from the monastery and not a purchase or sale.¹⁰⁵

The continued involvement of the order in financial matters, both on the scale of the monastery and the larger scale of wider Church issues once the Cistercians did have one of their own as pope, only deepened the anxiety the order had over money and anyone who was involved with it. The spiritual organization of the mind was one step to help the monks keep themselves pure in spirit and in action, but the existence of an entire subclass of lay brothers created yet another point of entry for corrupting influences into the world of the monk. The position of the *conversi* is especially important because they did occupy one of the ultimate and undesirable liminal positions in the Cistercian order, so uneasy about the virtue of their community. Because the lay brothers were not full monks, a certain amount of segregation was allowed and even desirable, but because they did live a form of a monastic life, there were unavoidable points of contact between the two groups. As the spiritual progression outward from the monastery into the secular world of the Cistercian order continued, the lives of the saints represent a pivotal insight into the Cistercian conception of the liminal figures of the ever problematic -yet fascinating- *conversi*.

¹⁰⁴ Charters #1-4 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*, 166.

Chapter Three:

Trampling Down the Devil: Cistercian Hagiography and *Conversi* Spirituality

While the sermons and exegetical texts of the order, such as Bernard's Song of Songs, reveal something about the Cistercian ideal of a purely monastic life, they do not inform the historian about the lives of a vast segment of the Cistercian population, that of the *conversi*. These lay brothers made up a large part of the Cistercian work force, but they existed in a liminal spiritual state. In a way, the *conversi* had a greater power to infect the cloister with outside contagion than did lay donors or other aristocrats. *Conversi* could never become full monks, as the Charter of Charity clarifies.¹⁰⁶ They did, however, participate in their own version of the monastic life and were required to assemble with the regular monks for certain prayers and masses. Hagiographical sources, particularly of Cistercian saints, illuminate the Cistercian concept of a life existing on the border of the spiritual and the earthly and allow the examination of the roles that the *conversi* played in the Cistercian monastery, both as barriers to worldly pollution but also as possible sources for contamination. Before I delve into the depths of saints' lives, however, a short overview of the *conversi* and their role in the monastery is necessary. Such an analysis will contextualize fully how the practice of business and the handling of currency sparked anxieties in the monastery.

Cistercian *conversi* played a critical role in both the expansion of the order, especially in the area of land holdings as well as in a spiritual milieu. According to the early documents of the order, a Cistercian regular monk was an individual who lived within the community of the

¹⁰⁶ Summa Cartae Caritatis XXII in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 450.

cloister, and who was forbidden from pastoral services and other contact with laypersons. Instead, lay brothers assumed these duties in order to preserve the sacredness of the monastery itself and its monks.¹⁰⁷ The institution of the lay brotherhood was in many ways a result of the difficulties that beset early Cistercian communities. As I have discussed in the introduction, the early monks of Cîteaux were destitute, and likely they could not have continued in the development and codification of their spiritual practice had they not been gifted with land from the Burgundian nobility. The Cistercian desire for an intensely individual and secluded spirituality made these arrangements incredibly problematic especially when the extent of land a monastery held exceeded the amount that the monks could care for, tearing them away from their contemplation and solitude and upsetting the careful balance of work and meditation that the Cistercians so desperately craved.

Thus, the emerging order developed a strategy that would allow them to continue to expand the boundaries of the monastery and the influence of their vision of ascetic life without compromising the ideal of “fulfilling perfectly the Rule day and night.”¹⁰⁸ To this end, the lay brotherhood was likely introduced within the first few decades of Cîteaux’s founding.¹⁰⁹ According to the Charter of Charity, which provides the basic regulations governing Cistercian lay brothers, the purpose of the *conversi* was to prevent regular monks from associating with laymen in their agricultural work, specifically raising animals and cultivating lands, and especially “giving or receiving shares or profits.”¹¹⁰ All of these duties were the purview of the *conversi*, which resulted in the lay brother’s complex status in the Cistercian hierarchy. On one

¹⁰⁷ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁹ Historians differ on the date for the institution of the *conversi*, see note 34 in Newman, *Charity*, 267.

¹¹⁰ Summa Cartae Caritatis XIX in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 449.

hand, the ideals of love and charity that run throughout Cistercian writings seem to extend to the *conversi*. The Charter of Charity itself also states that these men were “our brothers and, equally with our monks, sharers of our goods both temporal and spiritual.”¹¹¹ On the other hand, the same document is very careful to curtail the presence of regular monks on the granges. This restriction was ostensibly to ensure that the monk did not stray too far or stay too long away from the cloister, but the text seems to betray anxiety about the place of *conversi* in relation to the regular monks. The lay brother who wished to become a monk was expressly forbidden from that vocation, “even if he greatly desires it,” and those who did take the habit were considered influenced by the forces of Satan and summarily cast out of their home monastery and additionally forbidden from admittance into any other Cistercian house.¹¹² Such strident consequences echo scriptural warnings and reflect continuing Cistercian anxiety about the purity of their community as a whole.¹¹³ Though monks and lay brothers did work together in the fields for much of the order’s early history, there was a concentrated effort to segregate and separate those monks fully bound to the Rule and the *conversi* in the mid twelfth century.¹¹⁴ The *conversi* are obviously associated with the lower categories of the virtual monastic body through their work. These men represented the hands and feet of the order as a whole as opposed to the minds and mouths represented by the choir monks and were therefore subject to the greater dangers of contamination. Thus, they represented a uniquely problematic part of the Cistercian community that was, in theory, equal to the other members, but in practice had to be protected itself and also

¹¹¹ Charter of Charity XX in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 450.

¹¹² Charter of Charity XXII in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 450.

¹¹³ 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

¹¹⁴ Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*, 167.

guarded against by the regular monks so that their virtual body parts did not become infected by association or excessive contact.

Such confusion even in the early Cistercian documents and practice suggests that the position of the *conversi* in the larger scheme of the order was problematic at best and perhaps even dangerous, especially if the lay brother presumed to intrude upon the cloister by trying to join the ranks of the regular monks. The policy of the order to make sure the regular monks were protected from association with secular laypeople, particularly in the area of exchange of currency as would occur in the buying and selling of livestock or land upon which to construct granges, led to the development of intense disparity between the Cistercian monks and their *conversi* counterparts despite the assertion that they were the equals of the regular monks. The *conversi*, however, were vital in securing the cloister and in providing for the well-being of monasteries, especially large houses such as that of Rievaulx which supported up to five hundred *conversi* and quite a few hundred choir monks, an immense population by late Medieval standards.¹¹⁵ These anxieties stemmed not only from the duties of the lay brothers, particularly when they intersected with business ventures, which they very often did, but also from their location. Granges, like the *conversi* themselves, were liminal. They were an extension of monastic ground and thus somewhat sacred, but the granges housed lay brothers, who were often employed in the business of transporting goods for sale and moving themselves to and from the central monastery buildings.¹¹⁶ Additionally, granges were often located at quite a distance from

¹¹⁵ Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 159-60.

¹¹⁶ *Usus Conversorum* 6.13-15 in Chrysogonus Waddell. *Cistercian lay brothers: twelfth-century usages with related texts : Latin text with concordance of Latin terms, English translations and notes*, (Brecht, Belgium: [s.n.], 2000), 165.

the monastery proper, with the upper limit being established at about a day's journey.¹¹⁷ These lands were also where many products that the order exchanged for currency were produced.¹¹⁸ This created an immense grey area that defied the definitive boundaries between “world” and “cloister” that the order wanted to try and create, even though the monks themselves recognized that such a stark delineation could not truly exist.

In order to combat these issues within the lay brother community, the Cistercians brought the concept of spiritual warfare and sanctification through labor into the spirituality of the *conversi*. Just as the lay brothers represented a step down the spiritual ladder in a sense, the basis for the religious and spiritual practice of the brethren also represented a focus outside of the mental cloister so common to the full monks. Instead of the spiritual warfare of the mind, the *conversi* were involved in a much more direct and physical form of battle because of their liminal status. Every day they were required to wage the war within their own bodies in order to submit them to spiritual desires rather than the lures that were in many cases within their grasp, especially that of profits to be made from their trades. Aelred of Rievaulx commends an unnamed lay brother for giving up worldly riches for the spiritual wealth of the monastery. When the brother was injured in his labor, Aelred praises him for his attention to the poverty his weakness would bring upon the community, not for his own personal gain. The man was subsequently healed in body and thereafter “efficiently managed the affairs of the church” and even “lifted the house out of poverty.”¹¹⁹ This lay brother did not fall prey to the temptation of

¹¹⁷ Fregusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx*, 3, 238n5.

¹¹⁸ R.A. Donkin. *The Cistercians: Studies in the Geography of Medieval England and Wales*, (Toronto: Pontifical Inst. of Medieval Studies, 1978), 133, 142.

¹¹⁹ “The Saints of the Church of Hexham” 1.4 in Aelred, and Jane Patricia Freeland. *Aelred of Rievaulx: the lives of the northern saints*. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006), 77.

the world and was even more concerned for the stability of his community when it was deprived of his labor.

Like this injured *conversus* whose healing and activities within the church thereafter are presented as somewhat miraculous, the great role models for a lifestyle of self-subjugation in the ancient world were the saints, through whom the heavenly and the earthly intersected. In many saints' lives, the holy ones do lead a kind of ascetic life, though they are not always associated with a specific order. Abba Anthony (c. 251-356 CE), the great father of Egyptian monasticism, spent a great amount of his life without a community, battling his spiritual demons and defining what it meant to pursue the eremitic life, even during the short time he inhabited that small strip of desert so close to the cities of Egypt.¹²⁰ The ascetic life was also embodied in saints represented in Cistercian writings, though often their lives reflect concerns that were more prevalent for the authors and their particular environments. Even when such saints do handle money or do business, it is primarily in the context of a spiritual urging and the desire for further inner advancement. Ida of Nivelles (d. 1231), while still a novice, expressed anxiety about donating some forty pounds gained from her father's commercial business in a donation to the monastery, even after some "reliable gentlemen" had assured her that the sum was pure and untainted. To assuage her spirit, the saint eschewed the advice of those men and brought the issue to God himself through her prayers. Through this mystical conversation and exchange with the divine that she was assured of the acceptability of the currency as a gift, however, the money

¹²⁰ Brown, "Desert Fathers", 221.

itself is not mentioned again in her *vita*; it is simply used as a device used to discuss her spiritual growth.¹²¹

These hagiographical portraits of Cistercian saints, who walked the line between the world and the divine much as the Cistercian lay brothers did, shed light on the liminal status of the *conversi*. In their lives, however, at least as presented by their hagiographers, these saints learn to overcome that tension and strike an appropriate balance between the two that enables their spiritual growth even though many were still involved in secular activities. The lay brothers were not allowed to become full monks, but could ascend past the spiritual abilities of everyday men, meshing the business of the monastery with their vocation as saints rose above the spiritual capabilities of everyday individuals. This ascent up the spiritual ladder surely helped the Cistercians in the task of justifying their use of lay brothers, upon whom the majority of their economic influence and, by the thirteenth century, the continued existence of their monastery, depended.¹²²

The lay brothers were the instruments through which the regular monks worked to achieve these bonds. They were to be the physical manifestation of the spiritual community that resided in the cloister, the hands and feet of the virtual monastic body.¹²³ It is my argument that the use of *conversi* in the Cistercian system was a method of creating further barriers from the non-spiritual world through the creation of a middle layer of “sacred ground,” run by partial monks, who could intercept any contaminating influence from secular entities before it reached

¹²¹ “The Life of Ida of Nivelles” 4a. Goswin, and Martinus Cawley. *Send me God: the lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, lay brother of Villers, and Abundus, monk of Villers*. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 37.

¹²² Wood, *Economic Thought*, 58.

¹²³ 1 Corinthians 12:12-20.

the monastery.¹²⁴ Because of their economic dealings, however, the *conversi* themselves were eternally part of this liminal space between fully sacred and fully earthly, leading to a conflicting spiritual thought process where lay brothers were concerned. Indeed, some abbots concerned themselves not at all with the conduct of their lay members, preferring instead to devote all of their instruction and correction to the regular monks who had the potential of fully rising up the spiritual hierarchy. In contrast, the *conversi* did not share the same benefits, at least as long as they held to the regular standards of lay brotherhood.¹²⁵

The hierarchy presented in Bernard's Song of Songs and applied to the regular monks is therefore writ large over the organization of the entire Cistercian system, but with the added caveat that the lower orders would not, because of their station, be able to rise to full spiritual maturity even through their ascetic efforts. Those individuals called to become *conversi* seemed to be thought somewhat better than the average layperson by virtue of their vocation; obviously they had some spiritual capacity, but in comparison to those called to the conversion into a full monk, these men were "simpler and uneducated" as stated in the *Usus Conversorum* (c. 1120).¹²⁶ That almost childlike categorization led to the spirituality of the *conversi* being primarily inscribed upon their physical bodies, with the discipline of contemplation being reserved for more advanced lay brothers who demonstrated exceptional dedication to mastering their fleshly forms by enduring hardship and suffering for the purification of the soul.¹²⁷

The analysis of the *conversi* and their relation to the larger monastic philosophy is well illustrated through the concept of the virtual monastic body. Throughout Cistercian practice,

¹²⁴ Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, Prologue 40-44, p. 18.

¹²⁵ Waddell, *Lay Brothers*, 164.

¹²⁶ Prologue to the *Usus Conversorum* in Waddell, *Lay Brothers*, 165.

¹²⁷ "The Life of Arnulf" II.4d; II.11. in Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 160.

from the insistence of Bernard in his sermons upon mental hierarchies and purity to the more basic administrative concerns outlined in the Charter of Charity, the order was focused on creating a unified and concordant system. The whole Cistercian order was a body, just as all Christians comprised one larger body of Christ.¹²⁸ Monks (head, mouth) and even lay brothers (arms, feet) were, arguably, some of the more important “members” of the collective Christian body in the twelfth century, and thus held more responsibility for upholding their own honor so as not to shame the entire collective. Within the hierarchy of the particularly Cistercian spiritual body, however, the *conversi* were not accorded a high placement. Theirs was the lower order, relegated to the hands and feet more than the mind or mouth that the regular monks occupied through the performance of the liturgy. The lay brothers were instituted primarily as a labor force to work with their bodies on the land and to develop “waste” land that was donated into arable territory for the monastery. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, the *conversi* in English and Welsh monasteries were also involved in the transport of goods, particularly wool and its derivative products, to markets and buyers.¹²⁹ It was their activities in the commercial sphere that could very easily lead to the degradation of that body and due to their lower station, they were forever in danger. The *conversi* were eternally at risk of coming across something defiling and bringing it into the bodily system, and their purification necessitated greater physical effort and activity because their duties required that they interact with the filth that was money.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:12.

¹²⁹ William Illingworth, ed. *Rotuli hundredorum*... 2 vols. (London: Record Commission, 1812-18), 1: 317 in Donkin, *Studies in Geography*, 141.

¹³⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

Thus, the battle of the *conversi* was one centered firmly within their bodies and the world. Their struggles were still spiritual, but because of their position within society and within the monastic body, they were hopelessly enmeshed in the goings on of the outside world. Unlike the urban ascetics of fourth-century Jerusalem, the lay brothers could not simply immure themselves on their granges and refuse to perform their office. Such disobedience would have been a neglect of the physical but also the spiritual, which was still a critical component of the life of a lay brother. The practice of a less restrictive form of monastic life, though, opened up an elevated spirituality to secular communities that had interaction with Cistercian houses. Many of the first lay brothers were peasants who could find more security within a monastery than outside it, where a certain amount of instability was guaranteed.¹³¹ On a more spiritual level, however, the lay brotherhood offered a place for those who would not necessarily be accepted into the order as full monks due to their lack of education or social standing, allowing many peasants and other workers to attach a higher meaning to their labor.

There were still intense anxieties among the regular monks, however, concerning interactions between their brothers and the lay brothers. The monk represented the mind and spirit of the monastic community, but an insufficiently advanced brother could be pulled down the spiritual hierarchy by too much association with the lay brothers who represented the physical and worldly side of the virtual body. This precipitous decline would lead their minds into defilement and curtail spiritual advancement if they continued to foster these relationships, exactly the antithesis of the goal of the Cistercian hierarchical system. Thus, the lay brothers had their own superiors within the community but were also watched over by a regular monk, usually

¹³¹ David H. Williams. *The Cistercians in the Early Middle Ages*. (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998), 81.

of high ranking and spiritual fortitude that had potential to rise to the position of abbot.¹³² Such treatment mirrors the behavior toward children in the monastery in Benedict's *Rule*, where young brothers were placed among elder members in the dormitories and were also allowed a more lenient ration of food.¹³³ The "simple" *conversi* did experience much surveillance by their own brothers but also by the choir monks. This anxiety also led to rulings on the behavior of the *conversi* that were restrictive and designed to continually keep them mindful of their place in the monastery and of the fact that they were not still fully in the world. The lay brothers were perhaps the most obvious example of individuals that were to be "in the world, but not of the world" and the efforts of the Cistercians to regulate even very small facets of their lives show that there were problems and anxieties about the implementation of a holy life that was not fully monastic if it was even truly possible.¹³⁴ The *Usus Conversorum*, a codification of regulations pertaining to the lay brothers, details some of these restrictions, which included specific utterances the lay brothers were to recite during their liturgy, including an injunction that "when...in church, each says the whole of this silently."¹³⁵

Like the choir monks, the *conversi* were confined to certain kinds of speech and action. The lay brothers were only to speak to other monks concerning absolute necessities, such as their work. Idle talk or gossip was not considered appropriate, and too much interaction with the outside was incredibly problematic. Women, merchants, and other secular individuals would regularly have dealings with the lay brothers. The *conversi* themselves also traveled outside the

¹³² *Les Codifications Cisterciennes de 1237 et de 1257* ed. B. Lucet (Paris 1977) 300-01, 333-39; Othon, P., 'De l'Institution et des Us des Convers', in *Saint Bernard et Son Temps* (assocn. Bourguignon des Soc. Savantes, Congrès de 1927; Dijon, 1928) 187 as cited in Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 94.

¹³³ Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, sections 22.7, 37.2, p. 49, 60.

¹³⁴ *Usus Conversorum* 6.5-8, 9.2 in Waddell, *Lay Brothers*, 178, 182.

¹³⁵ *Usus Conversorum* 1.14 in Waddell, *Lay Brothers*, 167.

monastery for business, but their version of the monastic rule also regulated these activities strictly. Brothers were forbidden from speaking to anyone they might meet on their way from the grange to the monastery and were not to converse with any guests of the abbey.¹³⁶ A lay brother outside the monastery was “to act like a monk,” not to fall into the temptation of pleasing fleeting lusts or desires as represented by some wayward monks in the tales of the desert fathers. One individual continually meandered into and out of the monastic life, to the detriment of his spiritual and physical well-being.¹³⁷ St. Ninian, a fourth century missionary to the Picts, whose *Life* was written in the twelfth century by Aelred of Rievaulx and likely reflects many twelfth-century ideals, is not disturbed in his meditations by crowds or journeys, but uses times of rest to chant Psalms or read scripture.¹³⁸

This kind of mental and physical restraint was similar to that of the regular monks discussed through their system of barriers to the virtual cell of the mind, but the *conversi* in many ways required even more strict boundaries between the spiritual in the secular precisely because of their position right at the edge of the sacred and the world. These boundaries were primarily shown through the ascetic practices of the lay brothers as well as the role that labor played in their spirituality. *Conversi* were involved in a wide variety of trades, including mercantile activities, smithing, constructing wagons, and the ever-present arena of agriculture. This physical labor was the cornerstone of the life of lay brothers; most of their day was likely spent in the

¹³⁶ *Breve et Memoriale Scriptum* 7.10-11 in Waddell, *Lay Brothers*, 202.

¹³⁷ Ward, *Desert Fathers*, 56-57.

¹³⁸ “The Life of Ninian” 1.9 in Aelred and Freeland, *Northern Saints*, 53.

field or working at their given profession, reciting Our Fathers or other simple prayers in place of the more lengthy mass of the regular monks.¹³⁹

The physical nature of the work was also reflected in the images of Cistercian saints, particularly Arnulf of Villers who was himself a *conversus*. Arnulf was a highly exalted lay brother, and his *Life* gives a powerful illustration of the kind of existence led by a *conversus* at the pinnacle of the possible heights of spiritual ecstasy within his station. His *Life* is ascribed to Goswin, a cantor at the monastery of Villers and was likely composed in the 1230s for a much more local audience of monastic votaries in the Low Countries, roughly around modern Belgium. Noticeably, the presentation of Arnulf, a man “of middle class parents,” is very different from that of Bernard of Clairvaux, a nobleman who became a highly influential regular monk.¹⁴⁰ This may be partly due to the local nature of his notoriety, while Bernard’s *Vita* had to be approved by many Church officials, but there is a very distinct contrast in the behaviors praised in each work as saintly and good.¹⁴¹ While regular monks such as Bernard were commended for their mastery of the inner chambers of the mind, Arnulf is lauded for his strict treatment of his flesh, mastering it with increasingly painful and intense ascetic exercises.¹⁴² Throughout his life, the saint wore unpleasant undergarments, such as a hair shirt (a traditional display of asceticism with roots in the Egyptian desert), a vest of porcupine skins worn with the spines piercing his flesh, and even a breastplate of chain mail overlaid with the porcupine

¹³⁹ P. Othon, ‘De l’Institution et des Us des Convers’, in *Saint Bernard et Son Temps* (assocn. Bourguignon des Soc. Savantes, Congrès de 1927; Dijon, 1928) 185; *Les Codifications Cisterciennes de 1202*, ed. B. Lucet (Rome, 1964) 165; *Les Codifications Cisterciennes de 1237 et de 1257* ed. B. Lucet (Paris 1977) 345 as cited in Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 84.

¹⁴⁰ “The Life of Arnulf” 1.1a in Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 129.

¹⁴¹ *Vita Prima* 6.27-29 in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 27-28.

¹⁴² “The Life of Arnulf” 1.8-9 in Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 142-43.

garment.¹⁴³ The saint was a wagon maker for his first duty in the monastery, but his spiritual fervor quickly led to his increasing absence from the physical labor that occupied most lay brothers. His commitment to contemplation and the inner life was recognized by “his grange masters,” at which point he was given more time to spend in those activities, separating himself physically and in practice even from his fellow *conversi* as he intensified his spiritual and corporeal practices¹⁴⁴ As Arnulf gained more and more heavenly grace from God, increasing his devotion, he was given more time for contemplation and the mental work that characterizes the life of a regular monk. Through his life, it is possible to see the tensions present in Cistercian thought concerning the *conversi*, particularly with their physical bodies. Arnulf’s *Life* gives the lay brothers their own saint, a surprising and important distinction. Arnulf’s commitment, both to the contemplative and physically ascetic lifestyle, addresses unease within the order about lazy or uncooperative lay brothers that could cause trouble for the monks. His portrayal also highlights the ideal motivations for entering the monastery as a *conversus*. Arnulf’s intense mortification of the flesh reflects larger Cistercian disquiet about these men and the perceived spiritual leniency of their lifestyle.

Lay brothers, perhaps because of their increased workload, were already given some clemency in regards to their ascetic practice. They had a higher ration of food than the regular monks, and their rising time was later to allow them adequate sleep before their work began.¹⁴⁵ These regulations catered more to the basic bodily needs and wants of the *conversi* than the rules that bound the regular monks, which sparked anxiety in the order and also advertised their

¹⁴³ Ibid., 147-48.

¹⁴⁴ “The Life of Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers” II.4d; II.11. in Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 160.

¹⁴⁵ B. Lucet, ed. *Les Codifications Cisterciennes de 1202*. (Rome, 1964), 163; B. Lucet, *Les Codifications Cisterciennes de 1237 et de 1257*, (Paris 1977), 343-44 as cited in Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 84.

second-class ritual status. Such leniency could have disastrous consequences if taken too far, and the motivation of men entering the lay brotherhood was already heavily under question at the end of the twelfth century. Many individuals had begun to request admission into the fellowship of the *conversi* as a way of escaping worldly problems, particularly debts.¹⁴⁶ Though problematic and disobedient lay brothers most likely comprised a small percentage of the overall Cistercian population, their presence in the monastery spawned continuous discussion and censure. If their disruption of monastic life was too great, some houses forbade the practice of using lay brothers entirely, cutting out an important source of a monastery's financial well-being. This fact is demonstrated on a small scale in the anguish felt by the anonymous lay brother in Aelred's work on the saints of Hexham, whose inability to work could potentially propel his monastery deeper into poverty.¹⁴⁷ All of these factors play into the Cistercian idea of an exceptional *conversus* who takes full control of his willful and liminal body, submitting it in order to experience the fullness of divine grace through the spirit. Arnulf's portrayal in his *Life* seems to address these issues, giving the often excluded community of lay brothers their own holy figure and providing a blueprint for the *conversi* to advance spiritually, giving them a way to rise up in the ritual system through emulation of the contemplation of the choir monks, though not without first bringing their corporeal natures under strict control.

This focus on the lay brother's body was imperative from a spiritual perspective because of the reality of the economic situation of many Cistercian abbeys, especially in the mid twelfth century. The order had a reputation for being incredibly wealthy, and many monasteries acted as banks of a sort, keeping treasure and gold from ruling kings and queens, and many powerful

¹⁴⁶ Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 81.

¹⁴⁷ "The Saints of the Church of Hexham" 1.4 in Aelred and Freeland, *Northern Saints*, 76.

houses also had storehouses for their holdings within the grounds of the monastery. The Abbey of Rievaulx housed a treasury next to the parlor its monks used to conduct business.¹⁴⁸ This space was incredibly problematic because it was where the monks negotiated exchanges and grants of land and oversaw monastic economic activities. The lay brothers also brought in as much revenue as possible to preserve the livelihood of monasteries. Despite their “banker-like” status, however, many Cistercian monasteries often operated very near the line between solvency and debt. Financial issues also led to problems and wider concerns about the motivation of those who were becoming *conversi*. In the late twelfth century, a number of houses had stopped receiving the land grants that had sustained their growth and prosperity for years, and the population of *conversi* began to include more noble men who could provide a struggling house with land and coinage. In the face of wavering spiritual motivation for men to join the lay brotherhood, the activities of the *conversi* also came under more suspicion due to brothers who used monastery money or goods to gain profits for themselves. For example, certain English *conversi* who were selling wool at dangerously high price ran the risk of contaminating their souls, bodies, and the spiritual body of the entire Cistercian order in the process.¹⁴⁹

Such closeness of *conversi* to the lure of money and profit required them to be ever watchful and be even more physical in battling those spiritual temptations that could corrupt their souls and bodies. It was imperative, however, that the lay brothers not increase their ascetic practices without the permission of their abbot or overseer. The individual had to be on guard against pride, which might lead him to take on more than he was able in an effort to prove his

¹⁴⁸ Fergusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx Abbey*, 47, fig 11.

¹⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:18-22; J.S. Donnelly, *Decline of the Medieval Cistercian Laybrotherhood* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1949), 19 as cited in Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 94.

spiritual worth. The overseer provided an important check on this, but also encouraged further spiritual advancement among lay brothers as far as they were able, shepherding those “most in need of our care and attention.”¹⁵⁰ To guide abbots and overseers in directing the path of the *conversi* toward spiritual advancement and away from contamination, the order looked to their founding virtue of charity, or love. The *conversi* were responsible for much of the trade and industry of the monastery, but each brother required the direction and approval of his abbot before leaving the grange in order to undertake those duties. Additionally, the behavior of the brother was strictly regulated outside the monastery. While on the road, *conversi* adhered to all possible forms of their regular life, including keeping their regular eating and prayer habits even though the usual manual labor was rendered impossible through travel. Such attention to their bodily purity enabled the individual to stay spiritually clean while he travelled through a possibly contaminating landscape.¹⁵¹

This kind of oversight also helped mitigate the problems associated with money, lending, and trade within the order. Bernard himself was adamant that money itself was not evil, nor was the appropriate use of funds inherently immoral. It was only when the motivations of the user crossed into greed and selfishness that such activities became sinful and contaminating. With proper guidance and attention to their spiritual well-being, even the “simple” lay brothers could perform their duties in an acceptable manner without defiling their communities. Indeed, simplicity could help to refine faith, “overlay[ing] it with pure gold” as it did for Wulfric of Haselbury (d. 1154), an anchorite who considered the Cistercians “like sons of his own body”

¹⁵⁰ *Usus Conversorum* Prologue in Waddell, *Lay Brothers*, 165.

¹⁵¹ Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, section 67, p. 91.

and who was held in great esteem by his biographer and Cistercian abbot John of Ford (1150-1214).¹⁵²

The economic activities of the lay brothers then took on a spiritual aspect, not simply a commercial one. In addition, because of the necessity of permission from a higher ranking spiritual authority in order to perform their duties, the cloister still retained some control of these members and their activities. The supervision of more advanced members of the community likely helped legitimize and integrate many of the order's activities within its ideology as well. The full monks lent a watchful eye over lay brothers who could become problematic, but also who could ensure that the trading or negotiations instigated by the *conversi* were still within the bounds of acceptable use of Cistercian funds and did not cross any moral lines. Monks would accompany *conversi* on their journeys, suggesting that these members needed the physical presence of the religious hierarchy to keep them on the correct path.¹⁵³ The system of boundaries was kept in place as the monks, the "head" of the virtual Cistercian corpus, instructed its "hands" and "arms" just as the physical mind instructs the body to perform an action.

The emphasis upon the *conversi* bringing their bodies to submission through regular physical discipline and labor increased the layers of spiritual barriers to contamination as well. The warfare of the lay brother was against the demons of his body first; through much work and prayer he could progress and build additional mental barriers, but the primary method of spiritual fulfillment was through complete and utter self-mastery of the body. This was the asceticism of the lay brethren, a further influence from the desert monasticism that inspired the Cistercians in their infancy. Their spirituality was written onto their bodies, a mirror of the suffering of Christ

¹⁵² "From *The Life of Wulfric of Haselbury*" in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 238.

¹⁵³ *Usus Conversorum* 14.6 in Waddell, *Lay Brothers*, 187.

for the sins of many, but also the site of prayer and spiritual enlightenment. After all, it was with his body that St. Anthony battled demons, coming out victorious but with obvious signs of his struggle plain to see on his person.¹⁵⁴ Ida of Nivelles, similarly liminal in status to the *conversi* as a female member of an order that seemed to want to push women out of their history, likewise battled a demon with her body.¹⁵⁵ She “raised her fist” to him and “trampled him down like worthless mud” to protect her sisters in the dormitory from his influence.¹⁵⁶ Benedict of Nursia threw himself into thorn bushes to avoid temptation, and Arnulf of Villers, that great example of *conversi* spirituality regularly beat his own flesh until blood flowed.¹⁵⁷

All of these activities were not out of pure hatred for the physical but a desire for its purification, bringing the rational soul to the fore and enabling it to bring the entire individual into a spiritual unity.¹⁵⁸ The harsh labor and physical hardships of the monastic life had been indicative of a desire to return to a more ideal human state since the beginning of Christian asceticism with the hermits. By denying their bodily urges and cultivating a strong practice of *askesis* (“discipline”, “training”), the individual became closer to a perfect bodily state. Like the desert fathers, the *conversi* were participating in the perfection of their souls through the taming of their bodies.¹⁵⁹ Similar to the effort of the full monks to create a sacred cloister in their minds that allowed them to act righteously in all situations, the *conversi* purified their physical nature in order to take part in the work of the world. This division into those who purified the mind and those who purified the body shows how the Cistercian concept of hierarchy extended into the

¹⁵⁴ “The Life of Anthony” 8, in Athanasius, *Anthony*, 37.

¹⁵⁵ Anne E. Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: the Women’s Religious Movement and its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 80-81.

¹⁵⁶ “The Life of Ida” 13a in Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 50.

¹⁵⁷ “The Life of Arnulf” in Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 134.

¹⁵⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum. *Jesus as Mother*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 89-90.

¹⁵⁹ Ward, *Desert Fathers*, 57.

organization of the entire monastery along the lines of a virtual body. Each layer performed a different function within the community and added to the layers that protected the cloister from assault by the influx of money. Because the *conversi* handled currency and negotiations with pure bodies, the results of their efforts were also purified so that the monastery could be a storehouse for treasure and land and yet maintain its identity as the “new Jerusalem,” a holy place among worldly dwellings.¹⁶⁰

Overlaying all of these concepts of the virtual body, the divisions of monastic settlements into “those who work” and “those who pray,” and the dual focuses of spiritual practice between monks and lay brothers is the all-important virtue of obedience. One of the primary monastic vows, it was also promised by every lay brother when he was inducted into their fellowship.¹⁶¹ The promise of obedience gave a final element of control to the monastery regarding the economic activities of their *conversi*. The addition of land to monastic holdings or the participation in the trade and sale of goods at markets was not a problem in itself, but the potential for abuse made those things more anxiety inducing for the rest of the community. Through their accumulation of land, the Cistercians were creating a separate enclosure, widening the borders of their new desert through progressive accumulation of specific plots of land.¹⁶² In order to appropriately negotiate these activities and ensure the purity of the monastic enclosure, the obedience of the *conversi* to their overseers was paramount.

Through the use of the *conversi*, the Cistercians extended their strategy of creating a series of boundaries to the cloister, preventing its contamination by wealth and money.

¹⁶⁰ Matthew 6:20; Revelation 21:2; Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 54-56.

¹⁶¹ Section 5.1-4 in Fry, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 29.

¹⁶² Newman, *Charity*, 70.

Additionally, the conception of the monastic community as a virtual body allowed the order to imprint spirituality on the bodies of their lay brothers and on the minds of the full monks, enabling trade, sale of goods, and the attainment of land to be considered a pure act performed by bodies rendered holy through physical denial.¹⁶³ The virtues of obedience and stability also helped ensure that the activities of the *conversi* were approved and somewhat controlled, and the penalties imposed upon monasteries with unruly or unethical lay brethren encouraged this panoptic activity of the regular monks both for the sake of monastic purity and to preserve their work force.

The work of the *conversi* is intimately tied with the acquisition of land and property by the Cistercians because many times they were the instigators and negotiators. Because the lay brothers were ritually pure through their physical asceticism, the land that was granted to the monastery passed through a sanctifying boundary during those transactions. The acquisition of land transferred it out of the realm of the secular and added to the physical expanse of a heavenly kingdom being created by the Cistercian order. The ways in which the order negotiated for particular pieces of land, as well as the individuals that they involved in those transactions also play into the Cistercian strategy of layers and boundaries to contamination. That strategy enabled them to deliberately use land and money to expand their domain but retain a sense of spiritual purity even as they were involved in these business ventures. In the next chapter, I shall examine some of the charters of Cistercian abbeys to illuminate this intersection between spirituality and ground level economics, illustrating the ways that this concept of boundaries

¹⁶³ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 16-18.

informed Cistercian strategies of land acquisition and money usage in the social setting of the twelfth century.

Chapter Four:

The Master Craftsmen and the “New Jerusalem”: Monastic Business and Cistercian Lands.

The mission of the Cistercian order from its outset was to practice a kind of asceticism that was closely tied to the value of poverty. The monks called themselves the “poor of Christ” and professed intense ascetic values, strictly ruling on the exact amount of food each monk could receive and mandating a general chapter to ensure uniform practice of their interpretation of the Benedictine rule.¹⁶⁴ This chapter was a yearly gathering of all the abbots of the various Cistercian abbeys, though attendance every year was not mandated for many monasteries in England and Ireland due to distance. As the order expanded throughout the twelfth century and became more and more involved with agricultural processes, its worldly prosperity grew. This wealth was in many ways due to the incorporation of the problematic *conversi*, featured in the previous chapter. However, the ways in which the Cistercian order grafted its spiritual ideals onto the reality of the extended monastery is the prime subject of this thesis, and it is through charters that a more accurate picture of the order’s real economic dealings can be seen. The Cistercians were very fond of espousing an ideology of radical destitution, going to great lengths to separate themselves from their secular and lay brother counterparts, but by the end of the twelfth century the order was an economic powerhouse, controlling vast stretches of land through their grange agriculture and taking leading roles in the wool trade. All of these activities afforded the Cistercians access to immense amounts of power and currency, which presented quite the conundrum for the monks.

¹⁶⁴ “Summa Cartae Caritatis” IV in Lekai, *Cistercians*, 445-46.

The Cistercians found themselves in a position much more similar to that of the earlier monastic center Cluny than they perhaps desired. Cîteaux and Clairvaux headed a monastic empire reaching into England, Ireland, and Scotland as well as to the east of Poland and into Spain.¹⁶⁵ With that growth came increasing difficulties in wrangling a geographically widespread and culturally diverse order and conforming it to the standards set out by the General Chapter in Burgundy. The power the Cistercians were wielding in the fabric of society was also growing, increasing donations just as the monasteries sought expansion of granges to protect their monks from the outside world.¹⁶⁶ These exchanges of land prompted the Cistercians to develop ritual and rules governing agrarian exchange, just as the Abbey of Cluny had done in an earlier era. These negotiations illuminate some of the ways the Cistercian concept of hierarchy and monastic business played out in the real social fabric of the twelfth century, with high medieval lords, kings, and other earthly potentates vying simultaneously to bolster and in some cases bring down the monasteries because of their economic power.

The overt concern with purity diminishes somewhat when one begins to examine the actual documents that illustrate the exchange of property between monasteries and laypeople. The rituals of giving and taking from the order demonstrate an effort by the monks to create boundaries and regulations along with a concept of appropriate monastic business that enable them to participate in this economic system without completely divorcing themselves from their profession of poverty. These innovations manifest themselves through changing Cistercian attitudes toward land and currency as well as the uses to which those items donated to the monastery were put. All of these issues served to make land donation and possession for the

¹⁶⁵ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 40-44.

¹⁶⁶ Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 79-80.

Cistercians a matter that was not completely divorced from their ideology or monastic calling, but something that could be consolidated into their spirituality and therefore justified and continued. Much as the early Benedictines viewed their agricultural holdings as belonging to God or to their patron saints, the Cistercians saw their lands as extensions of the holy ground that was the monastery, the growth of which simply propelled the sacred atmosphere and work of the monastery forward to reach those who could be called to asceticism or to the lay brotherhood.¹⁶⁷

The development of a different thought process in relation to monastic involvement with money and the outside world enables a deeper analysis of the fusion of monastic business and practice within a Cistercian context. A shift in the mentality toward labor occurred during the high Middle Ages, in which “craftsmanship” and those who created things from raw materials were prized over other modes of labor. This shift helps to explain Cistercian ideologies of the holy. The restrictions the order placed upon the use of land also emphasize the overarching Cistercian philosophy toward money and gifts of property. In particular, many donations were specifically directed toward the support of the poor, which helped to legitimize the monastic involvement with physical money because it was not necessarily used for the monks themselves. Through examination of the uses to which these funds were to be put, it is possible to form an answer to the question of why the order felt these sorts of exchanges were within their purview as the “poor of Christ” and further elucidate how the meshing of monasticism and business came about on a more realistic level than that of the spiritual ideologies presented in sermons and hagiographies.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 75.

¹⁶⁸ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 68-69.

The charters for the Cistercian order available in translation are few and far between, so I shall be primarily focusing upon the following documents: charters from the abbey of Fountains in Yorkshire, charters contained in the Cartulary of Old Wardon, an English monastery, as well as some abstracts obtained from the abbey of Duiske in Kilkenny, which is in modern Ireland. The charters of Old Wardon record contracts from the early years of the abbey in the twelfth through the fifteenth century. According to the foundation charter, the house was established around 1135-6 by a minister of the Crown in Yorkshire.¹⁶⁹ The abbey of Duiske in Kilkenny was founded “for Cistercian monks” later in the history of the order, around 1204 according to its charters. At the time of its founding, there were already two other Cistercian abbeys in the county, which caused tension and feuds between these houses over land, some of which lasted for centuries.¹⁷⁰ Fountains, “the greatest, the richest, and almost the oldest of Cistercian establishments in Yorkshire,” held large tracts of land and its abbots exerted much influence over temporal affairs of the time.¹⁷¹ The charters themselves, which detail each grant, are contained within cartularies, collections of charters together into bound volumes, usually composed much later than the documents which they contain. The organization of the documents within the volume could vary because some monasteries arranged their documents by contract type, some by the relative importance of the donor, and others by the property itself.¹⁷² The charters for Fountains abbey, for example, were likely prepared in the fifteenth century and Duiske’s cartulary in the fourteenth or fifteenth.

¹⁶⁹ Wardon Abbey, and G. Herbert Fowler. *The cartulary of the Cistercian abbey of old Wardon, Bedfordshire, from the manuscript (Latin 223) in the John Rylands library, Manchester*. (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1931), 5-6.

¹⁷⁰ Duiske Abbey, *Duiske*, 25.

¹⁷¹ Preface in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 1.

¹⁷² Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*, 170-71.

All of these settlements were rather far from the reach of Cîteaux and Clairvaux, which provide a clearer vision of the realities of Cistercian practice as it spread outward and farther from the immediate range of the General Chapter and its visiting abbots. Many of these charters are also from a later time period than the writings of Bernard, presenting evidence of the methods the Cistercians used to mold their practices as they moved from Burgundy and also as the economic climate of their surroundings began to change and move toward a more commercial business model. Such movement is evident in the charters themselves: an increasing number of straight sales and rents or leases begin to be recorded in the later documents, which perhaps illustrate changing attitudes at least on the part of these particular communities, as to the role of the monastery when dealing with money and the outside world.¹⁷³

By the mid to late twelfth century, the reach of Cistercian houses and their land holdings had become expansive by the standards of the day; the abbey at Fountains commanded over a hundred square miles of land at a conservative estimate. The mere owning of property by a monastery had been one of the points of contest in the great feud between Cîteaux and Cluny, and yet the Cistercians themselves would come to possess land covering a wide geographic range as they carried out their mission of rooting and planting and making habitable their new deserts in the contexts of their further settlements.¹⁷⁴ Within the larger body of church philosophy, the issue of property was also highly debated. The ideal of monks living without individual possessions and renouncing the lusts and lure of delighting in one's earthly goods was brought into clear conflict with the corporate ownership and monetary income many houses were

¹⁷³ Charters #8b, 7, 26, 61 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 4, 16, 29, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 12-20.

gaining, which could be counted in the thousands of pounds for particularly prosperous English monasteries.

By the time of their expansion, the Cistercians were beginning to look more and more like the monasteries they had so despised, ruling a veritable empire with a whole accoutrement of papal and immunities, granting them freedom from “geld, denegeld, fines” and other financial responsibilities.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the possession of money itself was “neither good nor bad,” but more capital meant more temptation and a greater chance that those funds would be abused in favor of the greed of gain.¹⁷⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, the use of the *conversi* addressed some of these issues, but the fact still remained that the order as an entity controlled large amounts of currency and property, moving in and out of the monastery through the negotiations represented in the charters. I argue that it was in the everyday and ground level negotiations of charters through which the larger spiritual strategy of barriers and the layering of defenses, both physical and mental, throughout the virtual Cistercian body, as well as the changing attitude to land and currency, both within and without the monastic community, is truly represented. It is because of these efforts that the order could participate in all of these negotiations, gaining and giving land, and striking rent deals with secular individuals, while still keeping their spirituality alive and intact.

Throughout most of these charters, the members from the monastery mentioned are lay brothers or high ranking monks, such as an abbot or prior.¹⁷⁷ Because those monks of high rank were considered to have ascended the spiritual ladder and constructed strong mental barriers to

¹⁷⁵ Charter #3 in Duiske Abbey, *Duiske*, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Homily 4.10 in Perigo and Saïd, *Magnificat*, 55-56.

¹⁷⁷ Charters #57; 8-9 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 58, 89-90.

temptation and sin, they would have been more able to contend with the seductive power of profit and personal gain, at least according to the theory of Cistercian asceticism. These monks could also oversee the lay brothers and ensure the purity of their transactions. The extension of Cistercian monasteries into large granges that spread out from a monastery was a method of distancing the cloister from the secular, but it was also a method of conquering land and using it for heavenly purposes, providing for those pursuing the spiritual life.

The Cistercian attitude toward land began evolving almost immediately after the foundation of Cîteaux when the brothers found that their experiment in radical spirituality was going to be abruptly cut short if they did not find some way of supporting themselves. Shortfalls in funding propelled donations into the equation of Cistercian spirituality very early on, allowing the monks to continually rework their philosophy regarding money and property in relation to relevant issues that came to light as the order became more unified, organized, and expansive.¹⁷⁸ The effort to restrict monastic involvement in negotiations to lay brothers created a gateway of sorts, allowing the land to pass through the barrier from secular to sacred. Land, after all, was symbol of relationships in these transactions, although the Cistercian model differed from the Cluniacs in that the land was not usually returned to the donor and then re-gifted in a series of exchanges.¹⁷⁹

The system of land transfer at the Abbey of Cluny was a complex web of gifts, quitclaims, and re-gifting that served to ratify and change social relationships between Cluny and its community as well as between lay members themselves. As Barbara Rosenwein outlines, land served as a ritual object in exchanges with Cluny because it could take on and shed

¹⁷⁸ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 36-38.

¹⁷⁹ Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 69; Newman, *Charity*, 71-72.

associations and relationships without physically moving at all.¹⁸⁰ Gifting in the Cluniac system was a way for lay donors to show their own prestige and reinforce their social standing within the community as well. This gift economy was a system in which the conference of property to the Abbey was prestigious and even expected of important families and indeed of Cluny itself. The benefits for donors within this system of exchange were largely social or spiritual and much less likely to be monetary than donations to Cistercian abbeys. The give and take of a place was part of the building of networks, sometimes during key life stages such as marriage, death, or the passing on of an inheritance when the social fabric could shift its alliances and had to be re-established through gifting and granting.¹⁸¹ Land given to Cluny also came with intangible benefits such as the prayers of the monks, which were also commonly cited in Cistercian charters, as well as the celestial exchange of worldly goods for heavenly wealth.¹⁸² Two important spiritual benefits that are not present or not highly represented in Cistercian documents, though, are the idea of being a “neighbor” to a saint and the entrance into Cluny’s confraternity, a group of laypeople that received treatment like a monk of the abbey upon their burial and were also entered into the prayer list of the monks. Cistercians did bury donors, but there does not seem to be the same concept of the donor as “virtual monk” that existed with the Cluniac system. The Abbey of Cluny also had a very special relationship with the church in Rome and its land was considered very literally to be the property of Saint Peter himself.¹⁸³ Cistercian houses, however, were all dedicated to the Virgin Mary and did not hold these kinds of elevated associations with particular saints.

¹⁸⁰ Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 69.

¹⁸¹ Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 48.

¹⁸² Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 41.

¹⁸³ Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 76.

The land given to the Cistercian monastery became a part of the order's New Jerusalem, the sacred sphere of the monastery and its inhabitants.¹⁸⁴ Property passed through the ritual barrier of the *conversi*, extending the physical boundary of a monastery's spiritual walls and was summarily considered no longer the property of its original possessor. Many of these grants allowed the monks to "enclose and make fences [around] all the lands which they hold," enabling them to create a physical enclosure that matched the spiritual separation of monastic space.¹⁸⁵ The ritual of donation was still incredibly important as a social and spiritual process, but scenarios where lay donors would retake land, while prevalent at Cluny were very much diminished in the Cistercian context. The usual formula for a donation granted certain pieces of land to a monastery "in free and perpetual alms," sometimes stipulating that the land was "confirmed to the monks in perpetual possession." In this particular case, the negotiation was witnessed in the monastery's chapter house, an area where the monks would gather together and conduct monastery business, both economic and administrative. This exchange was further confirmed by offering the land "on the altar of Fountains," formally consecrating it to the abbey.¹⁸⁶ The Cluniac model was in a sense very reciprocal; a family gave land or money to the monastery so that the monks might give it to God in the form of donations to Rome, ornate liturgical instruments, or even through the prayers of the brothers themselves.¹⁸⁷ The Cistercian return on a donor's investment began to move away from spiritual rewards such as prayers or burial, though those things were still fairly common, especially for donors of higher social status, and into a more concrete economic exchange of currency for land.

¹⁸⁴ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 54-56.

¹⁸⁵ Charters # 26 and 27 Lancaster, *Fountains*, 129.

¹⁸⁶ Charter #73 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 105.

¹⁸⁷ Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 44-45.

This shift made the Cistercian strategy of creating barriers and enforcing ritual purity even more imperative than it would have been had they continued to emulate the Cluniac gift economy model of giving and taking. In reality, though the monastery wished itself to be secluded, it was an economic center of activity. The charters of Fountains Abbey record donations to the monks, but also claims, sales, and quitclaims (renunciation of rights to a piece of land) between lay individuals. Much like donations at Cluny, these events seem to have been somewhat performative in nature. Many of the grants were witnessed by the parties involved but also by “many others” who are not specifically named. Abbeys even became courts of law in many cases, deciding land disputes between families and enforcing fines upon individuals for various infractions including unpaid rents or false claim to monastic lands.¹⁸⁸

In the face of this fervor of activity, it is difficult to maintain the spiritual *topos* so beloved by Cistercian writers that the order was adamantly anti-materialist and endeavored to isolate its settlements from all outside influence. Even the abbots of Cîteaux and Clairvaux, the heart of the Cistercian empire, encouraged the Abbey of Fountains to acquire as much land as possible, including “fuel and timber wherever they can, and saltbeds and fisheries.”¹⁸⁹ These sorts of injunctions from the head of the order might seem incredibly at odds with the professed goal of poverty and austerity that was preached by the founders of Cîteaux in 1098. It is highly likely that such activities were not what the founders had envisioned for their “New Monastery,” however, the Cistercians were very particular about the land that they acquired. They did not simply grasp for every plot that might have been donated. Instead, there was often a very careful series of negotiations, including exchange of certain pieces of land for areas more desired by the

¹⁸⁸ Charter # 55c, 11b in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 37; 120.

¹⁸⁹ Charter # 17 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 148-49.

monks. At the abbey of Duiske in 1256, for example, the monastery ceded “five acres of meadow near [the lay donor’s] house...and three acres...which his father granted to the convent in exchange for eight acres of meadow lying near the abbot’s land.”¹⁹⁰ The exchange was equal, eight acres exchanged for a different eight acres in an area that was perhaps more useful to the monks. Similarly, at the abbey of Fountains, a certain Richard gave land to the monks for which they gave him “in exchange” other pieces of property in their possession.¹⁹¹ All of this worked to make a monastery self-sufficient, which was more important than absolute adherence to the letter of the law, even as early as Cîteaux.¹⁹²

Grants to Cistercian abbeys were often essentially permanent, unlike donations to Cluny, where the monastery sometimes returned land back to the family in a series of back and forth negotiations. Indeed, many charters have clauses specifying that the donor and even his descendants will never try to retake land they had given to the monastery.¹⁹³ Similar to the order's behavior toward monks or lay brothers who had abandoned the community, there was intense hostility to any efforts to renegotiate and reclaim donated land, except in the situation where land was in negotiation for another piece of property that was more desirable or presented a greater strategic advantage for the monastery to possess. Even those negotiations, however, did not decrease the overall expanse of monastic property, only shifted it in a way that was pleasing to both the donor and the monks.¹⁹⁴ Fountains abbey records “an exchange of lands,” all in the same general area, and transacted between a lay couple and the abbot, an equal

¹⁹⁰ Charter #60 in Duiske Abbey, *Duiske*, 88.

¹⁹¹ Charter # 72 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 231.

¹⁹² Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, xii-xiii.

¹⁹³ Fo. 298 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 182.

¹⁹⁴ Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 260-61.

exchange of “five roods for other five roods in the same territory.”¹⁹⁵ This transaction enabled the monastery to gain control of land closer to its other holdings and exchange it for other pieces the lay donors could still use.

The ritual of land donation reflects a mission of the order to spread its influence and convert both individuals and space to the sacred life of asceticism. The creation of sacred space through the incorporation of land into the monastery imprinted the spirituality of the Cistercians onto the earth just as it was emblazoned on the minds of the monks and the bodies of the *conversi*.¹⁹⁶ The payment of money for land, then, was simply a method through which to do the work of God and the labor that the order itself felt was of first importance: preparing the ground for the seed of scripture, especially the call to a monastic life. The concept of poverty within the order shifted from a reliance upon the physical reality of denying tithes or certain kinds of donations such as serfs or estates, into a more spiritual definition of what it meant to be radically impoverished. As historian Lester Little sees it, the decision to be “poor by profession” was simple in the realm of ideology but exceedingly difficult in practice,¹⁹⁷

The attitude of the Cistercians towards money and economics shifted along with the development of a more commercial societal system. The rise of mercantilism, trade, and currency brought physical coinage into the monastery even more prevalently than before, which brought about anxiety about its use from those within the monastic community as well as detractors such as the Franciscans that believed the Cistercians had succumbed to the traps of greed and the lure of worldly prestige. In the eyes of the monks themselves, though, this was not

¹⁹⁵ Fo. 307 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 189.

¹⁹⁶ Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 142-43.

¹⁹⁷ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 90-91.

necessarily the case. They realized the necessity of careful handling of currency, lest greed and lust for its power enter their minds and corrupt them, and perhaps to combat this danger, much of the actual currency granted to the monks was earmarked for some specific purpose. One donor to Fountains Abbey granted an acre of land that “shall be assigned absolutely to the support of the infirm in the infirmary.”¹⁹⁸ Another contracted to “render yearly to the gate of Fountains for support of the poor...five shillings.”¹⁹⁹ This earmarking created a purpose for currency that entered a monastery and ensured, at least ideologically, that the monks would use it for a righteous purpose and not for personal gain.

Most often, money given outright to a Cistercian house was explicitly for the support of the poor. A common phrase in these charters is that the donation be for “the poor who congregate at the gates.”²⁰⁰ Charity, that great Cistercian value, was practiced by the monks toward the outside community especially during the Lenten season.²⁰¹ Such efforts, which could be very grand in some houses, certainly required large amounts of concrete funds which were provided partially through these agreements. Money, as long as it was carefully and righteously used, was no longer an inherent form of sin or contamination. Though the emerging merchant class was still looked upon with much disdain, at least until the Franciscan and other mendicant orders emerged to give them a place within a spiritual framework, the Cistercians were fulfilling the duty that was set before them by Christ in the scripture: to clothe and feed those who were in need and at the same time creating relationships with individuals who could eventually convert

¹⁹⁸ Fo. 300b in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 184.

¹⁹⁹ Charter #11 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 144.

²⁰⁰ Charters #40, 47, 79, 161 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 226-27, 233, 252.

²⁰¹ Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 118-119.

to some form of the monastic life, either through lay brotherhood or entrance into the full community of the monks.²⁰²

The relationships built through grants to the Cistercians rested not on re-gifting, as they had with the Cluniac system, but with successive confirmations in later generations of the sovereignty of the monks over donated lands.²⁰³ These confirmations did not give the land anew to the monastery in a physical sense, but they did confirm for a new generation that the property was still a part of the sacred expanse of the monastic settlement.²⁰⁴ This formula occurs throughout Cistercian charters, such as this from the abbey of Fountains: “Confirmation by Robert de Mubrai of all the grants and confirmations which his father, Roger de Mubray, and Nigel his (Roger’s) son made to the church of Fountains.”²⁰⁵ These charters served to sanction the relationship between the donor’s family and the monastery itself, but it also tied individuals in the secular world spiritually to the work of the monastic community through the medium of land.²⁰⁶ They were not “virtual monks” any more, as they had been in the Cluniac system, but they were still participating in the spiritual transformation of physical space through their offering of land, though without the guarantee of return, so perhaps these donors were more like virtual lay brothers. They assisted in the physical work of the *conversi*, contributing to the metaphysical separation between the spiritual “new desert” of the monastery and the secular world.²⁰⁷ Through confirmation charters, the status of that land was reaffirmed and the separation between monastery and world strengthened in a sense. Through its donation, the land

²⁰² Proverbs 19.17, Matthew 25:35.

²⁰³ Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*, 170.

²⁰⁴ Warden Abbey, *Warden*, 80, 87-88, 95-96.

²⁰⁵ Charter #22 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 105. 211.

²⁰⁶ Newman, *Charity*, 70-72. For land as a ritual object, see Rosenwein, *Saint Peter*, 200-207.

²⁰⁷ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 94.

was purified, allowing monastery involvement with laymen to remain spiritually uncontaminated through the breaking of the link between donor and abbey.

Additionally, such confirmations cemented relationships between families and the monastery for another generation and reflecting changes in the ideology of property, shifting from the gift economy model prevalent at Cluny toward a more market driven system (at least in the eyes of the Cistercian monks). The disparity that sometimes emerged between donors and the monks regarding the particular meaning of their contracts is likely also a reason for these successive confirmations, which restate the specific requirements of a family's contract to the monastery. These confirmations represent the end point of negotiations between donors and monks regarding the specific meaning of their agreement or donation, not to mention the untangling of complex webs of inheritance the monasteries had to unravel in order to prove their claim to property they might have thought was already theirs. Such validation often required the presentation of confirmations or previous grants, which also helps explain the prevalence of such documents which might seem formulaic and unnecessary to the modern viewer.²⁰⁸

For the brothers, the idea of exclusive property ownership seemed to stay much of the anxiety over contamination of the monastic enclosure because of land transactions, especially re-gifting or return grants. The land itself was necessary to support the conversion of more monks and lay brothers, and the brothers themselves did not technically own the property. It was collective property and in a spiritual sense belonged to God, not to the brethren. Though their intentions in the early days of the New Monastery may have been to avoid owning land, the focus seems to have been more upon profit-earning pieces such as churches which would

²⁰⁸ Berman, *Cistercian Evolution*, 170-171.

generate tithes (a source of income the Cistercians specifically shunned).²⁰⁹ The acquisition of grange lands tied any profit that might be gained to the physical labor of the lay brothers. This association meshed very well with changing medieval attitudes about trade and profit, especially in relationship to anything that could be termed “mercantile activity,” of which the Cistercian order was certainly a part. One of the duties of the *conversi* after all was transporting goods to markets in order to sell them.²¹⁰

Traditionally, medieval thought centered on negative portrayals of merchants, who were associated with the biblical figures of the money changers on the Temple mount that Christ turned out of the house of God, Judas the betrayer of Christ, and the Jews who also turned God over to Rome.²¹¹ This led to a view, espoused by such illustrious minds as Augustine of Hippo, that merchants should be expelled from the fellowship of the Christian body and true Christians should never be involved in such economic pursuits.²¹² However, with the increase in currency circulation as opposed to a system of bartering that rose to prominence in the twelfth century, many merchants were economically powerful and likely donated land or some of their incestuous money, which compounded through interest without active work on the part of the merchant, to monasteries.²¹³ This new kind of munificence required a reframing of the traditional concept of professions that earned a profit, which the Cistercians could use to their own advantage when opposition began to emerge against their own wealth and economic success.

Those who simply bought items cheaply and sold them at exorbitant prices, their only motivation being pure profit, were still considered practitioners of “shameful gain,” that offense

²⁰⁹ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 65-68.

²¹⁰ Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 86-87.

²¹¹ Matthew 21:11-13, Mark 11:14-16, John 2:13-16, Luke 19:45-48; Little, “Pride”, 37n82.

²¹² Wood, *Economic Thought*, 112-13.

²¹³ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 178-79.

for which Bernard exhorted his community to be eternally on guard.²¹⁴ Craftsmen, those who transformed raw product into something and then sold it, were still considered righteous if they received back the worth of their labor and even a small profit. And what were the Cistercians if not master craftsmen, transforming the land itself, making wasteland habitable and arable and most importantly turning the raw material of property from its degenerate state into a piece of a spiritual paradise and fortress?²¹⁵ This transformation enabled the lay brothers and monks in turn to continue their refinement into spiritual beings by the master craftsman himself, the god of heaven who created humans and molded them as “the work of his hands (Isaiah 64.8).”²¹⁶ Any profits gained from land grants or donations, therefore, could be justified in a sense because the Cistercians labored for their earnings both spiritually and physically, molding the land to reflect the molding of their souls by God. It was the development of the spirit through labor that caused the solitude to bloom and the desert of the Cistercian monastery to “be like a paradise of delights.”²¹⁷

The Cistercian strategy toward money and trade, exemplified in the spiritual practices of the creation of barriers within the mind and the body, became less concretely defined and much more fluid when they were put into practice at the local level. The monks had to deal with the unshakeable reality that their careful separations did not necessarily extend to their patrons, who had certain expectations for their relationships with monastic houses to which they contributed. Stipulations such as entrance into the fraternity of lay brothers or prayers for the souls of the donor’s family were fairly common still, and the order’s opposition to such practices was swayed

²¹⁴ “Lenten Sermons” 14.5 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 233-234.

²¹⁵ Jeremiah 1:10; Newman, *Charity*, 94-95, 294n113.

²¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 3.10

²¹⁷ Gueric of Igny, *In navitate sancti Ioannis Baptistae, sermo quartus I*, in *Sources Chrétiennes*. Paris 1942-.202; 352, Cistercian Fathers Series. 1970-.32:141 as cited in Newman, *Charity*, 295n115.

often when a negotiation with higher nobility would give them much desired lands for their cattle or for farming.²¹⁸ One donor to Duiske provided the monks “license for feeding forty hogs and pasture for twelve cows,” apparently in return for the prayers of the monks.²¹⁹ Another donor to Fountains who granted fourteen acres of land specified that “the Church of Fountains is to receive him if he wishes to become a monk.”²²⁰ Though the Cistercians may have wanted to keep their business transactions simple and “pure,” the prospect of an advantageous exchange would likely inspire some leniency in practice.

In comparison, the charters that detail a simple exchange of currency for land seem to almost have been more spiritually pure or desirable than such complex land grants which enmeshed the monastery within a web of often conflicting loyalties to donors and to their spiritual impetus.²²¹ For example, a certain Turgis was given “nine marks of silver and a horse in recompense” for his donation of pasture to the monastery.²²² Cistercian attitudes toward their more wealthy donors remained conflicted, however. Bernard seemed to believe it was the duty of those who had been blessed with economic prosperity to support the “poor of Christ” who theoretically gave up their potential for worldly gain by entering the monastery. This was a spiritual transaction more than an economic one; the currency exchanged was not the physical gold but that of one person’s blessing in this world for the blessing the monks could bestow upon him in the next.²²³

²¹⁸ Charter #1 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 90.

²¹⁹ Charter #16 in Duiske Abbey, *Duiske*, 39.

²²⁰ Charter #2 in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 12.

²²¹ *Summa cartae caritatis* 23. For a discussion of this untangling of social obligations, see Newman, *Charity*, 69-70; 72-73.

²²² Charter #5 in in Lancaster, *Fountains*, 16.

²²³ Wood, *Economic Thought*, 63-67.

In essence, the Cistercians created their own version of a spiritual economy overlaid onto the physical exchange of goods and services. Their system was based, like that of Cluny upon the spiritual benefits that could be gained from donating or selling land to the monastery. No doubt this novel approach to exchange alienated some Cistercian thinkers. Because the monks were involved in manual labor as a central tenet of their following of the Rule, they could be considered in the light of “craftsmen” that created goods from raw materials and were therefore entitled to some profit from their ventures.

In reality, much of the Cistercians’ understanding of their economic activities stemmed from both their concern with containing the cloister and purifying monastic space and bodies as well as a fluid interpretation of the Rule and what it meant for each community in its particular setting. Their emphasis upon physical labor for all their members, even the full monks, also made the Cistercian monastic economy a model that more closely mirrored a craftsman’s role in a profit economic system. This emphasis took many of the internal issues concerning money and the economy and gave the financial world legitimacy within the Cistercian spiritual realm. The danger of money and profits was still very prevalent, as can be seen through the number of times Cistercian writers warn their communities about its lure, causing the church to “rivet its stones in gold and leave its children naked.”²²⁴ Bernard cautioned his congregation, saying “who does not know that to serve mammon, to worship avarice...is the sign of a degenerate soul?”²²⁵ Yet the strategy of the *conversi* and the creation of spiritual barriers helped to purify incoming funds from their taint of sin. Thus, for themselves, the issue of monastic finances was fairly wrapped up in a spiritual strategy that coincided with a helpful economic paradigm.

²²⁴ “From an Apologia for Abbot William” 12.18 in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 57.

²²⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, “On Conversion” 8.15 in Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, 50.

In the wider world, however, the Cistercian enterprise seemed excessively successful and worldly, leading to sayings that one was “as rich as a Cistercian” or that the brothers were even lower on the scale of spiritual hierarchy than Jews, long demonized for their own economic ventures.²²⁶ Though the order seemed able, like the Benedictines before them, to develop an effective strategy to consolidate their spirituality with a changing system and the rise of a more commercial, currency and profit-based economy, they were not able to escape the wider issues that surrounded such development. Church involvement with worldly affairs, from which the Cistercians were certainly not segregated, continued to be a seriously contested point throughout the remainder of the Middle Ages. The Cistercians, however, represent a very important stepping stone between the gift economy of Cluny and the stricter professional poverty of the mendicant orders which would rise to prominence after the Cistercians faded from the world stage. Additionally, the space which the Cistercians carved out for laymen through the *conversi* would be fully expanded through the Franciscans and Dominicans into a whole organization that provided a full spiritual niche for the often neglected class of merchants and businessmen. The Cistercian ability to combine spirituality, labor, and commerce also helped push much of Western Europe into an agricultural commercial economic system which would influence the world for centuries to come.

²²⁶ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 56-57.

Epilogue

In the history of religious reform movements, the Cistercians represent a pivotal bridge between the liturgical focus of houses like the Abbey of Cluny and the urban and merchant-centered spirituality of the Franciscans and Dominicans. Their endeavor to combat the increasing intrusion of an economic framework based upon currency and exchange through a varied and complex set of spiritual and social barriers combined aspects of the old gifting system with new conceptions of poverty, property, and wealth. As evidenced by their great economic and political success, the strategy was effective for much of the twelfth century, allowing the Cistercians to extend their influence far beyond the reach of Burgundy and Cîteaux.

The Cistercian attitude toward wealth was a complex fusion of unease about its corruptive power with the belief that the appropriate use of money was a righteous act, coupled with a shifting economic climate that prized craftsmanship and labor, considering payment for work a legitimate means of earning profits.²²⁷ This change in perspective, combined with a monastic culture that emphasized the creation of barriers, both mental and physical, between the individual and the contaminating effects of money, enabled the order to participate in business and economic ventures while keeping intact their spiritual impetus, at least within the realm of ideology. They were able to conceive of their order as a community of craftsmen working and creating the spiritual out of the temporal. This picture of the Cistercian community was only successful, however, if all the monks were invested in their own spiritual journey, which would fortify them against temptation.

²²⁷ Newman, *Charity*, 94-95

Through their sermons, the great thinkers of the order developed a system of hierarchy and organization that rested within the mind as the control for the body.²²⁸ This arrangement extended the concept of a “virtual cell” within the mind of the monk, allowing some members to be involved in economic processes and retain their purity in the eyes of the community.²²⁹ Abbots and priors, the likely choir monks to participate in these exchanges, were considered spiritually advanced enough to mediate the crossing of the barrier between the secular and the sacred necessitated by business ventures. Additionally, the physical labor prescribed by the Rule and the Cistercians’ own plan for monastic life helped to control the body as the monk worked on his soul and the tending of his “virtual cell.” The fortification of the individual mind was the first defense against contaminating temptation and it was upon that which the rest of the Cistercian strategy to defend their choir monks against the lures of profit was built.

Though the monks were largely protected through their fortified minds, the mind was not the only barrier the Cistercians tried to build between them and the outside world. The *conversi* were also an important part of the Cistercian strategy of purity, though they contributed to the order’s disquiet on account of their economic activities. These lay brothers gave the order a large work force through which to extend their geographic reach while providing some kind of spiritual advancement for men who were perhaps not suited to become full monks.²³⁰ The community of *conversi* might also have enabled some individuals to maintain more stability than they were guaranteed in a life outside the control of the monastery.²³¹ These brothers were involved in the order’s agricultural work, especially the transport of goods to markets for sale,

²²⁸ “Sermons on the Song of Songs” 50.6 in Matarasso, *Cistercian World*, 69-70.

²²⁹ Hedstrom, “Monastic Cell”, 762.

²³⁰ Lekai, *Cistercians*, 26; Little, *Religious Poverty*, 19-21.

²³¹ Williams, *Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, 81.

and were thus an immense source of unease for the choir monks due to their mobility and liminal state. Cistercian hagiographies, particularly the *Life* of the *conversus* Arnulf of Villers, show that anxiety through their focus on the physical ascetic practices of these saints.²³² Lay brothers were seen as potentially problematic as well as the spiritual “children” of the order and were treated accordingly. Their bodies were the primary source for temptation, whether through laziness, disobedience, or trying to use their role in Cistercian business to their advantage. Thus, many Cistercian hagiographies of other liminal figures, such as Ida of Nivelles, a female ascetic, and Wulfric of Haselbury, a hermit, also focus on the spiritual taming of bodily desires and needs in order to reach a higher spiritual plane.

These portraits gave the lay brothers a template and some, particularly Arnulf’s *Life*, were likely composed to encourage *conversi* to attend more closely to their spirituality in an era when motivation for entering the lay brotherhood was coming under close scrutiny. Though the *conversi* were given these models of exceptional spirituality, the order still made an effort to maintain a close watch over their lay communities, assigning a choir monk to be their overseer.²³³ Rebellious *conversi* could cause problems for the entire community through spiritual contamination but also by economic means. Too many instances of rebellion could force a house to stop taking in lay brothers and also rid itself of the *conversi* that were already part of the community.²³⁴ Through their promotion of a unique spirituality for the *conversi*, situated within the body, which complemented the mental asceticism of the choir monks, the

²³² “The Life of Arnulf” 1.8-9 in Goswin and Cawley, *Send me God*, 142-43.

²³³ B. Lucet, *Les Codifications 1237 et de 1257*, 300-01, 333-39; Othon, P., ‘De l’Institution’ in *Saint Bernard et Son Temps*, 187.

²³⁴ Williams, *The Cistercians in the Early Middle Ages*, 81.

Cistercians continued to develop their strategy, creating another set of barriers in the lay brotherhood and continuing the fusion of monasticism and business.

Through investigation of charters from land grants and sales, however, as well as hagiographies to some extent, it is apparent that this seemingly cohesive blending of old and new was not necessarily reflected in reality. Despite their ideological commitment to poverty and an apostolic vision of monastic life, the Cistercians were still heavily involved in exchanges between the monastery and the outside world both in terms of property and currency. Within their own spiritual framework, however, those business exchanges were seen as legitimate because they were used in a just manner, such as for poor relief, or in return for the work of reclaiming the land and turning it to spiritual use rather than its productivity being purely worldly. Through their acquisition of property and even currency, the Cistercians were creating a physical manifestation of their spirituality, the “new Jerusalem” mapped on the earth through the physical labor of their lay brothers and choir monks alike.²³⁵

Outside the Cistercian community, however, the wealth produced by these activities prompted massive backlash from other religious communities who believed, like the Cistercians had of the Cluniacs before them, that the order had strayed from its apostolic ideal of poverty. Developing particularly in urban centers where merchants were prominent, the mendicant orders would be the next major trend in Christian asceticism, and their existence, as well as their organization and focus on the ideology of poverty, is owed at least somewhat to the prominence of wealthy Cistercian abbeys and monks. These monastic communities provided for merchants what the Cistercians had for many laymen by furnishing them a spiritual niche that was relevant

²³⁵ Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 54-56.

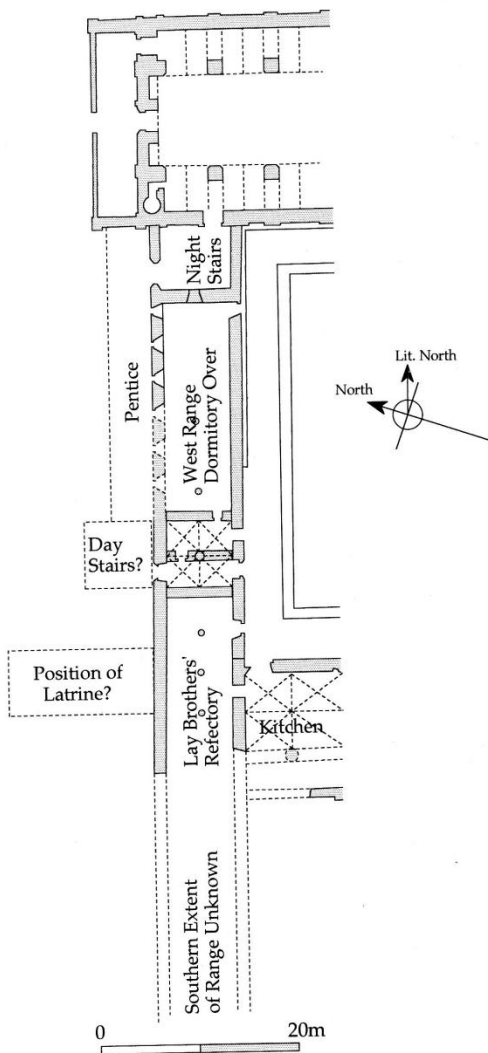
to the economic and social tensions of the day. Francis of Assisi, the great founder of the mendicants, was originally a merchant but turned aside from his worldly business of selling cloth and took up the vocation of peddling the gospel as an itinerant preacher. Francis' example would be followed by the Dominicans as well in response to increased mercantile activities in the secular and monastic worlds.

Though the Cistercian order did largely take a back seat with the rise of these more beguiling practitioners of poverty, their efforts to meld monasticism and the emerging system of mercantile and profit economics, which utilized currency and valued financial gain measured not through lavish liturgical vestments or altarpieces but through physical holdings and wealth, influenced the larger economic system in Europe far beyond the reach of the Cistercian order. The Cistercian focus on poverty and the resurgence of the ideal of desert practice also influenced the up-and-coming mendicant orders which took the injunction to apostolic poverty and moved it into the urban, mercantile sphere. Though the Cistercians were an important stepping-stone to the mendicant orders, it was their unique fusion of economic machine and spiritual center that fostered their success during the twelfth century and paved the way for further integration of business and monastic spirituality.

Appendix

Figure 1

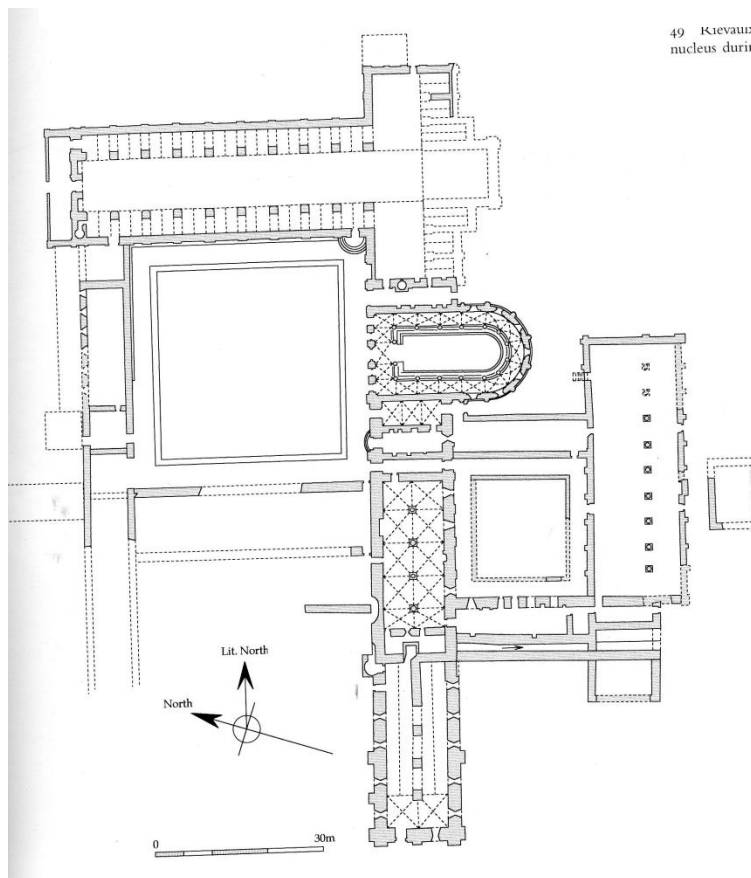
18 below Rievaulx: plan of the west range, c.1180



236

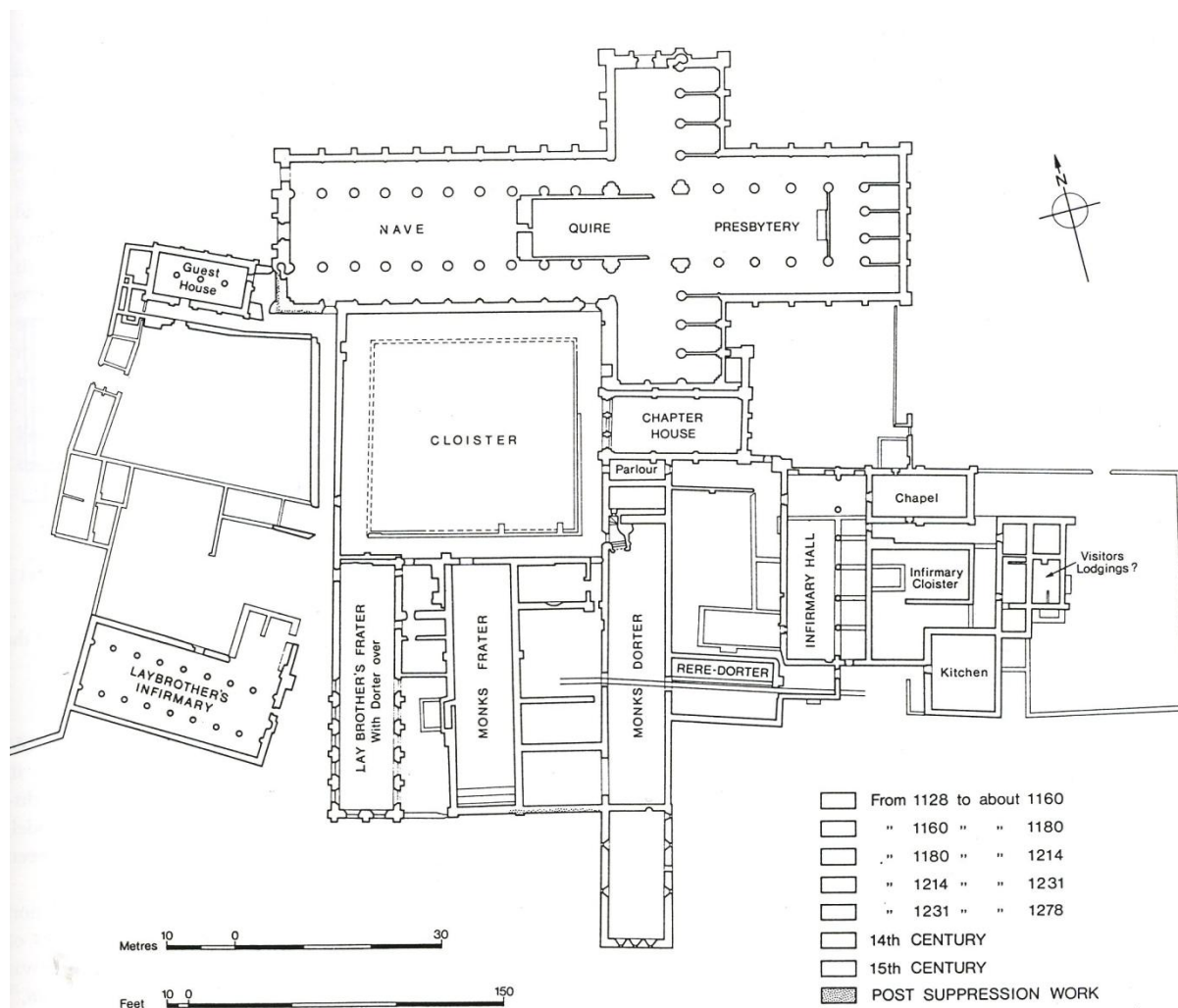
Figure 2

49 Rievaulx: plan of the eastern nucleus during Aelred's rule



²³⁶ Figures from Fregusson and Harrison, *Rievaulx*, p. 52, 87, 165.

Figure 3



139 Waverley: plan of the monastery

Works Cited

- Berman, Constance H.. *The Cistercian evolution: the invention of a religious order in twelfth-century Europe*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
- Brooks Hedstrom, Darlene L. . "The Geography of the Monastic Cell in Early Egyptian Literature." *American Society of Church History* 78, no. 4 (2009): 756-791.
- Brown, Peter Robert. "The Desert Fathers: Anthony to John Climacus." In *The body and society: men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. 213-240.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as mother: studies in the spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982.
- Cave, Roy C., and Herbert Henry Coulson. *A source book for medieval economic history*. New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1965.
- Cawley, Martinus. *k of Villers*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003.
- Coon, Lynda L.. *Dark age bodies: gender and monastic practice in the early medieval West*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Donkin, R. A.. *The Cistercians: studies in the geography of medieval England and Wales*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978.
- Elder, E. Rozanne. *The New Monastery: texts and studies on the earliest Cistercians*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998.
- Fergusson, Peter, and Stuart A. Harrison. *Rievaulx Abbey: community, architecture, memory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

- Fowler, G. Herbert, and Warden Abbey. *The Cartulary of the Cistercian Abbey of Old Wardon, Bedfordshire, from the manuscript, Latin 223, in the John Rylands Library, Manchester. Transcribed and edited with an introduction by G. Herbert Fowler ... Published by the Governors of the John Rylands.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931.
- Freeland, Jane Patricia. *Aelred of Rievaulx: the lives of the northern saints.* Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006.
- Fry, Timothy. *The rule of St. Benedict in English.* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981.
- Geary, Patrick J.. *Readings in medieval history.* 1989. Reprint, Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2010.
- Grauguenamanagh, Ireland. *The charters of the Cistercian Abbey of Duiske in the county of Kilkenny;.* Dublin: Hodges, Figgis;, 1918.
- Gregg, Robert C.. *The life of Antony and the letter to Marcellinus.* New York: Paulist Press, 1980.
- Gregory, and Henry Davis. *Pastoral Care.* Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950.
- Lancaster, William Thomas. *Abstracts of the charters and other documents contained in the chartulary of the Cistercian Abbey of Fountains in the West Riding of the county of York ...* Leeds: J. Whitehead & Son, printers, 1915.
- Leclerq, Jean. *The love of learning and the desire for God: a study of monastic culture.* 3rd ed. New York: Fordham University press, 1988.
- Lekai, Louis Julius. *The Cistercians: ideals and reality.* Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977.

- Lester, Anne Elisabeth. *Creating Cistercian nuns: the women's religious movement and its reform in thirteenth-century Champagne*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011.
- Lewis, George. *Saint Bernard On consideration*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908.
- Little, Lester K.. "ride goes before avarice: social change and the vices in Latin Christendom." *American Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (1971): 16-49.
- Little, Lester K.. *Religious poverty and the profit economy in medieval Europe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Martin, Dale B.. *The Corinthian body*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Matarasso, Pauline. *The Cistercian world: monastic writings of the twelfth century*. London, England: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Newman, Martha G.. *The boundaries of charity: Cistercian culture and ecclesiastical reform, 1098-1180*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Norton, Christopher, and David Park. *Cistercian art and architecture in the British Isles*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Rosenwein, Barbara H.. *To be the neighbor of Saint Peter: the social meaning of Cluny's property, 909-1049*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Russell, Norman, and Benedicta Ward. *The lives of the desert Fathers: the Historia monachorum in Aegypto*. London: Mowbray, 1981.
- Säid, Marie, and Grace Perigo. *Magnificat: homilies in praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1979.
- Säid, Marie. *Sermons on conversion: On conversion, a sermon to clerics and Lenten sermons on the psalm "He who dwells"*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981.

Waddell, Chrysogonus. *Cistercian lay brothers: twelfth-century usages with related texts : Latin text with concordance of Latin terms, English translations and notes*. Brecht, Belgium: [s.n.], 2000.

Williams, David H.. *The Cistercians in the early Middle Ages: written to commemorate the nine hundredth anniversary of foundation of the Order at Cîteaux in 1098*. Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998.

Wood, Diana. *Medieval economic thought*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.