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Views from Afar: North American Perspectives on Medieval Monasticism.

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All historians view medieval monasticism from afar, in the sense that the Middle Ages is strange to everyone living today. But North Americans have additionally to deal with the fact that the European Middle Ages is not only geographically disjoined from their continent but not even part of their national history, whether U.S. or Canadian. Why have North Americans studied the European Middle Ages at all? To some degree to find answers to the "larger" questions about the origins of modernity (e.g. the law, the state) in general; but mainly to claim the European heritage for themselves¹. Medieval English history is especially popular in North America because many American scholars think of England as their cultural country of origin, whether or not it can be claimed ethnically. Nearly as popular is medieval France².

Until the 1970s, however, professional historians in North America did not ordinarily pursue medieval monastic history³. Change came from a variety of sources. One derived from developments within the Catholic church itself, particularly the "new theology" of Etienne Gilson and Henri de Lubac, which privileged medieval primary sources over scholastic manuals, and the pronouncements of Vatican II, which encouraged religious orders to «rediscover the ideals of their founders»⁴. In Europe, these movements were related to the writings of religious historians like Marie-Dominique Chenu and Jean Leclercq⁵. In North America they resulted in a number of publishing projects, not least those of Gilson himself, at Toronto, and, even more important for monastic history, a series begun in Massachusetts entitled «Cistercian Publications». These, founded in 1968 by the then young Trappist monk Basil Pennington with encouragement from Jean Leclercq, were meant to promote monastic spirituality through translations and special studies of Cistercian writings. In the event, however, «Cistercian Publications» also stimulated much historical work. Now numbering over 250 volumes, «Cistercian Publications», became associated with the Medieval Institute at Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo in 1973, an affiliation that made it well known to medievalists in general thanks to the Medieval Institute's

¹ See the discussion in PAUL FREEDMAN - GABRIELLE M. SPIEGEL, *Medievalisms Old and New. The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies*, «American Historical Review», 103 (1998), pp. 677-704, here pp. 679-93. In preparing this paper I have had help from many sources: I should like to thank Constance H. Berman, E. Rozanne Elder, Steven A. Epstein, Patrick J. Geary, Hans-Werner Goetz, Lester K. Little, Jo Ann McNamara, Bruce L. Venarde, and Stephen D. White for their scholarly generosity and useful suggestions.

² KARL F. MORRISON, *Fragmentation and Unity in American Medievalism*, in MICHAEL KAMMEN (ed.), *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1980, p. 14, gives the figures for late medieval English and French topics for Ph.D. dissertations written in 1960-1961 and then again in 1977-1978. It may be that the turn to Spain (suggested below at n. 59) has to do with increased sensitivity to the importance of Latino culture in the United States.

³ While not lacking, monastic historiography in Europe before the 1970s was largely the special province of those in orders. For discussions of the movement of medieval religious studies from margin to center, see LESTER K. LITTLE - BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN (eds.), *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, Oxford 1998, pp. 301-9; SHARON FARMER - BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN (eds.), *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society*, Ithaca, N.Y. 2000, pp. 1-8.

⁴ The quote comes from an e-mail message of December 22, 1999 from Rozanne Elder. For de Lubac and Gilson, see HENRI DE LUBAC, *Memoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits*, 2d ed, Namur 1992; ETIENNE GILSON, *Lettres de M. Etienne Gilson adressées au P. Henri de Lubac et commentées par celui-ci*, Paris 1986; for the connections between de Lubac's theology and the canons of Vatican II, see Giovanni Moretto, *Destino dell'uomo e corpo mistero: Blondel, de Lubac e il Concilio Vaticano II*, Brescia, 1994.

⁵ Chenu's work became well known in North America with the publication of M.-D. CHENU, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, JEROME TAYLOR - LESTER K. LITTLE (ed. and trans.), Chicago 1968; Leclercq was even more popular and much earlier with JEAN LECLERCQ, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, C. Misrahi (trans.), New York, 1961.

annual International Medieval Studies Conferences⁶. This is no doubt a major reason why the Cistercian order is the medieval monastic group best known and most studied in North America today.

The Cistercians form a constant and durable part of the North American historiography of monasticism. But once monastic studies had gained momentum, they gathered in their wake studies of English Benedictines⁷, French Cluniacs⁸, and even some Italian orders⁹.

To the stream inspired by Cistercian studies must be added other traditions deriving originally from separate sources. One was institutional history as applied to monasticism. In England, the great practitioner of this sort of history was David Knowles¹⁰. In North America it was (and remains) Giles Constable¹¹. Already in 1957, Constable had edited the letters of Peter the Venerable as his Harvard Ph.D. dissertation¹². The issues that he encountered during that enterprise led him to publish studies on monastic tithes, on Cluny, and on twelfth-century monastic reform, among other topics¹³. But his published *oeuvre* is only half the story, for Constable was the teacher of many of the historians - Caroline Bynum, Sharon Farmer, Stephen White, for example - who figure as key players in the North American historiography of monasticism.

A very different yet equally influential tradition-merging eventually with Pennington's legacy and Constable's progeny to form the new monastic historiography of the last few decades was the history of mental attitudes. Although partly to be associated with the notion of *mentalité* in the French *Annales* school (for religious history, Marc Bloch's *Les Rois thaumaturges* was decisive in this regard), it was also evident in a peculiarly British incarnation, in the work of R. W. Southern, who was interested in «ways of thought and feeling», including those within the monastery¹⁴. In

⁶ Precise figures as of December 22, 1999, kindly provided to me Rozanne Elder: «Cistercian Studies Series» has 190 vols, but 5 of these remain in preparation; «Cistercian Fathers Series» has 64 volumes, 8 of which remain in preparation; «Cistercian Liturgy Series» has 20 volumes «again with a blank or two». There is also the *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, which, although not officially affiliated with «Cistercian Publications», is currently edited by Pennington himself.

⁷ For England, see, for example, SHARON K. ELKINS, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*, Chapel Hill 1988. Of 28 dissertations on monasticism written between 1989-1999, 10 (36%) focused on England. Normandy is also popular (the focus of 2 of the same 28 dissertations); its importance is in some ways an outgrowth of focus on England, as it was the homeland of the Norman conquerors. See, for example, the work of a student of C. Warren Hollister, CASSANDRA POTTS, *Monastic Revival and Regional Identity in Early Normandy*, Woodbridge 1997. Ireland also has its North American researchers, but for the opposite reason: it is seen as a fiercely independent culture that resisted "Norman" incursions. Thus LISA M. BITEL, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1990, p. 237, speaks of the «Norman invasion of Ireland» though in fact she is thinking of men under Henry II who came via England and Wales.

⁸ BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN, *Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century*, Philadelphia 1982. But Cluny had a special history in the historiography of the United States, partly due to the sponsorship by the Medieval Academy of excavations there under the direction of Kenneth John Conant, no doubt (as Giles Constable kindly suggested to me) funded by John Nicholas Brown, and partly due to Constable's own work, for which see below, n. 13.

⁹ «Cistercian Publications» itself sponsored some far-flung forays, as exemplified, for example, by articles in JOHN A. NICHOLS - LILLIAN THOMAS SHANK (eds.), *Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1, *Distant Echoes*, Kalamazoo, Mich 1984 (Cistercian Studies 71). The wide-ranging article by BRENDA M. BOLTON, *Mulieres Sanctae*, in SUSAN MOSHER STUARD (ed.), *Women in Medieval Society*, Philadelphia, 1976, pp. 141-158, was published in the United States and much read in North America; but Bolton herself is British.

¹⁰ DAVID KNOWLES, *Medieval religious houses: England and Wales*, London 1953; ID., *Cistercians and Cluniacs: The Controversy between St. Bernard and Peter the Venerable*, London 1955.

¹¹ Constable has told me that he was much influenced by Herbert Bloch, whose *Monte Cassino, Byzantium, and the West in the Earlier Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Mass. 1946 (Dumbarton Oaks Papers 3) was at the time a pioneering look at a monastery in historical context.

¹² As Constable notes in the introduction to GILES CONSTABLE, *Religious Life and Thought (11th-12th centuries)*, p. II. His edition was published ten years later: GILES CONSTABLE, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 2 vols, Cambridge, Mass 1967 (Harvard Historical Studies 78).

¹³ GILES CONSTABLE, *Monastic Tithes from their Origins to the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, 1964 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, n.s., 10); ID., *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, The Trevelyan Lectures, University of Cambridge, 1985, Cambridge 1996; there is an excellent bibliography of Constable's works in the latter publication, pp. 337-40.

¹⁴ R. W. SOUTHERN, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, New Haven 1953, p. 252; MARC BLOCH, *Les rois thaumaturges: Etude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*, Strasbourg 1924.

his general history of the medieval church, Southern set a model for much of what was to come in insisting - with Chenu - that «ecclesiastical development and social change» be treated together¹⁵. Important turning points in the 1970s developed out of this brew of "new theology," interest in mental attitudes, and institutional concerns. In particular, Caroline Walker Bynum and Lester K. Little (admittedly inspired by Europeans such as Chenu, Cinzio Violante, R.W. Southern, and Peter Brown) gave new direction to North American monastic studies¹⁶. While drawing inspiration from their European predecessors, they nevertheless broke new ground. Chenu had spoken of spiritual programs responding to societal needs. In a book published in 1978, Little explicitly and precisely tied monastic groups to social and economic contexts: the Cluniacs lived comfortably within the gift economy of the tenth century; the Cistercians uncomfortably accommodated to the new profit economy of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; other orders tried to withdraw entirely; and the mendicants at last resolved the tensions between religious life and commercial society by ministering to urban clienteles while elaborating new ethics attuned to its needs¹⁷. Bynum was less obviously revolutionary: indeed, she saw herself as a conservative, "returning" to the non-sociological, mystical sources to discover and tease out the meaning of religious imagery¹⁸. But in the process she "discovered" two different, though sometimes related, matters: women's spirituality and the social meaning of metaphors embedded in texts. Bynum was prescient. The study of gender and the symbiosis of religion and society came to define the two subsequent paths of North American monastic studies.

Monks, Nuns, and Gender

Women and gender is almost certainly the most characteristic preoccupation of current North American monastic historiography. The women's movement of the 1970s galvanized this "feminine turn," and it is not surprising that women historians are normally its practitioners. A few examples may suffice. In 1981 Penelope Johnson published a book on monks; in 1991, she was writing about nuns¹⁹. In 1973, Jo Ann McNamara was writing about Gilles Aycelin, confidant of Philip the Fair; in the mid-1990s she was writing a survey of Catholic nuns from their origins in late antiquity to the present²⁰. Caroline Bynum is another example of this trend. In 1974 she was interested in the differences between monks and regular canons; three years later she was thinking about Jesus as a kind of woman²¹.

¹⁵ In his *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Harmondsworth 1970 (Pelican History of the Church, 2), p. 11.

¹⁶ For Chenu see n. 5 above. Peter Brown, *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*, «Journal of Roman Studies», 62 (1971), pp. 80-101 was not about monastic orders per se, but its insistence on the social function of ascetics provided a model for those seeking similar insights for later monastic groups.

¹⁷ On this latter point, the social meaning of the friars, an important contribution had been made two years earlier in JOHN B. FREED, *The Friars in German Society in the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass. 1977.

¹⁸ CAROLINE WALKER BYNUM, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Berkeley 1982, p. 9: «The essays that follow . . . [turn] back to the kind of source material treated by the old-style history of doctrine.» This is Bynum in the early 1980s reflecting on her methods and purposes in the 1970s. But in fact, the "old-style" history, at least that based on direct reading of the primary sources of spirituality, dates back only to the 1920s, to, for example, the Jesuits Henri de Lubac and J. Daniélou and their series *Sources chrétiennes*.

¹⁹ PENELOPE D. JOHNSON, *Prayer, Patronage, and Power: The Abbey of la Trinité, Vendôme, 1032-1187*, New York 1981; EAD., *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France*, Chicago 1991.

²⁰ JO ANN MCNAMARA, *Gilles Aycelin: The Servant of Two Masters*, Syracuse, N.Y. 1973; but in the 1980s: EAD., *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries*, New York 1983 and *Muffled Voices: The Lives of Consecrated Women in the Fourth Century*, in *Medieval Religious Women, Distant Echoes*, pp. 11-30. In the 1990s: JO ANN MCNAMARA and JOHN E. HALBORG, with GORDON WHATLEY, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, Durham 1992; JO ANN MCNAMARA, *The Need to Give: Economic Restrictions and Penitential Piety among Medieval Nuns*, in RENATE BLUMENFELD-KOZINSKI and TIMEA SZELL (ed.), *Images of Sainthood in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1993, pp. 199-221; EAD., *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996. A pioneer who seems to have begun her research with the "female question" in mind was JANE T. SCHULENBERG, who wrote about women in monastic life in the late 1970s in *Sexism and the Celestial Gynaeceum, 500-1200*, «Journal of Medieval History», 4 (1978), pp. 117-133.

²¹ CAROLINE WALKER BYNUM, *The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century: A New Approach*, «Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture», n.s. 4 (1973), pp. 3-24; EAD., *Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing*, «Harvard Theological Review»,

While in Europe there was and remains a strong tradition from at least Grundmann's day of interest in female monasticism by male historians, this is not much the case in North America, where only a very few men are interested in the topic²². Nevertheless, it is not enough to say that in North America the enterprise is simply of feminist historians writing about female monasteries. There are different kinds of feminists. Some have taken on the straightforward mission of finding out about nuns as historians once found out about monks. This is the impulse, for example, behind Penelope Johnson's *Equal in Monastic Profession*, which claims as its goal to bring "ordinary" medieval nuns "alive"²³. In fact its thesis is, as the title implies, male and female parity. Did monks know about herbal medicines? Nuns did as well²⁴. Did monks exercise charity? So did their female counterparts²⁵. And so on²⁶. This is a book directly about empowerment. Jo Ann McNamara's *Sisters in Arms*, which was almost titled *Virile Women*, appears similarly motivated at first glance²⁷. Certainly it grew out of McNamara's willingness to help newly self-conscious modern nuns discover their own history²⁸. But at a more profound level, McNamara's study is a lengthy meditation on the meaning of sexual renunciation and its role in the construction of gender²⁹. This latter point leads to a more interesting issue, one at the heart of the best of modern feminist critical theory: the "constructedness" of gender. This postulates that, apart from biological differences, male and female are malleable entities whose characteristics are determined by different societies at different times. Thus, in this view, turning from male monasticism to female does not entail simply filling in holes of ignorance. Rather, it demands that the whole field of monasticism - male and female - be rethought³⁰. Consider Bynum's study of the meaning of the metaphor of Christ as mother. Maintaining, contrary to received opinion, that the mothering Christ was an obsession of male Cistercian monks, not female mystics, Bynum was most interested in what the image said about Cistercian

70 (1977), pp. 257-84, both reprinted and emended in *Jesus as Mother*.

²² HERBERT GRUNDMANN, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, Hildesheim 1961². A brief sampling of the more modern European bibliography of male historians on female monasticism: MICHEL PARISSÉ, *Les chanoinesses dans l'Empire germanique (IX-XIe siècles)*, «Francia», 6 (1979), pp. 107-126; ID., *Les nonnes au Moyen Age*, Le Puy 1983; JEAN VERDON, *Les moniales dans la France de l'ouest sur XIe et XIIe siècles. Etudes d'histoire sociale*, «Cahiers de civilisation médiévale», 19 (1976), pp. 247-264; KASPAR ELM, *Die Stellung der Frau in Ordenswesen, Semireligiösentum und Häresie zur Zeit der heiligen Elisabeth*, in *Sankt Elisabeth, Fürsten, Dienerin, Heilige*, Sigmaringen 1981; PETER DINZELBACHER - DIETER R. BAUER (eds.), *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter*, Wien 1988. Nevertheless, we should not exaggerate the differences between Europe and North America in this regard. In the United States, a study by a male historian working on female monasticism is BRUCE L. VENARDE, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1997, while a survey by Hans-Werner Goetz and his collaborator on current historiography in Germany makes clear that the centers of research into monasticism there - Münster and Dresden - rarely look at female monasteries. Gert Melville's paper herein makes the point clear. The major topics in Germany are studies on social relations between monasteries and the world and on the institutionalization of orders and the use of writing therein. Cluny and its priories, Fruttuaria, the Cistercians, and the Premonstratensians are the chief foci. I am grateful to Professor Goetz for sending me pertinent information.

²³ JOHNSON, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, p. 7 for «ordinary», p. 2 for «alive».

²⁴ *Ibi*, p. 53.

²⁵ *Ibi*, p. 55.

²⁶ For the equal efficacy of monks' and nuns' prayers, *ibi*, p. 59; for episcopal visitations, p. 69, and for resistance thereto, p. 100, etc. Johnson does recognize differences; they appear as minor variations due, for example, to «the hierarchy's view of women as dependent and men as autonomous.» (*Ibi*, p. 63).

²⁷ MCNAMARA, *Sisters*, p. IX.

²⁸ McNamara notes that she first became interested in nuns when, in 1979 or 1980, the Cistercian Sister Lillian Thomas Shank asked her to write about the history of Cistercian nuns «for the use of her novices» (*ibi*, p. X; personal E-mail communication). That there was little for them to read before the 1980s was not by hazard: «Nuns had long been rigorously trained to have no history, personal or communal». (MCNAMARA, *Sisters*, p. 632). Thus, just as the North American study of male monasticism was spearheaded by a Cistercian monk, so a female novice mistress gave impulse (nearly twenty years later) to the study of medieval nuns. Both Pennington and Shank were responding to Vatican II's call for a return to roots.

²⁹ See *ibi*, pp. 3-4, where virginity, even male virginity, is gendered female.

³⁰ On this point, not only for monasticism but for the entire history of the Middle Ages, see CLARE A. LEES (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis 1994 (Medieval Cultures 7).

monks' notions of themselves³¹. In her view, the Cistercian idea of motherhood conjoined the attribute of «nurture» to «conceptions of leadership, authority, and pastoral concern»³². A simple feminist reading of the sources would have assumed women to be the primary generators of maternal imagery; if men used the same imagery it must signal their interest in the feminine. Bynum's work resolutely obliterates any such easy correspondences. It maintains that the image of Christ as mother ultimately tells us nothing about women - but a great deal about how even mothering can, under certain circumstances, be absorbed into a male notion of male gender. Bynum argued here, and even more forcefully elsewhere, that medieval women were far less interested than men in associating acts and traits - whether nurturing or dominating - with any specific gender³³.

The danger of applying feminist critical theory to the history of monasticism is that it leads in directions far from the cloister. Already in 1987 Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* said much about mystics, very little about monasticism. In the 1990s, she turned resolutely to the meaning of the body in medieval religion and has most recently edited a volume on medieval eschatology³⁴. Does this presage a turn away from monasticism in general, Bynum serving as bellwether of North American interests? The answer must be partially affirmative. I will return to this point at the end of my paper.

Social History and Monasticism

But first I need to retrace my steps through the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. This time my focus is not historians gripped by gender issues but rather those keen to understand the role of religion in society and of society in religion. The division gender/society is of course artificial: who can talk about gender without looking at the society engendering its meaning? Who would talk about religion and society without taking women into account. Nevertheless, emphases differ: in gender studies, the focus is on women or on the differences between women and men: in the social history of religion it is on legal, gift-giving, or economic systems.

In North America the first significant book on monasticism and society, as I noted above, was published by Lester K. Little in 1978³⁵. In its wake came a spate of books numerous and pointed enough to constitute a historiographical movement. The goal of this movement was to discover the social meanings of religious phenomena, including monasticism in its widest sense, including liturgy, monastic reform, monastic expansion and the creation of congregations, lay and episcopal oversight (or control) over monasteries, and lay-monastic relations, including pious donations. My own work comes into play here, but what is most interesting - if a bit disquieting to me personally - is how thoroughly it is subsumed by the larger historiographical movement of which it forms a part.

The first and perhaps most important point to be made about this historiography is its source base: monastic charters. Hitherto, North American monastic studies drew mainly upon theological, meditative, and polemical texts³⁶. The «Cistercian Publications» series was interested in monastic spirituality, newly legitimized as a form of "theology" by Gilson and Leclercq³⁷. The

³¹ For the "received opinion", BYNUM, *Jesus as Mother*, in *Jesus as Mother*, p. 111 n. 3.

³² *Ibi*, p. 149.

³³ *Ibi*, p. 149, pointing particularly to Gertrude of Helfta's insouciant notion of «God the mother as disciplinarian». For more extended discussion of the different ways men and women used female symbols, see CAROLINE WALKER BYNUM, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley 1987, pp. 282-294.

³⁴ Once *Holy Feast* was completed, the next books by Bynum focused on the body. See her *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York 1992; EAD., *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York 1995 (Lectures on the History of Religions, new ser. 15). Her most recent work as editor (with Paul Freedman), *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia 2000, grows out of her seminar on eschatology.

³⁵ LITTLE, *Religious Poverty*.

³⁶ The institutional historians are exceptions to this; see, for example, GILES CONSTABLE, *Monastic Tithes* for its use of charter materials.

³⁷ ETIENNE GILSON, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, New York 1940, based on lectures given in 1933. In the thirties and forties, it was a daring step to call Bernard a theologian. Jean Leclercq was certainly influenced by it. His *L'amour des lettres de le desir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen Age*, Paris 1957 in English

monastic gender-studies people tended to use these same sorts of sources. And these were also largely the texts that Lester Little himself drew upon in a book that in so many other ways struck out in new directions.

But the pursuit of the social meaning of monasticism led subsequent researchers to the holy grail of social history already discovered by Georges Duby: monastic charters. Duby used those of Cluny, but he had not been interested in Cluniac monasticism. His *thèse* on the Mâconnais taught a whole generation of French and then American historians how rich and useful charters could be for research on local familial relations, feudal networks, legal practices, and institutions of power³⁸. In the hands of monastic researchers of the 1980s and early 1990s, the charters also became a route to a certain kind of monastic history, one with social context as its focus.

Let us consider for a moment the nature of monastic charters and speculate about why, in the 1980s, they became so important in North American historiography. French historiography has always been methodologically inspiring to North American researchers. Duby's fame and impact in France made it certain that he would influence medievalists across the Atlantic. But why in monastic history? For, although a few American historians did do French local history along the lines of Duby³⁹, that was not the chief focus of the charter-happy monastic practitioners who interest us here.

It is important, then, to recognize that it wasn't just Duby but the charters themselves that attracted American researchers once their value had been made clear. Charters give "hard" evidence, and this was important to the new secular monastic historians of the 1980s. The spiritual writings of monks did not put off the gender-studies people because they wanted to explore perceptions and attitudes. But historians seeking the social significance of religion were impatient with affective texts and flights of mystical fancy. Charters are legal sources, deal in mundane matters, and are apparently incontrovertible. A charter that is drawn up to record a land transaction taking place on such-and-such date and witnessed by so-and-so people either records a fact or is a forgery. It is not subjective - at least not in the way that the *De institutione* of Aelred of Rievaulx is subjective⁴⁰.

Another attraction of charters is that they are amenable to computerization and statistical analysis. Already in the late 1970s a group of scholars working under Joachim Wollasch at Münster, Germany, had seen the advantages of computer-assisted studies of Cluny's charters. Their work was publicized in North America in part by their own efforts and in part by Patrick J. Geary, who helped them locate financial support⁴¹. Constance Bouchard knew about the work at Münster and spent some time there before she published *Sword, Miter and Cloister*. But that book - published in 1987 and arguably the first of the new breed of monastic-social history - made only graceful and, indeed, hidden use of computers⁴². The next two books in the field, Stephen White's on the *laudatio parentum* (1988) and my own on Cluny and its neighbors (1989), fully and explicitly

translation (*The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, New York 1961) remains one of the most frequently cited work on medieval monasticism in North American historiography.

³⁸ GEORGES DUBY, *La société aux XIe et XIIe siècles dans la région mâconnaise*, Paris 1953 (2d ed., 1971). On the antecedents and influence of this work, see LESTER K. LITTLE and BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN, *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, Oxford 1998, pp. 107-113.

³⁹ Examples include GEORGE BEECH, *A Rural Society in Medieval France: The Gâtine of Poitou in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Baltimore 1964; THEODORE EVERGATES, *Feudal Society in the Bailliage of Troyes under the Counts of Champagne, 1152-1284*, Baltimore 1975.

⁴⁰ For the use of Aelred, BYNUM, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 163, n. 173. For the on-going critique of the "objectivity" of charters, see below.

⁴¹ Most North American medievalists probably first learned about the computer-assisted work of the Münster group from MARIA HILLEBRANDT, *The Cluniac Charters: Remarks on a Quantitative Approach for Prosopographical Studies*, «Medieval Prosopography», 3 (1982), pp. 3-25.

⁴² CONSTANCE B. BOUCHARD, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1987. This was hardly the first book on monastic patronage; but that is a different issue. On the latter topic, see for example, BENNETT D. HILL, *English Cistercian Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Twelfth Century*, Urbana, Ill. 1968. JOHNSON, *Prayer, Patronage and Power*, chap. 3 predated Bouchard in taking up the issue of lay and monastic relations through charter evidence and two statistical tables. But framed, as that chapter is, by a study of La Trinité's "organism" on the one hand and its artistic contribution on the other, it functions more to "round out" the picture of La Trinité than to explore its social meaning.

brought computer technology and statistical tables into their very narrative⁴³. A couple of years after that, Bouchard's *Holy Entrepreneurs* did the same⁴⁴. These books clearly were in part celebrations of a new, modern technology. Since the early 1990s, though, computers have become so routine that they have once more retreated to the background. And using monastic charters for monastic history has also had a falling off. I am thinking, for example of Phyllis Jestice's 1997 book, *Wayward Monks*⁴⁵.

Thus the social-monastic movement of the 1980s, so reliant on charters, had a beginning and an end. What did it accomplish while it existed? First, it redefined the issue of lay involvement in monastic affairs as a social and indeed religious issue rather than as a moral scandal. «Monasteries required the friendship of the secular nobility for their maintenance and growth, and... monasteries in turn fulfilled a noble's need to find salvation through adopting a way of life - either vicariously or in person - uniquely differentiated from his own», Bouchard wrote in 1987⁴⁶. Interaction was the watchword. Although it is certainly part of the medieval monastic phenomenon, we are nevertheless authorized to ask why "interaction" was the emphasis of the new historiography. Let me hazard some guesses. The theme partook of the interest in lay religiosity that began in European historiography in the 1970s⁴⁷. But, while European historians concentrated on the urban laity and its needs, Americans looked at the aristocratic elites, which in most instances were in fact the laypeople most involved with Benedictine and Cistercian monasticism. New tolerance, if not real sympathy, for the medieval aristocracy reflected the declining attractiveness of Marxism and its disdain for the directing, feudal classes⁴⁸. Emphasis on "interaction" also grew out of the conviction, present in social and anthropological theory, that societies are organic wholes, that many seemingly simple acts (such a lay gifts to monasteries) have multiple and multi-layered meanings, and that religion is part of a larger cultural system⁴⁹.

This last point leads to the second major contribution of the 1980s social-monastic movement: its interest in and exploration of theory to illuminate the phenomenon of medieval monasticism. Both White and I were much influenced by Marcel Mauss's theory of gift-exchange and the subsequent anthropological literature inspired by it, while White also utilized concepts about status from Max Weber and ideas about kinship structures postulated by contemporary social theorists. Lester Little's 1993 study of the liturgy of maledictions, which situated the ritual of cursing within the Benedictine monastic context, used the linguistic philosopher John Austin's notion of «performative utterances». Thereafter, Austin has become one of the select group of theorists whom medievalists read⁵⁰. Bouchard, resolutely non-theoretical, nevertheless ended up building

⁴³ STEPHEN D. WHITE, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The 'Laudatio Parentum' in Western France, 1050-1150*, Chapel Hill 1988; BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1049*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1989.

⁴⁴ CONSTANCE B. BOUCHARD, *Holy Entrepreneurs: Cistercians, Knights, and Economic Exchange in Twelfth-Century Burgundy*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1991.

⁴⁵ PHYLLIS G. JESTICE, *Wayward Monks and the Religious Revolution of the Eleventh Century*, Leiden 1997. The same must be said Constable's, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, but Constable never partook of the rage for charters.

⁴⁶ BOUCHARD, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ ANDRE VAUCHEZ, *La Spiritualité du Moyen Age occidental, VIIIe-XIIIe siècles*, Paris, 1975; G. G. MEERSSEMAN, *Ordo Fraternalitatis: confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo*, 3 vols., Rome 1977. For further discussion and bibliography, see LITTLE and ROSENWEIN, *Debating the Middle Ages*, pp. 303-4 and SHARON FARMER and BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN (eds.), *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society*, Ithaca, N.Y. 2000, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Marxism in fact held little sway over American medievalists, even in its heyday (the 1960s), when it provided theoretical ballast for other sorts of historians. Perhaps, then, medievalists of the 1980s were simply once again picking up on French trends: Duby, for example, had been influenced by Marxism in the decade between 1955 and 1965 but by the 1980s was portraying medieval knights with empathy: GEORGES DUBY, *History Continues*, ARTHUR GOLDHAMMER (trans.), Chicago 1994, pp. 62-65 (Marxist phase); chap. 15 (knights); ID., *Guillaume le Maréchal, ou, le meilleur chevalier du monde*, Paris 1984.

⁴⁹ MARCEL MAUSS, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, IAN CUNNISON (trans.), London 1970; CLIFFORD GEERTZ, *Religion as a Cultural System*, in MICHAEL BANTON (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London 1966 (Association of Social Anthropologists Monographs 3), pp. 1-42.

⁵⁰ LESTER K. LITTLE, *Benedictine Maledictions: Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1993, pp. 113-18. John Austin is cited (with a nod to Little) in THOMAS HEAD, *Saints, Heretics, and Fire: Finding Meaning through the Ordeal*, in *Monks and Nuns*, pp. 231-232.

on the edifice raised by Mauss when she wrote:

An examination of Cistercian records reveals that for the Cistercian too establishing social ties, either ties between laymen and monks through gifts and other forms of economic exchange, or ties between different laymen as they all witnessed various transactions together, was a vital part of what might at first glance appear to be only material interactions⁵¹.

The anthropologists have clearly triumphed here.

A third contribution of the social-monastic group has been, perhaps ironically, to call the objectivity of its chief source - monastic charters - into question. The issue is more subtle than the distinction between authenticity and forgery. The legal formulae of charters contain at least one, and sometimes more, embedded discourses about power, ownership, right, and ritual. These reflect the unspoken agendas of those who drew up or otherwise participated in the charters' making. In my own work, I discovered a give-and-take gift-giving system that was utterly hidden by the individual charters of Cluny though it could be discovered by viewing the charters in series. A similar point may be made for Stephen White's study of the *laudatio parentum*, where shifting family members in witness lists are explained not as "objective" statements about kin networks but as choices made by individuals deciding whether or not to participate in any given transaction. In Lester Little's work, the formulae of maledictions are performative rather than normative: they come to life to effect what they threaten. In Patrick Geary's work, the monks who draw up monastic charters and cartularies pick and choose what will be remembered and how, consigning other facts to oblivion⁵².

Yet, despite its contributions and intellectual fecundity, in the course of the 1990s, the social-monastic movement has more or less unraveled by now. While in Europe research is generally institutionalized - monastic history being carried out either by members of religious orders or within specialized organizations such as the centers at Münster and Dresden or *Groupements de recherche* in France - in North America it tends to depend largely on individual preferences. Although the American women's movement continues to galvanize a large number of medieval historians to look at women's monasticism, the social-monastic group adheres to no political agenda and appears to be dispersing. Thus, while Bouchard continues to produce editions of monastic cartularies at an astonishing rate, her latest books are on chivalry, the medieval family, and twelfth-century intellectuals⁵³. White's work, always contributions to legal history as well as monasticism, is now focused on trial scenes in Old French literary texts. Lester Little is now interested in the seventh-century plague. Constance Berman, while about to publish a new book on the Cistercians, is meanwhile turning to the issue of women's contribution to the commercial revolution⁵⁴. My own work, while touching on monasticism in my most recent book, *Negotiating Space*, is now largely focused on the issue of emotions in the early Middle Ages⁵⁵.

Charters continue to be exploited, but the trend now is to use them in a new kind of political

⁵¹ BOUCHARD, *Holy Entrepreneurs*, p. 176.

⁵² PATRICK J. GEARY, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium*, Princeton, N.J. 1994, esp. chaps. 3 and 4; ID., *Monastic Memory and the Mutation of the Year Thousand*, in *Monks and Nuns*, chap. 1.

⁵³ Her most recent books: CONSTANCE BRITAIN BOUCHARD (ed.), *The Cartulary of St.-Marcel-lès-Chalon, 779-1126*, Cambridge, Mass 1998 (Medieval Academy Books, 102) and *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1998. Forthcoming are *Those of my Blood: Constructing Noble Families in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia and *Every Valley Shall be Exalted: The Tension of Opposites in Twelfth-Century Thought*, Ithaca, N.Y.

⁵⁴ CONSTANCE HOFFMANN BERMAN, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Philadelphia 2000. For her recent work on Cistercian nuns, see *Abbeys for Cistercian Nuns in the Ecclesiastical Province of Sens: Foundation, Endowment and Economic Activities of the Earlier Foundations*, «Revue Mabillon», 69 (1997), pp. 83-113. Her project on women in the economy is entitled «After the Millennium: Women and the Economy in Eleventh-Century Europe».

⁵⁵ BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1999.

history - explorations of discourses of power in micro-environments - rather than in social-monastic studies per se⁵⁶. Interest in the interplay of society and religion has certainly not waned, but it is now focused more on non-monastic phenomena. Articles on religion and society recently written for a *Festschrift* for Lester Little cover the cult of the saints, saintly cursing, miracle stories, lay piety, the uses of religious imagery in warfare, and the meaning of poverty and disease in religious discourse. Characteristically, of the four articles on monasticism, two are about women and the cloister⁵⁷.

Thus, monastic source materials remain important, but often to pursue topics that belong more to cultural or social matters than to monasticism per se. I do not mean to suggest that interest in medieval monasticism is dying in North America, however. Publications on Cistercian topics remain vigorous; Cluny continues to fascinate; the connections between the Gregorian reform and its monastic roots retain their siren call; and there will always be historians interested in the new monasticism of the twelfth century⁵⁸. Future directions of research are as yet only dimly visible. One may be a turn away from French monasticism to that of Germany and Spain. This is part of a larger North American trend in general, as the Spanish and formerly East German archives, newly opened up, beckon young graduate students and older researchers alike with their extraordinary riches. Of the twenty-eight dissertations written in the last ten years on medieval monasticism, five (18%) touch on Germany or Lotharingia, one (4%) on Spain. That compares with only twelve dissertations on monasteries in the previous ten years, of which only two (16%) covered Germany and none Spain⁵⁹. The jump in numbers of dissertations on the topic of monasticism show that there is no falling off of interest. The geographical trends, if such they be, are as yet indecisive. Another new direction in research may be interdisciplinary. Roberta Gilchrist has recently published a book on archaeology and nunneries, while collaborative work on Cluny's customs is underway by the historian Isabelle Cochelin of the University of Toronto and the musicologist Susan Boynton of the University of Oregon⁶⁰.

Topics for a North American conference on the historiography of monasticism would almost certainly include Beguines, anchorites, and friars. The first two would be on the program because of the keen interest in religious women, and all three would be there because of the relative disinterest (in North American) in adhering to official Church definitions of monasticism⁶¹. On the other hand, with regard to the latter, official groups, it is quite remarkable how limited in certain ways the horizons of North American monasticism has been. If Cluny and Cîteaux have figured

⁵⁶ See, for example, JEFFREY A. BOWMAN, *Do Neo-Romans Curse? Law, Land, and Ritual in the Midi (900-1100)*, «Viator», 28 (1997), pp. 1-32; *Thomas Head, *Speculum*

⁵⁷ The *Festschrift* is *Monks and Nuns*.

⁵⁸ On Cistercians, CONSTANCE H. BERMAN, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Philadelphia 2000. On Cluny: Brent Hardy, a student of Stephen White, is writing a dissertation on the informal relations between abbots and monks; see also ISABELLE COCHELIN, *Etude sur les hiérarchies monastiques: le prestige de l'ancienneté et son éclipse dans le Cluny de la fin du XIe siècle*. On monasticism and the Gregorian reform, JESTICE, *Wayward Monks*; On the "new monasticism", CONSTABLE, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, though this is a reworking of lecture delivered in 1985.

⁵⁹ These statistics were derived from information in the on-line Dissertation Abstracts. Other researchers may come up with slightly different numbers depending on how narrowly they construe the topic of monasticism. Susan Rabe, whose first book was on Saint-Riquier (SUSAN A. RABE, *Faith, Art, and Politics at Saint-Riquier: The Symbolic Vision of Angilbert*, Philadelphia 1995), has changed focus in her next study: *The Dragon and the Lamb: Apocalypse and the Construction of Identity in Early Medieval Spain*.

⁶⁰ ROBERTA GILCHRIST, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women*, London 1994 (Gilchrist is a Canadian trained in England). SUSAN BOYNTON and ISABELLE COCHELIN, *The Customary of Bernard of Cluny*. See also ADAM S. COHEN, *The Art of Reform in a Bavarian Nunnery around 1000*, «Speculum», 74 (1999), pp. 992-1020.

⁶¹ Evidence of the current popularity of these groups: ANN K. WARREN, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*, Berkeley 1985; CAROL NEEL, *The Origins of the Beguines*, «Signs», 14 (1989), pp. 321-41; ELIZABETH MARIE PANZER, *Cistercian Women and the Beguines: Interaction, Cooperation and Interdependence*, Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison 1994; KATHERINE JANE GILL, *Penitents, Pinzochere and Mantellate: Varieties of Women's Religious Communities in Central Italy, c. 1300-1520*, Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1994. ROBERTA A. MCKELVIE, *Retrieving a Living Tradition: Angelina of Montegiove, Franciscan, Tertiary, Beguine*, New York, 1997. AMY M. HOLLYWOOD, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*, South Bend 1996 (Studies in Spirituality and Theology 1). Both Beguines and anchorites are included in GILCHRIST, *Gender and Material Culture*.

importantly, if Fontevrault has attracted a good deal of attention⁶², if English Benedictine and Norman houses have their historians, and if some of the twelfth century Italian orders - such as the Camaldoli and Vallombrosians - have their American researchers, nevertheless, it is impossible to find much interest at all in many of the monastic groups taken up at this convegno. No one seems to be working on the Damianites (though there is keen interest in Clare herself); no one is interested in Montevergine or the Olivetans, nor even the Florensi (though Robert Lerner is about to publish a book on Joachim of Fiore) nor the Celestines (though Robert Brentano is working on Peter of Morrone)⁶³. In North America, monasticism more or less stops with the twelfth-century reformation. After that, interest turns to the friars. But perhaps this twelfth-century bias will change - perhaps the thirteenth century will be added to the Spanish and German sources as part of the "new frontier" that American monastic historiography will traverse in the twenty-first century. After all, when one views monasticism from afar, it takes only a slight shift to find a new focus.

⁶² LORAIN N. SIMMONS, *The Abbey Church at Fontevraud in the Later Twelfth Century: Anxiety, Authority, and Architecture in the Female Spiritual Life*, «Gesta», 31 (1992), pp. 99-107; CARL KELSO JR., *Women in Power: Fontevrault and the Paraclete Compared*, «Comitatus», 22 (1991), pp. 55-69.

⁶³ ROBERT LERNER, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: The Joachite Millennium and the Jews*, Philadelphia; ROBERT BRENTANO, *Sulmona Society and the Miracles of Peter of Morrone*, in *Monks and Nuns*, chap. 4.