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Siblings and the Sexes within the Medieval Religious Life[1]

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In 1156, the German visionary Elisabeth of Schönau received a series of revelations concerning Saint Ursula, whose body, together with some of the eleven thousand virgins supposedly martyred alongside her, had allegedly been discovered in a cemetery just outside the city walls of Cologne. Elisabeth's revelations, which were prompted by the arrival at Schönau of two bodies from Cologne (one male and one female), resulted in one of her most controversial and certainly most popular works, the *Liber revelationum*. Prompted to investigate the Cologne discovery by "certain men of good repute," Elisabeth reports that she was visited first by Saint Verena and then by Saint Caesarius, cousins whose bodies had come to rest at Schönau. The two regaled her with stories of the martyrs' journey from Britain to Cologne and confirmed for her the authenticity of their relics. Such confirmation was necessary: Elisabeth admits that she had initially been skeptical of the association with Ursula, since male as well as female bones had been discovered in the Cologne cemetery. "Like others who read the history of the British virgins," she confesses, "I thought that that blessed society made their pilgrimage without the escort of any men."[2] The bones of men, intermingled with those of women whose very sanctity depended on their virginity, caused Elisabeth no small discomfort. Pressing her saintly visitors on this point, Elisabeth nevertheless received assurance that although many men had indeed accompanied the women, they had done so licitly, primarily as members of the women's families.

Elisabeth's willingness to accept that the companionship of male relatives had not compromised the purity of the virgin martyrs has important implications for the study of medieval monasticism and, above all, for our understanding of relations between the sexes within the religious life of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. During Elisabeth's lifetime, the involvement

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[2]*Liber revelationum Elisabeth de sacro exercitu virginum Coloniensium*, 3; ed. F. W. E. Roth, *Die Visionen der hl. Elisabeth und die Schriften der Aebte Ekbert und Emecho von Schönau* (Brünn: Verlag der Studien aus dem Benedictiner- und Cistercienser-Orden, 1884), 124; trans. Anne L. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 215.

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of women in the monastic life increased dramatically—indeed, the number of monasteries for women in western Europe alone grew four-fold in the century leading up to her death in the 1160s, with some decades witnessing as many as 50 new foundations.[3] And yet, despite the obvious attraction of women to the religious life and the dramatic upsurge in houses for women during this period, there is a sense that this was a difficult time for religious women, a time when the church reform movement—with its increased attention to the enforcement of clerical celibacy—brought about creeping limitations on women's autonomy and spiritual opportunity.[4] One measure of the challenges facing religious women lies in the increased anxiety that surrounded contact between the sexes within the religious life. According to the prevailing rhetoric of the period, the separation of the sexes was essential for individual spiritual advancement; religious men in particular were encouraged to maintain their distance from women, who often appear as temptresses in monastic literature. As a result, male monastic orders appear to have limited their contact with women, withdrawing from women or denying them the crucial spiritual and material services (the *cura monialium*) that only a priest could provide.[5]

[3]Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890–1215* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 54. For a survey of female monastic communities in the Rhineland during the twelfth century, see Franz J. Felten, "Frauenklöster und –stifte im Rheinland im 12. Jahrhundert," in *Reformidee und Reformpolitik im spätsalisch-frühstaufischen Reich*, ed. Stefan Weinfurter (Mainz: Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1992), 189–300.

[4]For a brief survey of the campaign to abolish priestly marriage, see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 214–223. Anne Barstow argues that efforts to abolish priestly marriage coincided with an increase in clerical misogyny: Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1982), 178–180. According to Jo Ann McNamara, the "Gregorian revolution aimed at a church virtually free of women at every level but the lowest stratum of the married laity": Jo Ann McNamara, "The 'Herrenfrage': The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3–29, 7. The coincidence of reform and decline for religious women is argued in Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[5]On the *cura monialium*, see Klaus Schreiner, "Seelsorge in Frauenklöstern—Sakramentale Dienste, geistliche Erbauung, ethische Disziplinierung," in *Krone und Schleier: Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern*, ed. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn und dem Ruhrlandmuseum Essen (Munich: Hirmer, 2005), 53–65; Fiona J. Griffiths, "Brides and *Dominae*: Abelard's *Cura monialium* at the Augustinian Monastery of Marbach," *Viator* 34 (2003), 57–88; Fiona J. Griffiths, "'Men's Duty to Provide for Women's Needs': Abelard, Heloise, and their Negotiation of the *Cura monialium*," *Journal of Medieval History* 30:1 (March 2004), 1–24; Julie Hotchin, "Female Religious Life and the *Cura Monialium* in Hirsau Monasticism, 1080 to 1150," in *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 59–83; Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order, c. 1130–c. 1300* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 71–137; *Les religieuses dans*

It is against this backdrop that the visions of Elisabeth of Schönau are so important. As Elisabeth's visions demonstrate, alongside the drive toward sexual segregation within the religious life there was an alternate spiritual possibility, one in which contact between the sexes was not only acceptable, but could even be mutually advantageous.[6] As we have seen, Elisabeth's saintly visitor Verena confirmed that men as well as women had been martyred at Cologne. Moreover, the men had benefited from their proximity to women, drawing inspiration from their courage and devotion, and ultimately earning sainthood alongside them.[7] Nevertheless, the men's chief purpose in accompanying the women had been to provide spiritual care for them.[8] In several cases, the male martyrs were also bishops, who furnished the women with the sacraments during the course of their travels. In every case, however, the male-female relationship—admittedly treacherous spiritual territory—was legitimized through blood ties: the men were brothers, cousins, and uncles of the saintly women.[9]

I. Spiritual and Biological Family in Early Christian Thought

The presence of men among the company of virgin martyrs and the centrality of family ties to Elisabeth's explanation for their presence raise important questions concerning the role of biological families within the overarching spiritual "family" that the Christian community—and above all the monastery—was

le cloître et dans le monde des origines à nos jours, Actes du Deuxième Colloque International du C.E.R.C.O.R. Poitiers, 29 Septembre–2 Octobre 1988 (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 1994), 331–391; and Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 76–115.

[6]Barbara Newman writes that Elisabeth's revelations present a "vision of religious life as a glorious, equal-opportunity venture in which women and men could provide mutual aid and comfort": Barbara Newman, "Preface," in Clark, trans., *The Complete Works*, xvii. Franz Felten notes the importance of Elisabeth's visions for the light they shed on life within the double monastery at Schönau: Felten, "Frauenklöster und –stifte," 269. For a study of Elisabeth's visions against the backdrop of the double monastery, see Joachim Kemper, "Das benediktinische Doppelkloster Schönau und die Visionen Elisabeths von Schönau," *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 54:1 (2002), 55–102.

[7]Caesarius reports that Verena "strengthened me to undergo martyrdom and I, seeing her steadfastness in agony, suffered together with her": *Liber revelationum*, 3; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 124; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 214.

[8]According to one explanation, Ursula's father had arranged that bishops from Britain accompany the women on their initial journey in order to provide "comfort" for the virgins: *Liber revelationum*, 6; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 126; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 217.

[9]Bishop Maurisus was martyred with his nieces Babila and Juliana; Archbishop James of Antioch with his nieces; and the Greek bishop Marculus with his niece, Constantia, whom he had brought to Ursula in order to safeguard her virginity: *Liber revelationum*, 10, 9, 14; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 128, 128, 130; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 219, 218, 221–222.

thought to constitute. While contact between men and women within the medieval religious life was never easy, Elisabeth's account of the martyrs of Cologne suggests that it could be acceptable, provided that the men and women concerned were biological kin. Of course, Elisabeth herself may have had more than a passing interest in the legitimizing quality of kinship ties: she maintained a close relationship with her brother Ekbert throughout her life, even prompting him to join her in the religious life at the double monastery of Schönau, where he served as her secretary and aide until her death.[10]

Nevertheless, the pointed celebration of family that appears in Elisabeth's Cologne visions stands in sharp contrast to a long-standing tradition within Christian thought of ambivalence concerning natural, or biological, family. According to early Christians, believers were united by ties of spiritual kinship, which superseded the bonds of biological kinship. Jesus himself championed such a view, commenting that "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50; cf. Mark 3:34–35, Luke 8:21). Elsewhere, Jesus spoke out even more strongly against biological family, counseling followers to reject blood ties entirely and declaring that "if anyone comes to me, and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26; cf. Mark 10:29, Matt. 19:29). According to this teaching, biological kinship was not simply inferior to its spiritual counterpart but in fact posed an active obstacle to true discipleship.[11]

[10]For a discussion of Ekbert's role and his influence on Elisabeth's life and visions, see John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 25–44; Anne L. Clark, "Repression or Collaboration? The Case of Elisabeth and Ekbert of Schönau," in Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl, eds., *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution and Rebellion, 1000–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 151–167; Anne L. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: A Twelfth-Century Visionary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 130; Anne L. Clark, "Holy Woman or Unworthy Vessel? The Representations of Elisabeth of Schönau," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 35–51. Ekbert was at Elisabeth's side when she died and recorded the details of her death in a quasi-hagiographic text, *De obitu domine Elisabeth*, which he composed for female relatives at the Augustinian community of Andernach.

[11]According to Elizabeth Clark, the rise of Christianity was accompanied by a "blow to 'family values'" as church fathers extolled the ascetic renunciation of both marriage and family: Elizabeth A. Clark, "Antifamilial Tendencies in Ancient Christianity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5:3 (January 1995), 356–380, 358. For the argument that late antique Christian discourse was not entirely anti-family, see Andrew S. Jacobs, "'Let Him Guard *Pietas*': Early Christian Exegesis and the Ascetic Family," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11:3 (Fall 2003), 265–281; and Rebecca Krawiec, "'From the Womb of the Church': Monastic Families," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11:3 (Fall 2003), 283–307. On the centrality of the family to early monasticism, see also Susanna Elm, "Formen des Zusammenlebens männlicher und weiblicher Asketen im östlichen Mittelmeerraum während des vierten Jahrhunderts nach Christus," in *Doppelklöster und andere Formen der Symbiose männlicher und weiblicher Religiosen im Mittelalter*, eds. Kaspar Elm and Michel Parisse (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1992), 13–24. On late antique household monasticism, see Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making*

Elisabeth's close ties with her brother Ekbert, together with the spirited defense of family that emerges from her Cologne visions, offers a robust challenge to this image of a Christianity in which biological ties presented little more than an obstacle for the holy man or woman to overcome. Even so, her defense of family, and in particular of the blamelessness of male-female kin relations, was not her own creation but formed part of a medieval tradition—rooted in late antiquity—in which kinship bonds could be privileged as a legitimate context for contact between ascetic men and women. Already in the fourth century, the Synod of Elvira had ruled that bishops and other clerics should allow their daughters and sisters to live with them, provided that these women had vowed themselves to God.[12] Some years later at Nicaea, the assembled church leaders declared that while clerics were to refrain from entertaining unrelated women in their homes, they could nevertheless continue to welcome their "mother or sister or aunt," explicitly claiming that these women were above suspicion.[13]

The validation of family ties expressed in these two councils reflects one side of an ongoing debate within early Christian communities concerning both the proper stance of believers toward their biological families and the ideal relationship between men and women within the newly constituted spiritual "family." Neither topic was without controversy. Although Jesus had taught that all believers were joined to him—and thus to each other—by ties of spiritual kinship, there was nevertheless considerable concern regarding the conduct of spiritual siblings, the so-called "brothers" and "sisters" to whom the apostle Paul had addressed himself.[14] Close friendships between these men and women were routinely viewed with suspicion and even denounced

of Asceticism in Late Antiquity (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 263–5; and, with a particular focus on women, the essays by Kate Cooper in *Household, Women, and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, eds. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

[12]Synod of Elvira (306), canon 27; ed. J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum, nova et amplissima collectio*, 54 vols. (Paris: H. Welter, 1901–1927; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960–61), 2:10.

[13]First Council of Nicaea (325), canon 3; ed. and trans. Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:7. The catalogue of "acceptable" kinswomen published at Nicaea was repeated by many other church councils—East and West—in subsequent years. Hans Achelis, *Virgines subintroductae: ein Beitrag zum VII. Kapitel des I. Korintherbriefs* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902), 69–70. For a list of councils forbidding clerics to live with women unrelated to them, see Pierre de Labriolle, "Le 'mariage spirituel' dans l'antiquité chrétienne," *Revue historique* 137 (May–August 1921), 204–225, 222.

[14]On the concept of fictive, or spiritual, kinship within early Christianity, see the essays in C*onstructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (New York: Routledge, 1997).

by skeptical observers who doubted that such friendships could have a spiritual purpose.[15] The danger that spiritual brothers and sisters might overstep the limits of acceptable affection was made clear in Clement of Alexandria's fear that even the ritual kiss of peace might, through "unrestrained use," cause "shameful suspicions and slanders."[16]

In response to these concerns, some Christian writers and church leaders seem to have celebrated and even promoted the biological family as an alternate, and legitimate, context for relations between the sexes within the ascetic life. Spiritual kinship—the rhetorical underpinnings of early Christian communities—was no longer sufficient to shield ascetics from scrutiny, as the early fourth-century Council of Ancyra explicitly ruled: "We prohibit those virgins, who live together with men as if they were their brothers, from doing so."[17] In lieu of spiritual brotherhood, chaste men and women were encouraged to forge ties with blood kin, who—given similarities in age and lifespan—were most often biological siblings.[18]

II. Brothers and Sisters in Late Antique Monastic Practice

In keeping with the promotion of family within certain segments of late antique Christian society, some saints' lives celebrate men's attention to the spiritual lives of their sisters, implicitly condoning, and even advancing, the legitimacy of the sibling bond. Antony and Pachomius, both founding fathers of monasticism, were each associated by their biographers with a sister, for whom they were reputed to have shown particular care. Athanasius's fourth-century *Life* of Antony records that, before adopting the

[15]In particular, church leaders opposed the cohabitation of priests with women, who were known as *sunesaktai* or, in Latin, *virgines subintroductae*: Achelis, *Virgines subintroductae*; and Hans Achelis, "Agapetae," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, 13 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1961), 1:177–180.

[16]Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, 3.11.81; ed. C. Mondésert and C. Matray, *Le Pédagogue*, Sources chrétiennes no. 158 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 156–157; cited in Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1. That the fraternity of unrelated "brothers" and "sisters" could be perceived as "promiscuous" is discussed by Brown, *The Body and Society*, 140–159.

[17]Council of Ancyra (314), canon 19; ed. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum*, 2:520. On the conflation of metaphorical kinship (which was not necessarily chaste) and biological kinship, see John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994), 131–135.

[18]On the significance of biological siblings within medieval kinship networks, see Didier Lett, "Brothers and Sisters: New Perspectives on Medieval Family History," in *Hoping for Continuity: Childhood, Education and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Katarina Mustakallio (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2005), 13–23. For a survey of relationships between saintly siblings (brother-sister and sister-sister) in the early Middle Ages, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500–1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 271–305.

religious life himself, the saint ensured his sister's future, placing her with a group of religious women.[19] Pachomius's biographer records that he demonstrated even greater concern for his sister, identified in the *Bohairic Life* as Maria, ultimately incorporating her into the religious life that he had chosen. Although he had initially refused to see her when she visited him in the desert, Pachomius later installed Maria as the head of a female community that was twinned with his male one.[20] Moreover, he guaranteed the viability of this new female community, sending brothers to build the women's monastery, selecting an old man named Apa Peter to provide for their spiritual needs, and furnishing them with a copy of his rule for monks.[21] Pachomius's community maintained close ties with Maria's foundation although the two were physically separate: according to Palladius, when one of the women died, her body was brought to the male house and buried in the men's own tombs.[22]

The importance of the sibling bond, and its centrality to the monastic life and, above all, to the emergence of "double" or "paired" monasteries,[23] is confirmed in the fourth-century *Life* of Macrina. Bereaved of her fiancé at the age of twelve, Macrina claimed the dignity of widowhood and disdained further talk of marriage, shutting herself up in the family home, which

[19]Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony*, 3; ed. and trans. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Vie d'Antoine* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 134–5; trans. Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Cistercian Studies Series 202 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 2003), 61.

[20]*The Bohairic Life*, 27; *The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples*, trans. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3 vols., Cistercian Studies Series 45–47 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1980–1982), 1:49–51. On Pachomian foundations for women, see Elm, *Virgins of God*, 289–296. For a discussion of women's involvement in the early monastic life, see McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*, 61–88.

[21]Despite his support for his sister's religious life, Pachomius's rule established that no monk should visit the women's community "unless he has there a mother, sister, or daughter, some relatives or cousins, or the mother of his own children": *Rule*, 143; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 2:166–7. The *Bohairic Life* further notes that only brothers "who had not yet attained perfection" could visit a relative in the women's community: *The Bohairic Life*, 27; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koininia*, 1:50.

[22]Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 33, 1; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 2:129. See also *The Bohairic Life*, 27; trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koininia*, 1:51.

[23]On double communities, see Stephan Hilpisch, *Die Doppelklöster: Entstehung und Organisation* (Münster in Westf.: Aschendorff, 1928); Catherine Rosanna Peyroux, *Abbess and Cloister: Double Monasteries in the Early Medieval West* (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1991); Stephanie Haarländer, "'Schlangen unter den Fischen': Männliche und weibliche Religiosen in Doppelklöstern des hohen Mittelalters," in *Frauen und Kirche*, ed. Sigrid Schmitt, Mainzer Vorträge 6 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002), 55–69; and the essays in *Doppelklöster*, eds. Elm and Parisse. On the methodological problems associated with the study of double monasteries, see Elsanne Gilomen-Schenkel, "Das Doppelkloster—eine verschwiegene Institution. Engelberg und andere Beispiele aus dem Umkreis der Helvetia Sacra," in *Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige* 101 (1990), 197–211. For criticisms of the term "double monastery," see Sharon K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), xvii–xviii; and Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin*, 101–102.

became the basis for a small religious community.[24] Significantly, this community included both sexes. In addition to Macrina's mother, who soon joined her, Macrina raised her youngest brother, Peter, in the religious life; as her biographer and brother, Gregory of Nyssa, notes, "She became everything for the little boy: father, teacher, tutor, mother, counsellor in all that was good."[25] That Peter lived among the holy women demonstrates that there was initially no segregation of the sexes within Macrina's community.[26] The mixed religious life of Macrina's community likely inspired a further brother, Basil the Great: the monastery that he founded, not far from Macrina's house at Annisa, likewise included both men and women, as well as children, in separate houses.[27]

When monasticism was carried to the west, the association of brothers and sisters went, too. John Cassian, who introduced monasticism to southern Gaul in the early fifth century, devoted attention to both sexes, establishing a monastery for men as well as one for women—possibly for his sister—near Marseilles.[28] Just a few miles further west, Caesarius of Arles founded communities for both men and women, placing his sister, Caesaria,

[24]Rousseau assesses the domestic versus the institutional character of Macrina's community, concluding that the community was primarily an "extended family": Philip Rousseau, "The Pious Household and the Virgin Chorus: Reflections on Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13:2 (Summer 2005), 165–186.

[25]Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita sanctae Macrinae*, 12; ed. and trans. Pierre Maraval, *Vie de sainte Macrine*, Sources chrétiennes, no. 178 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 182–3; trans. Joan M. Petersen, *Handmaids of the Lord: Contemporary Descriptions of Feminine Asceticism in the First Six Christian Centuries*, Cistercian Studies Series 143 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1996), 61.

[26]Peter later became head of the male portion of the double community: Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita sanctae Macrinae*, 37; ed. and trans. Maraval, 258–9; trans. Petersen, *Handmaids of the Lord*, 80.

[27]Anna M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23–24. Silvas writes that the example of Macrina's religious life "cannot but have been a material factor in Basil's own turn, or preferably *re*-turn, to Scripture and in the resultant 'Christianization' of his ascetic discourse" (92). Susanna Elm writes that "it is reasonable to suggest that Basil and Macrina developed their ideas in continuous exchanges, although we do not possess a single source by her alone." Indeed, she notes that Basil "seems to have considered Macrina's community as model": Elm, *Virgins of God*, 102, 104, n. 90. Nevertheless, Basil's rule for monks warns against entanglement with family members who remain in the world and sets forth strict guidelines concerning contact between consecrated men and women: Saint Basil, *The Long Rules*, 32–33; trans. Silvas, *The Asketikon*, 233–236.

[28]Gennadius of Marseilles writes that Cassian founded two monasteries "id est virorum et mulierum." Gennadius of Marseilles, *De viris inlustribus*, 62; ed. Ernest Cushing Richardson, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 14.1 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1896), 82. Cassian's relationship with his sister is somewhat obscure: Columba Stewart writes that "of family members he mentions only a sister who remained somehow part of his monastic life" (4). *Cassian the Monk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4–5, 16. Although he recognized the tradition that monks were to shun women and bishops, Cassian admits that he had been unable to avoid (*vitare*) his sister: *De institutis coenobiorum*, 11.18; ed. and trans. Jean-Claude Guy, *Institutions cénobitiques*, Sources chrétiennes no. 109 (Paris: Cerf, 2001 [1965]), 444–445.

as abbess over the female house.[29] In addition to writing a letter to her on the religious life, Caesarius penned a rule for the women.[30] Although the male and the female communities were physically separate,[31] Caesarius envisioned himself in death not among the men, but among the women; Caesaria was buried alongside the tomb that was destined for Caesarius.[32] In Spain, the brothers Leander and Isidore—both bishops of Seville—maintained similarly warm relations with their sister, Florentina, a woman professed to the religious life. Leander, who had been a monk before being elevated to the bishopric, composed a rule to guide Florentina in her religious life, while Isidore dedicated his *De fide catholica contra Judaeos* to her.[33] Like Caesarius, these brothers also chose to be joined with their sister in death.

As these examples suggest, holy men were also men who had families, and often sisters who—in some cases—required their support in the religious life. In other cases, sisters like Macrina blazed a spiritual trail for the rest of the family to follow. Some men, like Gregory of Nyssa, memorialized their sisters in biographical accounts of their holy lives.[34] Others, like Pachomius and Caesarius, presided over double communities (or paired communities) in which their sisters held authority over the women.[35] Often these men also wrote rules governing the religious life for women, as Caesarius and

[29]Caesarius initially sent his sister to a monastery in Marseille (presumably Cassian's foundation for women) in order that she might be "a pupil before becoming a teacher": *Vita Caesarii*, 1. 35; ed. Germain Morin, *Sancti Caesarii episcopi arelatensis Opera omnia*, 2 vols. (Maredsous, 1937–42), 2:310. On Caesarius, see William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[30]Caesarius, Ep. 21; ed. Morin, *Opera*, 2:134–144; trans. William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life, Testament, Letters*, Translated Texts for Historians 19 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 129–139. Caesarius, *Regula sanctarum virginum*; ed. Morin, *Opera*, 2:99–124; trans. Maria Caritas McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with Critical Introduction* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1960).

[31]The separation of the two communities was in keeping with canon 28 of the early sixth-century Council of Agde: ed. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, 8:329. In his letter 21, Caesarius wrote to his sister and her companions, warning them vehemently against the dangers of contact with the opposite sex: Ep. 21, 3; ed. Morin, *Opera*, 2:137; trans. Klingshirn, 131–132.

[32]*Vita Caesarii*, 1, 58; ed. Morin, *Opera*, 2:320; trans. Klingshirn, 39. Caesarius's death and burial in the basilica of St. Mary is described in *Vita Caesarii* 2, 50; ed. Morin, *Opera*, 2:345; trans. Klingshirn, 65.

[33]Leander, *De institutione virginum*; PL 72:873–894; trans. Claude W. Barlow, *Iberian fathers*, 3 vols., The Fathers of the Church, vol. 62, 63, 99 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1969), 1:183–228. Isidore, *De fide catholica contra Judaeos*; PL 83:449.

[34]Gregory of Nyssa's friend, Gregory Nazianzus, also memorialized his sister, Gorgonia, composing a funeral oration for her: Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 8; ed. and trans. C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952 [1890–1900]), 7:238–245.

[35]For other examples of early medieval double monasteries founded by brother-sister pairs, see Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 275–278.

Leander, as well as several others, did.[36] Although we rarely know very much about these sisters, some men, like Basil the Great, may well have derived spiritual inspiration from their sisters' piety. Men's devotion to their sisters was often confirmed in death: Gregory of Nyssa wrapped Macrina's body in his own grave clothes, while Caesarius of Arles, Leander, and Isidore of Seville chose to be buried alongside their sisters.[37]

III. Benedict and Scholastica

By the twelfth century, when Elisabeth of Schönau received her Cologne visions, the early encouragement of family ties had been buttressed by centuries of Christian tradition, rendering contact between siblings something of a cliché, especially within the biographies of male saints.[38] Although not all male saints were associated with a sister (and some holy men continued to avoid female relatives),[39] the persistence with which sisters appear in the recorded *Lives* of holy men nevertheless raises several important questions. Clearly sisters were thought to play a vital role in the biographies of holy men. What role was that? What work did their presence perform in the spiritual portfolio of the holy man? Why—in short—do they appear so regularly, even when they remain largely shadowy figures? The fact that

[36]Donatus of Besançon composed a rule for the women of Jussanensis, a community founded by his mother, Flavia, and in which his sister Siruda also lived: Jo Ann McNamara and John Halborg, *The Ordeal of Community* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1990), 32–73.

[37]Other brother-sister pairs who were buried together include Pope Damasus I and his sister Irene. In an an epitaph composed for Irene's tombstone, Damasus describes his loss at her death: describing Irene pointedly as his *germana* or "blood sister," Damasus writes, "I did not fear her death, since she approached heaven freely/but I confess that I was pained to lose the companionship of her life." "Non timui mortem caelum quod libere adiret/sed dolui, fateor, consortia perdere vitae." *Epitaphius sororis*, ed. Antonius Ferrua, *Epigrammata Damasiana* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1942), 109. Like many other men devoted to their sisters, Damasus was reunited with Irene in death: the *Liber Pontificalis* reports that he was buried "close to his mother and sister": *Liber pontificalis*, 39; ed. Th. Mommsen, *Gestorum Pontificum Romanorum*, I, Libri Pontificalis pars prior, MGH (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898), 84; trans. Raymond Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 30.

[38]Brother-sister relationships were so prominent within the texts of early monasticism that one scholar has remarked, with little exaggeration, "It was almost as important for these mythological heroes of medieval hagiography to have a sister as it is for the President of the United States to have a wife": Pearse Aidan Cusack, "St. Scholastica: Myth or Real Person?" *The Downside Review* 92 (1974), 145–159, 148.

[39]Several *Sayings* of the early desert fathers stress the need for separation not simply from women, but from female relatives as well. That even a man's own mother could threaten his chastity is clear in one account in which a holy man carrying his mother across a river covers his hands with a cloak, explaining to her that "a woman's body is a fire. Simply because I was touching you, the memory of other women might come into my mind": *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 2003), 31. For men who avoided contact even with a female family member, see below, 49–51.

evidence for a sister's very existence is often shallow raises the interesting possibility that she may—in some cases—have been fabricated. Why?

The example of St. Benedict of Nursia is a case in point. Associated with a sister, Scholastica, from the late sixth century, Benedict nonetheless provides an ambiguous example of a brother-sister relationship. The evidence for Scholastica's life is thin—she appears only in Gregory the Great's *Life* of Benedict, and then only in two of its chapters. Nevertheless, her presence in the *Life* launched Scholastica to sainthood and provided the basis for the belief, current by the ninth century, that she and Benedict had been twins.[40]

According to Gregory's short account, Scholastica had been given to the religious life as a child, yet she maintained contact with her famous brother, visiting him once a year at a house not far from Monte Cassino. On the particular occasion that Gregory records, Scholastica and Benedict had spent the day together in worship when dusk began to fall. Realizing that her brother would soon leave her, Scholastica begged him to stay the night and, when he refused, she began to pray, unleashing a torrential rain. When Benedict chastised her, Scholastica responded, invoking God as her advocate (and thereby implying his support for sibling intimacy): "When I appealed to you, you would not listen to me. So I turned to my God and He heard my prayer. Leave now if you can. Leave me here and go back to your monastery." Resigning himself to the delay, Benedict spent the night in a holy vigil with his sister. Three days later Scholastica died, and Benedict sent for her body, which he then put in his own tomb at Monte Cassino. As Gregory concludes, "The bodies of these two were now to share a common resting place, just as in life their souls had always been one in God."[41]

The formulaic nature of Gregory's account—the brother momentarily rejecting the sister (Pachomius) and the burial in a shared tomb (Caesarius and Leander, as well as hints of Pachomius)—raises questions concerning the story's authenticity. To be sure, medieval hagiography was a formulaic enterprise, one in which past exemplars were routinely raided for present purposes. However, the possibility that Benedict did not have a sister or, more to the point, that Scholastica (if she existed) was not his biological sister,[42] raises some important questions. First, if Benedict did not have

[40]For various interpretations of Scholastica's significance in the *Life*, see J. H. Wansbrough, "St. Gregory's Intention in the Stories of St. Scholastica and St. Benedict," *Revue bénédictine* 75 (1965), 145–151; Adalbert de Vogüé, "The Meeting of Benedict and Scholastica: An interpretation," *Cistercian Studies* 18 (1983), 168–183; and Cusack, "St. Scholastica: Myth or Real Person?"

[41]Gregory, *Dialogues*, 2.33.4, 2.34.2; ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, 3 vols., Sources chrétiennes no. 251, 260, 265 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978–1980), 2:232, 234; trans. Odo J. Zimmermann and Benedict R. Avery, *Life and Miracles of St. Benedict: Book Two of the Dialogues* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1980 [1949]), 68, 70.

[42]This is Cusack's conclusion: Cusack, "St. Scholastica: Myth or Real Person?" 159.

a blood sister, and there was no historical person named Scholastica, why did Gregory see the need to invent her?[43] Second, if Scholastica did exist, as a companion, or spiritual "sister," but not a biological sister to Benedict, why did Gregory imply that she was his blood sister—and why was she later revered as his twin?

Answers to these questions point to the centrality of the sibling bond as a privileged form of engagement between men and women within the medieval religious life. The second question is straightforward enough: as we have already seen, relationships between brothers and sisters who were blood relatives were permissible within Christianity, while relationships between unrelated men and women were typically suspect. If Benedict had maintained a close friendship with a holy but unrelated woman, Gregory may have chosen to describe her as his sister in order to emphasize the closeness, and yet the blamelessness, of their bond. "Sisterhood" may be functioning here as a trope—a way for Gregory to talk about Benedict's holy relationship with one particular woman while warding off inevitable accusations of wrongdoing.

The answer to the first question is more complex. If Benedict had neither a sister nor a close female spiritual companion, why might Gregory have chosen to depict him with one? The answer may be that, by the time of writing, carefully prescribed contact with a holy woman—ideally a sister—had become an important element in the spiritual portfolio of a holy man. The pairing of a male saint with a woman (who was sometimes also a saint in her own right, as with Saints Clare and Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century) broadened his appeal and made his story relevant not just to men, but to women as well.[44] While by the thirteenth century it was possible for such contact to be with an unrelated woman (who was nevertheless often described in familial terms, as with Thomas of Cantimpré and his spiritual "mother," Lutgard[45]), in the earlier period such contact was almost always with a family member, and above all with a sister.

Gregory's decision to feature Scholastica in his account of Benedict's *Life*, and to paint her, at least temporarily, as the spiritual superior in the relationship, reflects the accumulated weight of several centuries of Christian tradition concerning the proper interaction of men and women, and of male

[43]Paul Meyvaert makes a case for the historical Scholastica in his review of William D. McCready, *Signs of Sanctity: Miracles in the Thought of Gregory the Great* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989) in *Speculum* 66:2 (April 1991), 446–9, 449.

[44]As Cusack writes, "The introduction of a sister adds to the interest of the story; it gives edification to both sexes and avoids the embarrassment of pairing the saint with a female who is otherwise unrelated to him": Cusack, "St. Scholastica: Myth or Real Person?" 148.

[45]Thomas of Cantimpré, *Vita Lutgardis*, 3.1.3; AASS June III (June 16), 254; trans. Margot King (Toronto: Peregrina, 1991), 90.

and female siblings. It also, importantly, served to perpetuate the brother-sister bond, mediating the late antique paradigm of sibling intimacy to medieval audiences. Although Scholastica is not known apart from Gregory's brief reference to her, her fame nevertheless spread quickly in the century after his death and continued to grow throughout the medieval period. Her relics became the goal of acquisitive monks and were subject to conflict and controversy. Sometime between 690 and 707, monks from the French monastery of Fleury seem to have traveled to Monte Cassino, uncovered the tomb shared by the sibling saints, and retrieved the relics of both Benedict and Scholastica.[46] An account written by Adrevald of Fleury in the mid-ninth century adds that the Fleury group had been accompanied by monks from Le Mans, whose specific goal was to recover Scholastica's relics. Although the Fleury monks succeeded in retrieving the relics of both saints, the Le Mans contingent ultimately secured some relics of Scholastica and founded a new monastery in her honor to house them—solidifying her cult.[47]

As we might expect, the model of brother-sister intimacy presented by Gregory influenced other hagiographers, among them the biographer of St. Hiltrude, who with her brother Guntard was described as being "another Scholastica and Benedict" and possibly also Felix, the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon biographer of saint Guthlac, who presented the saint as maintaining close (yet physically distant) relations with his sister, Pega.[48] Benedict's relationship with Scholastica may also have influenced Rudolf of Fulda's depiction of Boniface's relationship with his kinswoman (though not sister) Leoba. Although Boniface and Leoba were not biological siblings, Leoba specifically asked that she be allowed to consider Boniface as her brother,

[46]Walter Goffart, "Le Mans, St. Scholastica, and the literary tradition of the translation of St. Benedict," *Revue bénédictine* 77 (1967), 107–141. Goffart cautions that the monks at Fleury and Le Mans were less concerned with Scholastica than with Benedict, whose importance was "overshadowing" (129).

[47]Adrevald reports that Scholastica's bones were separated from Benedict's through the prayers of the people: Adrevald, *Historia translationis s. Benedicti*, cc. 12–13; ed. E. de Certain, *Les miracles de Saint Benoît, écrits par Adrevald Aimoin, André, Raoul Tortaire et Hughes de Saint Marie, moines de Fleury* (Paris: Chez Mme Ve J. Renouard, 1858), 10–13. For further attention to Scholastica, see "Three Songs about St. Scholastica by Aldhelm & Paul the Deacon," trans. Mary Forman, *Vox Benedictina* 7:3 (July 1990), 229–251. By the later Middle Ages, Scholastica was venerated in her own right; an independent *Life* appears in a late thirteenth-century South English Legendary: "The Life of St. Scholastica in the *South English Legendary*," ed. E. Gordon Whatley, in *Saints' Lives in Middle English Collections* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications for TEAMS, 2004), 199–212.

[48]*Vita S. Hiltrudis virginis*, 1.7.10; AASS Sept. VII (Sept. 27), 494; *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985 [1956]). For Pega, see below, 47. Stephanie Hollis observes that "the kindred-soul relation of Benedict and Scholastica provides the justifying authorization and the model for the hagiographic presentation of the friendships of male and female religious": Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 1992), 289.

since, as she wrote to him, "There is no other man in my kinship in whom I have such confidence as in you."[49] In keeping with their metaphorical brotherhood, and with longstanding late antique and early medieval traditions concerning saintly siblings, before his death Boniface requested that the two should be buried in the same tomb.[50]

IV. Brothers and Sisters in the Twelfth Century

My purpose in detailing the early history of the sibling bond within Christian thought is to demonstrate that, by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the idea was firmly in place that a male saint should have an intimate and exclusive relationship with one woman in particular: his sister. Despite a prevailing clerical rhetoric that emphasized the separation of the sexes, relationships between brothers and sisters, like Elisabeth and Ekbert, persisted with little apparent scrutiny. Brothers and sisters continued to maintain contact, often living in close proximity and not infrequently engaging in intimate spiritual relationships. In the first place, then, the continued prominence of these sibling relationships reveals that contact between the sexes within the religious life was not only possible, but could be actively encouraged and even celebrated by medieval Christians, despite escalating fears of sexual pollution. Indeed, the First Lateran Council, while forbidding priests to live with wives or concubines, nevertheless allowed that they could live with female kin, explicitly invoking the precedent set at Nicaea.[51]

At the same time, sibling relationships demonstrate the essential mutuality of men's and women's spiritual lives. As we have seen, men contributed to the spiritual lives of their sisters, providing not only material support but sometimes also priestly services. The ultimately controversial practice of pairing male and female monasteries had its origins in the very real concern that male monastic founders like Pachomius and Caesarius had in ensuring the spiritual welfare of their kinswomen. This concern persisted in the central Middle Ages and provided the basis for such monastic foundations as Marcigny and Jully—paired with the male houses at Cluny and Cîteaux, respectively. In many cases, brothers also engaged their sisters spiritually in writing, composing letters for their edification, rules for their monastic observance, and even their *Vitae* after their deaths. Above all, a brother could ensure the viability of his sister's religious life, providing crucial

[49]Ep. 21; PL 89:720–1; trans. Ephraim Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 60. For a discussion of the relationship between Boniface and Leoba, see Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 283–297.

[50]*Vita Leobae Abbatissae*, 17; MGH SS 15/1:129; ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981 [1954]), 222.

[51]First Lateran Council (1123), canon 7; ed. and trans. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1:191.

pastoral support, which other men, although theoretically also spiritual "siblings," could scarcely afford to risk. In sum, while familial relations provided a natural way in which men and women could establish contact in the religious life, they also provided a means through which women could claim—and receive—the care of a priest.[52]

The benefits of the sibling relationship were not one-sided; men too derived significant benefits from their interactions with their sisters.[53] Like mothers, who often exerted a powerful spiritual influence over their sons' spiritual vocations, sisters too are depicted as playing an important role in the spiritual lives of their brothers.[54] Although in most cases the brother was at least nominally superior—especially if he was ordained—spiritual influence flowed in both directions. Sisters provided their brothers with spiritual encouragement, often serving as the spiritual leader in the relationship—as Scholastica appears in Gregory's brief account, or Macrina in Gregory's *Life*. Men in turn recognized deep piety in their sisters, often admitting a spiritual imbalance in the relationship from which they felt that they stood to benefit. Their devotion to their sisters was thus not entirely altruistic; men clearly expected to profit from their relationships with pious female siblings.

Leander of Seville offers one early example of a man who saw himself in a position of spiritual dependence with regard to his sister. Encouraging Florentina to maintain a life characterized by sexual purity, Leander makes clear his expectation that he would receive an eternal reward through her. "Although I do not have within myself what I wish you to achieve," Leander writes, praising Florentina's virginity and hinting at his own unchasteness, "You are my shelter in Christ; you, dearest sister, are my security." In his view, Florentina's power derived from her relationship as the bride of Christ. Placing his whole confidence in her, Leander therefore urges Florentina to

[52]Indeed, for Abelard, writing in the twelfth century, Scholastica called to mind not simply the relationship between biological siblings, but rather the obligation that monastic men ("brothers") had to provide pastoral care for religious women. Abelard writes, "And so the convent of St. Scholastica which was situated on land belonging to a monastery was also under the supervision of one of the brothers, and took both instruction and comfort from frequent visits by him or by the other brothers": Abelard, Letter 8; ed. T. P. McLaughlin, "Abelard's Rule for Religious Women," *Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1956), 241–92, 258; trans. Betty Radice and M. T. Clanchy, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 155. For Abelard's concern for the care of religious women, see Griffiths, "'Men's Duty to Provide for Women's Needs.'"

[53]For the idea that men could benefit from their interactions with holy women, see Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*.

[54]The notion that a pious woman might convert her male kin was already widespread in the second and third centuries. See, for example, Augustine's discussion of his mother Monica's influence on his own conversion and her long-suffering concern for her husband, who ultimately also converted to Christianity: Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.8, and 9.9; ed. James J. O'Donnell, *Confessions*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Text* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 110, 111–113; trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, *Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1961), 192, 194–6.

intercede for him with her heavenly bridegroom: "If you are acceptable to God, if you shall lie with Christ upon the chaste couch, if you shall cling to the embrace of Christ with the most fragrant odor of virginity, surely, when you recall your brother's sins, you will obtain the indulgence which you request for that brother's guilt."[55] As Leander writes, laying bare his own hope for salvation through Florentina, Christ will not "allow to perish a brother whose sister He has espoused."[56]

Leander is unusually explicit in detailing the spiritual benefit that he expected to achieve through his sister; however, other men shared his views concerning their sisters' potential spiritual superiority and echoed him in acknowledging the benefits they expected to receive through them. We have already seen how Macrina, whose *Life* was recorded by her brother Gregory of Nyssa, led her brother Peter to the religious life and presumably also influenced Basil in his own spiritual quest. Gregory's devotion to her is unmistakable, not only in his decision to record her *Life* but also in his presence at her death and his decision to have her corpse wrapped in his own grave clothes. He was also quick to point out Macrina's spiritual strength, likening her to Job and claiming that she had access to divine inspiration. Toward the end of her life, Gregory records that Macrina discoursed on many things, including the life to come, which he later recorded in his treatise *De anima et resurrectione*, where he refers to Macrina explicitly as "the teacher."[57]

In the same way, men during the twelfth century provided for their sisters' material and spiritual needs, yet expected to benefit from the relationship. This sort of spiritual exchange is clear in Elisabeth of Schönau's relationship with Ekbert. Although he was her superior in ecclesiastical matters, having been educated in Paris and ordained to the priesthood, Elisabeth was nevertheless the spiritual leader in the relationship. Sometime after she began

[55]Leander, *De institutione virginum*; PL 72:878; trans. Barlow, *Iberian Fathers*, 1:189. The author of the *Liber de modo bene vivendi, ad sororem* (long thought to be the work of Bernard of Clairvaux) makes the same argument, drawing directly on Leander's text, although he removes all reference to biological brotherhood, PL 184:1306. On the *Liber* and its middle English translation, see Anne McGovern-Mouron, " 'Listen to Me, Daughter, Listen to a Faithful Counsel': The *Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem*," in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, eds. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 81–106.

[56]Leander, *De institutione virginum*; PL 72:878; trans. Barlow, *Iberian Fathers*, 1:189–190.

[57]*De anima et resurrectione*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 5:430. Cautioning that accounts of early Christian women were "literary constructions, some of a high rhetorical order," Elizabeth Clark writes that "Macrina serves as a tool with which Gregory can think through various troubling intellectual and theological problems that confronted male theologians of his day": Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,' " *Church History* 67:1 (March 1998), 1–31, 15, 27.

to receive visions, Ekbert, then a deacon at Saint Cassius in Bonn, abandoned a promising career in the church in order to adopt the religious life alongside her. At Schönau, he was given the delicate task of recording Elisabeth's visions, a task that he executed with some editorial license. From Elisabeth's point of view, Ekbert's oversight may have provided a welcome degree of protection from potential detractors. For Ekbert, however, the advantages of his special relationship with Elisabeth were equally, if not more, profound. Through Elisabeth, Ekbert believed that he had access to theological truths, which she obtained in visionary dialogues, primarily with the Virgin Mary. Ekbert turned Elisabeth's visionary experiences to his own advantage, priming her with questions on delicate doctrinal matters, which he then encouraged her to present to her heavenly visitors.[58] Indeed, Ekbert was so fascinated by Elisabeth's visionary spirituality that he sought similar religious expression himself, asking his sister on her deathbed to intercede on his behalf so that he could inherit her visionary gift upon her death.[59]

In addition to the tangible theological benefits that Elisabeth provided, Ekbert also profited from her personal spiritual strengths. It was most likely Elisabeth who prompted him to enter the religious life, and she who encouraged him to seek ordination.[60] She was, moreover, active on his behalf in spiritual intercession. On one occasion, Elisabeth comforted a priest (possibly Ekbert) who had accidentally spilled the consecrated wine at the Eucharist.[61] In his *Death of Elisabeth*, Ekbert describes Elisabeth as "that chosen lamp of heavenly light, that virgin outstanding and honored by the abundant grace of God, that splendid gem of our monastery, the leader of our virginal company." Reflecting more directly on her influence on him, Ekbert wrote that "she bought me forth into the light of untried newness; she led me to the intimate ministry of Jesus my Lord; with her honeyed mouth she used to offer me divine consolation and instruction from heaven and made my heart taste the first fruits of the sweetness hidden from the saints in heaven."[62]

Ekbert's sense of his sister's spiritual superiority is echoed in the writings of Aelred, the Cistercian abbot of Rievaulx. In the rule that he penned for his sister's religious life, Aelred recalls their youth together, bemoaning his past

[58]Coakley writes that Ekbert approached Elisabeth as a "kind of a research assistant," using her to find answers to the questions that interested him: Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 28.

[59]Ekbert, *De obitu*, 2; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 271; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 265.

[60]*Libri visionum*, 1.59; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 29; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 81. Here Elisabeth records that she prayed to the Virgin "especially" for a certain friend, likely Ekbert, who was a deacon, but whom she had encouraged to seek ordination. See also Emecho's record of the event: *Vita Eckeberti*, ed. S. Widmann, *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für altere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 11 (1886), 447–454, 449.

[61]*Libri visionum*, 2.25–26; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 51–52; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 113–114.

[62]Ekbert, *De obitu*; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 263; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 255.

sins and reminding her of her spiritual care for him: "You mourned for me and upbraided me often when we were young and after we had grown up."[63] Even though Aelred had attained the abbatial dignity by the time of writing, he nonetheless continued to see his sister as his spiritual superior. Commenting that "we have run the same course, we were alike in everything: the same father begot us, the same womb bore us and gave us birth," Aelred nevertheless contrasts his own life of sin to the holy example of his sister, who remained continent while he "freely abandoned [himself] to all that is base."[64] "O sister," he writes: "How much more happy is the man whose ship, full of merchandise and loaded with riches, is brought to a safe homecoming by favorable winds than he who suffers shipwreck and barely escapes death with the loss of all?"[65]

The belief, expressed by Leander, Gregory of Nyssa, Ekbert, and Aelred, as well as countless others, that women had the potential to surpass men in their piety and the intimacy of their relationship to Christ deeply influenced men's interactions with women, adding to the traditional idea that brothers *ought* to attend to their sisters' needs, a sense of the real benefit to men of providing care. Whether men expected to achieve salvation through women, to gain access through them to visionary experiences, or to profit from the spiritual encouragement that women evidently provided, men clearly saw tangible benefits in their care for women. It is not surprising, then, that the relationship between a brother and his sister very often centered on the provision of spiritual care, as, for instance, in the case of Christina of Markyate, who received significant spiritual support from her ordained brother, Gregory, a monk at the neighboring monastery of St. Albans.

Christina's relationship with Gregory is revealing. Unlike Elisabeth, Christina is known from a source that was independent of her brother; he appears only briefly in her *Vita* and was not its author. Even so, Christina's relationship with Gregory was close; her biographer comments that she "cherished" him "with extraordinary affection."[66] Gregory evidently returned her affection; it was his practice to visit Christina at Markyate, to stay with her and, while he was there, to say Mass for her community.[67] Yet despite

[63]Aelred of Rievaulx, *Rule*, 32; eds. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot, *Opera omnia*, CCCM 1, 2a–2b (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971-), 674; trans. in *Treatises: The Pastoral Prayer*, Cistercian Fathers Series no. 2 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 94.

[64]Aelred of Rievaulx, *Rule*, 32; eds. Hoste and Talbot, 673–4; trans. in *Treatises*, 93–94.

[65]Aelred of Rievaulx, *Rule*, 32; eds. Hoste and Talbot, 675; trans. in *Treatises*, 95.

[66]*The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987 [1959]), 156–7. On Christina, see the essays collected in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, eds. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (London: Routledge, 2005).

[67]These visits were undertaken with the permission of Gregory's abbot, Geoffrey, who was himself enthusiastic in his support for Christina: *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. and

Gregory's authority as a priest, there is no question that Christina was the spiritual superior in the relationship, interceding for her brother and mediating heavenly messages to him. Christina's intercession for Gregory—and also for a brother named Simon, who otherwise appears only as a witness to a Markyate charter—is confirmed in the so-called St. Alban's Psalter, which includes obits for both men.[68]

Gregory's cameo appearance in Christina's *Life* confirms both the potential benefits that a brother in the religious life could derive from his saintly sister and his very real concern to provide for her spiritual needs. Gregory, though less spiritually mature than Christina, was nonetheless able to furnish her with one very central spiritual benefit: the Mass. As their example suggests, the pastoral care of women by a man related to them—here a brother, although elsewhere a nephew, or an uncle—raised few suspicions of wrongdoing. With his abbot's permission, Gregory was even able to stay overnight at Markyate, a feat that few monks would have dared. As Christina's brother, Gregory could presumably justify providing care for his sister, since the tradition of sisters in the lives of prominent holy men had made this relationship licit, respectable, and even a sign of male sanctity.

The catalogue of brothers and sisters could go on: Hugh of Cluny founding Marcigny with his brother Geoffrey II of Semur, no doubt with his mother, Aremburgis, and his sister, Ermengardis, in mind;[69] Anselm of Canterbury guiding and supporting his sister Richeza in her marriage and, later, widowhood;[70] Bernard of Clairvaux encouraging his sister Humbeline to

trans. Talbot, 158–9. For Geoffrey's relationship to Christina, see Rachel M. Koopmans, "The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's *Vita*," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51:4 (October 2000), 663–698.

[68]*The St. Albans Psalter (Albani Psalter)*, eds. Otto Pächt, C. R. Dodwell, and Francis Wormald (London: Warburg Institute, 1960), 27.

[69]The two women appear first in the community's entry list: Else Maria Wischermann, *Marcigny-sur-Loire: Gründungs- und Frühgeschichte des ersten Cluniacenserinnenpriorates, 1055–1150* (Munich: W. Fink, 1986), 39. Two other sisters, Mathilda and Adelheid, subsequently entered the community as well, as did two of Hugh's nieces, Ermengardis and Lucia: Joachim Wollasch, "Frauen in der Cluniacensis ecclesia," in Elm and Parisse, eds., *Doppelklöster*, 97–113, 99. Other monks at Cluny arranged for their own sisters to enter Marcigny, as did a certain Bernard, who coordinated the transfer of his sister, Anna, from St. Jean, Autun, to Marcigny: Jean Richard, *Le cartulaire de Marcigny-sur-Loire (1045–1144): Essai de reconstruction d'un manuscrit disparu* (Dijon: Sociéte des Analecta Burgundica, 1957), no. 175. Some men, like Peter the Venerable, even had mothers who were "sisters" at Marcigny.

[70]Promising his nephew that he would care for Richeza, Anselm wrote, "As far as I am able, I shall not cease to help her in every way as long as I live": Ep. 328, ed. F. S. Schmitt, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad-Cannstatt: F. Frommann, 1968–1984), 2:260; trans. Walter Fröhlich, *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1990–1994), 3:45. For Anselm's relations with women, see Sally N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God: A Study of Anselm's Correspondence with Women* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

adopt the religious life as a nun at Jully;[71] Richard of Springiersbach founding the Augustinian community at Andernach for his sister Tenxwind;[72] the hermit Godric of Finchale overseeing the religious life of his sister, Burchwine;[73] and Hildegard of Bingen's brother, Hugo, serving as provost at the Rupertsberg.[74] In each case, the brother provided care for his sister, founding a monastery for her, serving as her priest or as provost of her community, or writing letters or other texts to guide her in the religious life. In many cases, concern for a sister was part of a larger phenomenon that included a man's entire family—as with Bernard of Clairvaux, whose conversion was a family affair that involved several of his brothers and kinsmen. The conversion of so many men had obvious implications for their wives, many of whom were ultimately housed at Jully, alongside Bernard's sister Humbeline.

V. Families in the Religious Life

As Bernard's example suggests, it was not unusual for family members to convert to the religious life as a group. Nor, indeed, was it unusual for women, when they did convert, to live alongside their male kinsmen in communities generally designated as "male." At Bec in the late eleventh century, where Anselm was a monk and then abbot before becoming archbishop of Canterbury, the community included several women, chief among them the founder's mother, Heloise.[75] During Anselm's time at Bec,

[71]According to Bernard's biographer, Humbeline came one day to see her brother, magnificently attired and accompanied by a large retinue. Bernard "reviled and cursed her" and refused to see her. Humbeline, struck to the core, called on Bernard to speak with her, lamenting that "if my own brother spurns my body and its appearance, as a servant of God he should not refuse to help my soul." Promising to obey his advice, Humbeline was ultimately received by Bernard, who (in the tradition of Pachomius and Maria) encouraged her to reject worldly enticements. Some years later, she entered the monastery at Jully and was made prioress, succeeding her sister-in-law, Elisabeth: *Vita prima*, 6; PL 185:244; trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker, *St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1960), 51. The spiritual importance of the sibling bond is emphasized once more in Bernard's *Life of St. Malachy*, where he records that Malachy encouraged his sister to adopt a more religious life, although in vain. When she died, without having been reconciled to the faith, Malachy's prayers on her behalf secured God's forgiveness for her: Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Life and Death of Saint Malachy*, 5; PL 182:081–1082.

[72]Felten, "Frauenklöster und –stifte," 257–260.

[73]Reginald, *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici, Heremitae de Finchale*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, Surtees Society 20 (London: Nichols, 1847), 140–5.

[74]Guibert of Gembloux, Ep. 26: 307–329; *Epistolae*, ed. Albert Derolez, CCCM 66A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988-), 279.

[75]Although Gilbert Crispin downplays Heloise's role in the foundation, Bec was founded on Heloise's dower lands. Gilbert Crispin noted that "she performed the duty of a handmaid (*ancilla*), washing the garments of God's servants and doing most scrupulously all the extremely hard work imposed upon her": *Vita Herluini*, ed. J. Armitage Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster: A Study of the Abbey under Norman Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 93; trans. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 69.

several other women joined the community when their husbands became monks. The monastery's chronicle reports that "in the time of Abbot Anselm three noble matrons gave themselves in subjection to Bec: Basilia wife of Hugh of Gournay, her niece Amfrida, and Eva wife of William Crispin."[76] According to Herman of Tournai, a similar situation unfolded at the monastery of St. Martin in the late eleventh century, where both his parents as well as at least one of his brothers made their profession.[77] Nor was Herman's family unique: he reports that "Henry, an extremely wealthy man, together with his wife, Bertha, his as-yet unweaned son, John, and two daughters, Trasberga and Iulitta, entered the monastic life in almost the same fashion."[78] Ultimately the number of women who converted at St. Martin's meant that they required their own community, which the abbot Odo of Orléans founded and placed under the authority of his sister—a woman named Eremburg.[79]

As these examples indicate, families during the central Middle Ages could embrace the religious life together, entering monasteries either as nuclear families with small children or as kin groupings composed of adult children.[80] Although saints' *Lives* from the period do often continue to present family as an obstacle to the religious life—as the *Life* of Christina of Markyate certainly does—it appears that family may have become more, rather than less, important with the late eleventh- and twelfth-century shift away from child oblation toward adult conversion.[81] This shift meant that new recruits to the religious life had lived many years in the world and,

[76]*Chronicon Beccensis*; PL 150: 648; cited in Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 91.

[77]Herman of Tournai, *Liber de restauratione monasterii Sancti Martini Tornacensis*, 62–63; MGH SS 14:302–305; trans. Lynn H. Nelson, *The Restoration of the Monastery of Saint Martin's of Tournai* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 89–94.

[78]Herman of Tournai, *Liber*, 65; MGH SS 14:305; trans. Nelson, *Restoration*, 95. The conversion of an entire household is also recounted in the life of Stephen of Obazine: *Vita S. Stephani Obazinensis*, 1.29; ed. and trans. Michel Aubrun, *Vie de saint Étienne d'Obazine* (Clermont-Ferrand: Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Clermont-Ferrand, Institut d'études du Massif central, 1970), 86–7. See also the example of Geoffrey III of Semur, who entered the monastery with his wife, son, and at least two daughters: Richard, *Le cartulaire de Marcigny-sur-Loire (1045–1144)*, between 240 and 241.

[79]Herman of Tournai, *Liber*, 69; MGH SS 14:307; trans. Nelson, *Restoration*, 99.

[80]Even in the early Middle Ages, the entrance of entire family groups was not uncommon. Fructuosus of Braga's seventh-century "General Rule for Monasteries" notes some of the problems that the entrance of families could pose, cautioning that families "may not hold converse together, except with the permission of the prior." Demonstrating that the entrance even of small children was not unusual, Fructuosus nevertheless allowed that exceptions should be made for the "tiniest children … who are still in the cradle" who were allowed to go "to their father or mother when they wish": Fructuosus of Braga, *Regula monastica communis*, 6; PL 87:1115; trans. Barlow, *Iberian fathers*, 2:186.

[81]Even so, the incidence of "saintly siblings" declined at this time, as Schulenburg observes: *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 305.

accordingly, brought with them not only strong family ties but also related obligations. Nor were these ties all external to the monastic community, given that entire families often converted to the religious life together. Even within the cloister, monks and nuns continued to concern themselves with family—with their mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and even children. Elisabeth of Schönau maintained warm relations with several of her siblings, not simply Ekbert. At her death, she was surrounded by what may have been the last remaining members of her nuclear family, two of them at least "from afar."[82] Likewise, Christina of Markyate re-created at Markyate and St. Albans a household in miniature, in which at least two of her siblings shared the religious life she had chosen. When her brother Gregory died, both Christina and her sister Margaret, also a nun at Markyate, were present at the burial.[83] At Sempringham, Sharon Elkins comments that "three nuns were sisters, their uncle was a member of the monastery, and their parents were affiliated, as part of the 'fraternity.' "[84] Based on her study of nuns who had relatives within the religious life in the later Middle Ages, Marilyn Oliva similarly notes that several brothers "remembered their sisters in their wills, which indicates at the very least that the male clerics had not forgotten about their monastic sisters."[85] Far from renouncing family and the associated dangers of the flesh, these examples demonstrate that medieval monastic men and women maintained close ties with their blood kin, despite their entrance into the new spiritualized "family" of the monastery. The blurring of spiritual and biological kin that was the result is most clear in a comment, made by Bernard of Clairvaux's biographer, that Humbeline "proved to be a true sister of the holy monks of Clairvaux not only in the flesh but also in the spirit."[86]

Elisabeth of Schönau's Cologne vision, with its abundance of episcopal uncles providing spiritual care for their saintly nieces, underscores the fact that contact between male and female family members quite often occurred within the increasingly controversial context of pastoral care. Indeed, some of the period's most interesting literature of spiritual advice for women was

[82]Ekbert reports having summoned Elisabeth's sister to her deathbed, describing her as "a God-fearing woman whom I had called from afar for Elisabeth's funeral": *De obitu*, 2; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 273; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 268. For the arrival of Elisabeth's brother, see *De obitu*, 2; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 276; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 272. Schulenburg notes that saintly siblings were often present at a brother or sister's death and often took a leading role in preparing for the burial: *Forgetful of Their Sex*, 297–303.

[83]*The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. and trans. Talbot, 160–161.

[84]Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*, 99.

[85]Marilyn Oliva, "All in the Family? Monastic and Clerical Careers among Family Members in the Late Middle Ages," *Medieval Prosopography: History and Collective Biography* 20 (1999): 161–180, 164.

[86]*Vita prima*, 6; PL 185:245; trans. Webb and Walker, *St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, 52.

composed by a male relative, as in the cases of Peter the Venerable and Osbert of Clare, who wrote for their nieces, Margaret and Pontia, and Margaret and Cecilia, respectively.[87] Other women, too, found that male relatives were the most likely source for their spiritual care. Hildegard of Bingen's brother, Hugo, was not the only one of her kinsmen to support her in the religious life: when she encountered difficulties in securing pastoral care from the monks at neighboring Disibodenberg, she appealed to Pope Alexander III, who assigned her nephew Wezelinus to resolve the matter.[88] The underlying idea that men should support the religious lives of their female kin is confirmed in the letters of Heloise and Abelard. Writing to Abelard—formerly her husband in the flesh but now her "brother" in Christ[89]—Heloise invoked their marriage as grounds for the care that she argued he ought to provide for her and her community. "Consider the close tie by which you have bound yourself to me," she writes, "and repay the debt you owe a whole community of devoted women by discharging it the more dutifully to her who is yours alone."[90] The relationship that these two had shared is certainly unique among medieval religious men and women; nevertheless, when Heloise came to claim Abelard's spiritual and material support, she did so on the basis of their familial connection, rather than their spiritual "kinship" in Christ.

VI. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that, despite calls for the separation of the sexes within the context of church reform during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, relations between certain men and women—biological siblings—

[87]Peter the Venerable, Ep. 185; ed. Giles Constable, *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1:427–434; trans. Vera Morton in *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 98. Osbert of Clare, Ep. 21–22; ed. E. W. Williamson, *The Letters of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 89–96; trans. Morton, *Guidance for Women*, 111–120.

[88]For Hildegard's nephew, see Hildegard, Ep. 10–10r; ed. L. Van Acker, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium*. CCCM 91 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 23–25; trans. Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994–2004), 1:45–47. For a later example of brothers who supported their visionary sister, see Susan D. Laningham, "Making a Saint out of a Sibling," in *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others*, eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 15–27.

[89]In her first letter to Abelard, Heloise emphasized the shift in their relationship, from marriage partners to spiritual siblings: "To her lord, or rather father; to her husband, or rather brother; from his handmaid, or rather daughter; from his wife, or rather sister: to Abelard, from Heloise": Heloise, Letter 2; ed. Eric Hicks, *La vie et les epistres: Pierres Abaelart et Heloys sa fame* (Paris: Champion-Slatkine, 1991), 45; trans. Radice and Clanchy, *Letters*, 48.

[90]Heloise, Letter 2; ed Hicks, 48; trans. Radice and Clanchy, *Letters*, 50.

persisted and were even actively promoted in saints' lives, legend, and devotional literature. Late antique and medieval Christians, though typically ambivalent concerning the role of family within the spiritual life, nevertheless encouraged connections between brothers and sisters "in the flesh," often preferring them to the ties of so-called "spiritual" siblings, unrelated men and women who (it was feared) could easily fall into sexual temptation and even sin.[91]

The traditional use of kinship metaphors, especially the sibling motif, to describe bonds between unrelated Christian men and women confirms the importance of biological kinship as a model for the interaction of the sexes. From the first century, when Christians began to adopt the language of family to identify cobelievers, the sibling motif was used to signify the ideal relationship between chaste men and women. In the second century, the Shepherd of Hermas reports that an angel instructed the visionary to treat his wife henceforth as a "sister," an injunction presumably to renounce sexual relations with her.[92] In the sixth century, Gregory the Great likewise wrote of a priest who "loved his wife as a brother loves his sister," although he avoided her.[93] The fact that chaste men and women were described in kinship terms as "brothers" and "sisters," a motif that was common both among early Christians and within medieval monastic communities as well, indicates the high esteem in which biological siblings were held by medieval Christians.

There was, nevertheless, a current of suspicion and anxiety associated even with kinship relations. Elisabeth of Schönau's otherworldly visitor Verena was quick to point out that among the 11,000 virgin martyrs of Cologne, the men had kept apart from the saintly women, joining them only on Sundays, and then for the sole purpose of providing pastoral care.[94] In a similar vein, Saint

[91]Indeed, the valorization of the sibling bond may have served to entrench the segregation of the sexes, encouraging ascetic men to limit their contact with unrelated women and to devote their available energies instead toward the fostering of bonds with biological siblings.

[92]*The Shepherd of Hermas*, vis. 2.2.3; ed. and trans. Kirsopp Lake, in *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: W. Heinemann, 1917), 2:18–19. Jerome expressed a similar idea, writing that a chaste wife was her husband's "sister," an idea that also appears in the writings of Paulinus of Nola, and in Gregory of Tours' account of Riticius, who was buried alongside his virginal spouse: Jerome, Ep. 49, 6; ed. Isidore Hilberg, CSEL 54, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 359. Paulinus, Carm. 25; trans. P. G. Walsh, *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola* (New York: Newman, 1975), 250–251. Gregory, *Gloria confessorum*, c. 74; ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH Scrip. Rer. Merov. 1/2:341–2.

[93]Gregory, *Dialogues*, 4.12.2–3; ed. de Vogüé, 3, 48; trans. Odo John Zimmerman (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), 203. My understanding of chaste marriage is greatly indebted to Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993). See also Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

[94]*Liber revelationum*, 10; ed. Roth, *Die Visionen*, 128; trans. Clark, *The Complete Works*, 219.

Augustine's biographer Possidius was careful to note that Augustine had not allowed his sister or any female relative to stay at his house, although such a visit would not likely have raised suspicions.[95] The eighth-century Anglo-Saxon saint Guthlac similarly refused physical contact with his sister, Pega, explaining on his deathbed, "I have in this life avoided her presence so that in eternity we may see one another in the presence of our Father amid eternal joys."[96] Some brothers sought physical separation from their sisters, even when they otherwise supported them. For Pachomius, care for Maria and her community was furnished indirectly through the aged person of Apa Peter, leaving Pachomius himself free from potential temptation. That such temptation was real is clear from the writings of Jean Gerson. Having composed a series of letters and treatises for his six sisters, in which he encouraged them and provided guidelines for their religious lives, Gerson nevertheless admitted that he had suffered from carnal thoughts in their presence.[97]

The fact that even relations between brothers and sisters could be tainted by sexual scandal was underlined in the biblical story of Amnon and Thamar, who were half-siblings through their father, King David (2 Samuel 13:8–14). Amnon, burning with illicit desire for his sister Thamar, feigned illness in order to lure her into his bedchamber, where he raped her before throwing her out of his house in disgust. The story of Amnon and Thamar was not lost on medieval audiences, who recognized that any relationship could be polluted with unchastity. The seventh-century Spanish abbot and, later, archbishop, Fructuosus of Braga, warned his monastic audience against contact with women, even those women related to them, reminding them

[95]Possidius writes, "No woman ever lived in his house, or stayed there, not even his own sister, who as a widow in the service of God lived for many years, to the very day of her death, as prioress of God's handmaidens. It was the same with his brother's daughters, who were also enrolled in God's service, although the councils of the holy bishops had allowed an exception to be made of them. He used to say that even though no suspicion of vice could arise from his sister or his nieces stopping with him, *they* would have to have other women attending on them and staying with them, and other women again would be coming to see them from outside, and all this might give scandal or prove a temptation to the weak": *Vita Augustini*, 26; PL 32:55; trans. F. R. Hoare in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 58. A similar reasoning was at work in Theodulf of Orléans' decision to abolish the privilege of clerics to live with female family members: "Let no woman live with a presbyter in a single house. Although the canons permit a priest's mother and sister to live with him, and persons of this kind in whom there is no suspicion, we abolish this privilege for the reason that there may come, out of courtesy to them or to trade with them, other women not at all related to him and offer an enticement for sin to him": Cited in George E. McCracken and Allen Cabaniss, *Early Medieval Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 385.

[96]*Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, 50; ed. and trans. Colgrave, 155.

[97]Brian Patrick McGuire, "Late Medieval Care and Control of Women: Jean Gerson and his Sisters," *Revue d'historique ecclésiastique* 92 (1997), 5–37, 33, n. 98.

pointedly of Amnon and Thamar: "That none may assume that his chastity is safe in the presence of a woman related to him, let him remember how Thamar was corrupted by her brother Amnon when he pretended to be ill."[98] In the ninth century, Pope Nicholas I invoked Amnon and Thamar as evidence that the cohabitation of men and women—even those related by blood—could give rise to lechery.[99] In the twelfth century, Gerald of Wales reiterated Pope Nicholas's caution, reminding his clerical audience that although men vowed to continence were permitted to live with female relatives, they should avoid temptation since "Thamar was corrupted by her own brother Aman." As Gerald writes, "We have even heard of certain priests who, at the instigation of the ancient enemy and because of the occasion and convenience afforded by living together, have indulged in detestable concubinage with their nieces, their sisters, and even their own mothers!"[100] For this reason, several early medieval church councils warned priests not to have female family members in their homes, even though the tradition established at Nicaea explicitly allowed such familial contact.[101]

Interpretations of Amnon and Tamar did not always fuel fears of incest, however. An early thirteenth-century moralized Bible (Vienna ÖNB 2554) highlights instead the contemporary concern with clerical immorality, presenting Amnon not as a lecherous brother intent on the seduction of his biological sister, but rather as a corrupt churchman violating a female member of his flock (fols. 46rC-47*vD).[102] Interpretative texts make clear the threat posed to female congregants by lecherous churchmen. "That Moab [*sic* Amnon] feigns sickness to deceive his sister signifies the rich clerics

[98]Fructuosus of Braga, *Regula*, 17; PL 87:1124; trans. Barlow, *Iberian fathers*, 2:201.

[99]"For where a man lives together with a woman, it is difficult for the snares of the ancient enemy to be lacking, snares which, without doubt, were not lacking in that place where a brother and a sister, namely Ammon and Thamar, lived alone together for the briefest of times": Pope Nicholas I, Ep. 99; MGH *Epistolae* 6:586.

[100]Giraldus Cambrensis, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, 2.15; Gerald of Wales, *The Jewel of the Church*, trans. John J. Hagen (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 179–80.

[101]For the seventh-century Council of Nantes, see Charles Joseph Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, 3/1 (Paris: Letouzey, 1907-), 297. Referring to instances of priests who had apparently impregnated their sisters, the ninth-century Council of Mainz ruled that women who were blood relations should not be allowed to live with clerics: Council of Mainz, 10; ed. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum*, 18, 67.

[102]*Bible moralisée: Codex Vindobonensis 2554, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, ed. Gerald B. Guest (London: Harvey Miller, 1995). On the basis of internal evidence, Tracy Chapman Hamilton argues that the manuscript was produced for Blanche of Castile: Tracy Chapman Hamilton, "Queenship and Kinship in the French *Bible moralisée*: The Example of Blanche of Castile and Vienna ÖNB 2554," in *Capetian Women*, ed. Kathleen Nolan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 177–208. On the depiction of Amnon and Thamar in the manuscript, see Gerald B. Guest, " 'The Darkness and the Obscurity of Sins': Representing Vice in the Thirteenth-Century *Bibles moralisées*," in *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser, Papers in Mediaeval Studies 18 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies Press, 2005), 74–103, 91–95.

who feign sickness to deceive the good virgins," notes one commentary, while another observes: "That Moab lies with his sister Thamar by force and takes her virginity signifies those bad clerics who take the good virgins and force them and deceive them with gifts and with promises and take their virginity and their goodness."[103] As these texts indicate, concern with the dangers of biological incest has been eclipsed in this manuscript by concern with the more immediate reality of spiritual incest—intercourse between a churchman and his spiritual child. As Peter Damian had argued, any ordained minister who had sex with a woman committed incest, since "all the children of the church are undoubtedly your children."[104] According to the makers of ÖNB 2554, the real danger, then, lay not with biological brothers and sisters, who receive no attention here, but with male pastors who abuse the intimacy with women afforded them through their role as providers of pastoral care. Given the very real dangers of spiritual incest, one might conclude that a woman could be secure in her relationship with her priest only if he was, in fact, her biological brother.

Contact between the sexes within the religious life presented a perennial source of anxiety for medieval churchmen. Even so, men and women who were siblings both "in the flesh" and "in the spirit," were accorded a degree of freedom in their interactions that those who shared merely in a spiritual kinship did not enjoy. Despite lingering concerns to do with incest and sexual temptation, the sibling bond remained one of the few licit means by which men and women could maintain contact within the religious life. As a connection that had been privileged since late antiquity, and that had become almost a prerequisite for male sanctity by the sixth century, the sibling bond was central to the pious medieval imagination. Like Benedict of Nursia and Scholastica, and Bernard of Clairvaux, who was paired with Humbeline in later medieval visual depictions despite the relatively small role that she played in his *Vita*,[105] male saints were frequently memorialized alongside female companions—who were most often their sisters. Clearly, brothers and sisters did maintain contact within the religious life; more important, it was very often assumed that they *should* and that such contact could be mutually beneficial.

[103]Trans. in Guest, " 'The Darkness and the Obscurity of Sins,' " 91.

[104]Cited in Megan McLaughlin, "The Bishop as Bridegroom: Marital Imagery and Clerical Celibacy in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform*, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York: Garland, 1998), 209–237, 223.

[105]Late-medieval images depict Humbeline alongside Bernard as the founder of the Cistercian tradition for women. For discussion of Humbeline's depiction in art, see James France, *The Cistercians in Medieval Art* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 139–141.

As one of the few licit contexts for male-female monastic friendship during the medieval period, the relationship of a biological brother to his sister provides a valuable lens through which to consider relations between the sexes more broadly. The prevalence of the male-sister bond in the late antique and medieval religious world offers a compelling challenge to existing scholarly models of the medieval religious life, which have tended to assume the dissolution of family ties and the segregation of the sexes. Whether such segregation was ever more than the "pious wish" that Susanna Elm has argued for late antiquity,[106] it was, in any case, impossible, since at the very least monastic women needed sacramental services, which could only be provided by an ordained priest. Not surprisingly, these services were sometimes provided by male family members—brothers, cousins, uncles—on the basis of kinship ties. While it is true that male monastic orders routinely rejected the obligation to provide pastoral care for women, citing the distractions that such care would inevitably entail and the resources required, many individual monks were deeply involved with women. Despite the official stance of their orders, these men embraced the care of women in particular circumstances; moreover, they did so as part of a long and established tradition of men caring for their families within the religious life. Such care was not provided on the basis of an abstract obligation, but was born of deep, affectionate, and ongoing familial ties.

[106]Elm, "Formen des Zusammenlebens männlicher und weiblicher Asketen," 14.