1996

Gregory of Tours and Orderic Vitalis : a comparative analysis of sanctity

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GREGORY OF TOURS AND ORDERIC VITALIS:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SANCTITY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Janice Marie Phillips

May 1996

UMI Number: 1379369

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ABSTRACT

GREGORY OF TOURS AND ORDERIC VITALIS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SANCTITY

By Janice M. Phillips

This thesis examines Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* and Orderic Vitalis' *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*. By a comparison of the narratives and the miracles therein, this study analyzes the gradually changing view of sanctity in terms of its possession, function, and perception (both popular and ecclesiastical) from the sixth to the twelfth centuries.

An examination reveals two broad trends that depict a gradual transformation of spirituality between these centuries: first, the significance of a saint, usually dead and a man, as the primary exemplar of virtue and as an object of reverence was slowly augmented by a "living" holy man; second, the delivery of divine intervention significantly changed between the sixth and the twelfth centuries. By the twelfth century, the saint as the primary channel to God lessened in importance. God's miraculous response to man was more often direct than through an intermediary.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES

- EC Encyclopedia of Early Christianity. Edited by Everett Ferguson.
- EH Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis. Edited and translated by Marjorie Chibnall. Referred to in text as Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy=Historia. (Footnote citation such as 5:9:5 is read volume 5, chapter 9, page 5.)
- GC Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Confessors. Translated by Raymond Van Dam. (Footnote citation such as 43:66 is read as biography/miracle 43, page 66.)
- GM Gregory of Tours: Glory of the Martyrs. Translated by Raymond Van Dam. (Footnote citation such as 98:122 is read as biography/miracle 98, page 122.)
- HF History of the Franks. Gregory of Tours. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. Referred to in text as Histories. (Footnote citation such as 2:22:134 is read book 2, chapter chapter 22, page 134.)
- LF Gregory of Tours: Life of the Fathers. Translated by Edward James. (Footnote citation such as 7:2:14 is read as biography 7, section 2, page 14.)
- RB RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict. Edited by Timothy Fry, O.S.B.

GREGORY OF TOURS AND ORDERIC VITALIS:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SANCTITY

Sanctity, the quality of a person or an object as being sacred, takes a place as one of the most important concepts in defining Christian spirituality. A broad and fluid term, sanctity applies to men, women and children, the living or the dead, the religious or secular, that is, to anyone who was revered for the godliness or holiness exhibited in his or her life. More specifically, sanctity is embodied in saints and in the ritual of worship involved in the cultivation of the cult of the saints. Christianity, especially medieval Christianity, held a deeply rooted belief that saints and their relics provided a channel for divine intervention between heaven and earth. The mediation of saints manifested itself as a miracle: a divine and supernatural intervention in the natural world. The aura of divine influence or power also extended to sanctified secular persons and more customarily to sacred objects; thus, issues of possession, translation, and pilgrimage acquired great importance. The manipulation of divine power demanded certain obligations of the saint and granted to him or her certain rights.

This study examines Gregory of Tours' *The Histories* (sixth-century Gaul) and Orderic Vitalis' *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy* (early twelfth-century Normandy) in order to analyze the gradually changing view of sanctity, in terms of its possession, function, and perception (popular and ecclesiastical) from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Chronologically these sources reflect the transformation of religious and intellectual thought in Gaul and Normandy from the era of late antiquity and the early Middle ages to the incipient formative and renewal era of the twelfth century. Gregory of Tours and Orderic Vitalis share historical, ecclesiastical, and hagiographical traditions which span the period from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. Each historian

sits at a moment of change. Gregory combines the late-antique ideal of the cult of the saints with the ecclesiastical imperatives of educating its clergy and flock, and institutionalizing the Church amid the incursions of the Germanic peoples during the fifth and sixth centuries in Gaul. Orderic Vitalis places great value on tradition and recognizes his place within it. In his narrative, Orderic demonstrates the continuity of this tradition by using examples from sixth- and seventh-century saints' Lives to authenticate sanctity in his day. Writing at the beginning of the intellectual and religious revival of the twelfth century, Orderic combines this hagiographical tradition with a view of sanctity no longer focused solely on the cult of the saint; he broadened it to include the living "holy" person whose exemplary virtue, more than his or her necessary participation in the manifestation of a miracle, signified his or her sanctity.

An examination of these two narratives reveals two broad trends that depict a gradual transformation of spirituality between these centuries: first, the significance of a saint, usually dead and a man, as the primary exemplar of virtue and as an object of reverence was slowly augmented by a "living" holy man; second, the delivery of divine intervention significantly changed between the sixth and the twelfth centuries. By the twelfth century, the saint as the primary channel to God lessened in importance. God's miraculous response to man was more often direct than through an intermediary. To document these trends, I intend to analyze the two narratives and miracles therein to explore the holiness of the life and character of the saint or holy person. This effort will isolate the values and qualities that distinguished the saint or holy person for the historian, as well as to consider how this reputation for holiness influenced the role and function of the saint or holy person in the social and political life of a community, be it ecclesiastical or secular.

I contend that the gradual changes in sanctity, function, and power of the saint or holy person reflect concurrent religious, intellectual, social, political, juridical, and

economic changes. In general, with the disappearance of the Roman administrative network and the expansion of the Germanic kingdoms, life in fifth- and sixth-century Merovingian Gaul was violent and brutal. Poverty, disease, and hopelessness were endemic. Frankish kings (often several at one time), busy with internecine warfare, provided little security for those whose lives depended on royal authority for the maintenance of peace and order. Early medieval Christianity, continuing the late-antique ideal, focused on the saint, who created a sense of reconciliation and socialization within the community. The saint also played a role in building Church institutions and reinforced the power of the bishop to govern. The Church sought to establish stability by defining orthodoxy within formal church worship, and the relatively static nature of society encouraged the stability of religious ideals and institutions into the eleventh century. Intellectual, religious, and juridical thought relied on approved custom, biblical authority, and the writings of the Church Fathers.

By the second quarter of the twelfth century when Orderic Vitalis wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*, western Europe had changed considerably due to increased population growth, the rise of cities, and commercial expansion. Contacts between western Europe and the Mediterranean increased dramatically. Politically, kingship based primarily on theocratic notions of sovereignty began to turn to Roman law; kings needed to buttress their claims to sovereignty and to provide themselves with a theory of rulership to replace theocratic kingship. In the practice of law, a new legal system of justice began to emerge that recognized the differences between law based on learned principles or jurisprudence, and law based on tradition and custom. Intellectual thought reemerged with the rise of the new schools and Scholasticism, the rise of philosophy, and science. There also emerged a new concept of the individual, with a search for “self” as distinct from community and “truth” as opposed to custom. In medieval religion, the formal worship and obedience of the early Middle Ages was replaced by a more personal

and intense religiosity, increasingly sought outside of the Church. The saint became of less social and political importance to the community, and the saint, originally one of the most important cohesive elements for the Church, competed with an increasing number of persons and objects of popular devotion to maintain his or her position of prominence as a focus of faith.

A Note on Terminology

Historically, both men and women were designated as holy and venerated as such; however, for purposes of stylistic convenience and clarity, the author has chosen to use masculine pronouns as generic throughout the text.

CHAPTER 1

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PERCEPTIONS OF SANCTITY

This study compares sanctity in terms of definition and function in Gregory of Tours' *The History of the Franks* and Orderic Vitalis' *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*. The narrative evidence in support of this study reflects both change and continuity, and testifies to a continuing Christian tradition shaped by historical changes. This chapter provides a necessary historical overview as background to the following chapters. It examines evolving definitions of sanctity, the importance of saints, relics, and the miraculous in medieval piety, and evolving functions of sanctity in western Europe from the period of late antiquity through the central Middle Ages.

Evolving Definitions of Sanctity

Any discussion of medieval piety and sanctity necessarily focuses on saints and the cult of the saints. Consequently, it is pertinent briefly to survey the historical origins of saints and those considered sanctified. From the earliest days of the Christian Church, the Greek or Latin equivalents of the term "saint" were applied to Church members and the spirits of the departed in heaven.¹ While believers were one in the body of Christ and shared in the holiness of God, God alone remained truly holy.² By the end of the second century, however, Roman persecution of Christians hastened the development of a special category of holy person: the martyr. Since the early Church made a distinction between political deaths and those who for religious reasons confessed

¹Stephen Wilson, *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2.

²John H. Corbett, "Saints," EC, 821.

before authorities and survived, “true” martyrs for the faith were few.³ True martyrs were viewed as heroes of the Church. The Christian cult of the saints arose from their veneration, precisely because they refused any compromise with the established Roman religion. They were regarded as witnesses to the truth of the faith for which they died and earned the status of “friends of God.” Christians inferred that these holy dead had the power to intervene with God on behalf of human beings.⁴

By the late Roman Empire, when Christianity had become publicly established, a new paradigm of holy person emerged: the ascetic. Ascetics assimilated the cultural tradition of martyrdom, and those who practiced asceticism faithfully were considered worthy of the same honor of veneration as martyrs. Although not all could live a life of “rigorous” asceticism, asceticism, as with martyrdom, was a path of Christian behavior open to all. While ascetic practices varied in form and degree, the ascetic ideal as an element of Christian theology was based on the belief that renunciation of human society facilitated access to the spiritual realm and divine power.⁵ In practice, solitary ascetics such as St. Anthony of Egypt (d. 356), became revered for the deprivations they sought in their solitude: fasting, flagellations, sleeplessness, vigils, and battles against powerful demons. This lonely communion with God imposed an interior martyrdom that became a locus of power. Anthony and the other Desert Fathers were recognized as miracle workers; pilgrims and the needy sought them out in their self imposed exile.⁶

The fourth century also saw the rise of other special groups viewed as holy: those who spread the gospel among the heathens or who governed the Church in piety. After

³Everett Ferguson, “Martyr, Martyrdom,” *EC*, 575-59.

⁴Corbett, “Saints,” 821. See also Peter Brown, “The Rise of the Friends of God,” in Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 54-80.

⁵James E. Goehring, “Asceticism,” *EC*, 104-6.

⁶Wilson, *Saints and Their Cults*, 3. See also Peter Brown, “From the Heavens to the Desert: Anthony and Pachomius,” in Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, 81-101.

Constantine's conversion, the Christian Church expanded its network of bishoprics throughout the empire. The transformation of the western portion of the Roman Empire into a series of Germanic kingdoms created a new missionary challenge. Missionaries, most of them monks, worked among the various Germanic tribes spreading the faith, establishing monasteries, and building churches. These missionaries became the new martyrs--warriors in the battle against paganism. These ascetics, models of piety, not infrequently were martyred in deed, and became recognized sources of divine power and authority. Increasingly, monks assumed the additional role of bishop.⁷ Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St. Martin* offers us the best of this new dual role, the monk-bishop. In Gaul, Martin (d. 397), ascetic and monk, evangelized the pagan countryside and became bishop of Tours. However, unwilling to relinquish the monastic life, he founded a monastery at Marmoutier near Tours, where he lived as a recluse while "symbolically" serving as bishop. Sulpicius Severus passes over Martin's early life as irrelevant; only Martin's conversion and later religious career matter.⁸ According to Sulpicius Severus, even before his death, Martin was recognized as a saint, on account of his piety, his teaching, and the manifestation of miracles, prodigies, and visions connected with him.⁹ More commonly, saintly bishops in this period actively participated in secular politics.

In seventh-century western Europe, a new type of saintly person emerged. Unlike those considered sanctified in the Gallo-Roman period, these contemporary saints were nobles, who after their conversion to the religious life actively served at the royal court. Later, after their royal service, they founded monasteries, served as bishops, and undertook missionary activities. These saints were exceptional for remaining in close

⁷E. Glenn Hinson, "Missions," *EC*, 606-7.

⁸Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 176.

⁹Sulpicius Severus, "Life of St. Martin," in *Writings*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, Fathers of the Church Series (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1949), 114.

contact with the secular world. They abandoned neither family nor society; rather their sanctity was reflected back on them, and their family and its social stratum thereby also was sanctified.¹⁰ This type of saint was important in giving the noble leadership in the Frankish realm a specifically Christian sanction.¹¹ One of these new saints was Arnulf of Metz, not only an important member of the Frankish Austrasian aristocracy, but also a close counselor and an official representative of the king.¹²

The saints of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages--the martyr, the ascetic-hermit, the bishop--remained traditional role models of sanctity throughout the Middle Ages. Between the ninth century and the late eleventh century, however, sanctity became channeled (and controlled) more specifically within an ecclesiastical institution.¹³ Those who emerged as holy or blessed during this period were found mainly within the membership of the monastery, the center of religious and cultural life in a predominantly rural Europe. Withdrawn from the secular world--a spiritual martyrdom--monks lived a life not of action, but of contemplation. Their lives focused on the resurrection and salvation promised by Christ. According to Christian teaching all men are equal, but society generally recognized that monks, based on their piety and ascetic life, occupied a position closer to heaven than that of other humans.¹⁴

While secularity and sanctity generally were exclusive, sacral kingship nevertheless became one of the most important concepts in the central Middle Ages. Divine kings were ritually sanctioned by the Church through anointment. The rite of

¹⁰Geary, Before France and Germany, 175-76.

¹¹Franz Irsigler, "Aristocratic Character of Early Frankish Society," in The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century, ed. and trans. Timothy Reuter (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1979), 112.

¹²Geary, Before France and Germany, 175.

¹³Wilson, Saints and Their Cults, 5.

¹⁴Heinrich Fichtenau, Living in the Tenth Century: Mentalities and Social Orders, trans. Patrick J. Geary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4-5.

anointment granted the king, not magical powers, but through grace, the ability to fulfill his this-worldly royal function.¹⁵ Among divine kings, the Anglo-Saxons, Ottonians, and Anglo-Normans best personified sanctity in the secular world. Whereas in the early Middle Ages, kings such as Clovis and Guntram were merely clothed in an air of sanctity, later, theocracy became a well-established tradition. The ruler judged and governed in matters of faith, serving both God and kingdom. The king's office, that is, his obligation to rule, protect, and defend, reflected God's authority.¹⁶ The person of the ruler was sacred based on his office; in his human *persona*, the ruler was not considered a saint.¹⁷ A king, who in his capacity as ruler achieved sainthood, did so primarily for two reasons: he either rejected the secular world and abandoned his kingdom to become a monk; or he died as a "martyr" defending his kingdom or at the hands of traitors.¹⁸ Should the king die in fulfillment of his obligation to rule and protect the Church, as did Edmund of England and Cnut of Norway, he was declared to be a martyr for the faith; on this basis his sanctity equaled that of saints. In addition, other models of secular sanctity became recognized by the tenth century in the form of the saint-queen and the saint-nobleman.¹⁹

This overview has touched upon the various paradigms of sanctity in western Europe from the period of late antiquity through the central Middle Ages, each model shaped by the cultural, social, political, and theological needs of the period in which it

¹⁵Janet Nelson, "Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship," in Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World, ed. D. Baker, Studies in Church History 10 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 43.

¹⁶Uta-Renate Blumenthal, The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 34.

¹⁷Heinrich Fichtenau, The Carolingian Empire, trans. Peter Munz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 56.

¹⁸Nelson, "Royal Saints," 40.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 41.

arose. One last aspect remains to be mentioned--the issue of recognition. Who determined whether a holy person might be properly considered a saint and for what reasons? Martyrs who died for the faith claimed sainthood beyond question by means of their mode of death. Martyrs of the early Middle Ages, those who lived lives of selfless virtue dedicated to God and who manifested the miraculous, also were attributed as holy within their local communities. While spontaneous public acclamation remained the norm throughout the Middle Ages, in the early Middle Ages, bishops and synods began to control the process of recognition. This brought the saint and the supernatural under the control of the clergy. However, this process often had little effect in communities where strong local sentiment acclaimed someone as saintly on the basis of miracles performed for them, and consequently recognized him as singularly their own patron and protector. Gradually, the approval of the papacy was added to the process of formal recognition. At first, bishops only requested papal approval as a means to enhance the importance of particular saints' cults; with the rise and growth of papal power from the eleventh century, however, the papacy gradually imposed itself on the process, eliminating episcopal canonization in 1234. Thus, having exclusive jurisdiction over the process of canonization, the papacy now controlled the paradigm of sanctity, excluding non-orthodox saints from formal recognition.²⁰ In considering evidence of sanctity, the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love, and the natural virtues of prudence, fortitude or strength of soul, temperance, and justice remain the clear proof of a Christian life.²¹ Miracles performed before or after death carry only secondary importance and are ignored if proof of virtue is lacking. While these criteria reflect the prevailing view of

²⁰Wilson, Saints and Their Cults, 5-6.

²¹John M. Mecklin, The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Cultural Type (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 62.

the clergy, popular medieval conceptions of sanctity continued to emphasize miracles, cures, assistance, and other manifestations of saintliness.

The Emphasis on Saints, Relics, and the Miraculous in Medieval Piety

Medieval man experienced God in terms of His ruling of the world, a world consisting of a terrestrial as well as a heavenly realm. These spheres were not distinct from one another, but met, thus allowing continual movement and access between the two. From this conception of the universe follows the most important aspect of medieval piety, that is, the direct influence and perpetual intervention of God in the human world. To medieval minds, God was the only law creating order out of chaos. He was the direct and immediate cause of everyday events, whether they appeared natural or contrary to nature, momentous or trivial.²² Medieval man recognized the workings of God in any unusual and striking event: storms, floods, comets, earthquakes, fires, a particularly dry season, famine and pestilence, or more curious still, roses blooming in winter. All reflected the mysterious and often quixotic hand of God at work. God was equally present in manifestations of the supernatural. Angels and spirits acting at his behest and direction appeared in dreams and visions to predict the future and assist mankind. Just as goodness was personified, so was evil. Under the influence of Christianity, Satan personified evil and evil spirits, and among them, nature spirits and even pagan Gods acted as his agents.²³ The devil rarely appeared in person, but when he did, it was usually to pious hermits or monks, those who wrestled in spirit against him.²⁴ Satan or his assistants more commonly appeared in the form of animals: ravens, vultures, wolves, and even more dramatically, imps or frightening creatures such as dragons and

²²Jonathan Sumption, Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 13-14.

²³Mecklin, Passing of the Saint, 38-39.

²⁴Fichtenau, Living in the Tenth Century, 311-12.

towering demons. To medieval man these images were visible and tangible; evil was not an abstract force. Sin was instigated by the devil, and accidents and misfortunes were the devil's work. (His presence was perceived in cases of madness and epilepsy.) Set in heroic opposition to evil stood the Christian saint or holy person, one who mediated salvation and controlled the forces of evil. Regarding St. Martin, Sulpicius Severus wrote how when he was confronted by the devil in the shape of a mass of flames threatening to burn him, Martin recognized this as the devil and stood his ground by faith alone until the devil retreated.²⁵

The saint was not only a hero, but a religious exemplar recognized for his extraordinary holiness. In his life, he exhibited a determination to rise above his human weaknesses and reject what he regarded as the sinfulness of human life. Saints lived lives of such virtue that they became objects of reverence to the faithful and acted as intercessors of divine power.²⁶ Indeed, the ability to manifest the miraculous, before and after death, stood as evidence of their sanctity. Living or dead, saints had special powers of healing, of prophecy, and of protection. But only after death, when the saint rose to heaven as one of the blessed, did his intercession become fully effective; for after death the saint passed easily from one realm to another.²⁷ At the saint's death, his resting place took on a special significance. Although the holy man now resided in heaven, at the "popular" level the faithful believed the saint remained present in his shrine.²⁸ The remains of saints were not just corpses; they were disassociated from physical death. It was a common-place of hagiography that the saint's body in his grave

²⁵Sulpicius Severus, "Letter to Eusebius," in Writings, 145.

²⁶Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, Saints and Society: the Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5.

²⁷Wilson, Saints and Their Cults, 9.

²⁸*ibid.*, 11.

remained in good condition and gave off a sweet fragrance, the odor of sanctity.²⁹ (Demons on the other hand, left behind a very unpleasant stench.)³⁰ The saint's body became a wholly sacred relic and his tomb the most important site at which to venerate his memory.

To the medieval mind, the body of a saint (or even a part of it) was actually the saint himself. Thus, in addition to the saint's resting place, cultic veneration oriented itself around his remains, because the miraculous power exhibited by a holy person in his lifetime was also associated with his relics. But holy relics consisted of much more than just bones. They also included objects that at any time had come into contact with the saint. These objects--such as, cloak threads, dust, gloves, a cape or tunic, strands of hair, tears, and even a cloth dipped in his blood--were believed to possess the same ability to mediate divine power as the saint himself had demonstrated.³¹ Indeed, any item that allowed the possessor to establish a physical and therefore personal relationship with the saint was considered significant; for the relics of the saint constituted an assurance of protection against natural, human, or demonic afflictions to the individual or church that possessed them.

The personal and impersonal components of the cult of the saints and relics often became mixed in the minds of the faithful. The "popular" usage of a talisman reflects this. The wearer of a talisman or amulet not only believed the saint protected him, but also that the amulet itself contained the inherent ability to avert evil.³² In cases where the personal component of a relic gradually distanced itself from its named saint, the relic still retained its value as an object of miraculous power. In turn, the belief

²⁹Fichtenau, Living in the Tenth Century, 326.

³⁰Severus, "Life of St. Martin," in Writings, 136.

³¹GM, 49:73. See also HE, 4:36:230-32.

³²Fichtenau, Living in the Tenth Century, 329.

became popularly accepted that by increasing the number of relics, their collective power likewise increased.³³ Thus, demand for sacred relics was keen and competition fierce to obtain them.

Churches and monasteries augmented their power and honor by the acquisition of relics as well as by guaranteeing their physical proximity to saints. Every altar contained one or more relics, and their display increased the sacredness of a church interior. It was not unusual for relics to be enclosed in the capitals of churches, as they were in Magdeburg Cathedral.³⁴ Individual collectors acquired relic collections as a means to enhance their fame or prestige. Kings had relics placed in their crowns, wore relics around their necks, and even had relics placed in their thrones, as Charlemagne did at Aachen.³⁵

Men were physically and psychologically dependent on the power of the supernatural; saints and their relics made that power accessible to them. Kings depended on the power of saints to protect their realms against the forces of nature, demons, and man. Armies carried relics before them into battle seeking assurance of victory. Relics were used as instruments of state, and of law and order. Ordinary men appealed to the supernatural for personal protection, well-being, and a good harvest.³⁶ These examples reflect the most significant aspect of popular piety, the expectation of divine assistance in the human realm. In exchange for divine providence, medieval man manifested devotion to the saints by means of fasts, pilgrimages, prayer, and the composition of hymns and saints' Lives.

³³Ibid., 328.

³⁴Ibid., 328-29.

³⁵Richard W. Southern, Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages (New York: Viking Penguin, 1970), 30.

³⁶Southern, Western Society and the Church, 30.

Indeed, for the majority of Christians, popular belief centered on the saints and the belief in the miraculous, not on Christ or exemplary Christian living. While some clergy disapproved of the excessive veneration of saints and relics, in practice the Church encouraged it. From the days of the early Church, it was recognized that miracles were necessary to establish the faith, and that when this was accomplished, miracles would cease to occur. Augustine asserted that the novelty of miracles was necessary in Jesus' day to persuade the multitudes who relied on their senses. However, in his treatise *On the True Faith* written in 390, Augustine maintained that miracles which occurred in the times of the Apostles were no longer necessary, as the unity of the Catholic Church was secure.³⁷ This unity proved to be ephemeral, however, as it was not realized in his lifetime. As Bishop of Hippo, Augustine was confronted by sickness, heresy, and pagan dismissals of Christian miracle claims. Indeed, he found it necessary to record and defend contemporary miracles. Modern miracles, which Augustine in his youth considered "peripheral" to the Christian faith, became "urgently important" as supports to believers and as a defense against assaults on the orthodox creed by Donatists and Pelagians. In addition, a very contemporary evangelical need existed to convert Romans who manifested an interest in Christianity.³⁸

The necessity to present and promote miracles existed as well for missionaries in northern and western Europe, when they attempted to convert people whose religion was fundamentally pantheistic. Pagans, with their strong belief in the spirits of the natural world, did not differentiate between nature and God. Therefore, missionaries concentrated on proving the superior strength of the Christian god over pagan gods.³⁹ In Gaul, where pantheism included pagan beliefs as well as Roman cults, Gregory of Tours

³⁷Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 415-18.

³⁸Brown, *Augustine*, 415.

³⁹Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 56.

wrote of St. Martin who with the assistance of two angels tore down a pagan temple in the face of angry peasants. Many of the pagans, seeing the temple reduced to dust, believed the power of Martin's god and confessed to believe in Jesus.⁴⁰ It is also recorded of St. Martin how he resurrected three men from the dead and subsequently converted a large body of pagans.⁴¹ In the conversion of Britain, the missionary Augustine worked miracles daily to prove the truth of Christianity to king Ethelbert of Kent. "And bear in mind that whatever power to perform miracles you have received or shall receive from God are entrusted to you solely for the salvation of your people."⁴² Among miracles reputed to have occurred in this period, Bede records sight restored to the blind, the lame healed, prayers saving the royal city from fire, and a heavenly light appearing over a holy tomb that healed the populace from demonic possession. Bede emphasized the miraculous and the immediacy of the supernatural as proof of God acting through his saints who were everywhere and powerful.⁴³

To the early medieval mind, miracles constituted a necessary component of religion; people insisted on them, and the Church obliged, for with the cessation of miracles, pagans reverted to their former gods and shrines. Thus, the Church acknowledged the necessity of miracles; but this stand created a problem from the perspective of the more theologically elite, who continued to predict the end of

⁴⁰Severus, "Life of St. Martin," in *Writings*, 122-23.

⁴¹*HF*, 1:39:91-92.

⁴²Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Viking Penguin, 1968), 88-89.

⁴³In Bede, *English Church and People*, see chapter 7, pp. 44-47, where the city of Canterbury, almost destroyed by fire, was saved by the intervention of Bishop Mellitus. The bishop, although ill, had himself carried into the path of the fire. Trusting in God, he prayed for divine assistance, and the fire burned out and died. In chapter 18, pp. 134-36, Germanus restored the sight of the daughter of a tribune by applying relics of the saints to the girl's eyes. In chapter 21, pp. 64-65, Germanus caused "ignorant" folk to convert by healing the lame son of a local chieftan. He passed his healing hand over the afflicted area and at his touch health swiftly returned.

miracles.⁴⁴ The writings of Gregory the Great (d. 604) in the sixth century reflect this dualism. As a theologian, Gregory believed there were no modern miracles, and yet, the wonders of God must be documented as evidence of the true faith for contemporary Christians who question or need encouragement.⁴⁵ He devoted a large part of his *Dialogues* to miracle stories, many of them familiar in hagiography: dreams, visions, prophecies, and divine assistance obtained by prayer.⁴⁶

Succeeding generations of churchmen and historians believed each in their turn that the age of miracles had ended. Bede, writing in the eighth century, believed that the power to perform miracles, lost to many, had been recovered by those exhibiting extraordinary holiness.⁴⁷ Again, when Orderic Vitalis, the twelfth-century monk and historian, wrote, he believed the world was so full of evil that miracles had ceased to occur. Yet, his work contains many examples of divine intervention and saintly miracles. For didactic reasons, miraculous manifestations confirmed the continuing activity of God in the world and reinforced the faith of the pious.⁴⁸

Thus, divine manifestations of the miraculous remained a traditional element in medieval religious thought, both for ordinary believers as well as those with a stronger theological background. Miracles were essential for three reasons. At the most basic level of Christian faith, miracles served as a focus of attention and as a source of supernatural power. Signs, wonders, and prodigies remained continuing and necessary

⁴⁴Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 56-57.

⁴⁵"An explanation of holy scripture teaches us how to attain virtue and persevere in it, whereas a description of miracles shows us how this acquired virtue reveals itself in those who persevere in it. Then, too, the lives of the saints are often more effective than mere instruction for inspiring us to love heaven as our home." See Saint Gregory, *Dialogues*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman, Fathers of the Church Series (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959), 6.

⁴⁶Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 43.

⁴⁷Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 58.

⁴⁸EH, 6:12:475.

reminders to the faithful of God's intervention and guidance in the mundane world. Finally, throughout the medieval period, miracles affirmed to ordinary believers the sanctity of someone deemed holy. Alongside of this a new use of miracles arose beginning in the twelfth century. For a person to be officially recognized as a saint, the evidence of God's approval was necessary in the form of miracles. The canonization process demanded evidence of miracles and witnesses. This emphasis required accounts of saints' lives to be specific as to the place miracles occurred and the type of miracle performed in the life and after death of a saint. This process not only allowed the Church to control the growth of saints' cults, but produced a type of sacred literature intended by the Church as edifying to Christians.⁴⁹

Evolving Functions and Obligations of a Saint in Western Europe

The importance of the saint and his relics was based on expectations of the miraculous. To this end, saints fulfilled a variety of functions. Generally these functions are grouped under the headings of universal assistance, patronage, political, and religious functions, although all four overlap. Saints, alive or dead, actively participated in and influenced human life. In providing universal assistance, saints answered pleas to make women, land, and animals fertile. They prevented or cured illnesses and exorcised the possessed. They warded off pests, storms and fires, and saved communities and their inhabitants from floods, earthquakes, and droughts. In fulfilling requests for patronage, saints served as defenders of communities or cities against enemy attacks. They responded to individual needs, such as giving aid in childbirth, or finding lost or stolen objects ranging from horses to water jugs. In their political role, saints authenticated judicial decisions, served as advocates and mediators, ritually sanctioned oaths and vows, and exposed and punished those who perjured themselves.

⁴⁹Ward, Miracles, 191.

Saints became an object of worship and fulfilled the functions of the local gods or tutelary spirits as patrons of secular communities.⁵⁰ Within the religious community, saints protected monks, monasteries and holy shrines, and served as the focus for religious devotion.

Just as the ideal of sanctity changed over time, so the function of saints and relics evolved. At its most basic level, the function of saints and relics changed very little throughout the Middle Ages. Certainly, requests for saintly healing, protection, and vengeance and justice remained traditional functions of a saint or holy person. Yet, the functions and perceived obligations of saints and their relics varied across the Middle Ages as saints fulfilled the social, religious, and political and judicial needs of the community or region in which they were venerated. To study this change one must attempt to isolate those functions which, at various times, saints and their relics fulfilled. Obviously, variations in time and place exist within this general evolution in saintly function, but a changing pattern nonetheless emerges. A brief overview of the evolving functions of saints and relics in western Europe from the sixth century through the twelfth century will illustrate this.

Merovingian Gaul in the early Middle Ages was essentially a rural, agrarian society. Its populace was overwhelmingly superstitious, semi-pagan, and semi-Christian. Without any effective secular or ecclesiastical institutions, society remained highly decentralized. The village provided the center of religious, political, and social life. Early Christianity, continuing the late-antique ideal of sanctity, focused on the saint, who created a sense of social integration, compromise, and reconciliation within the community.⁵¹ Saints and holy men functioned not only as patrons and defenders of

⁵⁰Wilson, Saints and Their Cults, 16-24.

⁵¹Raymond Van Dam, Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-4.

the Christian community, but as guardians of its churches and holy sites. At these sacred places, ordinary believers made material contact with the saint or his relics. This bonding conveyed a sense of identity, kinship, and friendship to the faithful.⁵² Serving as intercessor to God, the saint was the locus of miracles requested by the pious; these miracles freed the unjustly imprisoned or captured from captivity, provided peace and protection, and assisted in healing and cures. Most significantly, divine power responded to acts of injustice unhesitatingly with stunning acts of vengeance. The manifestation of these miracles all reflected different aspects of sanctity as expressed by the saint or holy man, within the local and rural perspective.

Not only did the saint possess a leverage for influence and authority within the community based on his power to perform miracles, but particular saints such as St. Martin, through his formal representative the bishop, often held an authority beyond the community that rivaled royal Frankish kings. On the basis of his perceived power, the saint dispensed justice and political protection. For example, the renown and proven powers of St. Martin were sufficient to induce warring armies to retire from the field, and soldiers who violated the sanctity of a monastery, which housed St. Martin's relics, were punished by death.⁵³

A significant change in the function and use of sanctity occurs under the Merovingians's successors, the Carolingian Franks (751-877). Chronologically, the Carolingian era forms an important transitional period between Gregory of Tours and Orderic Vitalis; geographically, the region of the Carolingian Empire unites these two historians as it comprised both Gaul and Normandy. Carolingian kings maintained a close working relationship with the Church and assumed a guiding role in religious affairs.

⁵²Peter Brown, Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 50-58.

⁵³HE, 4:49:245-46, 4:48:244-45.

This relationship fostered a unity within the empire, and an attempt to standardize and centralize ecclesiastical practices. Also the need to evangelize the populace more effectively continued to exist. Only a few ecclesiastics had a detailed knowledge of Christian doctrine, and the majority of priests remained largely ignorant and untouched by reform at higher levels. The general population remained incompletely Christianized and combined pagan beliefs in magic and spirits with Christian beliefs in the resurrection and saintly miracles. On the local level, the population looked to the saint and his relics as the source of all good things, the spiritual protector and patron to town and abbey, and guardian of community and church.⁵⁴ The saint and his relics served as objects of worship and as the focus of the faith of ordinary believers.

Charlemagne channeled this faith for his own social, political, and religious purposes. He expanded and strengthened the place of sacred relics in Frankish life. By bringing their veneration under his control, Charlemagne made them an essential component in his program of consolidation, his "Renewal of the Romans"--a revival of the empire of the West.⁵⁵ Although it was a long established ecclesiastical practice to swear upon relics, Charlemagne expanded the legal and social significance of relics by legislating that all oaths be sworn either on relics or in a church. This had considerable significance because oath taking was important in a society where public authority was weak and legal institutions rudimentary. This ritual assumed special importance as a means of making agreements binding and of enforcing group responsibility for the

⁵⁴Fichtenau, Carolingian Empire, 171.

⁵⁵Patrick J. Geary, Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 37. I am especially indebted to Patrick Geary for his works Furta Sacra: The Theft of Relics in the Central Middle Ages and Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages. Both books are important for their depth of research studying the relationship of the dead to the living, particularly in the person of saints and their remains in the central Middle Ages. From these studies much of the following information and examples come. Note *Renovatio romani imperii*, for the "Renewal of the Roman Empire."

behavior of individuals, and divine sanctions upheld its effectiveness. The formula prescribed was, "May God and the saint whose relics these are judge me."⁵⁶ A code of conduct and obedience emerged that was not only linked to a saint and secular authorities, but also was backed by the commands of the Church.⁵⁷

Charlemagne likewise expanded the role of relics in religion. In 801 and again in 813, the canon *Item placuit* from the Fifth Council of Carthage (401) was reinvoked, reaffirming that all consecrated altars must incorporate relics; were they lacking the altar was to be destroyed.⁵⁸ The focus on saintly relics provided a strong impetus to acquire them and initiated relic searches to Spain, Moslem Africa, and the distant East, but predominantly Rome. Moreover, the translation and depositions of relics held great significance. For the populace, feasts, prayer vigils, and processions exhibited the relics. Within a church, the splendor of the formal rituals celebrating these events focused the faith of nominal Christians and newly evangelized Christians. Thus, in a circular fashion, the psychological import of these religious events, emphasizing the importance of saints and their relics, and the appreciation of saintly power and the necessary obedience to it, was channeled back into the secular world giving support to royal authority. Charlemagne, by increasing the role of saints' relics in society, by emphasizing their power and properties, and by identifying them closely with his reign, increased his prestige and ability to rule.

The unity of the Carolingian Empire disintegrated by the middle of the ninth century due to the growing power of local and regional aristocracies.⁵⁹ Dynastic quarrels and civil war diverted attention from defense of the empire, and a series of almost continuous raids from the North began spreading devastation and terror. With

⁵⁶Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 37-38.

⁵⁷Fichtenau, *Carolingian Empire*, 172.

⁵⁸Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 37.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 18.

the disintegration of central authority and the accompanying loss of national identity, the population regrouped under local leaders. As earlier, the rural populace looked primarily to the supernatural and the saints as local protectors, healers, and patrons. Churchmen also looked to the supernatural; for monastic communities were particularly vulnerable to exploitation and destruction. Saints provided religious institutions with a sense of identity and family, protection, and economic sustenance.⁶⁰

The founding and survival of a religious institution in the post-Carolingian world often was made easier if a monastic community was able to identify itself with a saint, particularly as it sought to establish itself within the emerging “feudal” order. This social order, organized by family structures and extended clan ties, provided a means of continuity and stability in a geographic region. The monastery integrated itself into this kin network in two ways. First, it was not uncommon in the tenth and eleventh centuries that descendants of noble families, who had acquired the status of saint, as with Saint Gerald d'Aurillac, founded religious communities. Second, a monastery became the family of its patron saint. Thus, the saint not only founded a monastic community, but he provided also an identity to the monastic family. In this way the monastery became established within the network of other local noble families and gained the ability to maneuver within the new social order.⁶¹

The saint as patron and guardian of the monastic family intervened to protect the monastery's interests. Monasteries were a prize not only to invaders who viewed the monastery as a source of wealth, but also to the divisive and competitive noble families surrounding them. A monastery possessed little leverage in its ability to maintain a mutually cooperative relationship with its neighbors. Unlike the secular clergy, monks could not threaten excommunication or interdict, and they frequently lacked the political

⁶⁰Ibid., 19.

⁶¹Ibid., 19-20.

or military power to force lay cooperation. Thus, they relied on the supernatural to protect themselves and their property.⁶² The monastery, if attacked or victimized, could resort to the public ritual of the clamor (literally a cry to the Lord for help), and to the accompanying humiliation of relics and sacred objects or images in response to specific persons and acts against them. To dishonor the monastery was to dishonor its saint. The monks physically emphasized this connection, when in times of crisis, they humiliated or mistreated cult objects by laying them on the ground before the altar. This disturbed the proper hierarchic relationship between the human and the divine, and a society dependent on supernatural powers could only anticipate the worst for themselves, as well as for the opponent of the monastery.⁶³ At the same time, the monks restricted popular access to the saint's shrine and cult objects, preventing worshippers from touching or being close to the cult object as was usual in medieval devotion to the saints.⁶⁴ This focused public opinion directly on the offender. Such was the case with Count Fulk Nerra of Anjou and Touraine. In late 996 or early 997, Fulk, along with armed retainers, entered the cloister of St. Martin of Tours, damaging the house of the treasurer and violating the immunity of the monastery. The canons, having no one to turn to for assistance, responded to this outrage by humiliating the relics of the saint and the crucifix; then they closed the doors of the church against the count and his men. The monks allowed access only to outsiders, who in turn stirred up public opinion against Fulk with tales of the "pitiable condition" of St. Martin's relics. In time, the count sought forgiveness and physically humbled himself in St. Martin's church.⁶⁵ The effectiveness of humiliation as a defensive weapon varied. It might be literally years

⁶²Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 95.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 106-7.

before the offender corrected his misdeed. Of course, the possibility also existed that the dishonored saint might just strike down the offending party or retaliate indirectly. For example, the saint might cease to work miracles, perhaps the promise of an anticipated rainfall, the assurance of a successful harvest, or the physical well-being of the community. This cessation of benevolent supernatural benefits (or the fear of it alone) would have a tremendous psychological impact on the local and surrounding communities. Public opinion as a mechanism of social pressure, probably more than fear of the supernatural, forced the offender in time to reach an understanding with the monks and a renewal of the proper relationship of saint to community.⁶⁶ This conclusion however, should not undervalue the role of the saint and the perceived importance of his supernatural power, by the community as a whole, as an integral element to the maintenance of household and community.

Saints further extended their power of protection in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries as guarantors of peace pledges. In southern France, where political consolidation was the weakest, the clergy could not rely on the weak Capetian monarchs to control feuding warriors. Thus, synods and councils which met to proclaim the Peace of God, assembled the relics of saints, and the obligation to peace and justice was reinforced by sacred oaths made before those relics.⁶⁷

Saints assisted also in the economic recovery of a community or region. Their presence at shrines inspired the faithful to make donations, and if these venues then became pilgrimage sites, the shrines or tombs became a source of revenue for whomever controlled or maintained them.⁶⁸ Saints helped finance construction. Late in the tenth

⁶⁶Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 20-21.

⁶⁷Wilson, *Saints and their Cults*, 36. See also H. E. J. Cowdrey, "The Peace and Truce of God in the Eleventh Century," in *Popes, Monks and Crusaders* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), VII 42-67.

⁶⁸Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century*, 329.

century, the practice arose of lay or clerical preachers traveling with holy relics. The telling of the saint's miracles and the subsequent request for alms raised funds for construction purposes at monastic communities. These offerings were a vital source of funds at a time of needed renovation and reconstruction.⁶⁹

These examples illustrate a few of the ways in which saints and their relics provided for a community's social integration, political protection, and economic assistance in the rural and fragmented world of post-Carolingian Europe. While the seeds of change appear as early as the tenth century, only in the twelfth century, with the development of new social, religious, economic, and political systems, did the saints and their relics less effectively provide these same services.⁷⁰ For example, monastic communities which in the tenth and eleventh centuries depended on saintly founders and patrons for their identity and social integration within the local feudal society, now identified with another kind of family, the monastic order. The significance of a saint as a family member and as a patron did not necessarily diminish for the individual monastic community, but integration into the wider world of an emerging Europe demanded broader ties.⁷¹ Other changes came to the monastery as a benefit of the economic revival of the eleventh and twelfth century. Not only could monasteries budget better, but agricultural advances allowed them to maximize the yield on their monastery lands. The saint still remained important as a fund-raiser, but his significance as a day-to-day source of income lessened.⁷² Finally, in terms of protection and peace, a strong secular authority, with the military might to keep local aristocratic powers curbed, provided

⁶⁹Geary, Furta Sacra, 63.

⁷⁰Geary, Living with the Dead, 206.

⁷¹Geary, Furta Sacra, 22-23.

⁷²Geary, Living with the Dead, 206.

far better protection to a monastery robbed of land, than appeals to the saints and the humiliation of relics.⁷³

This brief overview reveals that whenever a simple social order or an age of political fragmentation existed, saints and relics flourished as they provided political authority, identity with family and community, physical and physic healing, and physical protection. Where an effective central government provided or at least coordinated similar services, the relative importance of the saint and his relics lessened in providing those same services. Nonetheless, as recognized sources of divine power, saints lent support to royal authority and for national identity. Meanwhile, the religious and miraculous functions of saints and relics as a focus of devotion, and as patrons, healers, and intercessors remained a constant whether in a simple or complex society.

⁷³Geary, Living with the Dead, 206.

CHAPTER 2

GREGORY OF TOURS AND ORDERIC VITALIS AS SOURCES

Gregory of Tours was born Georgius Florentius in 538 or 539 in the Auvergne, whose capital is the present day Clermont-Ferrand. He was descended from a distinguished Gallo-Roman family with a strong ecclesiastical tradition of service. His paternal uncle, Gallus, was bishop of Clermont; his maternal great-uncles were Tetricus, who became bishop of Langres in the year in which Gregory of Tours was born, and Nicetius, bishop of Lyons.

Gregory's family was prominent in central and eastern Gaul and here Gregory spent his youth. It was common for young men destined for the episcopacy to be sent to a close relative, usually a bishop, to be educated.¹ Thus, Gregory, growing up in the 540s and 550s spent time with his uncle Gallus in Clermont² and learned how to read and write from his great-uncle Nicetius.³ He continued his studies at a "choir school" which stressed ecclesiastical and biblical literature, with Archdeacon Avitus, later bishop of Clermont. Under Avitus he read first the Psalms, then the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of St. Paul.⁴ His knowledge of the Bible was respectable, but his acquaintance with classical literature was limited, although he made reference to classical sources, such as Virgil and Sallust, in his *Libri Historiarum*.⁵ Gregory

¹LF, 17:1:105.

²LF, 7:2:14.

³LF, 8:2:51.

⁴Raymond Van Dam, Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 221.

⁵Thomas J. Heffernan, Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3. Cf. M. L. W. Laistner, Thought and Letters in Western Europe: A.D. 500 to 900 (London: Methuen, 1931), 98-99, where he says Gregory "shows considerable familiarity with Virgil and his two

himself records, "I have not been polished by the cultivated reading of secular writers," but have been "exhorted to study ecclesiastical works, by the blessed father Avitus."⁶

After entering the church, Gregory took his name from his mother's great-uncle, Gregory (Gregorius) of Langres, known for his miracles. He may have served as a priest at the shrine of St. Julian at Brioude, a shrine he visited often as a young man and with which his family had connections.⁷ From the *Life of St. Martin*, we know that Gregory was already a deacon when he traveled to Tours as a pilgrim in 565.⁸ In 573, Gregory surprisingly succeeded to the bishopric of Tours, at the death of his mother's cousin Eufronius. Previous to that time he had little contact with St. Martin's city, and the appointment was much coveted due to the wealth and importance of Tours.⁹ The selection of Gregory had the support of King Sigibert who likely hoped to better control Tours by controlling the selection of its bishop.¹⁰ Perhaps as a means of supporting his appointment to the bishopric, Gregory, in his *History of the Franks*, reminded readers that all of the previous bishops of Tours except five were blood-relatives of his.¹¹

references to Sallust's Catiline are doubtless reminiscences of an ever-popular school-text."

⁶LF, 1:Preface:3.

⁷Gregory's family was attached to the cult of St. Julian, the "martyr of Clermont." His uncle Gallus established an annual pilgrimage to the saint's shrine in thanks for the province of Arles being delivered from the plague (LF, 6:6:38-40) and Gregory "eventually considered himself a 'foster son' of the saint whom he thought of as his 'special patron.'" See LF, Preface, p. 1.

⁸LF, Intro., p. ix.

⁹Patrick J. Geary, Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 126-27.

¹⁰Raymond Van Dam, Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 63-64. Gregory's early tenure may have been tenuous as at the time of Gregory's consecration King Chilperic actually controlled Tours and its surrounding area, and in the future Gregory's position did not remain unopposed. See HF, 5:47-9:313-22.

¹¹HF, 5:49:321.

Following Gregory's consecration in 573 by Egidius of Rheims,¹² Gregory did not proceed directly to Tours, but first returned to Brioude for the obligatory festival of St. Julian at which time he pulled some threads from the shroud covering St. Julian's tomb. Keeping these to himself as protective relics, Gregory then journeyed on to Tours. Shortly after his arrival, a "possessed man" claimed to have seen a flash of light from the heavens announcing that St. Julian had arrived in response to a request from St. Martin to come to Tours.¹³ This was the first of many miracles that assisted Gregory in resolving competition over and maintaining his claim to the bishopric. The miracle signified, "not only had St. Martin accepted St. Julian, 'the martyr of Clermont,' but now Tours should accept St. Julian's foster son, the new bishop from Clermont," Gregory.¹⁴ For the next twenty years, Gregory served as bishop and guardian of St. Martin's cult, as well as a patron of St. Julian's, until his death at Tours in 594 or 595.

During these twenty years Gregory did much of the writing by which we remember him. At the end of the *History of the Franks* he sums up his works. "I, Gregory, have written the ten books of this *History*, seven books of *Miracles* and one on the *Lives of the Fathers*. I have composed a book of *Commentaries on the Psalms*. I also wrote a book on the *Offices of the Church*."¹⁵ He also translated an account of the *Seven Sleepers in Ephesus*; wrote a preface for a collection of liturgical masses composed by Sidonius, now lost,¹⁶ and condensed a book about the miracles of St. Andrew. His least

¹²Technically his consecration was contrary to canon law, an irregularity that while not uncommon, may have made Gregory's position tenuous. Gregory was not elected bishop by local clergy or public acclamation, but was ordained by Egidius of Rheims, the metropolitan see of a different ecclesiastical province. The Council of Orleans in 541 specified that a bishop should be consecrated in the city and church he is to govern and if that is not possible, at least within the same ecclesiastical province. See Van Dam, *Leadership*, 214.

¹³Raymond, *Saints and Their Miracles*, 66.

¹⁴Raymond, *Leadership*, 215.

¹⁵HF, 10:31:602-3.

¹⁶HF, 2:22:134.

known work is a short essay entitled *De cursibus ecclesiasticis*. This essay gives us an idea of scientific knowledge in Gregory's day. He wrote it to provide astronomical observations so that the clergy could perform night offices at the proper hours, no matter the season.¹⁷

The seven books of the *Miracles* and the one on the *Lives of the Fathers* are collectively referred to as the *Wonders*. These are "abstract" hagiographic works as the stories are not placed in the context of contemporary events. Gregory shared these saints' Lives with his audience through oral presentations, generally sermons. The *Wonders* includes:

(1) *Glory of the Martyrs*, stories about martyrs and the miracles they or their relics performed;

(2) *Suffering and Miracles of the Martyr St. Julian*, stories about the saint and his shrine at Brioude;

(3-6) *Miracles of the Bishop St. Martin*, four books consisting of stories about the patron saint of Tours and the miracles he performed, primarily at Tours, before and during Gregory's episcopacy;

(7) *Life of the Fathers*, twenty short biographies of Gallic saints, almost all of whom lived during the sixth century and many of whom were related to Gregory; and

(8) *Glory of the Confessors*, consisting of stories about confessors and the miracles they or their relics performed.

The *Wonders*, composed of stories about saints, their cults, and miracles, stressed miracles performed by the saints over any historical knowledge of the saint's life. Gregory emphasized the reality and frequency of everyday miracles such as cures

¹⁷Laistner, *Thought and Letters*, 99.

for hip pains,¹⁸ fever blisters,¹⁹ and snake bites,²⁰ rather than the more extraordinary miracles, such as a village burned by fire sent from heaven.²¹ He emphasized what the saints could do for one, following God's command to record for posterity as many current miracles as he recalled. These events were presented repetitively in sermons, for those events written about were easily forgotten. Only by concrete example was sanctity recognized and understood as God's continued and active presence among his flock, so the repeated sermons of the miraculous increased the faith. In the preface of the first book of *The Miracles of Blessed Martin the Bishop*, Gregory wrote, "Therefore let no one doubt past miracles when he behold the gift of the present signs given forth, since he sees the lame made straight, the blind given sight, demons put to flight, and other kinds of disease cured by his healing."²² By exhaustive repetition, Gregory dramatically recreated those moments of divine intervention at the tombs and shrines of saints, where saints performed miracles in response to appeals for assistance. This miraculous element in hagiography and the saints' role as intercessor for the faithful remains an integral component in Gregory's *History of the Franks*.²³

The ten books of the *Histories* represent Gregory's best known work. Although it is more familiarly known as the *History of the Franks*, this is not Gregory's title.

Gregory entitled his work the *Liber Historiarum Decimus* (Ten Books of History).²⁴

¹⁸GM, 99:123.

¹⁹GC, 43:66-67.

²⁰GM, 98:122.

²¹HF, 5:33:296.

²²William C. McDermott, Monks, Bishops and Pagans: Christian Culture in Gaul and Italy, 500-700 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 133.

²³Many of these saints' *vitae* appear in the History of the Franks and Gregory makes reference to their original source as suggested readings.

²⁴On this topic see Walter A. Goffart, "From *Historiae* to *Historia*: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours," in Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages, eds. Thomas F. X. Noble and John J. Contreni (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), 55-76.

The title "*Historia Francorum*" made its earliest appearance in manuscripts of late Carolingian date. Medieval and more recent historians have culled Gregory's work for specifically Merovingian-Frankish history, but Gregory did not undertake to write a history of the Franks, nor a history of the Gallo-Roman church.²⁵ The focus of this work is a history of public Christianity. Gregory presented to the public how day-to-day events should be properly viewed and acted upon in light of the principles of Christianity.²⁶ He showed how some (whether clergy or laymen) merited God's care and grace through His saints, and how others, through greed, avarice, and sheer bad judgment fell afoul of God and never achieved salvation. Thus, Gregory presented history where the "disasters of worthless men," as well as miracles of the saints, took place side by side. In this study Gregory's work will be referred to simply as the *Histories*.

The plan of the *Histories* is as follows: Book I briefly sketches events of universal history from the Creation to the death of St. Martin of Tours in A.D. 397. (Briefly is the key word here, as Gregory by his own admission covered 5,596 years in this one book.)²⁷ Books II, III, and IV are still introductory to Gregory's topic, but the pace slows. Book II brings the reader up to the death of the Frankish king Clovis in 511. Book III covers only thirty-seven years to the death of King Theudebert, and Book IV narrates Frankish history from 544 to 574 and the death of Sigibert, an event presaged by flickers of lightning across the sky.²⁸ Books V-X cover in greater detail the years from 574 to 591, years in which Gregory served as bishop of Tours.

Gregory did not follow an explicit model in organizing his work. In his text he noted his historical sources, the Eusebius-Jerome *Chronicle*, Rufinius' translation of

²⁵Walter A. Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History, A.D. 550-800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 153.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 228.

²⁷HF, 1:48:99.

²⁸HF, 4:51:247.

Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, and Orosius' *History against the Pagans*, but these provided limited guidance for his writing with their focus on the past and their heavy emphasis on biblical history.²⁹ In the sixth century, a historian of current events meant a chronicler, one who recorded events in primarily chronological form. This is the method Gregory chose, probably noting events in quasi-diary form. In format, the final *Histories* consists of narrative passages, interspersed with brief annalistic comments, but all in chronological order.³⁰

Fortunately for posterity, Gregory included within his framework supporting documents: a letter from St. Radegund concerning the foundation of her nunnery, and an answer of approval and a promise of support from seven bishops; the text of the Treaty of Andelot; an address of Pope Gregory to the inhabitants of Rome; the judgment given regarding the revolt at St. Radegund's nunnery; and lists of Fasts and Vigils observed in the cathedral and the other churches of Tours. These documents possess great historical importance since Gregory's text remains the sole witness to them.³¹

Historians have criticized the structure of Gregory's narrative as a disorganized mixture of events both temporal and miraculous, and this criticism contains a certain amount of truth in it. Book III, for instance, proves a good example of the variety and scope of topics which interested Gregory the historian. The book begins with remarks concerning the Holy Trinity. Yet in the book the Danes invade Gaul; Sigeric is murdered by his evil step-mother and his father King Sigismund; an oath of safe-conduct is broken; Theuderic's army ravages Clermont, breaks into the church of St. Julian and by the judgment of Julian they "[tear] themselves to pieces with their own foul teeth;"³² Gregory's kinsman Attalus is enslaved and later escapes; the generosity of King

²⁹Goffart, *Narrators*, 157.

³⁰HE, Intro., p. 24.

³¹HE, Intro., p. 30.

³²HE, 3:12:171.

Theudebert to the churches in his kingdom and his respect for bishops is noted; the stoning of Parthenius who murdered his wife and friend is related; and the book ends abruptly with winter weather more harsh and bitter than usual. (Gregory never notes good weather.)

On the other hand, Gregory has a design and his *Histories* reflects that plan in its composition:

As I continue to follow the march of history I recount for you at one and the same time, and in the muddled and confused order in which these events occurred, the holy deeds of the Saints and the way in which whole races of people were butchered. It will not, I am sure, be held unreasonable of me if I describe the blessed lives of the Saints together with the disasters of the unfortunate: for it is the course of events which demands this and not my own fantasy as a writer.³³

For Gregory, history was the manifestation of God's will on earth and the will of God was equally apparent in secular events as well as in the lives of saints and the manifestation of the miraculous. Gregory believed without question or speculation that these concrete acts confirmed the Christian truth, that God created the world and solely governs it. God manifested his power directly to caution and warn humanity by fearful prodigies and portents that signaled disaster or presaged death. "A wind devastated an area a mile or more across. . . . On a number of occasions, too, the cocks crowed at the beginning of night. The moon darkened and a comet appeared in the sky. A serious epidemic followed among the common people."³⁴ God also found it necessary to remind the faithful of his presence in the usually uneventful course of nature by causing flowers to bloom in winter. "There were torrential downpours in the month of January, with flashes of lightning and heavy claps of thunder. The trees suddenly burst into flower . . . and a comet appeared again and the sky seemed particularly black where it passed across the

³³HF, 2:Preface:103.

³⁴HF, 5:41:306.

heavens.”³⁵ But God as a distant power was brought to the familiar and local level by “his friends,” the saints, who mediated God’s power over nature in response to appeals for assistance: curing disease, extinguishing fire, controlling nature, and conquering death.

Gregory wrote the *Histories* with a pastoral purpose. Its presentation is moral and didactic and reflected Gregory’s concerns with the failures of his parishioners: failure to recognize God’s presence, failure to realize a life lived in sin, failure to achieve salvation, and failure to abide by Christian principles in everyday life. With these concerns in mind, the *Histories* is filled with examples of those who lived lives worthy of emulation and those whom God punished for their sins. Thus, the examples of Bishop Theodore, wrongly held prisoner by King Guntram, who remained unharmed as he was clearly “a man of great sanctity and assiduous in his prayers;”³⁶ and of Mark the Referendary,³⁷ who “had amassed vast wealth by keeping for his own use part of the taxes which he collected [which should have been used for the poor]. He was suddenly seized with a pain . . . When he died he took nothing with him on his journey, except the eternal damnation of his soul.”³⁸ In case any parishioner thought these examples too oblique, Gregory described how the Franks, driven on by the devil himself, slaughtered St. Martin’s monks and damaged the monastery; “If anyone thinks that this happened by chance, let him consider the fact that one innocent man was saved among so many who were doing evil.”³⁹ These moral lessons were directed at Gregory’s immediate audience.

³⁵HE, 6:14:345. On this topic see Giselle de Nie, “Roses in January: A Neglected Dimension in Gregory of Tours’ *Historiae*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 5 (1979): 259-89.

³⁶HE, 8:12:442.

³⁷Referendaries were the legal secretaries of the king, but they were also given the function of tax-collectors.

³⁸HE, 6:28:355-56.

³⁹HE, 4:48:245.

Gregory, who spent most of his life in the area of Clermont and Tours, particularly aimed his history at the Christian Gallo-Roman audience in this region. Many of the events he wrote about were of topical and contemporary interest to them.⁴⁰ By numerous examples, Gregory described God's judgment against those who were addicted to amusements, or dominated by the vices of gluttony, drunkenness, lust, arrogance, and greed. He contrasted these by examples of piety, chastity, generosity and charity, and compassion. Surely, no more starkly contrasting opposites of character could be described.

In his general preface to the *Histories* Gregory implies that there is much happening in the world about him, but that no one is sufficiently skilled to record these events:

A great many things keep happening, some of them good, some of them bad. The inhabitants of different countries keep quarreling fiercely with each other and kings go on losing their temper in the most furious way. Our churches are attacked by the heretics and then protected by the Catholics; the faith of Christ burns in many men, but it remains lukewarm in others; no sooner are the church-buildings endowed by the faithful than they are stripped bare again by those who have no faith.⁴¹

However, no writer had come forward with sufficient skill to describe these happenings. Thus, "I have written this work to keep alive the memory of those dead and gone, and to bring them to the notice of future generations."⁴²

Gregory's history must be seen in the light of his faith; he clearly enunciated his position in the preface to the *Histories*. "My one desire is that, without the slightest deviation and with no hesitation whatsoever in my heart, I may hold fast to what is ordained in church that we should believe, for I know that one given to sin may obtain pardon with God through the purity of his faith."⁴³ He then recited the Creed from

⁴⁰Goffart, *Narrators*, 138.

⁴¹HE, 1:Preface:63.

⁴²HE, 1:Preface:63.

⁴³HE, 1:Preface:63.

memory as the basis of this faith. He debated and defended points of theology against Jews⁴⁴ and Arians,⁴⁵ but he was not a theologian nor did he attempt to impart this in his history. His arguments consisted of quotations of biblical passages. In a doctrinal dispute, he undertook to support the “true” faith by using the irrefutable proof of miracles to oppose the Arian heresy. In a history that is not philosophical, but one of events, Gregory made a brief comparison “between the happy outcome of the Christians who have believed in the Holy Trinity and the disasters which have befallen those who have sought to destroy it.”⁴⁶ Gregory noted with relish how God miraculously intervened on behalf of orthodox Christian adherents and punished the disbelievers for their obstinacy. The miraculous won out over disputation.

The prominence given to the miraculous and God's active presence on earth as historical elements in the *Histories* cannot be over-emphasized. Contemporary miracles of the saints authenticated miracles from a historical past and brought the past into the present, and in so doing saints documented proof of the eternity promised to those blessed by God. For Gregory, a “Christian moralist,” events defined as “slaughters” and “downfalls” must be recorded because these attested to God's presence as much as they confirmed the folly of those who doubted or those who followed an alternative belief system to their detriment.⁴⁷

However, the *Histories* is more than just a vehicle of Christian instruction. It remains an invaluable portrait of sixth-century Merovingian Gaul, particularly for the years from 573 to 591. Within these years, Gregory, as bishop of Tours, filled a key position in regional power as a member of the aristocratic senatorial class, as well as the spiritual head of an important diocese. In all probability, Gregory stood more at the

⁴⁴HF, 6:5:329-33.

⁴⁵HF, 5:43:307-10.

⁴⁶HF, 3:Preface:161-62.

⁴⁷Goffart, *Narrators*, 202.

center of political events than he would have preferred. He personally dealt with four kings, Sigibert, Chilperic, Guntram, and Childebert, and was accused of treason by one queen, Fredegund. By necessity a man of administrative and political acumen, Gregory held the most important position of power and influence in the region, just below king. Within the city of Tours, he stood one step above count, the highest civil position in a town.⁴⁸ At a time when the distinction between secular and religious office often blurred, Gregory, as bishop, found himself vulnerable to intrigue through conspiracies from competing secular authorities. In fact, Count Leudast, with the assistance of Riculf, the sub-deacon of Tours, conspired to have Gregory removed as bishop. Charged as an enemy of the queen, Gregory, in what remained a very close call, cleared himself by oath.⁴⁹

Official church duties led Gregory on journeys throughout Gaul.⁵⁰ As bishop of Tours, Gregory was also the Metropolitan bishop of Le Mans, Rennes, Angers, Nantes and four other sees. In Tours, he oversaw the rebuilding of St. Martin's church and in the immediate area dedicated churches and oratories.⁵¹ He attended Church councils and councils convened by the king, one of the most notable, a council of bishops in Paris to try Praetextatus, Bishop of Rouen, for conspiring against King Chilperic.⁵² Praetextatus was not the only bishop embroiled in politics. Egidius of Rheims who consecrated Gregory as bishop, was implicated in a plot against Childebert II, deposed and

⁴⁸Geary, Before France and Germany, 131-32.

⁴⁹HF, 5:49:316-22.

⁵⁰Besides Clermont and Tours where Gregory spent most of his life, Gregory has documented visits to Poitiers, Saintes, Bordeaux, Riez, Cavaillon, Vienne, Lyons, Chalon-sur-Saône, Châlons-sur-Marne, Rheims, Soissons, Metz, Coblenz, Braine, Paris, and Orleans. See Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks, trans. Ernest Brehaut (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1969), ix.

⁵¹HF, 10:31:602.

⁵²HF, 5:18:275-82.

sent into exile for treason.⁵³ When the nuns revolted at Radegund's nunnery in Poitiers, King Childebert chose Gregory as one of the bishops to investigate the case and judge the offenders.⁵⁴

Gregory fulfilled diplomatic duties where he came in contact with the leading Franks of his day. He was with King Chilperic at Nogent-sur-Marne in 581 upon the return of ambassadors from a visit to Emperor Tiberius II in Constantinople;⁵⁵ he was in Chalon-sur-Saône in 587 with King Guntram, as the envoy of Childebert II to witness the Treaty of Andelot;⁵⁶ and he personally received the deputation of Roccolen, sent by King Chilperic, demanding Duke Guntram Boso be expelled from St. Martin's church.⁵⁷ Apparently, Boso was one of a flood of never ending evil-doers (political refugees) seeking sanctuary in St. Martin's church.

Gregory also actively participated in politics and law. He personally interceded with King Guntram to allow Childeric the Saxon to leave church sanctuary without repercussions,⁵⁸ and he intervened to save Berulf and Arnegisel from execution for the theft of Sigibert's treasure.⁵⁹ Gregory played a large part in the history of his times, and was an important eye-witness to events within Gaul and the most important first-hand source for his *Histories*.⁶⁰

For the early period of Frankish history Gregory looked to written sources of information. He used saints' *vitae*⁶¹ and fourth-century works now lost, the *Historia*

⁵³HF, 10:19:576-80.

⁵⁴HF, 10:15:569.

⁵⁵HF, 6:2:327-28.

⁵⁶HF, 9:20:502.

⁵⁷HF, 5:4:258.

⁵⁸HF, 8:18:450.

⁵⁹HF, 8:26:455-56.

⁶⁰Gregory appears in 67 of the 265 chapters of the last six books and his role was often central. See HF, Intro., p. 31.

⁶¹HF, 2:31:144.

of Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus and the *Historia* of Sulpicius Alexander. More contemporary to Gregory were the writings of Ferreolus, Venantius Fortunatus, and Sulpicius Severus, whose *Chronicle* was particularly important for Sulpicius' personal relations with St. Martin, and later Martinian writings. The paucity of this material may account for many of the factual errors found in the *Histories*. Scholars believe Gregory may have been misled by sources or simply did not know the truth, but whatever errors appeared were not intentional.⁶²

The use of hagiographic works as historical sources, and the inclusion of saints' deeds and the miraculous as elements of history leaves Gregory open to charges of credulity and ingenuousness. Who are his sources and what is his evidence? How does he evaluate his evidence?

It appears Gregory relied heavily upon oral tradition for both past and contemporary events, as well as on saints' *vitae*.⁶³ Most of Gregory's information for his writings came from tales and stories, and occasionally, he specifically named his informants. For example, "often I have heard the abbot Brachio,"⁶⁴ or "from the mouth of the blessed Leobardus himself,"⁶⁵ and abbot Eustachius can attest to this miracle.⁶⁶ More commonly, he referred only vaguely to his sources, such as: "The boy . . . told this story to me"⁶⁷ and "I heard all this from the mouth of the deaf and dumb man."⁶⁸ Usually, however, his informants remained anonymous and Gregory simply introduced his stories with generic references like: "Many witnesses have reported,"⁶⁹

⁶²HF, Intro., pp. 35-36.

⁶³GC, 22:36-38.

⁶⁴GC, 38:50.

⁶⁵LF, 22:2:127-28.

⁶⁶LF, 22:3:128-29.

⁶⁷GC, 82:88-89.

⁶⁸HF, 6:6:337.

⁶⁹HF, 2:24:138.

or “I have been told by the faithful,”⁷⁰ and “From all accounts.”⁷¹ Gregory’s reasoning that this type of authentication sufficed is found in the preface to the *Glory of the Confessors*: “It is shameful for a man who is foolish, fraudulent, ignorant, and lazy to undertake what he cannot accomplish. But what am I to do? I forbid concealment of the miracles of the blessed [saints] that I have myself often seen or of the events that obviously happened and that I learned about from an account by trustworthy men and of certain reliability.”⁷²

Gregory corroborated this oral tradition by his own personal experience, for he visited many of the shrines where he heard stories, saw the relics, or directly participated in or witnessed some of the events. He personally saw the fetters broken from captives at the tomb of St. Medard of Soissons.⁷³ As a young boy, he received a vision instructing him how to heal his father’s gout.⁷⁴ When stories circulated of the healing power of St. Tranquillus, Gregory heard of these and noted, “I in fact received this proof [of the saint’s power] there.” Gregory reported that moss growing at St. Tranquillus’ tomb healed painful blisters on his hands.⁷⁵

While oral tradition certainly served as the most important source for Gregory’s information, he also studied physical evidence found at tombs and shrines. With a critical eye, he studied historical scenes sculpted on tombs, tomb inscriptions, and the quality of tombs themselves to obtain information regarding the identification of those buried at the sites. For example, in the church of St. Venerandus there were “many tombs sculpted from Parian marble, in which some holy men and ascetic women were

⁷⁰HE, 5:6:263.

⁷¹HE, 4:9:202.

⁷²GC, 1:17-18; Author’s emphasis.

⁷³GC, 93:97-98.

⁷⁴GC, 39:51-52.

⁷⁵GC, 43:55.

buried.” They were undoubtedly Christians, “because the historical scenes [sculpted] on their tombs are revealed [to be] about the miracles of the Lord and his apostles;”⁷⁶ and at the holy shrine of the blessed Helius “I noticed an inscription on the door [that mentioned] how a violator of this tomb had plundered the lifeless corpse. I was curious about the occasion [and asked] whether the events that were seen to have been depicted on the door were true.”⁷⁷

Probably the most important determinant of Gregory’s access to contemporary information was the importance of the city of Tours, from its regional location to its religious significance. Situated near the Loire river, Tours benefited from the river traffic that carried trade, travelers, and information. Tours also lay on the main road connecting Spain to the south and Aquitania and the north. In addition, it was at the hub of five Roman roads.⁷⁸ As an important regional center, Tours was fought over by three Frankish kings and was the object of civil war. In addition, Tours was one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Gaul, for this was St. Martin’s city. His tomb in the great church built by Perpetuus outside the walls of Tours a century before Gregory’s time formed the center of his cult.⁷⁹ Gregory enlarged this church and expanded the number of relics available for veneration.⁸⁰ He not only guarded the cult of St. Martin, but he also patronized the cult of St. Julian. The promotion and expansion of the traditions of St. Martin and St. Julian increased the value of Tours as a pilgrimage site. In a curious positive and negative turn of events, St. Martin’s church became the favored destination for not only those who sought cures, but also for political refugees and fugitives seeking

⁷⁶GC, 34:47-48.

⁷⁷GC, 61:67-68.

⁷⁸Brehaut, History of the Franks, x.

⁷⁹HF, 2:14:130.

⁸⁰HF, 10:31:601-2.

asylum. Thus, Gregory, as bishop of Tours, not only created events, he participated in events and was privy to information that flowed into Tours.

Did Gregory have a sense of critical judgment concerning the events he recorded? Yes, but his evaluation of information and proof had a different kind of rigor than ours does. For instance, Gregory as a historian was anxious to report and authenticate the stories concerning the lives and miracles of the holy. In the *Lives of the Fathers* he wrote: "And perhaps some doubters will try to object to what we have said. But they should know that I have seen the priest Deodatus, who is eighty years old, and he has told me the things which I have written here, declaring under oath that everything is the absolute truth."⁸¹ Obviously, his search for credibility and truth was shaped by his own sense of truth as he knew it. Thus, "a trustworthy man talked with me; I know that he told the truth because I knew that what he said had certainly happened."⁸² These are not "facts" but a confirmation of a belief already held.

One must question and consider the validity of Gregory's *Histories* as a primary source. Obviously, Gregory knew much more than he included in his history. As with any historian, he selectively suppressed, idealized or revised the available facts to provide a record of events he considered comprehensive for his purposes. This does not necessarily discredit the validity or importance of his historical narrative for historians. Gregory's *Histories* dramatizes the world of public Christianity in sixth-century Gaul. Within this, his expressed personal interests are neither political, ethnic, nor dynastic, nor does he even orient his interests to the Gallo-Roman Church or the Church of Rome. He presents the reader with straightforward political and dynastic information of events in Spain and Gaul; he voices his concerns about the Arian heresy;

⁸¹LF, 13:89.

⁸²GC, 1:17-18. Cf. HF, Intro., p. 33 where it says Gregory questioned this naive statement as valid proof; Author's emphasis.

and he portrays the often antagonistic relationships between bishops. The *Histories* records contemporary events in a world of personalities, not institutions. The *dramatis personae* are kings and queens, counts and dukes, bishops and martyrs, but the events and personalities only provide the background for Gregory's narrative. The unifying element among these events, with their participants, remains their relationship to the saints, and thus to God.

Gregory clearly defines those through whom, or for whom, God works wonders, be they monk, bishop, martyr, confessor, living holy person, or dead saint. He portrays a world in which saints play an integral role between God and the earthly world. God's goodness is clear to all by the manifestation of miracles, and the access to his goodness is through prayer and reverence for the saints. Gregory and his audience share faith and belief in these occurrences, and within the bounds of Gregory's sense of history, he has accurately portrayed these moments. Yet, Gregory's faith clearly affected his presentation of events. As a zealous churchman and a fervent Christian, he saw situations from the viewpoint of the church. He had many ecclesiastical concerns: the poor, the weak and oppressed, law and order, and justice. But he subordinated history to moral instruction. A king, however cruel, could be forgiven his faults by his offering of extra alms to the church.⁸³ A king who slaughtered all those who opposed him could be forgiven for supporting the orthodox faith.⁸⁴ Their vices might be more readily condoned in history. But the queen, Fredegund, with a well deserved reputation for intrigue and assassination, was not forgiven by one good deed.⁸⁵ For Gregory this reflected the correct interpretation. The problem in using Gregory as a historical tool is to remain aware of differing truths, especially in view of twentieth-century standards

⁸³HF, 5:34:298. See also, Geary, *Before France And Germany*, 121-22.

⁸⁴HF, 5:Preface:253.

⁸⁵HF, 5:39:303-5, 5:34:297-98.

for judging historical evidence and interpretation. This situation remains constant in dealing with the *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy* of Orderic Vitalis.

Orderic Vitalis--Monk and Historian

Orderic Vitalis was born in England, at Atcham, near Shrewsbury, in February of 1075. His father was Odelerius of Orleans, a learned clerk who came to England between 1066 and 1068 with Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, to serve in his household and chapel. Orderic's mother was probably English, as Orderic refers to himself as *angligena*.⁸⁶ In 1080, at the age of five, Orderic was sent to school in Shrewsbury at a small church. An English priest, Siward, described by Orderic as "both highly born and learned" served as Orderic's instructor for the next five years.⁸⁷ Here Orderic learned to read Latin, possibly learned to write, memorized the Psalms, and helped with services in the church.⁸⁸ At age ten Odelerius sent Orderic away to Saint-Évroul in Normandy, a monastery with a reputation for learning and piety. The reasons were twofold: the construction of the abbey of Shrewsbury, with which Orderic's father had connections, was not yet complete enough to house monks or to provide a monastic education; and Odelerius felt that Orderic would have a better chance of achieving salvation by dedicating his life to God, removed from familial ties of affection.⁸⁹

Orderic spent his formative years in the cloister and school of Saint-Évroul as an oblate. His schooling focused on devotional works, reading the Psalter, biblical studies, and exegesis. It probably also included works of the early Christian encyclopedists and Carolingian scholars, but the focus remained on the *lectio divina*, the understanding of

⁸⁶EH, 2:Intro.:xiii.

⁸⁷EH, 1:Intro.:3.

⁸⁸EH, 1:Intro.:5.

⁸⁹EH, 1:Intro.:5.

the Scriptures, spiritual meditation, and the liturgy.⁹⁰ Orderic's schooling probably lasted until he became a deacon in 1093, at the age of eighteen.⁹¹ In 1107, he was ordained a priest and continued his studies as he worked in the scriptorium and library.

The books and documents Orderic copied and read undoubtedly influenced his future writing. Not all the works he copied are extant, but his handwriting appears in over a dozen manuscripts among them works of scriptural exegesis, lives of saints, hymns, liturgical works, and legends. He also copied historical works and documents, among them, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, extracts from Bede's *De temporum ratione*, the *Gesta Normannorum ducum* of William of Jumièges, the only known diploma of the first monastery of Saint-Évroul, and a section of the annals of Saint-Évroul. These were works of particular interest to his monastery and represented writings in addition to the traditional core of scriptural reading material available in a medieval monastic library.⁹²

The core collection in Saint-Évroul's library was substantial. The first catalogue made of Saint-Évroul's collection in the second quarter of the twelfth century listed over 130 titles, and some of the volumes may have contained several treatises.⁹³ Among the devotional works and writings of the Church Fathers in its collection were a complete Bible, the complete works of Gregory the Great, treatises by Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Eusebius, Orosius, and Isidore. Some monks may also have had a passing familiarity with classical authors, due to works on the library shelves by Servius, Donatus, Priscian, Hippocrates, and Aristotle.⁹⁴

⁹⁰EH, 1:Intro.:14-15.

⁹¹EH, 1:Intro.:23.

⁹²EH, 1:Intro.:23-24.

⁹³EH, 1:Intro.:16-19. The catalogue has been printed by H. Omont, *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, ii. 468-69, and Delisle, *Notice*, p. xxviii n. 11. See EH, 1:Intro.:17, note 2.

⁹⁴EH, 1:Intro.:16-19.

The monks at Saint-Évroul not only copied books and documents, they also composed original works of scriptural exegesis, glosses, sermons, lives of saints, and musical compositions.⁹⁵ Orderic himself composed saints' Lives, sermons, and verses, particularly epitaphs as for Hugh of Grandmesnil, one of the monastery's benefactors, and for Earl Waltheof, a martyred patron of Croyland Abbey in England. He also wrote several poems on the evils of the times and in praise of the saints, and this type of verse passage became a common element in his *Historia*.⁹⁶ In addition to literary compositions, he wrote portions of the annals of Saint-Évroul, and a life of St. Évroul, the monastery's patron saint. Moreover, he received requests to write a foundation history for Croyland Abbey in England, as well as a life of its patron saint, St. Guthlac. A commission from his own abbot, Roger of le Sap, to write a foundation history of Saint-Évroul and his acceptance of that project, interesting however, led to his life's work, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*. Unfortunately, following Orderic's death in approximately 1142, there was no one to continue his history.⁹⁷

The composition of this history was an act of faith. On the first page of Book XI, a weary Orderic calls out to God:

I worship and seek you, I toil to please you rightly; Now an old man, I write the deeds of kings and bishops; I, a sexagenarian, make them plain to the novices . . . If new miracles were openly performed in these days, I would endeavour to include them faithfully in my chapters; I believe that a brief account of them would be more acceptable to present and future generations, more profitable to me, more pleasing to others, than vainly to explore and then recount long stories of earthly happenings and transient generations.⁹⁸

⁹⁵EH, 1:Intro.:22.

⁹⁶EH, 1:Intro.:28-29.

⁹⁷The original holograph consisted of four volumes of which only three now survive. The three surviving volumes (A) are now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, MSS. lat. 5506, parts I and II, and 10913. See EH, 1:Intro.:118-125, esp. 118.

⁹⁸EH, 6:11:9.

The general plan of Orderic's *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy* is as follows:

Book I contains the *Life of Christ*, examining Christ's ministry and the series of the Lord's miracles recorded in the four Gospels, and a universal history from the creation of the world to the year 1137.

Book II contains lives of the apostles and evangelists, followed by the lives of the popes up to 1142.

Books III contains the early history of Saint-Évroul and an account of the Norman conquest of England. This book also includes the *Life of St. Judoc*, and a collection of St. Judoc's miracles;

Book IV narrates events in England and Normandy from 1067 to approximately 1078. It covers the pacification of England following the Conquest, to the quarrels between the sons of King William. This book also includes the *Life of St. Guthlac* and his miracles by Felix, and an early history of the abbey of Croyland, written when Orderic was in England.

Book V includes an account of Orderic's father, Odelerius, and the foundation of Shrewsbury Abbey, the Synod of Lillebonne in 1080, and a history of the archbishops of Rouen. It also includes the internal history of Saint-Évroul and gives a full account of the benefactions made to the abbey.

Book VI, along with Book V and sections of Book III, make up the main body of the work relating to the internal monastic history of Saint-Évroul and the miracles of St. Évroul.

Book VII mainly summarizes French, Norman, and English history from 688 to 1087, and treats with the death of William the Conqueror.

Books VIII-XIII have a roughly chronological format and cover the reigns of William Rufus, Henry I, and Stephen in England and Normandy, the council of Rheims, the first and second crusades, and concludes with the *Chronicle of St. Évrault*.

In this study Orderic's work is referred to as the *Historia*. The *Historia* is a moralistic, didactic work and a masterpiece of "monastic" narrative history. "If his own preference was for the lives of saints and holy prelates, miracle and marvels, he was assiduous in amassing evidence about feuds, battles, and the descents of fiefs and castles."⁹⁹ This work in thirteen books, written between 1114 or 1115 and 1141, reflects events set against a background of changing power and authority. In scope it stretches from the Creation to the crusades, and provides a wealth of political, social, and religious information, especially in terms of institutions and personalities, for historians. Orderic's tendency to follow where his interests took him within a basically chronological format explains the organization of the work, described by some historians as a "confused jumble." He wrote the books out of order and constantly revised them. Even after the completed work was submitted for acceptance, it was subject to the scrutiny and revision by his superior, the abbot.

Orderic saw all human history as part of God's plan and conceived of history as the vehicle for the praise of Him. "A chronicle must be composed in praise of the Creator and just Governor of all things. For the eternal Creator still works without ceasing and marvellously orders all things; and of his glorious acts let each one according to his ability and desire duly relate what is shown him from on high."¹⁰⁰ History was thus not only the proof of God's active presence in the world, but it was meant to praise him and serve notice to those who doubted God's presence or needed reminding of it.

⁹⁹EH, 1:Intro.:39.

¹⁰⁰EH, 3:6:215; Author's emphasis.

Orderic's interpretations of events and his vivid descriptions of personalities in the *Historia* are strongly moralistic, for he viewed the world with outright dismay and was clearly concerned about the salvation of his audience. With this in mind, he filled his books with examples of behavior worthy of the notice of God, but more often showed how God punished the sinful.¹⁰¹ "I am compelled to speak of dark deeds seen and suffered, I relate the transient doings of men who are fickle, for love of the world drags down human beings to perdition and the file of justice does not smooth away the rust from them. Prone to every evil, they brood on earthly matters and scorn the things celestial, so bent they cannot see them."¹⁰²

Orderic wrote to entertain as well as to instruct, and his examples of the catastrophes which God sends to mankind as chastisement for pride and arrogance make for compelling reading. Not even William the Conqueror was immune from chastisement. The wreck of the White Ship, on which William's son and heir died, was a judgment of Heaven due to unnatural vices among the young men of his court. "What could a great retinue, or wealth, or earthly glory, or your own beauty, William, do there to help you? Royal splendour decays; and the ocean obliterated equally what you have been, and what you were going to be. Damnation threatens all those lost in deep waters unless mercy from heaven is willing to spare them."¹⁰³ Of William the Conqueror's daughter, Orderic wrote:

Although Queen Matilda was now a powerful ruler with vast resources at her command she was overwhelmed with grief at her father's death, her mother's bereavement, and the cruelty of her brother, who had brought about the ruin of another brother, a dear nephew, and many friends. So omnipotent God strikes mortal

¹⁰¹Antonia Gransden, Historical Writing in England: c. 550 to c. 1307 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 154.

¹⁰²EH, 6:11:9.

¹⁰³EH, 6:12:303.

men who are unmindful of him, overthrows the proud, and shows that he reigns on high over all the earth.¹⁰⁴

God also intervened to protect church and monastic properties. Count Rotrou of Mortagne had “repeatedly plundered the lands of the cathedral church of Chartres . . . and by remaining obdurate in spite of frequent remonstrances by the bishop and clergy had incurred excommunication; by divine judgment he became deaf and never again recovered his hearing.”¹⁰⁵ At a time when monasteries sought to protect their lands from encroachment by the nobility, Orderic also wrote:

It is manifestly unjust and contrary to all reason that the things given to God by the generosity of Christian princes, or honourably increased by the care of stewards of the Church’s goods, should revert to lay hands and be applied to unholy secular uses. We must believe unquestioningly that just as those who dutifully gave of their wealth to God have received a reward according to their deserts by God’s grace, so sacrilegious men who appropriate holy things will be punished by God’s vengeance and stripped of the wealth they have unjustly acquired, to their perpetual disgrace.¹⁰⁶

The monastic life and its teachings strongly color Orderic’s considerations of the monastery and its brethren, and admonitions to his brothers were common and frequent: shun sloth, the enemy of the soul:

Only one demon tempts the monk who is active in doing good, but a thousand demons assault the slothful monk and prick him with so many temptations that he comes to scorn the monastic cloister and longs to see the pernicious sights of the world and experience its perilous delights. . . . Pray, read, chant psalms, write, persevere with such things, and consciously arm yourselves with them against the wiles of the devil.¹⁰⁷

Orderic claims to be an unbiased reporter and non-judgmental in his treatment of events. “I am not able to unravel the divine plan by which all things are made and cannot explain the hidden causes of things; I am merely engaged in writing historical

¹⁰⁴EH, 2:4:285.

¹⁰⁵EH, 2:4:361.

¹⁰⁶EH, 4:8:175-77.

¹⁰⁷EH, 2:3:51-53.

annals at the request of my fellow monks. Who can penetrate the inscrutable?"¹⁰⁸

Orderic recorded what he had seen and heard to glorify the works of God, but left it to his readership to judge how these events might guide their lives and lead them to salvation.

A twentieth-century historian might look at this disclaimer with some suspicion. A historian by occupation must choose his material, judge its value, and interpret it.

Today, it would be disingenuous for a historian to deny responsibility for his recording of events because God governs the world.

It is not unusual for Orderic to show God's will manifested by thunderbolts, plague, earthquakes, or fire, but Orderic's enthusiasm is for reflecting God's will as revealed in the miraculous and the marvelous either delivered directly or mediated through His saints. The saint as the mediator of God's intervention is traditional in medieval religious thought, and the lives of saints, central in both the liturgy and monastic daily life, represent an integral part of Orderic's *Historia*. For example, the inclusion of the Lives of St. Guthlac and St. Judoc, sixth- and seventh-century saints, represents an affirmation of times gone by, a better past than the present where miracles have ceased. Orderic believes in the validity of ancient miracles and records these miracles (so similar to those of Gregory of Tours) to affirm the glory of God and to edify the reader. More contemporaneously, as in the case of the *Life of St. Guthlac*, this encapsulation of the saint's life, woven around the abbey of Croyland and including an account of the death of its patron, Earl Waltheof, fostered a cult. Saints' Lives are appeals to popular piety and the pre-eminent saint in Orderic's *Historia* is St. Évrout. The emphasis on St. Évrout's founding of the abbey, the reverence for his relics, and his posthumous miracles create a suitable environment for pilgrims coming to worship at the abbey. Orderic also makes many passing references to saints, especially those

¹⁰⁸EH, 6:13:437.

connected with Normandy (St. Ouen, St. Philibert and St. Wandrille).¹⁰⁹ Wherever possible Orderic includes saintly miracles. But his narrative confirms that actual incidents of saintly intercession in his day were far fewer in number than previously occurred. The providential action of God directed at an individual or to the greater populace through portents and prodigies expresses God's goodness or anger. For example, while King Henry I wreaked vengeance through Normandy:

Almighty God showed marvellous and mighty works on earth, by which he moved the hearts of beholders to refrain from evil-doing . . . [and the inhabitants of Rouen and Paris] felt to their cost the harm done to their homes and crops by the raging torrents of the overflowing Seine. . . . At the same time a bright redness was seen shooting from Poissy through Mantes into Normandy. This was interpreted in various ways by the beholders, who told their listeners whatever they wished according to their individual tastes. . . . So proud men in their wilfulness recklessly twisted the prophecy to their own desires, but the outcome of affairs brought them very different results.¹¹⁰

These moral lessons were plainly aimed at Orderic's audience, with the primary audience being his own monastic community. His work contains biblical, hagiographic, and martyriological sections, all suitable readings for a monastic audience in the refectory, cloister, chapter house, or choir, as well as at church services on saints' days. He intended his "monastic" history to be read as a component of the *lectio divina*, the daily spiritual readings.¹¹¹ The interweaving of charter and chronicle in the *Historia* provides a legal testament of the monastery's endowments, patrons, and early history. Within this, the lengthy enumeration of endowments and their specific benefactors served as a reminder to the monks for whom they were to pray, and additionally who provided their sustenance.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 155.

¹¹⁰EH, 6:12:227-29.

¹¹¹Roger D. Ray, "Orderic Vitalis and His Readers," *Studia Monastica* 14 (1972): 32. See Ray, "Orderic and His Readers" for a detailed article on the reception of Orderic's history by members of his monastic community.

¹¹²Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 163.

Orderic did not just direct his work at monks, however, but also at educated laymen, English, Norman, and French.¹¹³ Parts of the *Historia* directly concerned the neighboring nobility. Many of these lords were patrons, and had close ties to the church either through benefactions or family relations. The foundation history served to confirm certain rights of the abbey and its properties, and reminded the nobility of their obligations to provide and defend the abbey. Many of Saint-Évroul's community also came from the neighboring nobility, some whom in their prime as knights defended the abbey, or fought in England, Sicily, or on the crusades; and then they retired to the community, becoming monks to prepare their souls for salvation. These lords, ladies, knights, and clerks were not only audience, but source for much of Orderic's material. Their presence at the abbey as neighbors and benefactors was undoubtedly due to the importance of Saint-Évroul as a Benedictine monastery. Saint-Évroul held an important place in the eleventh-century monastic revival in Normandy. It stood at the center of a network of dependencies that widened its feudal contacts, contacts that reached to the frontier regions, southern Italy, and England.¹¹⁴ It served as a resting point for pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land, for travelers between England and Normandy, and for knights on their way to the crusades. Thus, Orderic was privy to stories about life at court, knightly exploits, battles, dynastic marriages, and papal affairs in Rome.

Not all of Orderic's information was second or third hand however. He certainly paid visits to the priories of Saint-Évroul or to other abbeys in the vicinity,¹¹⁵ and despite his protestations that he led a cloistered life, he also traveled more widely. He visited England in about 1115, spending five weeks at Croyland Abbey, and later visited

¹¹³EH, 1:Intro.:36-37.

¹¹⁴EH, 1:Intro.:8.

¹¹⁵EH, 1:Intro.:26.

Thorney and Worcester.¹¹⁶ In addition, he visited Cambrai, probably Arras,¹¹⁷ and likely was present at the council of Rheims in 1119.¹¹⁸

Orderic culled portions of his *Historia* from the works of other historians. He was influenced by Anglo-Saxon biographies and chronicles, and was particularly impressed by Bede. Indeed, Bede had the greatest influence on Orderic. Orderic borrowed from both the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and Bede's universal chronicle in *De temporum ratione*.¹¹⁹ Orderic was also influenced by Norman histories, particularly by the *Gesta Guillelmi* of William of Poitiers, whose theme--that all earthly achievements are ephemeral--resembles Orderic's.¹²⁰ Other historical sources such as Eusebius' *Chronicle*, the *Historia Langobardorum* of Paul the Deacon, the *Gesta Normannorum ducum* of William of Jumièges, and the *Liber Pontificalis* also provided material for Orderic.

In Orderic's day conflations of history were common. Orderic used modified, revised, or even entire passages out of the histories of others, and conflated several together to achieve what he considered the full story.¹²¹ These histories and chronicles served as records to be amended, abbreviated, and paraphrased to bring information up to date as he interpreted it, without citing his sources. "I have sometimes changed the words, but have always made it my chief endeavour to pursue the irrefutable truth, and have never intentionally departed from the original meaning."¹²²

In the use of documents and charters he was more precise. It was not uncommon for Orderic to copy into his narrative the entire text of a charter, a letter, or a church

¹¹⁶Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 152.

¹¹⁷*EH*, 1:Intro.:25.

¹¹⁸*EH*, 1:Intro.:26.

¹¹⁹Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 153.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 159.

¹²¹*EH*, 1:Intro.:51-61.

¹²²*EH*, 1:Intro.:98.

council. In addition to charters and canons of council, Orderic used, cited, or mentioned over one hundred sources. Various books from the *Bible*, with an emphasis on the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, comprised the most important of his sources. He used the historical books of the Old Testament and some of the Prophets less frequently.¹²³ The library and archives at Saint-Évroul provided much of his material, but Saint-Évroul had close contacts with other Benedictine houses, among them Bec-Hellouin, whose library he used.¹²⁴

One must certainly ask how objectively did Orderic use his information and evidence. In the *Historia* he affirms:

I will give a true account of the different events, both prosperous and adverse, which have happened in the course of thirty years, and will record them simply, for the benefit of future generations, to the best of my ability. For I believe there will be some men after me like myself, who will eagerly peruse the events and transitory acts of this generation in the pages of chroniclers, so that they may unfold the past fortunes of the changing world for the edification or delight of their contemporaries.¹²⁵

Having taken notice of this statement it is important to remember that the interpretations in Orderic's *Historia* were influenced primarily by two facts. He was a monk carrying out a mission inspired by God and he considered himself an English exile.¹²⁶ Orderic clearly had divided loyalties. By birth and background Orderic always held close associations with England. During his lifetime, England and Normandy became politically and culturally united. His sympathies lay with the English, but he had to justify the Norman Conquest. His narrative describes the English as a rustic and nearly illiterate people.¹²⁷ The Norman Conquest remedied this situation; William the Conqueror restored discipline to both clergy and laity alike, and "all provident" God sent

¹²³EH, 1:Intro.:48.

¹²⁴EH, 1:Intro.:27.

¹²⁵EH, 5:9:91.

¹²⁶EH, 6:13:553-55.

¹²⁷EH, 2:4:247.

Lanfranc to cooperate in matters of church reform.¹²⁸ Apparently, Orderic saw God intervening on both sides--many English and Normans fell at the battle of Hastings. "So on that fourteenth of October almighty God punished countless sinners in both armies in divers ways."¹²⁹ Each side had been guilty of coveting the goods of other men and "avenged" by the same just judge.¹³⁰

Orderic offers a fairly objective treatment of secular rulers. He firmly believed in hereditary kingship, and he used this basis for his denunciation of those who for dynastic reasons engaged in the interminable civil wars that were a constant in his life and that of the abbey.¹³¹

Orderic criticized those rulers who ill-treated or failed to defend the Church more consistently, the perfect example being his hatred for William Rufus. The *Historia* makes it clear that in Orderic's mind William Rufus deserved the arrow that killed him in the New Forest.¹³² In opposition to William Rufus stood his brother Henry I, who administered justice and kept the peace so that the Church could prosper. Any faults of Henry I that Orderic mentioned in his narrative were subordinated to this fact. In addition, Henry I confirmed Saint-Évroul's title to its properties, and this earned him Orderic's approval.¹³³

Orderic accepted the conventional social stratifications of his time, the division of society into four "orders"--monks, clerks, knights, and peasants.¹³⁴ On this basis,

¹²⁸Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 153; *EH*, 2:4:255.

¹²⁹*EH*, 2:3:177.

¹³⁰*EH*, 2:3:179.

¹³¹*EH*, 4:8:179-81, 6:11:93-95, 6:12:209.

¹³²*EH*, 5:10:285-91.

¹³³Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 156. See also Roger D. Ray, "Orderic Vitalis on Henry I: Theocratic Ideology and Didactic Narrative," in *Contemporary Reflections on the Medieval Christian Tradition* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974).

¹³⁴Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 229, notes that this belief

he denounced peasants who wished to avoid the life of toil that was their lot; he was scornful of those such as Ranulf Flambard who rose from the dust to a social station high above their birthright by ambition and intrigue;¹³⁵ and he was extremely critical of some churchmen, "Who waited on the royal court out of covetousness for high office, and, to the great discredit of their cloth, shamelessly pandered to the king."¹³⁶

One finds the clearest statement of Orderic's objectivity in his criticism of his sources. For example, throughout the text of the *vita* of St. Évrout, Orderic indicates what his own research efforts involved and he appears to judge critically the available sources: he seeks out the very best texts; he regrets the loss of some good texts during the Viking invasions; and he claims others are in error concerning contemporary events. But fortuitously, Orderic is able to give a true account of father Évrout's life because he received the information from a reliable line of scrupulous and devoted monks. What Orderic searched out were not "facts" as we know them, but evidence that confirmed what he already knew. He searched out materials that taught monastic piety and reflected the reality of God guiding human affairs. Thus, Orderic, for his purposes, justified the choice of a written source by appealing to its proven usefulness as a selection read during the church sermon. A good source improves one spiritually, but it is not necessarily one that we would call objectively accurate.¹³⁷

The *Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy* nevertheless remains a valid, useful narrative source for historians. As with any history, it demands that one have an awareness of the likely problems of interpretation which may arise. When

in society based on four orders was also held by Bernard of Clairvaux and Guibert of Nogent. In the last quarter of the twelfth century, the model of a perfect society was represented by a ternary pattern: knights, clerks, and peasants. See pp. 271-73.

¹³⁵Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 157; *EH*, 4:8:171-73.

¹³⁶*EH*, 2:4:269.

¹³⁷Ray, "Orderic and His Readers," 24-25.

considering Orderic, one must remember that he wrote his narrative on two levels, the moral and the historical. In his mind they were one and the same. Some contemporary historians will probably use the first to discredit the second. Yet, this work is a panorama of religious and secular events in England and Normandy, by a medieval historian with a keen eye for social, cultural, and religious detail, an instinctive feel for personality, and the gift to express it. In a world where it was accepted as a matter of faith that heavenly and mundane spheres meet and God directly intervenes on earth, every event orchestrated by God became the truth. Orderic conveyed this truth in a common language and these “facts” appear as real to Orderic as to his audience. These “facts” are revealed by the miraculous, by portents, and by prodigies. In addition, the *Historia* presents a good exposition of popular beliefs: the walking dead, healing, divine judgment, demons, and purgatory.

The largest part of Orderic’s *Historia* concerns events at their literal, historical level. Politically, Orderic expresses an embryonic faith in hereditary kingship, but certainly evinces no political philosophy. The reader is introduced to several levels of law: divine law, church law, and secular law. Within the descriptions of cases involving these specifics, Orderic’s assessment of right and wrong provides evidence of the ethical values and social customs of the early twelfth century. Orderic’s narrative also expresses the concerns of the contemporary ecclesiastical establishment, albeit from a monastic viewpoint. He favors the growth and preservation of traditional monastic communities, versus the emergence of the “novel” newer orders.¹³⁸ Problems of episcopal supervision, intervention, and attention to duty are explicated. The papacy in word and deed attempts to intervene in the secular administration of the Anglo-Norman

¹³⁸On this topic see Christopher Holdsworth, “Orderic, Traditional Monk and the New Monasticism,” in *Tradition and Change*, eds. Diana Greenway, Christopher Holdsworth, and Jane Sayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21-34.

Kingdom. He more enthusiastically expresses the papacy's role in the crusades, and with it an intriguing view of the Moslem world and the "infidels." Orderic's descriptions of "fortune," and of the arts of magic, medicine, astronomy, and the sciences, reveal the changing intellectual attitudes to science and medicine. The description of a physician as aided by God reflects the current thinking.

The richness of this narrative reflects the anxieties and conflicts of the age as perceived by a less than cloistered monk: tensions between king, pope and bishop, conflicts in secular authority between England and Normandy, open criticisms of royal abuse (particularly when they involved a lack of protection for monks and monastic communities), his concern for conflicting secular and ecclesiastical land claims, the moral conflicts of an abbot's proper Christian role and his actual behavior, and the necessity of the "holy man" as an exemplar of virtue and spiritual attainment at a time when Christ's spiritual successors are addicted to worldly pleasure and luxury. All of these elements make Orderic's *Historia* a valuable historical narrative.

In a comparison and contrast study of these two historical narratives, the differences and similarities between Gregory's *Histories* and Orderic's *Historia* need to be considered. Is there enough commonality for them to be used as comparative historical sources in a valid study?

As medieval historians, Gregory of Tours and Orderic Vitalis shared common premises of space and time; the worlds of the sacred and the profane intersected. God created the natural world; and all its movements however strange, frightening, or monotonous were due to his intervention and guidance. Saints, although deceased and passed on to God in spirit, still "lived" in this world through their relics and interceded for the living just as they did when earthbound. This belief was instilled not only by faith, but by personal experience. Both Gregory and Orderic experienced the miraculous

and shared that sense of intimacy and adjacency of the holy in their lives. The saints lived forever within a perhaps slightly more current historical time span which began with the Creation and would continue until the Last Judgment, an event imminent to both authors.

As ecclesiastical historians, Gregory and Orderic represented a church culture within a secular culture. Geographically, both historians lived in western Europe, within the region defined by the Carolingian Empire. The unifying feature of western Europe was not geographic boundaries nor political dynasties, however, it was the orthodox Christian Church, whether that Church was viewed institutionally or merely as a focus of faith. Both historians within this church culture shared a similar educational background based on Scripture, the Gospels, and the writings of the Church Fathers. They shared Church traditions in terms of the liturgy as the vehicle of religious instruction, as well as a belief in saints and relics; each in his own way fostered the growth of cults. Both wrote hagiographic works and strove to validate and authenticate saintliness. Moreover, Gregory and Orderic each wrote for reasons of faith and their histories, Latin and didactic, interpreted events within a religious and moral context. Gregory wrote to emphasize the immediacy of God to fledgling Christians in an effort to instill faith, to make Christianity “real.” God as a distant power was brought to the local and familiar level by the saint as mediator and patron. By faith alone one had access to God’s goodness. Gregory emphasized the saint as the channel for the miraculous from God. Orderic wrote to emphasize that all human history was part of God’s plan. No one could judge the way of an inscrutable God. His focus was on salvation, a more mature internal faith than Gregory hoped his flock to attain. Orderic believed there was much more sin in his time and fewer miracles. Increasingly, portents and prodigies took the place of the miracles Orderic hoped to see. These miraculous manifestations were instances of God’s direct intervention in the world, bypassing the saints. The Church

tradition of saint as miracle-worker continued, but Orderic was more concerned with sin and salvation, and the importance of the living “holy man” as an exemplar of virtue, than with the saint as an exemplar of virtue or as a miracle-worker.

Yet, the saint and the “holy” are integral elements in both narratives. Orderic employed sixth- and seventh-century saints’ *vitae* to confirm the constancy of God’s intervention in his lifetime, but looked to the past as the better time. Gregory’s St. Martin still remained an exemplar of sanctity. Although each author defined the qualities and virtues reflected by the saint or holy person, Orderic built on a hagiographic tradition established by Gregory. Both historical narratives also depict saints functioning within contemporary society. Gregory’s saints are somewhat removed from a social context, but the benefits they deliver reflect the social needs, the anxieties, and the concerns of the local community. On a larger scale, the saint and holy person for Orderic reflects the needs, anxieties, and problems of the monastic community, town or city, and realm, but within a social context. We can readily compare the function and perceived need for divine intervention, either delivered directly or mediated through God’s saints.

Although these narratives were written five hundred years apart, both histories are structured around the same medieval concepts of time, space, the immediacy of the supernatural, and the reality of God’s intervention in the temporal world. Each defines sanctity, the holy and the sacred, and within the religious and secular spheres describes a person’s or object’s function within society. A tradition of scriptural studies, sacred literature, and hagiography connects the narratives and their authors. Beyond a saint’s *vita*, both narratives deal with relics, pilgrimage, and the obligations of veneration. These basic features are present in both narratives, but contemporary concerns and conflicts, maturing theology, political philosophy, and law affect them, alternately expanding and contracting the definitions of sanctity and their function. The number of

similarities in faith and personal experience of the authors justifies a comparison of their narratives. A comparison of these narratives will show the saint as an essential element of faith and tradition and will show that the concept of the "holy" expands in the twelfth century.

CHAPTER 3

AN ANALYSIS OF SANCTITY IN GREGORY OF TOURS

Before examining the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours it might be helpful to reiterate some points. First, the *Histories* describes public Christianity of sixth-century Gaul, not a history of the Gallic church nor of the Church of Rome. It is important to remember that Roman Gaul was converted only nominally to Christianity by the mid-fifth century. Its population remained a blend of ethnicities and cultures, and was formally Christian in little else other than baptism and in the outward observance of Christian forms.¹ The variety of beliefs held by those within the Christian community existed due to residual pagan beliefs and to a lack of interest among most Merovingian churchmen in providing a religious education to the populace. Consequently, ignorance existed among the laity and probably, even among the clergy.² These variables represent Gregory's religious world.³ Second, Gregory of Tours, as an orthodox Christian bishop, clearly reflects in the *Histories* his episcopal concerns: spiritual and pastoral. Spiritually, he felt compelled to present arguments for Catholic orthodoxy to refute Arian beliefs; pastorally he felt an obligation to present God's message of salvation in terms understandable to his audience. The bishop's most important duty remained to preach to the Christian community, but in the sixth century that community revolved around and depended on the town. But what instruction did the predominantly rural population receive? The sixth-century Merovingian church did

¹Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 127.

²Edward James, *Origins of France: From Clovis to the Capetians, 500-1000* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 97.

³See Ian Wood, "Early Merovingian Devotion in Town and Country," in *The Church in Town and Countryside*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 61-76.

not encourage preaching in the countryside.⁴ For these people, knowledge of Christianity remained at the most basic level and biblical teaching was a long time coming to them.⁵ Thus, the *Histories* represents a pastoral work written for an audience superficially Christian at best, an audience that venerated power, and one that was sensitive to a supernatural world that punishes or rewards. By faithfully recording and promoting the miraculous, Gregory made visible the power of God and the ubiquity of divine intervention. He described a world where “sanctus” was everywhere. From that which was sacred, be it a living saint or the relics of a dead saint, tangibly emanated a supernatural power, “virtus,” perceived as a sign from God acknowledging a life devoted to His service.

Gregory described miraculous events, manifested by saints and their relics, to draw attention to values important to the Christian community, such as obligations of charity, generosity, chastity, and humility. Additionally, with the focus on saints and their relics at specific sites, and ritual ceremonies on particular days, Gregory promoted an atmosphere of faith, veneration, and obligation that committed the believer to definite patterns of behavior and rhythms in his life: among them demands of observance of certain feast days, pilgrimage, offerings of gifts at shrines, churches and monasteries, and refraining from manual labor and sexual relations on Sundays.⁶ But the veneration of divine power extended beyond the saints and their relics. Not only were miraculous events mediated for and through saints, but miracles were mediated on behalf of “holy” people living or dead, by divine intervention. These persons were neither saints nor patrons in their community, but were set apart by a life lived in respect of and pursuit of God. The sheer variety of those considered “holy” speaks to the

⁴James, *Origins of France*, 54.

⁵*Ibid.*, 59.

⁶Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 119.

community need for exemplars of piety and virtue as well as mediators of divine power, both real or perceived.

This chapter has two main goals. The first, to analyze the ethical dimensions of sanctity, what defines a person as “holy” and why; and second, to explore the practical and functional dimensions of sanctity in mediating and influencing religious, social, and political problems and concerns contemporaneous to Gregory, historian and bishop, in sixth-century Gaul. Gregory does not concern himself with defining sanctity, he provides concrete examples of those who are sanctified--their lifestyles, their virtues, and their role in society. For this we turn to the *Histories* and Gregory’s message of salvation. Gregory preached,

There are many steps by which one can reach heaven. . . . These steps of various works are a progression in the worship of God, and no-one can walk this path . . . without being spurred on by the help of God . . . And this assistance has been promptly obtained . . . by all those whom discipline has strengthened in it.⁷

For Gregory, saints and holy persons were those who through discipline obtained salvation and reached heaven. They comprised a highly diverse group, varying in social and economic backgrounds, and in their commitment to God, but in common they possessed the quality of sanctity.

Although subtly shaped by different times and circumstances, these “steps of various works” fell into the traditional categories of the “holy” from the early Christian period: martyrs, confessors, hermits and recluses. In sixth-century Gaul, martyrdom was still held to be the most direct and honored route to sanctity. Martyrs of the early Church imitated Christ by suffering and dying for their faith through passive resistance; but by the sixth century the period of persecution by secular authorities had passed. Frankish kings had accepted Catholic Christianity--if perhaps not its responsibilities--and believers were not likely to suffer persecution and death for it.

⁷LE, 10:Preface:71.

Another route to martyrdom, although less prestigious than the former, was dying for the faith through missionary work.⁸ Prior to the “conversion” of Gaul, martyrdom through missionary work among the Frankish and Roman pagans was possible, but in the sixth century it was less likely, although confrontations still occurred. Gregory records no martyrs’ deaths taking place in his time, but does record the destroying of temples and the building up of churches.⁹ With few exceptions, Merovingian churchmen were not concerned with converting pagan peoples.¹⁰ Thus, the early Christian concept of “witnessing” for the faith changed. Now the “struggle” or “contest” to compete as “athletes of Christ” in leading an exemplary life replaced “witnessing” for one’s faith.¹¹

Gregory emphasized not the physical resistance, but the moral resistance to vice.¹² Saints by their deeds exhibited the Christian virtues of charity, generosity, righteousness, humility, and chastity. Martyrs imitated the life of Christ in its spiritual ideal. St. Salvius, who observed the law of Christian charity, “humbled” himself before God and “never permitted himself to be ensnared by the carnal desires which so frequently fill[ed] the minds of young people.”¹³ St. Nicetius offered to all people, “that loving kindness which the Apostle told us to show to everyone wherever possible. In his heart was seen the Lord Himself, who is true love.”¹⁴ According to

⁸J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Frankish Church (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 89.

⁹HE, 1:31:87-88, 1:33:89, 1:39:91-92, 10:31:593-604. The conversion of the Arians to orthodoxy interested Gregory, but not the evangelization of heathens as an everyday activity. See Walter A. Goffart, Narrators of Barbarian History, A.D. 550-800 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 138.

¹⁰Pierre Riché, “Columbanus, His Followers and the Merovingian Church,” in Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism, eds. H. B. Clark and Mary Brennan, BAR International Series 113 (Oxford: BAR, 1981), 65.

¹¹GM, Intro.:12.

¹²GM, 106:133-34.

¹³HE, 7:1:385.

¹⁴HE, 4:36:230.

Gregory, an admirable life was one lived with discipline. Julian, the priest of Randan, “was most temperate in his personal habits, never drinking wine, never eating meat . . . constant in his vigils, perpetually at prayer.”¹⁵ More frequently, Gregory resorted to repetitive phrasing, for example the saint was a man of “remarkable holiness and impeccable virtue”¹⁶ or he “was remarkable for saintliness and chaste in his behavior.”¹⁷ Saints provided assistance and the example of a virtuous life within the community. They also built up the church. Gregory recorded how St. Nicetius of Lyon “forgave the penitent, gave alms freely, attended to the erection of churches, to the sowing of his fields and the planting of his vines: but none of these things distracted him from prayer.”¹⁸ Quite properly, the abbot St. Aredius devoted all his time to fasting and prayers, yet retained a commitment to building churches. “He built churches to the glory of God’s saints, collected relics for them and tonsured as monks his own family retainers, [and] founded a monastery.”¹⁹ Not only saints but ordinary believers could demonstrate their own commitment by living virtuously and suppressing their vices. Gregory wrote of a wealthy woman, who, dressed in a simple dark dress prayed at the church of St. Stephen. A poor man came to pray, mistook her for a needy person and put a piece of bread in her lap. She did not scorn the gift, but took it and thanked him. “She ate it instead of her other food and each day she received a blessing from it until it was all eaten up.”²⁰

¹⁵HF, 4:32:227.

¹⁶HF, 1:45:94.

¹⁷HF, 4:36:230.

¹⁸HF, 4:36:230-32.

¹⁹HF, 10:29:589-92.

²⁰HF, 2:17:131-32.

Gregory promoted chastity as an ideal form of asceticism.²¹ In the *Glory of the Martyrs*, he wrote that by “rejecting the desire of the flesh we are worthy to become martyrs, as was said by him who crowns with precious jewels in heaven those who faithfully struggle for him.”²² It was believed that celibacy as a means of self-denial allowed one to grow spiritually and thus was a sign of heroism.²³ Gregory approvingly included in the *Histories* the tale of two lovers, who, on their wedding night, dedicated their bodies to Christ and remained chaste throughout their marriage. God acknowledged the preservation of their chastity by miraculously moving their tombs together after their deaths.²⁴

Gregory, with his access to the aristocracy, often had little good to write about concerning its membership. It must have been with some relief that he could note how King Guntram was known for his charity, fasting, and vigils.²⁵ Of Queen Clotild, Gregory recorded the generosity of her almsgiving and charity, her life lived in chastity and virtue, and her endowment of churches, monasteries, and other holy places. “Her giving was so generous and so eager that already in her lifetime she was looked upon not as a queen but as the handmaiden of God . . . In all humility she moved forward to heavenly grace.”²⁶ Of equal importance was Radegund, a religious and cloistered queen, who founded a monastery at Poitiers. In addition to the sacrifice of removing herself from the temporal world, “She was famous for her prayers, her vigils and her

²¹This may have been an up-hill battle for Gregory. Geary notes a progressive decline of the ascetic ideal among sixth-century aristocrats. See Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 131.

²²GM, 106:133-34.

²³Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 234-35.

²⁴HE, 1:47:95-97.

²⁵HE, 9:21:509-10.

²⁶HE, 3:18:182.

charities, and she became so well known that the common people looked upon her as a saint.”²⁷

A second pattern of sanctity very similar to that of the martyr was the confessor. Unlike the Christian who achieved martyrdom by moral resistance to vice, the confessor achieved martyrdom through self-persecution. Through abstinence and various exterior mortifications to his body, the confessor hoped to make himself more worthy of God. Biblical precedents are clear on this point. The apostle Paul stated, “Always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in your mortal body.”²⁸ Martyrs mortify their flesh to live with Jesus Christ. “It is not I who live, but Christ liveth in me.”²⁹

In pursuit of worthiness, Gregory’s confessor saints mortified themselves by wearing hair-shirts under their tunics,³⁰ iron chains wound around their body next to the skin,³¹ and Maurilio, Bishop of Cahors, already suffering from gout, applied “a red-hot poker to his shins and feet in order to increase his suffering.”³² Gregory included a poignant tale concerning the priest Julian, whose feet were swollen through long hours of standing. When asked why he stood longer than his bodily strength permitted, he answered: “As long as life is in me, my feet will serve me well enough, and by God’s grace they will not fail to support me.”³³

Gregory’s conception of a contemporary “ideal” was also certainly influenced by the patron saint of Tours, of whom Gregory considered himself to be the successor, St. Martin, the paradigm for a “bloodless martyr.” According to Sulpicius Severus,

²⁷HE, 3:7:168-69.

²⁸LF, 2:Preface:11.

²⁹LF, 2:Preface:11.

³⁰HE, 4:32:227, 6:6:333, 5:10:265.

³¹HE, 6:6:333.

³²HE, 5:42:306.

³³HE, 4:32:227.

Martin's first biographer, Martin would gladly have undergone torture for his faith or died a "death condemned to the sword," but he experienced neither: "In his hope of eternal life, is there any bitterness of human suffering he did not endure--hunger, vigils, nakedness, fasting, envious insults, vicious persecution, worry for the sick, anxiety for those in danger?"³⁴ Martin represented the "perfect type" of holiness, because he had been at the same time a monk, a missionary, a bishop, and a miracle-worker. "He had proclaimed before men . . . and before devils, the absolute choice that man must make of God."³⁵

The virtues of confessor saints were those of St. Martin: piety, mercy, evenness of temperament, patience, and charity. They likewise led lives of temperance and denial. Some ate only "a little bread and green vegetables, with some water,"³⁶ others never ate meat or drank wine.³⁷ St. Hospicius "ate nothing but dry bread and a few dates," but the worthiness to God of his self-denial was perceived by all, for "the Lord deigned to perform remarkable miracles" through him.³⁸ In Gregory's description of Patroclus we find the ideal confessor saint. A man of remarkable holiness and piety, and devoted to great abstinence:

He was always being plagued with this illness or that through his fasting. He would not drink wine, or cider or anything else which could intoxicate, taking only water slightly sweetened with honey. He would eat no animal food. His staple diet was bread soaked in water and sprinkled with salt. His eyes were never closed in sleep. He prayed unceasingly . . . and went to join Christ [at death].³⁹

³⁴Sulpicius Severus, "Life of St. Martin," in Writings, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, Fathers of the Church Series (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1949), 150-51.

³⁵Jean Leclercq, Francois Vandenbroucke, and Louis Bouyer, Spirituality of the Middle Ages (London: Burns and Oates, 1968), 55-56.

³⁶HF, 8:15:445-47.

³⁷HF, 4:32:227.

³⁸HF, 6:6:333.

³⁹HF, 5:10:265.

The life of asceticism was considered a worthy model to follow, but extreme instances of self-persecution were unacceptable to Gregory and his fellow bishops.⁴⁰ Gregory described a missionary, Vulfolaic, near Triers. Out of faith, Vulfolaic set himself up a column, after the fashion of Simeon Stylite, and in his bare feet stood on it through the harsh winter. "It so froze me with its icy frost that the bitter cold made my toenails fall off, not once but several times, and the rain turned to ice and hung from my beard like the wax which melts from candles."⁴¹ Certain bishops exhorted him not to continue, and ordered him to come down, telling him that the climate was too harsh for him to continue "tormenting" himself in this way. "Come down off your column, and live with the brethren whom you have gathered around."⁴² The bishops not only intended to restrain his asceticism, but also to bring him under the authority of episcopal control, a common theme in the *Histories*.⁴³ A reading of this passage indicates that Gregory approved of the bishops' actions.

Hermits and recluses comprise the last model of sanctity in the *Histories*. For spiritual and reflective reasons, hermits and recluses felt the need to withdraw from the turbulence of everyday life, its corrupting temptations and distractions. Although many of Gregory's examples, including the recluse Patroclus, overlap the category of confessor, Gregory was so specific in identifying the various paths to sanctity that the category of hermits and recluses should be included here.

Hermits led simple lives within the world of nature as did the wild-men found in Gregory's hagiographic works. They were figures suited to a time of transitional beliefs.

⁴⁰Merovingian clergy had little inclination for asceticism and took no part in the life of those recluses and hermits who, like the monks of the East, mortified themselves in order to find God. See Riché, "Columbanus," 59. Gregory personally did not incline to asceticism and enjoyed a drink and a good meal. *HE*, 8:2:434.

⁴¹*HE*, 8:15:446.

⁴²*HE*, 8:15:447.

⁴³Geary, *Before France and Germany*, 138.

Superficially Christian, Franks saw the countryside as “sanctified,” a world inhabited by deities of nature; hermits at home with animals and birds reflected one element of this image.⁴⁴ Gregory attempted to incorporate the hermit into the Merovingian Church by stressing his asceticism. He held before himself the ideal of St. Martin, who had been a hermit before he became bishop. One of the very few hermits in the *Histories* was a Breton, Winnoch, who made his way from Brittany to Tours. Gregory recorded that Winnoch practiced extreme abstinence, and wore no clothes except sheepskins from which the wool had been removed and as food ate only the uncooked herbs of the field. As far as wine was concerned, he would merely lift the cup to his mouth, appearing to touch it with his lip instead of drinking it.⁴⁵ “He seemed to me to be a most pious man and in the hope of keeping him with me I ordained him a priest.”⁴⁶

The distance by which a recluse withdrew from everyday life might be only a matter of degree. The “saintly abbot” Maxentius lived as a God-fearing recluse in his own monastery.⁴⁷ Gregory devoted several pages to the abbot St. Salvius, who believed it better to serve the Lord in poverty and humble oneself. Salvius withdrew to a cell in his monastery and then withdrew to a still more remote cell. He became convinced that it suited him better to remain hidden away among his monks, rather than to appear in public and be addressed as Abbot. He said farewell to the monks and in the loneliness of his cell he submitted himself to even greater abstinence than before. By his continual fasting he shed his skin nine times or more. At the same time, he took care to observe the law of Christian charity, offering up prayers for all who came to visit the monastery. Time and again those who arrived with grave afflictions went away cured. Who could doubt his holiness when at his death the cell filled with a bright light and the

⁴⁴Wallace-Hadrill, *Frankish Church*, 87-88.

⁴⁵*HE*, 8:34:467-68.

⁴⁶*HE*, 5:21:287-88.

⁴⁷*HE*, 2:37:153.

walls seemed to shake. After his death, Salvius was miraculously returned to the living because mankind needed him as an exemplar and intercessor to God.⁴⁸

It was not unusual for a holy man to withdraw from society and particularly from familial attachments.⁴⁹ As a rule recluses did not withdraw far, often only to the outskirts of town or to marginal land, just within or just beyond estate boundaries. They claimed this space as their *desertum*.⁵⁰ Here, semi-isolated in a state of spiritual contemplation, they manifested miracles the knowledge of which traveled by rumor and gossip; consequently their fame attracted followers who desired a guide or teacher. Senoch, the holy priest, withdrew from the world and lived in a cell which he built for himself among the ancient ruins of Tours. He gathered a number of monks around himself and rebuilt an oratory.⁵¹ It was also not uncommon that, when a holy man withdrew to a cell to pray and fast, others gathered around him and provided for his needs, for example Eparchius, the recluse of Angoulême,⁵² or the very similar situation of St. Martin at Marmoutiers, the monastery he founded outside of Tours.

Hospicius is a good example of a recluse, solitary, but not totally isolated from the world. Near the town of Nice, he shut himself up in a tower with only a small window. But his little window on the world allowed him to fulfill the needs of man. Gregory described how Hospicius felt the spirit of God welling up in him and sensed a man nearby needed healing. Hospicius grabbed the man by his head and pulled him in the window to cure him.⁵³ Gregory also described several incidents of immuring, where a

⁴⁸HF, 7:1:386-88.

⁴⁹One of the chief dangers of family influence on an ascetic was marriage. See Ian Wood, "A Prelude to Columbanus: the Monastic Achievement in the Burgundian Territories," in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, eds. H. B. Clarke and Mary Brennan, BAR International Series 113 (Oxford: BAR, 1981), 8.

⁵⁰Wood, "Prelude to Columbanus," 5.

⁵¹HF, 5:7:264.

⁵²HF, 6:8:338.

⁵³HF, 6:6:335.

believer was literally walled in. This represented the ultimate contempt for the world and examples, such as the young boy walled up who went insane,⁵⁴ and the nun who saw a vision of heaven and requested to be shut up in a cell to read and pray, were few.⁵⁵ These believers did not have the ability to channel miraculous power themselves although God communicated with them.

Extreme examples of isolation did not reflect the balance in life Gregory extolled. The majority of Gregory's recluses all combined a balance of asceticism and pastoral purpose. They exhibited the spiritual values of poverty, humility, self-denial, chastity, and piety. They remained visible exemplars of Christian policy and subsumed their personal needs and desires when called upon to serve the faith. Gregory wrote of the recluse St. Salvius, who was elected Bishop of Albi and consecrated against his will. An outbreak of the plague came and most of the citizens left but Salvius:

[The] good shepherd refused to leave his city. There he remained exhorting those still in the land of the living to pray unceasingly, not to relax in their vigils and to concentrate their minds and their bodies on doing only what was good. 'Always act in such a way . . . that if God should decide to recall you from this world, you may enter not into His judgment, but into His peace.'⁵⁶

This overview of the "steps" to heaven leads to the following observations. For Gregory the path one used to achieve holiness was based on a model of behavior, but this was more an emphasis on external behavior than internal spiritual transformation. This reflected the quality of sixth-century Gallic Christianity. Gregory intended to instruct and imprint biblical traditions upon an often resistant populace by concrete example and repetitive patterns. We are confronted with a culture whose values were being reshaped by Christian belief.⁵⁷ Since the paradigm of sanctity remained the most

⁵⁴HF, 8:34:468.

⁵⁵HF, 6:29:357-58.

⁵⁶HF, 7:1:388-89.

⁵⁷Gregory had been personally confronted by those he claimed "to follow idolatrous practices, for they did not recognize the true God. They fashioned idols for

important determinant of that which was sacred, designations such as monk, priest, nun, abbot, or bishop were peripheral to that which constituted "holy." Ecclesiastical vocations and titles did not define someone as saintly. Behavior and deeds which fit the Christian mold were uppermost in importance.

The social origins of individual ascetics were imprecise and should be considered doubtful.⁵⁸ They did not carry much importance in a saint's Life. Neither was one's economic background a defining characteristic of one who might incline to asceticism. Asceticism was the defining point, not one's social or economic background. However, the majority of saints in the *Histories* emphasized by Gregory were all of Gallic origin. Local saints successfully competed with the Apostles. For example, a man traveled to Rome to be healed, but the trip was unnecessary as St. Hospicius cured him just as he began his journey. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Jesus Christ, for having deigned to reveal such a miracle by the hand of your servant. I was on my way to Peter, I was going to Paul and Lawrence, and all the others who have glorified Rome with their blood. I have found them all here, in this very spot I have discovered them."⁵⁹

The majority of those leading saintly lives were men, and of those leading saintly lives, the majority were not recognized as saints until after their death. The reader quickly notices that an inordinate number of bishops were saints. The bishops in the *Histories* were first saintly and then recruited to a bishopric. In this position they

themselves out of the creatures of the woodland and the waters, out of birds and beasts: these they worshipped in the place of God, and to these made sacrifices." *HE*, 2:10:125. Still in the seventh century, Eligius, bishop of Noyon from 641-60, preached to the Franks in the countryside against their continuing pagan practices, specifically "wicked dancing," "diabolical games," and "other superstitions." He so aroused the locals to anger that he nearly achieved martyrdom for himself. "Although you are always bothering us, you will never uproot our customs, but we will go on with our rites as we have always done . . . There will never exist the man who will be able to stop us holding our time-honored and beloved games." See James, *Franks*, 125.

⁵⁸Wood, "Prelude to Columbanus," 4.

⁵⁹*HE*, 6:6:335.

fulfilled the role of a “good” bishop, as Gregory himself functioned as bishop of Tours. This again follows the paradigm of St. Martin, a saintly monk recruited to the bishopric of Tours.⁶⁰

Saints and holy persons were not only examples of the path to heaven, but they also exemplified lives guided by Christian ideals. The majority of “holy” people exhibited disciplined moral lives and fulfilled Christian public policy; they were chaste, sober, moderate, always ready to do a kind deed, sound in judgment, charitable, and generous. In addition to biblical virtues, they exhibited the preferred Merovingian virtues of austerity, affability, purity, patience, and hard work.⁶¹ Gregory made a clear distinction between “holy” persons and lay people who led saintly lives. Those leading secular lives were sanctified by the ability to do good works and imitate Christ, but they were not mediators of divine power. They represented Christian role models for the community. Their lives were important as a contrast to the “bad” role models in the *Histories*.

When Gregory of Tours made reference to a “holy man” he referred to a saint. While living holy people were “alive and well” in sixth-century Gaul, Peter Brown was quite correct in asserting that Gregory’s motto was “Call no man holy until he be dead.”⁶² This follows because Gregory considered salvation only possible after death. Thus, the basis for the saint’s validation as a “friend of God” was secured, and even the *virtus* exhibited from the saint’s tomb or shrine was stronger after the saint’s death

⁶⁰Statistics of posthumous cults give some impression of the changing position of the bishop. Of the 54 Gallic saints known from the fourth century, 52 were bishops; in the fifth century there were 123 bishops out of 175 saints; in the sixth century of 293 saints there were only 148 bishops. See James, *Origins of France*, 55.

⁶¹Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, 79.

⁶²Peter Brown, “Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways,” in Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 185.

because the saint was no longer distracted by earthly concerns.⁶³ Gregory focused predominantly on saints, the “best friends” of God. Merovingians were strongly hagiocentric. Saints existed as the key to their faith. The saint with his human form and personality established an attitude of “intimacy and sincerity which united the faithful” with their local saint, his shrine, and his relics.⁶⁴ This was an accessible figure, not the invisible, awe-inspiring, and distant God. Man did not perceive his relationship to God as direct. Even Christ as God remained an intangible concept for peasants more accustomed to worshipping at the shrine of their local god or saint.⁶⁵ It was important for Gregory to fit sixth-century saints into traditional Christian paradigms. This validated historical models by confirming their continuing presence and function. All saints by their degrees of abstinence, mortification, and examples of Christian charity and chastity represent paradigms of Jesus Christ. As Jesus guarded and taught his flock, so do they. As Jesus died and rose from the dead, so will they. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”⁶⁶ The faithful must conclude that through prayer to the “friends of God” they assured themselves of the earthly promise of salvation.⁶⁷

With the authority of biblical tradition, the saint represented the premier intercessor between God and ordinary believers. “We believe that heaven awaits those who have died in sanctity, and that as they emerge from the tomb a miracle will be

⁶³Brown, “Eastern and Western Christendom,” in Brown, Society and the Holy, 190.

⁶⁴Aron Gurevich, Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception, trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 43.

⁶⁵Wallace-Hadrill, Frankish Church, 93.

⁶⁶HE, 5:7:264, 10:13:560-66.

⁶⁷John H. Corbett, “Hagiography and the Experience of the Holy in the Work of Gregory of Tours,” Florilegium 7 (1985): 48.

performed. . . .”⁶⁸ The biblical tradition of the saint as spiritual intercessor combined with the late-antique tradition of secular patron. The saint actively participated in society, fulfilling the role of patron in response to political, social, and religious needs. In everyday circumstances the spiritual, moral, and practical dimensions of sanctity merged. Gregory specifically emphasized the saint as patron. After describing the church built by Perpetuus at Tours in honor of St. Martin and alluding to the feast-day of St. Martin on July 4, Gregory noted that “If you celebrate this faithfully you will gain the protection of the saintly Bishop in this world and the next.”⁶⁹ Likewise, Gregory explicitly described as intercessor the saintly bishop Aravatus responding to the very practical need to protect his flock from the impending invasion of the Huns. Aravatus, fearing that his prayers to save his people had not been granted, resolved to travel to Rome to add “the power of intercession of the Apostle to his own.”⁷⁰

The miraculous represents a powerful element in the belief of saints as patrons and intercessors, but beyond the manifestation of the miraculous exists the expression of actual needs. What concerns and conflicts in sixth-century Gaul demanded divine intervention? What political, social, and moral problems concerned Gregory, and how is this reflected in the actions of the saints as portrayed in the *Histories*? Gregory’s saints manifested the miraculous in response to appeals from the faithful for healing and cures, for encouragement of the Christian faith and the protection of its caretakers, for the protection of private as well as church properties, for release of those held captive, and for demands for punishment and vengeance. However, the most significant number of miracles regard the imposition of peace and justice.⁷¹

⁶⁸HE, 10:13:563.

⁶⁹HE, 2:14:130.

⁷⁰HE, 2:5:114.

⁷¹Kathleen Mitchell, “Saints and Public Christianity in the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours,” in Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages, eds.

Gaul in the middle of the sixth century lacked any strong centralized government and often appeared on the verge of disintegration. Clovis had consolidated the rule of the Franks over much of Gaul, but at his death his sons divided the realm among themselves. These mini-kingdoms generally had territorial cores, but they also often included control over individual cities scattered around Gaul, with more than one king claiming a particular area or city as his. With several kings ruling concurrently, this situation of overlapping land and kin-group loyalties created power struggles, not only among the kings, but also among their wives.⁷²

The theme of war dominates the pages of the *Histories*. The saint by necessity fulfilled a political role as preserver of the peace, by acting as a mediator or focus of reconciliation between warring parties. Frequent civil wars caused wide-spread destruction to people and property throughout Gaul.⁷³ Gregory recorded,

It gives me no pleasure to write of all the different civil wars which afflicted the Frankish people and their rulers; what is even worse, we now seem to see the time draw near which our Lord foretold as the real beginning of our sorrows: 'The father shall rise up against the son, and the son against the father; brother shall rise up against brother, and kinsman against kinsman.'⁷⁴

King Lothar, about to be attacked by the assembled armies of his brothers, is protected by a storm brought about by St. Martin on the appeal of Queen Clotild, the kings' mother.⁷⁵ The two kings, Childebert and Theudebert, "were cut about by the hailstones as they lay on the ground. They did penance to God and begged Him to forgive them for having attacked their own kith and kin. No drop of rain fell on Lothar, no clap of thunder was heard, no winds blew where he was." Lothar's brothers subsequently sent

Thomas F. X. Noble and John J. Contreni (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), 87.

⁷²Geary, *Before France and Germany*, 120-21.

⁷³HF, 6:31:359-61.

⁷⁴HF, 5:Preface:253.

⁷⁵HF, 3:28:185-86.

messengers to him to sue for peace and concord.⁷⁶ Saints intervened to protect communities as well as kingdoms. Gregory credits the power of St. Vincent with having saved the city of Saragossa when it was besieged by Childebert and Lothar, sons of Clovis. When the city was surrounded, the inhabitants turned in great humility to God. They abstained from eating and drinking, marched around the walls singing psalms, carrying with them the tunic of St. Vincent, and implored God to show mercy to them. When the besiegers learned of the presence of the saint's relics, they abandoned the siege of the city.⁷⁷

Saints also served as guarantors of peace treaties. Possession of the city of Paris was a constant source of conflict among the kings. The kings, Guntram, Chilperic, and Sigibert, all contemporaries of Gregory and grandsons of Clovis, reached an agreement by which each promised not to enter Paris without the prior agreement of the others. They appealed to the martyr Polyeuctes, St. Hilary, and St. Martin to judge the circumstances and punish any offender who broke the agreement not to enter the city.⁷⁸ Shortly, Guntram's brother Sigibert broke the agreement. By God's judgment, he died and so forfeited his share. Next Chilperic broke the agreement and entered Paris, now also forfeiting his share. "They both incurred the vengeance of God and the malediction promised in the pact."⁷⁹ This remained a visible demonstration of the saints' authority to judge and punish those who broke the law.

Although saints might act as political counselors to kings, dukes, and counts, having the responsibility to warn or rebuke if necessary, Gregory believed that the responsibility for Christian society resided in kings and secular rulers. Gregory told

⁷⁶HE, 3:28:186.

⁷⁷HE, 3:29:186-87.

⁷⁸HE, 7:6:391.

⁷⁹HE, 7:6:391-92.

King Chilperic, "You have the law and the canons. You must study them diligently. If you do not carry out what they say, you will soon come to realize that the judgment of God hangs over your head."⁸⁰ In one instance Eparchius, the recluse of Angoulême, on hearing that a thief was sentenced to be hanged, pleaded with the count to set the man free. But the crowd demonstrated against this, and the count gave in to the mob and hanged the thief. Miraculously, the gibbet broke and the monks carried the thief back to the monastery, where he was restored to health by the prayers of Eparchius. Eparchius then summoned the count to appear before him. "'My dear son,' said he, 'you have always listened sympathetically to what I have had to say. Why were you so adamant today, when you refused to pardon the man whose life I asked you to save?' 'I am always ready to listen to you, saintly priest,' replied the count, 'but today . . . I had a riot on my hands.' 'You did not listen, but God deigned to listen.'"⁸¹ The lesson given was that authority must be maintained by the count, who should rely on his own judgment and not be swayed by the mob. The saint's example should serve as a guide.

The saint as a part of his political function played a permanent role in law and justice. Gregory assumed a linking of law and the holy, a link clearly observed in the issue of oath taking and perjury.⁸² In Gregory's world, men worried very much about perjury. At King Guntram's instructions, Claudius rode to Tours and St. Martin's church to seize Eberulf. Claudius took notice of omens "as barbarous Franks always do," and at the same time he inquired of many whether the saint had recently manifested his miraculous power against breakers of oaths and especially whether vengeance was

⁸⁰HE, 5:18:278.

⁸¹HE, 6:8:339.

⁸²Brown, "Eastern and Western Christendom," in Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 194.

enacted immediately.⁸³ A little more caution might have saved Claudius' life. Claudius falsely promised Eberulf safety to lure him from the church. A battle ensued and Claudius himself sought refuge in the church, "seeking protection from one whose patron he had never had the sense to reverence."⁸⁴ Spears hurled into the church transfiged him in death, the certain end for one who took the power of St. Martin lightly. As perjurers stood in peril from the authority of saints, so did false accusers. Gregory recounted the attempt by Count Leudast, who by means of perjury and "unjust and wicked calumnies," sought to have Gregory expelled from Tours. In this power play between secular and ecclesiastical authority in Tours, Leudast was punished by the vengeance of God for the discord in St. Martin's city, as well as for his attack on Gregory, one of God's servants.⁸⁵

The appeal to supernatural authority likewise appeared in the practice of ordeal by oath. A man was accused of having burned down his neighbor's house. There was no doubt of his guilt, but he hoped to exonerate himself of the charge by swearing an oath at St. Martin's church. Gregory met him as he entered the church and reminded him, "Now, God is everywhere, and His power is just as great outside the church as it is inside. If you have some misguided conviction that God and His saints will not punish you for perjury, look at His holy sanctuary which stands before you."⁸⁶ The arsonist still denied his guilt before God and St. Martin. In this ordeal, an appeal to the supernatural to judge one's guilt, the perjurer lost. As he turned to leave the church "he appeared to be on fire himself. He fell to the ground and began to shout that he was being burned by

⁸³Contemporaries of Gregory often did not distinguish between pagan auguries and witchcraft on the one hand, and the veneration of saints on the other. See Gurevich, Medieval Popular Culture, 44.

⁸⁴HF, 7:29:411.

⁸⁵HF, 5:49:316-22.

⁸⁶HF, 8:16:448.

the saintly Bishop. In his agony he kept shouting: 'As God is my witness, I saw a flame come down from heaven.'"⁸⁷ As he said this he died; a horrifying object lesson to all who might perjure themselves.⁸⁸

Gregory emphasized the issue of ecclesiastical sanctuary. As the saint judges and punishes those who make and break oaths in his name, so his authority protects those who seek asylum in his church. Duke Austrapius, pursued by Chramn, sought sanctuary in the church of St. Martin. Chramn attempted to force Austrapius out by ordering him not to receive any food or drink. "As he lay half-dead someone came with a cup of water and offered him a drink. He took it, but the local judge rushed forward, snatched it from his hand and poured it on the ground. The vengeance of God and the miraculous power of the saintly Bishop were not slow in punishing this deed." That very day the judge fell ill of a fever and died.⁸⁹ The repetitiousness of sanctuary in the *Histories* underlines more the necessity of it, than the secular assurance of it. Gregory personally experienced the demand of Chilperic to expel Merovech from St. Martin's church in Tours. Chilperic threatened to "set the whole countryside alight" if his demand was not met. Gregory responded that he would not expel Merovech as "it was impossible to do in Christian times what had not been done even in the days of the heretics."⁹⁰

The invisible power of the saints allowed them to mediate between secular authorities and those who sought asylum. Gregory attempted to get an audience with King

⁸⁷HE, 8:16:449.

⁸⁸False accusers and perjurers were subject to excommunication according to church canon. See also HE, 5:49:320. Church councils throughout the century reaffirmed legislation against false accusers, perjurers, and those sworn to enmity and in support of ecclesiastical sanctuary. Gregory does not mention any specific legislation, but as a bishop who attended councils, it is probable that Gregory was in sympathy with this legislation. See Mitchell, "Public Christianity," 85, and notes 77-78, pp. 93-94.

⁸⁹HE, 4:18:214.

⁹⁰HE, 5:14:268.

Guntram on behalf of Garachar and Bladast, who sought sanctuary in St. Martin's church.

At first, Gregory had no success, but once again he addressed the king:

'Listen, mighty King!' I said. 'I have been sent by my master to give you a message. What answer shall I carry back to him who sent me, seeing that you refuse to give me a reply?' Guntram was astonished at what I said. 'Who is this master who sent you?' he asked. I answered with a smile: 'It was St. Martin who told me to come.' At that he ordered the men to be brought in.⁹¹

Incidents of unjust and oppressive behavior by powerful men, and the disregard for law and legalities were endless in the *Histories*. Of King Chilperic Gregory wrote, "He frequently brought unjust charges against his subjects with the sole object of confiscating their property."⁹² One of the best examples regards Count Leudast, a man whose cruelty defied description. Gregory wrote of him,

He could trust no one, for he himself was every man's enemy. When he sat in court with the senior citizens to support him, some of them laymen and others churchmen, he would fly into a rage and curse the inhabitants of Tours if any one came to seek justice. He would order priests to be dragged about in manacles and have soldiers whipped with sticks.⁹³

Society as represented by Gregory was fundamentally violent. Acts of greed, violence, murder, and rape were commonplace. When "justice" was dispensed, Merovingians tended to savage cruelty. Gregory condemned King Chilperic as especially cruel in this respect. Although ever on the lookout for new ways to torture his victims, blinding remained his favorite punishment. Instructions issued to his judges always ended with the words: "If anyone disobeys my orders, he must be punished by having his eyes torn out."⁹⁴

⁹¹HF, 8:6:438.

⁹²HF, 6:46:380.

⁹³HF, 5:48:315.

⁹⁴HF, 6:46:380-81.

In a society marked by the abuse of power, saints participated within the community to reinforce and ameliorate existing legal and political structures.⁹⁵ They were not opposed to secular authority. The wicked or unrighteous judge familiar in the Acts of the Martyrs (*Acta Martyrum*) was almost unknown in Merovingian hagiography⁹⁶ and this was also true for the *Histories*. Likewise, the saint did not readily object to the harshness of a judgment, though he might try to lessen its consequences.⁹⁷ Such was the case of Eparchius who pleaded with the count for the life of the horse thief. The verdict was not in doubt, but the saint demonstrated charity and forgiveness, two qualities in very short supply in sixth-century Gaul. A common aspect of a saint's power was the ability to free prisoners, whether their release was merited or not. St. Germanus, bishop of Paris, who died in 576 exercised his power during his own funeral procession. As the saint's body was carried to the tomb, some prisoners in the street called upon his name. Immediately the body grew heavy, but as soon as the prisoners were released, it was again lifted with ease. "By the grace of God true believers experience many miracles at his tomb, for any man whose petition is just [that is one who petitioned in Christian faith] receives without delay what he has sought."⁹⁸ Gregory knew personally of the experience of Modestus, who publicly rebuked Riculf for speaking against Gregory. Modestus was arrested, tortured, and imprisoned. He lay between two guards, chained to a block, but he prayed to the Lord while his guards were sleeping. At midnight the power of St. Martin came to his aid and set him free. His chains fell off, the block broke and the door of the prison miraculously

⁹⁵John H. Corbett, "Saint as Patron in the Work of Gregory of Tours," Journal of Medieval History 7 (March 1981): 4-5.

⁹⁶Gurevich, Medieval Popular Culture, 56-57.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸HF, 5:8:264.

opened.⁹⁹ These instances of interference in secular justice did not contrast secular justice with heavenly justice, but the conflict between *potestas* and *caritas*. The focus of these narrations emphasized public authority in contrast to heavenly affection and love, the “compassion of the saint’s unearthly goodness” and not the innocence or merit of the one set free.¹⁰⁰

All of the above examples give evidence of the variety of ways by which saints intervened in the course of justice. However, there is one last observation of the power of saints to consider: the interesting correlation between the nature of Merovingian justice and the independent actions of saints. In other words, how and why did saints manifest the miraculous in cases where they had not been directly appealed to? Numerically, after miracles performed in support of the faith and the faithful, followed miracles manifested on the basis of non-appeal, primarily for reasons of punishment and vengeance. Saints, modeled on a human image and endowed with human emotions, directly reflected the level of social and political development in the community. Within Frankish society, the most basic and compelling moral force acting for (or against) law and order was the idea of feud,¹⁰¹ the firmly held belief that a wrong done to one’s sense of honor demanded vengeance. These acts of aggression ranged from civil wars, to private vendettas, to petty quarrels among townsmen as well as kindred joined by marriage. The long term effects of feud-related violence caused devastation and often dislocation of entire towns, villages, and families.¹⁰² Gregory recorded the story of an altercation between certain Franks in the Tournai. “In the end not a single member of either family remained alive, except one survivor for whom there was no opponent

⁹⁹HF, 5:49:318-19.

¹⁰⁰Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 56-57.

¹⁰¹James, *Franks*, 171-72.

¹⁰²HF, 4:47:244, 8:42:473.

left.”¹⁰³ Gregory himself had very personal reasons for deploring the continued enmity that feuds produced as his own brother, Peter, died the victim of one.¹⁰⁴ Gregory personally hoped to mitigate the long term affects of feud-related violence by supporting legal arbitration and compensation, compensation which would be provided by the church if necessary.¹⁰⁵ This was certainly preferable to Queen Fredegund’s method of judgment. A certain dispute to her annoyance became a “public nuisance of considerable dimensions.” She unsuccessfully attempted reconciliation by mediation and “in the end Fredegund silenced both sides by the axe.”¹⁰⁶

Gregory portrayed divine justice “as resting squarely on, and sanctioning, the same direct response to personal injury that was shown underpinning contemporary society.”¹⁰⁷ The saints exhibited the same motives, needs, and aggressiveness as found in secular society, but these similarities were not perceived as contradictory to saintliness. For Gregory, divine vengeance was God’s own feud in defense and support of the faithful.¹⁰⁸ As God defended his servants, so he responded with “righteous” vengeance to those who slighted his honor by skepticism, irreverence, or reckless contempt.

Within the category of miracles whose purpose was to punish and avenge, the miraculous manifested through divine intervention evenly divided between direct intervention by God and intervention mediated through the saints. However, manifestations not mediated through the saints were generally affected by God on the

¹⁰³HF, 10:27:586.

¹⁰⁴HF, 5:5:259-61.

¹⁰⁵HF, 7:47:430.

¹⁰⁶HF, 10:27:586-87. On the topic of dispute settlements, see Ian Wood, “Disputes in Late Fifth- and Sixth-Century Gaul: Some Problems,” in The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe, eds. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 7-22.

¹⁰⁷Goffart, Narrators of Barbarian History, 210.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 151.

saints' behalf. Thus, the saint remains an integral element of the miraculous. Saints responded to theft and despoliation of their property, they responded to the theft of property left in their protection, and they responded to abuse of church caretakers. For example, in his account of the devastation of Auvergne by the army of Theuderic in 532, Gregory told how St. Julian showed his displeasure and punished the invaders for breaking into the church of St. Julian and plundering it of the possessions which the inhabitants of the region stored there for safety. "Those responsible for these crimes were seized by an unclean spirit. 'Why do you torture us this way, holy martyr?' they shouted, as they tore themselves to pieces with their own foul teeth."¹⁰⁹ Those possessed immediately and dramatically perceived St. Julian to be the judge and avenger of his church.

Less frequently, but just as dramatically, saints protected God's servants. A decree was issued that anyone who failed to join the military expedition against Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges was to be fined. The count of Bourges sent his representative into one of the religious houses belonging to St. Martin in that region, with orders that the churchmen there should pay the fine. The steward of the house resisted vehemently:

'These men serve Saint Martin,' he said. 'They are not in the habit of taking part in military maneuvers.' The representative scorned the name of Martin and immediately fell to the ground in great pain. In a feeble voice he cried out . . . 'Call upon the name of Saint Martin. I fully recognize how great is his miraculous power.'¹¹⁰

In these instances the saint responded immediately to a lack of reverence or respect. Consequently, the physical and psychological effect on secular authority and their representatives was a powerful deterrent to behavior the Church deemed unacceptable.

Churchmen and saints worked together not only to reshape public behavior to address Church concerns, but they cooperated also to alleviate problems of social

¹⁰⁹HE, 3:12:172.

¹¹⁰HE, 7:42:426.

distress, an area in which the Church played an active role. Indeed, "Sixth-century Gallic episcopal councils interpreted and legislated the Christian virtue of charity into a social-legislative norm."¹¹¹ This legislation clearly echoed Gregory's concerns.¹¹² Of particular concern were those without natural protectors: paupers, widows, orphans, slaves, prisoners, and lepers.¹¹³ Various church councils specifically charged the clergy with the primary responsibility for such needy people.¹¹⁴ The saint, exercising another facet of his divine power, assisted in this charitable activity. The primary source of revenue to provide for the needy came from tithes and alms.¹¹⁵ These funds were hardly sufficient and the saint actively directed or stabilized an imbalance of wealth from other sources to achieve this end. Eparchius, a recluse of Angoulême, gave proof of his holiness by his extreme generosity toward the poor. If anyone gave him any money, he immediately turned it over to be used for the poor and the redemption of captives.¹¹⁶ Avitus gave alms to the poor, consoled widows, assisted orphans, and ruled his flock justly.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Salvius, bishop of Albi, turned any money which came into his possession over to be distributed among the poor.¹¹⁸ The saints were not to be provoked for their efforts. St. Martin struck deaf, dumb, and insane a man who accused

¹¹¹Mitchell, "Public Christianity," 84.

¹¹²See Mitchell, "Public Christianity," 87, for specific councils and legislation. On the topic of the Church in council, see also Wallace-Hadrill, Frankish Church, 94-109.

¹¹³See Sara MacGonagle, The Poor in Gregory of Tours: A Study of the Attitude of Merovingian Society Towards the Poor, as Reflected in the Literature of the Time (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1936).

¹¹⁴Mitchell, "Public Christianity," 84. See also J. N. Hillgarth, ed., Christianity and Paganism, 350-750 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 101, from the Council of Orleans, 511: "The bishop shall distribute, as far as his means allow clothes and food to the poor or sick, who, because of their weakness, cannot work with their hands."

¹¹⁵Wallace-Hadrill, Frankish Church, 102-3.

¹¹⁶HE, 6:8:338.

¹¹⁷HE, 4:35:230.

¹¹⁸HE, 7:1:389.

him and St. Martial of having emptied the royal treasury by inspiring acts of fiscal charity. The man afflicted “in his misery he came to the church of St. Martin in Tours and kept vigils there and presented gifts, but the usual miraculous power did him no good, for he went away just as ill as when he came.”¹¹⁹

Personal and public disaster were often construed as signs of divine anger for oppressing the poor or exhibiting a lack of compassion. Queen Fredegund saw her children near death from dysentery, and begged the king to help her make her peace with the divine power by destroying the books which held the tax lists for her cities. “‘What are you waiting for?’ she asked? . . . ‘We may still lose our children, but we shall at least escape eternal damnation.’” She threw the books into the fire as an act of repentance. The boys died, but “from this time onwards King Chilperic was lavish in giving alms to cathedrals and churches, and to the poor, too.”¹²⁰ The saint stood firm against arbitrary or oppressive taxation. King Lothar tried to appropriate one-third of all church revenues for his treasury. All the other bishops had agreed to this, but St. Injurious stood up to him and refused to give up church revenues that were for the poor. Then, Lothar, in fear that St. Martin would punish him for his actions, begged for forgiveness and canceled what he had done.¹²¹ In addition, kings Charibert, Sigibert, and Childebert II all “refrained from taxing because of awe for St. Martin.”¹²²

Charity was considered a mark of special sanctity and the saint often displayed this quality by ransoming captives. The tithe, originally intended for the poor, was by extension applied to captives. St. Salvius personally negotiated with Mummolus to persuade him to free the inhabitants of Albi whom he had taken prisoner. The Lord gave St. Salvius “such influence over these people that those who had captured the Albigeois

¹¹⁹HF, 4:16:211.

¹²⁰HF, 5:34:296-98.

¹²¹HF, 4:2:197.

¹²²Mitchell, “Public Christianity,” 79.

accepted a reduction in the ransom which they had asked and even gave presents to Salvius. In this way he liberated the townsfolk of his own diocese and restored them to their former state.”¹²³ The fate of the captives was not of particular concern; the story stressed the actions of the saint. The saint fulfilled a need which secular authorities were unable or unwilling to provide. Thus, bishops, with the supernatural assistance of saints, provided for the needy and destitute, while seeking to ameliorate the attitudes and actions of secular officials toward the helpless.¹²⁴

The only constants in Merovingian society besides civil war were the endemic incidents of famine, plague, and dysentery. Gregory, with his gift of descriptive narrative wrote, “While the Kings were quarreling with each other again and once more making preparations for civil war, dysentery spread throughout the whole of Gaul.”¹²⁵ The symptoms and the pain were so severe that “the countryfolk imagined that they had boils inside their bodies.”¹²⁶ Concerning the epidemic Gregory continued,

[It] attacked young children first of all and to them it was fatal: and so we lost our little ones, who were so dear to us and sweet, whom we had cherished in our bosoms and dandled in our arms, whom we had fed and nurtured with such loving care. As I write I wipe away my tears and I repeat once more the words of Job the blessed: ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it come to pass.’¹²⁷

The emotional and psychological terror of waves of death are difficult for the contemporary reader to measure. Gregory wrote, “In the Paris region real blood rained from a cloud, falling on the clothes of quite a number of people and so staining them with gore that they stripped them off in horror.” This portent presaged another terrible year of epidemic.¹²⁸ Great numbers of the populace “were carried off by a whole series

¹²³HF, 7:1:389.

¹²⁴Mitchell, “Public Christianity,” 84.

¹²⁵HF, 5:34:296.

¹²⁶HF, 5:34:296.

¹²⁷HF, 5:34:296.

¹²⁸HF, 6:14:346.

of malignant diseases.”¹²⁹ In Clermont-Ferrand, from where Gregory and his family originated:

Many people were killed off throughout the whole region and the dead bodies were so numerous that it was not even possible to count them. There was such a shortage of coffins and tombstones that ten or more bodies were buried in the same grave. In Saint Peter’s church alone on a single Sunday three hundred dead bodies were counted.¹³⁰

Understandably and with some understatement, the social miracles most commonly encountered in the *Histories* were healings and cures manifested by a saint or his relics.

Of course the plague with its myriad symptoms amounted to only a small portion of the complaints from which Merovingians sought relief. There were the lame, deaf mutes, the blind, those afflicted with sores, and those suffering from various sorts of paralysis. Allied with sickness was diabolic possession in its many forms including those who suffered a madness of some sort or epileptic fits. While some of these illnesses were the natural consequence of harsh living conditions and inadequate nutrition,¹³¹ the Merovingian mentality attributed the causes of sickness to evil spirits or to Satan. The saint with his fusion of sanctity and thaumaturgy was sought after by parishioners to protect and defend them. In this belief, Gregory, the historian and hagiographer, reflected the popular culture of his time and the *Histories* abounds in examples where a believer prayed in faith at the tomb or shrine of a saint and went on his way whole.¹³²

From personal experience Gregory wrote, “Once in the church of Saint Julian the martyr I myself saw him heal a man possessed of a devil by uttering a single word. Often he would relieve quartan fevers and other such diseases by prayer.”¹³³ In a similar

¹²⁹HF, 6:14:346.

¹³⁰HF, 4:31:226.

¹³¹HF, 7:45:427.

¹³²HF, 6:37:370.

¹³³HF, 4:32:227.

fashion, Patroclus cured the ill of fevers, boils, and other maladies through prayer.¹³⁴

Of St. Nicetius, Gregory wrote, "great miracles are wrought at his tomb by those who come to pray there. By means of the oil in the lamp which burns daily at his tomb he gives back their sight to the blind; he drives out evil spirits from the bodies of those possessed; he restores health to paralyzed limbs; and in our time he is . . . a ready source of help to all who are infirm."¹³⁵

The power of the saint-bishop was likewise formidable in the protection of his Christian community. The plague raged during St. Gall's time. He was anxious not only for himself but for his flock. He prayed to God for deliverance and his prayers were answered by an angel who appeared to him in a vision. "'You do well, Lord Bishop,' said the Angel, 'to pray to God in this way for your people. Your prayer has been heard. As long as you live, you and your flock will be free of the plague and no one in this region will die because of it.'"¹³⁶ Likewise St. Martin, the patron saint of Tours, cast a protective net across his city. A young boy who suffered from madness kept calling out the saint's name. The boy was eventually brought to the city of Tours where "the evil spirit was unable to harm him." In the opinion of Gregory the spirits were "held in check by the miraculous power of St. Martin."¹³⁷

Some cases of the infirm being healed are described in detail: the woman possessed of three devils cured by Hospicius making the sign of the cross over her,¹³⁸ and of Vulfolaic, who found his whole body covered with sores, rubbed himself with holy oil and awoke completely cured after sleeping at the tomb of St. Martin. However, numerically, most miracles of healing were generic. Gregory often ended a recitation of

¹³⁴HF, 5:10:265.

¹³⁵HF, 4:36:231.

¹³⁶HF, 4:5:199-200.

¹³⁷HF, 8:34:469.

¹³⁸HF, 6:6:336.

a saint's deeds with words similar to "many miraculous cures were performed" at the saint's tomb.¹³⁹ He emphasized the divine power of God channeled through the saint to heal and protect from sickness; those individuals healed were secondary to his purpose. The corollary to this was his expressed concern for those who would mistake false sanctity and be deceived by the false powers (magic) of magicians, conjurers, and demons.¹⁴⁰ The few physicians represented no competition at all. The ability to manifest supernatural power with which to combat the Devil and evil spirits was not at their disposal. Gregory specifically admonished, "Granted a cure from heaven, do not seek earthly remedies."¹⁴¹

The saints in the *Histories* responded to those concerns and conflicts Gregory considered most threatening to society: civil wars, feuds, injustice and oppression, false imprisonment or enslavement, poverty, and sickness. They functioned politically as mediators, judges, and chastisers. Saints provided social stability as social patrons, protectors, and healers. They shaped secular attitudes by their actions against those who were dishonest, greedy, and ambitious. Whether fulfilling a political or social role saints actively promoted the Christian ideals of compassion, justice, charity, and generosity. They were closely associated with existing legal, political, and religious (social) structures and carried out social and political duties similar to those of the living bishops and holy men with whom they interacted.¹⁴² Thus, Gregory's saints and their cults were integral to the preservation of sixth-century Merovingian Gaul. For only the saints were able to establish a unity and purpose within communities wracked

¹³⁹HF, 8:15:447.

¹⁴⁰HF, 9:6:486-87.

¹⁴¹HF, 5:6:264.

¹⁴²This is effectively the opposite of the holy men in the East. They functioned mostly outside of, and in tension with, normal power structures. See Peter Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 103-52.

by violence and aggression. The saint served as a cohesive force (if only by the fear of divine punishment) where no “living” man or woman could guarantee a consensus. The saint, while residing both in the heavenly world and the earthly world, participated in everyday community life, and served and protected his flock. He was a “tangible, physical source of authority and power, a sure point within a world of constantly changing fortunes.”¹⁴³

¹⁴³Geary, Before France and Germany, 136.

CHAPTER 4
IMPRESSIONS OF SANCTITY IN
THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF ENGLAND AND NORMANDY

The eternal Creator wisely and providently ordains seasonal and historical change; he does not dispose and alter human affairs according to the pleasure of foolish men, but rightly preserves and aptly promotes and controls them in his mighty hand and with his glorious arm.¹

Orderic Vitalis views all events in human history as part of God's plan, and in his *Historia* Orderic explicates the relationship between God and man as well as the relationship of monk and monastery to the world. Thus, he creates a picture of twelfth-century western European Christian piety marked both by continuity and by change. The blend of ethnicities and cultures present in the early Middle Ages which had nurtured a combination of paganism and Christianity, became less significant as a characteristic of Christian faith by the central Middle Ages. Most people received baptism in childhood and knew no alternative pattern of worship. For the majority of the lay population, however, the quality of Christian education and understanding of Church doctrine had changed little since sixth-century Gaul and Gregory of Tours. The land may have been covered by a "white mantle of churches," according to Rodulfus Glaber writing in the second half of the eleventh century, but many villages were isolated and country clergy were few.² While town dwellers may have heard sermons, the Church did not commit itself to preaching to its parishioners beyond the fundamental articles of faith until the

¹EH, 5:9:5.

²Rodulfus Glaber, Historiarum libri quinque, ed. and trans. John France (Oxford: Clarendon Press), bk. III, chap. 13, p. 117; Gerd Tellenbach, The Church in Western Europe From the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century, trans. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 135.

thirteenth century.³ Thus, an ignorance of the formal content of the faith prevailed and the majority of the population perceived Christianity as a routine of processions, ceremonies, and ritual. One participated as a member of the Christian community and honored God and His saints, as well as their relics, with due respect and dignity. In return, God and His saints granted them earthly assistance and provided the key to salvation.

This is not to say that lay piety did not in some cases attain a more elevated understanding of the Christian faith. Many a pious layman exhibited a religious devotion on a level with the most reverent of clergy. This deeper sense of Christian faith reflected a new pattern of interior piety marked by a need for self-knowledge as the path to God. It evinced a need to examine oneself for personal sin and unworthiness, thereby distinguishing external penance from inner repentance, the latter of which pious Christians believed God most valued.⁴ By the middle of the eleventh century, many nobles took the Peace of God movement seriously as they promised to limit warfare and preserve the peace. Accordingly out of love of the Church and certainly with their own salvation in mind, they endowed monasteries and cathedrals, undertook arduous pilgrimages to holy sites to do penance and acquire merits, and planned to take monastic vows shortly before death.

The belief in saints and relics, and their veneration in the hope of miraculous assistance in this world and the winning of eternal life in the next, reflected not just “popular” piety, but permeated all levels of Christendom.⁵ The saint’s ability to manifest miracles proclaimed his relationship to God and served in turn to glorify him.

³Tellenbach, Church in Western Europe, 93; Colin Morris, “Christian Civilization,” in The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity, ed. John McManners (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 220.

⁴Colin Morris, Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 71.

⁵Tellenbach, Church in Western Europe, 100.

But as Orderic Vitalis sorrowfully pointed out, sin in his day had grown so great that incidents of saintly intercession were now fewer. Indeed, the light of true holiness was dim among all orders, as both ecclesiastical prelates and secular rulers reveled in pomp and worldly riches.⁶ Living exemplars of sanctity, “the faithful who were to fight for Christ,” became essential in order to reflect God’s continuing presence on earth as well as to mediate at His inevitable judgment.⁷ Thus, by the central Middle Ages, communities of monks, these “soldiers of Christ,” assumed the obligation of salvation-saving intercession, a function formerly held exclusively by martyrs and saints.⁸ Although monks, living under a monastic rule, were not marked out as miracle-workers, God marked out the more exceptional of them by performing miracles on their behalf.

This concern for one’s personal salvation was enhanced by the belief that about the year 1000 the end of the material world would come, and with it the Last Judgment, an image so vividly brought to life on the tympanums of their cathedrals. Nothing happened, but watchful waiting continued, and many fervently desired to reject the secular world and become members of a monastic community in order to guarantee more surely their own salvation.⁹ Yet, the Church also recognized the spiritual sacrifice of its members who chose to remain in the secular world and who exhibited characteristics of leadership which achieved peace and discipline toward their dependents or in defense of the faith. Those secular leaders in performance of their obligations were to exhibit the Christian virtues of humility and patience, chastity and abstinence, mildness, mercy, and respect for the Church and its caretakers.

⁶EH, 3:6:215, 4:8:179.

⁷EH, 2:3:101.

⁸Tellenbach, *Church in Western Europe*, 100.

⁹EH, 3:5:9.

By the twelfth century, the number of those considered “holy” had grown significantly since the sixth century and Gregory of Tours. This reflected a continuing need for exemplars of sanctity as a focus of faith and belief, and as mediators of divine power, real and perceived. Without question, saints remained the ultimate exemplars of sanctity, yet, in Orderic’s *Historia* they assumed a lesser significance as intercessors of divine power than monks, those “cowled champions engage[d] in ceaseless combat against Behemoth for your soul.”¹⁰ But saints and monks represented only a partial aspect of an evolving Christian faith. Where sixth-century Christians were hagiocentric (saint-centered), twelfth-century Christians were Christocentric (Christ-centered). For the first thousand years of Christianity, Christ had been a remote figure, a divinity rather than a man, but now the emphasis was on Christ’s humanity, particularly on his sufferings at the Passion. Thus, in the twelfth century a new piety developed, marked by a relationship with Christ, as well as increased devotion to the Virgin Mary, the gracious and loving mother of Christ.¹¹ Likewise, devotion extended to those objects associated with the life and passion of Christ: the cross, the Holy Lance, and the crown of thorns.

¹⁰EH, 2:3:101.

¹¹Morris, *Discovery*, 160. In the official doctrines of the Church throughout the Middle Ages, Christ, and not the saints, was at the center of Christian worship. However, this made little direct impact on popular devotion. The incompletely Christianized laity in the early Middle Ages tended to think of power and influence in personal terms, and of supernatural power as present in, and mediated through, the saints. For the majority of the populace, the most concrete, immediate, and satisfying devotional practices focused on saints and their relics. God and Christ, as invisible powers, were difficult for them to comprehend. Certainly, in this period, various individuals and communities developed and maintained a devotion to Christ, but in the monasteries of the eleventh century, a more personal piety arose. Monastic spirituality stressed the cult of Christ, and focused on the life of Christ and the meaning of the crucifixion. Gradually, this personal piety became widely shared by the laity. See Richard W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1970), 219-57.

The objectives in this chapter are two-fold. The first is to analyze the ethical dimension of sanctity by isolating the values and qualities which Orderic Vitalis, as a Cluniac monk, deemed requisite in one defined as “holy” and why. The second objective is to explore the practical dimension of sanctity by focusing on the mediation of divine power as it influenced political, social, and moral problems of contemporary and monastic concern to Orderic.

Orderic, like Gregory, does not define sanctity; he illustrates it with specific examples of the exterior behavior and deeds of those who are sanctified, and of their role in contemporary society. Unlike Gregory, however, Orderic considers also their “interior” purpose and intention in terms of life and lifestyle. Whether those “sanctified” are saints, who mediate God’s miraculous power, or whether they are living exemplars of virtue who are only the recipients of divine intervention, both groups are God’s servants. God glorifies them so that Christians may see and contemplate His power, and so that the faithful according to Orderic, may, by emulating their interior, that is, their spiritual attainments, “hasten after them along the narrow path of righteousness to our eternal home.”¹² In striving to imitate the interior faith of God’s servants, we are weakened by our sins. Our only recourse is to struggle faithfully in their steps and follow the course they have pursued.¹³ Those “sanctified” strengthen the faith and represent the path to salvation. Thus, Orderic illustrates sanctity using the traditional paradigms of the “holy” from the early Christian period: martyrs, confessors, hermits and recluses. Both Gregory of Tours and Orderic Vitalis share a continuity of tradition in representations of sanctity and vocabulary, both of which link the past with the present. At the same time, as evident in the *Historia*, an evolution of

¹²EH, 2:3:3.

¹³EH, 2:3:3.

symbols and language occurs which redefines these paradigms of sanctity in terms of twelfth-century history, culture, society, and religion.

A brief review is helpful at this point to understand the significant changes to the “ideal” of martyrdom as reflected in the twelfth century. The martyrs of the early Christian church, according to biblical tradition, modeled themselves on Christ in dying for their faith. This definition of martyrdom, as a paradigm of sanctity, remained important and valid, but it underwent changes in the following centuries. In the sixth century, Gregory of Tours portrayed martyrs as those who chose to imitate the life of Christ in its spiritual ideal, by their moral, not physical, resistance to vice. The “holy,” whether they lived a solitary or a communal life as well as ordinary believers with a commitment to virtuous living, were defined by their exterior behavior and deeds. In common, they all exhibited the Christian virtues of charity, generosity, righteousness, humility, and chastity. Although individual expressions of extreme ascetic religious enthusiasm appeared, the Church slowly restrained those who practiced this lifestyle within emerging monastic communities. Still, ecclesiastical designations of position such as monk, priest, nun, abbot, or bishop were peripheral to those virtues characteristic of someone considered “holy.” Ecclesiastical vocations and titles did not define someone as saintly.

Monk as Martyr

The sixth-century determinant of a “holy person,” as one defined by the quality and character of their life, rather than by ecclesiastical vocations and titles, disappeared under the growing influence of western monasticism and the monastic life, and its identification with the Benedictine order. To Orderic Vitalis in twelfth-century Normandy, as well as to his contemporaries in western Europe, the dominant paradigm of “martyr” transformed into that of monk. To many, the life of a monk represented a

spiritual martyrdom, for he consciously chose to reject the secular world and sacrifice himself for the love of Christ:

Who can tell all the vigils of monks, their hymns and psalms, their prayers and alms, and their daily offerings of masses with copious tears. The followers of Christ devote themselves wholly to this, sacrificing themselves to be found truly acceptable to God. They reject the world and its parasites, scorn all its pleasures as filth, and shun worldly wealth for the hope of Heaven. Their lot is a harsh life, wretched clothing, scanty food and drink, and renunciation of their own wills for the love of the Lord Jesus.¹⁴

Monks no longer distinguished themselves from other men by the holiness of their character or by their desire to seek God, but rather by their fervent rejection of the secular world and their cloistered lifestyle within a community dedicated to the “practice of the Christian life at a level of excellence judged to be impossible outside such a community.”¹⁵ These monks, known as the *virī religiosi*, took life-long vows which set them apart from all other members of the Church. Based on this exclusiveness, monasticism claimed that authentic Christianity existed only within the monastery¹⁶ and to be a member of a religious community was one of the best guarantees for salvation.¹⁷ This belief mirrored the personal experience of Orderic, who as a young child was sent by his father to the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Évroul in Normandy. Orderic recalled the promise of his father, that by his renouncing the world, becoming a monk, and devoting his life fully to God, Orderic should “taste the joys of Paradise with the Innocents” after his death.¹⁸

Orderic, from the age of ten, spent the rest of his life at Saint-Évroul, first as an oblate and later as a monk. His personal experience as a monk and his earnest desire to

¹⁴Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 71-72; *EH*, 3:5:145.

¹⁵Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 214.

¹⁶Giovanni Miccoli, “Monks,” in *Medieval Callings*, ed. Jacques Le Goff, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 39.

¹⁷Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 214.

¹⁸*EH*, 6:13:553.

see others conform to the monastic life come through in his writings. In the *Historia*, he explicitly illustrates the values, virtues, and lifestyle of a monk, one of Christ's spiritual warriors.¹⁹ In this effort to characterize the "ideal" monk, Orderic drew on his own religious and cultural background as a Benedictine monk; he drew on traditional themes of sanctity as a hagiographer; and he followed the literary tradition of the abbey of Saint-Évroul.

The clearest way to pursue the study of sanctity within the monastic community is to focus on the duties and virtues of both the monk, and his superior, the abbot, as exemplars of sanctity. The best way to begin this is to turn to the *Rule of St. Benedict*.²⁰ All monks are encouraged to follow the tools for good works: live by God's commandments every day; treasure chastity; be moderate in food and drink; avoid laziness and sloth; harbor neither hatred nor jealousy of anyone; do nothing out of envy; do not love quarreling and shun arrogance; respect the elders and love the young; relieve the lot of the poor and clothe the naked; visit the sick and bury the dead; and remember to pray for your enemies out of love for Christ and never lose hope in God's mercy.²¹ And most important, the Rule counsels, "Do not aspire to be called holy before you really are, but first be holy that you may more truly be called so."²² To be called "holy" requires a monk to persevere in his holy intentions, fight strenuously against sin, and devote himself to worshipping God. Many fought this "heroic struggle" but few won. Therefore, exemplars of sanctity were needed to show the way, as well as to attest to the

¹⁹EH, 3:5:145.

²⁰From the beginning of the Middle Ages, a great diversity in religious orders existed; the Order of St. Benedict was just one of them. The Benedictine Rule, first drawn up in the sixth century, became a feature of secular government in the ninth and tenth centuries. By 1050, under the influence of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny, the Rule had become the most important form of religious life throughout western Europe. It maintained its monopoly until about the middle of the twelfth century.

²¹RB, RB 4:15, p. 183; RB 4:38, p. 183; RB 4:63-74, p. 185.

²²RB, RB 4:62, p. 185.

rewards of achievement. Orderic specifically noted those monks, who, by their discipline and dedication to the monastic life, provided shining examples to others, not only to the brethren within, but just as important to patrons. For patrons, in expectation that the unfailing excellence of worship by monks at prayer would in turn aid their own salvation, as well as that of their families, supported the monastery by their endowments. Thus, Orderic characterized Benedict as “strict in his observance of the monastic rule from early childhood, and [he] worshipped God with devotion both night and day.”²³ He said of Brother Roger, prior of Noyon, that “for almost forty years he lived in piety, a monk, gladly bearing the yoke of the most high Lord . . . setting his brethren a precious example.”²⁴ Orderic’s comments concerning his own experience echoed that of Brother Roger:

Clothed in the honourable habit of the monastic order . . . I have gladly borne the easy yoke of the Lord for forty-two years, and with my companions have joyfully walked in the way of God, as the Rule prescribes, to the best of my ability, striving to learn the customs and service of the Church and always devoting my mind to work of some worth.²⁵

Finally, he observed that under the guidance of Abbot Mainer, “ninety monks from every walk of life . . . renounced the world to submit themselves to discipline at Saint-Évroul and set out along the narrow way of the Lord helped by their own high enthusiasm and the good examples of others.”²⁶

Since the salvation of the brethren depended upon monastic discipline,²⁷ Orderic had to demonstrate a life of discipline and illustrate the reward for a life so lived. Clearly, the monk William of Rots lived a holy life and so he “died happily,” secure in

²³EH, 2:3:127-29.

²⁴EH, 6:11:153.

²⁵EH, 3:5:9.

²⁶EH, 2:3:151.

²⁷EH, 3:5:149.

the knowledge that he would rest in heaven.²⁸ With William of Saint-Évroul, Orderic was more explicit. William “leads a life of habitual virtue in the assurance of passing after a good end to his eternal rest.”²⁹

The path to virtue and salvation, and the key to monastic discipline begins with obedience:³⁰ obedience to the Rule; obedience of heart and body to the Gospel as guide; and prompt obedience to the abbot without hesitation, as if the command came from God himself. Without obedience, the “dread lord” might punish monks “as worthless servants for refusing to follow him to glory.”³¹ Consequently, this emphasis shifted the direction of monastic spirituality prevalent in the fourth to sixth centuries. Monastic institutions, in their formative years, stressed charity and the brotherhood of mutual love. The Rule emphasized obedience and hierarchy, as a hierarchical relationship emerged between monk and abbot, with the abbot elevated over the rest of the monks by his authority and relationship to God.³² Orderic carefully noted those monks as worthy who put obedience faithfully into practice. He wrote approvingly of Roger, who “carried out his master’s orders with great energy . . . So he fulfilled the duties of various offices as the Rule required for twenty years.”³³ In the same manner, charity and generosity shifted its emphasis from relief for the lot of the poor, to stress material wealth needed to support the monastic community. Alms and endowments became a form of generosity to pave the way for one’s salvation. For example, William of Rots “By his many gifts to the church of Saint-Évroul earned a place for his name in the general roll, and it was

²⁸EH, 6:11:139.

²⁹EH, 2:3:87.

³⁰RB, RB 5:1, p. 187.

³¹RB, Prologue 21, p.161; RB 5:4, p. 187; Prologue 7, p.159.

³²Charles M. Radding, A World Made By Men: Cognition and Society, 400-1200 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1985), 102-4.

³³EH, 3:6:241-43.

resolved therefore to offer masses and prayers and alms for him as for one of our own monks."³⁴

According to the Rule, a monk should be gentle, modest, kind, and patient. Curiously, Orderic only infrequently mentioned these specific qualities. He noted of the monk Roger, one of three brothers serving God, that he was "beloved by all for his natural kindness"³⁵ and of Brother Roger, prior of Noyon, that he was gentle as well as generous.³⁶ Orderic also had a keen eye for the weaknesses of human nature. He described a number of confrontational incidents within the monastery between the brethren in their bids for power and authority, all of which highlight arrogance, envy, and greed. From Orderic's descriptions, it appears that desirable qualities of good character were few and it was more important for him to note the presence of it, than any specific examples. Thus, Orderic most commonly provided generic references to character. For instance, "three brothers came to the monastic life at an early age, and since they were conspicuous among the monks for excellence of character they became acceptable to God and men. . . ."³⁷ By their virtuous behavior they must be imitated. Thus, of William of Rots, Orderic approvingly wrote, that he "held up a shining mirror of good works to the world."³⁸ Because much of what Orderic wrote was intended to instruct his fellow monks, he noted with zest any examples of divine intervention for lapses of good character. A demon tempted Romanus, a monk at Saint-Évroul, to steal, a failure of human nature specifically warned against in the Rule.³⁹ Rebuked by the abbot, he pleaded innocence, only to confess soon afterwards. The proof of this monk's

³⁴EH, 2:3:151.

³⁵EH, 3:6:241-43.

³⁶EH, 6:11:153.

³⁷EH, 3:6:241-43, 2:3:87; Author's emphasis.

³⁸EH, 6:11:139.

³⁹RB, RB 4:5, p 181.

unrepentant nature came one night as he lay in bed and was attacked by a demon. "Hearing his hideous shrieks, the monks rushed to his aid, and by shaking him and sprinkling him with holy water finally succeeded in freeing him from the devil that possessed him."⁴⁰ In relating this tale, Orderic reinforced a daily lesson to the monks striving toward holiness: "The more dangerous battle is against the evils of the spirit, a fight you must wage every day."⁴¹ At the same time, he taught how monks in common purpose might save one another by faith.

Orderic never assumed an aura of holiness for himself, but his description of William, an "ideal monk," comes very close to being a mirror image of Orderic's life and career. William like Orderic, began his vocation as an oblate at Saint-Évroul, was of sound character and applied himself to his studies:

He was an able reader and chanter, and a distinguished scribe and illuminator of books. The works executed by his own hands for reading and singing are still models which encourage us to put away idleness and follow his example. From his childhood up he carefully observed the offices of prayer and vigil, and even in old age he performed adequately the necessary fasts and other mortifications of the flesh. A faithful follower of the monastic rule . . . [he] continues to lead a life of habitual virtue in the assurance of passing after a good end to his eternal rest.⁴²

While Orderic emphasized a claustral life and its demands, it was not uncommon for a monk to be sent out to manage the extended properties of the monastery. For instance, Abbot Mainer sent Roger of Hauterive, to Heudicourt in the Vexin, to administer an endowment granted the monastery by Richard "the wounded." As a result of war and other disasters, Roger found the region desolate and almost uninhabited. He built a chapel there with his own hands and dedicated it to St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra. At first this tale appears very reminiscent of traditional early medieval hagiography, specifically that of Herluin, one of the founders of the abbey of Bec with whom Orderic

⁴⁰EH, 2:3:43-45.

⁴¹EH, 2:4:275.

⁴²EH, 2:3:87.

was familiar. In common with these earlier models of sacred biography, Orderic stressed the practical activity of the monk, rather than the miraculous, and ignored the specifics of an ascetic existence which must have been common to both Lives.⁴³ Significantly, Orderic emphasized the manner in which this “holy man,” exiled from his brethren out of obedience to his abbot and building for the service of God, remained under His divine protection, as a father protects and comforts his son. As Roger “used to relate to us, it often happened that when he was singing Matins during the night watches in his wattle chapel, he would hear the wolf at his door growling as if he were chanting the responses to the psalms.”⁴⁴ This incident confirmed Orderic’s faith in the good works of monks and reaffirmed that God constantly supervised them with affection, if not vigilance. As Orderic knew, a monk “is always seen by God in heaven, [and] that his actions everywhere are in God’s sight and are reported by the angels at every hour.”⁴⁵

The omission of any specific ascetic elements as a part of the monk’s existence in the tale of Roger “into the wilderness” deserves mention. The Benedictine Rule stresses moderation in all things: eating, drink, fasting, and even speaking. Indeed, in saints’ Lives from the earlier medieval period which Orderic included in the *Historia*, particularly that of St. Évrout from the seventh century, the “holy confessor” and patron of his own monastery, Orderic paid particular attention to the austerities these saints endured with patience and determination as a condition of their call to holiness.⁴⁶ These elements formed part of a literary tradition of sanctity going back to a period when holiness and salvation were possible outside the monastery. Yet, in the twelfth century, these extreme austerities became counter-productive to the health of the monks. In fact,

⁴³Sally N. Vaughn, The Abbey of Bec and the Anglo-Norman State 1034-1136 (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1981), 71.

⁴⁴EH, 2:3:153.

⁴⁵RB, RB 7:11-13, pp. 193-95.

⁴⁶EH, 3:6:271-307.

the abbot was responsible for preserving the health of the brothers, adjudging the proper amounts of food and drink according to the age and health of the brothers, their activity, and the weather.⁴⁷ Living under the Rule, only strict adherence to its conditions were required for salvation. That asceticism was a non-issue is reflected in the fact that Orderic commented only once on the abstemious behavior of a monk, Roger, in taking food, drink, and sleep.⁴⁸ Just as the Rule frowned on extreme austerities in terms of food and drink, it equally discouraged extreme forms of asceticism, such as flagellation and the wearing of hair shirts. Indeed, the Rule did not lay great stress on exercises of corporal penance, because the asceticism of a monk lay in the exact and unflinching practice of monastic observances. According to St. Anselm, a contemporary of Orderic, these "observances of themselves are sanctifying."⁴⁹ This viewpoint did not dissuade Orderic from writing with some reverence for his fellow monks who practiced mortification of the flesh. Possibly he viewed these few instances as examples of a more heroic and superior endeavor on the path to holiness. Two examples suffice to demonstrate what Orderic valued as evidence of virtue. Benedict worshipped God with devotion both night and day. Though suffering from ill health since childhood, he deliberately exerted himself beyond the limits of his strength making his condition incurable. He suffered such agony, but was steadfast in his faith believing God

⁴⁷RB, RB 39-40, pp. 239-41.

⁴⁸EH, 3:6:241-43.

⁴⁹Jean Leclercq, Francois Vandenbroucke, and Louis Bouyer, Spirituality of the Middle Ages (London: Burns and Oates, 1968), 163-64. Outside of traditional Benedictine monasticism, fasting and scourging took an ever larger place. In the Lives of the time, sleeping on the ground, *metanoia*, and other corporal penances are spoken of as the normal conditions of sanctity. Peter Damian wrote several treatises to justify the practice of self-flagellation: "When with my own hands in the presence of God I strike myself, I prove my devotion to suffering and what I wish and would will to suffer if the torturer were there. Since in spite of my longing I have not the opportunity of martyrdom, by riddling myself with blows I at least show how fervently I desire it." See Leclercq, Spirituality, 116-18.

recognized his righteousness and would purge him from all sin.⁵⁰ Likewise, brother Ralph felt his sins to be burdensome. He implored God to afflict him with leprosy and his prayer was answered. God's response to Ralph's prayer confirmed his holiness and many, who heard of his wisdom and fame, flocked to see him and receive his holy counsel.⁵¹ Similar to Gregory of Tours' saints, he served as an exemplar within and without the monastery. However, Orderic makes no implication that Ralph might have been a miracle-worker, apparently he was sought out only for his wisdom and sanctity. Orderic used these examples of Benedict and Ralph as exemplars to the brethren to stress the search for humility and the role God assumes in strengthening their faith.

God's vigilance and divine justice were directed just as equally at those who failed to fulfill monastic obligations. Ansered, a secular priest with loose morals, suffered a serious illness and, near death, begged the monks of Saint-Évroul to take him into their community. They granted him the habit of St. Benedict, and as Orderic sagely noted, "The man changed his habit but not his habitual conduct."⁵² Ansered hated monastic discipline and when he recovered his health, asked to leave the cloister. The abbot feared that Ansered's vices would set a bad example for the other brethren and let him depart. He promptly returned to a life of sin among the company of common women and was brutally murdered. For Orderic the moral lesson was clear. "What a wretched death this man suffered, who chose rather to return to worldly vanity than to seek the way to heaven among the servants of God."⁵³ In the same manner, another priest, Adelard, assumed the monastic habit at Saint-Évroul during a severe illness. Upon recovering his health, he obstinately refused to remain at the abbey and returned to his former life.

⁵⁰EH, 2:3:127-29.

⁵¹EH, 2:3:77.

⁵²EH, 2:3:45-47.

⁵³EH, 2:3:45-47.

He lived for another fifteen years, but “he never enjoyed good health and suffered one illness after another.”⁵⁴ Because Orderic viewed earthly life in black and white, damnation or salvation, his objectiveness in implying divine intervention in these cases needs to be examined more closely. Orderic failed to mention that both of these men were unlikely converts in the first place. A monastic community comprised clerical as well as lay converts, having a diversity in age, education, and background. Many entered the monastic life in their later years, with neither the education nor the religious training to convert with a lasting conviction.⁵⁵ Also, while religious reasons for taking monastic vows are well documented, vows may also have been taken by political refugees seeking sanctuary.⁵⁶

The monk chosen to guard, guide, and enrich this heterogeneous flock was the abbot. The abbot, according to the Rule, holds the place of Christ within the community;⁵⁷ and Orderic believed him to be “God’s agent of choice.”⁵⁸ Orderic detailed the sacred character of the office of abbot based on the dutiful practice of the Rule and exercise of authority. For instance, Robert of Grandmesnil, abbot of Saint-Évroul, was known for his “tireless energy on behalf of the monastery, and his industry and ability as an administrator.”⁵⁹ In a more detailed fashion Orderic wrote:

[Gontard of Jumièges] carefully fed the sheep committed to his charge with the food of spiritual doctrine, and steadfastly upheld the discipline of monastic life. He tended and loved the obedient and gentle as a father loves his children; but to the reprobate and contumacious and breakers of the rule he was a stern master, wielding the rod of discipline.⁶⁰

⁵⁴EH, 2:3:47.

⁵⁵Chibnall, World, 76-79.

⁵⁶EH, 2:3:103-5. See also EH, 2:3:76 note 3 and 2:3:103 note 5.

⁵⁷RB, RB 2:2-3, p. 173.

⁵⁸EH, 2:3:147-49.

⁵⁹EH, 2:3:75.

⁶⁰EH, 2:4:295.

The abbot was not only teacher, but exemplar and ultimate role model. Orderic wrote of Abbot Mainer:

[He was] eager to inspire the brethren to all good works. Himself a tireless observer of the monastic rule, he was able to show his monks the way of life by his example as well as his instruction, and he led many labourers to work in the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts, where he himself toiled ceaselessly at their side.⁶¹

Likewise, Orderic highly regarded Abbot Warin: "He respected holy men, humbly giving them precedence over himself, and, setting aside the dignity of his office, he eagerly busied himself, with various duties appropriate to the younger monks . . . [thus] he set an admirable example to those in his charge."⁶²

Because the sacred character of the office of abbot was more important to Orderic than the life of a particular abbot, value judgments are difficult to make concerning specific virtues and values of abbots in the performance of their vocation. Orderic idealized references to abbatial character. Abbots were typically men of remarkable wisdom and piety. Conspicuous for their holiness and virtue, they lived lives beyond praise. Orderic repeatedly compared them to "stars shining in the firmament of heaven."⁶³ This was the equivalent of their holiness proclaimed by heaven. All these phrases reflected the very high respect in which abbots were held as men deemed "holy." By stressing this specific type of imagery, Orderic created an individual worthy of veneration. Indeed, abbots often enjoyed a reputation for sanctity equal to that of the monastery's patron saint. Consider Orderic's "ideal" abbot, Thierry of Saint-Évroul. Orderic tells us Thierry accepted his ordination with great humility and patiently taught the monks under him to live according to the Rule. He led an ascetic life of continual prayers, fasts, and vigils. He forced his body to endure extreme rigors of cold by sometimes going through the whole winter without a cloak. One day as he

⁶¹EH, 2:3:147-49.

⁶²EH, 3:6:347.

⁶³EH, 2:3:11, 2:4:193, 6:11:139, 2:4:299.

prepared to offer Mass, he miraculously found a cloak of dazzling whiteness laid upon the altar. He realized angels must have laid it there and gave thanks to God. As abbot, he taught in the monastic school, a center renowned for its studies as well as its piety.⁶⁴

Just as God watched over Thierry in life, He glorified him after his death.

Thierry, on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, stopped at Cyprus to rest. There, he lay down before the altar of St. Nicholas the confessor and died. Already revered as a man of holiness, fellow pilgrims grieved at his death and tried to lift him for burial. But God willed otherwise and made his body too heavy to lift causing some perplexity. Finally, the bishop said Thierry must be buried in a worthy spot with all ceremony and reverence. When Mass had been said they “lightly lifted up his body for burial and decently interred it before the altar. There in the years to come many who were suffering from fevers and other sicknesses were healed by his merits.”⁶⁵ The emphasis here is on Thierry, the ascetic revered pastor of his flock, teacher of the religious life, recipient of God's glory, and by the merits of his holiness through his relics, able to manifest the miraculous. Orderic intended to attract a cult about Thierry, very similar to the cult of St. Évrout, but Thierry died too soon.⁶⁶

Having explored the qualities and conditions upon which Orderic Vitalis believed monks and abbots to be the successors to the martyrs of the early church, let us conclude this section by explaining the relationship of Benedictine monks to their fellow Christians on the basis of their reputation for holiness. Monks, in their renunciation of the active life, were considered the most authentic Christians; and the monastic community modeled its way of life on the apostles and the communities of the early Church. This placed monks not only closer to Christ's own time, but also closer to His

⁶⁴EH, 2:3:19-21.

⁶⁵EH, 2:3:73.

⁶⁶Chibnall, *World*, 109.

eternal kingdom. Therefore, while all clerics prayed, in the minds of most people, monks were the most holy and the most effective intercessors. In their prayers, monks asked God for protection, peace, and prosperity for king and kingdom, but the greatest value was set on their prayers for the eternal salvation of all living and dead. Such was their reputation for holiness, that all persons, from kings to peasants consistently turned to monks for divine assistance.⁶⁷ Orderic confirms this expectation and noted that the prayers of monks “for whomsoever among the faithful they are offered up, rise immediately to the throne of God, and that whatever they ask of the King of Hosts they surely receive. . . .”⁶⁸

Crusader Knight as Martyr and Exemplar of Chivalry of Christ

“Baldwin . . . took the Lord’s cross on his right shoulder and, at Pope Urban’s command, set off on the crusade against the infidel.”⁶⁹ Many in the “Glorious army of Christ”⁷⁰ set out, but according to Gilbert, bishop of Lisieux (and learned astrologer), they were never to “return until the stars return to their own orbits . . . Others indeed will remain in the high, holy places, like stars shining in the firmament.”⁷¹ This second category represents another variant of a twelfth-century Christian martyr, the crusader knight.

Pope Urban II may have announced the First Crusade at Clermont in 1095, but in Orderic’s *Historia*, he wrote that the faithful believed this was a divinely inspired pilgrimage, portended as it was by a “disturbance of the stars.”⁷² This expedition

⁶⁷John Van Engen, “The ‘Crisis of Cenobitism’ Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050-1150,” *Speculum* 61/2 (1986): 292.

⁶⁸EH, 3:5:145.

⁶⁹EH, 4:8:219.

⁷⁰EH, 5:9:189.

⁷¹EH, 5:9:9.

⁷²EH, 5:9:9.

purposed to defeat the infidels in the eastern lands who had “overrun the holy places, slaughtered the Christian inhabitants, and sacrilegiously defiled the holy things. . . .”⁷³ The call to defend the Church and their fellow Christians inspired thousands.⁷⁴ Orderic wrote, “Many burned with zeal to go on pilgrimage, to see the holy sepulchre and the holy places, and to prove their knightly prowess against the Turks. . . .”⁷⁵ For the majority of those who took part, the crusade meant taking a pilgrimage, a *peregrinatio* or *expeditio*. Historically, however, a pilgrim should be unarmed, trusting to God for mercy and protection. Theoretically, pilgrimage was incompatible with warfare, but Urban at the council of Clermont added a new dimension to this. He announced a plenary indulgence for everyone who would journey to Jerusalem and liberate the church of God. By linking pilgrimage with a military objective, it became acceptable for pilgrims to bear arms and engage in warfare sanctioned by, and in defense of, the Church. Clermont stands out as the first time that the Church officially proclaimed an armed pilgrimage.⁷⁶ Indeed, some scholars see this as the most decisive change in the moral ethic of warfare in a thousand years of Christian tradition.⁷⁷ Prior to 1095, the best example of secular sanctity promoted by the Church had been Gerald d’Aurillac, confessor, saint, and noble knight of the early tenth century. He drew his sword only in the defense of the poor and to put down violence. According to his biographer, Abbot Odo of Cluny, Gerald resorted to the sword only as an unavoidable necessity; and “he would order his men to fight with

⁷³EH, 5:9:5.

⁷⁴See also Giles Constable, “Opposition to Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages,” in *Religious Life and Thought: 11th-12th Centuries* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), IV 125-46.

⁷⁵EH, 5:10:323.

⁷⁶Carl Erdman, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter A. Goffart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 331.

⁷⁷H. E. J. Cowdrey, “The Genesis of the Crusades,” in *Popes, Monks and Crusaders* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), XIII 27.

the flat of the sword and with their spears reversed.”⁷⁸ The invincible power of God determined the outcome, not the force of arms.⁷⁹ In terms of paradigms, Gerald d’Aurillac marks a change from Gregory of Tours’ St. Martin who became a saint in spite of his military background, not because of it.

Now, in the late eleventh century and into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in western Europe, the Church sanctified arms and holy war in defense of the Holy Sepulcher and to protect the faithful. Thus, war, once a regrettable necessity, now became for Christians an obligation, as well as a virtue.⁸⁰ Not only could pilgrims bear arms without jeopardizing the spiritual benefits of pilgrimage, but knights were encouraged to dedicate their swords to Christ and join the Christian army.⁸¹ To these knights Orderic wrote, “Truly you are blessed and beloved by God, marked out by him to be participators in the joys of his heavenly court. Behold, if a pure faith burns in you, be assured that a cause now invites you to martyrdom. . . .”⁸²

Two important theological ideas then current played an important role in the overwhelming acceptance of the Pope’s call. First, the eschatological concern, or endtime expectations, at the turn of the millennium. Humanity awaited the promised fulfillment of the resurrection on the Last Day, which the death and resurrection of Christ offered to them.⁸³ This was to take place in Jerusalem where the Lord would

⁷⁸H. E. J. Cowdrey, “Cluny and the First Crusade,” in Popes, Monks and Crusaders (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), XV 289.

⁷⁹Barbara H. Rosenwein, “St. Odo’s St. Martin: the Uses of a Model,” Journal of Medieval History 4 (1978): 325.

⁸⁰Colin Morris, “Propaganda for War: the Dissemination of the Crusading Ideal in the Twelfth Century,” in The Church and War, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 79.

⁸¹Erdman, Origin, 336.

⁸²EH, 6:13:499. Concerning Orderic’s attitude toward warfare, see Christopher J. Holdsworth, “Ideas and Reality: Some Attempts to Control and Defuse War in the Twelfth Century,” in The Church and War, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 59-78.

⁸³Morris, Discovery, 144.

appear to judge the living and the dead. Around the year 1000 many believed the return of the Lord to be imminent. This didn't come to pass and many considered it a prophecy of what was still to come. This feeling of expectation combined with another prophecy delivered by Urban II at Clermont. Evidently, the Pope made reference to scripture that the Antichrist would reside in Jerusalem. The Antichrist would certainly attack Christians, but he could hardly appear until they occupied Jerusalem. The crusade then, might be a prelude to Doomsday.⁸⁴ Certainly, many of those who answered Urban's call to join the Crusade shared this view and desired to journey to the Holy Land where God awaited them.⁸⁵ This eschatological idea appears in all the writings occasioned by the Crusade: letters, sermons, *chansons de geste*, marching songs, and battle hymns. The biblical events of the Old Testament influenced the spirituality of the First Crusade, particularly the exploits of the Israelites compared to the suffering of the crusaders: their patience, their march, like the Maccabees they fought for Jerusalem, they faced martyrdom, and God's favor was revealed in miracles.⁸⁶ This theme appears in the *Gesta Francorum*, an anonymous account of the First Crusade written by a fighting knight:

When that time had already come, of which the Lord Jesus warns his faithful people every day, especially in the Gospel where he says, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,' there was a great stirring of heart throughout all the Frankish lands, so that if any man, with all his heart and all his mind, really wanted to follow God and faithfully to bear the cross after him, he could make no delay in taking the road to the Holy Sepulcher as quickly as possible.⁸⁷

Orderic made numerous references in the *Historia* to knights who suffered for Christ and called out to him for succor. He noted of Arpin for example, whom the emir

⁸⁴Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 143.

⁸⁵See Riley-Smith, *First Crusade*, where he argues that eschatological concerns were in the air, but were not a major element in the Crusade, 35, 143.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁸⁷Cowdrey, "Genesis of the Crusades," XIII 11.

Orderic made numerous references in the *Historia* to knights who suffered for Christ and called out to him for succor. He noted of Arpin for example, whom the emir held prisoner in Cairo: "Remembering the countless torments which the martyrs had endured even to death in Christ's name, he [Arpin] often called to Christ" and was comforted by him.⁸⁸ At the siege of Antioch, the Franks steadfastly kept watch allowing themselves neither time to sleep nor eat. Famine spread and they were forced to eat their horses and donkeys.⁸⁹ These deprivations punished the crusaders for their sins. In desperation, they prayed to God for assistance and were heard; God blessed them and led them to safety. These two examples are only a few of the tales Orderic related in the *Historia*, which proved to his satisfaction, that the crusaders were truly under God's watchful eye.

The second theological concern logically follows the first: the need of individuals for the assurance of a penance fulfilled and salvation assured. The need to secure the remission of sins--*remissio peccatorum*--appears consistently in eleventh-century sources, especially those relating to the Crusade.⁹⁰ One reason for this was that the penitential system in western Europe was antiquated and to eleventh-century minds concerned with a new awareness of sin and its consequences, the system needed to be revised to assure proper remission of those sins.⁹¹ For example, the penitential system being used arose in the Carolingian era. Originally, a Christian had done a specific penance to counterbalance a sin, which, once performed either publicly or privately, restored him to God's grace. This system of discipline based on externals increasingly became inappropriate for a period aware of the difference between external penance as distinct from inner repentance. Theologians needed formally to redefine the conditions

⁸⁸EH, 5:10:351.

⁸⁹EH, 5:9:99-101.

⁹⁰Cowdrey, "The Genesis of the Crusades," XIII 21.

⁹¹Morris, Discovery, 70.

under which one obtained penance. Clear cut distinctions between guilt and punishment, eternal and temporal punishment, and penance and indulgence did not appear until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁹² Thus, during the eleventh century a Christian did not know clearly how to obtain the remission of his sins. In a world where sin loomed large, men lived with the dread of dying without having made sufficient satisfaction for sins committed or without having made provision for the completion of their penance by someone else.⁹³ Thus, the lack of a penance system structured to eleventh-century needs resulted in anxiety. Those unsure that their penance equaled their sin, felt obliged to go beyond what the penitential system considered a "satisfactory" penance.⁹⁴ Now the Crusade offered the professional knight (and likely adventurer) the remission of sins expressly because he used his military skills in the service of Christ. This penance was not to be taken lightly. According to Orderic, "God put his champions to the proof, testing them in the furnace of tribulation so that they might make atonement for their sins."⁹⁵

The battles, imprisonment by the Saracens, the suffering, and deaths of knights on crusade are all well documented. With sincere piety most participants vowed to enlist in the Crusade in a search to correct their lives, imitate Christ, and achieve salvation. This represents the paradigm of knight as martyr. These knights by enduring the difficult pilgrimage, as well as the agonies of martyrdom, were "girded with the raiment of holiness."⁹⁶ This reflects the culmination of Church recognition and acceptance of its need for Christian champions as well as a transformation of religious concepts. Thus, crusading became the divine service of knights, the *militia Christi*. Earlier generations

⁹²Cowdrey, "The Genesis of the Crusades," XIII 21-22.

⁹³Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, 227.

⁹⁴Cowdrey, "The Genesis of the Crusades," XIII 21-22.

⁹⁵EH, 5:9:105.

⁹⁶EH, 5:10:353.

had applied this concept to the “spiritual combat” of martyr and monk. It now lost its spiritual ascetic meaning. In the same manner, the expression *athleta Christi* that earlier had applied to the ascetic confessor saint, now referred to the brave crusader.⁹⁷

Hermits and Recluses Portrayed as Twelfth-Century Paradigms of Sanctity

The lonely battle of the solitary saint against demons and the elements remained a staple of Christian tradition. The solitary’s renunciation of the world, his physical deprivations and self-mortification, allowed him to imitate the sufferings of Christ and set the solitary ascetic apart as “sanctified.” In the *Historia*, St. Guthlac (c. 673) fulfills this traditional role model, and is just one of this type of hermit of whom Orderic wrote at great length. In keeping with a formulaic hagiography, a heavenly portent in the sky announced Guthlac’s birth. Born of a noble family, he gave himself up to the pursuit of arms as a youth. Suddenly, he reflected on the frailties of mortal life, rejected his kinsmen and home, and entered a monastery. A life of holy learning and discipline failed to satisfy him, and he retreated to an island surrounded by strange monsters and all manner of terrible shapes. Dressed only in skins and eating very little besides barley bread and clear water, he faithfully kept his vigils and defeated all the wiles of the devil to tempt him. This “man of God” tamed the wild animals and earned a fame for his wisdom so great that multitudes flocked to him. At his death, his small house filled with heavenly light, and many were “restored to health by his merits [and] gave thanks to God.”⁹⁸ Even in the seventh century, however, St. Guthlac as a solitary ascetic was an anachronism. Already, by the time of Gregory the Great (c. 540-604),

⁹⁷Erdman, *Origin*, 340-41; A critical distinction must be noted here. This model of martyr applies to knights on pilgrimage who took up the cross of Christ, without having embraced the monastic life. This distinction excludes those nobles, who, without renouncing their arms took up the life of a monk, submitting to obedience, chastity, and poverty as did the Templars and other knightly monastic orders.

⁹⁸*EH*, 2:4:323-39.

any ascetic experiences encountered outside the monastic community were isolated exceptions.⁹⁹ With the growing organization and institutionalism of monasticism, these solitary and individualistic reclusive figures were being submerged within monastic communities ordered according to a *regula*.¹⁰⁰

Beginning in the sixth century, the free experience of God which solitaries sought was suppressed and became a systematic daily routine directed and supervised by the abbot of the monastic community.¹⁰¹ Where previously a solitary renounced the world and his own inclinations into the hands of God, he now placed himself and his own will into the hands of a superior.¹⁰² Two notable changes occurred in the quality of spiritual fervor as a result of this melding. First, communal asceticism, a practice of imitation and not reflective of an inner intention, replaced ascetic initiative. Communal asceticism was thus a leveling of extremes, needful for a communal lifestyle, but thought by many to place spirituality at a level lower than that of a hermit.¹⁰³ This was a serious contention, as the life of a solitary, a life lived without a common discipline under a superior, was believed by some to lead to moral collapse and mental eccentricity.¹⁰⁴ Second, monasticism as the realization of a perfect Christian life became defined by the promise of salvation. The monastic vow to commit to Christ was seen and referred to as a second baptism. For many, the formal taking of this vow and entry into membership of a religious community remained the beginning and end of their commitment to reach God. Only the exceptional few, more intensely sought the personal

⁹⁹Miccoli, "Monks," 42.

¹⁰⁰Recall, Vulfoaic, ascetic *extraordinarie* in Gregory of Tours, whom bishops ordered off his pillar to live in common with his brethren. See chapter 3 above, p. 73.

¹⁰¹Miccoli, "Monks," 42.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³Derek Baker, "Surest Road to Heaven," in Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World, ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 55.

¹⁰⁴John Cassian, Conferences, with an Introduction by Owen Chadwick, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulus Press, 1985), 5.

and spiritual discipline necessary to be worthy of the divine.¹⁰⁵ While life in a religious community rapidly came to take the place of life in devout isolation, many sought a still more ascetic and reclusive spiritual path, but significantly they sought seclusion as spiritually trained monks. It became commonplace in the West that the life of a religious hermit actually depended on a preparatory training within a community.¹⁰⁶ This feeling had emerged much earlier. John Cassian (c. 365-433), one of the leading Fathers of the early Church wrote: “men who are first trained in monasteries, [and] have achieved perfection in their way of life” are the most desirable of those living the hidden life of solitude.¹⁰⁷

Orderic’s “ideal” solitary saint, the founder and patron of his own monastery, St. Évrout, reflected this newer paradigm of a religiously trained monk. St. Évrout’s Life in the *Historia* stressed the heroic struggle of a monk, who longed for the greater solitude of the wilderness, yet accepted responsibility as the superior of a monastic cell with a positive sense of duty. The image of St. Évrout portrays a holy man remembered by his community for his personal and practical virtues, his compassion, and miraculous powers. The *Historia* includes no instances of extreme asceticism in his Life.

While Orderic remained a staunch supporter of monasticism as the model of the apostolic life, the general Benedictine experience included solitaries. In addition to the professed religious, it was not unusual for individuals of various backgrounds to be loosely connected to many Benedictine houses without making any formal profession. They were most numerous up to the end of the eleventh century and exhibited a great diversity of lifestyles at a time when non-monastic forms of religious life were less

¹⁰⁵Miccoli, “Monks,” 42.

¹⁰⁶B. B. Price, *Medieval Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 21-22.

¹⁰⁷Cassian, *Conferences*, 185.

fully recognized and accepted.¹⁰⁸ The hermit was the most important of these solitary types. Though many of these hermits in time became monks, they vowed themselves to lifelong seclusion, spending their days in prayer, reading, meditation, and working with their hands.¹⁰⁹ Often clustered in cells near a monastery they were able to receive the sacraments from the monks' church.¹¹⁰

Others sought an independent solitude outside the influence of a monastery or church. It was characteristic of this period that those desirous of a solitary life were often laymen, who felt the contemplative life could not be found within a monastery. Councils, bishops, and abbots were anxious to give Rules by which these hermits were to guide their lives. A saying that gained currency went, for "the habit maketh not the hermit."¹¹¹ The ecclesiastical hierarchy worried that solitaries might become weak in the face of temptation, and solitude for some might endanger those qualities necessary for the soul's salvation: humility, charity, and purity of thought and deed.¹¹²

Hermits reflected a genuine Christian spirituality and culture, and were admired for their piety and wisdom. Not all of them vowed themselves to seclusion however; many were actively involved in Church growth and were effectively controlled within it. Orderic wrote that during the reign of King Henry I,

The Church of God . . . and every religious order flourished greatly to the glory of the Creator. Monks and clerks bear witness to this, for they increased in number and distinction during his reign. Hermits can add their testimony, for they cut down dense woods and now give praise in the high-roofed monasteries and spiritual palaces

¹⁰⁸Chibnall, *World*, 79-80. Twelfth-century England particularly enjoyed a great growth in those committed to the eremitic lifestyle. "This was not anti-Norman in character, but as a religious movement it was a self-consciously English reaction and adaptation to the Norman Conquest. . . ." See H. Mayr-Harting, "Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse," *History* 60 (10/75): 338.

¹⁰⁹Mayr-Harting, "Functions," 350.

¹¹⁰Chibnall, *World*, 79-80.

¹¹¹Leclercq, *Spirituality*, 274.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

built there, chanting glory to God with peace of mind in the places where formerly robber outlaws used to hide to perform their evil deeds.¹¹³

Reclusion could be only a matter of distance. St. Benedict permits a monk who has been purified by the common life to withdraw into solitude, if only momentarily, for more private meditation and reflection.¹¹⁴ This position reflects that of Peter the Venerable: "Let the retreat be temporary--Build your refuge in the depths of your own heart: make your hermitage there."¹¹⁵ This inclination to solitude and contemplation expressed a strong contemporary impulse, and reflected a change in thought prevalent in the early Middle Ages. The literature of the early Middle Ages stressed the heroism of the lonely Christian warrior in his battles against demons and his inner self. Now, in the eleventh century, literature emphasized the gladness of spirit, the pleasant springs and refreshing breezes, and the loving meditation on Christ.¹¹⁶

Consider the original community of Saint-Évroul which had been established with several sanctuaries. When Ralph the monk contracted leprosy, he withdrew to a distant chapel with one monk as his companion. This same chapel also offered temporary political sanctuary to Abbot Robert's two sisters, Judith and Emma, who took the veil in an effort to avoid Duke William's wrath at their family during a politically turbulent time.¹¹⁷ It was not uncommon for women with pious motives to settle in small cells outside of an abbey, receive the veil from the abbot, and still enjoy participation in the liturgical ceremonies of the church.¹¹⁸ Recluses remained an element of Benedictine

¹¹³EH, 5:10:295-97.

¹¹⁴RB, RB 52, p. 255.

¹¹⁵Chibnall, *World*, 82-83.

¹¹⁶Richard W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 28; Leclercq, *Spirituality*, 164-65.

¹¹⁷EH, 2:3:102-5.

¹¹⁸Chibnall, *World*, 80-81.

life, whether their motives inclined to retreat and spiritual renewal, or for seclusion in their closing years for purposes of contemplation.¹¹⁹

For all that solitaires (be they lay or ecclesiastical) may have been admired by many and considered “holy” by virtue of their religious devotion, Orderic considered it more meritorious to worship God within the framework of a monastic community. “And so, when I consider the rites of men in different parts of the world and carefully look into the lives of hermits and canons, I see that all are inferior in their way of life to monks who live canonical lives under a rule.”¹²⁰ Whether Orderic’s reaction to the eremitic existence was defensive or because he believed monasticism was the “surer road” to salvation, he ardently asserted it was the stability and perseverance maintained in a community which was acceptable to the Creator, and “useful and salutary to men, who may be inspired to greater virtue by seeing an example of sanctity.”¹²¹ Here appears a relative scale of “sanctity.” Hermits may be “holy,” but to Orderic monks by their profession were “holier.”

Models of Secular Sanctity

The church recognized it was not possible for everyone to join a religious community. However, there were those, who without taking monastic vows, dedicated themselves to the secular equivalent of these vows, which might be expressed as the Christian virtues of righteousness, almsgiving, chastity, humility, and self-denial. However, unlike the models of secular sanctity in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours, these eleventh- and twelfth-century exemplars were not considered “holy,” nor did Orderic even compare them to saints as Gregory did of Radegund, the religious and cloistered queen, who was so “famous for her prayers, her vigils and her charities . . .

¹¹⁹Chibnall, *World*, 82-83.

¹²⁰EH, 2:4:145.

¹²¹EH, 4:8:325.

that the common people looked upon her as a saint.”¹²² According to Orderic, William, duke of Normandy and king of England, set the model of secular sanctity. “He strove to imitate the zeal of his ancestors for the Church of God . . . [and] the barons of Normandy were inspired by the piety of their princes to do likewise, and encouraged each other to undertake similar enterprises for the salvation of their souls.”¹²³ Thus, magnates supported the clergy on their own estates, and restored and built churches and abbeys, all for the service of God.¹²⁴

A pattern of service to country and church runs through the *Historia*. Very properly, Walter, a scion of the Giffard stock, “gave splendid service to his country . . . [and] filial in his duty was patron to the clergy of all orders.”¹²⁵ Similarly, Countess Adela “governed her husband’s county well after his departure on crusade and carefully brought up her young sons to defend the church.”¹²⁶ According to Orderic, the nobility “vied with each other in the good work, and competed in giving alms generously as befitted their rank.”¹²⁷ Among those cited by Orderic were Gilbert of Auffay, Matilda, queen of England, and Avise, daughter of Herbrand. All were devoted to God and distinguished themselves by their generosity to the clergy, the sick, the needy, and the poor.¹²⁸

The equivalent of alms to the poor were endowments to the Church, not only for the love of Christ, but as a advantage toward one’s salvation. For example, Countess Adela “gave generous sums for the Pope’s needs” when in 1107 Pope Paschal came into

¹²²HE, 3:7:168-69.

¹²³EH, 2:3:11. See also C. Harper-Bill, “Piety of the Anglo-Norman Knightly Class,” in *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies II*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1976), 63-77.

¹²⁴EH, 2:3:11-13, 3:6:331.

¹²⁵EH, 6:11:37.

¹²⁶EH, 6:11:43.

¹²⁷EH, 2:3:11.

¹²⁸EH, 3:6:257-59, 4:7:45-47.

France to celebrate the feast of Easter at Chartres,¹²⁹ and Queen Matilda, a patroness of the abbey of Saint-Évroul, paid to have a stone refectory built where the monks could all take their meals together.¹³⁰ Many men and women made gift-offerings of various kinds to the monastery in the hope of obtaining spiritual benefits.¹³¹ In pursuing salvation, it was a common practice to leave alms to a church in order to procure perpetual prayers for oneself and one's family. Orderic recorded the advice of Ansold of Maule to his son: "For if you take care to be a true patron to them, they will never cease to pray to God for you."¹³² There are numerous references to patronage and prayer in the *Historia*, along with many descriptions of those who followed this practice. For example, Fulk, count of Anjou, prior to setting out for Jerusalem as a penance for his sins, provided an annual revenue be given to monks for prayers on his behalf.¹³³

Orderic keenly noted examples of moral resistance to vice as well as virtues, probably because there were so few and the need was so great. Civil war and strife surrounded him almost his entire life at Saint-Évroul and dynastic aggression needed tempering. Of Gilbert of Auffay, Orderic wrote approvingly, he "returned to Normandy, though the king offered him great estates in England; for he, who lawfully enjoyed a modest inheritance, declined to have any part in plunder. Content with his own, he rejected other men's goods. . . ." ¹³⁴ Likewise, Orderic thought highly of Avise, the wife of Walter of Auffay. A woman of wisdom and sound morals, she restrained the foolish conduct of her husband by her advice and wise influence.¹³⁵

¹²⁹EH, 6:11:43.

¹³⁰EH, 3:6:241.

¹³¹EH, 3:6:241.

¹³²EH, 3:5:195.

¹³³EH, 6:12:311.

¹³⁴EH, 3:6:257.

¹³⁵EH, 3:6:257-59.

The feminine virtues most often mentioned by Orderic were chastity and constancy. But the definition of chastity for Orderic did not imply secular celibacy; he meant fidelity and loyalty to one's husband and family.¹³⁶ Indeed, Avise bore her husband twelve sons and daughters. The men of Auffay lament for the loss of this lady, she who was "so chaste and constant that not the most craven dared to breathe one base word against her bright honour."¹³⁷ In the same fashion, Rollande, daughter of Eudo of Chaumont, "led a life of strict virtue" bearing her husband four sons and several daughters.¹³⁸

Just as Orderic noted a secular life well-lived, he also gave confirmation of its rewards. Matilda, queen of England, won her share of everlasting joy as benefactress to the poor and needy.¹³⁹ Of Giroie, son of Arnold the Fat of Courceraut, Orderic noted a life of devotion to the Church and its servants, such that after his death, Arnold deserved the remission of his sins and peace in the company of the faithful.¹⁴⁰

Given the number of examples in the *Historia* of knights who undertook monastic vows early in their careers this must have been a common practice. Robert of Grandmesnil provides one very good example. In his youth, he trained for warfare and served Duke William as squire for five years. Upon being knighted, he suddenly feared for his salvation, took monastic vows and resolved to found a monastery. Thereafter, Robert devoted his life to alleviating the poverty of his fellow monks, by soliciting charitable donations from his wealthy relatives.¹⁴¹ At the end of their lives, it was not

¹³⁶This view is at variance with the standard attitude of monastic culture which portrayed a "negative judgment of humanity that did not have chastity--or at least the unmarried state--as its first requirement." See Miccoli, "Monks," 54.

¹³⁷EH, 3:6:259.

¹³⁸EH, 2:3:153. See also Marjorie Chibnall, "Women in Orderic Vitalis," in Haskins Society Journal 2 (1990): 105-21.

¹³⁹EH, 4:7:45-47.

¹⁴⁰EH, 2:3:23-25.

¹⁴¹EH, 2:3:41.

uncommon for these exemplars of secular sanctity to assume monastic garments and take vows. Apparently, it was a common practice for knights to cover a life of violence by taking monastic vows at the end of their days, but certainly for others it was the final fulfillment of a long cherished purpose. For instance, as Ansold, patron of Maule, neared death, concerned for his "eternal salvation, he turned his whole mind to the Lord, and, eager for eternal life, made haste to accomplish those things that he had learnt from wise men . . . He called the monks and told them he wished to be received as a monk."¹⁴² With his whole being, Ansold longed to finish his life as one of the poor of Christ, because God promised salvation to His own. For many women also, the last chapter of their lives involved retiring to a nunnery. The widow of Arnold of Échauffour, a woman of great chastity and gentleness, abandoned the world towards the end of her life and took vows at the monastery of Holy Trinity, Lessay.¹⁴³ Similarly, Adela of Blois, a woman of great wealth, began to fear death as she reflected on the sins of mortal life. In order to save her soul, she became a nun at Marcigny; there she served the Lord under the strict Cluniac rule.¹⁴⁴ It is obvious Orderic admired these people, many of them neighbors as well as patrons of the monastery of Saint-Évroul. At a disadvantage in the secular world, they strove to imitate the life of Christ in its spiritual ideal by living the virtues of charity, generosity, gentleness, righteousness, devotion to God, and looked to the assurance of salvation either by the genuine display of sanctity in their lives or by taking monastic vows in their final days.

This survey of paradigms of sanctity allows us to make numerous conclusions. For Orderic Vitalis, a privileged (and almost exclusive) relationship existed between the

¹⁴²EH, 3:5:193-95.

¹⁴³EH, 2:3:125-27.

¹⁴⁴EH, 6:11:45.

monastic life and sanctity. Just as martyrs of the early Church literally gave their lives for Christ, monks by their renunciation of the secular world and their claustral life experienced a spiritual martyrdom. By their greater submission to Christ, monks were perceived to be the only “true” Christians. This attitude and acceptance of monastic superiority was a fact of eleventh- and twelfth-century religious, political, and social life. The ecclesiastical designations of monk, nun, abbot, and abbess became endowed with a notion of sanctity. These religious no longer stood distinct from other Christians because of the holiness of their character, but because of their distinctive lifestyle. Having taken vows in acceptance of the monastic life, monks were presumed to lead lives of holiness. Often, in fact, they did not. Orderic recognized abuse by those holding ecclesiastical positions who should have led exemplary lives, but hid behind their habits, with a moral tale of purgatory. Very late one dark night a priest, Walchelin, was frightened by the appearance of a spectral army of sinners bewailing their torments. Among the sinners were monks, bishops, and abbots. The priest was surprised to see many, who, according to human judgment were believed to have joined the saints in heaven. But God looks into the heart and these clergymen were found unworthy of salvation.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, while monasteries admitted men of all socio-economic ranks into the monastic life, the majority of the brethren, as well as the abbots, were overwhelmingly from the nobility. For instance, Orderic recorded in almost every descriptive passage concerning abbots comments regarding their noble origins.¹⁴⁶ This indicates that noble parentage increasingly became the paramount characteristic, rather than one’s personal attributes, in determining one’s suitability for the position of abbot.

Martyrs in the central Middle Ages, like their earlier models, were heroes of dramatic and mortal struggles for the faith. In a few cases where a violent death was the

¹⁴⁵EH, 4:8:241.

¹⁴⁶EH, 2:3:75, 2:3:87, 2:3:103, 2:4:201.

only evidence of martyrdom, legend held that the victim had died in defense of the faith or interests of the Church. One example is the cult that grew up around King Cnut (d. 1086). Probably murdered by one of his brothers for political reasons, Orderic noted only that the king is deservedly honored for having brought the Christian faith to Denmark and that miracles performed at his tomb confirm the martyr's sanctity.¹⁴⁷ This was a traditional theme. Orderic specifically recorded of the king of the East Angles, who died in the Danish massacre of A.D. 870, "St. Edmund fell a martyr in the faith of Christ."¹⁴⁸ Edmund did not necessarily exhibit any holiness in his lifetime, but his biographer, Abbo of Fleury, in the *Life of St. Edmund*, implied that Edmund's "death was a martyrdom because in it he fulfilled his royal office and thus proved his faith in God."¹⁴⁹

The *Historia* does mention a few specific confessor saints, but in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, those who satisfied the paradigm of confessor were perceived more important as monks and martyrs. As a designation "confessor" was still used, but Orderic's confessor saints came from an earlier period, none of whom were contemporary to him; with admiration, Orderic wrote of St. Évrout, St. William, and St. Nicholas of Myra. Where Gregory's confessor saints achieved martyrdom through extreme abstinence and self-persecution, Orderic's confessor saints were not known for self-mortification, but for their austerity and disciplined lives as monks. Although he admired their individual acts of asceticism and personal religious fervor as ideals, these acts of individual expression and action were now harnessed within the monastic community whose Rule discouraged this type of behavior.

¹⁴⁷EH, 4:7:55.

¹⁴⁸EH, 6:11:151.

¹⁴⁹Thomas Head, Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 242-43.

The scarcity of contemporary saints (in general) as ideals of sanctity, however, is very apparent. This does not mean that saints lessened in significance, but they were subsumed within the monastic milieu. For example, the most significant saint for Orderic remained St. Évrout, patron of his monastery. While the abbey kept alive the memory of its holy founder, he did not exist apart from the monastery. The monastery of Saint-Évrout administered and promoted the veneration of the cult of St. Évrout, and he in turn enriched the monks as his representatives. The abbey relied on the patronage and protection of St. Évrout, but the monks themselves possessed significant prestige and communal authority based precisely on the holiness of their lifestyle. Because monasticism was interpreted as the only true road to perfection, monks, as men of God, represented living models of sanctity; and it was widely accepted that only through membership in a monastic community could sanctity remain physically present and demonstrated in the life of common men.¹⁵⁰ The fact that the reputation for sanctity of abbots often equaled that of the monastery's patron saint validates this notion. Some abbots, although in life not miracle-workers, through deep devotion to God and living a virtuous life, mediated God's power to heal after they died. Indeed, "While a living holy person had numerous ways in which to exercise *virtus*, such as asceticism and teaching the monastic life, the posthumous exercise of that *virtus* was virtually synonymous with miracles."¹⁵¹ Moreover, Orderic recorded little about local or regional saints' cults. Unlike Gregory of Tours, whose vision was insular and his saints primarily Gallo-Roman, Orderic's saints are more cosmopolitan. Although Orderic emphasized the cult of St. Évrout, he also included Lives of English saints, the translation of the relics of St. Nicholas of Bari, and with enthusiasm recorded the exploits of crusader saints such as St. George and St. Demetrius.

¹⁵⁰Miccoli, "Monks," 46.

¹⁵¹Head, *Hagiography*, 135.

Finally, Orderic consistently undervalued secular society. Although many people undeniably devoted themselves to Christ and the Church, exhibiting Christian virtues of righteousness, almsgiving, chastity, humility, and self-denial, nevertheless, they were never considered “holy” nor did they mediate divine power. Exemplars of secular sanctity remained important as models of Christian virtues, not because they were visual examples of Christian public policy for those newly accepting of Christianity and its expectations, but because in the central Middle Ages, secular role models represented salvation saving lessons. When Orderic Vitalis made reference to a “holy man,” he referred to a monk. He stressed the importance of the “living” exemplar of holiness. But if in fact they were no longer alive, these exemplars of the monastic virtues of discipline, humility, obedience, and generosity, remained alive within contemporary memory. The saints of the late antique and early Middle Ages remained alive only as traditional “ideals.” Just as cultic veneration surrounded the relics of saints, it could also arise around the relics and memory of these holy monks after their death. Certainly for Orderic, the focus on the “holy” consisted of contemporary monastic figures remarkable not for their miracle-working in this world, but as intercessors for salvation in the next. Indeed, it was their reputation for sanctity and the hope of salvation by those “outside” the monastic community, which lay behind the numerous offerings and endowments to monastic communities so that donors could share in the merits of the monks.

The Miraculous in the *Historia*

By the merits of these “friends of God” and His grace, “may we be joined with the company of the blessed.”¹⁵² This concept of saintly intercession between God and ordinary believers is fundamental to biblical tradition. The faithful believed God

¹⁵²EH, 2:3:3.

participated through his saints actively in their lives, and consequently crowds journeyed on pilgrimage to holy sites, churches, and shrines of healing. Popular piety focused on the supernatural and demanded miracles. Thus, the veneration of relics and the cult of saints dominated the lives of lay persons and the less-educated clergy. This level of faith demanded miracles for assistance in the basics of everyday existence, and for them miraculous manifestations mediated through saints signified God's presence in this world. However, alongside of, but not distinct from, this basic perception of Christianity, existed the piety of the more culturally elite and religiously sophisticated, which had been transformed by the dominance of monastic culture. Orderic, a product of this environment, looked at divine intervention in two ways. First, Orderic emphasized saints who were founders and patrons of monastic communities, saints whose patronage and intercession continued after their death, even in the absence of their relics. The miracles manifested by these monk-saints established monasteries and protected them, their property, and the brethren. They encouraged conversion and recruitment, and confirmed monastic practices, ideals, and observances. In this Orderic faithfully reflected the hagiography of the period. Second, beyond the element of divine power mediated through saints, remained the repetitive theme of direct divine intervention. In this manner, God directly controlled human affairs by intervening or conversely, by deliberately refraining from intervention.¹⁵³ Orderic, less dramatically than Gregory of Tours, presented God's watchful control and intervention more often by implication, than by thunderbolts from heaven.

The miraculous represents a powerful element in the belief of saints as spiritual intercessors, but beyond the manifestation of the miraculous exists the expression of actual needs. What political, social, and moral problems and conflicts in late eleventh-

¹⁵³EH, 4:7:57, 5:9:121.

and early twelfth-century Normandy demanded divine intervention? How did the will of God manifest itself in relation to these concerns as Orderic Vitalis perceived them and recorded in the *Historia*? The reliance on miraculous intervention extended beyond the monastery, beyond the local community and its villagers, and even further across the broader Anglo-Norman realm in response to traditional pleas for protection, healing and cures, freedom from captivity, and requests for vengeance and justice. However, the greatest number of miracles recorded by Orderic relate to the imposition and maintenance of peace and justice. The largest obstacle to this lay in the inherent nature of the Normans themselves.¹⁵⁴ In Orderic's opinion, as delivered from the mouth of William the Conqueror in his death-bed speech, the Normans needed discipline under a just and firm rule to keep to the path of justice. "But without such rule they tear each other to pieces and destroy themselves, for they hanker after rebellion, cherish sedition, and are ready for any treachery."¹⁵⁵ For Orderic, the Norman people must live according to the law of God and be united under a good prince.¹⁵⁶ William was such a prince. Personally strong, he inspired loyalty and laid down just laws, gave fair judgments to rich and poor alike, and took monasteries and their endowments under his protection. By the strength of his will, he established an enduring peace in Normandy until his death in 1087. After that time, dynastic quarrels began between his three sons and later his grandson, leading to an almost endless tale of private war, murder, pillage, perjury, disloyalty, and revolt. Effective discipline and justice ceased, while "every

¹⁵⁴See Marjorie Chibnall, "Feudal Society in Orderic Vitalis," in Proceedings of the Battle Abbey Conference I, ed. R. Allen Brown (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1978), 35-48.

¹⁵⁵EH, 4:7:83.

¹⁵⁶EH, 6:13:457.

man did whatever he happened to wish with impunity" and those granted secular rule did not fulfill their charge to guard and protect the Church.¹⁵⁷

Not surprisingly, the most common miracles described by Orderic depict the encroachment and despoliation of local monastic lands. For example, Peter of Maul "recklessly" seized the vineyard of Clairfont, which rightly belonged to St. Mary's. Punished with illness by divine providence, "he confessed his fault and restored it to St. Mary."¹⁵⁸ Divine protection extended also to abandoned monastic sites. An early site of Saint-Évroul, established at Ouche, was known for its holy relics and various miracles. Among the ruins of the church, a knight named Harduin found a great block of stone which he took home in order to make a water-trough for himself and his stock; he had scarcely begun to hollow it out when he fell ill. In a vision, Harduin was advised to return the stone to its holy site or else he would die. He "returned the stone to the sacred building, begged for mercy from omnipotent God, and soon became well again."¹⁵⁹

Chastisement miracles also occurred in circumstances where a monastery's level of subsistence might be endangered. Feudal obligations of service often demanded a monastery extend hospitality to its secular patrons; but excessive demands for hospitality could quite literally take food from the monks' mouths. Such is the example of the infamous Mabel of Bellême. Described by Orderic as forceful, cunning, and extremely cruel, her hostility to the monastery of Saint-Évroul stemmed from its partial founding by the family of Giroie with whom her family held a bitter feud. She often descended on the monastery with a large retinue of knights, demanding hospitality beyond what the monastery could afford. The abbot warned her to restrain her vanity and refrain from coming to such a poor monastery with such worldly pomp. She

¹⁵⁷EH, 6:12:245.

¹⁵⁸EH, 3:5:201.

¹⁵⁹EH, 3:6:333-35.

remained haughty despite the abbot's warning that she surely would suffer for her wickedness. Indeed, the very next night she fell sick and suffered great agony. She fled in terror and having "felt the hand of God at St. Évrout she never went near the place again. . . ."160

The fear of supernatural sanction being invoked often engendered a palpable emotion of fear strong enough to protect God's servants without His visible interference. Orderic told the story of a young knight who arrogantly attacked a monk of Maule and stole his horse. When the news of this outrage reached his mother, she lamented loudly while wringing her hands and tearing at her hair as if her son were already dead. "By unjustly injuring a helpless servant of Christ you have deserved a fatal punishment for yourself. O Ralph, my son . . . you struck your first blow as a knight against the Almighty."161 She endeavored to console the monk, fearful lest her son be "possessed by a demon here and now for such a crime."162

God intervened characteristically to provide care and protection not only for His servants and specifically monastic lands, but also for Church properties in general against encroachment and violent plundering by castellans who presented a significant threat. Without hesitation, Orderic noted that Giroie perished in a fit of madness for raiding the land of the church of Lisieux.¹⁶³ And of Rotrou, count of Mortagne, who repeatedly plundered the lands of the cathedral church of Chartres, "by divine judgement he became deaf and never again recovered his hearing."¹⁶⁴ Even William I, so often the recipient of heavenly protection, was not immune from divine chastisement.

¹⁶⁰EH, 2:3:55.

¹⁶¹EH, 3:6:243-45.

¹⁶²EH, 3:6:243-45. Of course divine intervention did not dissuade the most "bloodthirsty," and Orderic recorded an instance where monks were forced to ransom themselves, literally paying protection money to have peace. See EH, 4:8:301.

¹⁶³EH, 2:3:31.

¹⁶⁴EH, 3:4:361.

William, a great lover of forests, laid waste more than sixty parishes, compelling the peasants to move to other places, so that he could create a hunting preserve. According to Orderic, two of his sons, Richard and William Rufus, as well as his grandson Richard, perished in this forest; and “visions appeared in many terrible forms to various men, by which the Lord plainly showed His anger that consecrated buildings had been given over to be a habitation for wild beasts.”¹⁶⁵

Divine intervention evinced a political function as preserver of the peace. The precariousness of existence amidst civil disorder was a fact of life and God often intervened to protect His flock from the depredations of bandits and marauders. Sadly Orderic noted the circumstances: “So unhappy Normandy was disturbed by storms of many kinds, wounded by the swords of her own sons as they slew each other, and was everywhere filled with the sounds of lamentation for massacres without number.”¹⁶⁶ Disturbances of the peace (beyond the usual) invariably occurred at the death of a ruler because effective leadership ceased. For example, at the death of King Henry I, his castellan, Richard Silvanus, assembled a band of outlaws and murdered local inhabitants at will. The avenging hand of God responded to this brutality; He saw to it that Silvanus was pierced by a lance during a confrontation with a troop of knights from a neighboring stronghold.¹⁶⁷ On another occasion, a raiding party of knights pursued a group of peasants. The peasants, without the means to defend themselves, flung themselves down in front of a wooden crucifix by the side of the road. The pursuing knights “moved by the fear of God, and for sweet love of his Saviour dutifully respected his cross . . . and turn[ed] back.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵EH, 5:10:285.

¹⁶⁶EH, 6:13:495.

¹⁶⁷EH, 6:13:491-93.

¹⁶⁸EH, 6:12:251.

The fear of offending God served also to maintain feudal bonds, for personal and political alliances, and the subsequent oaths of homage and fealty, were fundamental to maintaining discipline in a feudal society.¹⁶⁹ Just as oaths of fidelity signified allegiance and loyalty, their disavowal equated to disloyalty and treachery, a veritable quagmire, for shifting loyalties were legion and dual oaths of vassalage not uncommon. One “stained with perjury” could expect the wrath of God upon his head, and Orderic implied this circumstance to Harold Godwin who “usurped the kingdom of England.” According to Orderic, Harold had taken an oath of fealty to Duke William at Rouen in the presence of the Norman nobility, and “after becoming his man had sworn on the most sacred relics to carry out all that was required of him.”¹⁷⁰ Harold’s disavowal of his oath to William and seizure of the English throne made Harold a “perjured king,” and William by “divine grace” wrested the kingdom away from him.¹⁷¹ To emphasize William’s “righteousness” in waging war against Harold, Orderic also noted the intervention of St. Nicholas and St. Valéry who protected and assisted William in his quest; “divine providence, which at all times and in all places guides to prosperity all whom it wills,” gave succor to the “good duke” and his army.¹⁷² This example not only depicts divine justice fulfilling a political and legal function, but it also reflects Orderic’s view of secular authorities as tools of divine will.¹⁷³

This viewpoint expresses a working relationship between the Church and Norman kings. It was commonly believed that rulers were to dispense justice in accordance with the law of God, and thus, guide and assist the people entrusted to them. Likewise, kings

¹⁶⁹EH, 6:11:95-97.

¹⁷⁰EH, 2:3:135-37.

¹⁷¹EH, 4:7:91, 4:7:95.

¹⁷²EH, 2:3:171, 2:4:209-11.

¹⁷³EH, 6:12:285-87.

served as patrons and protectors of the Church,¹⁷⁴ while at the same time they treated the Church as an aspect of government.¹⁷⁵ For their part, churchmen functioned as advisors and guides to secular authorities by virtue of their moral and spiritual superiority. Kings were reminded that all power comes from God. God puts kings in place to rule on His behalf; and only God can grant kings salvation, when they properly fulfill their role.¹⁷⁶ Yet, an uneasy relationship often existed between the Crown and the Church. King's were pragmatic, and their baser instincts of greed and power often prevailed. Orderic noted many instances of royal abuse of power, situations in which churchmen warned, rebuked, and attempted to persuade secular authorities by threats of eternal damnation; when that failed the will of God manifested itself to protect the interests of the Church and to redress an imbalance of power. During the reign of William Rufus, the see of Canterbury remained vacant for three years, while the king collected the church revenues for himself. "However, the just Judge, who looks down from Heaven . . . struck down the king of England with a severe illness when he was defiled with the filth of many crimes. Chastised by sickness . . . [he] ordered the governors of the Church to elect an archbishop in accordance with God's will."¹⁷⁷

God also chastised mankind for acts not in accordance with divine or moral law. The deliverance of divine justice carried with it a sense of moral superiority over secular justice, as well as over the authorities who dispensed it. For example, Earl Waltheof was summoned before King William and was accused of being part of a conspiracy against his lord. In reality, the Normans coveted Waltheof's land, and he was

¹⁷⁴EH, 6:12:323.

¹⁷⁵David Bates, Normandy Before 1066 (London: Longman, 1982), 190.

¹⁷⁶EH, 6:12:323.

¹⁷⁷EH, 4:8:177. To the Norman audience, high-lighting the Church-Crown conflicts might have emphasized the solidarity of the monastic community in opposition to secular excess and encroachment. This was an issue under William Rufus and therefore a focus on tradition.

condemned and executed before dawn so as not to attract a crowd.¹⁷⁸ William was censured for Waltheof's death by many, and, by the righteous judgment of God, William in the thirteen years following Waltheof's death never again won a pitched battle or succeeded in taking a town he besieged. "The omnipotent judge orders all things rightly and leaves no sin unpunished, for he never fails to mete out punishment either in this world or in the world to come."¹⁷⁹ Even men of God were not immune from divine judgment for lacking a sense of duty, obedience, and compassion. William ordered Archbishop John to hasten to Lisieux to bury Bishop Hugh. The archbishop, a proud and headstrong man, who disliked Bishop Hugh, ignored the royal command as well as his clerical obligations, and refused to bury his fellow bishop. As the archbishop returned from the king's court, God caused him to suffer a stroke.¹⁸⁰ In both these instances, God exercised His power of sanction in temporal affairs.

The will of God functioned likewise in law and justice as testament to the continued linkage of law and the holy. Justice and real judgments were recognized through trial by ordeal. William Pantulf was charged with treason in the murder of Mabel of Bellême, although he had been away in Apulia at the time. He denied the charge and no one could provide proof of his guilt, yet none would accept his denial of the crime. He offered to clear himself by due process of the law and underwent the ordeal of hot iron at Rouen. "He carried the glowing iron in his bare hand, and by the will of God remained

¹⁷⁸EH, 2:4:321-23. Waltheof's death transformed him into a significant and early political martyr, and he became a focus for anti-Norman sentiment. Orderic was very familiar with him, as Waltheof was an important patron to the abbey of Croyland, for which Orderic had written a monastic history. Orderic remembers him in the *Historia* as a man "exceptional for his generosity and courage; a devoted Christian who showed humble obedience to all priests and monks and truly loved the Church and the poor. . . ." It is no wonder God so approved of the man, that miracles marked him as one sanctified. See EH, 2:4:347.

¹⁷⁹EH, 2:4:351.

¹⁸⁰EH, 3:5:19.

unscorched, for which the clergy and all the people praised God with a loud voice.”¹⁸¹ But during the ordeal his enemies, armed, stood watch according to Orderic, waiting to cut off his head if he were found guilty. On a less deadly note, King William’s son, Robert Curthose, hesitated to admit paternity for two boys presented to him at court. “The mother publicly carried the red-hot iron, and escaping without the least burn, proved that she had conceived by the king’s son.”¹⁸² The winner was assumed to have won by the power of God who judges justly. Legal claim or trial by battle existed as a corollary to the ordeal.¹⁸³ Even with a growing body of rational and literate justice administered by councils of kings, counts, and bishops, and increasingly by royal authority alone, a reliance on the supernatural remained fundamental.¹⁸⁴ A divine decision was unimpeachable; it alone remained a clear, public, and final decision by God in legal matters.

Divine intervention could also free those unjustly held in captivity. This type of legal or political “justice” miracle, particularly in the early Middle Ages, emphasized the ability of saints to mediate power on behalf of humanity. This focus shifted somewhat in the central Middle Ages. Orderic wrote of Bricstan, a man inspired by divine grace to submit himself to the rule of St. Benedict. However, before he could do this, a man falsely accused him of theft and Bricstan was thrown into prison, where he remained chained for a considerable time. Suffering daily from cold and hunger, he prayed for

¹⁸¹EH, 3:5:161-63.

¹⁸²EH, 5:10:283, 6:12:285-87.

¹⁸³EH, 5:10:231.

¹⁸⁴In general, the validity of supernatural judgment began to “wither” through the eleventh and twelfth centuries, although not critically attacked until the late twelfth century. See Peter Brown, “Society and the Supernatural,” *Daedalus* 104 (Spring 1975): 133-51. See also Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 26, where he states that ordeal is not the main instrument of judicial proof, but only one of many other recognized forms of proof used in the twelfth century. Ordeal is the last resort when “certain proof” is not available in any other way.

divine aid. St. Benedict (the saintly advocate for monks), St. Etheldreda, and her sister, St. Sexburga, responded, and carrying out the Lord's command, they effected Bricstan's release. This miraculous escape emphasizes less the saints mediating the power of God, than the monk as beneficiary of the miracle. God wished to see Bricstan clothed in the monastic habit of St. Benedict and thereby be assured of salvation. Nevertheless, "justice" was still served since God set right an imbalance of power. The hanging of Bricstan's fetters in a church, where they remained a witness to the miracle in the sight of the people, demonstrated physically the superiority of divine justice.¹⁸⁵

The examples of divine intervention which we have explored so far deal with political and legal issues. Indeed, much of the *Historia* is devoted to God providing and preserving peace and justice. But one important aspect of the human experience left almost untouched by Orderic is the issue of social responsibility. Public disasters were plentiful in eleventh- and twelfth-century Normandy, and the need for protectors and advocates as necessary then as in sixth-century Gaul. Yet, the *Historia* provides few examples of contemporary miracles of social obligation. Certainly, the conditions and needs existed. The *Historia* records droughts, famine, brutal slaughters, the ravishing of fields, destruction of harvests, driving off of herds, and the burning of houses. The poor, widows, orphans, and socially humble in desperate need must have appealed for heavenly assistance. But their pleas are not recorded here. This has much to do with the relationship of the monk and the monastic institution to the world. The "true" monk, with his mind set on salvation and heaven, remained indifferent to the transitory world. If he tried to correct the faults and defects of the here and now, the effort would divert him from his goal of salvation and plunge him into sin.¹⁸⁶ Orderic's sense of community looks inward and does not aspire outward. He shows only an impersonal concern for the

¹⁸⁵EH, 3:6:347-59.

¹⁸⁶Tellenbach, *Church in Western Europe*, 102.

wider community and its populace, particularly at a time when the number of destitute were increasing. This is not to imply that the concept and value of charity and generosity had diminished since the early Middle Ages. While charity was still seen as a social obligation and a Christian ideal, the monastic community considered the needy and the sick, more symbolically and ceremonially, than functionally. For example, during the time of William of Normandy, Abbot Osbern established a special day of commemoration for the dead at Saint-Évroul. On that day, the almoner assembled as many poor people in the convent as there were monks and they were each provided with fare. Yet, Orderic observed that Abbot Osbern “was a true friend to the poor and sick and made provision for all their needs.”¹⁸⁷ Orderic based his opinion on the fact that Osbern directed the monks to perpetually take care of, and support, seven lepers in the name of the Lord; but in time even that number was reduced to three.

The Rule admonishes the monks to relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, and visit the sick. Although, selected abbots may have had a reputation as monks concerned for the poor, one cannot doubt that Orderic stressed endowments and alms generously provided to the monks for their own earthly maintenance.¹⁸⁸ Orderic clearly assigned the social obligation of providing for the poor and destitute to laymen who may redeem their sins by piously founding hospitals for the poor and sick.¹⁸⁹ In addition, holy men, who reject all worldly things, warn the princes of the world to “support with their endowments the poor and the despisers of the world, so that they may deserve to receive eternal glory for themselves from Christ who declares that he

¹⁸⁷EH, 2:3:115-17. Even bishops gave more and more attention to worldly affairs and less attention to the needy, and the poor receded into obscurity until the late Middle Ages. See Sara MacGonagle, The Poor in Gregory of Tours: A Study of the Attitude of Merovingian Society Towards the Poor, as Reflected in the Literature of the Time (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1936), 104-5.

¹⁸⁸EH, 2:3:33-39, 3:5:119, 3:5:193.

¹⁸⁹EH, 3:6:261-63.

abides in the poor.”¹⁹⁰ The emphasis here resides less on the poor and needy, than on laymen fulfilling an obligation to more certainly assure their own salvation.

Similarly, the lack of material concern shown by Orderic for the poor appeared in his depiction of those suffering sickness. Personally, Orderic was aware of the numerous famines and plagues which swept across the land and the consequent ills. For example,

In the month of May an infection of a phlegmatic kind spread all over the west, afflicting everyone with catarrh and streaming eyes, so that throughout France, where I was at the time, all cheeks were wet with tears . . . Burning fevers of different kinds and other infections caused great suffering, and stretched many people on beds of sickness.¹⁹¹

Other illnesses familiar to the period were dropsy, blindness, deafness, dumbness, tumors, and withered limbs.¹⁹² With this backdrop it is not difficult to understand why cures were one of the most manifested miracles in the twelfth century.¹⁹³ Yet, the number of miraculous cures related in the *Historia* were quite small, and as a point of comparison, accounts for less than one-quarter of the number of cures included in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours. Orderic did include narratives of traditional tales of miraculous cures. He also recognized the emotional impact of popular piety on the supplicants and their pleas for divine assistance at holy sites or near holy relics. For instance, he recounted that as soon as the sacred relics of St. Nicholas were placed in the church of St. Benedict, crowds flocked from every country in the western world. In the days that followed, many were cured who were possessed with demons or deaf or lame or dumb or blind or oppressed by a variety of other afflictions. Restored and healed, they returned home joyful and gave thanks to God. Too numerous to record were “all the

¹⁹⁰EH, 3:6:263.

¹⁹¹EH, 6:11:75.

¹⁹²Benedicta Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 116.

¹⁹³Ward, Miracles, 84.

cures and aids which almighty God in his mercy has granted to his servants when they ask in faith, by the merits of the most holy bishop Nicholas.”¹⁹⁴ Orderic’s presentation of these miraculous benefits are formulaic. The miraculous cures that he records are specific to site, not to an individual, and emphasized the ability of the saint to mediate God’s power of healing. Orderic included in the *Historia* traditional stories of miraculous healing because they appealed to a specific audience, yet, his personal concern for earthly healing differed. As a monk, he perceived illness not as something to be cured, but as something to be endured as a means of seeking repentance. Orderic stressed the connection between illness and sin. Therefore suffering was requisite for growth and redemption. This emphasis on salvation appears in stories of the miraculous, where the will of God mediated on behalf of those ill. Orderic recorded how King Louis of France lay sick, his strength wasted and in fear of imminent death. Although the physicians had given up all hope of the king’s recovery, the “almighty God, who gave King Hezekiah fifteen more years of life, prolonged the life of the ailing Louis for a while, and unexpectedly granted him better health and time for the amendment of his life.”¹⁹⁵ God also manifested sickness as a tool for salvation in his concern for his flock at large. In the year of our Lord 1109, “divine vengeance caused a number of scourges to punish the sins of men and, as always, made use of terror with fatherly solicitude, thereby calling sinners to repentance and showing forgiveness and salvation to the penitent.”¹⁹⁶ In France, particularly in Orleans and the province of Chartres, many people were weakened by a feverish sickness, and some died.

Throughout the *Historia* the will of God, as creator, guide, and arbiter of human history emerges as the constantly expressed theme. Whether the power of God was

¹⁹⁴EH, 4:7:69.

¹⁹⁵EH, 6:13:447-49.

¹⁹⁶EH, 6:11:167.

mediated through saints, or personally delivered to mankind, it was usually directed at the concerns and conflicts Orderic Vitalis perceived as most injurious to his world: war, rebellion, abuse of secular authority, Church and Crown conflicts, problems of patronage, injustice, false imprisonment, and sickness. In response to these concerns and conflicts, incidents of saintly intercession occurred less frequently and remained less influential than direct divine intervention. Unlike the early Middle Ages, where saints were closely allied to emerging social, political, and religious structures, the dominant political and social structures of eleventh- and early twelfth-century feudal Normandy placed saints within religious structures, particularly monastic communities. At the same time, God more visibly reacted to a greater sense of community, and acknowledged the needs and circumstances of a larger world.

In political events, the hand of God functioned to chastise, mediate, and judge as it maintained feudal bonds of fealty and homage, imposed and preserved the peace, and redressed imbalances of power between secular justice and divine justice. Divine intervention provided patronage and protection to the Church and its servants. It thus maintained the necessary level of social stability for the existence and functioning of the monastic community and the extension of Church authority throughout the Anglo-Norman realm. In addition, divine intervention chastised those who were morally deficient, while reinforcing positive Christian ideals such as charity, chastity, humility, righteousness, and self-denial. Beyond these earthly concerns, God intervened to heal spiritually and redeem by providing lessons and opportunities for salvation. Whether these miracles affected great men or ordinary men, they were demanded and accepted as an integral part of earthly life. The continuity of the miraculous reassured the faithful, even as man puzzled over their interpretation. Miracles were moments of faith, as well as propaganda, and the occurrence of miracles was well recorded, while increasingly a miraculous event was attributed to natural causes over the supernatural.

CONCLUSION

This study began by arguing that the ideal of sanctity, in terms of its possession, function, and perception (both popular and ecclesiastical), gradually changed between the sixth century and the twelfth century. This change is reflected in the historical narratives of Gregory of Tours and Orderic Vitalis. In studying paradigms of sanctity between historical periods, we find that the use of identical terms expresses a continuity of shared religious beliefs, needs, and expectations. Saints and holy men as the servants of God conform to models corresponding to recognized categories of exceptional Christian beings: martyrs, confessors, and hermits and recluses. Saints and holy men served in common as a focus of faith and as instruments of God's purpose--through them, or for them, God intervened in the world. At the same time, one must recognize that similar terms reflect realities that often differ from one period to another, in terms of both definition and function. Literary and historical evidence in the previous chapters support this view. We need to draw these main points together now by briefly reviewing the most significant changes to the image of the Christian ideal, changes that in reality can be neither as straightforward, nor as simple, as presented here.

From the days of the early Church, saintliness was synonymous with martyrdom. Martyrs gave their lives in witness to the true faith of Christ, and, following the example of Christ, they believed that at their death they too would attain eternal life. This ideal of the martyr remained valid as an essential element of faith and Christian tradition throughout the Middle Ages, yet, in the early Medieval West the emphasis became modified to encompass the "struggle" of an individual to lead an exemplary Christian life. Thus, for an audience only superficially Christian, the martyr served as a "living" spiritual and moral role model; he or she exhibited the virtues and values

important to a Christian community. More important, martyrs functioned as miracle-workers and intercessors--they were a channel to God proven by their ability to manifest the miraculous. St. Martin of Tours best characterizes the exemplar of a "bloodless martyr." He proclaimed his faith before men and demons, while serving the community as a monk, a missionary, a bishop, and a miracle-worker. His reputation for holiness rested on his behavior and service to the church and community, not on his ecclesiastical vocation.

Similarly, the eleventh and twelfth centuries gave a contemporary relevance to the paradigm(s) of martyr. Under the growing influence of western monasticism and the monastic life, monks symbolized the "new" martyrs. Unlike martyrs of the early Middle Ages, monks were no longer set apart by the holiness of their character or their desire to seek God, but because as members of a monastic community they followed a life different from the standards of common men. By their commitment to the pursuit of religious perfection and salvation, the designation of "monk" became endowed with a notion of sanctity. Because the monk dedicated his life to prayer, he was perceived not as a miracle-worker, but rather was considered to possess the ability of manifesting the power for one's salvation. Abbot Thierry represents the ideal of a familiar and yet recent holy man with whom contemporary society could identify. This holy abbot illustrated Orderic's role model of a monastic martyr--a selfless man devoted to God, one so exceptional in his faith that God manifested the miraculous for him as a sign of Thierry's salvation and God's approval.

This concern for salvation was a factor in the transformation of the knightly ideal into an alternative paradigm of martyr. The need for a warrior dedicated to the service of Christ arose from the Church's intention to recover the Holy Sepulcher from the infidels. However, the impetus for the thousands inspired by the call to defend the Church and their fellow Christians came from their belief that to die in defense of the

faith achieved a martyrdom similar to that which Christ had suffered. By linking the idea of pilgrimage with a military objective, the Church sanctified arms and holy war. This development in the moral ethic of warfare represented a momentous change from the early Middle Ages, when any association between the military and the holy was condemned by Church leaders.

The dominance of the monastic culture and the perception of a monk as a spiritual martyr in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is reflected in the declining use of the confessor saint as a model of a holy man. The designation of "confessor" was seldom used during this period, for confessor saints were perceived as more important as monks and martyrs, and categorized as such. This demonstrates an important change from the early Middle Ages, when the paradigm of martyr was equally important to that of the confessor. An equally significant change appeared in the definition of a confessor saint. Confessors from the earlier period hoped to make themselves more worthy of God by lives of self-denial and self-mortification. But by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, confessor saints were no longer known for self-mortification, but for their austerity and disciplined lives as monks. Individual acts of asceticism and personal religious fervor became restrained within the monastic community.

The last major paradigm of sanctity explored was that of hermits and recluses. In the early Middle Ages, these were simple and unlettered men leading lives at one with nature. The affinity for nature remained a pagan holdover, and these figures were incorporated into the Merovingian Church by stressing their asceticism. Alongside these hermits existed solitaries who were often lettered and frequently monastic. Some in reclusion practiced acts of extreme asceticism, but the Church discouraged extreme forms of eremitic existence, and strove to contain ascetic practices within monastic communities. The majority of recluses combined a balance of asceticism and pastoral purpose.

By the twelfth century, these solitaires were submerged within cenobitic communities. The contemporary manifestation of the ideal of a hermit-recluse became a monastically-trained monk. While the desire for solitude so necessary for spiritual contemplation still existed, a new mentality arose concerning the eremitic existence. Whereas earlier, hermits fought lonely battles against demons and their own souls to reach perfection, monks began to view isolation as a place of peace and communion with God. Ideally, isolation should be for brief moments of solitude until the return to the supervision of the monastic community. Spiritual renewal must be found within oneself, and not apart from one's brethren.

Just as a religious reorientation of the eremitic life occurred, so did the representation of exemplars of secular sanctity change. While models of secular sanctity are not included within traditional Christian paradigms of holiness, they provided visual examples of Christian virtues and values, and they too changed between the sixth and the twelfth centuries in accord with a change in cultural and religious attitudes. In the sixth century, ordinary believers could demonstrate their own commitment to God by living a virtuous life; they represented Christian moral and spiritual role models for a superficially Christian community. They were sanctified by their ability to do good works and imitate the life of Christ. Significantly, the efforts of exemplars of secular sanctity were not considered less because they chose to remain in the world. This attitude changed dramatically, however, by the twelfth century. While exemplars of secular sanctity remained moral and spiritual Christian role models, their demonstration of these values and virtues served also as salvation-saving lessons to others. Nobles and knights served Christ and the Church as its protectors and patrons, redeeming their sins by benefactions and almsgiving. Regardless of the depth of their personal piety, the laity were never considered "holy" as the perceived superiority of the monastic life undervalued the secular existence; this attitude accounts also for the

number of lay Christians who converted to the monastic vocation near the end of their lives or on their deathbed.

Finally, we need to summarize the gradual changes in the function and delivery of divine intervention and the miraculous between the sixth and the twelfth centuries. Throughout the Middle Ages, the faithful believed that God actively participated and intervened in human society through His saints. Saints provided an accessible form of holiness at the local and familiar level, serving as mediators, patrons, and protectors within the community. As a channel for divine power, saints and holy men responded to the universal and compelling need for the miraculous by their worshippers. However, the expression of actual needs and the supernatural response to them differed between these centuries due to religious, social, and political changes.

In the early Medieval West, the saint was deeply involved in the active life. Within a brutal secular society lacking a strong centralized government, the saint functioned politically as an advisor and critic to kings and secular authorities. The saint preserved the peace by acting as a mediator or as a focus of reconciliation between warring parties. Thus, did St. Martin intervene in the civil war between kings Lothar, Childebert, and Theudebert. In this same connection, the saint witnessed and guaranteed peace treaties backed by the authority of God to judge and punish those who broke the law. The peace treaty concerning the possession of the city of Paris was so important that two saints, Hilary and Martin, and the martyr Polyeuctes served as witnesses and judges. As the defender of the weak, the saint combated oppression and violations of the law committed by secular authorities. Specifically, the saint freed prisoners, and ameliorated existing legal and political structures supported by the secular recognition of his supernatural power. The saint played a personal role in law and justice, serving as both witness and judge for those who made and broke oaths in his name, and he provided a recourse to arbitrary justice by preserving the right of ecclesiastical

sanctuary. When Claudius, at King Guntram's behest, tried to seize Eberulf from St. Martin's church, Claudius paid the penalty for taking St. Martin's power to lightly. He died transfixed by spears.

Saints worked with churchmen to reshape public behavior and address church concerns. Of particular concern were the needy who lacked natural protectors: widows, orphans, prisoners, and lepers. The clergy were charged by various church councils to take primary responsibility for these people, and saints assisted in this effort by collecting and redistributing wealth. In one instance, the recluse Eparchius gave whatever money he received for his own benefit to the poor and for the redemption of captives. Thus, they functioned in society as a visual and necessary social conscience. Saints functioned not only as social patrons and protectors, but also as healers. The Merovingian mentality attributed cases of sickness to evil spirits or to Satan, and the saint effected cures and exorcisms. Whether the saint promoted peace, justice, protected the poor and needy, or healed the infirm, he was closely associated with existing legal, political, and religious structures.

Divine manifestations of the miraculous remained a traditional element in medieval thought. However, by the twelfth century, the saint not only responded differently to the needs of human society than he did in the sixth century, but as the primary channel to God, the saint also declined in importance as God more often intervened directly in human affairs. First, let us consider instances of saintly intervention. Unlike the early Middle Ages, when saints were closely allied to emerging social, political, and religious structures, the dominant political and social structures of eleventh- and early twelfth-century feudal Normandy placed saints within religious structures, particularly monastic communities. Thus, it comes as no surprise that many of the imperatives demanding saintly intervention were monastic. Saintly founders and patrons protected monasteries, monastic property, and the brethren.

Miracles encouraged conversion and recruitment, and confirmed monastic practices, ideals, and observances. Manifestations of the miraculous not only preserved the dominance of monastic culture, but allowed the extension of Church power. In all this, the voice of the lay population remained muted. Monasticism's emphasis on the renunciation of the temporal world fostered an indifference to it; the natural corollary to this appears in the very few miracles of social obligation mentioned in the *Historia*. Public and natural disasters were plentiful, yet, the poor, widows, orphans, and socially humble continued in desperate circumstances without a patron or protector. Monastics held charity to be a Christian ideal, but dealt with it symbolically; the Church in this period assigned the social obligation for the poor and destitute to laymen, and eventually to the "new" monastic orders beginning to emerge at this time.

Second, beyond the miraculous manifested by saints (or the contemporary lack of it) there remained the repetitive theme of direct divine intervention. God actively attended to concerns that extended from the local community and its villagers, across the broader Anglo-Norman realm, and beyond into the East where Normans endured the hardships of the crusades. God controlled human affairs by intervening or, conversely, by deliberately refraining from intervention. Characteristically, He protected monasteries and the brethren, monastic properties, churches and relics, and shrines and their attendant pilgrims. Ecclesiastics who failed to fulfill their responsibilities to the Church or to their fellow clergymen were divinely chastised, the consequence of which reaffirmed the Christian virtues of humility, righteousness and charity, and emphasized Church solidarity. The deserved divine response for overweening pride and arrogance served as a visual lesson to all observers. Divine chastisement descended equally on secular authorities who failed to protect the Church and its revenues. Thus, God struck down William Rufus with illness, when he refused to appoint a new archbishop of Canterbury and exacted its income as his own. Secular rulers were charged to guard and

protect the Church, as well as to guide and assist the people entrusted to them. However, when they failed to uphold the divine and moral law, God divinely judged and punished them. In consequence, William the Conqueror, responsible for the political execution of Earl Waltheof, never again won a victory in battle.

The reputation of the Normans as a quarrelsome and rebellious people was not undeserved. When effective justice and discipline ceased, the ensuing civil disorder required God's intervention to impose and maintain peace and justice. Often with swift retaliation, God protected His flock from depredations by bandits, marauders, and unruly castellans. The fear of supernatural sanction also preserved the peace by sustaining oaths of homage and fealty, bonds necessary to maintain discipline in a feudal society. These oaths were not only taken in His name, but He served to judge and punish the violators. The linkage of law and the holy continued from the sixth century as justice and real judgments were recognized through trial by ordeal and trial by battle. Even as expectations grew concerning the form of "justice" that law and royal authority should deliver, reliance on a divine decision in legal matters remained fundamental.

To the more religiously sophisticated, the greatest miracle was salvation by God, and God intervened often and dramatically to impress this on His flock. He manifested sickness as a tool for salvation by calling sinners to repentance, showing forgiveness, and salvation. By curing those who suffered from illness, God provided them with opportunities to repent of their sins and be saved. For others, the appearance of amazing and fearsome portents and prodigies provided salvation-saving lessons by the visible demonstration of God's power.

Whether saints or God divinely intervened in human society, the demand for the miraculous and the reliance on miraculous intervention continued unabated, particularly by lay persons and the less-educated clergy. Indeed, the miracle remained necessary for the majority of the populace to focus on God and strengthen their faith.

Throughout these centuries, exemplars of sanctity continued to live among men as part of a continuing, yet, changing Christian tradition in response to community needs and expectations. However, by the twelfth century, historical circumstances and changing spiritual needs broadened the traditional models of sanctity to include the cult of the Virgin and the cult of Christ. The earlier fundamental importance of local saints and their relics now included more contemporary and universal saints, such as abbot Thierry, and St. George and St. Demetrius, patron saints of the crusader knights, the knowledge of which, and worship of which, spread due to increased communication, mobility, and the crusades. This newer and more inclusive view of sanctity existed alongside of models of holiness more pertinent and particular to rural Christian communities still rooted by their faith in the past.

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