

STRUCTURE AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE  
'EXORDIUM MAGNUM CISTERCIENSE':  
THE CLAIRVAUX CISTERCIANS AFTER BERNARD.

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Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a valuable revival in Cistercian research which has made it possible for the first time to provide a critical understanding of early Cistercian texts<sup>1</sup>. Also the writings and person of Bernard of Clairvaux have been in the forefront of European and American studies<sup>2</sup>. This is hardly surprising, for one of the most fascinating aspects about the Cistercians is their early reforming idealism and the manner in which Bernard adopted and adapted it in order to make the Cistercians one of the central cultural and religious movements in the medieval West.

But for the decades after Bernard's death, explanations are needed. Historians as sensitive to the monastic spirit as David Knowles have traditionally dated to this period the decline of Cistercian attention to the order's original reforming impulses<sup>3</sup>. A number of agricultural and economic studies have confirmed the huge expansion of Cistercian holdings in the last half of the twelfth century<sup>4</sup>, while one historian has made use of the records of the general chapters published by Canivez to deal with *The Decline of the Medieval Cistercian Lay Brotherhood*<sup>5</sup>. While there has

1. See Jean de la Croix Bouton et Jean Baptiste Van Damme, *Les Plus Anciens Textes de Cîteaux* (Cîteaux, Commentarii Cistercienses: Studia et Documenta II, Achel 1974) especially the bibliography for recent studies, pp. 43-46.
2. For work on Bernard to 1966, Jean Leclercq, *St. Bernard et l'Esprit Cistercien* (Editions du Seuil: Maîtres Spirituels, Paris), pp.186-88. The results of Leclercq's enquiries together with a team of psychiatrists in Rome in order to penetrate the psyche of Bernard can be found in *Nouveau visage de Bernard de Clairvaux* (1976). See also the 'selected bibliography' in *Bernard of Clairvaux 13: Five Books on Consideration* (Cistercian Fathers Series, 37, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1976), pp.211-213.
3. 'The Cistercians from 1153 to 1216', *The Monastic Order in England* 940-1216 (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 348-358, esp. p.356.
4. Some of the best articles can be found in *Analecta Cisterciensia* (Rome: formerly *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis*). Examples are: Coburn V.Graves, 'The Economic Activities of the Cistercians in Medieval England' 13 (1957), 3-60; R.A.Donkin, 'The Urban Property of the Cistercians in Medieval England', 15 (1959, 104-131, and 'The English Cistercians and Assarting, c.1128-c.1350' 20 (1964).
5. James S.Donnolly, Fordham University Studies. History Series 3, 1949.

been an abundance of specialized studies on aspects of Cistercian life such as theology, farming, and architecture<sup>6</sup>, attempts to penetrate the reasons for the departure from the early idealism have been few and far between<sup>7</sup>. Only R.W. Southern, in his *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, has considered the total impact of the Cistercians on society after Bernard<sup>8</sup>. Southern, however, chose to view the Cistercians from the outside, as it were, in terms of the gap between the new religious discipline they claimed to represent and the growing criticism and suspicion which they met. I shall try here to deepen Southern's portrait by going to the sources for the Cistercians' inner life in order to find out whether or not the works themselves reveal any awareness of the changes in idealism and spirituality which twentieth century historians have claimed to find in the order.

The best way to approach the Cistercians in the decades after Bernard would be by an exhaustive study of all the available materials, from hagiography to theological tracts to property records. Since this would be an almost super-human task, it is more realistic to limit an enquiry to the most articulate, self-aware, but also representative sources we have from this period. This means coming down from the burning heights of Bernard and William of St. Thierry's theological and mystical speculations. But it also implies leaving aside economic developments because the records of economic acquisition are so impersonal that they make it almost impossible to discuss motive, intention, or consciousness. What we need is a pedestrian yet idealistic type of source, one that somehow reflects the hopes, dreams, and fears of the middling monk.

Most monks were not authors, and so any monk who did write works of any kind can hardly be called average. But since everything written by a Cistercian monk had to have the approval of the General Chapter, we can

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6. For recent work on Cistercian theology, see the various numbers of the Cistercian Fathers Series and the Cistercian Studies Series in Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo. For an attempt to describe and illustrate the interrelationship between Bernard and the building programme of the order, Georges Duby, *Saint Bernard: L'Art Cistercien* (Les Grands Bâtisseurs: Paris, 1976).
  7. Louis Bouyer, *La Spiritualité de Cîteaux* (Paris, 1955) did succeed, in expressing the content and wholeness of Cistercian idealism, but he did not deal with the problem of decline. See now, however, Louis Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent State, 1977).
  8. The Pelican History of the Church 2 (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp.250-272.

assume that works that have survived do reflect the attitudes and views of the Order as a whole<sup>9</sup>. There is a uniformity in Cistercian language that owes much to Stephen Harding and Bernard - the agricultural metaphors, for example, or mystical descriptions of personal experience. These appear everywhere in Cistercian devotional literature, and it is precisely here that we find the works which perhaps can lead us to the interior of the Cistercian mind.

The most ambitious and one of the most successful of all these devotional works is the *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense* from the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. Since Bruno Griesser's critical edition of 1961, the fruit of decades of archive work, very little has been done with the *Exordium Magnum*. Perhaps the problem is its size: more than 325 pages of Latin leave the reader bewildered at the thought of where to begin. Also the style of the work is hardly attractive: the vines of early Cistercian literature have grown and luxuriated here until they have become an almost impenetrable jungle. One must cut through the thick foliage emanating from the Psalms, wade among classical reminiscences, and be assaulted by the author's constant sermonizing before one can reach the clearing of the *exemplum*, the moral anecdote which is the point of the chapter. And here, as often as not, one discovers that the author has borrowed word-for-word from Herbert of Clairvaux's *Liber Miraculorum* from the beginning of the 1180's<sup>10</sup>.

9. Thus the dying Guerric of Igny in examining his conscience remembered that 'patres statuisset nullum absque capituli generalis licentia libros facere debere'. *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense sive Narratio de Initio Cisterciensis Ordinis*, ed. Bruno Griesser (Rome, 1961), *Distinctio tertia*, capitulum 9, p.166. All references to the *Exordium Magnum* will be in the form EM, followed by distinction, chapter, and page number in Griesser's edition. For the statute, see J.M.Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis* (Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique, 9: Louvain, 1933) p.26: *Statuta Ordinis Cisterciensis* 1134: LVIII: Nulli liceat abbati nec monacho, nec novitio, libros facere, nisi forte cuicumque in generali capitulo concessum fuerit.
10. There is unfortunately no critical edition of Herbert. The most accessible text is that in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 185, col.1273-1384. This is a copy of what probably was a first redaction, from 1178 (see the early thirteenth century *Chronicon Claraevallense*, PL 185, 1249), is divided up into three books. Later redactions, from 1181 or shortly after, have many additional chapters, as those about Archbishop Eskil of Lund, and are not divided up into books, only chapters. See Lauritz Weibull, 'En samtida berättelse från Clairvaux om ärkebiskop Eskil av Lund', *Scandia* IV (1931), 270-290. Also Bruno Greisser, 'Herbert von Clairvaux und sein Liber miraculorum', *Cistercienser Chronik* 54 (1947) 21-39; 118-148.

Such considerations probably contributed to the Abbé Vacandard's rejection of the work as usable source material for the early Cistercians and the life of Bernard. But Vacandard was appalled at the development of Cistercian legends concerning Bernard and the other founders from 'the heroic age'. For him it was necessary to remove all these additions to the original portrait and thus to find the true figure of the real Bernard<sup>11</sup>. Therefore the Clairvaux tradition of miracle literature was a deplorable development, and Vacandard went about his cleansing of the smudged portrait with a nineteenth century confidence in the powers of historical criticism to uncover truth<sup>12</sup>.

Since the time of Vacandard, historians have begun to use sources for more than the extraction of objective truths. The legends of *Liber Miraculorum* and the *Exordium Magnum* can be employed in dealing with the development of cultural myths and the display of group or individual attitudes. A growing interest in *exemplum* literature has conceded the *Exordium Magnum* its rightful place in one of the central literary genres of the twelfth century<sup>13</sup>. In the light of this approach, the *Exordium Magnum* deserves another look in terms of what it reveals about Cistercian consciousness. It is only an advantage that the book is mainly a compilation of other men's thoughts, for here we can see an author at work gathering together the materials of a century and organizing them in accordance with the needs of his own place and time. It is my contention that the *Exordium Magnum* points to a continuing vitality and reform impulse in the interior, spiritual life of Clairvaux and some of its daughter abbeys at the beginning of the thirteenth century<sup>14</sup>. I do not claim that the content of the work contradicts our age's thesis of a decline from original Cistercian ideals, as outlined in the *Exordium Parvum*, of poverty, simplicity of life, and lack of involvement in secular affairs. The *Exordium Magnum*

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11. E. Vacandard, *Vie de Saint Bernard* (Paris, 1895) I, xlv-xlviii.

12. Vacandard, liv: 'Les traits et les couleurs qui ont été ajoutés après coup à son portrait authentique disparaîtront aisément sous l'action d'une critique prudente.'

13. A fundamental point of departure for the study of the *exemplum* is still J.-Th. Welter, *L'Exemplum dans la Littérature religieuse et didactique du Moyen Âge*

14. Here I part company with the interpretation of the single work that has attempted to deal with the same problem - and by using all available materials: D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Etudes sur l'Etat intérieur des Abbayes Cisterciennes et principalement de Clairvaux au XII<sup>e</sup> et au XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris, 1858).

does, however, show an acute awareness of the dangers of *interior* laxity, and thus through its *exempla* which served as warnings to the monks, there emerges an historical awareness that has not previously been noticed. Like all works of edification, this one uses the good and evil deeds of the past to provide lessons for the present and betterment in the future. But in so doing, the *Exordium Magnum* gets beyond nagging moralizations and reveals a Cistercian mind at work, trying to curb an historical development which the author feels has come about in his own lifetime. He compares the order of his own day with the stories of monastic life provided for him by the elders (*seniores*) of Clairvaux. Thus the *Exordium Magnum*, regardless of its pomposity and loquacity, reflects the same passion for self-examination and self-denial that we find in early Cistercian literature.

#### 1. AUTHOR, DATING AND SOURCES

Thanks to Griesser's work, there is little doubt that the author of the *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense* is the Conrad who became abbot of the Rhineland Clairvaux daughter, Eberbach, in 1221 and died soon after<sup>15</sup>. Since Conrad's name is only included in two of the manuscripts, however, there always will remain a certain element of doubt about the author's identity. We have no idea when he was born or where: the name hints at German origin, and certainly he is very much caught up in German affairs<sup>16</sup>. There is no doubt that the author spent some time at Clairvaux and afterwards lived in Eberbach.

Here, however, there are problems. Conrad says that two of the monks whose lives affected him the most in Clairvaux were Geoffrey of Auxerre, the former secretary of Bernard, and Gerard, who was prior at Clairvaux<sup>17</sup>. Griesser has pointed out that Conrad could have known Geoffrey after he had given up the abbacy of Clairvaux in 1165<sup>18</sup>. Since Geoffrey did not die until 1188, the years in which Gerard acted as prior are much more decisive in dating the *terminus post quem* for Conrad's stay at Clairvaux. But here there is the problem that Gerard could have acted as prior in Clairvaux in more than one period - he first was there at the end of the

15. EM, pp.31-32.

16. See the entry 'Germania' in Griesser's index, EM P.372.

17. EM VI,10, p.368.

18. EM pp.32-33.

1160's. Subsequently he went to Eberbach to assume the abbacy, but may well have returned to Clairvaux as prior after 1177<sup>19</sup>. Therefore we cannot use the careers of these two men for dating Conrad's stay at Clairvaux, except to say that if Gerard did return to Clairvaux after 1177, then Conrad need not have entered Clairvaux until after 1177, instead of the 1169/70 dating that Griesser provides. This alternative is supported by Conrad's own words that he was at Clairvaux in the time of Abbot Peter Monocolus and Garner of Rochefort. Peter was abbot from 1179-86, while Garner held the office from 1186-93<sup>20</sup>. Why would Conrad make such a statement if he had also been at Clairvaux under earlier abbots? On the basis of this one assertion, as well as a lack of convincing evidence for anything earlier, I think we can place Conrad's arrival at Clairvaux to the end of the 1170's and not the beginning.

Conrad's mention of his stay at Clairvaux under Abbots Peter and Garner indicates that he left Clairvaux in the 1190's, perhaps already before 1193. Here the structure and content of the *Exordium Magnum*, which we later will review in detail, provide a natural division between the first four books, which are centred on Clairvaux and the French Cistercians, and the last two books, which bring in a substantial amount of German Cistercian materials. It is likely that Conrad completed the first books at Clairvaux by the early 1190's and then the last two at Eberbach sometime later. We do not know, however, if he moved directly from Clairvaux to Eberbach: the only indisputable fact is that he became abbot there in 1221 and died shortly after.

One indication of Conrad's presence at Eberbach before the abbot election of 1221 is his reference to Theobald as abbot of this monastery, 'one of the first daughters of Clairvaux'. From him 'we learned of these matters': a revolt of the lay brothers at Schönaue, Eberbach's daughter house in the 1170's, where Theobald at the time was subcellarer<sup>21</sup>. Later Theobald became abbot of Schönaue, and finally from 1206-1221 abbot of Eberbach.

19. EM II, 29, p. 135.

20. EM VI, 10, p. 367: ... sanctae religionis vigor conservatus in eadem gloriosa domo illibatus duravit, sicut etiam temporibus venerabilis ac Deo digni viri domni Petri abbatis eiusque successoris domni Warnerii, postea Lingonensis episcopi, divina favente gratia nobis probare concessum est.

21. Vacandard I, xlix; EM V, 10, p. 295: '... domnus Theobaldus, tunc subcellarius, postmodum vero eiusdem loci abbas, quique inde assumptus praelatus matri ecclesiae, scilicet Everbacensi, quae est una de primis filiabus Claraevallis, cuius etiam relatione nos ista didicimus...'

Why did Conrad leave the happy existence he claims to have had at Clairvaux and emigrate to a German house, whose quality and fervour of life he always is denigrating? Here the person of Gerard, third abbot of Eberbach from about 1171-1177, is of primary importance. He was twice prior of Clairvaux (thus before 1171 and after 1177). After his second period at Clairvaux, he again became abbot of Eberbach<sup>22</sup>. Conrad must have known him and respected him: in his final *recapitulatio*, Conrad uses an anecdote from Gerard to provide a warning against the negligence of the new age<sup>23</sup>. Although Gerard's career cannot provide us with a date for Conrad's departure from Clairvaux, his movements and offices indicate an exchange of personnel between Clairvaux and Eberbach. If Gerard's career is in any way representative, then it seems to have been quite natural for monks to spend a number of years at Clairvaux and then depart to a daughter house. This seems to be what Conrad did in the 1190's.

With this division of the *Exordium Magnum* into two separate segments, we can now provide some likely dates. The first books could not have been begun before 1181, when Herbert finished the first draft of the *Liber Miraculorum*. The early 1190's seem to fit as *terminus ante quem* for the first four books' completion not only because it was then that the abbacy of Garner ended but also because more than halfway through the fourth book, Conrad says that fifty years after Bernard had sent the Clairvaux monk Gerard to Sweden in 1143, he returned to die at Clairvaux<sup>24</sup>. Griesser did not take this figure into account. Certainly such a large number of years leaves much room for inaccuracy, but the figure would put the writing of the fourth book of the *Exordium* at 1193 or soon after. Further evidence for the early 1190's is given by the mention of Abbot William of Ebelholt in the first book. Conrad based an anecdote in I,9 on a conversation with

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22. D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Etudes*, p.357. Troyes MS 1402 is a late 13th century or early 14th century Clairvaux MS which asserts that Gerard was twice prior of Clairvaux and twice abbot of Eberbach. See Griesser's comment, EM p.39, note 5; also p.135, note 2.

23. EM VI,10, p.368: ... loquimur, quid a praefato venerabili viro domno Gerardo priore in capitulo Claraevallis aliquando audierimus, non sine multo timore et tremore reminiscimur.

24. EM IV,28, pp.259-60: ... et quae post annos quinquaginta futura erant, spiritu prophetico praevidens et praedicens ait ad eum: Vade, fili carissime, vade... Also IV,29, p.262, Conrad says that Gerard made the return journey to Clairvaux when he was 'quadragessimus in praelatione complens annum'.

him: we know that William was in France from 1193 to 1196 and probably in 1195 was in captivity at Dijon and Châtillon (Book II, Letter 45)<sup>25</sup>.

As for the last two books (V and VI), our best dating is a reference to a revolt of lay brothers at Eberbach (V,10, p.297). Caesar of Heisterbach mentions it in connection with another story in his *Dialogus Miraculorum*, and if he wrote this passage sometime between 1220 and 1222, the revolt took place between 1208 and 1210<sup>26</sup>. In the light of the limited evidence available for dating, the first part of the *Exordium Magnum* should be placed in the early 1190's, while the second part prior to about 1210 or slightly later. This means there may have been a pause of some years between the composition of I-IV and V-VI. This gap is apparent not only from Conrad's geography in the two parts. His goal in writing also changes. In the first distinction, he gives his motive for describing the early Cistercians as *necessitas nonnulla* created by the attacks of the Benedictines, especially in Germany, on the legitimate origins of the Order of Cîteaux<sup>27</sup>. In his *recapitulatio finalis* at the end of the sixth distinction, Conrad repeats this motivation but adds as his primary concern a fear that the brothers now living in monasteries distant from Clairvaux and Cîteaux may have lost contact with these houses' early tradition<sup>28</sup>.

Thus in the first distinction, Conrad finds himself at the centre of the Order, in Clairvaux, defending it against traditionalist attacks that come from the outside. In the last distinction, he is outside the centre,

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25. See *Diplomatarium Danicum Række I*, Bind 3, 2. del (Copenhagen 1977), p.538.
  26. D.Strange ed. (Cologne 1851, I, pp.314-15). Caesarius says his story took place 12 years earlier and that the revolt at Eberbach happened prior to it.
  27. EM I,10, p.61: Porro ad hoc opus non solum devoto et utilitas rerum nos invitat, verum etiam necessitas nonnulla compellit. Monachi namque nigri ordinis, maxime in provinciis Germaniae degentes, ubicumque vel apud quoscumque possunt, sacro ordini nostro derogare non cessant asserentes sanctos patres nostros cum scandalo et inobedientia contra voluntatem abbatis sui de Molismensi coenobio egressos fuisse. Quorum quam sit impudens mendacium, subsequentis narrationis textus rem gestam enucleatius pandens manifeste declarabit.
  28. EM VI,10, p.365: Et primo quidem, ut fratribus nostris, qui in remotioribus nobis partibus sacrum ordinem nostrum professi sanctam domum Cisterciensem tamquam caput et matrem omnium nostrum itemque sanctam domum Claraevallis propter beatum Bernardum carius amplectuntur, de initio ordinis nostri certam notitiam traderemus... This theme is already implied in I,10, but in a much less specific manner, and without the geographical reference to houses in 'remoter areas': ... fratribus quoque nostris, qui haec hactenus fortassis adeo perspicue non noverant...



in a German Abbey, and is fighting what he finds to be a gap between ideal history and present-day reality. Conrad tries to summon up the spirit of devotion and attention to the monastic rule that he can remember from his Clairvaux years, and to remind the German brothers of the Order's early idealism.

As far as Conrad's sources are concerned, Griesser has already reviewed them, so there is no need to repeat his findings here. It might be worthwhile, however, to elaborate on one point. Conrad belongs to a solid Clairvaux tradition for writing *exempla*, and this tradition seems to have been fostered by the prior of Clairvaux and abbot of Eberbach, Gerard. Conrad's debt to Herbert's *Liber Miraculorum* is immense, but he also may owe something to a lost book of visions and miracles written by John, prior of Clairvaux from 1171-1179<sup>29</sup>. It is impossible to determine whether some of the *exempla* that cannot be attributed to Herbert might come from John, but it is clear that John's effort to maintain standards in Clairvaux made a deep impression on Conrad<sup>30</sup>. Another *Liber Miraculorum* was written by Goswin, monk of Clairvaux and must have been finished after 1192<sup>31</sup>. This one was dedicated *ad abbatem Everbaci Gerardum*, apparently the same Gerard we earlier have met. The post-1192 dating indicates that Gerard, after his second period as Clairvaux prior subsequent to John's death in 1179, returned to Eberbach to resume the post of abbot. This could have been at the end of the 1180's or in the early 1190's, but he was here after 1192 when the Clairvaux monk Goswin sent him his completed *Liber Miraculorum*. In all likelihood, Gerard as prior of Clairvaux in the 1180's had encouraged the writing of this work.

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29. EM p.40. *Chronicon Claraevallense* PL 185, 1249C. Testimonium domni Gossuini monachi quondam Claraevallis qui apud Chimum diu mansit, et in Burlencuria requievit. Hic ergo scripsit quemdam librum Miraculorum, ad abbatem Everbaci Gerardum, et in prologo suo ait: 'Johannes prior Claraevallis, pluchrum volumen fecit componi, in quo miracula diversorum et visiones, ad aedificationem legentium continebantur descripta.'

30. EM IV,26: De mirabili fervore domni Johannis, quondam prioris Claraevallis. See G.Hüffer, *Der hl. Bernard von Clairvaux, Vorstudien* (Münster, 1886), 156-7.

31. Under the year 1192, the Clairvaux Chronicle (PL 185, 1252B) mentions the death of the priest Everard of Cologne, whose life and death are described in Goswin: de cujus vita et obitu, et de locorum transitu animae ejus post mortem, ipse qui haec vidit in spiritu, domnus Gossuinus multa retulit.

Thus when Conrad came to Eberbach, probably in the later 1190's he arrived at a Clairvaux daughter headed by a former Clairvaux prior who was actively encouraging monastic *exemplum* literature. Gerard's role in inspiring Conrad cannot be determined for certain, but we can see here a circle of Clairvaux monks collecting and ordering stories about marvels from the first decades of the Order. Herbert, Goswin, John, Conrad and Gerard all belong to the same Clairvaux tradition of miracle literature, a tradition that apparently moved to Eberbach with Gerard. These monks contributed to a peculiarly Cistercian type of *exemplum* literature which finds its most popular expression in the *Dialogus Miraculorum* of Caesar of Heisterbach from the early 1220's.

## 2. CONRAD'S USES OF THE 'EXORDIUM PARVUM' AND HERBERT'S 'LIBER MIRACULORUM'

In the first nine chapters of the first distinction, Conrad provides a brief but comprehensive review of monastic history up to the time of the founding of Cîteaux. His use of sources can hardly be called original, but the presentation is clear and concise, at least by his own standards. From the eleventh to the twenty-first chapter, Conrad turns to the *Exordium Parvum*, the record of the earliest days of the order that was probably composed by Stephen Harding, the third abbot of Cîteaux<sup>32</sup>. Almost everything in the *Exordium Parvum* is used, but Conrad breaks up chapters and rearranges their inner sequence. The most interesting aspect of Conrad's revision is his addition of a harsh attack on the first abbot, Robert of Molesme. The usual account of Robert's return to Molesme as in Orderic Vitalis, emphasizes that he was ordered to do so by the pope<sup>33</sup>. But for Conrad, Robert returned also because the life at the 'hermitage' was too hard for him:

Quanti enim fuit male blandiens illa temporalis huius vitae commoditas, ne dicam voluptas, qua illiciente abbas ille squalores heremi declinans sustinentiam perdidit<sup>34</sup>.

Thus Robert and the other brothers who returned with him to Molesme were traitors to Christ, and yet Conrad can still assert that the foundation of the order is without stain or fault.

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32. For the problem of authorship, see the conclusions in the Bouton-Van Damme edition (note 1), pp.9-10.

33. *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, IV, Books 7 and 8, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford Medieval Texts: 1973), p.322: 'Abbati enim apostolica iussit auctoritate ut prius monasterium repeteret, et ne laboretur regulariter regeret...'

34. EM I,15, p.68.

It is only good, he says, that there never could be any question of the first Citeaux brothers' disloyalty to their Molesme abbot in starting a new house. Since the abbot was one of the initiators, the new order 'which would have such authority in the church of God' escaped the odium of a 'reprehensible start'<sup>35</sup>. Conrad makes no attempt to hide his hostility towards Robert for his *instabilitas*. The one chapter of the *Exordium Parvum* which Conrad omits, as Griesser points out, is that in which Walter bishop of Chalons writes to Robert bishop of Langres and gives his permission that the brothers at Citeaux who wish to return to the old monastery do so<sup>36</sup>. Conrad, acutely aware of the continuing polemic on the founding of the Cistercian Order, says it was 'not those who came from Molesme to Citeaux' who were disobedient, 'but rather those who returned from Citeaux to Molesme', since by choosing a lesser good for a greater one they acted wrongly<sup>37</sup>. The papal letter giving such permission makes no difference for Conrad: he admits it and quotes it, but with its phrase *coacti tandem a fratribus nostris* it makes much less convincing reading than the letter of Walter would have done.

Thus almost a century after the founding of Citeaux, Conrad still feels insecure about its origins and turns the aggressor in order to defend the Cistercians. The victim is Robert of Molesme, and the result is that Conrad shrouds in controversy the very origins he wants to clarify. After Robert's canonization in 1222, the Cistercians again took Robert to heart and subsequent manuscripts of the *Exordium Magnum* simply dropped these

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35. EM I,15, p.69: Sane quod idem abbas ad horam compunctus proposito sancto acquiescisse visus est, propter hoc factum esse reor, ne Cisterciensis ordo, qui tantae auctoritatis in ecclesia Dei futurus erat et per quem tantus divinae pietatis fructus provenire debebat, statim reprehensibilis initii naevum haberet, si fratres illi absque consensu et licentia abbatis sui tale quid praesumpsissent.

36. EM p.35. *Exordium Parvum* VIII.

37. EM I,15, p.68: cum tamen non hi qui de Molismo Cistercium venerunt, contemptus et inobedientiae macula religionis Cisterciensis initia foedaverint, sicut nunc monachi ordinis illius falso criminantur, sed potius hi, qui de Cistercio Molisium redierunt, quoniam maius bonum eligendo minus bonum sibi illicitum fecerunt, apostasiae nota non careant... Later Conrad elaborates on this same principle, which forbids the abandonment of a greater good for a lesser one: I,35, p. 38. It comes originally from Gregory the Great, as Conrad himself points out: *Regula Pastoralis* ch.26 (PL 77, 104B) and can be found in two of the letters of Saint Bernard: 94 and 313 in the Migne edition; 168 and 169 in the English translation of Bruno Scott James, *The Letters of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* (London, 1953).

ten chapters with their bitterness and hostility<sup>38</sup>. Thanks to Griesser, we have the whole text, but it is interesting to imagine how the *Exordium Magnum* must have appeared in the later thirteenth century, shorn in many manuscripts of almost the entire *Exordium Parvum* account. In this abbreviated form, Conrad's topheavy emphasis on Clairvaux's history as opposed to Citeaux's became even more pronounced. The omission of these chapters meant that the whole story of the return from Citeaux to Molesme, as well as the earliest documents under the first abbot, Alberic, was missing. In this way Stephen Harding became *e silentio* the founder of Citeaux.

As already indicated, Conrad does not take the *Exordium Parvum en bloc*. It might be useful to analyze a chapter in the *Exordium Magnum* in order to see how Conrad restructures a section of the *Exordium Parvum* (EP). The EP's chapter XVII starts out with the death of Alberic, mentioned by Conrad in his chapter XX. Then at the start of chapter XXI, Conrad takes a sentence from EP XVII about the election of Stephen as abbot. After this the EP describes how the Citeaux monks forbade secular princes to hold court in their church and how they maintained poverty and prohibited rich liturgical decorations. Conrad uses these sections, but first he provides a small anecdote about the early life of Stephen Harding: a pilgrimage to Rome, entrance at Molesme, and participation in the founding of Citeaux in 1098. This story comes directly from Herbert's *Liber Miraculorum* (II, 24: PL 185, 1333D) and it is followed by some general remarks (presumably Conrad's own) on how Stephen tried to improve the state of Citeaux.

Later, after the practical remarks on reforms as taken from EP, Conrad launches into a series of exclamations and jubilant statements on the greatness of the Order, here to say that it could only have been founded by the Holy Spirit. Subsequently he returns to the substance of the EP with its description of how God answered the monks' prayers for new recruits. At this point Stephen Harding describes the great number of clerks, nobles, and learned men, as well as powerful lay noblemen, who came to Citeaux, thirty at one time in the cell of the novices, in order to fight the devil. This is clearly an allusion to the coming of Bernard, but interestingly enough the *Exordium Parvum* does not mention his name. Conrad does so, however: the advent of Bernard is seen as the salvation of the

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38. EM pp.10-11. The second part of I,14 and subsequent chapters, up to and including I,20, are omitted.

Order, and is followed by words of rejoicing, based on Psalm 103:

'O quam mirabilis est Deus in operibus suis, quam velociter  
currit sermo eius..'

Moreover Conrad dwells on the types of people who came to Clairvaux because of Bernard. They were men of all classes *nobiles, mediocres, pauperes*. Stephen has merely stated that both young and old flocked to the monastery, from different parts of the world. The EP thus emphasizes the collectiveness of the movement: expansion comes all at once, and no single heroic individual is picked out. Conrad singles out Bernard, a practice that lives on to this day: without Bernard, we still hear, the order of Cîteaux would never have become so influential. The restraint of Abbot Stephen Harding on this point leads to some fascinating possibilities which cannot be pursued here, but as Bruno Scott James pointed out more than twenty years ago, the fact that most of Cistercian historians have been French has perhaps made it seem natural that Bernard became the leader of the new movement<sup>40</sup>. Stephen Harding's role until his death in 1133 has not been sufficiently considered<sup>41</sup>.

The *Exordium Parvum* gets through this description of the crucial early days of Cîteaux after the departure of Robert and the death of Alberic in 39 lines of concise narration, while the *Exordium Magnum* takes 93. This is about average for Conrad: because his descriptions so often are punctuated by meditative reflections and because he combines sources with each other, he takes longer. Already we begin to sense the breadth and ambition of this work: a compilation of all the earlier stories that, once and for all, will convince Cîteaux's detractors that its foundation was legitimate.

With Herbert of Clairvaux's *Liber Miraculorum* we find Conrad engaged in the same process of adding to the original text, but here, instead of breaking up a chapter into its individual parts and rearranging it, Conrad usually begins with his own introduction, then adds Herbert's *exemplum*, and subsequently draws his own lesson<sup>42</sup>. But Conrad's use of Herbert changes in the course of the *Exordium Magnum*. In the first three distinct-

39. As Knowles, *The Monastic Order*, p.218.

40. *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux: An Essay in Biography* (London, 1957), p.43.

41. See, however, the remarks of Georges Duby in *Saint Bernard: L'Art Cistercienne* p.14, for the measures that Bernard took immediately after Stephen's death.

42. In the words of Griesser, EM p. 36: '... soweit die reine Erzählung reicht, spricht Herbert. Die ausdeutenden und auswertenden Einleitungen und Folgerungen stammen von Konrad.'

tions, the Herbert anecdotes are left almost intact: they are merely set in a new context. From the fourth distinction onwards, Conrad begins to show a certain independence with Herbert. In the first place, he removes parts of stories that do not have direct relevance to Clairvaux and its monks. Secondly, Conrad makes the lessons of Herbert's stories clearer than ever. Sometimes he even finds a moral or a meaning in Herbert that is totally missing in his predecessor's original story<sup>43</sup>.

We find Conrad at work with Herbert's text in the seventeenth chapter of the fourth distinction. The story concerns an illiterate lay brother to whom knowledge of the Scripture and the ability to sing complicated chants were given. In Herbert (I,16), the story is quite simple: he merely repeats what he often has heard from other Clairvaux brothers in the infirmary:

*Solent frequenter fratres infirmarii Clarevallenses cum gaudio atque admiratione referre, de quodam honestae vitae converso, qui cum devenisset ad mortem, coepit loqui Latino eloquio. Et cum nunquam Latinas Litteras didicisset mira quaedam de Scripturis sacris luculento sermone disserebat; nihil penitus proferens, nisi quod sanae doctrinae congruebat. Praeterea quasdam suaves cantilenas, quae nusquam audiri consueverant, modulatis vocibus depromebat, ita ut videntes miraculi novitate obstupefaceret, et cantum suavitatem mulceret. Qui dum haec aliquandiu faceret, tandem in bona confessione animam reddidit, et extrema lucis illius gaudium occupavit. (PL 185, 1292)*

Contrast this with Conrad's text, with literal correspondences in italics:

1. *Solebant infirmarii Claraevallis cum gaudio et admiratione magna referre de quodam religiosae vitae converso gratiam quandam admirabilem et memoriam dignam, quam Dominus ipsi ante obitum illius conferre dignatus est.*
2. *Cum enim mater gratia bonae vitae ipsius merita remunerare disposuisset et infirmitate correptus aliquandiu decubisset tandem ingravescente languore mortis signa evidentius apparentia resolutionem corpusculi imminere nuntiabant.*
3. *Et ecce spirante ubi voluit et quando voluit, Spiritu sancto noviter et stupendo miraculo illuminatus est, intellectus eius et aperta lingua illius coepitque homo rusticanus, qui nunquam litteras didicerat, expedite Latino uti eloquio miras quasdam sententias de scripturis sacris disserens, nihil tamen proferens, nisi quod sanae doctrinae congruebat.*

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43. In IV,7, for example, Conrad omits two out of three visions of a brother described in Herbert, *Lib. Mirac.* II,21 (PL 185, 1329-31). The reason is obvious: these visions did not place at Clairvaux, while the third did. In the tale of a lay brother who had a vision of Jesus who helped him mind the monastery's cows, Conrad has turned a simple miracle story of Herbert's (I,15: PL 185, 1291) into an *exemplum* showing the reward for lay brothers who are obedient and perform manual labour without complaint.

4. Mirabantur fratres laici, qui litteras nesciebant, quatenus esset haec novitas, et accitis quantocius monachis in audientia nihilo minus eorum isdem infirmus scripturarum mysteria *luculento sermone* pandebat.
5. *Praeterea suaves quasdam cantilenas de mysteriis sanctae ecclesiae modulatis vocibus decantabat, quae nusquam audiri consueverant, ita ut audientes miraculi novitate attonitos redderet et cantus suavitatem mulceret.* (EM IV,17,pp.242-43)

These five sentences of Conrad's provide no more information than Herbert does about the miracle: Conrad describes the event at a more leisurely pace, as if to savour the taste of it all. He also makes the operation of supernatural forces clearer: Mary and the Holy Spirit are at work here. Finally, he specifies the effect of the miracle on the *fratres laici*, the illiterate brethren. All this additional verbiage leads to Conrad's lesson. In his sixth sentence, he praises God for making ignorant men learned, and here he uses a medley of Biblical allusions. Finally, in the seventh sentence, Conrad employs one of his favourite constructions: *utinam* with the subjunctive, to express a goal for all brothers, the meaning of the *exemplum*:

Utinam attenderent istud exemplum homines inquieti, qui circumeunt mare et aridam, ut palea litterae repleantur et typo scientiae turgeant, ut vocentur ab hominibus rabbites et magistri, ut glorientur se esse legistas et decretistas, dialecticos et sophistas, ut de negotio pietatis avaritiae et ambitioni serviant.

Conrad continues with this theme for two more sentences, much longer and with similar *utinam* constructions. But his meaning has been established. He is suspicious of the academization and professionalization of learning going on around him in university society. As a good monk, he seeks learning from inward meditation and suspects what can be absorbed from a classroom lecture. He qualifies himself, however: *non ut scientiae appetitiores generaliter condemnemus*, but so that every man may learn that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. As a monk and a traditionalist, Conrad could hardly be expected to say anything but this. What is interesting is not his distrust of academic life: it is his utilization of an *exemplum* that really says nothing about intellectual pride in order to draw a lesson on that front. We can thus see Conrad in the process of adapting sources to the perennial monastic problem of learning, now more acute than ever because of the growing attraction of the schools at Paris and elsewhere. Conrad is thus doing much more than writing another *Liber Miraculorum*. He has set out to reinterpret the earlier literature of Citeaux and Clairvaux in the light of present day challenges, and here

we find him confronting the temptation of the university as an alternative to the monastic way of life.

Throughout the *Exordium Magnum*, Conrad informs his readers that he knows exactly what he is doing - and how he is doing it. Once he begins using Herbert's work, Conrad stops for a moment to tell us how he intends to do so. In describing Fastrad, first abbot of Clairvaux and finally of Citeaux, he says that the holy life of this man already has been described by a monk of Clairvaux who was one of his friends and also wrote concerning other Clairvaux elders:

'sicut in libello ipsius digesta invenimus, huic operi nostro inseruimus, ut, quae ille sparsim et aliis narrationibus permixta posuit, hic in ordinem redacta et sibi similibus copulata clarius elucescant et ad utilitatem legentium magis proficiant.'<sup>44</sup>

Conrad says that he has ordered the tales and put together those that resemble each other. If we look at the contrast between Herbert's structure and Conrad's, we can see that this is a quite accurate statement. Herbert is a disorganized collector of what other men tell him. Each *exemplum* is a discrete entity. The division into books of the Migne text reveals no special subject matter in one book as contrasted with another. Moreover, later redactions of the *Liber Miraculorum* dropped this structure and just numbered the stories from one to a hundred and beyond<sup>45</sup>. This is raw material, chaotic in itself, but a happy hunting ground for Conrad, who could leave out the stories that had no particular connection with the Cistercians and then rearrange the relevant *exempla* in some kind of logical succession.

Conrad refers elsewhere to Herbert, although he never calls him by name<sup>46</sup>. His debt to him is enormous, and he does not hesitate to acknowledge it. Conrad makes no attempt to be original, although he does occasionally speak from his own experience. But like Herbert, he trusts the witness of other good Cistercians and is satisfied with merely recording it. Unlike Herbert, he demands a clear meaning and lesson from everything he includes in his work. He warns his readers at the end from using his stories for the sake of curiosity, as if they were 'chronicles of the

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44. EM I,32, p.89.

45. As in the Munich MS lat.2607,4<sup>o</sup> (from the Abbey of Alderbach, Passau) used by Weibull, where the Eskill story is chapter 98 (see my note 10).

46. EM II,32, p1143; III,13, p.176.



age or annals of kings',<sup>47</sup>. He makes no claim to be anything more than a compiler: 'ea quae a studiosis patribus sparsim exarata reperimus... in unum collegimus',<sup>48</sup>.

### 3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

Conrad's statement about his limited ambitions should not be taken too literally. The more one studies the structure of the *Exordium Magnum*, the more clear it becomes that the author was extremely careful in his selection of sources. One can rightly speak of an ideological purpose. Practically everything included is there in order to convince the reader that the Cistercians have a God-given mission on earth and a heroic tradition. This tradition, which starts with Stephen Harding but centres emotionally and spiritually on Bernard and Clairvaux, makes huge demands on Conrad's colleagues and contemporaries. There is nothing extraordinary about the aggressiveness of the message. Many Cistercian chronicles defend their monasteries by making great claims for the origins of the Order. The *Exordium* is special, however, because of the degree of sophistication in the argument. The work is structured so that every available piece of evidence can be used to show that the Clairvaux tradition is unique and alive. The last drops of information and piety are squeezed out of the materials: nothing is wasted.

In the first nine chapters, for example, Conrad does more than give a historical review of the development of monasticism before Cîteaux. He provides anecdotes in order to initiate themes that appear again and again later in the work. First of all (I,4), the Benedictine Rule is emphasized as having continuing relevance for monks in Conrad's day. In this chapter Conrad points to a continuity in the monastic movement. Secondly, in dealing with Cluny, Conrad finds incidents from the *Life* of Saint Odo which emphasize various monastic virtues: silence in the cloister (I, 6); the importance of the smallest matters in monastic discipline (I,7); the monks' concentration on purgatory, as shown by a vision of the dead granted to a Cluny brother. Finally there is the theme of decline: Conrad subtly contrasts the state of Cluny under Saint Hugh, when the abbot had such powers from holiness that he could cure a paralytic (I,9), with

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47. EM VI,10, p.369: ... qui venustissimam et fecundissimam seriem strenuae conversationis sanctorum patrum relegens velut chronica temporum vel annales regum ad solam curiosam notitiam rerum eam transcurrit...

48. EM VI,10, p.365.

the *negligentia* which took over Cluny. This *negligentia*, one of Conrad's favourite words, is the 'mother of dissolution',<sup>49</sup>.

The statement leads to a long plaint in which it is important to notice that instead of attacking Cluny, as one might expect, Conrad laments its decline and points out the danger that the same thing happen to the order of Citeaux. Cluny's condition after 1100 is an object lesson for Clairvaux-Citeaux in 1200. Conrad is describing a development which he is afraid might be repeated. To make it absolutely clear, he quotes Horace: '*nostra res agitur, paries dum proximus ardet*'. This remark closes the chapter, and the next chapter starts with the founding of Citeaux. Conrad is thus not attacking Cluny because its monks have attacked Citeaux. He is using the history of Cluny as an example, or in modern language, a paradigm, for the rise and fall of a monastic congregation. Conrad is thus aiming at a Cistercian audience, not a generally monastic one: '*Quid intendimus alterius ordinis et prius perfectissimam religionem et postmodum miserimam, quam hodie oculis nostris cernimus, dissolutionem replicando et inculcando.*' (p.60) The polemic here is an inwardly-oriented one. Conrad is much less concerned with defending the reputation of the Cistercian order than he is in rousing his comrades to the danger facing them.

Going from here to the foundation account (I,10) Conrad makes it quite clear how much he intends to heroize the origins of the order. The Cistercians are praised because they maintain discipline *non solum in maioribus verum etiam in minoribus*. This phrase, here introduced with reference to Cluny (I,7) is soon adapted into a Cistercian context. It becomes one of the major themes of the *Exordium Magnum*. Also the Cluniac link with purgatory is cistercianized. If it was Cluny that initiated the celebration of the feast of All Souls on November the second, then it is the Cistercians who have through many revelations and visions received the guarantee that at their deaths they will go to heaven without having to experience 'the purgatory fire', a privilege which indeed is 'most rare' in any other type of men, *alio genere hominum*. The Cistercians are thus made into their own race, a group apart, and as will be shown by a number of *exempla*, a good Cistercian goes straight to heaven. Here he finds his fellows in their place of honour in the heavenly court.

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49. EM I,9, p.59: *Quid agimus, quod negligentia, quae pro dolor! in ipsa quoque religiosorum conversatione deprehenditur, ad vitia tam proclivis est?*

The next ten chapters follow more or less the narrations and the documents of the *Exordium Parvum*, as already described. There then follow a number of anecdotes from the abbacy of Stephen Harding. (I,22-31) These make fascinating reading, for some of them are not from Herbert, and Grieser gives no alternative sources. They might be from one of the lost miracle books, but they could just as well be based on an oral tradition. Conrad emphasizes the simplicity of Stephen and tells his readers that if they want to see for themselves, they need merely to take a look at his pastoral staff, kept at Cîteaux, which is hardly more than a walking stick. (I,27)

After Stephen, Conrad leaves a chronological gap until the 1160's, except for the statement (I,31) that Stephen foresaw the unworthiness of his successor. Conrad explains nothing about this Cîteaux scandal. In general he tells very little about the interior life of Cîteaux. Already here Conrad's Clairvaux preference is obvious. He mentions Fastrad, who was elected Cîteaux abbot in 1161, but this same monk was first abbot of Clairvaux from 1157. The other Cîteaux abbot mentioned is Alexander (1168-78), but here again it is all to the greater glory of Clairvaux, for Alexander, once a master at Cologne, was visited and converted by Bernard. Conrad excuses his lack of attention to Cîteaux by pointing out that he knows and is best able to study the holy elders of Clairvaux and therefore concentrates on them. 'Far be it from me', he says, 'to prejudice the sanctity of innumerable servants of God both in Cîteaux and in the whole of the sacred order'.<sup>50</sup> Conrad is thus quite aware of what he is doing: without making a great effort to find original sources for Cîteaux, he is giving it its due, recounting enough so that his respect is obvious. In one vivid description, he tells of the monk Christian's vision of Abbot Reynard and the convent of Cîteaux. Angels were standing above the choir, corresponding to the places of monks in the stalls. Thus the divine liturgy of Cîteaux is blessed by the presence and participation of heaven's angels. (I,34)

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50. EM I,10, p.62: Si quem vero movet, quod Claraevallensium tantum et non etiam Cisterciensium seniorum mentionem fecimus, noverit nos ut ecclesiae Claraevallis alumnos nostrorum seniorum sacra studia familiaris et efficacius investigare potuisse nec ea, quae de paucorum sincera conversatione seu felici consummatione ad absolutionem sponsionis nostrae descripsimus, innumerabilium servorum Dei, qui tam in Cistercio quam in universitate sacri ordinis spirituales agones viriliter desudarunt, praeiudicare sanctitati.

But Conrad's passionate involvement in his subject so clearly shown in his account of the Order's foundations, does not reappear again until his chapters at the start of the second distinction on Bernard of Clairvaux. Here he immediately admits that the *Liber vitae eius* (the *Vita Prima*) tells a great deal, but, he insists, there is much else that was not included in Bernard's biography<sup>51</sup>. And we can add that Conrad selects sayings and episodes from Bernard's life that put him into focus as a mediator between the individual monk and heaven itself. Bernard is shown in the very first chapter as receiving through a vision of a dead monk a divine guarantee that every single member of the Clairvaux monastery would be saved - even a brother whom he scolded for his *negligentia et duritia cordis*. There was no room for doubt: *Nec ipsi deerit misericordia Dei*. The anecdote is taken from Herbert, but its placement here, prior to much more dramatic events from Bernard's life, indicates Conrad's intention. He wants to show that a good Cistercian is a saved Cistercian, and Bernard provides the best authority of all. The following anecdotes develop the same idea: because Clairvaux is the perfect community, then even the weakest brothers, even those who are already dead and handed over to devils, are assured salvation through the common prayers of the brothers. (II,2) When a monk loses faith in the power of the Eucharist, Bernard becomes his guarantor. (II,6) The monk is to receive communion on the basis of Bernard's faith, and so when the moment comes, the monk finds his faith restored. The greater faith can compensate for the lesser one: the individual soul and mind are subsumed into the community's abundance, made possible by Bernard.

Just as Bernard can assure divine gifts, he can delay them or diminish them. An epileptic monk is cured, but only partly, so that he will behave. (II,8) A dying monk is told to hold off until morning, after the service, so that the monks' night sleep won't be disturbed. (II,9) The hours must be sung properly, and so the brothers must be fresh in the morning. This is not the *Vita Prima*'s Bernard of political involvement or miracles who is out among lay people. It is Bernard the abbot, making sure that the community sticks together and carries out its monastic functions. Thus when Bernard's trips are described, it is only to point out that he frequently

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51. EM II,1, p.99: ...licet liber vitae eius plenius edisserat, tamen aliqua, quae illic praetermissa sunt, ad memoriam tanti viri simul et ad aedificationem legentium scribere congruum puto...

returned 'in the spirit' to Clairvaux to wander through the monastery and make sure that all was well. (II,11) And when the people of Milan received him with joy and tried to make him their archbishop, he remained true to his monks and refused to consent. (II,6) We thus find Bernard used to portray the ideals of Cistercian communal life. He belongs primarily to our community at Clairvaux, Conrad is saying. He is our abbot, and when he dies, those who try to make use of his relics in order to have miracles performed for them are frustrated, for Bernard's miracles are exclusively Cistercian property. (II,20)

Bernard, who in life had insisted on obedience and the primacy of the monastic hours, now in death also obeyed. The abbot of Citeaux saw that the influx of pilgrims and the pursuit of miracles were threatening monastic discipline, and so he ordered Bernard to stop the miracles. From that day public miracles ceased, except for a few almost exclusively for the Cistercians. And these miracles were of a type that did not encourage great numbers of pilgrims<sup>52</sup>. The remarks are Conrad's, not Herbert's. Conrad sees Bernard in death as a saint who exists in the midst of Cistercian life. The twentieth chapter on Bernard confirms the *exempla* of the first nineteen chapters. For the Cistercians and for them alone, Bernard is seen as an absolutely dependable source of spiritual energy, in death as in life. Not just a miracle-maker, he is the defender of the spiritual standards of the Cistercian Order (*disciplina...ordinis et sanctae religionis fervor*) and the guarantor of the salvation of each of the Clairvaux monks so long as they conform to the requirements of community life and discipline. Bernard is the great individualist spiritual hero who supports the collective life style. He is the monk who substitutes his faith for that of other monks. Interchangeable yet absolutely unique, Bernard is the perfect individual in the perfect group.

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52. EM II,20, p.117: Enimvero domnus Cisterciensis...considerans tantam importunitatem tumultuantis populi et ex praesentibus futura coniciens vehementer timere coepit, ne, si crebrescentibus signis tam intolerabilis illuc populorum turba concurreret, earum improbitate disciplina periret ordinis et sanctae religionis fervor in eodem loco tepesceret. Quapropter habita super hoc deliberatione reverenter accedens per virtutem obedientiae, ne signa ulterius faceret, inhibuit...Nam signa, quae tunc iam radiare coperant, ita cessavere, ut ex illa die et deinceps nunquam publica miracula facere visus sit, licet quibusque fidelibus, praecipue sui ordinis fratribus, pro variis incommoditatibus ad se clamantibus usque hodie deesse non possit. Namque sola illa signa, quae disciplinam ordinis per turbas concurrentium populorum minuerent, domnum Cisterciensem fieri noluisse manifestum est.

The remaining fifteen chapters of the second *distinctio* are given over to the successors of Bernard, from Robert of Bruges (1153-57) to Peter Monoculus (1179-86). There are no gaps in the chronology, as with the Cîteaux abbots. As a Clairvaux monk, Conrad wants to get the record straight. But he is not interested in short *vitae* in a few lines: as always he is looking for brilliant, representative anecdotes that tell of the great spiritual phenomenon that Clairvaux was and is. For Robert of Bruges, for example, we are told that under his abbacy a nobleman was converted to the monastic life simply because of the sight of monks. (II,21) This man, Andrew, had come to Clairvaux only in order to pray, but once he entered the chapter house and saw the brothers sitting there he was so struck by them that he became a new person<sup>53</sup>. As a novice, Andrew had many temptations because he could not stand the rough food he had to eat. But one day his peas came to taste of the finest meat sauce, and ever after he enjoyed his vegetables more than he once had liked meat. This anecdote is added not just because it involves the same monk and also Abbot Robert: it provides one assurance among many that the monastic life can be, through faith and divine help, a happy experience. If Clairvaux is heaven on earth, then the monks do not necessarily have to be suffering all the time. The Rule remains as strict as ever, but God sends his grace to make it bearable and even joyful.

Conrad's review of incidents from the lives of the later abbots introduces a number of similar themes concerning the trials and rewards of the monastic life. But for now we can jump ahead to his *recapitulatio* at the end of the second distinction, where he explains why he has mentioned only Cîteaux and Clairvaux. Other outstanding abbots are known from other houses, he says, especially the other three first daughters of Cîteaux: La Ferté, Pontigny, and Morimund. But the incidents from Cîteaux and Clairvaux will have to suffice, because *et sanctitas sine praeiudicio ceterorum excellentior esse creditur et auctoritas*. Conrad makes no attempt to apologize for what he has done: Cîteaux under Stephen and Clairvaux under Bernard represent the heights of Cistercian spirituality. But even after them, their 'sanctity and authority' still come first. Here

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53. EM II,21, p.119: Sed cum orationum suffragia petiturus capitulum fratrum introisset, videns sanctae illius multitudinis ordinem et velut angelicam conversationem compunctus est vehementer et insiliente subito in se spiritu Domini mutatus est in virum alterum.

is thus Conrad's explanation for the structure and content of his first two distinctions, and an indication of his belief in the continuing vitality of Clairvaux after Bernard.

While the second distinction is dedicated to Clairvaux abbots the third concentrates on other well-known Clairvaux personalities. We can label it 'Clairvaux success stories', ranging from the brother of Bernard, Gerard, and his administration of the office of cellarer (III,1,2), to Eskil, archbishop of Lund, who left his post in 1177 to spend the last four years of his life at Clairvaux. (III,27) All these notables are distinguished by the fact that they came either to or from Clairvaux, which functions as a centre of spiritual power. Here Guerric, monk of Clairvaux and later abbot of Igny (1138-57), is seen in choir, on his way to read the lesson, clothed in a garment of brilliant whiteness by an angel. (III,8) Likewise Geoffrey, monk of Clairvaux and later bishop in Sardinia, has a vision when he is in the choir. A heavenly procession of souls coming from the graveyard of Clairvaux crosses through the church through the door leading to the infirmary, where a brother lies dying. (III,23) Clairvaux is experienced through visions not so much as a place for spectacular miracles but as a place for heartfelt monastic devotion. But it is this devotion which brings the inhabitants of heaven directly to Clairvaux, as when Mary is seen presiding in the monastic chapter, or a brother sees Christ coming from heaven on the death of another brother. (III,31,33) The choirs of angels are here superimposed, physically and spiritually, on the monastic choirs.

But there are conflicts as well as victories. The story of the scandal of the young Robert, a relative of Bernard, is told, even though it is well known from the *Vita Prima*. Conrad includes the full text of Bernard's letter demanding his nephew to return from Cluny to Clairvaux, for it is necessary to warn potential recruits that they cannot accept the greater discipline and then abandon it for a lesser one. (III,11) Also we hear of a spiritual castration, the last resort in the monk Peter of Toulouse's long battle against sexual temptation. (III,15) Some of the anecdotes are filled with devils, their stench that refuses to go away. (III,22) But Conrad, unlike Herbert, prefers to emphasize Christ and his angels instead of Satan and his devils<sup>54</sup>.

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54. Only in three out of the 34 chapters of the third distinction do devils play significant roles (III,15,17,22), so about 10% of the stories. In Herbert the percentage would probably be about double.

Only once does Conrad allow himself to depart from anecdotes that reflect back on Clairvaux. After telling of Eskil's monastic achievements and his visions at Clairvaux, Conrad recounts in full the story in Herbert of Eskil's uncles, their pilgrimage to the East, and their happy deaths<sup>55</sup>. But the exception proves the rule. If we review the full extent of the Eskil literature included in Herbert, we can see how Conrad otherwise prunes away a number of superfluous incidents, such as the death of the disobedient bishop of Ribe or the grisly end of an adulterer<sup>56</sup>. Also the achievements of Eskil are toned down and fitted to a more exclusive Cistercian pattern: Herbert wrote of Eskil's monastic settlements of many different orders in a number of lands, while Conrad suffices with the two Cistercian houses in Denmark that Eskil helped to establish.

One can hardly say that Conrad uses a source like Herbert critically, but he does approach him selectively. We are given the full impact of many important personalities whose devotion to Clairvaux bring prestige and spiritual glory to the monastery. Within the distinction, no thematic ordering is apparent. There may be some chronological principle at work here, starting with early figures from Bernard's immediate circle of relatives and ending with those whom Conrad himself could have known at Clairvaux, men like Eskil. But Conrad allows himself to proceed at a leisurely pace, without the rigid structure of the first two distinctions. He closes with two visions that came at the death of Clairvaux brothers. (III,33, 34) There is no summing up or *recapitulatio*. Conrad goes right on into the next *distinctio*.

The fourth distinction, which has almost the same number of chapters as the third (34-35), leaves behind the V.I.P.s and goes over to monks in general at Clairvaux. Most of them are not named at all, and their identities are quite subordinate to the lessons they teach. Already here Conrad begins to move from the historical-hagiographical content of the initial distinctions to the pure *exempla* of the last two. The transition from third to fourth distinction is a preview of the movement of the entire *Exordium* from the *exemplum* inside an historical framework to history buried in the structure of the *exemplum*. Most of the chapters deal with

55. EM III,28, pp.214-217. Herbert ch.97 (or 98) printed in Weibull, p.288.

56. The adulterer story: EM III,27, p.212, l.32-39; Herbert *Lib.Mir.*Weibull, pp.280-281, at least twice as long, with many more details. The Elias bishop of Ribe story, pp.281-2 in Weibull's text of the *Lib.Mir.*, is completely missing in Conrad.



visions, and here devils play a much more important role than in the previous distinction. One virgin monk has terrible attacks by them, and despite bright sunshine, he can see them at midday in the air (IV,4). The devils are innumerable. But other brothers are privileged to see Christ, Mary Magdalene, or St. Bernard (IV,7-11,21-22). There is a whole section of about ten chapters dedicated to illiterate monks and to lay brothers (V,12-20). The illiterate are comforted by the thought of spiritual learning, while lay brothers are shown the reward they will receive for their obedience and lack of ambition. Conrad tries to provide the lay brothers with the same set of spiritual privileges as the monks themselves have. Angels visit good lay brothers; robbers are afraid of them when they are on the business of Clairvaux; they too can participate in the liturgy even if they are far from the monastery; they too can be attacked by devils.

In the twenty-fourth chapter, Conrad says he is embarking on *admonitiones*, warnings, instead of examples for imitation. He does not fulfill this promise. The remaining ten chapters are sprinkled with anecdotes that often have nothing to do with warnings, and already in IV,26, Conrad goes over to a detailed description of the life of John, prior of Clairvaux. John is contrasted with a Saxon Cistercian abbot who had the finest cloth purchased for his wardrobe every year in Flanders. Conrad's attention is wandering from Clairvaux as the centre for his tales. He is beginning to face the world outside, especially the Germany that finally drew him. But Clairvaux is still primary: we hear of voyages of brothers to Sweden, but also how they came back to Clairvaux to die (IV,28,29). A lay brother from Clairvaux, Lawrence, manages to make a great journey to Sicily and returns unharmed because of the protection of Bernard (IV,34).

In the fourth distinction, Conrad seems almost overwhelmed by the abundance of his materials and not certain in which direction he wants to go. It is thus much easier to point out structure and coherence in the first distinction than in the fourth, for in the first Conrad has carefully arranged his materials according to a principle of monastic history, while in the fourth, Conrad provides a jumble of miscellaneous stories, all more or less connected to Clairvaux, but devoid of any other principle of cohesion.

Conrad seems to have been aware of the problem, for in the fifth distinction he returns to his promise that he will provide warnings to monks by giving them examples of bad behaviour. In doing so, he finally

leaves the Clairvaux milieu. He branches out to other Cistercian houses, for the most part Clairvaux daughters, but also to non-Cistercian houses and even to lay circles. Dangers to salvation include: swearing (especially against Mary), personal possessions in the cloister, imperfect confession, laziness, ambition, disobedience, discord, and inattention to the liturgy. Not surprisingly, the most scandalous incidents take place far away from any Cistercian house. But there are a few exceptions to this practice: the revolt of the lay brothers at Schönaue, a daughter of Eberbach, is described in near-lurid detail (V,10). The story is perhaps included because the earlier revolt was ended by what seemed like a miracle: the sudden death of the lay brother who was the instigator of it all.

In the course of the fifth distinction, Conrad progresses from his earlier analysis of the roots of the Clairvaux tradition to a string of moralizing anecdotes. He is, as always, overwhelmingly concerned with the discipline of monastic life. But his stories are now more centred on the conscience and behaviour of the individual monk than with the monastery as a functioning community, the main theme in the Bernard anecdotes. Conrad is not just concerned with the monk's obedience to his superiors; he also deals with the responsibility of those in authority. Priests are, for example, to exercise discretion in giving out penances in confession (V, 12). Otherwise they will get nowhere. Conrad indicates that one particularly insensitive priest practically caused his own death because he was so harsh on a knight - who later repented and became a saint. Similarly, confession is to be heard as soon as a penitent seeks it: once again the consequences of inattention to individual needs could be catastrophic (V,13). Priests and others in authority are to lead righteous lives: otherwise they can scandalize their parishioners (V,14). Here Conrad gives various *exempla* to emphasize the importance of harmony between those in authority and those under them.

Just when we might think we are leaving the monastic life for good, Conrad reverses his direction and provides a number of anecdotes on the centrality of liturgy and the importance of attention to it, despite fatigue and boredom (V,16-20). If the brothers do not bear the hardships of long vigils in the choir, then they are condemned to the infinitely worse sufferings of purgatory. We are given an unusual anecdote with an extremely vivid account of purgatory (V,19). Conrad is back to his favourite theme, the danger of decline in the Cistercian order. Few of his *exempla*

have dealt directly with abuses in Cistercian monasteries, but he has at least shown that the moment monks give in to their bodies' demands, their monastery is abandoning its basic function in the church.

At the close of the fifth distinction, Conrad pauses again to explain and justify his method. Once again he reveals that he is perfectly aware what he is doing in terms of structure. He says he has given these instances of dangers and vices because he knows that *exempla* have a much greater effect on the monks than *verba*. And later on, he elaborates: we are more moved to virtue and fear of sin by remembering a deed (*factum*) than we are by ten thousand statements (*sententiae*)<sup>57</sup>. This is a very revealing glimpse into the psychology of Cistercian spirituality: Conrad feels that it would be useless to feed the *simplicium fratrum animos* with theological material. They will remember the striking deed, the clear manifestation of God's will, and this will provide them with material for fruitful meditation. In the course of the *Exordium*, Conrad has moved from a combination of *exemplum* and past history to a pure use of the *exemplum* taken from near-contemporary events arranged according to moral categories for the benefit of these not-too-learned brothers. Here we find a justification for the approach that Caesar of Heisterbach was to use a few decades later: the vivid *exemplum* embedded in the rock of historical circumstance and set in a recent enough past so that brothers could identify with it, but remarkable enough so that it would provide a memorable lesson.

In the sixth and final distinction we once again find a subject-grouping of *exempla* as encountered in the fifth. There are two chapters on faith in the Eucharist, then four on death, and finally two on confession. Here is an arrangement of *exempla* according to topic which will become much more specific and ambitious in the twelve distinctions of Caesar of Heisterbach. Conrad says at the end of the fifth distinction that he now intends to return to the milieu of Clairvaux, but he only partly fulfills his promise. The Eucharistic miracles have nothing to do with Clairvaux (VI,1-2), but some of the anecdotes about a happy death do take place

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57. EM V,21, p.338: ... ad exhortationem legentium summatim perstringere curavimus scientes simplicium fratrum animos exempla plus movere quam verba, quoniam devota mens, quae ex lectione spiritalis compunctionis fervorum magis quam infantis scientiae eruditionem quaerit, dum facti memoriam versando atque reversando quasi manu cogitationis tangendo palpat, ad amorem virtutum horroremque vitiorum amplius ex ea accenditur, quam si decem milia sententiarum cartulis exarata transcurreret.

there (VI,3-4). Here the world of Clairvaux and that of devout laymen come together. The strict divisions between the two which predominated in the first distinctions have completely disappeared: monks can learn from the piety of laymen, while secular priests can be warned from the over-speculation of a Cistercian monk on the mystery of the Eucharist (VI,2).

Looking back over the *Exordium Magnum*, we can find, that despite the size of the work and the seeming lack of organization, there is a clear sense of direction which has not been sufficiently appreciated before now.

- Distinctio 1 The founding of the monastic order (1-90)  
The founding of Citeaux (19-21)  
Incidents from life of Stephen Harding (22-31)  
Other Citeaux abbots (32-35)
- Distinctio 2 The role of Bernard in the order and at Clairvaux (1-20)  
The successors of Bernard to 1186 (21-34)
- Distinctio 3 Outstanding and famous officials at Clairvaux and their spiritual success stories (1-34)
- Distinctio 4 Anonymous monks at Clairvaux and their visions or experiences; warnings against various faults (1-35)
- Distinctio 5 The dangers of various types of sin, both within the abbey and without (1-21)
- Distinctio 6 Devotion to sacraments; divine help in death at Clairvaux and outside of it (1-10)

At the end of the second, fourth, and fifth distinctions, Conrad stops for a review of the section, a clarification of his intentions, and a preview of what is to come. And at the end of the sixth distinction he looks back on the whole of the book and reveals his concerns in a *recapitulatio finalis*. Since the book was written over a ten to twenty year period and Conrad had at his disposal innumerable sources, not just those from Clairvaux, he must have been quite aware of what he was doing, in order to create the result we have reviewed. The usual conception of the two-fold division of the *Exordium Magnum* (I-IV and V-VI), though basically correct, is oversimplified. The middle distinctions provide a bridge between the first and last ones.

Conrad starts his book with an interpretation of the past and ends it with an interpretation of the present. He does not try to trace an historical development in between, but he does consciously change his approach. The stories of the origins of Clairvaux and Citeaux give way to anecdotes that lead out to all corners of Europe. The Clairvaux centre is always emphasized, but the *exemplum* genre and the concern for the mentality of simple monks inspire Conrad to use incidents in the last distinctions that he would have considered irrelevant and out of place in the earlier ones. Perhaps this shift in content and emphasis is the result of living in a

provincial abbey and becoming aware that the standard of education and monastic discipline at Eberbach or Schönaue was far lower than that at Clairvaux. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Conrad modified his initial strictly Cistercian content. His material became broader and more representative of society as a whole. And yet his purpose and method kept his structure tight and thus prevented him from making his book into one more collection of miracles. Unlike Herbert, Conrad always shows a sense of direction. Usually one chapter has some logical connection with the next. However much this structure may be in danger by the sixth distinction, the literary and ideological goals are always articulated and out in the open, leading back to the centre of spiritual power at Clairvaux.

#### 4. THE CONCLUSION OF THE *EXORDIUM MAGNUM*

Conrad's willingness to stop frequently in the course of his work and tell the monastic reader about his method and aims might make it seem superfluous to deal further with his intentions. But the *recapitulatio finalis* at the end of the sixth distinction deserves more careful study, for here Conrad joins together many of the concerns and themes which he earlier mentioned only in passing. The *recapitulatio* is one of the central statements of Cistercian history and has not yet received the attention it deserves.

Conrad starts out in the most conventional way possible, asking for the prayers of any who might have received help from his *opusculum*. He describes his work as a combination of accounts of holy men at the beginning and *exempla* towards the end, and he repeats his frequent assertion that he has not tried to write a new work but merely to bring together in one place the writings of other authors<sup>58</sup>. But also, he says, we have taken a few chapters (*pauca...capitula*) from worthy monks, and if we look back through the *Exordium*, some of the best descriptions are precisely those

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58. EM VI,10, p.364: Explicitis iis, quae de initio Cisterciensis ordinis nec non et reverendis atque in omni religione conspicuis viris, qui in Cistercio et in Claravalle claruerunt, scribere necessarium duximus, simul etiam de exemplis, quae pro rei similitudine non incongrue, ut arbitror, iuxta finem locis oportunis inseruimus... pp. 364-5: Neque enim quasi novi alicuius auctores haec conscripsimus, sed, sicut in exordio huius voluminis praefati sumus, ea, quae a studiosis patribus sparsim exarata reperimus, ad manifestiorum rerum notitiam maioremque legentium utilitatem in unum collegimus...

in which Conrad has transferred an oral story into his own written version<sup>59</sup>. Once he could have used a written source for a story but instead based his anecdote on an oral one<sup>60</sup>.

At this point Conrad sets out into one of his sticky metaphors that demands an intimate knowledge of the Bible from his readers. The gist of it is that Conrad sees his task as gathering together what has been grown by others, but in so doing he must be careful only to put in the pot the herbs that are healthy<sup>61</sup>. In the second book of Kings (4:39), one of the servants of Elisha had gone into the fields and found a wild vine. From it he gathered gourds and added them to pottage, making a poisonous mixture.

However much Conrad repeats himself by using and developing such elaborate metaphors, he also clarifies his conception of his task: he is acting as a censor for Cistercian taste and consumption, and therefore any scandals are omitted or at least provided with an antidote that saves the dignity of the order. The revolt of the lay brothers at Schönaue or the murder of the Clairvaux abbot Gerard (II,28) are only included, for example, because they provide striking instances of direct divine intervention. Otherwise the anger of Gerard's attacker or the dissatisfaction of the lay brothers with their treatment by the abbot would have been considered poisonous ingredients in Conrad's stew.

From here Conrad states his purpose in writing: first to show the brothers who live in *remotioribus orbis partibus* how the Order began so that they can feel more devotion toward Cîteaux and Clairvaux, the first because it is the head of the Order, the second because of Bernard. Secondly, Conrad wants to deprive the black monks of any chance of calumniating the Cistercians. Conrad repeats in a few sentences the foundation story, and it is noteworthy that in contrast to the first distinction, he does not mention Robert of Molesme or Alberic at all. There is the emigration to Cîteaux, and then in the tenth year Stephen becomes abbot, and

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59. As the Schönaue uprising, V,10, or the accounts of the abbots of Clairvaux immediately before or during Conrad's stay at Clairvaux: VI,27-33.

60. EM I,9, pp.57-8: Hugh of Cluny's cure of a paralytic, included in his *Vita* by Raynald (PL 159, 897C), 'quodque venerabilis viri Wilhelmi, quondam subprioris sanctae Genovefae Parisius, postea vero abbatis Paracliti, quae est domus de ordine sancti Victoris, certa relatione cognovimus'.

61. EM VI,10,p.365: ...ita pulmentum filiis prophetarum ex herbarum in agro veterum patrum collectarum concisione et decoctione parantes, ut coloquintidas falsitatis tamquam mortiferum elleborum in ollam concidere nefas duceremus..

soon after Bernard arrives, but very quickly Stephen sends him off to found Clairvaux<sup>62</sup>. Thus the controversial aspects of the early years are left behind. The problem of Robert's return to Molesme is resolved *e silentio*. Conrad emphasizes harmony, and so all harsh words are gone. Also Stephen is seen primarily in the light of his recognition of Bernard's qualities: Bernard was very young, but Stephen realized that he already was advanced in wisdom and could shoulder the responsibility of becoming an abbot of a new monastery. Thus even the great Stephen is overshadowed by the person and activity of Bernard. Cîteaux's position is recognized, but Conrad's enthusiasm is turned towards Clairvaux.

This theme is made even more explicit in what follows. Who could have imagined the great numbers that came to Clairvaux to become monks, Conrad asks. I will be silent about the provinces of Italy, Germany, and Gaul in the middle of the world, but what about the distant isles of Ireland, Britain, Denmark and Sweden, which make up the ends of the earth<sup>63</sup>. They all were sending crowds of people to fill up this convent and venerated the place as holy because of its holy abbot. I will be silent about lay brothers, whose number was much greater than that of monks, he continues,

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62. *Ibid.*: Horum fortissimorum athletarum Christi dux et signifer existit beatae memoriae dominus Stephanus, cuius supra meminimus, qui decimo anno instituti Cisterciensis ordinis pastoralis curae officium in eadem domo suscipiens et propagandae sacre religionis desiderio fervens, cum per continuos quatuordecim annos paucitatis suae taedio tam ipse quam fratres eius vehementer afflicti fuissent, quinto decimo demum anno divina desuper aspirante gratia nostri temporis apostolum, beatissimum Bernardum, ...

63. *Ibid.*, p.366: Nempe, ut de mediterraneis Italiae, Germaniae, Galliaeque provinciis taceam, ipsae extremae insulae Hiberniae, Britanniae, Daciae et Sueciae, quae finem orbis faciunt, ad hunc coetum perficiendum crebras personas mittebant et propter abbatem sanctum etiam locum sanctum celebri devotione venerabantur.

The passage is extremely valuable because it shows that Clairvaux did not just send contingents of monks out to distant countries: there also was an influx from these countries to Clairvaux. Thus it seems possible that idealistic young Danish and Swedish aristocratic sons, for example, came to Clairvaux in the lifetime of Bernard, only to be sent back again to their home country in the 1140's and 1150's to found new monasteries as daughters of Clairvaux. Conrad also adds elsewhere, however, in connection with Gerard of Alvastra that the paucity of numbers in Scandinavia was made up for by an influx of English and German monks, IV,28, p.260. This statement accords with the information we have about the 12th century abbots of Esrum, many of whom were supposed to be English or German. See my 'Property and Politics at Esrum Abbey', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 6 (1973, 127-132).

but after the death of Bernard, in one place at Clairvaux there were found 888 *libelli professionum* (probably written promises of monastic profession made by new monks). And think of how many more of these *libelli* have been lost because of neglect or length of time! Always the number of novices in the *probatorium* under Bernard exceeded ninety and sometimes over a hundred, and yet that holy community never suffered difficulties from overcrowding. The devotion of Bernard made such numbers possible, but Conrad also adds that contingents of monks were constantly being sent to found new houses. To illustrate this development, he tells a story heard from Henry, who became abbot of Varnhem in Sweden in about 1150 and later first abbot of Vitskøl in Denmark.

Once when Henry was the prior of the novices, Bernard came into their quarters and gave him a piece of cheese: 'Brother, eat, for a great distance lies before you'. Bernard went around to a number of novices, giving each of them a 'pittance of charity' and saying the same words. Such brothers, Conrad insists, no matter where they went, always maintained the Cistercian discipline, in all *orbis climata*. They paid no attention to heat or cold because their training was fixed in their hearts.

I have repeated these statements in detail because they reveal so much about the way life at Clairvaux under Bernard looked at a distance of fifty years. Recruitment was no problem: teen-agers and men came streaming from all over Europe, but they were equally willing after their noviciate in Clairvaux to pick up again and head for equally remote areas. With a little cheese in their stomachs, they would set out for anywhere, so long as Bernard told them to do so. Thus, we can say, the population explosion at Clairvaux was kept under control. There may have been a hundred novices at a time, but there were never a thousand monks at once, for Bernard kept sending out new contingents.

Conrad is immensely proud of this record. He mentions all the magnates who insisted on having Clairvaux found monasteries in their districts, and also all the cities which tried to obtain monks as their bishops. Bernard always resisted any temptations to promotion in the church, because of his devotion to poverty, but Conrad savours the thought of the Cistercian pope, Eugenius III.

Until now, Conrad has only repeated what we could find elsewhere. As he himself might say, he has simply brought it all together in one place. But now Conrad draws on his own experience and insists that after the



death of Bernard, the Clairvaux tradition continued on in his spirit. And I myself had the privilege of experiencing this spirituality, he says, under the abbots Peter and Garner. 'The Lord is my witness that, when we were under the discipline of Clairvaux and the observances of the holy Order, we saw only religious discipline, gravity, purity, and sincerity, so that often we would exult in the grace of God and say in our hearts that if that lawmaker of ours Benedict, whose rule we professed, had been alive and had ruled in that holy convent, the institutions of the sacred Order could not have been observed more strictly',<sup>64</sup>.

Monastic propaganda? Nostalgia? These words, despite Conrad's usual longwindedness, convey the impression of sincere description of religious experience in a living community. Now far from Clairvaux, Conrad looks back with longing, but not with bitterness or despair. He uses his Clairvaux standard to evaluate the religious life of his day. Unless we choose to be skeptical or cynical, to consider all such statements of this type as orthodox propaganda, we touch here for an instant the pain, joy, and conviction of a medieval person in the midst of his passion determination, and hope:

*Incuria nempe vel levitas seu dissolutio, quae est ruina ordinis, locum ibi penitus non habebant, sed vernantium virtutum fraternaeque caritatis aemulatio sancta ibi vigeat. Quodque magis mirum est, ad haec singulos austeriori aliqua castigatione praelatis opus non erat, quia quasi hereditaria successione ad se transmissum tenebat beata illa congregatio vitia declinare et virtutibus operam dare.*

Here Conrad explains his previous assertion: the Clairvaux discipline was a matter of course, an accepted phenomenon, in which the monks acted as heirs of the spirit of the early days. The spring-like virtues were still there, and so there was no need for the abbots and other officials of the monastery to be harsh and angry on the monks, for discipline was spontaneous.

Conrad names some of the elders, disciples of St. Bernard, whose example meant most for him, and they include our Clairvaux prior

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64. EM VI,10, p.367: *Testis enim nobis est Dominus, quia, cum in Clara-valle disciplinis claustralibus et sacri ordinis observantiis subditi essemus, tantum ibi religionis et gravitatis tantumque puritatis et honestatis vidimus, ut saepius in gratia Dei exsultantes diceremus in cordibus nostris, quia, si ipse legislator noster beatissimus pater Benedictus, cuius regulam professi sumus, in carne viveret et per seipsum sanctum illum conventum regeret, districtius sacri ordinis instituta in loco illo observari non potuissent.*

and Eberbach abbot Gerard, and Bernard's secretary Geoffrey of Auxerre<sup>65</sup>. Thus until our time, Conrad insists, the monastic discipline of the early days continued unbroken. For Conrad there is no gap from the heroic days of Bernard to his own time. Thus the thesis of Knowles that finds a relaxation of Cistercian ideals after 1153 does not find confirmation here. Knowles was of course dealing with England, while the French Cistercians have had no comparable study. But any future evaluation of late twelfth century Cistercian spirituality will have to take into account that an articulate monk like Conrad insists on the continuity of the original impulses of Cîteaux in the Clairvaux tradition.

Despite this self-assurance, Conrad is not smug. He remembers a story he heard from the Clairvaux prior Gerard concerning a monk's vision of dead brothers. These souls said they had been handed over to terrible punishments, not because they had committed any grave sin but merely because they had not taken sufficient care to avoid daily acts of neglect in the monastic discipline (*sed quia cottidianas negligentias vitare minore sollicitudine, quam oportuerat curassent*). Here Conrad brings his fears into the open. *Negligentia*, he says, starts with tiny cracks that turn into larger ones and finally leads to gaping holes in the bulwark of monastic defence. Time is the enemy, for it weakens even monastic discipline, 'since men are more prone to follow vices rather than virtue'. Conrad expresses here nothing more than the Christian medieval view that man is a fallen creature who without direct divine aid tends toward bad choices. But Conrad gives life to this *topos* by applying it to the organism of a monastic order. Conrad's fear is that the heritage of Bernard, the spontaneous attention to the rule of monastic life, is slowly being forgotten. The monks, like other men, are returning to their natural inclinations.

And so we return to the purpose of the *Exordium Magnum*: the example of the early Fathers must turn their sons aside from this development. If we constantly compare ourselves with them, then we have a chance of betterment. If a monk wishes to improve his ways and feels he has little

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65. *Ibid.*, p. 368. Conrad also names 'domnum Hugonem de Monte Felice, domnum Petrum Catalaunensem'. Griesser provides no information about them, and I have not been able to find anything. In opposition to Gerard and Geoffrey, these two are not mentioned at any other place in the *Exordium Magnum*.

hope, then let him hear what Bernard says: I don't want to be made the best quickly; I wish to progress slowly. For good measure, Conrad adds a quote from Horace: so long as we are trying, we have a chance. All the weapons are brought out of the arsenal here: Horace is good because of the eloquence of his language, Bernard because he is the source of spirituality<sup>66</sup>. Conrad's Bernard, in contrast to William of St. Thierry's extreme ascetic in the *Vita Prima*'s first book, is not demanding the impossible.

Conrad brings together all his themes now in a final passionate assertion of the relevance of the Cistercian heroic age for the present one. He insists that he has been accurate in his recording of the past but admits that he has changed some of the stories in terms of their order or wording<sup>67</sup>. He ends on a note of alarm: the world has grown old, and faith is wavering, hope totters and charity grows cold. But we have the warmth of the Cistercian Order and Bernard as its principal support. Conrad is repeating himself here, indulging in literary *topoi*, and losing himself in a final sermon to the brothers. But the rhetoric has a solid historical foundation, both personal and institutional.

Conrad has in the course of his lifetime experienced a change in the content of inner life of the Cistercians. Perhaps this awareness came to him when he left Clairvaux; for there he had found that everything followed the early traditions. The difficulty with Conrad's interpretation is that he gives only a few concrete details for a historian to build on. In what does the decline consist, one asks? Conrad speaks of the *negligentia* and *torpor*, and many of his chapters are devoted to illustrations of these themes. He is concerned with what we might consider to be trivial

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66. *Ibid.*, pp.368-9: Si quis vero multum proficere volens, sed non valens ideoque taedio affectus remissius agere coeperit, audiat, quid sanctus pater Bernardus dicat: Nolo, inquit, repente fieri summus; paulatim proficere volo. Sed et facundissimus ille poeta facetia metricae suavitatis rudes et duras hominum mentes ad discendam morum honestatem invitans, ut ostenderet modicum qualemcumque profectum neminem despicere, sed neque ullis difficultatibus cedere debere, quoniam constantia probae intentionis vinciat omnia (There follows a quotation from Horace *Epistola* I 1,28-31, with Conrad's commentary added).

67. *Ibid.*, p.370: Ceterum in hac sola parte veniam a studiosis lectoribus petimus, quod aliquibus in locis sensum vel summam verborum, quae dicta sunt, retinentes eandem summam competenti formula orationis vestire curavimus; nam de rebus ipsis absit, ut, quantum in nobis fuit, minimum saltem articulum aliter, quam rei eventus fuit, mentiendi libidine laesa conscientia poneremus.

matters: falling asleep during service, being tempted by illicit foods, keeping a piece of cloth for one's private property. But for Conrad these are essentials, for the minor cases of neglect open the way for the major ones, and if the Cistercians do not watch out, they will go the way of the Cluniacs and lose sight of what makes them better than the Cluniacs and closer to the spirit of Benedict's Rule.

With our twentieth century awareness of economic factors as the foundation for all cultures, it is difficult to take Conrad quite seriously. We know the story of the Cistercian exploitation of the land and the huge growth of possessions precisely during this second half of the twelfth century. In one anecdote, we can see how Conrad simply bypasses this factor. The Abbot of Cîteaux visits a famous holy woman and asks her to reveal in what respects the Cistercians have adopted practices which are contrary to true monastic discipline. 'May you know, lord father', she answered him, 'that there are three things in your Order which especially offend the eyes of God: the multiplication of agricultural holdings, the excessive amount of building, and over-lavish singing'<sup>68</sup>. Since Conrad's theme in this chapter is the danger of monks who are trained primarily for singing on special occasions and so neglect the daily services, it is logical that he does not here develop the other two themes. But it is still remarkable that he lets two major charges against the Cistercians hang in mid-air. If he had followed his usual procedure, he would in the next chapter have developed a theme introduced here, but in this instance he turns to a quite different topic. Conrad is not interested in dealing with the subject of outward acquisition. His concern is monastic discipline within the cloister, not the economic policies and building program of the Order.

Here Conrad's silence is more significant than his usual loquacity<sup>69</sup>. This aspect of Cistercian life, so essential for us, is irrelevant for him both in terms of his literary genre *and* in relation to the goal of his

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68. EM V, 20, p. 335: Sciatis, domine pater, tria esse in ordine vestro, quae specialiter oculos summae maiestatis offendunt, multiplicatio scilicet agrorum, superfluitas aedificiorum atque lascivia vocum.

69. The positivist heritage has made the *argumentum e silentio* anathema. But it is my contention that in many cases, narrative sources are most revealing when they take a fact or an attitude for granted and leave it 'in between the lines'. Therefore the historian must sometimes venture beyond the text, if he is going to do anything more than repeat or refute what is in it.

work. The Clairvaux that he knew and loved was not a farming monopoly or a building complex: it was a community of brothers united in a historical and spiritual tradition. It is important to take this attitude seriously and try to analyse it further, instead of imposing our age's categories and cultural definitions upon it. And it is no use trying to claim that Conrad is suppressing dangerous material. Murder, suicide, and revolt inside Cistercian houses are all included, so one can hardly talk of self-censorship and undue favouritism! For Conrad our categories are irrelevant because the content of spirituality is central, while the question of possessions that belonged to the Order (and not to individuals) is peripheral. Conrad's blindness to 'our' point of view should only encourage us to examine more carefully the awareness he gained with a pair of eyes that could see aspects of a world that is so very different from our own.

##### 5. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSCIOUS THEMES: THE CENTRALITY OF CLAIRVAUX AND THE DANGER OF DECLINE

At no time in the course of the *Exordium Magnum* does Conrad lose sight of the central place of Clairvaux in the Cistercian tradition. We have already touched upon the way in which he uses anecdotes from the life of Bernard to illustrate the intimate connection between Bernard the saint and Bernard the abbot of Clairvaux. Also the abbots of Cîteaux receive short shrift, while those of Clairvaux are reviewed carefully. After the second distinction, the centrality of Clairvaux continues to be a major theme that binds together many of the scattered anecdotes.

One way in which Conrad continues to insist on the cult of Clairvaux is by providing stories of how brothers longed to be present at the monastery, to participate in its monastic hours, and especially to die and be buried there. Conrad in the third distinction usually specifies the exact spot where Clairvaux's most distinguished monks were buried. He never tires of showing how a community in life becomes one in death.

The story of Gerard of Farfa is typical for this pattern. Gerard as a monk at an abbey in Tuscany has a dream in which he is transported to Clairvaux<sup>70</sup>. There he goes around the workshops of the brothers with two buckets so that they can wash their hands. For Conrad this signified that Gerard one day would cleanse the sins of the Clairvaux brothers by

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70. EM III,17, pp.187-188.

the constant stream of his tears. He is made all the more desirable for Clairvaux because of the beauty of his physical features, which as in much monastic literature is meant to show inner spiritual beauty. The handsomeness of Abbot Fastrad is also noticed (I,32), and there also are accounts of beautiful angels who come to men to help them on their way to Clairvaux (as III,16). Clairvaux is made into a community bursting with beautiful spiritual men. They are often from rich and noble backgrounds, but they sacrifice all in order to become part of the fellowship. One story does tell of a common labourer who is summoned by a vision to go to Clairvaux together with a noble from the same district (III,19). The noble accepts him immediately as a travelling companion, but once they arrive at their goal, we hear no more about the peasant, while the further spiritual experiences of the noble are given in detail. Here South-ern's remarks about the aristocratic membership of the Cistercian Order come to mind<sup>71</sup>. Conrad's stories bring out this aspect clearly for Clairvaux, but aristocracy for him consists not just in family, but also in wealth, learning, and good looks. All these qualities reflect favourably on Clairvaux. The brightest, the best, and the most beautiful seek out Clairvaux - or are sought by it<sup>72</sup>.

Clairvaux is so attractive for three reasons: the prominence of the men recruited there, the spiritual treasury of the bones of saints who have lived and died there, and the continuing spiritual power of the divine office being said there. Conrad is constantly dealing with these themes in the third distinction, as when he describes incidents from the life of Geoffrey, a Clairvaux monk who later became bishop in Sardinia (III,23). During the monastic hours one night, Geoffrey has a vision, a magnificent procession which comes from the cemetery and continues toward the infirmary. He sees acolytes, subdeacons, deacons, and priests, all in order the one behind the other. The acolytes in white stoles carry wax

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71. 'The first Cistercians spoke equally confidently with two voices. The first was the voice of the military aristocracy from which they sprang, and this voice is most clearly heard in their legislation. The second voice was the one which they used in the cloister - it was the voice of mutual friendship of introspection and spiritual sweetness.' *Western Society and the Church*, p.257.

72. As in III,19, pp.194-95 the story of Arnulph, recruited by Bernard in Flanders: in capturam animarum laxaret et nobiles et litteratos viros multos de fluctibus saeculi ad litus conversionis attraheret. Arnulph is described as being 'dives et delicatus nimis'.

candles which seem to be more fire than wax. Each of the participants carry vessels appropriate for his respective liturgical function. After this procession comes a great crowd of men in white, similarly divided up into rank (probably saints), and finally the virgin Mary, with the apostles Peter and John to her left and right. The light from Mary fills the entire church. Geoffrey hears a voice telling him that this is Mary, 'the queen of heaven, the mistress of the angels'. Finally the procession goes through the door leading to the infirmary, where an old monk, Tecelin, has lain for a long time and suffered patiently. The procession is going to fetch him for heaven. This vivid and detailed description conveys something of the liturgical brilliance of life at Clairvaux: the heavenly assembly is a projection, a mental abstract, based on the ceremonies held on great feast days. The choirs of heaven become absorbed into the choirs of monks: angels and saints seek out this patch of heaven on earth, and monks can feel that they are in special contact with God.

This vision of the beauty and spiritual power of Clairvaux can be so overwhelming that it can make it possible for a brother from another monastery to die there. Conrad tells of a brother from a daughter house of Clairvaux who came on business to the abbey and during his stay happened to experience the services for the soul of a dead brother (VI,3). Conrad describes all the preparation for the funeral: the ringing of the bell for the dead, the assembling of a great number of monks and lay brothers into an *extensam et ordinatam processionem*, the various prayers for the dead. The visiting brother begs God that he too might experience the same last rites. The holy assembly, which is like an angelic choir, overcomes him with its spiritual sweetness and devotion<sup>73</sup>. At the end of the antiphon, with the phrase, *Domine, miserere super peccatore*, the brother bursts into tears, falls into a fever, and dies soon afterwards. Thus he in death is given the chance to be associated (*sociari*) with the brothers whose company he in life could not share.

This anecdote is followed by a similar one (IV,4), this time involving a lay brother, who journeys to Clairvaux from one of its Spanish daughters.

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73. EM.VI,3, p.350: ... totus in affectum pietatis resolutus et huius beneficii, quod semper optarat, aestuanti corde participium mereri desiderans cum gemitu valido petivit animae suae, ut moreretur, ex intimis medullis clamans ad Dominum et dicens: Moriatur, Domine, anima mea morte iustorum et fiant novissima mea horum similia!

The closer he comes to the monastery, the more he hopes to be able to die there. When he first sees the roof of the church, he makes his prayer, and then at Clairvaux he visits the tombs of Bernard and Malachy and asks again for a quick death. A few days later 'in the midst of so great and so holy an assembly, the abbots, monks and lay brothers, as he had desired, protected by fraternal brothers he breathed forth his spirit',<sup>74</sup>. Conrad adds here a vision of one of the Clairvaux elders who was told that when brothers die they are able to do even more for their fellow monks on earth than they could in life. Of course, adds Conrad with a word of caution, all these prayers and spiritual aids from beyond the tomb are no good if a monk has lived a depraved life. Individual initiative must be combined with spiritual fellowship. But the result is a virtual guarantee of salvation. The liturgy of Clairvaux is so effective, and the dead brothers so powerful, that any devout and obedient brother can always find the path to heaven here.

Conrad also includes a number of stories about how abbots and other churchmen who leave their home abbey in order to live and die at Clairvaux. Such is Abbot Simon of Chezy l'Abbaye, a Benedictine house, in the diocese of Soissons. Bernard denied him permission to come to Clairvaux, even though he pleaded with the saint: 'if I die outside that monastery, it will be for me an inconsolable grief and an irrecoverable loss',<sup>75</sup>. Bernard assures Simon: keep your place, but don't worry; your wish will be fulfilled. As it was. As was Archbishop Eskil of Lund's desire. He was a particular source of pride because he chose Clairvaux after having held a high position in the church (III,27-28). His stories impressed Herbert, and Conrad took over many of them.

But as Conrad points out in his final summary, Clairvaux was not just a place of arrival: it was often a point of departure. How could one ever get monks to leave Clairvaux when this was their goal, their source of spiritual vitality? The answer for Bernard was the promise that somehow the good monks would be able to return there in their old age to die. Conrad dramatizes this story through the story of Gerard, sent to Sweden, and fifty years later insisting to the brothers that it was time for him to

74. EM VI, 4, p.352: ... in medio tantae et tam sanctae multitudinis abbatum videlicet, monachorum et conversorum, sicut desideraverat, fraternis orationibus protectum spiritum exhalavit.

75. EM III,30, pp.218-9: Quodsi extra Claramvallem defecero, erit mihi dolor inconsolabilis et irrecuperabile damnum.



return. We can't even get you as far as the Danish border (in Skåne) they said to him, but he insisted that they hitch up a kind of stretcher between two horses, and in this fashion the long journey was made<sup>76</sup>. How much we would give for details of the route! But only the goal interests Conrad.

Conrad's sense of Clairvaux's superiority is never asserted at the cost of Cîteaux itself. For the most part, Cîteaux is ignored. But in the story of Gerard's death, Conrad adds an anecdote that characterizes his attitude: the Swedish king expresses his admiration for the holy Gerard and says that Swedish ground was not good enough to contain his body<sup>77</sup>. Conrad looks upon Sweden and Denmark as the farthest reaches of the world. They are barbarian, cold countries. But their hostile climates and half-Christian people, who had heard the word monk but never seen one before, are described in order to emphasize the uniqueness of Clairvaux as a source of spiritual energy that can penetrate even such spiritual wilds.

Conrad's Clairvaux chauvinism can be summed up in the following principle: a monk from Clairvaux automatically heightens the level of discipline in other monasteries, while monks from outside who come to Clairvaux have difficulty in maintaining the strict standards. Thus when a novice comes to Clairvaux from another order, he has tremendous difficulties in living up to the demands of the *Cistercienses observantias*, which he finds *rusticas et minus suaves* (IV,30). This is a typical Cistercian *topos*, but Conrad specifies it with application to Clairvaux in another anecdote where he points out how a brother from Clairvaux who was sent to Fontmorigny provided an example for the others. He showed them the content of *Claraevallensis disciplinae*. It was to him that Jesus appeared with his mother, and it was not only the vision, but also this brother's Clairvaux training, which inspired his fellows<sup>78</sup>. When a lay brother comes to Clairvaux from

76. EM IV,29, p.262: Quomodo te, pater, illuc reducere poterimus, cum praeter veteranae senectutis incommoda tot et tantis infirmitatibus quassatus et debilitatus sis, ut vix usque ad proximos terminos Danorum spirantem te pervenire posse putemus?... Itaque gestatorio inter duos equos composito in eo collocatur et non sine grandi miraculo a finibus orbis per tanta terrarum spatia, per tot maris et fluminum pericula Claraevallem pervenit ibique in infirmitorio aliquamdiu recubans in bona confessione spiritum exhalavit.

77. *Ibid.*: Cuius decessum cum rex Sueciae comperisset, cum gemitu protestatus est regnum et terram suam dignam non fuisse, ut in ea tanti viri sacra ossa requiescere debuissent.

78. EM IV,32, p.266: Ceterum fratres eiusdem coenobii de tam felici assumptione hominis Dei multum aedificati, Claraevallensis quoque disciplinae, quam in eo viderant, aemulatores effecti venerationi sanctae

the Danish abbey of Esrum, Conrad points out that he did not grow up under the same discipline as the other Clairvaux brothers<sup>79</sup>. And so it is not surprising that his past hides a terrible sin: he had fathered an illegitimate son.

Clairvaux is thus the seat of monastic purity of life, while scandals take place in other houses. The sense of the uniqueness of Clairvaux, almost as if it composed together with its daughters an order in itself, has already been pointed out by Watkin Williams from twelfth century documents<sup>80</sup>. Here we find the attitude much more elaborately expressed. It also implies divine protection to the unfortunate Clairvaux brothers who have to leave the monastery on business. Robbers panic when they find out that a lay brother whom they have plundered comes from Clairvaux. They give him back all their booty and ask for his forgiveness<sup>81</sup>. And when the lay brother Lawrence after the death of Bernard has to travel all the way to Sicily, he finds out that Bernard's protection is even greater in death than it was in life. Everywhere he goes, he is received with open arms by churchmen, merchants, and even highwaymen as soon as they recognize him to be a Clairvaux man: *cum eum Claraevallensem esse cognovissent* (IV,34). This particular lesson about Clairvaux's protection gives Conrad an opportunity to tell a picaresque tale of life on their road. But he never loses sight of his purpose, as Herbert so often does: to illustrate the continuing power of Clairvaux spirituality after Bernard's death. And Bernard's protection means not only entrance to heaven: it also provides worldly success in dealings with Sicilian rulers, Roman popes, brigands, or even beasts of burden<sup>82</sup>.

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Theotocon, Dominae nostrae, tanto alacrius intendebant, quanto sibi perire non posse sciebant, quidquid eius famulatu impendere potuissent. - The story itself comes from Herbert (II,40 - PL 185,1349), but, typically enough, this last sentence is Conrad's own. As so often, he uses Herbert's *exemplum* for his own ideological purposes.

79. EM II,31, p.138: Frater quidam laicus in Claravalle quidem aliquamdiu conversatus, sed sub castissima Claraevallensium disciplina nequaquam fuerat nutritus, verum de alia domo illuc transmissus crimina gravissima, quae in priori domo sua dommiserat, usque ad ipsum mortis articulum horrenda cordis duritia sine confessione et paenitentia abyssum celabat conscientiae.

80. *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* (Manchester, 1935), p.91.

81. One robber says to his companions: vae nobis miseris et damnatis! Et moriemur omnes, quia hunc tam sanctum hominem et tam sancti monasterii fratrem malo nostro tam male tractavimus - siquidem ipso revelante cognoverant, quod de Claravalle esset ... EM IV,20, p.247.

82. Lawrence is supposed to have brought back to Clairvaux from Italy a domestic animal which had never been seen before north of the Alps.

But, one asks, in what does the spiritual life of Clairvaux consist? Here Conrad provides many hints, but in describing the life of John, prior in Clairvaux from 1171-77, he gives the most details (IV,26,27). Conrad may have put together this hagiographical sketch from his own experience, or more likely from the tales of the brothers who knew John just before Conrad arrived at Clairvaux. In any case, this little-noticed collection of anecdotes makes up a whole that summarizes Conrad's interpretation of the content of Clairvaux life after Bernard. Conrad says specifically that he is using John's life in order to contrast it with the *tepiditas et negligentia* of today, for now matters have gone so far that a monk is considered to be quite devout if he is not found to be particularly tepid or remiss<sup>83</sup>. Conrad opposes this negative definition of monastic life with the positive content of John's *conversatio*. He rested neither night nor day. He gave his total attention to the psalmody and was very harsh on himself if his voice slipped or he mispronounced anything. He made no allowances during the long monastic hours for any signs of fatigue, and he went so far as to construct a little hammer *ingeniosa compositione* above his choir stall. He adjusted it so that if he began to fall asleep the instrument would knock his nodding head and revive him to attention (as well as, presumably, leaving him with a splitting headache!)<sup>84</sup>.

It is significant that John's attention to monastic hours is delineated first. Almost a tenth of the stories in the *Exordium Magnum* deal with the

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Conrad (who has taken the story from Herbert) marvels that he could have crossed the mountains with such a herd, only with the help of two boys: Quis enim satis mirari sufficiat, quod homo debilis ac veteranus cum duobus tantum puerulis tantae enormitatis ac ferocitatis animantia, quae etiam boves dupla aut tripla corupulentia et fortitudine superant, per tot locorum discrimina, per tanta latronum praedonumque molimina tam longo itinere salva et incolumnia minare potuerit, praesertim cum genus illud animalium citra Alpes, ut asserunt, in toto occidente hactenus visum non fuerit? EM IV,34, p.270. The beasts of burden are called *bubalos* (wild oxen or buffalo?).

83. EM IV,26, pp.253-4: Exigit autem hoc a nobis nostri huius temporis plane miserabilis inopia, in quo tepiditas et negligentia usque adeo invaluerunt, ut hodie ferventissimus sibi quisque videatur, si non usquequaque tepidus et remissus inveniatur.
84. *Ibid.*, p.254: Ut autem perpetuitatem vigiliarum quasi commonitori quodam pulsatus illibatam servare valeret, lignum quoddam in superiori parte stalli, in quo stabat, ingeniosa compositione sic aptaverat, ut, si quando prolixitate vigiliarum pertaes dormitare coepisset, nutantis capitis inclinationem malleolus repercutiens exciperet et ad vigilandum repentino ictu suo sollicitiorem redderet.

problem of staying awake and being attentive during hours, and John is a model primarily because he never gives in to the demands of his body. His rough clothes and hard bed are all mentioned and related to strictures in the *Vitae Patrum*, but the central element in John's piety is his attention to the requirements of the monastic liturgy. Thus even when he feels weak and ill, he insists on remaining in choir. He fears entering the infirmary, for there he would be given all the best food and treatment and this would be a bad example to the brothers. As prior, he must maintain standards, and the primary one of monastic life is the upkeep of the liturgy. God must get his due before men; the office must be carried out, despite fatigue and boredom - or even illness.

Here as in much else the regime of John at Clairvaux is used as a standard of comparison, an *exemplum* that points to all the best in monastic life. John's modest clothes are contrasted with the luxury of a Saxon Cistercian abbot who every year sent to Flanders to buy cloth so that he should have the finest materials. And John's desire to keep the laxity of the infirmary out of the monks' normal existence is shown by an incident in which the Abbot Gerard allows one of the older brothers to eat infirmary bread in the brothers' dormitory. John forbids this: the old and sick belong in the infirmary, he says, not here where only the abstinent should be. Conrad does more than provide such anecdotes: he generalizes about the priorate of John and points out that under him, new practices were forbidden and the strict early traditions were maintained. Once such a high standard is weakened, it becomes almost impossible to return to it. Conrad is aware of the danger of precedent in monastic life: John is heroized because he saw that he had to be on his guard. One exception to the rule could set a precedent that would corrupt the whole venerable Bernardine tradition:

Sciebat nimirum, quia, sicut beati sunt praelati, qui traditiones patrum per vigorem disciplinae illibatas custodiunt, sic profecto miseri nimis, qui per negligentiam et incuriam suam religionem intepescere et ordinem perire permittunt. Nam semel exterminata religio non sine gravissimo scandalo et perturbatione tam praelatorum quam subditorum reformari poterit<sup>85</sup>.

Such sentiments by themselves could be taken as mere commonplaces, but Conrad combines specific examples with generalizations and comparisons with practices elsewhere. The result is a fully formulated conception of

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85. EM IV, 27, pp. 256-7.

the threat facing Clairvaux and other Cistercian houses. John the prior, the author of a book of miracles, maintains his standards to the last. When two of the most celebrated monks of Clairvaux, Eskil, once archbishop of the Danes and Alan, once bishop of Auxerre and author of part of the *Vita Prima* of Bernard, insist that the dying John be dressed in softer garments than his usual ones, he objects: 'Will soft and delicate clothing make me more blessed than a rough and rustic one?'<sup>86</sup> John never makes an exception for himself: he acts as if Clairvaux had not become an abode of the rich and the privileged but was still the little agricultural-spiritual colony of 1115. At the time of the harvest, he would go out into the fields and help out in the heat the other 'Clairvaux martyrs, as it were being fried in a pan for the whole day',<sup>87</sup>.

The word *rusticana* in connection with clothes is significant in a broader context. For the John that emerges from the Cistercian consciousness conveyed to Conrad, the monks were still obliged to maintain the standards of the earliest days: total devotion in choir, bodily punishment, manual labour, simple peasant clothes and food. This regime was threatened on all sides by aristocratic comfort. Conrad insists, however, that he found the same intensity of monastic discipline in his years at Clairvaux, presumably after the death of John. But the very assertion of these virtues in John and the contrast with their absence elsewhere reveals Conrad's fear that the purity of Clairvaux life was being diluted by compromises and comforts<sup>88</sup>.

This is the thesis of decline, and again we run into one of the monastic commonplaces which are hard to pin down and specify. Yet here again

86. *Ibid.*, p.258: Tum vero fortis athleta Domini eadem vestimenta coram se posita severius intuens ait: Itane beatiorem me faciet vestis molli et tenera magis quam grossa et rusticana? Aut quale emolumentum erit humilitatem, quam a primis annis conversionis meae tanta sollicitudine servare curavi, imminente mortis articulo perdere?

87. EM IV,26, p.254 : Porro ad opus manuum, cum forte alias exoccupatus esset, frequenter ibat haud segnem se et in hoc exercitio demonstrans et pusillanimes non tam voce quam exemplo ad tolerantiam laboris exhortans. Praecipue vero secationis et messionis tempore, quando beati illi Claraevallenses martyres velut in frixorio tota die friguntur, adeo pertinaciter labori instabat...

88. We perhaps come closest to Conrad's fear in his reconstruction (with appropriate Biblical allusions) of John's warning against any of the old and sick monks being allowed to eat special food in the monks' refectory: Timendum et valde timendum nobis est, ne, cum sancti antecessores nostri incipientes carne, quod Deus avertat, enerviter consummemur. (V,27, p.257).

Conrad is an invaluable guide, for in the course of his work he provides many instances of what he means by decline. The first explicit example, where Conrad goes beyond his sources and adds his own interpretation, comes towards the start of the third distinction. In his description of Bernard's brother Gerard, cellarer at Clairvaux, Conrad praises Gerard for doing his job well but not taking advantage of its privileges. When Gerard visited the granges of Clairvaux, he would sit at the brothers' common table and drink water as they did, instead of the wine that was offered to him. He would refuse special dishes. Once, when the Clairvaux prior insisted that wine be provided for him, Gerard mixed the wine with the water, so that he and the brothers drank the same liquid: *ut omnes in commune biberent*. Conrad contrasts this communal spirit of sharing with the situation in his own day, when cellarers were not so self-effacing<sup>89</sup>.

Another of the original inhabitants of Clairvaux, Odo, who held the office of sub-prior, prayed that he might die before Bernard, so that he would not have to live through an iron age after the golden one of Bernard<sup>90</sup>. He got his wish, and at his deathbed Bernard guaranteed him he would go to heaven. Interestingly enough, Conrad does not develop this contrast between golden and iron ages at any other point in the *Exordium Magnum*.

Another early convert, Arnulph, rich and noble, was told by Bernard that although he had committed many sins, his only penance would be three Our Fathers, as well as obedience to the Cistercian rule until his death (III,19). Arnulph conformed and found out that this life penance was far more demanding than he had imagined, but in all ways, he conformed to the rule, had many visions, and although he was illiterate, reached a deep spiritual understanding that amazed the other brothers. Until this point in the chapter, all Conrad's materials are from Herbert, but here Conrad continues in his own words: the penance of Arnulph shows us our lukewarmness

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89. EM III,2, p.152: ...Gerardum, cui magno Dei munere ad observantiam verae religionis exteriorum administratio nil oberat, quae tam multos a tramite disciplinae claustralis solet avertere et in baratrum saecularis conversationis immergere. Quis autem tantae laudis praeconium digne admirari sufficiat, quod plus omnibus laborans minus omnibus accipiebat, quod nullo petulanti affectu in officio suo detinebatur, quod quidem *temporibus nostris rarissimum est, sed solo intuitu caritatis?*

90. EM III,7, p.162: ...ne post aurea saecula, quae sub tanto patre iocundissime floruerant, ferrea, quae mox subsecutura erant, lugentibus oculis videre cogeretur.

and neglect. We have entered the Cistercian order to do penance but instead we leave the monastic hours because of some slight indisposition (*frivola infirmitate*) and we are not ashamed to seek the comforts of the infirmary. The good examples of men like Arnulph should convince us of *tepiditatem et negligentiam nostram*.

Conrad can be even more specific than this. In one instance he lashes out against the brothers who spend their time in gathering herbs and distilling medicines to cure physical ailments<sup>91</sup>. To such a brother Mary denies the heavenly medicine that others receive when they enter the church. His crime is his individual care for himself, when he should be participating in the *communes cibos* offered to the community. Just as excessive interest in medicine is a threat to the monastic life, so over-intellectualization is to be avoided. A brother who speculates too much on the mystery of the Eucharist is punished by a temporary loss of faith (VI,1).

A number of times, Conrad links this view of decline and divine punishment of individual monks or a whole monastery to a larger thesis: the nearness of the end of the world. Woe to those who do not see the clear signs of the approaching end but instead scramble for offices in the Church (V,7). Conrad is never specific, but he is not in doubt, for he contends that signs are becoming clearer and more frequent<sup>92</sup>. Every Cistercian vision, every divine warning, points to the brevity of the present situation, with good and evil mixed together.

What is it that Conrad fears? Devotion grows cold, monks seek comforts and worldly position. But worse than anything else, they succumb to the demands of their bodies. After all his stories about physically weak monks who maintain the liturgical discipline no matter what, Conrad expresses his fury with a young, robust monk who constantly sought the

91. EM III,21, p.200: Ubi nunc sunt fratres illi, qui plus videntur sectari scholas Ypocratis quam scholas Christi, qui nimis affectuose diligentes sanitatem moriturae carnis suae tota aestate tota intentione occupantur ad quaerendas seu colligendas quaslibet viles et agrestes herbulas vel radices et tota nihilominus hieme solliciti sunt easdem exsiccando, terendo, molendo, componendo et non habituri effectum medicinae in solum se praecipitant reatum propriae voluntatis, qua proprietate nulla proprietas periculosior invenitur. - For strictures against medical monks and lay brothers (they were not to stay overnight outside the monastery or to treat lay people), see Canivez, for the General Chapter of 1175, nr. 52.

92. As in EM V,19, p.332: Luce ergo clarius constat revelationes huiusmodi per divinae pietatis dispensationem tanto magis crebrescere, quanto magis finis mundi appropinquat...

slightest excuse for going back to bed during matins or indulging in the comforts of the infirmary. 'Alas, in our times we have seen many such and we grieve for them, for they are more afraid of experiencing temporal discomforts than of being handed over to the punishments of hell',<sup>93</sup>.

At no point does Conrad say directly that the Clairvaux of the 1190's is not what the old Clairvaux was. His criticism is so generalized and aimed at the entire Order that Clairvaux remains a bright star for him. But his fear becomes apparent when we put together these scattered passages. Conrad communicates a great deal more than what he says outright. Here we can approach the border area between conscious statement and unconscious assumptions in Conrad.

## 6. THE BORDERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

### A. The Sense of Place

Conrad's world is a complex and rich one, and yet at the same time extremely limited in scope. He tells us very little about anything not connected to Cistercian life, at least not before the last two distinctions. The ways in which Conrad conveys his experience become apparent if we break his anecdotes up into the patterns of awareness that they take for granted. The most obvious type of awareness is the immediate physical one. Where do the anecdotes take place, what do they use as a setting? Almost always, they go on inside the monastery. The most frequent setting is the monks' choir in the church, for here many of the brothers' visions take place. Also it is here that they battle to stay awake, to hold on to some fragment of attention despite their tired limbs and the familiarity of the words repeated hundreds of times before. To a lesser degree, the dormitory is also a battle-ground. Here sleeping or wakeful brothers have visions of Mary, Bernard, or devils, inspecting them to see how they are sleeping and whether their dreams are pure or not. The one murder in the whole *Exordium Magnum* takes place in the dormitory, at the top of the stairs leading down to the cloister, and the dying abbot struggles down the night stairs to the church and collapses on the stone floor (V,10).

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93. EM V,17, p.328: Erat vero in eadem domo iuvenis quidam, Heinricus nomine, Argentinensis natione, robustus et vegetus corpore, sed spiritali macie foedus ac debilis corde, quales, heu! nostris temporibus multos videmus et dolemus, plus formidantes temporaliter macerari quam gehennae suppliciis deputari.



But the church is dark, and the sacristan first trips over the crumpled lump before anyone discovers what has happened.

The other rooms or buildings where the brothers spent their day appear only infrequently in Conrad's stories. We hear of the chapter house and sermons given there to the edification of the monks, but the daily business of the monastery transacted there is never mentioned. Similarly the refectory is there, but only to point out the threat of abuse in eating. The monks' physical world in Conrad is deliberately limited to their essential daily milieu of prayer and self-denial. The only room whose existence is indicated and which provides possible competition with the church is the infirmary. Conrad, as already indicated, harboured deep suspicion of the influence of infirmary life on monastic discipline in general. For him the infirmary is practically *extra monasterium*, an exclusive little club whose membership a number of monks were constantly trying to obtain. But the infirmary is also the place where many brothers die, and since heaven itself can come to fetch them there, Conrad cannot be completely skeptical about its necessary place in the monastery.

One location one might expect to be mentioned more often is the cloister walk, but this is usually only described in terms of the placement of graves and grave memorials for the founders and elders of Clairvaux. Only once are we told of monks bent over their daily reading in this drafty place (IV,5). Distractions in pious reading seem to be much less important to Conrad than distractions in the choir. Likewise we are given only the vaguest concept of the workshops (*officinae*) that existed in such abundance at a place like Clairvaux<sup>94</sup>. The *necessaria*, however, do appear, for they are the abode of devils and the site of the grisly suicide attempt that Conrad describes in detail<sup>95</sup>. One room in the main abbey complex whose placement is difficult to establish is the *auditorium*, where monks with problems could be allowed to speak with the abbot<sup>96</sup>.

94. Thus when a lay brother is missing (because he has been kidnapped by devils and taken outside the monastery), the brothers look for him here: *licet multum per officinas quaesitus inveniri non posset...* EM V,8, p.288

95. EM V,6, p.282 - a lazy brother is attacked by devils at the door of the *necessaria* by the dormitory after he has left the choir because of sleepiness. EM V,13, p. 312 - the brothers looking for the monk who has disappeared find his bloody body in the *necessaria* of the infirmary. Also III,17, p.189 - Gerard of Farfa's lamp is lighted with divine help so he can visit the *necessaria*.

96. EM II,22, p.142. Here Conrad may himself have experienced Abbot Peter Monoculus, with his head bowed, waiting for the brothers who needed

Conrad's sense of place is thus rather vague and unspecified, but this is as it should be. The monks are supposed to forget their physical surroundings and to concentrate on their spiritual mission. Not once does Conrad indicate any admiration or appreciation for the church at Clairvaux as a building. It provides the necessary background for his stories, but that is all.

Outside the monastery walls, dangers lurk. Devils can certainly get into the very choir and pester the monks, but they have increased powers outside the gates, as one unfortunate monk finds out (V,8). Beat up by devils, he is dumped in the marsh and only found the next morning by monks who have ventured outside in order to get water. Most Cistercian houses had their water supply inside the gates, so this arrangement seems unusual. The goal was to be self-sufficient, to leave the outside work to the lay brothers. They are found on the fields and hills around the abbey, and Conrad expends a number of chapters on *exempla* to show them that their job is out here and not in the church (IV,13-19). Sometimes God makes it possible for them to participate vicariously in the beauties of the liturgy, but their function is clear. They are to do the job that the monks are to avoid, the hard physical labour.

But Conrad does provide a number of anecdotes showing monks also at work in the fields, especially at harvest time<sup>97</sup>. The description of Prior John indicates that it was not unheard of in the 1170's for a Clairvaux monk to go out into the heat (IV,26). But the highlighting of the act points to the possibility that it may by now have been exceptional.

Towards the end of the fourth distinction, we leave the precincts of Clairvaux and take the road to new foundations and new adventures for Cistercian monks. But as indicated before, we always return to the mother house. The world outside the monastery exists, as it were, for the greater glory of Clairvaux. It is a testing ground, a dangerous source of temptation, but the brother who passes through it and returns to his true home is guaranteed the reward of heaven. In the fifth and sixth distinctions,

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to discuss their spiritual problems with him. Also mentioned in IV, 12, p.237. The *auditorium* might have been the same room as the *calefactorium*, a term which Conrad, however, does not employ.

97. It is significant, however, that Conrad balances off one story about a Clairvaux abbot who is divinely criticized for not participating in manual labour (II,24) with another episode in which one of his successors is shown that the care of the brothers' needs comes first (II,30).

we finally enter the secular world, walk through graveyards, visit lazy priests, travel to Eberbach and hear of a knight overcome by the experience of its beautiful and devout hours. The broadened vision of Conrad is probably due to the widening of his own personal experience. He talks to more monks than before and is less exclusive in his use of written sources. Conrad's world is larger here, but the lessons are the same as always.

#### B. Sight, Smell, Taste and Touch

The number of visions in Conrad might make us expect him to appeal a great deal to his readers' imaginations with vivid descriptions of angels and devils. This does occasionally happen, but usually Conrad is not over concerned with specifying what exactly his informant saw<sup>98</sup>. Angels are bright, lucid, beautiful, while devils are black, foul, hideous. Normally Conrad does not spend much effort on sense impressions. He hurries towards the lesson at hand. Only here, in reworking the rich language of Scripture, can he allow himself to indulge in metaphors with a clearly sensual content.

Yet the banishment of the senses only accentuates them. Conrad can assure his readers that a brother who thought a vision was only in his head when he had his eyes closed was shocked to discover on opening them that the phenomenon still was there (IV,7). There are spiritual vision and physical vision. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two of them, but both can often be combined in one total experience. Brothers who receive such visionary gifts should keep quiet about them unless directly ordered by the abbot to describe what they have seen. And by all means they should not be unhappy if they are only given the sight of Mary Magdalene instead of Mary herself! (IV,11)

The duty of the good brother is thus to see and not to see, to register the sights of the outward world but to use them only in order to penetrate inward reality. Likewise the sense of smell can aid this process, when some heavenly aroma fills a brother's consciousness and he thus recognizes

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98. For devils, see III,15, p.181: the devil as a hideously ugly human being in the sexual fantasies of Peter of Toulouse. Another young, virgin monk is also prone to experience the devil in a particularly vivid manner: IV,4, p.229: *Igitur secundum corporum lineamenta monstruosi homines esse videntur, statura gigantes, colore Aethiopes, agilitate angues, leones feritate, capitibus grossis atque turgidis, ventribus prominentes, corporibus curti atque gibbosi sunt, colla quoque producta habent et exilia, brachia nihilominus et crura longissima praeferunt.*

special divine favour. And taste, perhaps just as important as sight: the sweet taste of communion or the transformation of the rough taste of cooked vegetables into the most delicious meal imaginable<sup>99</sup>.

There can be bad smells and tastes also, moments when the devil emits all his foulness on the brothers in order to show them that they are in his power, and neglecting their monastic duties (V,18). Life is made up of oppositions, and if a monk is not progressing towards salvation, he is on his way to damnation. Special graces are sent to help him on the right path, and sometimes a monk can experience direct divine contact, the touch of Christ. Whenever this happens, Conrad uses the word *dignanter* to describe the experience, as if to make clear that there is no sensuality involved<sup>100</sup>. A monk can see a 14 year old novice singing in church before the crucifix. At one point the Christ figure reaches down and kisses the youth, *dignanter* of course<sup>101</sup>. Another brother kisses the right hand of the Lord who is blessing him (IV,10).

Embraces are infrequent in Conrad, and they are made by the saints to monks and not among monks themselves. Yet there is little open indication of sexual fears<sup>102</sup>. A number of episodes deal with sexual temptation,

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99. In V,6, p.283, taste and smell go together to indicate a heavenly blessing: *Nam cum carnalibus non solum desideriiis, verum etiam cogitationibus a corde suo penitus eliminatis in puritate et devotione mentis vigilaret, psalleret et oraret, superna desuper aspirante gratia solebat sentire naribus suis influentes peregrini cuiusdam odoris nectarem suavitatem cinnamomi, thuris et balsami omniumque odoramentorum fragrantiam incomparabiliter exsuperantem. Faucibus etiam suis quasi caelestis mannae dulcedinem infundi sentiebat omnem in se saporem et omne delectamentum suavitatis habentem.*
100. EM IV,2, pp.226-27: *Vidit namque in visu noctis se quasi in lacu profundissimo fluctuantem ac periclitantem. Cumque iam evadendi spes nulla esset, en subito adfuit adiutor in opportunitatibus Dominus Jesus Christus nudis pedibus ambulans super aquas. Qui cum ad eum venisset, extractum de aquis dignanter levavit miserum in sinum suum ac posuit in prato iucundissima viriditate amoen.*
101. EM III,18, p.191: *Porro imago crucis, quae super altare erat, quasi melodia ipsius delectata de cruce descendit veniensque ad eum expansis ulnis dignanter amplexata est eum tenere sibimet astringendo ac deosculando eum.* - Voyeurism and/or repressed homosexuality? It is impossible to say, but this passage and the following, which borrows from The Song of Songs and speaks of the sweetness of Christ's companionship, reveal some of the intensity felt in a religious community by an older monk for a younger one.
102. But the venerable abbots were aware of the 'danger' of too much contact. See the decrees of the 1181 General Chapter, nr. 9 in Canivez: *Indecens est consuetudo in quibusdam abbatiis vel abbatibus de via regressis, etiam non post longas moras, pacis osculum petant; quod ne ulterius fiat omnino his prohibemus.*

usually called *fornicatio*, but only in the episode built around a spiritual castration does Conrad imply that the monk involved was fighting the urge to masturbate (III,15). Otherwise the problem of living chastely in a community of men is not especially developed. Far more attention is given to the perils of inattention to the monastic hours.

The fact of human sensuality implicit in the anecdotes of Conrad is submerged and repressed to such a degree that it would be wrong to use a few of the more spectacular episodes in order to capture the content of everyday life in a Cistercian house. Conrad is too aware of himself and his literary/ideological goals to let us in on any dark secrets. His monastic world is one of constant struggle, but he assumes that the most dangerous impulses of the flesh are under control. It is laziness and neglect, not open erotic sensuality, that are his prime enemies.

### C. Human Relationships

Conrad is not especially interested in monastic friendships. Bernard of Clairvaux's passionate rhetoric and declaration of love expressed at the death of two Clairvaux monks receives his approval, for they are quoted in full (III,3-5). And Bernard's letter to the wayward Robert, with all the saint's declarations of affection and concern, is also included in the *Exordium Magnum* (III,11). But Conrad sees behind the phrases of warmth and human concern the strict abbot, using various crises in the life of his abbey, whether death or apostasy, to reassert the virtues of monastic discipline. Thus Bernard is admired as an authority figure, and not as a friend to monks in need. The hierarchy of monastic life leaves little room for special relationships between monks. Novices in the *probatorium* have to accept the fact that some of their number will not make the grade (III,22). There is nothing they can do. Such experiences warn against passionate friendships in the monastery.

There is no particular *exemplum* in the *Exordium Magnum* which warns directly against overheated friendships or exclusivity. Friendships in the cloister are accepted, for the term *amicus* appears occasionally (IV,3). But Conrad makes it quite clear that monks who talk together almost inevitably break the rule of silence, as he points out in his description of the lay brothers' revolt at Schönau (V,10). This crime is made possible because the ring-leader and his assistant drum up the resentments of the others. The abbot can tell that something is going on because he can hear

whispering in the corners. Thus close companionship and secretive conversations are associated with rulebreaking and outright conspiracy.

Friendship is not an evil in itself; but within the cloister life Conrad has little interest in it as a means of self-improvement. From Walter Daniel's *Life* of Ailred of Rievaulx, as well as Ailred's own writings, we do know that in at least one twelfth century Cistercian abbey, special friendships among monks were tolerated and even encouraged. And Conrad himself mentions four of the Clairvaux elders who had a profound effect on him when he was at the monastery, assumedly because they gave him advice and encouraged him when he needed it. Admittedly, Conrad only speaks of the example these monks set, but at least with Gerard, we can assume that Conrad had some sort of closer relationship.

Most important of all, the minority of chapters and incidents in the *Exordium* that are based on oral reports given to Conrad indicate that the monks did have a chance to go to the *auditorium* or a similar place on occasion and to share in private (*secretius*) their more edifying experiences with each other (III,34). Many of the anecdotes that Conrad tells could have come from the chapter house, but there are times when we can find him emphasizing that he heard the story from an eye-witness. Such is the case with Theobald, who was abbot of Eberbach from 1206 to 1221, who as sub-cellarer experienced the Schönau revolt: *cuius etiam relatione nos ista didicimus*.

Conrad may also have known the knight Conrad who came to Eberbach in order to pray and was so overwhelmed by the devotion of the monks that he promised and delivered to them a yearly sum for their upkeep<sup>103</sup>. The monk Conrad must have had broad-ranging acquaintances in secular circles in order to provide the type of stories he collects in the last two distinctions. Here at last we find the presence of devout women, while in the first four distinctions they are almost totally absent<sup>104</sup>.

103. EM V,17, 326-328. Conrad provides the important information that many laymen came to visit Eberbach and to hear the monastic hours: ... praecipuas etiam sollemnitates quidam devotionis illic agere consueverunt. The ensuing description of the knight Conrad's battle to stay awake during the services - how he would rub his forehead and temples, now stand, now sit - is one of the best in the EM.

104. See V,12, p.301. for the faithful wife whose love, prayers and tears prepare the way for her noble husband's final salvation (after he has murdered a foolish priest and been assaulted by the devil). These stories in the last two distinctions tend often to be longer and more detailed than those taken from Herbert - and also can be more entertaining, precisely because they are slow in development and

The harvest is a poor one, however: we can say very little about Conrad's attitude towards friendships inside and outside the cloister. Part of the reason is his extensive use of Herbert, who did talk to everyone and anyone and got to know intimately people like Eskil of Lund (III,27). But there is a deeper reason. Conrad is constantly emphasizing the dialectic between individual monk and monastic community: the monk must conform, dedicate his heart and soul to the requirements of community life. Thus the more he tries, the more he submerges his own individuality to a group consciousness, to a permanent spiritual state of wakefulness, hunger, and yearning for heaven. The individual in this process becomes in Conrad's eyes more a person than ever before: his soul begins to realize its potentialities as his bodily needs are removed. Self-denial and submission to the rule, however, are not the same as love of God. Conrad deals very little with this latter theme, except in infrequent descriptions of mystical experiences. For him it is the group that needs to be emphasized, for it is the community ethic, not the individual's well-being, that is in danger. Conrad is concerned with the movement as a whole. His totalitarian outlook (in the older sense of the word) is understandable in terms of his fear that the Order is breaking up into discrete factions that are forgetting the unity that the Bernardine tradition of Clairvaux should impose on it.

#### D. The Totality of the Vision - and its Reality

We can take one final look at this conception of the Cistercian Order in all its grandeur. A regular canon converts to the Order. He has trouble with the strictness of the new order, but finally he receives relief in a vision. He sees Christ coming to judge mankind, with the whole human race before him, and the various orders in the Church. None of them seems to be doing very well: those who followed the rule of St. Augustine have lived like secular men; the Benedictines have forgotten their founder. But then the troubled novice sees a huge assembly, separate from the others, in whose midst a brilliant youth adorned in heavenly glory stands like a leader of this great army. The other religious orders yield to this one, and Jesus receives the commander of the troops with a kiss of peace. The

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present many different milieux. One can almost speak of a *secularization* of the Cistercian *exemplum*, such as we find to a more advanced degree in Caesar of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*.

novice asks what this mighty army might be, for it is the only group whose behaviour has not been criticized by the harsh judge. They are, of course, the Cistercians. At this the novice says to himself: 'Was I not a novice in the Cistercian Order, in that great house of Clairvaux? Why have I been lazy and why don't I hurry up and join this most wonderful assembly, so that I can become a sharer in eternal joy with them?',<sup>105</sup>

In the novice's dream, he cannot move. It is as if his feet are stuck in the branches of a tree, all curved and knotty. The inclusion of this detail lends to the vision the impression of a real dream with its combination of spontaneous answers to life's problems and a sense of impotence at the decisive moment. The dream is supposed to have changed the life of the novice and to have made him into one of the most fervent and disciplined of all Clairvaux's monks. Here we can see Conrad at work with sub-conscious experience. It seeps up to the surface of life and profoundly reshapes it. The dream gave the brother the conviction he needed that the Cistercian's rough ways would pay off in the end. This anecdote, like so many others, reflects and contributes to the great Cistercian dream as found in Conrad. By living and dying at Clairvaux, by being loyal to the monasticism preached and furthered by Stephen Harding and Bernard, by waiting in the brothers' infirmary for the coming of a heavenly procession of angels and saints with Mary, the monks will someday be taken through the layers of the universe to heaven itself.

The vision is elaborated in every conceivable detail. But does it have any connection to late twelfth century and early thirteenth century monastic life? Is it all a piece of clever propaganda, to cover over what Conrad himself saw as growing cracks in the edifice? Is the appearance of such a careful compilation typical for the point in the history of an institution when the early ideals have definitively been left behind and there is no hope of reviving them? What can Conrad the myth-maker tell us about the state of the Cistercian Order at the end of the twelfth century?

As I have indicated in the course of this paper, Conrad bears witness on two counts to a continuing Cistercian vitality. First of all, the very act of writing such a work, as one of several contributions to the miracle and *exemplum* genre, shows that Clairvaux monks were engaged in an attempt to preserve, maintain, and further the early traditions of strict discip-

105. EM IV,30, p.264: Numquid non ego fui novitius in ordine Cisterciensi, in magna illa domo Claraevallis? Ut quid ergo miser otio torpeo et non festino me coniungere huic praeclarissimo coetui, quatenus cum eis aeternae beatitudinis particeps fiam?.



line within the cloister. Secondly, Conrad himself personally emphasizes the continuity and genuineness of Cistercian spirituality at Clairvaux thirty to forty years after the death of Bernard. In this context, Conrad's attacks on abuses in the Cistercian Order cannot be taken as vapid moralizations typical for the exemplum genre. Conrad sets his generalizations in an historical context, and thus he enables us to speak of a living Clairvaux tradition based on confidence in the uniqueness of the Cistercian role in the Church. The Cistercians are the chosen order of God, Christ's favourites, the picked troops of heaven. Here there is no room to doubt, only room to worry that the successors of the monks, the third generation which has no contact with the first generation heroes, will not live up to the standards of the decades immediately after Bernard's death.

Conrad is thus aware of an historical development and is doing his best to influence it. Structure and consciousness meet in the *Exordium* and make up an integrated whole. On both literary and ideological levels, Conrad has a plan and follows it to the very end, leaving little room for diversions and distractions. If his language were less florid, he probably would have been much more frequently used in recent times in order to characterize the development of a Cistercian consciousness. Behind the over-elaborate Biblical allusions and the penchant to expand stories into long sermons, there is a clear sense of purpose. In all the words there are passion and pain. Early Cistercian simplicity may have long since departed, but there is still the same goal of monastic purity of life and inner discipline.

Conrad's success in asserting and thus reflecting the continuity of the Clairvaux tradition can be detected in the writings of an early thirteenth century moralist and sermonizer, Jacques de Vitry. In his *Historia occidentalis*, written sometime after 1216, Jacques reserves a section of unqualified praise to the Cistercians<sup>106</sup>. He says nothing especially new or different about them. Indeed he repeats the Cistercian *topoi* of the preceding century, as if nothing had happened to pollute them. As an Augustinian canon, Jacques can hardly be expected to celebrate the Cistercians, but so he does, while other orders get harsh criticism. After reading the *Exordium Magnum* there is something very familiar about the language of the *Historia occidentalis*, but the Cistercians have such a uniform language

106. John Frederick Hinnebusch, *The Historia Occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry* (Spicilegium Friburgense 17: Fribourg, Switzerland 1972). For dating, pp.16-20. 'De Cysterciensibus', pp.112-115.

and set of images in describing themselves that at first sight it would seem Jacques merely has incorporated some of their familiar language. But he uses one *exemplum* which he took from the *Exordium Magnum*, the story of the monk who studied medicine and whom Mary refused the medicine of spiritual consolation in a dream where he entered the church at night<sup>107</sup>. The story is also found in Herbert, but the words Jacques borrows are only in Conrad. Here, as in the rest of the chapter, Jacques has apparently taken from Conrad not only a special type of language but also a view of Cistercian spirituality. He sees the Cistercians as versatile, dedicated, and faithful to their origins, *usque ad tempora nostra*. We can also remember that just before Jacques wrote this immensely popular book, the Fourth Lateran Council recommended the Cistercian form of organisation for the Benedictines<sup>108</sup>. Thus at the opening of the thirteenth century, the Cistercians still could claim their order was a model for the Church and receive a positive response from others who had no vested interest in being favourable. The *Exordium Magnum* must thus be seen as part of an ongoing attempt to maintain the spirit and vitality of the early days, an attempt that had meaning not just for Conrad but also for others in the early thirteenth century church.

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107. EM III,21, pp.199-200. Jacques de Vitry, pp.114-115. Jacques' phrase *communes cybos* and the term *complexioni* (in EM in opposition to *professione*) are lacking in Herbert's original version in his *Liber Miraculorum* (III,14 - PL 185,1366), while they are present in EM, p.200. - See p. 30 in Hinnebusch's introduction, where he contends, 'there is no direct evidence of a borrowing of material by Jacques de Vitry in the composition of the *Historia Occidentalis*'. In the light of Jacques' interpretation of Cistercian virtues, and especially with *communes cybos* as a striking phrase central to Conrad's interpretation of this *exemplum*, it seems clear that Jacques has read and accepted the message of Conrad, apparently because it coincides with his 'own experience and observation' (Hinnebusch).
108. See C.H. Heffele and H.Leclercq, *Histoire de Conciles* V,2, pp.1342-43 Canon 12: *Hujusmodi vero capitulum aliquot certis diebus continue iuxta morem Cisterciensis ordinis celebretur, in quo diligens habeatur tractatus de reformatione ordinis et observatione regulari.*