

**‘To Love and Be Loved:’ The Medieval Monastic Community as Family, 400-1300**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### ‘To Love and Be Loved:’ The Medieval Monastic Community as Pre-Modern Same-Sex Family, 400-1300

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This thesis expands how the medieval monastic family can be understood to parallel the traditional nuclear family founded upon the heterosexual union of husband and wife for the purpose of procreation. From the fourth to thirteenth centuries, monastic communities functioned as same-sex family units because they both differentiated from the larger associations of kin and community, and contained human relations that were very different from those outside the monastery. Medieval monasteries were composed of three generations of monks that fulfilled the familial and affective roles of fathers, brothers, and children. The monastic family incorporated components of the Roman and Hebraic families, but also created emotional bonds and affective experiences that are not mirrored by the medieval secular family. Monks were able to adopt fluid and reflexive affective roles that, according to the twelfth-century abbot, Bernard of Clairveaux, permitted a monk to be “both a mother and a father, both a brother and a sister.”

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The erosion of the traditional western family during the twentieth century, and the awareness of familial experiences that extend beyond the nuclear family, point to the fluidity of the definition of family in contemporary western culture. The family of the twenty-first century is not limited to the heterosexual union of man and woman and their biological children, but has expanded to include any group that chooses to define their relationships as familial. Most obvious is the prevalence of same-sex partners who marry legally and/or assume parental responsibilities over children. The critique that same-sex unions erode the definition of marriage and family presumes that there were no examples of alternative family units in the western tradition. It is thus necessary to analyze groups that were neither biologically related nor united for the purpose of procreation, but identified as, and fulfilled the basic functions of the family.

In the classical world, the word *familia* denoted those under the authority the *paterfamilias*, both kin and slave. However, it also designated any organized group of people that practised similar styles of life. *Familia* was used in Roman literature to denote prostitutes, publicans, tax collectors, military units, schools, and slaves. This usage was applied by Christian writers to monks and clergy, but also to the entire Church.<sup>1</sup> David Herlihy defined the medieval biological family as a group, related by blood and/or marriage, dwelling under the same roof.<sup>2</sup> These qualifications adequately describe the traditional nuclear family, founded upon the union of heterosexual spouses for the purpose of procreation, but excludes any group that falls outside of the heterosexual experience. Herlihy later broadened his definition of the family to a unit and a universe: “A unit as it is sharply differentiated from the larger associations of kin and community, and a universe in the sense that human relations within it are very different from

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<sup>1</sup> D. Herlihy, “The Family,” *The American Historical Review* 96,1 (1991), 1-15.

<sup>2</sup> D. Herlihy, *Medieval Households*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 3.

human relations outside its limits.”<sup>3</sup> This gender neutral delineation permits a broader examination of groups in medieval society whose familial experiences were not limited to marriage and procreation.

A plethora of extra-familial communities existed in the pre-Christian Mediterranean world, united through philosophical or religious ideology, rather than biological relationships. Though these groups could be found throughout the Greco-Roman world, the prolonged existence of any one ideologically-centered group was made difficult in the cultural, social, and political melting pot that was the classical world. However, the conversion of Constantine and the subsequent proliferation of Christianity throughout the fourth-century Mediterranean, provided the ideal ideological stability for the development of long lasting spiritual families. From the hinterlands of fourth-century Egypt emerged Christian monastic communities, both small and large, that structurally and experientially offered its members an extra-heterosexual familial experience. Kinship bonds formed the inner framework of medieval society, and many relationships outside the family adopted a similar structure, “strongest of all,” according to Duby, “in the families – as we may rightly call them – formed by monastic communities.”<sup>4</sup>

The monastic family, like the secular family of the late-antique and medieval world, was defined by patriarchal authority. The *paterfamilias* of the monastic community was the abbot, responsible for both the spiritual and physical well-being of his monks. Beneath the abbot were lower ranking father figures, *obedientaries*, that aided in the administration of the abbey. Monks of senior rank functioned as fathers to the juniors, who were regarded as communal children of the monastery. Although the structure of the monastic family was patriarchal, a monk was able to assume fluid and reflexive gender/affective roles. The spiritual aspect of monastic life required

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<sup>3</sup> D. Herlihy, “The Family,” *The American Historical Review* 96,1 (1991): 1.

<sup>4</sup> G. Duby, *Love and marriage in the Middle Ages*. trans. J. Dunnett, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 105.

the existence of mutual concern and affection that was not essential to the proper function of the secular family. This allowed an individual monk to be, “both a mother and a father, both a brother and a sister.”<sup>5</sup>

Christian monasticism depended upon the preservation of tradition from one generation to the next, thus education was a central focus of the monastic community. Whereas the earthly father taught his sons the skills necessary for secular pursuits, the spiritual father aimed to impart divine wisdom to his sons. The senior monks were to guide younger monks along their journey of monastic perfection, and, according to Benedict, would be held responsible on Judgement Day for the souls in their charge. The spiritual father was also responsible for the physical wellbeing of the monks in his charge, and ensured that a monastery’s income was sufficient to provide shelter, nourishment, and security to the brethren so they could wholly devote themselves to God.

The monastic life required the renunciation of biological family ties and secular society in general. However, this renunciation did not mean the abandonment of personal relationships; rather, the monk exchanged his temporal, earthly family for an eternal one that was found in God alone. The affection between the fathers, brothers, and children (oblates) of the monastic community was articulated as spiritual love. Aelred of Rievaulx rejected worldly love, but asked, “What is more tranquil to love and be loved? If this is in God and for God I do not disapprove; on the contrary, I entirely approve.”<sup>6</sup> Monks were encouraged to become each other’s spiritual brothers. This entailed more responsibility than secular brotherhood because the ultimate goal was spiritual perfection, so that the souls of the brethren could commune for eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard of Clairveaux, *Letters of Bernard of Clairveaux*, trans. Bruno James. (Chicago: Henry Regnary, 1953), Letter 56, 169.

<sup>6</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Mirror of Charity*, trans. E. Connor, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 71.

Though Christian monasticism was subject to change, especially through the turbulent centuries that followed Rome's collapse, a discernable monastic tradition can be traced from late-Antiquity to the High Middle Ages. The monastic family from the fourth to thirteenth centuries contained three generations of monks: the senior monks and the abbot were the patriarchs of the family, below them were their spiritual sons, the brethren that formed the majority of the community and whose relationships with one another were horizontal and egalitarian. The brethren were, in turn, spiritual fathers to the youngest members of the community, oblates given by their biological parents to be trained for the monastic life. Though monasticism evolved as it moved westward and became an integral institution in the consolidation and spread of Latin Christendom, the relative ideological stability of the monastic tradition from the fourth to thirteenth centuries provides a well-defined pattern of thought and behaviour and clearly demarcated historical and cultural context that permits the study of the monastic family over such a large time period. Thus, this study begins in late Antiquity to examine the precursors of the monastic family, proceeds through desert monasticism, early western monasticism, and Benedictine monasticism to conclude in the thirteenth century, when the practise of oblation was abandoned by the Latin Church, thus putting an end to the three-tiered monastic family that had existed for eight centuries. Sources will be considered from throughout the late-antique and medieval Christian world, spanning from Egypt to Ireland. The first three chapters will examine the structural evolution of the monastic family as it moved from east to west from the fourth to seventh centuries. The final chapter will examine affective roles and emotional bonds in monasteries from the fourth to thirteenth centuries



## Chapter 2: Historiography

To date, there has been no comprehensive study of the monastic community as a familial unit. However, scholars in the post-war era exhibited an interest in the social history of medieval monasticism. Whereas previous scholarship had focused primarily on the spiritual and structural evolution of institutional monasticism, scholars such as Leclercq, Knowles, Brooke, and Southern showed more interest in the qualitative experience in a medieval monastery. The experience of fatherhood, brotherhood (often articulated as friendship), and childhood in the monastery have been examined, but often fall short of tracing the experience through the entirety of the western monastic tradition.

In 1954 Leclercq published an article detailing a thirteenth-century monastic letter collection he discovered in a Paris manuscript. The abundance of affective language in the letters led him to suggest that monastic literature should be examined as a means of expressing personal, rather than political or courtly, friendship: a rarity in medieval source material. He asserted that letters reveal something about individual human relationships. His seminal work, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, placed interpersonal relationships concretely within monasticism, with no reference to the possible problems individual bonds might create.<sup>1</sup> His analysis of friendship in the context of twelfth century monastic letters contradicted the widely held belief that monks in the Middle Ages regarded relationships as a challenge to communal spiritual life.<sup>2</sup> In 1963 Southern published *Saint Anselm and His Biographer*, dedicating an entire section to, “Anselm’s Companions and Conversation.” Southern’s study of Anselm reflected a change in monastic history that made the analysis of interpersonal

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<sup>1</sup> J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. (1957; rpt. New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 181.

<sup>2</sup> B. McGuire. *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), xlv.

relationships in the monastic tradition a worthwhile and acceptable topic for historians.<sup>3</sup> Through both letters and Eadamer's *Life of St Anselm*, Southern was able to discern intense individual friendships between Anselm and his pupils. The interpretation of affective language in monastic correspondence, biography, and autobiography as genuine expressions of personal feelings rather than mere rhetoric paved the way for qualitative studies of the medieval monastic experience. In 1979 Adalbert De Vogue published *Community and Abbot in the Rule of Saint Benedict*. De Vogue studied eighteen chapters from the *Rule* to examine the abbatial office. His goal was to, "meditate on the sense of relationships which unite [the abbot] with his monks and on the society he forms with them."<sup>4</sup> Though the *Rule* is legislative and quantitative, in the monastic tradition there exist philosophies and lived experiences, both conveyed in literary forms, and both interdependent. De Vogue situated the realities of medieval monastic life within the framework of the legislative texts that dictated the nature of life in the monastery.

In contrast to Leclercq, Southern, and De Vogue, whose analysis were based on a single written source, Bynum, in her 1982 publication, *Jesus as Mother*, examined a variety of monastic literature written from 1050 to 1250 to study the metaphorical use of maternal imagery in descriptions of monastic leadership. Though she focuses on spiritual imagery rather than daily reality she argues that comparison of the imagery used by monastic authors can locate networks in the psyches and social experiences of those who created or used them, and can reveal to us what the writers cared about most deeply themselves and what they felt it necessary to present or justify to others.<sup>5</sup> She examines the metaphorical use of mother, nurse, womb, and breast to explore Cistercian concepts of leadership and asserts that the emotional significance of a word or

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<sup>3</sup> McGuire, *Friendships and Community*, xlvii.

<sup>4</sup> Adalbert de Vogue, *Community and Abbot in the Rule of St Benedict*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 13.

<sup>5</sup> C. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 5.

image cannot be inferred from its modern meaning but must be established by a careful study of the other images and phrases among which it occurs in a text.<sup>6</sup>

Boswell's 1980 *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* opened the flood gates for the analysis of affective and sexual relationships within the cloister. Though his primary concern was with homosexuality and homoeroticism, his arguments that Christianity had come into existence in a society that tolerated affective relationships between men, and that early medieval Christians tolerated same-sex affection are useful in analyzing the often homoerotic expressions of affection written by men that lived in celibate communities. Boswell also noted that affective terminology has to be carefully taken into consideration, since assumptions about language might obscure as easily as they might clarify historical relationships.

The language of monastic affectivity was intrinsically linked to the gender identity of the monastic class, which was, in turn, affected by secular masculinity. The relative absence of affective language in the literature of the desert fathers is linked by Nelson to the sexual anxiety caused by the evolution of masculinity during the transition from Greco-Roman to Christian sexual values in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>7</sup> In turn, the rise of affective language in the twelfth century is traceable to the restructuring of masculinity, identified by McNamara as precipitated by the struggle between celibate and married men for leadership in the Christian world.<sup>8</sup> Swanson argues that the comparison of celibate men with angels created a genderless status for monks in the twelfth century.<sup>9</sup> Murray asserts that the increase of monastic recruits from the military aristocracy caused a reticulation of monastic masculinity that ranked sexual

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<sup>6</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> J.L. Nelson, "Monks, Secular Men, and Masculinity, c. 900," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley, (London: Longman, 1999), 123.

<sup>8</sup> J.A. McNamara, "The *Harrenfrage*: the restructuring of the gender system, 1050-1150," in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. C.A. Lees, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>9</sup> R.N. Swanson, "Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reforms to Reformation," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley, (London: Longman, 1999), 162.

abstinence as a masculine virtue.<sup>10</sup> The implications of gender identity on the language of the monastic family demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between secular and spiritual realms of medieval society.

The different familial roles within the monastery have been the subject of study over the past century. Perhaps the most obvious of the familial roles within monastic communities is that of the abbot, or father. The majority of analysis on the abbatial office is concerned with Benedictine fatherhood and Benedict's sources of inspiration. Monastic scholars in the early twentieth century, such as Butler and Chapman, put forth the idea that the Benedictine abbot was heavily influenced by the example of the Roman *paterfamilias*.<sup>11</sup> Vogue rejected this comparison and asserted that Benedict could not have possibly had such a figure in mind, suggesting his influences were biblical rather than secular.<sup>12</sup> Pauley argues that the Benedictine abbot was more akin to the notions of fatherhood found in Hebrew Scripture.<sup>13</sup> Kardong acknowledges that Benedict was certainly influenced by both the Roman *paterfamilias* and the father in Hebrew Scripture.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of scholarship concerning monastic fatherhood concentrates on the early monasticism of the Egyptian desert. More importance was given to the spiritual father in the eastern tradition than the more regulated, western abbatial office. Rousseau's 1985 study of Pachomius, the first monastic legislator, discusses at length the intense emotional bond that was required for spiritual growth between a master and his disciple.<sup>15</sup> The articles collected in *Abba*:

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<sup>10</sup> J. Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity, and Monastic Identity," in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.M. Cullum and K.J. Lewis, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>11</sup> C. Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule*, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919); J. Chapman, *St Benedict and the Sixth Century*, (1929; rpt. Westwood: Greenwood Press, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> De Vogue, *Community and Abbot*, 98-99.

<sup>13</sup> J.B. Pauley, "The Roman Paterfamilias and the ,," in *Tjurunga* 55 (1998), 47-62.

<sup>14</sup> T.G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), xiv.

<sup>15</sup> P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of Community in Fourth Century Egypt*, (London: University of California Press, 1985), 105-118.

*Guides to Wholeness and Holiness, East and West* present several essays on the experiential aspects of spiritual fatherhood in the eastern monastic tradition. The source material for desert monasticism, the *Sayings of the Fathers* and *Lives of the Fathers*, are directly concerned with the words and deeds of spiritual fathers, and therefore provides more information on the role of the *abba* than his community.

The majority of relationships within the monastery were articulated by medieval authors as spiritual friendship, a term first used by Paulinus of Nola in the fifth century.<sup>16</sup> Though Leclercq and Southern touched on spiritual friendship in their studies, Fiske published a series of articles throughout the 1950s collected in *Friends and Friendship in the Monastic Tradition*.<sup>17</sup> She studied spiritual friendship through the writings of Cassian, Augustine, Isidore, Anselm, Aelred and Bernard. However, McGuire, in the seminal work on friendship in the monastic tradition, *Friendship and Community*, criticized Fiske for analyzing individual author's language of friendship, making spiritual friends into "static and disparate entities, without a sense of any development in the practise and concept of friendship."<sup>18</sup> McGuire notes that the study of inter-cloistral relationships through monastic literature is made difficult by the prevalence of affective rhetoric in monastic correspondence. However, he argues that, "in the various ways of expressing monastic friendship we find what can be recognizable in human terms, while at the same time we deal with a past culture which is, inevitably, different from our own."<sup>19</sup> The study of friendship in history is made difficult because it can almost never be narrowed down to a well-defined pattern of thought and behaviour in a given culture. McGuire's answer to this dilemma is

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<sup>16</sup> Bede, *Life of Cuthbert*, trans. J.F. Webb, (London: Penguin, 1965), 80.

<sup>17</sup> A. Fiske, *Friends and Friendship in the Monastic Tradition*. (Mexico City: Centro intercultural de documentacion, 1970).

<sup>18</sup> B. McGuire. *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), xlv.

<sup>19</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, vii.

to study friendship within the context of medieval monasticism because it offers a clearly demarcated historical and cultural context.

Children in monastic life were examined briefly by Knowles in *Christian Monasticism*, but he provided no analysis and limited his discussion to one page.<sup>20</sup> An in-depth analysis of the qualitative experience of oblation is contained in Boswell's *Kindness of Strangers*. Boswell's book analyzes the abandonment of children in the Middle Ages, and discusses oblation in negative terms, stating that the oblate was, "consigned irrevocably to a life of poverty, obedience and celibacy."<sup>21</sup> In Quinn's 1988 study of oblation, *Better Than the Sons of Kings*, she describes oblation in very positive terms, noting that the boys were the recipients of the best education available in Christendom, and attributes the success of Latin monasticism in medieval Europe to the steady flow of oblates.<sup>22</sup> Nelson asserts that oblation was a revamped version of aristocratic fostering, whereby young nobles were customarily brought up away from their families in the households of great men.<sup>23</sup> In 1996, De Jong published *In Samuel's Image*, the most comprehensive study of oblation to date. De Jong argues that oblation was not abandonment in any sense, and that Boswell's equation of oblation with abandonment is anachronistic. She asserts that oblation has to be understood as a gift to God in a society where gift giving was pivotal to building social relationships and communicating with the divine. Though De Jong acknowledges that not all oblates were given the opportunity to choose for themselves whether they wanted to enter the monastic life, she notes that adults and children alike were coerced into donning the habit for a variety of reasons.

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<sup>20</sup> David Knowles. *Christian Monasticism*. (Toronto: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1969), 421.

<sup>21</sup> J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 235.

<sup>22</sup> P.A. Quinn. *Better Than the Sons of Kings: Boys and Monks in the Early Middle Ages*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 1-3.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. Nelson, "Monks, Secular Men, and Masculinity, c. 900," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley. (London: Longman, 1999), 121.

In order to understand the cumulative relationships of the medieval monastery in the context of a cohesive familial unit, the experiences of the various members of monastic society have to be considered in relation to one another. To move beyond the many literary tropes to the people who formed them and to their feelings for each other an abundance of evidence from the fourth to thirteenth centuries must be examined. Monks were the inheritors of classical knowledge and the custodians of learning and literacy throughout the centuries of European intellectual stagnation. Monastic literature can generally be classified as legislative, spiritual, or correspondence, albeit with extensive overlap. As monks shared a common orientation to spiritual perfection, legislation was needed to express the content of this ideal, as well as the means to achieve it.<sup>24</sup> These rules exhibit the structure of the monastic family, and reveal the various social and ideological influences of their authors. Spiritual literature, mainly in the form of hagiography, provided monks with examples to aspire towards. Though often composed generations after their subject matter, the hagiographies demonstrate the emotional and affective ideal of the monastic environment. Letter collections, especially from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, provide insight into how the monks articulated intra-cloistral relationships. As Bynum noted, the emotional significance of a word or image cannot be inferred from its modern meaning but must be established by a careful study of the other images and phrases among which it occurs in a text.<sup>25</sup> Repetitions and commonplaces form a pattern that reveals to what extent they may be reaching out to each other as persons and friends. Sources will be considered from the fourth to the thirteenth century, when the practise of oblation and the religious and intellectual dominance of monasticism in European culture had ended. The historical development of the monastic family will be traced through eight centuries of monastic history

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<sup>24</sup> Ludo Mills. *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men*. (New York: Boydell Press, 1992), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 15.

because familial experience is not a static phenomena, but subject to geographic, temporal, material and intellectual circumstance.



### Chapter 3: The Spiritual Family

Although Christian monasticism emerged in the hinterlands of fourth-century Egypt, the qualities which defined it – communal living, pedagogy, and renunciation of the material world – were not novel philosophical and religious ideas in the late antique Mediterranean. Numerous intellectual traditions adhered to the perception that there were two worlds: the material world, experienced through the senses, and the immaterial, spiritual world, where God, truth, and virtue resided. Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Gnostic philosophy and religion all provided the intellectual framework for the structure and theology of the monastic family.

As long ago as the sixth-century BCE, Pythagoras (d. 495 BCE) asserted that humans were, “children of earth, imprisoned here for a while and hopeful of our release.”<sup>1</sup> In the fourth-century BCE, Plato identified two realms of reality: one that is material, perceptible, temporal, and changing, and another that is immaterial, intelligible, eternal, and permanent. The latter was understood to be the true reality which informed the former.<sup>2</sup> The perception that the material world was an illusion that hindered the soul from perceiving the truth was present, in one form or another, in every major philosophical tradition of the ancient Mediterranean world. Stoicism, the dominant philosophy of Republican and Imperial Rome, advocated strict self-discipline and moderation as the only means to access the realm of truth. The Roman philosopher Seneca (d. 65 CE), writing in the mid-first century, considered the flesh to be the source of ignorance and evil:

I was born for a greater destiny than to be a slave to my own body. I consider my body as nothing else but a chain that restricts my freedom. And therefore I set my body as an obstacle to fortune; on it she may make assaults; but I will not allow any wound to penetrate through the body to the real me. My body is the only part of me which can be injured; but within this fragile dwelling-place lives a soul that is free... Contempt for one's body is absolute freedom.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Clark. *Ancient Mediterranean Philosophy: an introduction*, (Chennai: Bloomsbury, 2013), 119.

<sup>2</sup> P. Remes. *Neoplatonism*. (King's Lynn: Acumen, 2008), 9.

<sup>3</sup> N. Denzey. “Facing the Beast: Justin, Christian Martyrdom, and the Freedom of the Will,” in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*. Rasimus, Engberg-Pederson, Dundrburg, eds., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 183.

Echoes of Stoic philosophy are found throughout the writings early Christianity, which held worldly renunciation as a means of spiritual freedom. For the Stoics, philosophy was not a detached intellectual technique dedicated the display of cleverness, but rather an immersed and worldly art of grappling with the human condition.<sup>4</sup> Plotinus (d. 270 CE), the father of Neoplatonism, advocated the “practices of the self” which included disciplines of diet and sexual abstinence, as well as a combative attitude towards pleasure in general. To this end, all pleasurable or potentially pleasurable features of life were scrutinized and shaped according to moderation and self-control.<sup>5</sup>

The self-discipline advocated by Greek and Roman philosophy was individualistic and aristocratic in nature, thus the renunciation of the material world was often superficial and relative given the patrician way of life. A Jewish sect, the Essenes, practiced renunciation and communal living in a form very similar to early Christian monasticism. The similarity between Essene literature and Christian Scripture has led many to argue that Jesus himself may have been an Essene, or at least familiar with their teachings.<sup>6</sup> The Essenes perceived the material world to be evil and lived in communities dedicated to spiritual perfection. The *Manual of Discipline*, discovered with the Dead Sea Scrolls, described the Essene view of humanity:

And then what is he, the son of man, among thy marvelous works; what shall one born of a woman be accounted before thee? He is kneaded from dust, and his dwelling is the food of worms. He is an emission of spittle, a cut off but of clay.<sup>7</sup>

The Essenes adhered to the doctrine of *yeseirim*, which suggested that two conflicting spirits coexist within the human heart, one good, one evil, and both struggling for mastery.<sup>8</sup> However,

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<sup>4</sup> Remes, *Neoplatonism*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> M. Miles. *Plotinus on Body and Beauty*. (Cornwall: Blackwell, 1999), 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> A. Welburn, *The Beginnings of Christianity: Essene mystery, Gnostic revelation, and the Christian vision*, (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1991); D. Howlett, *The Essenes and Christianity*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> W.H. Brownlee, “The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline,” in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research. Supplementary Studies*. No. 10/12, (1951): 46.

<sup>8</sup> P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity*, (Columbia University Press, 1988), 34-37.

the Essenes did not only influence the dualistic nature of the monasticism, they also provided a blueprint for the structure and atmosphere of a monastic family. The *Manual of Discipline* instructed the Essene to, “reprove his neighbor in truth and humility, and loyal love for each one.”<sup>9</sup> They were to let their deeds, “shine in the heart of man, and to make straight before him all the ways of true righteousness. . . to induce a spirit of humility, and slowness to anger, and great compassion, and eternal goodness . . . abundance of steadfast love for all the sons of truth.” The members are called “to practice truth, humility, righteousness, justice, loyal love, and to walk humbly in all their ways.”<sup>10</sup> Philo of Alexandria (d. 50 CE), in his *De Vita Contemplativa*, described an Alexandrian Jewish sect he refers to as the *therapeutae*, or, attendants of the gods. Scholars believe the *therapeutae* to be a community of contemplative Essenes, or people somehow related to the Essenes.<sup>11</sup> Philo recorded that the *therapeutae* withdrew from the city in a measured and responsible way, rejected marriage and the family, and lived in houses close enough for their mutual security but far enough apart to protect their individual contemplation.<sup>12</sup> Once a week they held a general meeting led by the eldest male. They rejected slavery as a source of evil and promoted equality amongst themselves. Though there were two centuries separating the active *therapeutae* community in Alexandria from the emergence Christian monasticism, the references to village settlement, manual labour, a structured community with a hierarchy of authority, and regular discussions of sacred teachings under a superior, cannot be dismissed as unconnected to later practices.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the most significant influence, both temporally and geographically, on the development of the Christian spiritual family were the various Gnostic movements coursing

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<sup>9</sup> Brownlee, “The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline,” 13.

<sup>10</sup> Howlett. *The Essenes and Christianity*, 147.

<sup>11</sup> Simon, Michael, *Jewish Sects at the Time of Jesus*, trans. J.H. Farley, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

<sup>12</sup> P, Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of Community in Fourth Century Egypt*, (London: University of California Press, 1985), 14.

<sup>13</sup> Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 15.

through the third- and fourth-century Mediterranean world. Most pertinent to the emergence of Egyptian monasticism were the Manicheans, who taught an elaborate dualistic cosmology that described the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light and an evil, material world of darkness.<sup>14</sup> Though Manichaeism earned the hatred of many Church leaders, Augustine (d. 430) and Jerome (d. 420) among them, the rivalry did not prevent a rich intellectual exchange between the two groups. It is now known that Manichaean communities existed alongside the earliest Christian ascetics in Egypt, and they are cited as a formative influence in the development of Christian coenobitic monasticism.<sup>15</sup> The influence of gnostic philosophy on early Christian theology is evident in the writings of the fifth-century church historian, Socrates of Constantinople (d. 439), who wrote in a distinctly gnostic style: “The mind is completely purified by the drinking in spiritual knowledge, charity cures the inflammatory tendencies of the soul, and the depraved lusts which spring up in it are restrained by abstinence.”<sup>16</sup> Gnostic philosophy, though considered heretical by church leaders, was nevertheless absorbed into monastic theology, and endowed Christianity’s earliest monks with a distinctly dualistic worldview.

Numerous explanations have been proposed to account for the initial impulse of Christian monasticism, ranging from a flight from taxes, a refuge from the law, a new form of martyrdom, a revival of a Jewish ascetic tradition, a rejection of classical culture, or an expression of Manichean dualism. Although all of these explanations are valid, of all the initial monastic impulses, Scripture stands as the most fundamental and influential. Certainly, key texts from the

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<sup>14</sup> N. Baker-Brian, J. *Manichaeism: an ancient faith rediscovered*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 4.

<sup>15</sup> S. Armstrong, “The First Generation of Manichaens and Other Communities in the Egyptian Desert: Methodology, the Available Evidence, and Conclusions,” in *Rose Cross Journal*, (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Socrates of Constantinople, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IV.23 in Theresa Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: historian of church and state* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

scriptures, especially those dealing with renunciation and detachment, served as primary sources of inspiration for early monks.<sup>17</sup> As Burton-Christie put so eloquently, Scripture,

filled the day-to-day existence of the desert monks, providing a horizon of meaning in light of which they understood their ongoing quest for salvation: the scriptures were experienced as authoritative words which pierced the hearts of the monks, illuminated them concerning the central issues of their lives, protected and comforted them during times of struggle and anxiety, and provided practical help in the ongoing quest for holiness.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, and understanding of the monastic family must be firmly grounded in the family of the Gospels.

Christian monks sought to live in accordance with the teachings of the Gospels and subsequent books of the Christian Scripture. They interpreted Jesus's commandments to love your neighbor and renounce the material world as the only means to live in obedience to, and unity with, the truth. Jesus had informed his followers that, "if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). The Apostle Paul expanded on Christ's injunction to renounce the material world when he identified the abode of humanity's propensity for evil as the body, and instructed the faithful to,

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do (Gal 5:16-17).

In conformity with the dualistic currents in contemporary Mediterranean philosophic and religious thought, Paul identified the body and the material world as a barrier to truth, and an obstacle in one's personal relationship with God. He further instructed his followers to,

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by

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<sup>17</sup> D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 4.

the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:1-2).

Thus, Paul taught that renunciation of the material world was the nucleus of life in Christ, from which all other virtues were derived. However, renunciation alone was not enough, Paul instructed his followers to live in devotion to Christ through, “mutual love, respect, sympathy, and care” (Rom 12:9-16). Fundamental to the Apostolic community was the unity and singleness of purpose, as predicted in Jeremiah: “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them” (Jeremiah 32:39). According to the Apostle Peter, unity of purpose was to be effected through, “obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love” (1 Peter 23). The impulse to recapture the aspirations and community of the first Christians, as described in *Acts of the Apostles*, was the central impulse of the earliest experiments in coenobitic monasticism, and indeed the primary aspiration of subsequent Christian monasticism. Two passages from *Acts*, describing the Apostolic community in Jerusalem, provided an ideal for Christian society to emulate, and the structural blueprint for the Christian monastic communities:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2: 42-47).

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of

encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4: 32-37).

Thus, communalism, renunciation of personal wealth, love, obedience, and prayer were established in Scripture as the fundamental aspects of the ideal Christian community. In their rejection the biological family, Christianity's first monks reacted to the Scriptural imperative that marriage was less holy than chastity. Apostolic and Patristic writers argued that the celibate were freer to devote themselves to God's work, because Jesus had required his disciples to leave their wives in order to follow him. Paul identified celibacy as superior to marriage because marriage carried with it, "tribulations of the flesh," and required time and energy that was better spent in service to God.<sup>19</sup> In Corinthians Paul wrote that, "I wish that all were as I myself am," meaning chaste, however, he recognized that, "each has his own gift from God," and concluded that, "it is better to marry than to burn with passion."<sup>20</sup> Christian monks responded to Paul's wish and rejected married life, but only because it would limit their ability to renounce the material world and embrace a life wholly devoted to contemplation, work, and prayer.

Christian monks, through prayer, contemplation, and later, the practise of *lectio divina* and recitation of the daily office, became extremely well versed in Scripture. Indeed, firm knowledge of scripture was one of the prime aspirations of the monastic vocation. Biblical formulations of secular and spiritual fatherhood would have been a major source of inspiration for the theology of the abbatial office. The Israelite father found in Hebrew Scripture, and the Paul's use of paternal metaphor to describe his relationship with those Christians over whom he had oversight, aided monastic legislators to mould the role of an abbot based on Biblical precedents.

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:28-32.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 7: 6-9.

In Hebrew Scripture, the relationship between master and disciple was frequently presented under the metaphor of father and son. Since both prophesy and wisdom literature has roots in the culture of ancient Western Asia, this metaphor extends far back into history.<sup>21</sup> The ancient wisdom literature of Mesopotamia is often presented in the form of a father's advice to his son: not only is the content the traditional paternal advice that was handed down to successive generations, but the form is a paternal monologue that frequently contains the direct address, "my son." The frequent use of this literary form in Proverbs demonstrates Israel's dependence upon prevailing cultural patterns of the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamian world.<sup>22</sup>

"Father" is used in Hebrew Scripture approximately 1,300 times, the vast majority of which refer to a male parent or forefather, twenty one refer to God as Father, and twenty five times in miscellaneous contexts/usages.<sup>23</sup> Frequently, the title of father is conferred upon high ranking administrators to denote political authority, like the patriarch Joseph.<sup>24</sup> It is used frequently to denote spiritual authority, which, according to Felix Donahue, "is connected to a tradition whereby the discharge of priestly ministry is thus incumbent on the actual head of the family, so that whoever functions in his place acquires the dignity of father."<sup>25</sup> Thus, the supreme family rank was accorded to high-ranking administrators

In order to understand the monastic family, and the abbot's role in it, it is necessary to understand the Hebrew family. In Hebrew Wisdom literature,<sup>26</sup> the biological father was a teacher to his children in matters religious, and the family home was the *schola* in which the

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<sup>21</sup> Claude, P., "The Abbot," in *Rule of St Benedict 1980* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 324.

<sup>22</sup> Claude, "The Abbot," 325.

<sup>23</sup> F. Donahue, "The Spiritual Father in the Scriptures," in *Abba: Guides to Wholeness and Holiness in East and West*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1982), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Gn 45:8, "So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt."

<sup>25</sup> Donahue, "The Spiritual Father in the Scriptures," 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Book of Job, Psalms, Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Book of Wisdom and Sirach.*



teachings took place.<sup>27</sup> Fathers were traditional custodians and disseminators of religious knowledge in both the Jewish and Roman worlds.<sup>28</sup> The father taught his children about the relationship between the God of their own fathers and the people of Israel. Fundamental to the fulfilment of his paternal duties was ensuring that wisdom was passed from one generation to the next. He was a loving father-teacher to his children, involved in both their education and nourishment, transforming the family into a classroom where children learned by example by and instruction the wisdom of previous generations.

In Christian Scripture, the word father occurs 415 times in Greek and three times in Aramaic.<sup>29</sup> Of these 418 times, 255 refer to God, and 26 to patriarchs and ancestors of the Jewish people. The remainder denote biological fathers or are used as metaphors. In the context of spiritual fatherhood, the title of father is given to those who evangelize and allow new believers to, “become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn 1:12). The Book of Ephesians calls for fathers to raise their children, “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Spiritual fathers were to be educators of the new covenant, who, “impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But. . . a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages” (1 Cor. 2:7-16). The Apostle Paul frequently referred to himself as the father of various Christian communities, because it was he who Christianized them and allowed them to, “become children of God.” In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul utilizes the paternal metaphor to denote the Christian community in Corinth, which was being influenced by heretics:

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<sup>27</sup> P. Bewley, “Paternal Metaphor in the Rule of St Benedict: Its Origins in Biblical, Monastic, Ecclesiastic and Secular Traditions” (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009), 27.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret MacDonald. *The Power of Children: Constrution of Christiian Families in the Greco-Roman World*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 76.

<sup>29</sup> Donahue, “The Spiritual Father in the Scriptures,” 6.

I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the Gospel. I appeal to you then, be imitators of me. For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every Church (1 Cor 4:14-17).

The pedagogical nature of Paul's fatherhood exhibits both his Jewish and Roman influences.

Paul's paternal authority was derived from teaching the truth, through both word and deed. He exhorted his fellow Christians to be imitators of him as he was of Christ. Like Paul, the abbot also represented Christ in the monastery, and taught by example, admonished when required, and encouraged as they saw fit.<sup>30</sup>

The monastic concept of brotherhood was based on both biblical and classical notions that friendship was a source of virtue. In Hebrew Scripture the most detailed description of friendship is found in the story of Jonathan and David. The affection is expressed mainly in terms of Jonathan's devotion to David and his concern for David's wellbeing and safety.<sup>31</sup> When mourning Jonathan's death, David compared their friendship as, "passing the love of women" (2 Sam 1:26). Spiritual friendship was frequently articulated in monastic literature in familial or sometimes erotic language. According to *Proverbs* true friendship "requires openness" (Pr 27:6) and "a friend loves all times" (Pr 17:17). Jerome and later writers subscribed to the idea that true friendship was indissoluble. Jesus of Sirach warned of false friends, but he meticulously described the qualities of a true friend:

A faithful friend is a strong defence. He that has found him has found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold and silver can countervail the goodness of his fidelity. A faithful friend is the medicine of life and immortality, and they that fear the lord shall find him. (Si 6:14-16)

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<sup>30</sup> Bewley, "Paternal Metaphor in the Rule of Benedict," 28-30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii

True friendship provides the individual with the strength needed to endure the sorrows of life.

Ecclesiastes, though generally pessimistic, provided a positive assessment of friendship:

Two are better than one because they have reward for their companionship. For if one should fall, he will be lifted up by the other. Woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, they can provide heat for each other, but how will one find warmth alone? And though someone might overcome a man who is alone, two will be able to withstand him. A threefold cord is difficult to break (Ecc 4:9-12).

The author of Ecclesiastes, who identified wealth and education as superficial, regarded friendship as among the most spiritually beneficial human activities. Friendship provided the strength necessary to endure the trials of this world.

Though individual friendships are to be praised, both Christian and Hebrew Scripture identified the communal friendship of the faithful as significant.<sup>32</sup> The *Book of Psalms* identified that it was, “good and pleasant. . . when brothers dwell in unity (Ps 133:1).” This was primarily practical advice, because the good community makes for good friendships; where there is no conflict between individual bonds and social structure. Although Hebrew Scripture praised friendship for the benefits it provided, friendship takes on a new meaning in the Gospels. Jesus’s command to, “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12), transformed communal friendship from a pragmatism into a necessary aspect of salvation.<sup>33</sup> However, friendship in Jesus was a certain type of friendship aimed at closeness with God and communal unity. James the Just harshly condemned friendship that was not grounded in the divine:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you. . . You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:1).

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<sup>32</sup> Ps 133:1, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.”

<sup>33</sup> Jn 15:12-17, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing: but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you.”

Strictly interpreted, Jesus left little or no room for individual friends and friendships. Loyalty and devotion to Christ became so important and central that all other human bonds were severed.<sup>34</sup>

Early Christians used familial language when expressing relationships within the community of believers because it emphasized group solidarity rather than individual bonds.<sup>35</sup> In Apostolic and Patristic times, to be a true Christian required the all-embracing love of Jesus and his Father. McGuire identifies that, in this total commitment, “the Christian is willing to be friend to the person in need, critical of those who need criticizing, and gentle with those who cannot bear harshness. What gets lost is the person behind the transformation.”<sup>36</sup> The Christian concept of friendship, then, was subject to change as Christianity’s place in society evolved. Early Christians were primarily concerned with expanding the community of believers, promoting communalism above individual wants and desires. Conversely, for Christians in medieval Europe, Christianity was a fact of life, the very essence of society, and exclusive friendships that brought the participants closer to God were both sanctioned and encouraged.

Monastic writers were also heavily influenced by classical literature. Classical Greek and Roman conceptions of friendship were adjusted by early theologians to align with the friendship of the Gospels. For aristocratic Greek and Roman men, friendship was the most natural thing in the world; it was the foundation of the state and society.<sup>37</sup> Aristotle divided friendship into three sections: friendship based on utility, friendship based on pursuit of pleasure, and friendship based on virtue, the latter of which was the, “perfect friendship of men who are good and alike in virtue.”<sup>38</sup> Like Aristotle, Cicero identified friendship as the abode of virtue, and good men could grow in virtue together through their relationship. Cicero believed friendship was “a good will

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<sup>34</sup> A. Fiske, *Friends and Friendship in the Monastic Tradition*. (Mexico City: Centro intercultural de documentacion, 1970), 3.

<sup>35</sup> B. McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), xxvii.

<sup>36</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, xxvii.

<sup>37</sup> Konstan, D., *Friendship in the Classical World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Rowe, C. J., and Sarah Broadie, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 212.

towards another person, for the sake of that person's good reciprocated by an equal will from that person."<sup>39</sup> Cicero's *De amicitia* was known amongst early Christian writers and was an integral ingredient in the formulation of the ideology of Christian friendship.

Central to Cicero's dialogue is a desire to recreate an ideal friendship valid in public as well as private life. The essence of friendship lies in a harmony of ethical values, and a commitment to virtue. Cicero believed that good men could improve each other's lives through close friendship. A virtuous friendship was born out of shared interests, as Cicero's narrator, Laelius, explained in his description of his relationship with Scipio Africanus: "Both in our public and private lives he and I shared all the same interests. Our tastes and aims and views were identical and that is where the essence of a friendship must always lie."<sup>40</sup> Mutuality was the bedrock upon which a virtuous friendship could be built. Cicero detailed that the nature of true friendship was a mutual desire for moral goodness:

Some people, I know, give preference to riches, or good health or power, or public honours. And may rank sensuous pleasure highest of all. But feelings of that kind are something which any animal can experience; and the other items in that list too are thoroughly transient and uncertain. They do not hang on our own decisions at all but are entirely at the mercy of fickle chance. Another school of thought believes that the supreme blessing is moral goodness; and this is the right view. Moreover, this is the quality to which friendship owes its entire origin and character. Without goodness, it cannot even exist.<sup>41</sup>

Cicero criticized the feeble friendships approved by Epicureans and Stoics because their wise man put his own security and freedom first, and rejected the possibility for pain and suffering in friendship.<sup>42</sup> The goal of Ciceronian friendship was moral development. The purpose of virtuous friendship in the *De amicitia* was the improvement of society. Cicero provided an outline of a form of community that was appealing to any group with common pursuits, especially those of

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<sup>39</sup> Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*, 371.

<sup>40</sup> G. Michael. *Cicero: On the Good Life*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 184.

<sup>41</sup> Konstan, David. *Friendship in the Classical World*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Fiske, *Friends and Friendship*, 5.

an intellectual and spiritual nature. Echoes of Ciceronian friendship can be found throughout early monastic literature.

The monastic understanding of children and childhood was firmly rooted in Biblical and Patristic precedents. Scripture provided several examples of children who had attained divine favour, for example, Samuel, David, and Daniel in Hebrew Scripture, and the Holy Innocents and the Christ child in Christian Scripture.<sup>43</sup> Jesus frequently enjoyed and welcomed the company of children, instructing his disciples that, “unless you become as little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt 18:15). Oblation was based on the Biblical examples of Abraham and Isaac, God claiming first born children of Israel, the offering of Jesus in the temple as a boy, and his instruction, as an adult, for his disciples to, “let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:14).” According to De Jong and Boswell, the story of Hannah offering Samuel to the service of God in the Temple was the passage most frequently cited to support oblation.<sup>44</sup> After Samuel had been weaned, Hannah brought him to the temple along with other sacrifices so that, “he [Samuel] may appear in the presence of the Lord and dwell there forever” (1 Sam 1:23). Samuel was taken care of by the priest Eli, who raised him (2 Sam 1:11). The example of Samuel allowed monks to justify the inclusion of children into their communities, even though the presence of children could be a distraction from devotional obligations.

Writers in the first Christian centuries held opposing views of childhood. In the fifth century, Pope Leo the Great (d. 461) praised childhood, “for it is the teacher of humility, the rule of innocents, the model of sweetness.”<sup>45</sup> Jerome praised the child because they experienced no

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<sup>43</sup> J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Mayke De Jong. *In Samuel's image: child oblation in the early medieval West*. (New York: Brill, 1996), 1; Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 242.

<sup>45</sup> C.N.L. Brooke, *The Monastic World 1000-1300*. (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 25.

pleasure in women, did not conceal their thoughts, lie, persisting in anger, or remember the offences of others against them.<sup>46</sup> Conversely, Augustine identified childhood as the germ of sin:

With what ignorance of the truth (already manifest in babies) with what plenitude of vain desire (initially apparent in children) man enters life? If he is allowed to live as he wishes... he will fall into all or many kinds of crimes and atrocities.<sup>47</sup>

Although Christianity regarded children with compassion, classical methods of childrearing remained largely unchanged. In Antiquity, parents had few children, but invested heavily in their upbringing. In his *Confessions*, Augustine lamented his miserable education and childhood: “If I was proved idle in learning I was soundly beaten, for this procedure seemed wise to our ancestors.”<sup>48</sup> Classical techniques of education were championed by the church fathers, who often regarded children with frustration, and childrearing as a laborious and aggravating task.<sup>49</sup> In Augustine’s time, Roman civilization depended upon the preservation, over generations, of elaborate traditions of thought and skill. Thus, though Augustine grieved his abusive upbringing, the suppression of concupiscence became the central goal of his educational philosophy, which justified frequent and hard punishment.<sup>50</sup> Roman methods of child rearing influenced medieval monastic communities which looked to the Fathers of the Church for guidance on how to raise children within the cloister.

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<sup>46</sup> D. Alexandre-Bidon and D. Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 20.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 2.22, trans. R.W. Dyson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 80.

<sup>48</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 119

<sup>49</sup> S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 9.

<sup>50</sup> C.N.L Brooke, *The Monastic World 1000-1300*, 28.





## Chapter 4: The Early Monastic Family

Outward displays of affection are often lacking from early monastic literature because of the fear of homoerotic behaviour. Whereas the later sources shy away from specific mention of homosexual or homoerotic behaviour, the early rules and sayings from the fourth and fifth centuries address it directly. The sexual concerns expressed by ascetic men in late Antiquity are, according to Nelson, a response a paradigm shift from Greco-Roman to Christian sexual values.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in order to ascertain the affective familial experience of the early Christian monastery, attention has to be paid to how monks expressed their relationships with each other, and the reader must adopt an interpretive lens to discern between rhetoric and genuine affection.

According to the tradition started by his biographer, Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), Antony the Great (d. 356) was the founder of Christian monasticism. Having been inspired by a reading of the Gospel in church, which instructed the rich to, “go and sell that you have and give to the poor; and come follow Me and you shall have treasure in heaven,” (Matt. 19:21) Antony, the eldest son of a wealthy family from the village of Fayum, abandoned his wealth and property to pursue a life devoted to contemplation and abstinence.<sup>2</sup> Antony immediately gave his, “productive and very fair” land to the villagers, and “all the rest that was movable he sold, and having got together much money he gave it to the poor.”<sup>3</sup> Antony’s *vita* established renunciation of biological family, property, and secular society in favour of spiritual contemplation and worldly withdrawal as the central component to monastic life.

Athanasius, a contemporary of the earliest desert monks, noted in the *Vita Antoni* how far word had travelled by the time he wrote his story, in the middle of the fourth century. In the

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<sup>1</sup> J.L. Nelson, “Monks, Secular Men, and Masculinity, c. 900,” in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley. (London: Longman, 1999), 123.

<sup>2</sup> The abandonment of family and property would become a staple of monastic hagiography; Matthew 19:21.

<sup>3</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. R.C. Gregg, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 3.

Prologue he wondered, “how is it that he was heard of, though concealed and sitting in a mountain, in Spain, Gaul, and in Rome and Africa?”<sup>4</sup> Athanasius’ *Vita Antoni* was disseminated throughout the Mediterranean world and quickly translated from Greek to Latin. The influence of Antony’s story on the development of monasticism is found in Augustine’s *Confessions*. He recounts a story told about two officers of the imperial court, who wandered into a Christian home, or perhaps a small monastery, and read the *Vita Antoni*. They were so impressed by Antony’s story that they relinquished their worldly possessions and embraced the ascetic life.<sup>5</sup> Augustine recorded that, after listening to this story, he himself was overcome with grief for, “grovelling in this world of flesh and blood.”<sup>6</sup> He credited Antony’s tale of renunciation of worldly possessions and ambitions as the final step in his own conversion to Christianity.

Though the influences and impulses which ignited the monastic movement are many, the intense relationships that were necessary to monastic life were a significant factor. Though Antony practised eremitic monasticism, for fifteen years he learned asceticism from spiritual fathers experienced in the monastic profession. Subsequently, he established himself in an abandoned Roman fort, entirely removed from the habitations of men. He resided there for twenty years, refusing to see anyone. Gradually, a number of disciples moved into caves and huts around the mountain and begged Antony to adopt them as spiritual sons. Eventually, he yielded to their supplications and re-entered the world, devoting himself to the instruction and organization of a large family of monks that had grown up around him. Christian monastic life consisted of several stages: first, the renunciation of the material world; second, a period of novitiate under the mentorship of an “old man;” third, living in common with many brethren; and finally, the ability of the spiritual father to guide new recruits. Thus, the relationship between a

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<sup>4</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, 98-99.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 169.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, 170.

spiritual father and his disciples was grounded in practicality and pedagogy, but the relationship was also intensely personal and was not based on the exercise of authority.

Antony ignited an era of monastic zeal in fourth-century Egypt, and his small isolated groups of hermits quickly expanded into immense monastic communities, which could often number in the thousands.<sup>7</sup> Of the many monastic experiments, the most significant was the monastery of Tabennesi established by Pachomius (d. 346), the first monastic legislator. Pachomius was a pagan military recruit stationed in Thebes in 312-13 where he was astonished by the charity of the Christians he encountered and decided to join the faith. He yearned to live the Christian life advocated by Scripture, so he became an ascetic and associated himself with an old hermit named Palamon. Pachomius spent the next several years under the tutelage of Palamon, until the hermit's death, when Pachomius was joined by his older brother at Tabennesi, a small abandoned village where the two lived contemplative lives and welcomed new recruits. A vision had instructed Pachomius to expand the monastery to house more monks, which, by his death, housed three thousand. Pachomius wrote the *Kononia*, a rule book which provided instruction for the governance of his monastic community and others. He sought to transpose his experience with Palamon onto a larger monastic community. Thus, Tabennesi was built upon mutual respect, collaboration, and most importantly, a readiness to encourage one another's spiritual goals, and ultimately accept individual responsibility for the interior development of the whole community.

Fundamental to Pachomian monasticism was the pedagogical relationship between a monk and his spiritual father. The *Vita Prima*, Pachomius' biography, refers to a monk at Tabennesi named Hieracapollon, who stressed the importance of Pachomius's example as an

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<sup>7</sup> P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of Community in Fourth Century Egypt*, (London: University of California Press, 1985), 63.

encouragement and a model for the other monks in the community. According to Hieracapollon, the dedication of the monks to their spiritual father was so firm that they, “prayed not to be separated from each other forever.”<sup>8</sup> The paternal structure of the Pachomian monastery did not differ greatly from the practices of desert anchorites. Eremitical monasticism also involved intense emotional and spiritual relationships. Years of training were involved in the process of becoming a monk, it could take a lifetime of learning and self-discipline before a monk would attract his own disciples. Spiritual fathers in a monastic community were vital to guide younger monks in the finer details of monastic living. The importance of Pachomius as a spiritual father is evident in the *Vita Prima*, where Hieracapollon says, “the devil knows that if carelessness overtakes you, he will also dominate us, for you are our model. Therefore endure, lest you have to answer for our blood if you are defeated.”<sup>9</sup> Pachomius exerted paternal authority over his disciples, and created a community based upon obedience to spiritual fathers and fraternity with spiritual brothers.

Pachomius codified Christian monasticism and brought it under the authority of the fourth-century Eastern Church. Gradually, the monastic movement spread throughout the Mediterranean, arriving in Europe in the fourth century. Fifth-century churchmen attempted to introduce Christian monasticism to the Roman world, and authored a multitude of treatise and regulations that became the foundational texts of Latin monasticism. However, the various attempts to introduce the monasticism of the Hellenized East to the Latin West produced a variation of approaches. Augustine of Hippo based his rule on the leisurely and meditative retreat practiced by the Roman aristocracy called *otium*. This aligned with his audience; coenobitic monks in the fifth-century west were usually aristocratic men whose monasteries were

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<sup>8</sup> Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 65.

productive villas.<sup>10</sup> Though Augustine's rule instructed monks to be governed by a superior, he was more concerned with harmony and fraternity between the brothers, who should, "live together in oneness of mind and heart."<sup>11</sup> Instead of *abbas*, Augustine named his superior *praepositus*, meaning the one placed over. He instructed his monks to, "obey your superior as a father, always with respect worthy of his position, so as not to offend God in him."<sup>12</sup> However, the authority of the *praepositus* was not final, he was to refer matters which exceeded his competence and power to a priest.<sup>13</sup>

The master – disciple relationship first developed in the semi-eremitic communities in fourth-century Egypt. In the Egyptian usage, the term *abba* did not designate the leader of a community, but an elder or senior, advanced in the wisdom of the desert and gifted with the charisma to enlighten others by conferring upon them the word. The relationship between an *abba* or an "old man," as they were commonly called, was grounded in practicality and pedagogy. Their relationship was practical because an *abba* could often be very old, and require aid to successfully endure the physical requirements of monasticism. In return, the *abba* taught his disciple how to live the monastic life and how to overcome the problems and temptations to which any monk was exposed.<sup>14</sup> For a new disciple, the first goal was to learn from an older monk the essential aspects of monastic life: how to fast, contemplate, and perform manual labour. However, the master-disciple relationship was based on an *abba's* ability to confer upon his disciple an understanding of the relationship with God. In order to achieve this, the process of learning required self-disclosure, endurance, and obedience. However, the relationship was

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<sup>10</sup> P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*, (Princeton University Press, 2012), 416.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *Regula ad servos Dei*, 1.3 cited by G. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his monastic rule*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 74.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Regula ad servos Dei*, 1.3, 74.

<sup>13</sup> P. Bewley, "Paternal Metaphor in the Rule of St Benedict: Its Origins in Biblical, Monastic, Ecclesiastic and Secular Traditions" (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009), 55.

<sup>14</sup> Gould, Graham. *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 26-27.

intensely personal, and, though obedience was fundamental to the monastic vocation, the relationship between an *abba* and his disciple was not based on the impersonal exercise of authority. An *abba* was to be both loved and feared. Abba Isadore explained that, “those who learn must both love as fathers those who are truly teachers, and fear them as rulers; and neither lose fear through love, not weaken love through fear.”<sup>15</sup> The disciple was both an obedient learner and a partner in an intensely personal relationship.

Obedience to an *abba* was central to the monastic profession because his will represented the will of God. The *Sayings of the Fathers* explained that,

If someone has faith in someone else, and makes himself subject to him, he does not need to apply himself to the commandments of God, but only to give up his will to his father, and he will not suffer reproach from God, for God requires nothing more from beginners than the labour which comes through obedience.<sup>16</sup>

It was by accepting the will of an *abba* that a monk learned to destroy his own desires and avoid error and confidence in his own works, or on the other hand, worry and uncertainty about his progress in monastic life. Renunciation of personal will was the keystone of true progress in the monastic life; a disciple should give up his will to the commands of his father even to the extent of ceasing to worry about his own obedience to the commandments of God.<sup>17</sup> Abba Poeman identified the will as, “a wall of bronze between man and God, and a rock which blocks his path. When a man renounces it he will say, ‘with God’s help I will leap over the wall.’”<sup>18</sup> In another story from *Sayings of the Fathers*, four monks approached *Abba Pambo* and told him their different virtues: poverty, chastity, fasting, and obedience. Pambo replied that obedience is the supreme virtue, because, “each of you has attained whichever virtue you wanted by your own will, but he has abandoned his own will to do the will of another. Such men are confessors if

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<sup>15</sup> E. Ward, trans., *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 98

<sup>16</sup> Ward, *Sayings of the Fathers*, 290.

<sup>17</sup> G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ward, *Sayings of the Fathers*, 54.

they endure to the end.”<sup>19</sup> Abandoning individual will for that of the abbot was integral to create the unity described in the Book of Acts. When semi-eremitic monasticism evolved into large cenobitic communities, the acceptance of an *abba*’s will became more symbolic. Admission to a Pachomian monastery required the novice to wait at the gate for three days, and, once admitted, verbally accept the will of the *abba*, and the formal regulations on food, clothing and sleep mandated by the Pachomian rule.

By the fourth century, monasticism was understood to be a communal endeavour, and the *Sayings* contain two anonymous warnings to brothers who think they can manage without the help of the old men:

A certain brother, having withdrawn from the world and taken the habit, immediately shut himself up, saying, ‘I am an anchorite.’ When the old men heard this, they came to his cell and threw him out, and made him go round to the cells of the brothers, doing penance and saying, “Forgive me, for I am not an anchorite but a beginner.”<sup>20</sup>

Another warning instructs monks that if a monk is, “climbing up to heaven by his own will, grab his foot and pull him down, for this is good for him.”<sup>21</sup> A monk that relies on his own knowledge and judgement rather than that of his *abba* may be deceived about his life and fall into sin, or even just achieve nothing.

The fundamental duty of the *abba* was to transmit monastic knowledge to a new generation. An *abba* could teach his disciple through both word and deed. It was perceived that an *abba*’s word to a disciple could possess an inspired or charismatic quality, an authority derived directly from God, and dependent on God’s will for its exercise. A disciple of the hermit Ephrem awoke early one morning and heard his master, “as if a spring was flowing from his

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 243.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 244.

mouth, and knew that what comes from the lips of Ephrem is of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup> The *Sayings* also convey the story of a monk who was troubled by his *abba*’s silence, but he was told by a superior, “not to be troubled by his silence, brother. . . for this is the old man’s custom. He does not readily speak, unless God gives him confidence.”<sup>23</sup> The desert fathers gave no advice unasked, and were frequently reluctant to accede to entreaty, because they were aware it was no trivial matter to direct another’s life and share in God’s own fatherhood.<sup>24</sup> Spiritual direction was not a set of stock solutions to be applied mechanically to every problem; it was an honest quest to know the other and help him to know himself, so that he might learn to fight his own weaknesses and surrender his life to the power of God.

Most important to monastic pedagogy was to teach by example. Hieracapollon, Pachomius’ successor, stressed the importance of Pachomius’ example as an encouragement and a model for other ascetics, who, “prayed not to be separated [from Pachomius] forever.”<sup>25</sup> An *abba*’s example was important because it should have been a product of his own experience in the monastic life. When *Abba* Poeman was asked by a disciple whether he should agree to be in charge of some brothers who had asked him to be their *abba*, Poeman responded, “No. Be their model, not their lawgiver.”<sup>26</sup> The emphasis on teaching by example was absorbed by the pioneers of Latin monasticism, and became an integral quality of the medieval abbot.

The eremitic nature of early Christian monasticism bequeathed a skepticism of the spiritual value of brotherhood and individual relationships to initial coenobitic communities. For the desert fathers, the abandonment of urban life for the desert meant leaving behind obligations and emotional attachments. The eastern fathers perceived other people primarily as a distraction from

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> P. Claude, “The Abbot,” in *Rule of St Benedict 1980* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 334.

<sup>25</sup> Athanasius, *Vita Prima Graeca*, trans. B.A. Pearson. (New York: Scholars Press, 1975), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ward, *Sayings of the Fathers*, 34.



devotion to God. The answer to this dilemma is found in the way of asceticism. Perfection of self was attained through the submergence of self in a community and by the performance of individual acts of self-denial. It required total separation from secular family and friends. The family of the early monastic community existed not in order to create new bonds of affection, but to provide a secure environment for the asceticism of the individual. Pachomian monasticism, though coenobitic in structure, retained the anti-social attitude toward monastic life ascribed to by the first monks of the desert. Peace of mind was to be found in minimizing one's daily obligations to other human beings, thus, the friendships that could develop in monastic communities were regarded as a distraction from total devotion to God.

The desert monk's most intense relationship was with his master, a vertical bond governed by authority and experience. The egalitarian relations of the brethren were looked upon as secondary or dangerous. This fear may have been linked to the possibility of homosexual relationships in same-sex celibate communities. Desert literature is open about this subject, and recognized that men living in close proximity could become physically attracted to one another. Pachomius' legislation on friendship demonstrated an awareness of situations of possible sexual temptation. He mandated that the brothers not hitch their clothes too high while washing, ride the same camel, or remove thorns from one another's feet.<sup>27</sup> Early cenobitic communities were organized in such a way as to minimize interaction between brothers:

These live a very strict life: they wear sheepskin cloaks, eat with their faces veiled and their heads bowed so that no one should see his neighbour and keep such a profound silence that you would think you were in the desert. Each one practices his own asceticism in secret. . . they try to avoid being seen by each other.<sup>28</sup>

The desert monk was encouraged to practice communal friendship with all his brothers. Abba Poeman instructed that, "whoever lives in the monastery should see all the brethren as one: he

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<sup>27</sup> B. McGuire. *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>28</sup> Russell, N., trans., *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 65.

should guard his eyes and his lips; and then he will be at peace without anxiety.”<sup>29</sup> Abba Anthony stated that, “our life and death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ.”<sup>30</sup> This statement demonstrates the early monastic attitude towards friendship: concord with one’s brothers was fundamental to the monastic experience, as it fulfilled God’s commandment to love, but individual relationships could distract an individual from God and detract from the community’s unity.

Although early coenobitic communities regarded friendship as a possible source of sin, certain types of friendship were regarded as a source of holiness. Daniel Krueger discussed how monks who practiced eremitic monasticism, in the early Byzantine era, were encouraged to form spiritual friendships, often in couples. John Moschos, a late sixth-century ascetic, detailed his intense relationship with another monk, the future Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius, in his autobiography, the *Spiritual Meadow*. They spent more than forty years in each other’s company, travelling to Alexandria and throughout Egypt, then staying ten years in the Sinai before travelling to Jerusalem, Syria, and eventually Rome.<sup>31</sup> Sophronius referred to Moschos in his own writing as, “spiritual father and teacher.” Moschos referred to Sophronius as, “my companion, my lord, brother Sophronios,” and, “sacred and faithful child Sophronius.”<sup>32</sup> Another seventh-century work, the *Life of Symeon the Holy Fool*, by Leontius of Neapolis, detailed the relationship between Symeon and his companion John. Symeon and John developed a spiritual friendship and, “agreed not to be separated from each other. Remember the fearful hour when we were clothed in the holy habit, and we two were as one soul, so that all were astonished at our

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<sup>29</sup> Ward, *Sayings of the Fathers*, 206.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> D. Krueger, “Between Monks: Tales of Monastic Companionship in Early Byzantium,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (2011): 30.

<sup>32</sup> Krueger, “Monastic Companionship,” 29.

love.”<sup>33</sup> Symeon and John left their monastery together with the blessing of the abbot: “amazed at the affection which Symeon held for his brother, and astounded by the love both had for each other, Nikon made the sign of the cross upon their breast and the whole of their body.”<sup>34</sup> This suggest that such emotional bonds between brothers were both sanctioned and encouraged by cenobitic monastic authorities. When Symeon left John to go to evangelize the city of Emesa, they, “kissed each other’s breasts and drenched them in tears.”<sup>35</sup> Their tearful parting exhibits the emotional ties that might develop between celibate monks who shared the monastic life over many years. In his description of this event, Leontius played on conventions for depicting parting lovers in ancient literary romances.<sup>36</sup>

Krueger identified that the monastic companionships take two forms: either a disciple - master dynamic that suggests a pederastic or Platonic context through which to understand these celibate pairing. Other stories depicted monastic brothers of similar ages and lengths of profession, like Symeon the Fool and his companion John, and thus suggests a context grounded in late-antique ideals of friendship, where symmetry characterized the context for affection.<sup>37</sup> It is also possible that these companionships were the Christian manifestation of the same-sex unions so common in the Greco-Roman world. Like monastic companionships, same-sex unions in ancient Greece and Rome were either composed of an older and a younger man or two men of equal age. Though the monastic ideal negated the possibility for sexual intimacy, monastic unions could provide their members an emotional intimacy with a same-sex partner that would not have been acceptable in Christian secular society.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> J. Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions*, (New York: Villard, 1994), 58-61.

The anxiety of homosexual relations in early monastic communities combined with the existence of monastic couples suggests that homosexuality, or at least homosexual-like behaviour may have been a common, though unsanctioned, aspect of early monasticism. These trends are also indicative of an evolving masculine identity and sexuality in a world where previous sexual practices were being replaced by a Christian religious ideology that left no room for sexual relations outside the matrimonial union of man and woman.

The texts from the first monks in the Egyptian desert take the presence of children in coenobitic communities for granted. Many of the most influential monks of the East were raised in monastic communities, including Paphnitiu, Gregory Nazianzus, Daniel the Stylite, Symeon the Stylite, Euthymios the Great, Sabas the Great, Nicholas of Sion.<sup>39</sup> However, like friendship, children were regarded as a possible source of sin within the monastery. In the *Sayings of the Fathers*, Abba Isaac warned: “do not bring young boys here. Four churches in Scetis are deserted because of young boys.”<sup>40</sup> Abba Macarius instructed his followers that when they encountered young children, they should “take up [their] sheep-skins and go away.”<sup>41</sup> The fourth-century rules of Abbas Shenoute and Pachomius contain very specific prohibitions against kissing and touching children and unsupervised activity with children.<sup>42</sup> Burton has argued that this anxiety stemmed from the continued existence of classical definitions of beauty in fourth-century monastic communities that borrowed heavily from Hellenic models of pedagogy.<sup>43</sup> The masculine ascetic ideal was built upon classical conceptions of masculinity, especially control of

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<sup>39</sup> J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 242.

<sup>40</sup> Ward, *Sayings of the Fathers*, 100.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>42</sup> Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain: 1000-1300*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 334-341.

<sup>43</sup> Burton, *Monastic and Religious*, 334.

the passions, but it embraced classical models of eroticism in which the adolescent male represents the ideal sexual partner.<sup>44</sup>

In his monastic rule, the *Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, Basil of Caesaria took oblation for granted, noting that children were easily moulded to the religious life because of a child's simplicity, innocence, and incapacity for falsehood.<sup>45</sup> Basil allowed admissions at, "every age, even the very earliest... And thus such children as have lost their parents we adopt of our own free will, being desirous, after the example of Job, to become fathers to the orphans."<sup>46</sup> This differs from later monastic rules that required oblates to have passed from *infantia*, infancy, to *pueritia*, childhood, defined by Isadore as seven years old, in order to be admitted. However, unlike the later western practise of oblation, which was irrevocable, Basil did not allow children to be, "received at once into the membership of the brotherhood," because they could, "fail in their purpose and so bring reproach upon the life of piety."<sup>47</sup> Basil was anxious that children be questioned strictly when they reached the age of "sixteen or seventeen," the age he believed a youth to be old enough to understand virginity.<sup>48</sup> During childhood, the Basilian oblate was to be educated and trained for the monastic life, and be treated "as common children of the brotherhood."<sup>49</sup> Basil had an exceptionally positive evaluation of children in a time when the predominant attitude towards children was negative.<sup>50</sup> Basil noted that, "the same sins are often to be found in both old and young," because, "he that is young in mind is no different from him

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<sup>44</sup> C. Schroeder, "Queer Eye for the Ascetic Guy? Homoeroticism, Children, and the Making of Monks in Late Antiquity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77.3. (2009): 333.

<sup>45</sup> Basil of Caesaria, *The rule of St Basil in Latin and English: a revised critical edition*, trans. A Silvas, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 122.

<sup>46</sup> Basil, *Rule of St Basil*, 123.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 122; Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 230; M. De Jong, "Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery: Magister Hildemar and his Oblates," *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983): 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>50</sup> S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 9.

that is young in age.”<sup>51</sup> He recognized that children needed different legislation with respect to, “sleep, vigils, time of meals, quantity and quality of food,” because of their mental and physical fragility.<sup>52</sup> He stipulated that, though all members of the community were to be as fathers to the oblates, groups of children should be assigned to monks who are, “well advanced in years.” These senior monks had proven their “powers of patience,” so they could educate the oblates with, “fatherly kindness and instructive discourse.”<sup>53</sup> It is evident in Basil’s rule that the relationship between the brethren and the oblates went beyond the classical model of pedagogy; it stipulated that the monks were to become “fathers to orphans,” and teach them with, “fatherly kindness.” The inclusion of children in early monastic life permitted celibate men that had renounced biological family to adopt parental that aided in a individual and communal spiritual growth.

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<sup>51</sup> Basil of Caesaria, *The Rule of St Basil*, 122.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

## Chapter 5: Western Monasticism

The desert fathers inspired the fathers of the Latin Church to introduce the monasticism of the east to western Christendom. Augustine was haunted by the ideal of the community in Jerusalem, and painfully laboured to replicate it. He believed that such an ideal Christian community remained a dream for the future, one that would come to fruition only in the heavenly republic beyond this world.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, John Cassian believed that the community of the apostles was a living experience among the monks of Egypt. When he arrived in Gaul in 415, with the intent of forming a monastery inspired by Pachomian monachism, he was surprised by the gentlemanly attitude towards wealth in Gallic monasteries.<sup>2</sup> Cassian had authored the *Institutes* and *Conferences* to introduce the monastic experience of the East to the service of the West. Fifth-century Gallic monasteries were kept economically stable by the revenues of their lands and by the pooled donations of wealthy members. For Cassian, these men could never be true monks because they had spared themselves the taste of real poverty, and had not genuinely forsaken the material world. Thus, the monastic ideal expressed in Cassian's *Institutes* emphasized humility, poverty, and obedience. He also provided a thorough account of Egyptian monasticism to contrast the reverence of Eastern devotion with the laxity of Gallic observance:

When the Psalm is ended they do not hurry at once to kneel down, as some of us do in this country, who before the psalm is fairly ended, make haste to prostrate themselves for prayer, in their hurry to finish the service as quickly as possible.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Augustine had instructed those entering a monastery to donate their property and wealth to the community, Cassian forbade such donations, and monks were required to divest themselves of all their worldly possessions upon entry:

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<sup>1</sup> P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*, (Princeton University Press, 2012), 414-415.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 415.

<sup>3</sup> H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), 181-83.

He cannot stay for long under the discipline of the monastery, nor ever learn the virtue of humility and obedience, nor be content with the poverty and difficult life of the monastery, if he knows that ever so small a sum of money has been kept hid.<sup>4</sup>

Cassian believed that wealth promoted individualism, which detracted from the community's ability to emulate the brotherly love of the apostles. Cassian's monastic life, "consisted in the despoiling of the self from all property... so that, apart from the will of the abbot, hardly any will should be alive in us."<sup>5</sup> Cassian's rule was in accord with the teachings of the Apostle Paul, who wrote that, "there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3.28)."<sup>6</sup> For a fifth-century Roman, Cassian's monastic structure would have resembled a slave barracks, his monks were to be obedient to their abbot, "in a way that no slave ever showed in the service of even the most harsh and overbearing lord."<sup>7</sup> Whereas the monks of the desert had viewed fasting as the surest way to avoid vice, Cassian believed obedience would, "stamp out anger or sulkiness, or the spirit of fornication."<sup>8</sup>

The abandonment of one's family and the acceptance of a superior's authority was essential to Cassian's monachism, and a prominent theme in his *Institutes*. The *Institutes* provide two allegories which epitomize the abbot's authority according to Cassian. The first is the story of Abbot John, who at the command of superior, stuck a dry stick into the ground and for the space of a year watered it twice a day with water he carried from a river two miles away.<sup>9</sup> The second story tells of how Paternucius, a formerly wealthy man, abandoned his wealth and sought to enter himself and his son into a monastery. The monks did not want to admit a father

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<sup>4</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes*, trans. E.C.S. Gibson, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1923), III. Accessed online: <http://www.osb.org/lectio/cassian/inst/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, XII.

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>7</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, IV.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, XIII.

<sup>9</sup> Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 182.



and son together because it was, “contrary to all the rules of the Coenobia.”<sup>10</sup> However, after prostrating themselves before the gates of the monastery for several days, the monks relented and admitted the pair into the brotherhood. As soon as they were admitted, they were given to the care of different superiors and put in separate cells:

So that the father might not be reminded by the constant sight of the little one that out of all his possessions and carnal treasures, which he had cast off and renounced, at least his son remained to him; and that as he was already taught that he was no longer a rich man, so he might also forget the fact that he was a father.<sup>11</sup>

To test Paternucius, the monks, “neglected and dressed [the child] in rags instead of proper clothes,” and abused the child with “blows and slaps from different people, which the father often saw inflicted without the slightest reason on his innocent child under his very eyes.”<sup>12</sup> The greatest test for Paternucius came when the abbot ordered him to throw his son into a river. Paternucius, “at once snatched up the child as quickly as possible, and carried him in his arms to the river’s bank to throw him in.”<sup>13</sup> The boy was rescued by some monks whom the abbot had placed downstream and Paternucius proved his willingness to accept the unbinding authority of his superiors. The allegory is an obvious allusion to the story of Abraham, but with a distinctly monastic tone. Cassian’s *Institutes* was written for the instruction of monks in Gaul, and the obvious message of obedience conveyed by the stories of John and Paternucius suggest that Gaulic monasticism did not place equal emphasis on obedience as their Egyptian counterparts. Though Cassian’s writing would inspire later monastic reformers, the monasticism he promoted was too harsh for fifth-century Latins.

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<sup>10</sup> Cassian, *Institutes*, XXVII.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, XXVII.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, XXVII.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, XXVII.

Monasticism's pastoral function in European society prevented western monks from incorporating the Stoic idea that the ascetic must completely renounce all passions and worldly involvements. Western monastic writers sought to define the various modes of monasticism they encountered in the East. Both Jerome and Cassian offered strict typologies of monastic forms, distinguishing cenobites who dwelled in communities from hermits who dwelled alone. Both also recognized a looser form of organization of smaller groups. In a letter to a Roman virgin dated 384, Jerome explained that in Egypt there was a third class of monks "who lived in twos and threes."<sup>14</sup> Cassian, writing for an audience in southern Gaul in the early fifth century, termed his third type of monks as "Sarabites," and complained that they,

Cut themselves off from the monastic communities and take care of their own needs. . . they exhibit no interest in monastic discipline. . . do not submit to the direction of elders and they do not learn their instruction in how to overcome their own desires.<sup>15</sup>

Jerome and Cassian, ever concerned with regulation and uniformity, condemned such loose associations of monks because of the risk they posed to organized monasticism. However, Western commentators did not share the desert fathers' anxiety of individual relations. Cassian himself travelled from Scythia Minor to Egypt with his friend Germanus in the early 380s. To demonstrate their "close friendship," Cassian described in his *Conferences* that, "each of us would say that we were one mind and one soul living in two bodies."<sup>16</sup> For Cassian, his friendship with Germanus was vital to their monastic success:

We were united in a tie of spiritual and not carnal brotherhood, and that from the first commencement of our renunciation of the world we had always been joined together in an unbroken bond as well as in our travels.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jerome, Letter XXII, *Selected Letters of St Jerome*, trans. F. Wright, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 136-137.

<sup>15</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. C. Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 188-189.

<sup>16</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, 37.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

The importance of Cassian's relationship with Germanus is reflected by the centrality of brotherhood in his *Conferences*. Inspired by Cicero, he identified that there were both harmful and beneficial forms of friendship. According to Cassian, monastic brotherhood was founded on mutual contempt for the material world, the renunciation of self will, a willingness to sacrifice, slowness to anger, the ability to apologize, and the belief in imminent mortality, "for this crushes all the activity of concupiscence and sin and makes it impossible to keep the least bitterness in one's heart."<sup>18</sup> Cassian enshrined emotional bonds between monks as integral to the monastic experience, but carefully defined the type of intra-cloistral relations that encouraged spiritual growth.

Though Cassian praised beneficial individual friendships, he prioritized communal friendship because it prevented favouritism and cliques from developing within the cloister. The Christian commandment of love of neighbor could be interpreted in the stoic sense of universal good treatment of human beings, whether they be friends or enemies. In such a context, the love of individual friends is potential distraction from a generalized and non-exclusive love of all men. One of Cassian's primary concerns was harmony and egalitarianism within the monastery, thus he recognized friendship as potentially disruptive. However, he did acknowledge the unavoidable existence of individual friendships:

This is truly the ordering of love, which hates no one, but loves certain people more because of their merits: although it loves all in a general manner, this love nevertheless chooses some of these whom it ought to embrace with a particular affection. Again it singles out, from among those who are foremost in love, a few who are cherished above and beyond others.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, for Cassian, spiritual friendship of a certain type was beneficial to the monastic experience. Earthly friendship could detract from devotion to God, but spiritual friends could aid

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 442-445.

<sup>19</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, 440.

one another in their spiritual development. If special bonds developed in the cloister, this was not necessarily a threat to monastic harmony, so long as the friendship was based on the spiritual growth, it was sanctioned.

Ambrose and Augustine, both members of the Roman elite, regarded the company of friends as absolutely fundamental to Christianity and spiritual growth. Both men were heavily influenced by Cicero's concept of virtuous friendship, but adapted it to align with the spiritual demands of Christianity. In the *De officiis* Ambrose, inspired by Cicero, wrote that, "we love those whom we think to be like ourselves," but only through God could,

Many become one. For if many are friends, they become one; in whom there is but one spirit and one opinion. We note, too, that in friendship corrections are pleasing. They have their sting, but they cause no pain. We are pierced by the words of blame, but are delighted with the anxiety that good-will shows.<sup>20</sup>

Here Ambrose combined Cicero's requirement that true friends correct one another, with the unity of the first Christian community described in the *Book of Acts*. Monastic brethren were to combine reproach with encouragement in order to preserve discipline and unanimity in their family.

The political-philosophical form of friendship idealized by Cicero provided Augustine the material for spiritualized Christian friendship founded upon common life, faith, and duties.<sup>21</sup> In his *Confessions* Augustine recalls a friend that he had before his conversion. They had, "grown up together as boys, gone to school together, and played together."<sup>22</sup> Upon the death of his young friend Augustine lamented:

How well the poet had put it when he called his friend the half of his soul. I felt that our two souls had been as one, living in two bodies, and life to me was fearful because I did not want to live with only half a soul. Perhaps this, too, is why I

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<sup>20</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, trans. H. Romestin, and H.T.F. Duckworth, (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1896), 173.

<sup>21</sup> A. Fiske, *Friends and Friendship in the Monastic Tradition*. (Mexico City: Centro intercultural de documentacion, 1970), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 75.

shrank from death, for fear that one whom I had loved so well might then be wholly dead. I wept bitter tears and found my only consolation in their very bitterness. This was the misery in which I lived, and yet my own wretched life was dearer to me than the friend I had lost...<sup>23</sup>

It is apparent that Augustine shared a deep emotional connection with this individual, whom he does not name. He utilizes the literary trope of “two souls in one body,” so beloved by later writers describing Christian friendship. However, he notes that his own life was more important to him than the life of his brother. Selflessness was an essential component of friendship in Christ. Augustine’s assessment of the significance of his own life over his friends is indicative, not of a deficiency in the friendship, but of the friends themselves. Although powerful friendships can be formed between non-Christians, they are fleeting and temporal. Augustine’s relationship with his childhood friend was, “not the friendship which should be between true friends. . . no friends are true friends, unless you, my God, bind them fast to one another through that love which is sown in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.”<sup>24</sup> Although a friendship can be virtuous in a Ciceronian sense, it cannot be truly (spiritually) beneficial unless the friends are united in belief.

Of all the Church Fathers, Augustine ranks friendship highest. In Augustine’s conception of monastic community, friendship among learned men that involved both mind and heart lay at the very center of monastic life.<sup>25</sup> Augustine’s classical conception of friendship was twofold: either the vertical bond that existed in the Roman *schola* between teacher and student, or the horizontal, Ciceronian, bond that existed between learned men of equal standing in Roman society. In writing his monastic rule, Augustine included both the authoritative relationship of abbot and monk as well as the egalitarian relationship between the brethren. Augustine’s desire

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<sup>23</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 77.

<sup>25</sup> B. McGuire. *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), xli.

to emulate the community of the Apostles led him to emphasize egalitarianism and harmony in his monastery whilst minimizing the authority of the abbot.

Thus, when monasticism was introduced to the West there were multiple approaches vying for supremacy, with varying degrees of strictness and divergent attitudes towards obedience, wealth, and poverty, and inter-cloistral relationships. Cassian's monastery resembled a slave barracks and Augustine's an aristocratic retreat. The attempts to introduce monasticism to Western Europe had presented prospective monks with two juxtaposed options. The monastic rules themselves took multiple forms: either pure regulation, like the Pachomius' rule, or a simple anthology of advice and counsel like the *Basilian Rule*. Uniformity in practise was required to fulfill the apostolic ideals of unity, obedience to truth, and brotherly love.

Several rules emerged in the first quarter of the sixth century that synthesized the principles and regulations of previous writers. The anonymous *Regula Magistri*, Caesarius of Arles' *Regula virginum*, and Columban of Bangor's Celtic Customs sought to balance the asceticism of the East with the realities of life in the West.<sup>26</sup> These rules encompassed the entire existence, both material and spiritual, of the monastic community, and were intended for use beyond their original communities. The most significant piece of monastic legislation in the Latin Church was authored in the mid sixth century by Benedict of Nursia. Though it lacked the brevity and spiritual intensity of other *regulae*, it presented monasticism in a way that was familiar and approachable to sixth-century Latins. In only three the regime of Benedict's abbey of Monte Casino that was carried far from the Gallo-Roman centres of the early medieval church.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> J. Clarke, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Clarke, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, 5.

To his medieval followers, Benedict was not only the father of black monks, but of all Christian monasticism. Medieval visual and literary representations depict him alongside the fathers of the desert, Anthony and Pachomius. Yet, the only textual trace of Benedict's life is the hagiography within Gregory the Great's second book of the *Dialogues*, authored in 590, fifty years after Benedict's death. According to Gregory, Benedict was born in the later fifth century to an aristocratic family in the heart of the Italian Peninsula. Benedict had attempted to found monastic communities throughout the Italian Peninsula, but had pressed his monks too hard, even inciting an assassination attempt, which was only prevented by divine intervention.<sup>28</sup> He aimed to create a monastic rule that balanced the extreme asceticism of the desert fathers and the luxurious *otium* of Gallic monks.

The *Regula Benedicti* was derivative of the *regulae* and *vitae* of the fourth-century fathers, acknowledged by Benedict in the final chapter of the *RB*: "what are they but the monuments of the virtues of exemplary and obedient men."<sup>29</sup> Benedict borrows his conception of the abbot, the importance attached to self-sufficiency through manual labour, and the approach to oblates from the *Basilian Rule*. Pachomian influence is seen in Benedict's requirement for prospective recruits to be delayed at the gates of the monastery for three days. According to James Clarke, Augustine's presence is unacknowledged, but implied by the humanity of the *Rule*'s mode of discipline and the paternalism of its conception of the superior's authority.<sup>30</sup> Benedict achieved what no monastic legislator had hitherto been able to accomplish: He balanced the asceticism and authoritarian discipline of Caesarius, Cassian, and the author of the

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<sup>28</sup> De Vogue, *Abbot and Community*, 1958; P. Claude, "The Abbot," in *The Rule of St Benedict 1980*, trans. T. Fry, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 12

<sup>29</sup> Benedict of Nursia, *Rule of St Benedict 1980*, trans. T. Fry, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981), LXXIII, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Clarke, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, 13.

*Regulae Magistri* with the charity and communality of Augustine, Basil, and Pachomius. The *Rule* combines patrician sensibility with the values of desert monasticism.

In Rome, early Christians utilized familial metaphors as a way to communicate the new religion, allowing Romans to understand one kind of experience, the Christian religion, by means of another kind of experience, the family.<sup>31</sup> Benedict seized upon this tradition and produced a monastic rule that was thoroughly Roman in nature. His insistence that the *Rule* was paramount was itself a reflection of his Roman heritage. At the time that the *Rule* was taking shape in his mind, the jurists of emperor Justinian were busy codifying the great mass of classical legislation and jurisprudence.<sup>32</sup> Whereas Cassian's abbot resembled slave master, Benedict, aware of his Roman audience, named the community *familia*, *grex* and *corpus*, the abbey *domus*, the monks *frater*, and the abbot *paterfamilias*. In classical Rome, *familia* was, according to the second-century jurist, Ulpian, "those persons who, by nature or law, are subject to the *paterfamilias*."<sup>33</sup> Thus, "*paterfamilias*" conveyed the authoritarian nature of the abbot's power, in terms recognizable to an inhabitant of the Italian Peninsula in the sixth century.

In ancient Rome, the *familia* was the fundamental economic, social, legal, educational, and religious unit of society and the *paterfamilias* functioned as its petty monarch, who had varying degrees of authority over his wife and children, clients, freedmen, and slaves.<sup>34</sup> During the late empire, the intervention of the state into the private domain and the growing influence of stoicism led to a relaxation of the *paterfamilias*' legal hold over his children and *familia*

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<sup>31</sup> Eva Marie Lassen, "The Roman Family: Ideal Metaphor" in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as a Social Reality and a Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes. London: Routledge, 1997. P.103.

<sup>32</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, (London: Longman, 1984), 28.

<sup>33</sup> D. Herlihy, *Medieval Households*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 2.

<sup>34</sup> F. and J. Gies, *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 19.



gradually came to signify kinship more than authority.<sup>35</sup> By the seventh century, Isadore of Seville acknowledged that *familia* could be metaphorically applied to slaves, but this “was not its proper application, a *familia* is so called from its longstanding designation based on birth.”<sup>36</sup> *Domus* denoted the physical household and all those who dwelt within it. According to Herlihy, the *domus*, much like the monastery, “was a religious community, charged with maintaining the cult of the household gods, the *lares* and *penates*.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed the classical layout of the Benedictine abbeys and priories of the Middle Ages was descended from the plan of the Roman country villa of late antiquity.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Benedict made monasticism more approachable by Romanizing previous legislation to convey the spiritual insight of the desert fathers in a way that sixth-century Romans could understand.

The use of familial metaphors such as *abbas*, *pater*, *frater*, and *domus* suggests that Benedict considered the monastic community, to a certain extent, a family. The Abbot’s Congress in 1967 determined that,

Because of the stability and the vital intimacy of the bond among its members, a Benedictine community is rightly compared to a family, a term which is also used by tradition. Like a family, it possesses an original uniqueness, its own manner of life, its own problems, and a unique destiny.<sup>39</sup>

However, whether Benedict intended the monastery to resemble the secular family is a topic of scholarly debate. Aldabert De Vogue has this to say on the matter:

The cenobium. . . is not a society created by the enactment of men and modelled on a secular “family,” but a church organized by God which, like the Church proper presents in its hierarchal structure a striking analogy with the *familia*. Churches and monasteries belong to the same category, the “divine households.”

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<sup>35</sup> D. Elliott, *Spiritual marriage: sexual abstinence in medieval wedlock*, (Princeton University Press, 1995), 7; Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, IX.V.13. trans. S. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, O. Berghof, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 207.

<sup>37</sup> Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> *Erbe und Auftrag* 45 (1969), 37f. cited in Aquinata Bockmann, *Perspectives on the Rule of St Benedict: Expanding Our Hearts in Christ*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 65.

The human household” may serve our understanding of the divine constitution of these societies come down from heaven, but it is not their exemplary cause.<sup>40</sup>

De Vogue is hesitant to directly compare the monastic family with the secular family, but he does not dismiss that the monastic community functions similarly to the secular family, albeit the experiential aspects of family life in the cloister or by the hearth were fundamentally different.

The *Rule* was Benedict’s enduring contribution to European monasticism. Three centuries after his death, the *Rule* was synonymous with the notion of a rule for monks. From the tenth to the twelfth centuries, the *Rule* was an inspiration for innovative, monastic, clerical, and secular forms of living. The dissemination of the rule throughout Europe, and the beginning of regimented Benedictine monasticism, was a Carolingian initiative; the result of the collaborative projects of Charlemagne (d. 814), Louis the Pious (d. 840), and Benedict of Aniane (d. 821), *abbot princeps* of the Carolingian empire. The acceptance of the *Rule* was not only the result of the imperial religious revival, but also complex patterns of conversion, settlement, patronage, and political hegemony.<sup>41</sup> By the close of the tenth century, the Benedict’s monasticism was the dominant practise in Western Europe.

The abbot is the most prominent figure in the *Regula Benedicti*. Two chapters are wholly devoted to the office and duties of the abbot: Chapter 2 focuses on the nature of his task and the manner of its exercise, and chapter 44 addresses the selection and installation of an abbot, adding further observations on the personal qualities of the man chosen for the role. Nearly every topic discussed by Benedict is related to the person of the abbot, the heart of the Benedictine community.<sup>42</sup> Benedict’s use of the term *abbas* to denote the superior of his monastery links him to the tradition of the desert fathers. In Jerome’s writing, the term *abba* is used sparingly, as Jerome seems to have objected to it on the grounds that scripture forbade designating human

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<sup>40</sup> De Vogue, *Community and Abbot*, 101.

<sup>41</sup> Clarke, *Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> T.G. Kardong, *The Benedictines*, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1998), 116.

beings as father.<sup>43</sup> Augustine never uses it, naming the superior of his monastery *praepositus*, “the one placed over.” It does appear frequently in Sulpicius Severus and John Cassian, and by the sixth century the term *abbas* is used in the *Lives of the Jura Fathers* and the *RM* to exclusively refer to the head of a monastery.

Benedict was familiar with Egyptian monastic literature and legislation, as well as Cassian’s *Institutes* and *Conferences*, all of which use the term *abba*. Benedict used *abbas* 126 times, *prior* 12 times, and *maior*, *pater monasterii*, and *pater spiritalis* once each. Benedict’s choice of *abba* as the primary designation for the monastic superior goes beyond a desire for historical continuity. He chose it because, for him, it crystalized his principal conviction about the abbatial office: it is a position of primarily spiritual leadership; its main character is mystical or sacramental. *Abba* was utilized by Benedict as a means of building a theology of the abbatial office based on the understanding that the *abba* is a Christ figure.<sup>44</sup>

In crafting his abbot, Benedict relied heavily upon Biblical precedence. He wrote, “what page, what passage of the inspired books of the old and new testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?”<sup>45</sup> Though the *Rule* relied heavily on previous monastic legislation, it was primarily shaped and fashioned by the Bible: prayer, work, fraternal relationships, and the role of the abbot are all determined and understood in a biblical context. Verse 1 of the Prologue to the *Rule* is clearly borrowed from Proverbs, “Listen, children, to a father’s instruction and be attentive that you may gain insight.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, Benedict would have been aware, like the desert fathers, of the educational aspect to fatherhood as described in Hebrew Scripture.

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<sup>43</sup> Matt. 23:9., And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven; Peifer, “The Abbot,” 323.

<sup>44</sup> Gal 4:6. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict, *Rule of St Benedict*, LXXIII, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Proverbs 4:1; *Rule of St Benedict*, Prologue: Listen, my son, and with your heart hear the precepts of your Master.

However, though it has been the subject of controversy, Benedict also drew from secular conceptions of fatherhood when crafting his abbot. Sixth-century monks in the Italian Peninsula would certainly have come from traditional families with a *pater* at its head. They would not, therefore, escape the comparison easily made between the superior of a monastery called *pater* and the head of a biological family also referred to by the same title. In Republican Rome, the *paterfamilias* held the power over his entire household, slave and kin alike. In the early Republic the *paterfamilias*' power extended to the decisions of life or death over his offspring, but also embraced a broad set of responsibilities for the management of the *familia*.

The pedagogical role of the abbot is reflected in the expectation that Roman and Greek fathers were to be the primary educators of their sons. Cato the Elder took personal care of his son's education, though he could have employed one of the best tutors of his time, and taught him literature, law, and gymnastics.<sup>47</sup> The Stoic philosopher Epictetus, Paul's contemporary, reminded sons to, "treat everything that is your own as belonging to your father, to be obedient to him in all things, never speak ill of him to anyone, nor to say or do anything that will harm him."<sup>48</sup> The *paterfamilias* in Benedict's rule was both the ruler and teacher of those under him.

Certainly the structure of the monastery was reflective of the Roman *familia*, especially the *Rule*'s emphasis on the authority of the abbot over all those in his community. However, De Vogue and Claude both deny that Benedict relied on secular influences to develop his abbot. Claude argues that, "the imagery of the *Rule* is eminently biblical; the entire description of the abbot is drawn from biblical themes and in no sense from profane sources."<sup>49</sup> Yet, he contradicts himself on the same page when he admits that,

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<sup>47</sup> P. Francesca. "Children and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge," 73-93 in *Children, Memory, and Family Identity in Roman Culture*. Eds. Dasen and Spath. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 77.

<sup>48</sup> Epictetus. *Discourses*. Translated by W.A. Oldfather. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. 2.10.7

<sup>49</sup> De Vogue, *Abbot and Community*, 1958; P. Claude, "The Abbot," in *The Rule of St Benedict 1980*, trans. T. Fry, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981), 353.

The abbatial office is, like all human institutions, culture conditioned. . . the analogy with profane institutions is not totally beside the point, for it is scarcely possible for people of any period to be uninfluenced in their perception of religious institutions by the pre-understanding they have gained from their environment.<sup>50</sup>

Claude's argument is grounded in his understanding that Benedict's abbot was primarily fashioned after the Israelite father of the Bible. It is true that the *paterfamilias* of Republican Rome was primarily a political office that lacked the affective responsibilities of biblical fathers, and fulfilled an integral social function in Roman society. However, the Roman definition of *pater* changed in late-Antiquity with the introduction of Christian virtues to Roman conceptions of family life. Augustine's proscriptions for the conduct of secular fathers in *The City of God* are undeniably congruent with the responsibilities of the spiritual father in the Benedictine communities:

It follows that as he advises his family to love God, he may also take pleasure in loving himself; and similarly his wife, his children, his slaves and other possible members. From here is born a peace within the home, namely an agreed accord of those living together in order and to obey. . . On this topic even if our just fathers had slaves, they regulated domestic peace as that they could distinguish family members from slaves by their condition, according to these temporal goods; and that they advise all members of their household to worship God with equal love, in whom eternal good is to be hoped for. . . He will be reproved by word, by blows or by whatever others just and appropriate punishment permitted by human society.<sup>51</sup>

Paternal power, according to Augustine, was not derived from one's authority over his household, but rather his responsibility to them. The *paterfamilias* must teach the love of God to his family, maintain order and obedience, promote egalitarianism, and deliver discipline when necessary.

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<sup>50</sup> P. Claude, "The Abbot," in *Rule of St Benedict 1980*, trans. T. Fry, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), 354.

<sup>51</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 19:14, trans. R.W. Dyson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 940; cited by P. Bewley, "Paternal Metaphor in the Rule of St Benedict: Its Origins in Biblical, Monastic, Ecclesiastic and Secular Traditions" (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009), 76.

The influence of Christianity shifted the definitions of *paterfamilias* and *familia* to emphasize affection and kinship rather than authority and ownership. By the seventh century, Isadore of Seville acknowledged that *familia* could be metaphorically applied to slaves, but this “was not its proper application, a *familia* is so called from its longstanding designation based on birth.”<sup>52</sup> The *paterfamilias* was so named because he “takes care of the slaves placed in his household.” However, he was to care for his slaves “just as a father directs his children, with paternal affection. . . and not distinguish in his affection the condition of the slaves from that of his children, but embraces them all as though they were a single unit.” The role of the *paterfamilias*, according to Isadore, was not to wield authority over those in his charge, but to care for them. Isadore added that, “those who lord it over their slaves in an unfair manner could never reckon themselves to be called *paterfamilias*.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, the role of the early medieval *paterfamilias*, though grounded in authority, entailed affective responsibilities not previously required.

It is a common trend for Benedictine scholars, such as De Vogue, Fry, Claude, and Kardong to deny that secular parenthood was any model for Benedict’s abbot. Their arguments are primarily concerned with the divergent responsibilities of the secular and spiritual fatherhood. Nonetheless, whether Benedict based his abbot on the Roman *paterfamilias* or the Israelite father, the Benedictine abbot was able to fulfil an equivalent emotional and affective role within his community. As mentioned earlier, the educational objectives of the monastic experience required complete dependence on the will of another and absolute psychological transparency. The teaching to which an abbot is obliged is the kind experienced within the family, rather than the kind a professional teacher gives a student. Its content is not speculative

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<sup>52</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, IX.V.13. trans. Stephen Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 207.

<sup>53</sup> Isidore, *Etymologies*, IX.V.7, 206.

knowledge, but a very practical knowledge on how to live. It is not formally presented, but communicated in an informal and subtle way through personal contact. The role of the disciple was not only to know, but be known. By exposing oneself day by day to the discerning gaze of a wise master, the new monk could hope to receive a truly personalized answer to his questions.<sup>54</sup> Such qualities as moral standards, politeness, respect for authority, sensitivity to others, honesty and reliability are instilled by good parents not by formal instruction, but through the countless personal encounters of everyday life. The familial atmosphere of the cloister was thus necessary to the pedagogical objectives of the monasticism; the relationship between a monk and his spiritual father became the platform from which a monk learned his profession.

As noted, the fatherhood of the Benedictine abbatial office was based upon the fatherhood of Christ; Christ is paternal because, through his sacrifice, humankind was saved from the realm of death and born unto God.<sup>55</sup> Much like a secular father was held responsible for his children's actions, Benedict stipulates that the abbot, "should always remember that he will be held accountable on Judgement Day for his teaching. . . any lack of good in his monks will be held his fault."<sup>56</sup> He was to promote egalitarianism and only show favoritism to those, "found more obedient or observant in faith."<sup>57</sup> Integral to monastic education and the maintenance of unity within the monastery, was the abbot's responsibility to punish wayward monks. Discipline within a monastery was to be vetted out at the abbot's discernment. Benedict had written that, "one must be corrected by friendliness, another by sharp rebuke, another by persuasion."<sup>58</sup> This instruction was grounded on the apostolic rule: "reprove, entreat, rebuke."<sup>59</sup> Whereas previous monastic legislators, such as Pachomius, had limited corporal punishment to instances of

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<sup>54</sup> Kardong, *The Benedictines*, 120.

<sup>55</sup> Claude, "The Abbot," 122

<sup>56</sup> Benedict, *Rule of St Benedict*, LIV, 48.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, II, 21.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, XLIV, 50.

<sup>59</sup> 1 Tim. 4:2

homosexuality or insurrection, Benedict instructed that the hard hearted and stubborn be, “punished with whips, even at the first sight of sin,” referring to Proverbs for justification.<sup>60</sup> Much like a secular father could disinherit a rebellious son, Peter Damian (d. 1072) noted that, “an abbot may do the same to a disobedient monk. For just as an actual father may disinherit a rebellious son, so may a spiritual father in a display of strict justice.”<sup>61</sup> However, Benedict tempered the disciplinary responsibilities of the abbot by instructing him to, “show the sternness of a master and the love of a father.”<sup>62</sup>

Benedict’s primary concern was harmony and unity among the brethren. In the first chapter of the *Rule* he condemns the monastic companions of the Eastern tradition, and labelled them, “Sarabites, the most detestable kind of monk,” because they were not tested by a rule and undermined more organized coenobitic monasticism.<sup>63</sup> In his second chapter, Benedict encourages egalitarianism and instructs the abbot to “avoid all favouritism in the monastery,” and, “not love one more than the other.”<sup>64</sup> However, he permitted the abbot to show favoritism if, “he finds someone better in good actions and obedience.”<sup>65</sup> This suggests Cassian’s influence because he also sanctioned virtue as an exception for individual adoration.<sup>66</sup> In a Benedictine monastery, rank was not based on age or secular social status. Benedict instructed that the brethren were to be ranked in accordance with, “the date of their entrance and the merit of their lives or order of the abbot.”<sup>67</sup> He also explicitly legislated that rank not be derived from age, “for Daniel and Samuel sat in judgement of the priests.”<sup>68</sup> In support monastic of egalitarianism,

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<sup>60</sup> Benedict, *Rule of St Benedict*, XLIV, 50; Prov. 29:19, “The fool is not corrected by words;” Prov. 23:14, “Strike your son with rod and you shall deliver his soul from death.”

<sup>61</sup> Peter Damian, *Letters 31-60*, trans. T. Halton, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), Letter 56, 185.

<sup>62</sup> Benedict, *Rule of St Benedict*, XLIV, 49.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, I, 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, II, 23.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, II, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. C. Luibheid, (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 387.

<sup>67</sup> Benedict, *Rule of St Benedict*, II, 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, II, 23.



Benedict invoked Paul, who said that, “there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:28) and, “God shows no partiality among persons” (Rom 2:11). He instructed the abbot to listen to the, “various opinions of the brothers,” before making a decision.<sup>69</sup> However, he reminded the brethren that, “individual desires have no place in the monastery, and neither inside nor outside the walls should anyone presume to argue with the abbot.”<sup>70</sup> Benedict diverged from other Western monastic commentators when he legislated against circumstances that could lead to homosexual activity. Whereas the desert fathers openly addressed homosexuality, it is absent from the literature produced by the Western fathers. Though Benedict did not address homosexuality directly, he instructed that young monks were not to sleep in the same part of the common dormitory, but should have their beds distributed among those of more senior rank. The monks were also to sleep singly in their beds and be dressed, and a candle was to be lit all night.<sup>71</sup> Although these instructions may have been precautions against homosexual temptation, McGuire argues that monks were to sleep in their clothing so they could be ready for matins, and the candle was lit to be a comfort to youths. But he does admit that the single beds were certainly intended to make it difficult for monks to have sexual contact with each other.<sup>72</sup>

Benedict’s ritual of admission to the monastic family demonstrates the responsibilities assumed upon entry into the community. The acceptance of an uncommitted monk could disturb the harmony that the brethren worked so tirelessly to maintain. To avoid this, those who wished to join a community were required to wait at the abbey gates for three days before they were allowed entry. If the suppliant persisted, he was granted entry to the monastic enclosure and

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, II, 25.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, II, 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, II, 22.

<sup>72</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, 83.

underwent a novitiate that tested his resolve. Upon official acceptance the novice came before the whole community “in the oratory and promised stability, fidelity, and obedience.”<sup>73</sup> This oath was ratified in a document, “drawn up in the name of the saints whose relics are there, and of the abbot, who is present.”<sup>74</sup> Most striking about the admission ritual is its similarity to the medieval wedding ceremony, according to the Latin rite. The thirteenth-century *Sarum Missal* relates how the spouses must pledge stability, “in health and sickness,” and renounce, “all others on account of him/her.”<sup>75</sup> These oaths were also ratified in a contract, signed before witnesses.<sup>76</sup> In place of a dowry, novices, especially those from wealthy families, were accompanied by a donation. Thus Benedict established that monastic relationships were lifelong associations, and, like marriage, indissoluble unions consecrated before God.

Basil’s instruction for rearing children in monastic communities provided a framework for western monastic legislators, and echoes of it are found throughout the *Regula Magistri* and the *Regula Benedicti*. The *Regula Magistri* describes the adoption of noble children into monasteries as a permanent arrangement, but it assumes that the child himself decided to enter, as opposed to an irrevocable donation by parents.<sup>77</sup> Benedict used the *Regula Magistri* as his primary source of inspiration and envisioned that a proportion of the community would be raised in the monastery from infancy. However, he placed the chapter on the provisions for the admission of children after the chapter that established that no one who had taken monastic vows could ever leave the monastery.<sup>78</sup> Whether Benedict intended to link these two ideas is unclear, but an ecclesiastical ruling on oblation was issued in 633 at the Council of Toledo. Though

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<sup>73</sup> Benedict, *Rule of St Benedict*, LVIII, 17-21.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, LVIII, 17-21.

<sup>75</sup> *The Sarum Missal*, trans. F.E. Warren, (London: De La More Press, 1911), 143-160.

<sup>76</sup> Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, 74.

<sup>77</sup> *Rule of the Master*, trans. E. Luke, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 91.

<sup>78</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, LIX, 91; J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 232; Clarke, *Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, 64.

irrevocable oblation remained the subject of debate throughout the Middle Ages, it was accepted throughout Europe that either parental desire or personal devotion could make a monk.<sup>79</sup>

The Benedictine ritual of donating a child to a monastery required the parents to sign an oath swearing that they would never, “give the boy anything or afford him the opportunity to possess anything.”<sup>80</sup> This act in effect disinherited him and transferred parental authority to the abbot. As with other aspects of Benedictine monasticism, the *Rule* balanced severity with compassion in the chapters dedicated to the rearing of oblates. For example, although children were required to eat standing, they were given more meat and fed more frequently than adult monks.<sup>81</sup> Benedict forbade that “age automatically determine rank” and provided the examples of Samuel and Daniel as support (1 Sam 3; Dan 13:44-62).<sup>82</sup> Commentaries on the *Rule* state that there were three masters for every ten boys and that once a week children were taken to a meadow to play.<sup>83</sup> However, children were subject to the discipline of the *Rule* and constant supervision by their masters. Benedict wrote that boys were,

To be disciplined in everything by everyone. . . in the oratory and at table, small boys are to be kept in rank and under discipline. Outside or anywhere else they should be supervised and controlled until they are old enough to be responsible.<sup>84</sup>

Benedict instructed that, since children were too young to understand the seriousness of excommunication, they should rather be punished with “severe fasts or checked with sharp strokes so they may be healed.”<sup>85</sup> In the chapter that addresses mistakes in the oratory, Benedict wrote that the brethren, “must make satisfaction there before all,” but children, “were to be whipped for such a fault.”<sup>86</sup> Benedict’s form of monastic education, with emphasis on correction

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<sup>79</sup> J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*, 10.631; cited/trans. Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 233.

<sup>80</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, LIX, 81.

<sup>81</sup> Boswell, *Kindness of Strangers*, 250.

<sup>82</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, LXIII, 85.

<sup>83</sup> Quinn, *Better Than the Sons of Kings*, 171-72.

<sup>84</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, LXIII, 85.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, XXX, 54.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, XLV, 67.

of faults and suppression of childish emotions, reveals the influence of Augustine's educational philosophy, Benedict's patrician background, and his familiarity with the traditions of late-antique Roman pedagogy.<sup>87</sup>

Though Benedict provided instruction for strict supervision and discipline, he also warned against unwarranted or over-zealous punishment. Punishment was to be delivered with "moderation and common sense."<sup>88</sup> If any brother treated boys unreasonably, he was "to be subjected to the discipline of the rule."<sup>89</sup> Benedict encouraged moderation when dealing with youths, and recalled Jesus' injunction to, "never do to another what you do not want done to yourself" (Matt 7:12).<sup>90</sup> It is clear that although the boys were to be brought up under strict discipline, he wanted this to be softened by familial affection. The junior monks were to respect their seniors and the seniors were to "love the juniors."<sup>91</sup>

Benedict not only instructed monastic communities to care for the young, but also the old and sick. In Chapter 37 he instructed monks to have compassion for both the old and young. Benedict assigned a monk to care for the sick and elderly in an infirmary attached to the monastery, but far away from the chapter house. Here the sick and elderly were kept warm and comfortable and received everything they required in the way of food and drink. Monks in the infirmary were exempt from the dietary restrictions of the *Rule* and were permitted to eat meat, fish, and any other nourishment that would aid their recovery. At St Augustine's, Canterbury, monks who received permission to go to the infirmary collected fat and wine from the cellarer and candles from the sacrist before going to the infirmary, where they stayed for at least eight

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<sup>87</sup> S. Ripon, "The New Math: How to Add and Subtract Pagan Elements in Christian Education," in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. Yun Lee Too. (Leiden : Brill. 2001), 405; <sup>87</sup> S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 14.

<sup>88</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, LXX, 93.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, LXX, 93.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, LXX, 93.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, LXIII, 85.

days.<sup>92</sup> The abbot would visit the sick each day to offer emotional support. Eadamer recounted how Anselm (d. 1109) would crush grapes for a brother whose affliction had left him paralyzed.<sup>93</sup> The monastery offered its weakest members a level of care unparalleled in secular society.

Older members of the community, no longer capable of cloistral life, were accommodated in the infirmary as well. They were known as *stagiarii*, old stagers, and were often extremely well provided for, receiving special meals and drink, and exempt from the *Rule*. The presence of elderly in the monastery provided oblates with the grandfathers they would likely not have had in the secular world. It was uncommon for children to know their grandparents because life expectancy was too short for many three generation families.<sup>94</sup> Though old age could bring with it neglect and malnourishment in secular households, monastic communities provided a comfortable and affectionate environment in which one could end his life. There was no question that an elderly peasant might enjoy voluntary retirement, but the poor man had to go on working until his strength failed him, after which it was the responsibility of his family to look after him. According to Geroges Minios, among the mass of poor people medieval society, the old were among the most wretched, and were regarded as a nuisance by society and their own children.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> J. Kerr, *Life in the medieval cloister*, (Cornwall: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 76.

<sup>93</sup> Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. R.W. Southern (London: Nelson Series, 1962), 22-3.

<sup>94</sup> J. Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization*, trans. J. Barrow, (New York: Blackwell, 1964), 288.

<sup>95</sup> G. Minois, *A History of Old Age*, trans. S. Tenison, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 139.

## Chapter 6: Affective Roles

This chapter will analyze the images and language used to describe affectivity in medieval monastic communities. Sources will be examined from the earliest monks to the thirteenth century, when spiritual and social change altered the internal and external nature of monasticism. Though this chapter examines fathers, brothers, and children, it is important to note that these divisions do not parallel those of the secular family. Family roles outside the monastery were well defined; each member fulfilled a specific task in relation to the rest of the family. The vertical relationships within the monastery are more reflective of those in secular society, whereas the horizontal relationships between brethren of equal rank are more difficult to compare to anything in the secular world.

The Abbot was the keystone of the medieval monastic family. Though the office was subject to a variety of conceptions and titles in the centuries between Antony and Benedict, the pedagogical relationship between an *abba* and his disciple remained integral to Christian monasticism. The father-son bond was of extreme importance in the late-antique and medieval world. The very public face of the father-son relationship and its significance for family identity is demonstrated by the dominant public perception of the son as the living image of his father. The imitation of the father by his son was central to the perpetuation of family traditions.<sup>1</sup> The image and concept of fatherhood was at the heart of the medieval notion of authority.

The father was not only a crucial social force in reality, but also served regularly to represent other forms of power in the medieval imagination. Most obviously the father image provided a way to understand God's relationship with humanity.<sup>2</sup> Fatherhood was also used to

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<sup>1</sup> M. MacDonald, *The Power of Children: Construction of Christian Families in the Greco Roman World*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 76.

<sup>2</sup> M. McLaughlin, "Spiritual and Secular Fatherhood in the Eleventh Century," in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities*, ed. J. Murray, (New York Routledge, 2011), 160.

reinforce temporal authorities such as kings, fathers of their kingdom, or spiritual authorities such as bishops, fathers of their diocese. According to William of Malmesbury, “if you do the works of anyone, you are called his sons.”<sup>3</sup> The metaphorical application of fatherhood was intended to express an individual’s authority over others. Monastic literature and legislation reinforces the authority of the superior of a monastery through the application of paternal language, notably *abbas*, Aramaic for “father.” The abbot was represented as the paternal head of his monastic family, however, unlike kings or bishops, whose paternal role was limited to the authority they exerted over their subjects, the duties of the abbot brought him into an intense, emotional relationship with those under his supervision.

The relationship between an abbot and his disciples was fundamentally pedagogical. As a man of experience, an abbot was, ideally, a monk who had fully realized himself in the calling of the monastic life, and who could serve as model for others. Through contact with him, and by the effect of his personal influence, disciples would learn the skills required to become a monk. However, ascetic perfection was not enough to create an *abba*; he also needed to be filled with the spirit, endowed with discernment, and have the gift of oratory, all of which would be adapted to the spiritual needs of each individual. What the abbot had to impart to a disciple was no academic discipline, but a way of life. An art only can be taught through demonstration, therefore, the example of the *abba* was his principle means of instruction, and imitation was, for the disciple, the chief means of learning.<sup>4</sup> Though an *abba*’s position allowed him to fulfil many of the same affective roles as a secular father, his paternity was not of this world, but of the next. The nature of the abbot’s spiritual fatherhood was firmly grounded in precedents laid out in both Hebrew and Christian Scripture.

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<sup>3</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Vita Sancti Wulfstani*, trans. R. R. Darlington. (London: Offices of the Society, 1928), 56.

<sup>4</sup> C. Peifer, “The Abbot,” in *Rule of St Benedict 1980* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 4.

Though the abbot was the primary spiritual father of the monastic community, coenobitism brought with it the need for a structured hierarchy of subordinates to administer the growing population of monastic communities. The spiritual fatherhood of the *abba* was extended to a greater number of disciples. Pachomius appointed a superior for each individual monastery under his supervision, known as the *oikonomos* (steward). Pachomian monasteries were divided into houses headed by an *oikiakos* (house master) that was the supervisor and spiritual teacher of each individual monk in his charge, their spiritual father.<sup>5</sup> Benedict used Pachomius' template and allotted that there be a prior below the abbot, a cellarer to purchase supplies and feed the community, a porter to control the gate, and a guest master to offer hospitality. In the High Middle Ages the great monasteries might have a vast number of other offices including physicians, librarians, gardeners, and agricultural supervisors. Each of these positions would have had numerous subordinates in their charge, extending the possibilities of spiritual fatherhood well beyond the abbatial office.

To be a spiritual father signified a special position in the monastic hierarchy. This position brought with it much moral responsibility. Monastic literature of the early Middle Ages was silent on the possibility of sexual temptation that might arise in paternal relationships. It was not until the Gregorian reforms that homosexuality was addressed within the cloister. In 1050 Peter Damian authored the *Book of Gomorrah* and condemned, in the harshest language, "spiritual fathers who are defiled along with their children." According to Damian,

Who would still remain under the rule of one who, he knew, was separated from God as an enemy? Whoever makes a mistress out of a penitent whom he had spiritually borne as a child for God subjects the servant to the iron rule of diabolical tyranny through the impurity of his flesh.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> P. Bewley, "Paternal Metaphor in the Rule of St Benedict: Its Origins in Biblical, Monastic, Ecclesiastic and Secular Traditions" (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009), 43.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Damian, *Book of Gomorrah*, trans. P.J. Payer. (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1982), 41.



Such an act was reprehensible because it shattered the pedagogical and spiritual responsibilities set forth by Benedict.

Though abuse was possible, the monastic father was frequently able to fulfil the same emotional role as the biological father, and sources from the beginning of monasticism to the High Middle Ages are replete with examples of love between spiritual fathers and their sons. When, after a long journey away from their spiritual father, Abba Abraham asked Abba Isaac why he was weeping, Isaac responded,

Why should we not weep, for where have we to go? Our fathers have died; manual work is not enough to pay the fare which we need to go and visit the old men, and so we are orphans. That is why I weep.<sup>7</sup>

The emotional bond that could develop between a master and his disciple was the product of prolonged interaction and spiritual growth on the part of both parties. Disciples could also love their masters for giving them the gift of faith, as Augustine recorded in his *Confessions*, that, “Ambrose truly loved him [Simplicius] like a father, for it was through him that he had received your [God’s] grace.”<sup>8</sup> Adomnan, writing in the seventh century, reported that, when the monk Finten had to relay the news of Abbot Columba’s death to monks at a neighboring monastery, he did so with “many tears and very sorrowfully,” and, “all those present wept bitterly.”<sup>9</sup> Bede ranked spiritual fatherhood above earthly fatherhood, noting that Abbot Benedict of Wearmouth “refused to bring forth children in the flesh, being predestined by Christ to raise up for Him sons nurtured in spiritual doctrine who would live forever in the world to come.”<sup>10</sup> In the tenth century, John of Salerno, confined to the infirmary by sickness, recounted how his brothers came to visit and,

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<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. B. Ward, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 159.

<sup>9</sup> Adomnan, *Life of Saint Columba*, trans. A.O. Anderson, (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1961), 1.2. 209

<sup>10</sup> Bede, *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, 186.

Recalled to my mind the holy and venerable and excellent memory of our most holy father Odo, knowing that before all things it was pleasing and sweet to me, either to narrate something about him to others, or to gather something of use to myself.<sup>11</sup>

During these visits John's brothers, "urged me, if I loved him, as I professed, that without any more delay in words I should write down this goodly inheritance for the benefit of posterity."<sup>12</sup>

John's adoration of Odo stemmed from the abbot's role in John's conversion. John wrote that, "I was involved in worldly interests. . . in his pity he caught me in his net and led me to the monastery of St Peter at Pavia."<sup>13</sup> Thus, whereas the biological father begot sons in the flesh, the spiritual father was responsible for the rebirth of the soul.

It was not only paternal imagery that was used to communicate the affective role of the spiritual father; monastic writers frequently used maternal imagery as well to describe the bond between an abbot and his children. This was based on Biblical images of God as both father and mother that aligned with pervasive motifs of fertility and kinship. The father represented protection and authority; the mother represented nourishment, compassion, or life source.<sup>14</sup> John of Salerno described that, in his last days, Odo desired to travel to Tours to visit the tomb of St. Martin, "from whom he had, so to speak, imbibed a warm and lasting love with his mother's milk."<sup>15</sup> Cistercian authors in the twelfth century use maternal imagery to describe authority figures. Thus, they refer to Biblical figures such as Jesus, apostles, and Old Testament prophets, as well as prelates - that is, abbots and bishops, as mothers. References to mothering in Cistercian writing occur as a way of describing a figure that teaches or exercises authority.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John of Salerno, *Life of St Odo of Cluny*, trans. G. Sitwell. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah J. Dille. *Mixing Metaphors : God As Mother and Father*. (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 173.

<sup>15</sup> John of Salisbury, *Life of St Odo*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> C. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 146-150.

Bernard of Clairveaux (d. 1153) identified himself as a mother to his cousin: “I begot you in religion by word and by example. I nourished you with milk when, while yet a child, it was all you could take.”<sup>17</sup> The relationships between superiors and their disciples in the monastic community necessitated an affectivity that could not be adequately expressed through paternal metaphor alone. Therefore, the role of the spiritual father was more complex than that of the secular father, as it combined paternal authority with maternal love and spiritual nourishment.

It was also possible that a spiritual father might fulfil the longing for fatherhood not experienced in the secular world. Peter Damian was orphaned at a young age and left in the care of his brother and his wife, who treated him abusively. This left Peter searching for a father figure, eventually finding one in the hermit Romauld, who taught Peter the rigours of eremitic monasticism.<sup>18</sup> Megan McLaughlin argues that although monks were excluded from the powerful and emotionally resonant masculine role of biological fatherhood, they were able to construct an identity for themselves as spiritual fathers, who begot and raised children in the faith.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the abbot held the authority and responsibilities of a father, but begot spiritual children and provided the nourishment of a mother. The abbot’s primary responsibility was to represent the sovereignty of Christ in the community, through his authority and his example. He ensured the monks well-being, both spiritually and physically. His pedagogical responsibilities brought him into close contact with his sons, and it was not uncommon for close emotional bonds to form between an *abba* and his disciple.

The emotional bonds formed between coeval brethren of the monastery are not directly reflective of any single affective role in the medieval secular family. Monastic authors articulate

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<sup>17</sup> Bernard of Clairveaux, *Letters of Bernard of Clairveaux*, trans. Bruno James. (Chicago: Henry Regnary, 1953), Letter 1, 7.

<sup>18</sup> McLaughlin, “Spiritual Fatherhood in Eleventh Century,” 26.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

the bonds between brethren in both fraternal and romantic language. Early monasticism, with its focus on communal relationships, generally used fraternal language to describe monk's relations with each other. Monastic authors after the twelfth century, when individual friendships become a focus of spiritual growth, utilize a very romantic and sometimes erotic language to express the love they held for fellow monks. Therefore, the affective bonds between monks of equal status has to be understood somewhere between fraternal and spousal emotional intimacy.

The early medieval conception of brotherhood and fraternity was defined by Isidore, Archbishop of Seville (d. 636), in his *Etymology*, an encyclopedia of knowledge from classical antiquity that would otherwise have been lost. Isidore wrote that, "brothers (*frater*) are so called because they are of the same fruit (*fructus*), that is, born of the same seed."<sup>20</sup> In concord with Paul's metaphorical use of brotherhood, Isidore identifies four types of brotherhood, the last of which is metaphorical. Metaphorical brotherhood could be spiritual and general. Spiritual brotherhood represents the affinity, "by which all of us Christians are called brothers." General brotherhood is the kinship of all humanity because, "all humans are born of one father."<sup>21</sup> Though Isidore did not provide a definition for friendship (*amicitia*), he defined those suffering from depression (*melancholicus*) as, "people. . . who flee from human intercourse and are suspicious of friends."<sup>22</sup> This definition aligns with Augustine who also favoured the company of friends over solitude.

The letters exchanged between Isidore and Bishop Braulio between 610 and 633, exemplify the affection present in spiritual brotherhood. Both men began their letters with

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<sup>20</sup>Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. Stephen Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), IX.VI, 207.

<sup>21</sup> Isidore, *Etymology*, IX.VI.10, 207

<sup>22</sup> Isidore, *Etymology*, X.M.176, 226.

statements of friendship. Isidore, Braulio's spiritual father, instructed Braulio, whom he called his "dearest son," to,

Not hesitate to embrace it as you would a friend. Indeed, this is the next best consolation for those who are absent from each other, that if someone who is dear to you is not present, his letters may be embraced in his stead.<sup>23</sup>

Both Isidore and Braulio lamented their physical separation and, as Braulio confessed: "Indeed I am tortured, Christ knows, by severe distress that so much time has passed and I am still not counted worthy of seeing you."<sup>24</sup> Though these expressions of affection may be mere rhetoric, evidence of Isidore's and Braulio's intimacy is evident in Braulio's letter, written in 632 or 633, in which he rebukes Isidore for not sending him a copy of the *Etymology*. Braulio chastised Isidore for his various excuses and reminded him that the knowledge contained in the *Etymology* was not for Isidore to keep to himself, but to share.<sup>25</sup> Isidore responded to Braulio's rebuke with an apology and the "manuscript of the Etymologies."<sup>26</sup> He then asked that Braulio, "become an intercessor with the Lord for my sins, so that my transgressions may be obliterated at your successful entreaty, and my misdeeds forgiven."<sup>27</sup> Braulio's comfortableness with his rebuke of his spiritual father and friend suggests that their friendship was indeed real, and the compliments and affection in the letters conveys their relationship.

Unfortunately there is a gap in evidence for the period between the eighth and mid tenth centuries, when mainland Europe was harried with invasion and internal warfare. However, there is an abundance of literature extant from the Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks of the British Isles. Because Celtic monasticism had been cut off from Rome it retained older practices, such as an alternate tonsure and a different mode of calculation of Easter. The tenets of Celtic monasticism,

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<sup>23</sup> "Correspondence of Isidore and Braulio," in *Etymologies*, trans. Stephen Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Letter 409, 610-620.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 409, 625

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 410

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, V.413.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, V.413.

as found in the *Rule of St Columbanus*, in fact paralleled those found in Western Europe.

Adomnan (d. 704), Abbot of Iona, authored a *vita* detailing the life of Columba (d. 597), the Irish missionary credited with the introduction of Christianity to Scotland and founder of the See of Iona. Though Celtic hagiography was primarily concerned with miracles and prophesy, it offers a rare, often peculiar, glimpse into the fraternity of the Celtic monastery. According to Adomnan, Columba sent two monks to Caitlin, “a prior in the monastery of Diun,” with a message instructing Caitlin to travel to Iona, “without delay.”<sup>28</sup> When Caitlin arrived Columba informed him that,

As one that loves his friend, I have sent to invite you, so that here with me in true obedience you may end the course of your life; for before the end of this week you will pass to the Lord in peace.<sup>29</sup>

This passage is indeed strange. The intimate nature Columba’s friendship with Caitlin is suggested by Columba’s wish to be at his friend’s side when he dies. It is also possible that Columba wished to be with Caitlin in order to bury him, a particularly familial responsibility of the monastic bond.<sup>30</sup> Yet it would seem more compassionate had Columba travelled to his friend, rather than summoning him. This story is concurrently a testament to monastic love and a lesson on the necessity of obedience unto death.

The Venerable Bede (d. 735) placed more emphasis on love and friendship than the stoic monks of Northern Scotland. In the *Life of Cuthbert*, Bede wrote that, “a soul lacking in love of God or man is easily caught in the devil’s nets.”<sup>31</sup> He recorded that a hermit, Hereberht, was, “bound to Cuthbert in spiritual friendship.”<sup>32</sup> Bede was the first monastic writer since Paulinus of

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<sup>28</sup> Adomnan, *Life of Columba*, I.33, 269.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 269.

<sup>30</sup> D. Krueger, "Between Monks: Tales of Monastic Companionship in Early Byzantium," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (2011): 36.

<sup>31</sup> Bede, *Life of Cuthbert*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

Nola (d. 431) to use the term *spiritalis amicitia* to describe the bond between monks.<sup>33</sup> While visiting Hereberht, Cuthbert prophesized that, “this is the last time we shall see each other with the eyes of the flesh. . . my time of departure is nigh.”<sup>34</sup> Hereberht’s reaction to this news is sorrowful, as he implores Cuthbert not to leave him and asks God to, “Grant that, as we have served him together on earth, so we may journey forth together to see His glory in heaven.”<sup>35</sup> Their prayer was answered and, “their souls left their bodies at one and the same moment and were soon carried to the celestial kingdom to be united with each other.” This story reflects the belief that true Christian friendship is eternal.<sup>36</sup> In *The Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, Bede focuses more on the communal nature of monastic friendship. In describing the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Bede noted that the two houses were, “bound together by the one spirit of peace and harmony and united by continuous friendship and goodwill. . . neither was anyone to attempt to disturb the brotherly love that would unite these two houses.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the same themes that pervade patristic and Gregorian monastic literature, namely spiritual friendship and communal friendship, survived in the writings of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monks during the centuries of monastic literary silence on mainland Europe.

The monasteries of Western Europe managed to preserve classical Latin learning through the turmoil of the Carolingian era, and from the tenth century onwards there was a fresh flowering of monastic and ecclesiastic friendship literature in letters, poems, and prayers.<sup>38</sup> According to McGuire, the literature of monastic friendship increased significantly in the last half of the eleventh and the first decades of the twelfth century as the revival of learning and a renewed need for scholars increased. Monastic brotherhood in this era was characterized as a

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<sup>33</sup> L. Carmichael, *Friendship: interpreting Christian love*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 71.

<sup>34</sup> Bede, *Cuthbert*, 28. Webb, 80.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Bede, *The Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, trans. Webb, 191.

<sup>38</sup> Carmichael, *Friendship*, 70.

natural manifestation of the ideals and pursuits that students and teachers shared.<sup>39</sup> Monastic writers looked to Augustine and Ambrose for inspiration, not Pachomius and Basil. Antony was admired as the father of monasticism, and the monks of the West vied to fight demons as he had done, but they did so in community, surrounded by a spiritual family to help them on their way to heaven. For writers such as Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1165), virtuous relationships were as integral to ascetic perfection as poverty, obedience, and chastity. The large monastic network of the High Middle Ages allowed for letters to be sent more frequently, across greater distances. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries monastic letters became increasingly personal and self-revelatory.<sup>40</sup> For example, Peter Damian summarized his illness to a hermit at Aripont because, “in the closest friendship we are like brothers from the same womb.”<sup>41</sup> Such correspondence provides a point of entry to examine the affection, intimacy, and self-disclosure essential to monastic fraternity.

Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) appears to have inspired and promoted new ways to articulate friendship in the eleventh century. Anselm and his followers simulated to a veritable revolution in the expression of human sentiment. Cicero’s thoughts on friendship were highly influential in the Middle Ages, and it is probable that Anselm was familiar with the *De amicitia*. If Anselm did not have direct access to Cicero, he was certainly exposed to Cicero’s philosophy through Cassian’s *Conferences*, copies of which were kept in the library at Bec.<sup>42</sup> For Anselm, the love experienced in emotional bonds was a mystical experience; it produced an interior presence of the friends to each other, and a certainty of love and mutual possession.<sup>43</sup> Anselm was most concerned to encourage the communal friendship that granted membership in the

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<sup>39</sup> McGuire, 195

<sup>40</sup> Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*, (Turnhout, 1976) 33.

<sup>41</sup> McGuire, 206.

<sup>42</sup> C. Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a lost Senility*. (Philadelphia, 1999) 32

<sup>43</sup> A. Fiske, *Friends and Friendship in the Monastic Tradition*. (Mexico City: Centro intercultural de documentacion, 1970), 45.



monastic family, but he also believed that virtue gave some friends a special worth. Anselm refers to his friend Gundulf as a second self.

For anyone who knows Gundulf and Anselm well will not miss what is implied or how much affection is conveyed when he reads ‘to Gundulf from Anselm.’ I think I should leave it to you, who are my other self, to understand it as you will and turn my pen to finishing this letter.<sup>44</sup>

Anselm’s reference to the shared heart and soul comes from Acts 4.32. Spiritual friendship did not require corporeal proximity because the relationship was held together by the love between the souls of the friends. Anselm explained how emotional bonds of this calibre transcended geographic proximity: “Wherever you go my love follows you, and wherever I remain my desire embraces you.”<sup>45</sup> Monastic friendship existed in spirit, but was experienced in the temporal world:

Your soul and my soul can never bear to be absent from each other but are incessantly entwined together, nothing of ourselves is lacking to the other except that we are not present to one another physically.<sup>46</sup>

Anselm’s language conveys intimacy, and is almost erotic, but medieval writers, in seeking to explain spiritual friendship, used a familiar vocabulary to articulate something that they could not see but only feel. This concept comes from biblical passages, such as the *Song of Songs* in which Solomon used love between humans as a symbol of the tie between God and his flock.<sup>47</sup>

Anselm’s letters are testament to the renewed and deepened monastic interest in individual relationships within the monastic community. Whereas fraternity connotes communal friendships, the language used by Anselm to describe his friends is more akin to that used between lovers than brothers. Such passionate vocabulary had not been used to describe

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<sup>44</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, Ep 7. *The Letters of St Anselm of Canterbury*, 3 vols. Trans Walter Frolich (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990)

<sup>45</sup> Anselm, Ep. 1.4., cited in Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 218.

<sup>46</sup> Anselm, Ep. 41, cited in McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, 353.

<sup>47</sup> Leclercq, Jean. *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 34-35

Christian celibate relationships since Augustine.<sup>48</sup> Because of his prestige and the number of persons touched by his affection, Anselm's version of monastic love was very influential. This love was not detached from spirituality; it was a central component.<sup>49</sup>

The emphasis on friendship and love in the monastic circles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries was a departure from the impersonal monasticism that emerged in the Carolingian centuries. New orders, such as the Cistercians, demonstrated an acute understanding of inter-cloistral relationships and their role in monastic life. These changes were caused by what McNamara identified as the eleventh and twelfth-century crisis of masculinity, precipitated by the struggle between celibate and married men for leadership in the Christian world.<sup>50</sup> Monks rejected the secular definitions of masculinity so tied to sexual prowess and praised abstinence as a prime spiritual virtue. According to Swanson, contemporaries commented that married priests spurned the opportunity to become angels. The link with angels marks a hierarchal progression that created an almost genderless status for monks.<sup>51</sup> This transition in monastic gender was intertwined with two far reaching trends in medieval religion: the rise of affective piety and the feminization of spirituality.<sup>52</sup> This is also reflected in changing images Christ, as the cross of victory became the cross of humiliation.<sup>53</sup> This period also witnessed the beginning of the decline of oblation, meaning that new recruits to the monastic life would have had to reject the masculinity of lay society in order to achieve monastic perfection.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, 354.

<sup>49</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 219.

<sup>50</sup> J. McNamara, "The *Harrenfrage*: the restructuring of the gender system, 1050-1150," in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. C.A. Lees, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>51</sup> R.N Swanson, "Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reforms to Reformation," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M Hadley. (London: Longman, 1999), 162.

<sup>52</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 146-147.

<sup>53</sup> Swanson, "Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reforms to Reformation," 162-63.

<sup>54</sup> Defined by the threefold activities of "impregnating women, protecting dependants, and providing for one's family;" V.L. Bullough, "On being male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. C.A. Lees. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 34.

Cistercian authors such as Bernard of Clairveaux, William of St Thierry, Aelred of Rievaulx, Guerric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, Adam of Persigne, and Stephen of Salley frequently referred to love and exhibited an awareness of the relationships among equals as well as between abbots and monks, seniors and juniors.<sup>55</sup> Leclercq notes that, in the nebulous of the Cistercian order, north-central France, the language of chivalry and the court, and the love literature that flowed from them would be familiar to all literate men, especially those of an aristocratic background.<sup>56</sup> According to Murray, many twelfth-century churchmen, such as Bernard of Clairveaux, came from the ranks of the military aristocracy, and carried with them the fraternal and romantic values and the language of the warrior-class.<sup>57</sup> The Cistercians viewed interpersonal relationships as an incentive to compassion and a context in which to learn humility. In a Cistercian community, love was an opportunity for personal emotional expansion, as affective rather than effective charity. Monks were not to edify each other, but close contact with other monks allowed them to correct by example.<sup>58</sup> The language of the *Song of Songs* became the normal language of divine love among Cistercian writers.<sup>59</sup>

Though “spiritual friendship” had been used to express the relationships between religious figures, in the twelfth-century the term became the most frequent articulation of the love and affection felt between monks. No medieval monastic writer devoted himself so wholly to the study of spiritual friendship more than Aelred of Rievaulx. Born near Hadrian’s Wall in 1100 to a married priest, Aelred entered the court of King David I of Scotland at age fourteen. In 1134, while visiting York at the behest of King David, he encountered a group of Cistercians

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<sup>55</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 77-79.

<sup>56</sup> J. Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 99.

<sup>57</sup> J. Murray, “Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity, and Monastic Identity,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, eds. P.M. Cullum and K.J. Lewis, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 27-28.

<sup>58</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 78.

<sup>59</sup> Carmichael, *Friendship*, 70.

sent by Bernard of Clairveaux to found a monastery at Rievaulx.<sup>60</sup> Aelred's formation as a novice took him through the Cistercian practise of meditation on five books from the Hebrew Scripture: "Ecclesiastes to teach the vanity of worldly pleasures and ambitions, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to teach self-knowledge and the practice of virtue, Wisdom and the Song of Songs to lead the proficient towards a life of contemplation."<sup>61</sup> The rigours of Cistercian education allowed Aelred to draw on biblical, patristic, and classical literature when making his exploration of spiritual friendship. Through *Spiritual Friendship* Aelred provided the systematic treatise on Christian friendship that patristic writers had failed to provide. Aelred used Cicero to define friendship as "mutual harmony in affairs human and divine, coupled with benevolence and charity."<sup>62</sup> However, he found this definition lacking because "true friendship cannot exist among those who live without Christ."<sup>63</sup> A friend, then, is one who is a guardian of the soul, and friendship is "that virtue by which spirits are bound by ties of love and sweetness, and out of many are made one."<sup>64</sup> He defined monastic friendship as different from the other types of friendship: carnal and worldly. Carnal friendship is derived from pursuit of vice, worldly friendship desires possessions and temporal advantages.<sup>65</sup> Conversely, spiritual friendship is desired "not for any worldly advantage or extrinsic cause, but from the dignity of its own nature and the feelings of the human heart."<sup>66</sup> For Aelred, a life without friendship was, "to take the sun out of the world" because, "we have nothing better from God, nothing more pleasant. Aelred believed that Christian life on earth should be afforded an experience of eternal union, not only

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<sup>60</sup> Sommerfedt, John. *Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness*. (New York: Newman Press, 2005) 1-3.

<sup>61</sup> D. Knowles, *Christian Monasticism*, (Toronto: Mcgraw Hill Book Company, 1969), 223.

<sup>62</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Mary Laker. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 1.8-11, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.16, 54.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, I.21, 55.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, I.39-44, 59-60.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, I.45-46, 60-61.

with God through prayer, but with another human being through friendship.<sup>67</sup> The centrality of human relations to Aelred's interpretation of monasticism may have produced some unique practices at Rievaulx, such as the annual "colloquies," gatherings for general conversation that were taking place there in his time though there is no provision made for them by the *Rule*.<sup>68</sup>

Though *Spiritual Friendship* expounded Aelred's philosophy on monastic friendship, the *Mirror of Charity* reveals more about Aelred's personal relationship with his friends. Aelred pauses in his discussion of the concupiscence of the flesh, eyes, and pride of life because:

Grief prevents me from going further. The recent death of my dear Simon forcibly drives me instead to weep for him... who would not be astonished that Aelred goes on living without Simon, except someone who does not know how sweet it was to live together. . . do not forbid these tears which your memory evokes, my beloved brother, do not let my sighing burden you, for it is prompted not by despair but by attachment... o wretched life, o grievous life, a life without Simon. The patriarch Jacob wept for his son; Joseph wept for his father; Holy David wept for his dearest Jonathan. Simon, alone, was all these to me: a son in age, a father in holiness, a friend in charity.. . Weep then dear fellow, weep for your most loving son, your most gentle friend, your dearest father.<sup>69</sup>

The death of a friend provided occasion for this literary display of monastic affection. Aelred suggests that he and Simon possessed a relationship that surpassed the communal friendship of the brethren. This demonstrates the often flexible nature of monastic brotherhood and how one single relationship could mirror several secular examples, just as Simon was a son, father, and friend. Though Aelred had individual loves, he also emphasized unity and egalitarianism at Rievaulx:

There is among the brothers such great unity, such great harmony, that what each has is considered as belonging to everyone. . . what pleases me in a marvelous way is that there is no partiality and no favoritism because of birth.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Carmichael, *Friendship*, 96.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>69</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Mirror of Charity*, trans. E. Connor, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 147.

<sup>70</sup> Aelred, *Mirror of Charity*, 194.

This is an obvious allusion to Acts 4.32, and indicative of Aelred's desire to fulfill the apostolic ideal. *Spiritual Friendship* was written at the behest of Bernard of Clairveaux in order to counter the accusations that the Cistercian order's austerity made them cold and unfriendly. In the more personal *Mirror of Charity*, Aelred provided his evaluation of friendship:

It is no mean consolation in this life to have someone with whom you can be united by an intimate attachment and embrace of very holy love, to have someone in whom your spirit may rest, to whom you can pour out your soul. . . someone who will weep with you in anxiety, rejoice with you in prosperity, seek with you in doubts, someone you can let into the secret chamber of your mind by the bonds of love, so that even when absent in body he is present in spirit.<sup>71</sup>

Aelred demonstrates that monks possessed an understanding of the psychological importance of human relationships unparalleled in secular society. Emotional bonds made the trials of the ascetic life bearable. A brother's "gracious conversation," offered a, "refuge amid sadness." In the Middle Ages, conversation (*conversatio*) did not mean dialogue, it was, rather, a state of being and a religious obligation. To converse with a brother was to commune with God, because conversation between friends transformed the soul.<sup>72</sup> Though monastic writers in the eleventh and twelfth century certainly expressed an ideal more than a reality, the existence of such an ideal demonstrates that monastic communities were at least a source of spiritual, or in a more modern sense, emotional, support. In the *Steps of Humility*, Bernard wrote that the spiritual person should, "seek truth. . . in our neighbours" because through seeking truth in one's neighbor, one is able to, "sympathize with their ills" allowing the soul to be "purified by brotherly love" and, "bear others ills for the love of it."<sup>73</sup> Affection was thus the glue that held the congregation together in unity.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>72</sup> C. Furey, "The Communication of Friendship: Gasparo Contarini's Letters to Hermits at Camaldoli," *Church History* 72.1 (2003), 71-95.

<sup>73</sup> Bernard of Clairveaux, *Steps of Humility*, 3:20, ed. E.G. Rosemary, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 110.

Members of the monastic family functioned as brothers and were responsible for the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of every member of the community. In the western tradition, biological brotherhood comprised responsibilities beyond those of mere friendship; monks were responsible for the very souls of their brothers. The responsibility and unique affection entailed in spiritual brotherhood was articulated in both fraternal and romantic language, demonstrating that the bonds between brothers were fluid and not reflective any single role found in the secular family.

Though scholars have debated whether oblation was a positive or negative childhood experience, this debate will not enter my analysis of the monastic family. Like the biological family, the spiritual family was capable of both love and abuse. The uniformity of western monasticism, especially from the tenth century onwards, provided a standardized set of guidelines on how to raise and educate children in a monastery. Though circumstances surely differed from one abbey to the next, the cloister certainly included guarantees of safety, education, and affection that secular households could not provide. In addition, the monastic educational curriculum, with its awareness of the nature and stages of childhood, demonstrates that monks possessed an acute understanding of child psychology.<sup>74</sup>

Ariès and Le Goff have asserted that the utilitarian nature of life in the early Middle Ages afforded no pity or compassion towards children in secular households.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, De Jong argued that, between the sixth and eighth centuries, monasteries rediscovered the nature of the

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<sup>74</sup> S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 193-4; Isabelle Cochelin, "Adolescence Uncloistered: Cluny, Early Twelfth Century," in *Medieval Life Cycles, Continuity and Change*, ed. I. Cochelin and K. Smyth. (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2013), 148: Cochelin asserts that monks were well aware of the stages of childhood and the mental and physical changes associated with these stages.

<sup>75</sup> Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life*. Trans. Robert Baldick. New York: Knopf, 1962), 42-3; J. Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization*, trans. Julia Barrow, (New York: Blackwell, 1964), 288.

child and all of its richness.<sup>76</sup> In a time when childhood was often perceived negatively, monastic writers frequently provide positive evaluations of children. The sixth-century Irish abbot, Columban of Bangor, noted that in some respects a boy could be a superior monk to an adult because, “he does not persist in anger, he does not bear a grudge, he takes no delight in the beauty of women, and he expresses what he truly believes.”<sup>77</sup> The awareness of childhood and children in monastic writing confirms that medievals certainly understood the physical and emotional nature of childhood.

During certain periods of the Middle Ages, monasteries were the only stable institutions in a society rocked by instability.<sup>78</sup> Monasteries conserved crafts and artistic skills in their workshops, and intellectual culture in their libraries and scriptoria, in times when secular powers were struggling for survival.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the aim of adoption into the community was not to ensure the oblate enjoyed his childhood, but rather to raise a good monk who would preserve monastic traditions. Nowhere else in society did education place such great pressure on the child to suppress his drives, and no other social group required such uniformity of conduct in order to survive.<sup>80</sup> The majority of their education prepared oblates to take part in the liturgy. Children performed a range of musical roles in monastic worship, both choral and solo chants, intoning psalms, antiphons, and hymns. On some feast days, a child soloist performed special chants. The daily monastic routine was divided according to the five monastic offices. The hours varied according

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<sup>76</sup> M. De Jong, “Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery: Magister Hildemar and his Oblates,” *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983): 101.

<sup>77</sup> A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland* II, i (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1873). 119-121.

<sup>78</sup> Hayward, Colin. *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 21.

<sup>79</sup> Jacques Le Goff. *Medieval Civilization*. Translated by Julia Barrow. (New York: Blackwell, 1964), 120.

<sup>80</sup> Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, 194.



to the season, but the first prayer was recited at approximately two in the morning, and the last at 8:00 in the evening.<sup>81</sup>

The proportion of monks to oblates surely varied from community to community. Angelbert (d. 814), Abbot of Saint-Riquier, wrote in his *Institutions* at the beginning of the ninth century, that the founder of his abbey had provided room for 300 monks and 100 children.<sup>82</sup> Oblates constituted a separate group within the monastery, with separate statutes to govern them, their own masters, school, and chapter house. Yet they were also integrated into communal prayer and singing the liturgy. The children were under the perpetual supervision of the master, who woke them in the morning and supervised them until they went to bed. John of Salerno described how Odo of Cluny, while he was master of oblates, was required to wake up and go to the latrine with the boys.<sup>83</sup> The master of oblates acted as disciplinarian, caretaker, and spiritual advisor to the boys in his charge.

Magister Hildemar (d. 685), a monk at Corbie Abbey, was tasked with the reform of north Italian monastic life in the ninth century, and wrote a commentary on the *Rule* that placed great emphasis on the rearing of oblates. According to Hildemar, from the moment of the donation, children were to be viewed as full members of the community. This had important consequences in both the care and education provided.<sup>84</sup> He allowed several concessions for oblates, and recognized that the full monastic observance was not practical for children. He recommended that oblates be allowed to eat meat, milk, fish, and butter, and be allowed to nap in seasons when the length of time between matins and lauds was extremely long.<sup>85</sup> He recommended that oblates be permitted to play for one hour, once a week, or once a month, at

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<sup>81</sup> J. Kerr, *Life in the medieval cloister*, (Cornwall: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 37.

<sup>82</sup> Doran, John. "Oblation or Obligation? A Canonical Ambiguity," in *The Church and Childhood*. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 129.

<sup>83</sup> John of Salerno, *Life of St Odo of Cluny*, trans. G. Sitwell. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 34.

<sup>84</sup> De Jong, "Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery," 103.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 103-4.

the discretion of their master.<sup>86</sup> However, these concessions ended when children were sixteen years old, recognized as the beginning of adolescence.<sup>87</sup>

Though Benedict instructed that oblates receive corporeal punishment for disobedience, the manner and extent of these punishments was left to the discernment of the abbot of each individual community. The remarks of Anselm of Canterbury to an abbot that savagely beat children in his monastery, indicate that some abbots took full advantage of the disciplinary privileges granted them by the *Rule*. Yet, it is evident that when Anselm was Abbot of Bec, not only were children hardly ever beaten, but they also enjoyed Anselm's attention, encouragement, and affection.<sup>88</sup> Hugh of Lincoln (d. 1200), who entered the priory of Villarbenoit alongside his father at age eight, was evidently beaten by his master. According to his biographer, Adam of Eynsham, "the rod of the master afflicted his childish frame, and the fetters of discipline restrained his boyish inclinations."<sup>89</sup> Like Guibert of Nogent, Hugh left monastic life only to return as an adult to the Carthusian monastery of Grande-Chartreuse.<sup>90</sup> The punishment inflicted upon these young bodies was intended to encourage obedience. In his *Golden Epistle*, William of St Thierry advises novices that, "through the medicine of obedience you will arrive at perfect health."<sup>91</sup> A master's attempts to mould the will of his students could often be too severe, and often incited youths to abandon the monastery in search of a more affectionate community. Bernard of Clairveaux's young cousin Robert, while a novice at Cîteaux, abandoned the Cistercian order in favour of the Cluny, which followed a more relaxed interpretation of the *Rule*. In a letter to his cousin, Bernard pleaded with Robert to return to Cîteaux, and admitted

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<sup>86</sup> Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, 196; De Jong, "Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery," 102.

<sup>87</sup> De Jong, "Growing up in a Carolingian Monastery," 121; Isabelle Cochelin, "Adolescence Uncloistered: Cluny, Early Twelfth Century," 148.

<sup>88</sup> Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. R.W. Southern (London: Nelson Series, 1962), 37-39.

<sup>89</sup> Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis*, vol 1. ed. and trans. D. Douie and H. Farmer. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1961), 5.

<sup>90</sup> Decima Douie, "Introduction," in *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis*, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961), vii.

<sup>91</sup> William of St Thierry, *The Golden Epistle: A Letter to the Brethren at Mont Dieu*, trans. T. Berkeley. (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 45.

that, “it may have been my fault that you left. I was too severe with a sensitive youth, I was too hard on a tender stripling.”<sup>92</sup> It is unclear whether Robert abandoned Cîteaux because of the strict nature of the Cistercian observance, or Bernard’s personal severity. Robert’s decision to enter Cluny does indicate that there was variation in the treatment of novices between Cistercian and Cluniac houses.

It is important to note that rules and regulations indicate the ideal situation, and it is self-evident that they are often more stringent than actual practise. Accounts of monks who themselves experienced oblation provide the most detailed and personal descriptions of childhood in medieval monastic communities. The sources take the form of autobiography and biography, often written by the spiritual son of the subject. These authors are honest about the frequently abusive nature of childhood in the monastery, yet they also express a great deal of affection towards other members in the community. The earliest accounts originate from the Scotland and England in the seventh century. Eddius (d. 730), biographer of St Wilfrid (d. 709), wrote that, as a child, Wilfrid asked Queen Eanfled for permission to devote himself in service to God, and, “made his master and older monks love him like a son, and his equals to regard him as a brother.”<sup>93</sup> This is a rare example of a child making a personal decision to become an oblate, though this could be literary embellishment. In old age, Wilfrid became a beloved father to many monks, who, after his death, demonstrated the “depth of love” they held for him and, “celebrated a private mass daily for the repose of his soul and had every Thursday, the day of his death, was kept as a feast just like Sunday.”<sup>94</sup> Like the secular family, one’s role in the monastic family was subject to change as time went on and one grew from childhood to adulthood, and old age.

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<sup>92</sup> Bernard of Clairveaux, *Letters of Bernard of Clairveaux*, trans. Bruno James. (Chicago: Henry Regnary, 1953), Letter 2, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, trans. B Colgrave, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 107.

<sup>94</sup> Eddius, *Life of Wilfrid*, 179.

Guibert of Nogent (d. 1124), though not technically an oblate, was placed by his mother in a monastery to receive education and became a professed monk at age twelve. In his *Memoirs*, Guibert thanked God for the death of his biological father, who would have encouraged Guibert towards, “worldly pursuits.”<sup>95</sup> Guibert’s relationship with his tutor was complex and difficult to understand. He balanced praise with insult, and Guibert described him as capable of both love and abuse. The man was, “unskilled in prose and verse composition” and abused his student with “a hail of blows and harsh words while. . . forcing me to learn what he could not teach.” However, he also recalled that, “most faithfully and lovingly he instilled in me all the all that was temperate and modest and outwardly refined.”<sup>96</sup> Although Guibert was subject to severe beatings, he recalls that his tutor,

made it quite plain the he loved me as well as he did himself he was thought to guard me as a parent, not as a master, and not my body alone but my soul as well. . . I conceived much love for him in response.<sup>97</sup>

It is evident that the tutor became a parental figure to Guibert, whose father was dead and mother had become a nun. Though exposed to the harshness that could typify monastic education, Guibert was able to observe the monastic way of life and, after briefly leaving the monastery, returned to it again, and, casting himself at his abbot’s feet, tearfully implored him to “receive a sinner.”<sup>98</sup> His return to the monastic setting suggests that, through the abuse and discipline of the rule, Guibert was able to appreciate the benefits of the monastic life.

Guibert relates that, as a novice, he was able to create lasting and affectionate relationships with his seniors. When Anselm was abbot of Bec, he used to visit Guibert’s monastery frequently. Guibert’s tendency to articulate his spiritual relationships through familial

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<sup>95</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*, trans C.C. Swinton. (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 44.

<sup>96</sup> Guibert, *Memoirs*, 47.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

imagery and language was perhaps influenced by his exposure to Anselm. He wrote that, though a, “mere child of tender age,” Anselm “offered to teach [him] to manage the inner self and how to consult the laws of reason in governance of the body.”<sup>99</sup> It is doubtful that Guibert had exclusive access to Anselm, or that Anselm taught him alongside the other novices. It is entirely possible that he embellished their relationship as a means of self-aggrandizement. More indication of the novice’s dependency on his seniors is found in Guibert’s description of the nightmares he experienced in his youth. He had dreams of, “dead men killed with swords” that would make him jump out of bed. From the description of his disturbed state, it is evident that Guibert suffered from night terrors, the condition in which a child, soon after falling asleep, starts screaming and appears terrified. The child may appear conscious, but remains mentally inaccessible until fully awakened.<sup>100</sup> This corresponds with Guibert’s description that, though out of bed, his anxiety and delusion could only be soothed by the “watchful protection of the master of mine.”<sup>101</sup> He recalled a specific episode when he jumped out of bed and saw “a demon in his own shape,” which, he says, should have driven him, “almost mad, had not my master, who very frequently stayed on guard to control my terrors, adroitly soothed by perturbed and terror struck wits.”<sup>102</sup> Guibert’s description of his childhood in monastic communities expressed both the difficulties of monastic education and the affectionate care the younger members of the community were provided by their masters.

Orderic Vitalis (d. 1142), at the end of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, provided a detailed and personal account of his own donation. Born in England, Orderic was gifted to the abbey of St Evroul in Normandy as a child oblate by his father, Odeler, when he was ten years old. He

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>100</sup> “Night Terror.” In *Concise Medical Dictionary*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>101</sup> Guibert, *Memoirs*, 80.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

recalls that he was assured that the distance from his biological family would enable him to serve God more fully and ultimately attain Paradise.<sup>103</sup> Orderic did not simply leave behind his family and friends, but his country and language as well. His heart-wrenching farewell from father, family, and country is detailed in the final pages of the *History*:

Weeping, he gave me into the care of the monk Reginald... and so, a boy of ten, I crossed the English Channel and came into Normandy as an exile. Unknown to all, knowing no one. Like Joseph in Egypt, I heard a language which I did not understand.<sup>104</sup>

Orderic's case is exceptional; it was custom for the aristocracy to donate their children to nearby monasteries, often their own foundations, to keep them close and have them represent their secular family within their spiritual family. Orderic was aware that, had he stayed in England, he would have been, "distracted among kinsfolk, who are often a burden and a hindrance to thy servants."<sup>105</sup> Orderic, though exiled from family and country, observed that at St-Evroul he found, "nothing but friendship and kindness among strangers."<sup>106</sup> It is possible that the monks of St-Evroul, instructed by Benedict to show compassion to the young, took pity on Orderic's situation and ensured his comfort above the Norman oblates.<sup>107</sup> However, the kindness described by Orderic could also be evident of the overall, affectionate atmosphere of St-Evroul. Elsewhere in his *History* Orderic recalls oblates who were warmly welcomed into the community. He describes John, a fellow Englishman, who entered the monastery as a child and, "won great repute for his learning and piety."<sup>108</sup> The monk Reginald was "brought up" at St-Evroul from the age of five and "given the name Benedict by the abbot because of his sweet nature."<sup>109</sup> He also described the "good monk Thierry" who was brought up from childhood in the monastery and

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<sup>103</sup> Kerr, *Life in the medieval cloister*, 31.

<sup>104</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vol. XIII, trans. M. Chibnall. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 555.

<sup>105</sup> Orderic, *Ecclesiastical History*, 553.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 555.

<sup>107</sup> Benedict of Nursia, *Rule of St Benedict* 1980, trans. T. Fry, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 60.

<sup>108</sup> Orderic, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 160.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, III, 127.

“never failed in his, prayers, fasts, and vigils.”<sup>110</sup> When Thierry reached the age of maturity, his spiritual father, Abbot Thierry of Jumieges, who “loved him dearly. . . and brought him up,” promoted him to master of oblates.<sup>111</sup> It is evident that Orderic believed that St-Evroul benefitted from oblation, though it is entirely possible that, because of his own childhood experience, he was sensitive to stories of oblates who went on to be successful monks.

Oblation was central to the institutional and economic development of monasticism in the Carolingian era, and the most common route to the monastic life in the central Middle Ages. However, in the decades on either side of 1200 the practise began to fade in England and France, and the rest of Europe followed suit in the last half of the thirteenth century.<sup>112</sup> The end of oblation in Benedictine abbeys was due to a growing anxiety about children in the monastery, their involvement in the observances to which it was bound, and the danger they posed to the moral integrity of the adults. This was largely effected by the reforms of Gregory IX, since they restored the final decision over profession of oblates to the abbots of individual houses. It was left to their judgement to decide whether an oblate had really desired to change his life.<sup>113</sup> William Thorne, a fifteenth-century chronicler, noted that his forbearers rejected oblation because, “certain abbots were induced by carnal affection” to the “scandal of religion and the loss of the Church.”<sup>114</sup> The appearance of the mendicant orders and the decline in oblation from the twelfth century onwards indicates the decline of medieval monasticism, both in terms of the quality of its practitioners and its relevance to the spiritual lives of the laity, who had previously supplied monasteries with oblates. The expansion of intellectual life beyond the confines of the

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, III, 19.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, III, 19.

<sup>112</sup> S. Boynton, “Introduction: Performance and Premodern Childhood,” in *Young Choristers 650-1700*, eds. Susan Boynton and Eric Rice, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 4.

<sup>113</sup> John Doran, “Oblation or Obligation? A Canonical Ambiguity,” in *The Church and Childhood*. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 140.

<sup>114</sup> William Thorne, *William Thorton's Chronicle of St Augustin's Canterbury*, trans A.H. Davis. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 94.

monastery debased monasticism' place in European society. The end of oblation meant the rearing of children, an integral function of the family, ceased to be an aspect of monastic life, thus putting an end to the three tiered monastic family tradition that had existed since the fourth century.



## Chapter 7: Conclusions

It could be argued that the monastic family was but one of many fraternal groups in the ancient and medieval world that could be labelled as “familial.” Herlihy’s definition of the medieval family, a unit that sharply differentiated from larger associations of kin and community with human relations very different from those outside its limits, is indeed vague. However, Christian monasticism provides historian with a continuous tradition that was safeguarded by its adherents from late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages, and therefore presents an abundance of source material. The longevity of the monastic tradition also allows for the analysis of how external factors influenced the structure of the monastic family and the literary articulations of monastic relationships. These changes are reflective of the greater movements that coursed through the medieval world, that ultimately dictated monasticism’s institutional and spiritual relevance to European civilization. In addition, the affective language of monastic literature reveals the psychology of familial love and emotional bonds that are not expressed in written form by any member of lay society until the emergence of secular literature in the later Middle Ages.

Early monastic relationships were marked by sexual confusion and anxiety, the product of new religious values that were incompatible with Greco-Roman sexuality. Initial monastic communities were more clandestine than later manifestations of coenobitic monasticism, and the *abbas* had more power, both temporally and spiritually. In the early monastic family, the master - disciple relationship was stressed above the relationship between coevals. The parables found in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* reveal that in desert communities, obedience to one’s master was prioritized above all other monastic virtues. Relationships between individual brothers were regarded as a threat to communal unity.

Similarly, oblates were regarded as a sexual temptation and legislation was enacted to ensure they would not be a source of sinful thoughts or actions for the monks. These communities retained the individualism of eremitic monasticism, and advocated that the route to salvation was through minimizing one's obligations to other human beings.

Desert monasticism was a product of the the south-east Mediterranean where Greek and Roman religions and philosophies intersected with Judeo-Christian and Gnostic ideologies to create the perfect environment for religious and intellectual exchange. When monasticism was introduced to the western Mediterranean the monastic family evolved, both in terms of structure and affective articulation. The first century of monasticism in Europe witnessed a plethora of monastic structures that, to varying degrees, combined Roman familial traditions with monastic practises from the east. This multitude of approaches to monasticism betrayed the monastic aim of unity. Benedict of Nursia solved this dilemma and provided a middle way with his rule that articulated monastic life in an identifiable language for sixth-century Latins, whilst still retaining the essential components of eastern monasticism: work, poverty, chastity, and obedience. Unlike the patriarchs of the desert, the Benedictine abbot had a very clear set of responsibilities and his power was checked by the ability of the brethren to seek external assistance from ecclesiastic powers. Benedict did not legislate against individual friendships, but he promoted egalitarianism and obedience to the abbot as a means of maintaining harmony in the community.

The *Rule of St Benedict* provided Latin monasticism with a uniform structure for the duration of the Middle Ages. The relative stability of the Benedictine tradition, especially after the Carolingian reforms and the establishment of a federated Benedictine order at Cluny, allows for the study of affective language in monastic sources. The *Vitas*, hagiography, chronicles, and legislative texts from the first six centuries of Christian monasticism offer glimpses into the

relationships that emerged between members of the monastic family. They express the importance of emotional intimacy to growth in monastic perfection, but contain an underlying suspicion of individual relationships. It is not until the emergence of affective piety in the eleventh century that inter-cloistral relationships became a focus of monastic literature. Monastic writers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries viewed individual relationships between monks of various stations within the monastery as fundamental to one's spiritual growth. In this new monastic environment, monks were permitted to assume various and reflexive familial roles. Senior monks acted as parents to the community, described as both mother and father figures. Whereas the secular family was defined by the clearly demarcated gender roles of its various members, the monastic family was defined by the monk's ability to be both a mother and a father, both a brother and a sister.

It was not the aim of this thesis to prove that the monastic family paralleled or equated to the secular family. Rather, the medieval monastic experience offered its members an alternative to the heterosexual familial experience, in a world where extra-heterosexual experiences were not accepted. Though the various members of the monastic family were identified as fathers, brothers, and children, these labels are misleading because they connote specific roles in the traditional family. Though other fraternal organizations existed, they were intrinsically bound to secular society, marriage, and procreation. Monasticism defined itself in opposition to lay society, and rejected relationships founded upon procreation. Though sexual intimacy was rejected, emotional intimacy within the context of spiritual perfection was a requirement in monastic life that was not reflected in the world outside the cloister.

The seniors of the monastery acted as parents to those below them, ensuring their flock was provided for, both materially and spiritually. Therefore, they filled the traditional roles of

both mother and father, as they held authority and provided nourishment. Relationships between the brethren were subject to the most change as early monasticism prioritized communal relationships, whereas monasticism in the High Middle Ages valued individual relationships between kindred spirits. Thus, brothers fulfilled both fraternal and spousal roles towards one another. The presence of children in the monastery was an aspect of monastic life for the first eight centuries of Christian monasticism. These were the communal children of the monastery and thus allowed each professed monk to act as a father figure. Though oblates were consigned to the monastic life irrevocably and had to endure the rigours of monastic education, several monastic authors that had been given as oblates relate the happy childhoods they enjoyed as children of the monastery.

Thus, the medieval monastery provided men in Christian society with an extra-heterosexual familial experience. To be a monk in the Middle Ages placed an individual in the top echelon of the social and spiritual hierarchy, and monastic education ensured that monks dominated European intellectual life. Though monastic obligation consigned one to a life of poverty, chastity, obedience, it did not deprive its members of the emotional intimacy enjoyed by secular families. The monasteries of medieval Europe were exempt from many of the hardships and responsibilities placed upon those in the outside world, aristocrat and peasant alike. Monks were free to live their lives in accordance with God's commandment to "love one another" (Jn. 13:4).

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