MOTIVES AND IDEALS OF
THE ELEVENTH-CENTURY
MONASTIC RENEWAL *

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Each time the auspicious beginnings of the second Christian millennium come up for discussion, the laws of association carry my memory back to the dramatic details of one of my boyhood readings that impressed me t1hen very deeply. It was a story of the Historical Miniatures of August Strindberg about the universal expectation of the end of the world, coming to a spectacular climax on New Year's Eve in 999. In Rome a tremendous throng converged upon Saint Peter's basilica. As the last minutes of the day were ticking away, all waited to hear the blare of heavenly trumpets. Then the big clock (?) started to strike midnight: one, two, three... and finally the sound of the twelfth bell floated away over the frozen multitude. Some could bear the tension no longer and fell lifeless to the ground, but nothing more striking happened. A few anguished moments later, the aging Pope Sylvester rose, turned to the crowd and with an indulgent smile on his lips blessed and dismissed the delirious people. He, of course, the wise old monk, knew all along that history was not to be closed but to be continued with another eventful century.

The purpose of our gathering here is the discernment of the spirit and aims of our founding fathers so that, inspired by them, our work toward a necessary Cistercian renewal may be carried out with proper regard for our precious inheritance. The founders of Cîteaux were undoubtedly children of their age. All grew up in the intellectual and spiritual environment of the late eleventh century; and when they set out in 1098 toward that new and exciting venture, they wished to materialize an ideal shared with their less successful predecessors.

It is only logical, then, that the discussion of the aims of Saint Robert and his companions be preceded by the consideration of the troubled monastic scene of the eleventh century. Without the proper understanding of this background we could hardly contemplate in valid perspective the builders of the New Monastery. In this endeavour we must rely on the methods offered by sound historical scholarship, the cornerstone of which is a sincere devotion to objectivity. Yet we are not studying, thinking and writing in a serene atmosphere of detachment, but under the pressure of an emergency. Moreover, at least instinctively, we all have specific ideas on how to ensure the safe survival of our Order; perhaps we even feel already committed to a course of action which, in our judgment, would be the most appropriate and effective. When we turn to the past, therefore, we wish to see our notions verified, our intentions supported; we want to make the great figures of monastic history speak on our behalf. To put the problem into a more concrete form: in a world crying out for active apostolate, involvement and social commitment, can we afford to prove that our founding fathers yearned to live in a complete detachment from all such cares?

Another related and equally grave problem lies in the tremendous difference that separates us from the world of our holy founders. The understanding that both our century and theirs feature revolutions brings little comfort, for the motion in them seems to be in diametrically different directions. Let me give a few examples: the eleventh century made great strides toward an institutionalized Church, a development that many of us deplore. Bureaucratic centralization made its beginnings then, while now we would rather de- centralize. Papal authority rose to an unprecedented height, but today we like to talk about collegiality. The clergy was successfully forged into a distinct class alien from the world, while now we feel that we must be integrated with the rest of society. The eleventh century witnessed the first triumphs of Canon Law, a book that some embarrassed members of our generation would rather hide. The celibacy of the clergy was finally achieved; now clerical marriage is often proposed for serious consideration. I could easily add to this list but I hope I have managed to illustrate my point.

Anyone who tries today to fathom the minds and hearts of people who lived 900 years ago is faced with a difficulty similar to that of the hunter who rides in a fast-moving car and aims his gun at a bird in full flight. To understand our distant ancestors with reasonable correctness takes not only a clear and disciplined mind but first-rate scholarship. Since I am

well aware of my shortcomings on both counts, I present the following only as a tentative approximation, subject to further comments, adjustments and corrections.

The year 1000 can justly be considered a turning point in the history of Christian Europe for weightier reasons than its conveniently round figure. The first attempt to establish peace, prosperity and civilized order over the ruins of the Roman Empire, i.e. the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, had failed. The proud empire of Charlemagne fell apart under his feuding grandchildren, and the flickering lights of monastic learning and piety were snuffed out by a new storm of barbarian invasions. The Vikings attacked from the north, the Saracens from the south, the Hungarians from the east. By the end of the ninth century, the question was no longer the preservation of Christian civilization but the survival of Christianity itself. The barbarians again rode or sailed at will throughout the continent. Rome or Paris became just as unsafe as Bordeaux, Marseilles or Naples. Smoking ruins of once mighty abbeys dotted the devastated landscape everywhere, while the papacy sank to the level of a degraded institution of purely local significance.

By the middle of the tenth century, however, hopeful signs began to multiply. The fury of invading barbarians abated. Both the Northmen and the Hungarians settled down in their newly acquired lands, embraced Christianity and turned out to be constructive partners in the slow process of recovery. The Saxon Otto I created a semblance of order in the German lands, renewed the Empire and rescued the papacy from the clutches of the Theophylacts. Meanwhile the fast growing Cluny restored confidence and respect for monasticism in the consolidating Capetian kingdom.

As the turn of the century approached, an elementary degree of order and security from invasion was achieved. This modest success set the stage for a spectacular outburst of creative energies responsible for the rise of the new civilization of the High Middle Ages. It was in the eleventh century that the institutions of Feudalism reached full development. The same era witnessed the emergence of medieval cities, combined with a remarkable revival of international trade and commerce. The new cathedral and municipal schools soon outshone the earlier monastic centres of learning, and prepared the way for the establishment of universities. The laity eagerly

seized the new opportunities, and professionally trained bureaucrats (ministeriales) began to replace bishops and abbots in administrative positions of government. Artists, scholars and poets were no longer humble admirers and imitators of classical antiquity. The new Romanesque architecture exhibited amazing originality in both engineering and decorative details. Saint Anselm can justly be considered the Father of Scholasticism; and his contemporary, Duke William IX of Aquitaine, a pioneer of courtly (troubadour) poetry. In Lombardy the study of Roman Law was resumed, which, in turn, inspired the rise of Canon Law. But there is nothing more dramatic as an illustration and proof of the enormous vigour and self-confidence of this new Europe than the successful counterattack against the infidels: the heroic reconquista in Spain, and the First Crusade, which took French knights thousands of miles away for the recapture of Jerusalem.

The reason, however, for which modem historians unhesitatingly call the eleventh century an era of revolution, comparable in its impact to the Reformation or the French Revolution, is the sudden reversal, commonly known as the Gregorian Reform, that took place in the field of Church-State relations.[1] * But "reform" is not the appropriate term. It was not a simple effort to eradicate abuses and return to some earlier pattem of Church life, but a violent demand for drastic change. It was, in fact, an ideological struggle trying to shake off age-old traditions and establish in the world a new order, better suited to changed circumstances.

After the short-lived experiment in the Carolingian Empire, a seemingly lasting equilibrium in Church-State relations was achieved in the Ottoman and early Salian Empires. It was characterized by an interpenetration of the ecclesia and the mundus. The emperor was not merely a secular ruler, but rex et sacerdos, with dual obligations involving the protection and propagation of the Church and wide authority over ecclesiastical appointments and functions. The hierarchy, in a similar manner, was fully integrated with the emerging feudal society, and carried, in addition to the administration of the sacraments, a variety of governmental, judicial and even military duties. Over a large area the authorities of pope and emperor were left overlapping, and a mild tutorship of the emperor over the papacy was not only condoned but often expected. This state of affairs was never more conspicuous than under Henry III (1039-1056), a stem and pious

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1   This view has been generally accepted after Gerd Tellenbach, Church, State and Christian Society, trans. R.F. Bennett (Oxford, 1940).

ascetic, "a monk in worldly garb."[2] He settled in the synod of Sutri (1046) a scandalous schism. He deposed the three competitors for the papal throne (Benedict IX, Sylvester III, Gregory VI) and arranged in succession the election of three popes, the third being his own uncle, Leo IX (1046-1054), the first "Gregorian" reformer.

The drastic change in attitudes manifested itself suddenly in 1059 in the famous decree on papal elections, and the publication of the equally epoch-making Three Books Against the Simoniacs by Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida. Under the banner of "freedom of the Church" the fight began against both secular influence in ecclesiastical administration and the involvement of the clergy in worldly affairs. The first can be conveniently simplified as the Investiture Conflict, the second as measures against Simony and Nicolaitism. Both phases of the struggle reached a dramatic climax under the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-1085), whose goal evidently included the total readjustment of Christian society, leading to an institutional separation of Church and State. This demanded stripping the emperor of quasi- sacerdotal powers, effective and exclusive central control exercised by the papacy over the whole Church, a morally purified clergy set sharply apart from the world, and, in case of conflicts between secular and ecclesiastical interests, a decisive role for the pope. The revolutionary programme could not be entirely executed either by Gregory or by his successors, but during the course of fifty years of incessant debates every facet of Christian life, including the role and position of monasticism, came under critical re-examination.

Monastic renewal in the eleventh century, then, can be properly understood only as an integral component of the Gregorian Reform. Renewal became inevitable, not because of declining morals or lax discipline, but because the monks were forced to find a new place in a rapidly changing society. What actually occurred was similar to the optical magic of an old- fashioned kaleidoscope. When the viewer turns the tube all particles are bound to move, assuming each time a different pattern of colours in perfect balance and harmony. Those who try to justify this or that monastic reform of significance by piling up incidents of abuses and misdeeds are banging on the wrong door. Unfortunately, human failings have always been in evidence even in the most perfect monasteries, but the eleventh century showed no conspicuous signs of monastic "decline". On the contrary, under Abbot Hugh the Great (1049-1109) the empire of Cluny, with its

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2   Norman F. Cantor, Medieval History (New York, 1963), p. 269.

countless directly or indirectly affiliated houses, reached the apogee of its history. The swelling wave of criticism directed against Benedictine monasticism in the eleventh century can be explained largely by the fact that Cluny and its associates were tardy to notice the changes around them and even tardier to adapt themselves to the new conditions. In fact, contrary to the still often expressed belief, Cluniac spirituality had no direct role in the launching of the Gregorian Reform. Abbot Hugh was less than enthusiastic about the extreme ideas of Gregory and, instead of supporting them, tried to mediate between the Pope and Henry IV. As is commonly known, this great Abbot was instrumental in the outcome of the famous confrontation at Canossa.[3]

Criticism of the traditional forms of monasticism came from various sources, but most often from the monks themselves. The best known and certainly the most influential of them was Saint Peter Damian who, in spite of his high position in the Curia, referred to himself as peccator monachus. He found many abbots of his time guilty of worldly display. They spent more time at royal courts than in their monasteries; they were better versed in politics than in matters pertaining to their office; they were constantly involved in litigations over property and income.[4] He had no admiration for the great builders who embellished their churches and enlarged their abbeys. He could not resist retelling a story according to which someone saw in a vision the famous Abbot Richard of Saint-Vanne in hell, condemned to erect scaffoldings forever in punishment for his extravagant taste for fine architecture.[5] Cardinal Peter had no appreciation for liturgical splendour either, and criticised "the unnecessary sounding of bells, the protracted chanting of hymns and the conspicuous use of ornament".[6] On the occasion of his memorable visit to Cluny in 1063, he observed that various offices were so prolonged that in a day's routine there was scarcely half an hour left to engage the monks in conversation. Meanwhile he was outright scandalized over the lack of penance and mortification, particularly in food and drink.[7]

In addition to the points just mentioned other critics of monasticism, whose numbers could be multiplied at will, spoke against seculars living

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3 Ibid., pp. 302, 327-8. Cf. Alberic Stacpoole, "Hildebrand, Cluny and the Papacy", The Downside Review LXXXI (1963), 142-64, 254-72.

4 De fuga dignitatum ecclesiasticarum, P.L., 145, 457-60.

5 Jean Leclercq, "La crise du monachisme aux XI. et XII. siecles", Bolletino dell'Instituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano LXX (1958), 23.

6 De institutis ordinis eremitarum, quoted in Owen J. Blum, Saint Peter Damian (Washington, 1947), p. 127.

7 Blum, Saint Peter Damian, p. 16.

among the monks under various pretexts; against the disturbing presence of children and other unwanted individuals; against monasteries built so close to cities that their solitude was endangered; and against unnecessary travelling and extensive vagrancy among monks. They pointed out that the clerical status of most monks served merely as an excuse for the abandonment of manual labour and that the assumption of pastoral duties led to undesirable competition with the secular clergy. In fact, the crities continued, many abbots usurped episcopal authority and eagerly acquired churches and a variety of other profitable benefices the holding of which was improper for monks.[8]

The dissatisfaction of the secular clergy with monastic standards became evident at a number of provincial synods held in France throughout the eleventh century. In 1031 the synod of Bourges stressed the virtues of obedience and stability, and threatened vagrant monks with excommunication. The council of Toulouse in 1056 attacked abbots who disregarded their duties, and emphasized the neglected virtue of poverty. In 1059 a similar gathering at Rouen chided the monks for the vanity of pursuing exalted positions and lofty dignities. At subsequent synods at Toulouse (1068) and Rouen (1074), the clergy enjoined the monks to adhere to the strict observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict without relaxing its prescriptions concerning silence, vigils, fasting and clothing.[9]

It seems that in the eyes of many contemporaries the root of such abuses was the fact that monks, forgetting their proper vocations, disregarded their divinely ordained role and place in the Church. This came to expression in the writings of William of Volpiano (d. 1031), the reformer of Saint-Benigne in Dijon, who deplored that in their conduct there was no distinction either between clergy and people, or between priests and monks.[10] His nephew, John of Fécamp, placed the same issue in an even sharper light when, following Gregory the Great, he insisted that there must be a clear line separating the laity from the clergy and an equally distinct place for monks, who should spend their lives in penance and solitude.[11]

In spite of their many failings, the monks of the time must be credited with manful efforts to reform themselves along the lines suggested by their critics. New foundations initiated by zealous individuals multiplied from

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8   See a long list of such accusations in Bede Lackner, The Eleventh Century Background of Cîteaux (doctoral dissertation in manuscript at Fordham University, 1968), pp. 120-47

9   Ibid., pp. 160-7.

10 Leclercq, "La crise...", p. 24.

11 Ibid., pp. 25-6.

Calabria to Brittany, while practically all older abbeys of some reputation undertook the arduous work of mending their ranks. Instead of attempting to deal with each, I wish here merely to analyze briefly the three basic ideas that seem to have guided the eleventh-century monastic renewal. These were poverty, eremitism and apostolic life. However, I must admit at once that the three were overlapping concepts and all had been, to some extent, already integrated with the Rule of Saint Benedict; therefore their reappearance resulted in the revival of older forms of monasticism. The originality of new establishments consisted largely in the peculiar blend in which the separate elements merged.

Poverty

Contemporary critics singled out riches and luxury as their prime targets, while reformers urged the strictest poverty as the first step toward meaningful renewal. Modern scholars seem to be in agreement with the ancient view linking wealth with decline. Thus Jean Leclercq asserts in one of his fine essays that "in reality the crisis of cenobitism was a crisis of prosperity",[12] created by abbeys amassing landed possessions and improving them through wise administration. A new stress on poverty, therefore, emerged as a spontaneous reaction to such prosperity. Although the validity of this line of reasoning sounds to me somewhat doubtful, the problem was so keenly felt in the eleventh century that in search of a solution, by-passing the Rule of Saint Benedict, the reformers reached back to the poverty of Christ on the Cross, the apostles and their first disciples. The movement apparently started early in the century in Italy, and spread quickly throughout die rest of Europe. The re-emerging dualistic heresies, looking askance at material things and condemning wealth and possessions, added to the impact of half-naked, weird-looking preachers of poverty roaming the countryside in increasing numbers.[13] Not only priests and monks became fascinated by the idea of absolute poverty but also the laity, as the example of the much-researched Patarini of northern Italy clearly indicates.

In this light the teaching of Saint Peter Damian, strict as it was, cannot be regarded as extreme. He replaced the Benedictine sufficientia with extremitas and penuria and encouraged his followers to go barefoot, sleep on hard beds and be satisfied with the indispensable necessities in clothing,

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12 Ibid., p. 24.

13 See a full list of such characters in Jeffrey Burton Russell, Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages (University of California Press, 1965), pp. 101-24

food and drink. Contending that God must be the monk's sole property, he considered the holding of money as outright sinful, a violation of the contract made by the monk when he signed his profession. "Therefore, let us turn back, beloved, to the innocence of the primitive Church, so that we may learn to relinquish possessions and enjoy the simplicity of regal poverty", Damian exhorted his disciples.[14]

Needless to say, no religious body could escape the impact of the trend. Pauperes Christi became the stereotyped reference to both monks and canons regular and was an often- repeated phrase in the correspondence of Gregory VII. Nothing can attest more to the overwhelming power of the idea than the strange attempt of Paschal II, a former monk of Vallumbrosa, to reach a solution in the Investiture Conflict. In 1111, to the amazement of Europe, he proposed that in exchange for the total elimination of secular interference in church matters, the hierarchy of the Empire should surrender its landed possessions to the crown.[15]

Eremitism

As an idea as well as a historical phenomenon, the revival of eremitism was closely linked with the new concept of poverty. The hermit not only withdrew from society but lived in total renunciation, in total poverty, both internal and external. As Saint Jerome put it: nudos amat eremus.[16] The roots of the movement reached back to the deserts of Egypt and Syria in the early Christian centuries. As a form of religious life it survived, particularly in the East, in spite of the growing popularity of eenobitism. It seems, moreover, that the continuity of eremitism remained unbroken to the eleventh century even in the West.[17] What appears to be new in the epoch under examination is its enormous popularity, its quick spread geographically and its penetration of all strata of the existing society. In trying to explain the obvious facts various attempts have been made to link the movement with the social and economic problems of the eleventh century. Such conditions were, however, very different from place to place, while the appeal of eremitism must have been universal; therefore any suspected causal link between the two remains ambiguous.[18] Since the revival of

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14 Quoted from Sermo 53 in Blum, Saint Peter Damian, pp. 92-3.

15 Cf. Cantor, Medieval History, p. 319.

16 16 Jean Leclercq, "L'érémitisme en occident jusqu'à l'an mil", in L'eremitismo in occidente nei secoli XI e XII (Milano, 1965), p. 29.

17 Cf. "Érémitisme" in Dictionnaire de spiritualité IV (Paris, 1960), 936-82.

18 Léopold Genicot, "L'érémitisme du XI. siécle dans son contexte économique et social", in L'eremitismo in..., pp. 46-69.

eremitism first became visible in Italy, it has often been proposed that the movement might have been inspired by eastern anchorites who settled down in the peninsula after they had been forced out from their original land by the advance of Islam.[19] However, religious contacts between Italy and the Byzantine Empire had never been entirely broken; therefore a few hermits could hardly have imported novelties of great significance. Furthermore, even if the local influence of some Byzantine hermits, e.g. that of Saint Nilus of Calabria, was significant, such isolated incidents cannot furnish adequate reasons for the spread of eremitism north of the Alps. It is probably safer to state that eremitism, like the new and strict interpretation of poverty, emerged as a reaction to the prevailing standards of monastic life, a spontaneous protest against the comfort and quiet daily routine of monks of great abbeys, which no longer presented sufficient challenge to souls yearning for the heroic life of the Desert Fathers.[20]

This attitude clearly implied that in the eyes of the new generation of reformers eremitic life appeared higher than life spent under the Rule of Saint Benedict. Accordingly, the monastery was conceived merely as a training ground for future hermits. As Peter Damian put it: "As the priesthood is the goal of clerical education, proficiency in the arts is the purpose of attending the schools of the grammarians, and as brilliant pleading at law is the culmination of dreary hours of legal study, so monastic life with all its observances is but a preparation for that higher goal, the solitude of the hermitage".[21] The monastery, he contended, was acceptable for the sick and infirm; but those who chose to stay there permanently could only be tolerated.

The lasting influence of individual hermits, as long as they truly remained in solitude and isolation, poses a peculiar problem. Obviously such people, no matter how deep or rich their spirituality might be, would pass away without any specific impression on others. On the other hand, the presence of disciples might facilitate the transmission of spiritual values, but would destroy solitude and involve the hermit in some sort of organization, the very thing he tried to escape. Individuals are ephemeral; only institutions have enduring existence. Most great hermits of the eleventh century solved the dilemma by concessions, and wound up as founders of religious communities where solitude was blended with elements of cenobitic life. Camaldoli, Fonte Avellana, Vallumbrosa, Fontevrault, Savigny, Grandmont,

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19 E.g., J.-B. Mahn, L'ordre cistercien et son gouvernement (Paris, 1945), pp. 26-7.

20 Jean Leclercq, "Epilogue", in L'eremitismo..., p. 594.

21 Quoted in Blum, Saint Peter Damian, p. 126.

Grand Chartreuse and Obazine are only the best known of many similar foundations of eremitical origin, where institutional frameworks guaranteed the survival of a peculiar spirituality long after the disappearance of the founding hermits and the decline of eremitism as a popular movement.[22]

Apostolic life

The third incentive for monastic renewal was the drive to imitate the life of the apostles, or, more specifically, the life of the apostolic community in Jerusalem, in poverty, simplicity and mutual charity. As G. Morin observed long ago,[23] in the eleventh century the word "apostolic" carried no connotation of preaching the Gospel or discharging other duties of the cura animarum; therefore the following of the apostles could be well within the programme of contemplatives or even hermits. On the other hand, the appeal of the "apostolic life" extended far beyond monastic circles. It inspired canons regular, intinerant preachers, poverty movements of the laity and many features of the Gregorian Reform.[24] Nothing demonstrates more eloquently the elementary force of the movement than the difficulty Church authorities experienced in trying to contain the growing number of itinerant preachers within the bonds of moderation and orthodoxy. Even such a renowned character as Robert of Arbrissel, the founder of Fonte-vrault, was severely reprimanded by the Bishop of Reimes for his bizarre appearance and extravagant behaviour.[25]

The influence of the primitive Church over monasticism had been, of course, as ancient as monasticism itself. The novelty consisted in the urgency and extent of the demand to reform religious communities in the light of the books of the New Testament. Peter Damian obliged his followers to "return to the innocence of the primitive Church".[26] At the council of Rome in 1059 Hildebrand used virtually the same phrases, demanding the restoration of the common life of the first century.[27] According to a prominent "poor man of Christ" of the next generation, Stephen of Muret, rules written by men are of secondary importance; therefore, "if anyone

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22 Cf. Jean Becquet, "L'érémitisme clerical et laic dans l'ouest de la France", in L'ere-mitismo..., pp. 182-204.

23 Dom Germain Morin, The Ideal of the Monastic Life (London, 1914), pp. 67-8.

24 M.-D. Chenu, Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century (University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 202-38.

25 Jean Leclercq, "Le poème de Payen Bolotin contre les faux ermites", Revue Bénédictine LXXIII (1958), 68-9. Cf. Ernest W. McDonnell, "The Vita Apostolica: Diversity or Dissent", Church History XXIV (1955), pp. 15-28.

26 Blum, Saint Peter Damian, p. 93.

27 Chenu, Nature, Man, and Society, p. 207.

should ask you to what religious order you belong, tell him the order of the Gospel, which is the basis of all rules".[28] A treatise of the early twelfth century, De vita vere apostolica, attributed to Rupert, abbot of Deutz, went even further: "If you wish to consult the relevant passages of Scripture, you will find that they all seem to say plainly that the Church originated in the monastic life." Saint Benedict's Rule was in fact the adaptation of the regula apostolica. Therefore, he continued, the apostles had been monks, and thus the monks were the authentic successors of the apostles.[29]

The implications of such thoughts were plain enough. Monks must free themselves from the entanglements of the feudal society; they must abandon their splendid surroundings, their elaborate ceremonials, the ease and comfort that the work of their predecessors made possible. Monks worthy of their apostolic heritage should turn their backs to the world and seek a renewed life in simplicity, poverty and charity of kindred souls.

In addition to the three motives for monastic renewal just discussed, many authors refer to another movement related to the same trend: "back to the sources" of Christian monasticism.[30] While it is undeniable that all reformers attempted to justify their demands by references to the Bible, the Desert Fathers or the Rule of Saint Benedict, it remains doubtful that such manifestations amounted to a "movement" characteristic of the eleventh century. Reformers of all times and every designation have employed the same tactics in vindication of novel approaches. Changes, innovations, breaking with the past, rarely generated universal enthusiasm among monks; therefore those who proposed such moves were compelled to disguise their intentions as mere attempts to return to certain ancient and hallowed traditions. On the other hand, institutional reforms are necessitated by radical alterations in the fabric of the surrounding society. These changes often result in a new and unique environment, and the initiation of corresponding changes in the institutions in question is a sign of a healthy instinct of survival. In such circumstances a traditional organization cannot ensure its sufficient readjustment by simply turning back to

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28 Quoted ibid., p. 239.

29 Ibid., p. 206.

30 Most recently and with renewed emphasis in Claude J. Peifer, "Monastic Renewal in Historical Perspective", The American Benedictine Review XIX (1968), pp. 11-16.

observances and procedures that are admittedly old. The problem can be solved by accommodations executed in the light of genuine traditions, but it is doubtful how far the eleventh-century monastic reformers were aware of the nature of their task or how sincerely they were devoted to the past. To be sure, they were scarcely in a position to interpret their sources with sufficient authenticity, for the simple reason that they were unaware of the fundamental differences that separated the mentality of the late Roman world from their own.

In my opinion it remains highly questionable that "their purpose was a return to sources, a rediscovery of the meaning of monastic life... to go back to the period before the Carolingian reformers... and recreate the original Benedictine structure in all its simplicity, purity and strength", and that therefore they "did not hesitate to go back beyond the Rule to rediscover the life-situation out of which the Rule grew"[31]. As I can see it, the actual process was far less sophisticated. The purpose of the reformers was the creation of a life of austerity in perfect seclusion. The importance of textual references was secondary. When they quoted some convenient passages taken from available sources, they did so primarily in self-justification. They could not possibly go beyond the Carolingian reformers in any scholarly sense, much less "rediscover the life-situation" of pre-Benedictine times, because they were ignorant of them and, for lack of adequate libraries and archives, they were unable to approach them. Medieval authors used the few documents within their reach far more often and far more efficiently as legal weaponry than as tools for the painstaking research of the mysterious past. The supposition that men of the eleventh century intended to execute, or could and in fact did execute, the above-quoted exceedingly ambitious scholarly tasks smacks of anachronism.

In the actual use of available sources the reformers followed their instincts, and handled them with amazing liberty. Here I wish merely to refer to the variety of contradictory interpretations to which the Rule of Saint Benedict was subjected. Its text, in basically identical form, was certainly available to all monks from Benedict of Aniane to Robert of Molesme. Its authority was such that, to the best of my knowledge, none dared to reject it. A few, such as Stephen of Muret, practically ignored it; others, such as Saint Bruno, embraced only certain elements of it; but the majority of reformers, while professing the utmost devotion to the Rule, proceeded to interpret it with less than hermeneutic scrupulosity. This

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31 Ibid., p. 14.

made possible a wide range of foundations: the Roman "Basilica Abbeys", the Anglo-Saxon "Mission Abbeys" and "Cathedral Abbeys", the German "School Abbeys" and "Culture Abbeys", the Carolingian "Prayer Abbeys" and "Pilgrimage Abbeys", the Cluniac "Cult Abbeys", and the eleventh-century "Solitude Abbeys".[32]

The most articulate spokesman of "Solitude Abbeys" was certainly Peter Damian who, while paying homage to the Rule of Saint Benedict, managed to read into it his own peculiar ideas about mortification. He saw no incompatibility between the monastic concepts of Saint Benedict and his desert predecessors, for he urged his followers to abide by "whatever is found in the Rule of Saint Benedict or in the Institutes or Collations of the Fathers".[33] Encountering the manifest moderation of Saint Benedict he argued that the Rule was written for the guidance of innocent souls, that Saint Benedict had no intention of supplanting the penitential canons applying to sinners, and that therefore "the Rule did not void the precepts of the Fathers who had gone before".[34] He himself, however, was quite willing to void in practice seventy-two chapters of the Rule in order to live up to the full extent of the seventy- third.

It is quite possible that reformers of the younger generation realized the inner contradiction of such approaches and as a reaction drew with greater sincerity closer to the Rule. Thus, not only was Vallumbrosa "founded on the authority of Saint Benedict", but John Gualbert "diligently began to discern the meaning of the Rule and intended to observe it with all his strength", while urging his disciples to follow it "in everything".[35] Bernard of Tiron and Vitalis of Mortain (Savigny) adopted similar attitudes, while the even more exact observance of the Rule appeared to be the very reason of the foundation of Cîteaux.

I have no intention here of discussing the correctness of Cistercian interpretation of the Rule, but I wish to reiterate that the common denominator of all reforming efforts of the eleventh century was the desire to establish a life of heroic mortifications spent in retirement from all worldly entanglements. In this the founders of new monastic institutions were eminently successful. The era when abbeys played the role of cultural centres, and individual monks acted as scholars, educators and even statesmen and

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32 The terms are taken from Stephen Hilpisch, "The Benedictine Ideal through the Centuries", The American Benedictine Review XV (1964), pp. 383-6.

33 Quoted in Lackner, The Eleventh Century Background of Cîteaux, p. 253.

34 Blum, Saint Peter Damian, pp. 113-4.

35 Lackner, The Eleventh Century Background of Cîteaux, pp. 264-7.

leaders of a consolidating society, came to an end. Henceforth monks were taken for unworldly contemplatives. If individuals, such as Saint Bernard, stepped out of their cloisters, they were the rare exceptions, who in their embarrassment felt compelled to offer excuses for their temporary abandonment of their solitude. Professor Norman F. Cantor demonstrated convincingly in one of his recent studies how "the Gregorian radical felt compelled to apply his puritan ideals to all aspects of social life... and was driven with all the reckless zeal of the ascetic saint let loose in an imperfect world", the end result of which was that "the monastic order lost nearly all its social utility" and "while the monastic order became spiritually embalmed within the walls of its comfortable establishments, a new, grasping, penetrating, secularist spirit came to dominate European political life". Thus he does not hesitate to state that the eleventh-century "crisis of monasticism was the crisis of medieval civilization itself".[36]

Even if we restrict our scope to the field of monastic history we must admit that the very success of the reformers carried the germs of another epoch of relative decline. Peter Damian and his heirs did establish a life of heroic asceticism and raised their new abbeys to never-experienced heights of monastic perfection, but such standards could not be maintained indefinitely. While insisting on the meticulous observance of certain passages of the Rule, they overlooked its governing spirit of moderation. Saint Benedict was willing to offer compromises to human frailty, but the new reformers were not. They refused to recognize that institutions banking on lasting success must take into account the limitations of the average, not the ambitions of saints and heroes. Once again, the wisdom of Saint Benedict proved to be far more enduring than the zeal of unworldly enthusiasts. Most eremitical or semi-eremitical foundations disintegrated, were absorbed within a few generations, or slipped back to insignificance. Of the new crop of monks and canons, only the Cistercians, Carthusians and Premonstratensians remained in the forefront of religious history. The strictly limited role and membership of the Carthusians enabled them to maintain their initial spiritual standards; but the other two, struggling to preserve their over- extended and overgrown institutions, were forced to take the downward road to compromises.

I realize that up to this point I have said nothing about the significant developments of structural nature that accompanied the moral and disci-

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36 "The Crisis of Western Monasticism, 1050-1130", The American Historical Review LXVI (1960), pp. 64-7.

plinary renewal just sketched. Unfortunately, the limitations of this paper exclude the meaningful discussion of this important subject. However, let me emphasize in conclusion that the early success of the Cistercians cannot be explained without proper consideration of their institutional advances which, in turn, rested largely on the achievements of some of their predecessors, particularly those of the Vallumbrosan congregation. The adoption of lay- brotherhood, a limited control exercised by the mother abbey, the idea of annual general chapters, annual visitation of each house, and the linear subordination of monasteries each dependent on its founder, were all features of Vallumbrosa that were later successfully employed and further developed by Cîteaux.[37]

The present discourse, no matter how brief, should not end without touching upon the intriguing question: "What was the mainspring of the eleventh-century religious revolution?" My previous statement to the effect that the monastic phase of this movement was part and parcel of the whole contributes little toward an answer. The problem, of course, is difficult, not merely because of the complexity of the issues under investigation but also because of the relative paucity of source material. In fact, only the Marxist historians seem to have a ready and infallible explanation. According to them the religious revolution of the eleventh century was in reality a disguised manifestation of class struggle, and therefore, under the cloak of moral perfection, salvation, poverty and austerity, forces of social and economic unrest must be identified. In the West, the best known representative of this school is Ernst Werner of the University of Leipzig, whose book, Pauperes Christi (Berlin, 1956), brings out at least one valid point: even in the case of purely religious matters, the consideration of the social and economic background may lead to a fuller understanding of the subject's nature.

This is exactly the ambition of the non-Marxist sociological school. Thus Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper of Oxford, while admitting that behind such

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37 Roger Duvernay, "Cîteaux, Vallumbreuse et Étienne Harding", Analecta Cisterciensia VIII (1952), pp. 379-495. Most recently, Denis Meade, "From Turmoil to Solidarity: The Emergence of the Vallumbrosan Monastic Congregation", The American Benedictine Review XIX (1968), pp. 323-57.

phenomena there was always a "complex chemistry of causes", advances the theory that the eleventh-century events were largely the results of a relative over-population followed by widespread agrarian unrest. Just what was the link between religion and economy, he does not say, but he confesses that "history is full of marvels... and surely the rise of western Europe, after its terrible abasement in the Dark Ages... is a miracle".[38]

Christopher Dawson dealt with the problem in the last chapter of The Making of Europe (originally published in 1932) and returned to it in a more detailed fashion in his Gifford lectures of 1948-49 (published under the title Religion and the Rise of Western Culture, 1950). In the seventh lecture he emphasized that "this movement was at first purely monastic and ascetic", but was subsequently adopted by Leo IX and grew to revolutionary proportions after the rediscovery and employment of Roman Law. "This marks a new departure in the history of Western culture, for it meant that men had begun to reason about the principles on which Christian society was based, and to use the appeal to these principles as a means of changing the existing order". In a descriptive sense Dawson's line of thinking seems to be cogent enough, but he declined to go further into the problem.

Professor Cantor of Brandeis University, in his article already referred to and in his more recent book (Medieval History, 1963), concurs with Dawson in stating that the movement of reform was initiated by monks; but, getting to the heart of the matter, he offers an interesting proposition. According to his view, the hidden power behind the movement was the drive of the clergy to maintain their pre-eminence, which was threatened by a great increase of lay piety. Therefore "to many eleventh-century churchmen it seemed that only a greatly improved morality and heightened religious fervor among the clergy could continue to justify the exclusive powers of the sacerdotium. Otherwise the ecclesia would be absorbed into the thoroughly Christianized mundus, and the clergy would lose their distinctive position in a society".[39]

Professor Gerd Tellenbach of Freiburg (im Br.) simply admitted that "a more than earthly wisdom would have been necessary to foresee this revolution", and "it will never be quite possible to discover what were the real causes of the great eleventh-century crisis in Christian history".[40]

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38 The Rise of Christian Europe (London, 1965), p. 24.
39 "The Crisis of Western Monasticism", p. 62.
40 Tellenbach, Church, State and Christian Society, pp. 97, 3.

Undeterred, I wish to append a few of my own thoughts. I suspect that what made the revolution possible, or perhaps inevitable, was the rising level of education, first among the monks, then among the clergy in general. Thanks to intense studies of the Scriptures and Church Fathers, it became possible to construct an image (some would say: a myth) of the apostolic Church, resplendent in the most appealing colours. The comparison of this idealistic picture with the sad realities of the present generated an intense desire for change. Since there were plenty of abuses to be seen even by the unlettered, it was a simple matter to convert the unhappiness of intellectuals to a mass movement. When the cutting edge of Cardinal Humbert's logic was applied to the living tissues of a society held together by immemorial customs, the revolution began. When Gregory VII quoted the Lord saying: *Ego sum veritas et vita*, he added in explanation: *non dixit Ego sum consuetudo, sed veritas*. By then the revolution had already been far advanced.

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