Introduction

The century and a half from 1050 to 1200 was crucial for the development of both church and society in the Latin West. It was a complex period, and modern scholars have employed a wide variety of approaches and techniques in order to grasp that complexity. Economic historians have described the period as one of economic and demographic expansion. Historians of the church have characterized it as an age of religious ferment that generated both new religious orders and new heresies. Institutional historians have found in those decades the beginnings of centralization and rationalization of government, most evident in the rise of the papacy and of the feudal monarchies. Finally, historians of culture and intellectual life have described a major revival in art, literature, and education that has been called the "Renaissance of the Twelfth Century."

In this study I propose to treat the unfolding of a single issue, that of the propriety of obtaining membership in a religious house in return for a payment. The debate over gifts at entry into religion is an illuminating one for the general history of monasticism, and it is also significant because it offers insight into the genesis and spread during the twelfth century of new legal and moral concerns from the university-trained elite to other groups in the church. Put briefly, this is a study of the formulation and partial implementation of new, disapproving views of gifts at entry into religion, views that upset generations-old social and economic arrangements. An understanding of the origin and diffusion of those views sheds considerable light on the forces of rationalization at work in the church between 1050 and 1200.
INTRODUCTION

The primary, though not exclusive, focus of this examination is Benedictine and French. It is based in good part upon some fifty monastic cartularies, which were examined for the information that they provided about traditional entry practices. The views gained from the charters were broadened and corrected by examining the legislation of religious orders, the writings of the canonists, the decrees of church councils, and documents issued by papal and episcopal chanceries. Virtually all religious houses, whatever their formal affiliation or rule, confronted analogous social and economic problems in the twelfth century, and virtually all found in the negotiations that preceded reception of a new member an opportunity to deal with some of those problems. One of the facts that emerged from this study was that, in spite of some differences from group to group, almost all varieties of religious communities in the twelfth century followed a similar pattern in that they received new members with gifts and under conditions.

Since the origins of Christian monasticism in fourth-century Egypt, the decision to join an ascetic community had been a complex phenomenon, not easily reduced to the formulaic treatment accorded it by hagiographers. When Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–ca. 550) composed his Rule in the mid-sixth century, he drew upon a monastic tradition already more than two centuries old. Benedict was aware of his debt to the past, and the Rule itself recommended to his followers the writings of John Cassian and Basil of Caesarea. Modern scholarship has painstakingly ferreted out and identified the earlier writers upon whom Benedict drew. In 1940 Dom Augustin Génestout suggested the revolutionary view that Benedict had drawn heavily upon one particular source, an anonymous rule known as the Rule of the Master, apparently written in Italy between 500 and 535. Dom Génestout’s hypothesis stimulated a generation of investigation into the relationship between the Rule of Benedict and that of the Master, which has generally confirmed the chronological priority of the latter and its extensive use by Benedict as a source. As a consequence of this
revised view of Benedict's work, recent scholarship has modified the traditional estimate of Benedict's originality and has placed him more clearly in the tradition of late Roman monastic legislators.5

However, these brilliant discoveries have had remarkably little effect on the assessment of the Rule's importance in the medieval West. The primary facts for medievalists are that during the seventh and early eighth centuries Benedict's Rule was one of several important pieces of monastic legislation and that during the late eighth and ninth centuries the combined efforts of Anglo-Saxon missionaries and the Carolingian monarchs made it the norm for monastic life in the West.6 Although the Rule of the Master and other sources used by Benedict fell into oblivion, his Rule served as the framework of life for generations of monks and nuns.

Benedict's monastery was a celibate community, and it perpetuated itself by admitting outsiders, first to a probationary membership and then to permanent membership. Aside from the implicit requirements that all new members be male and Christian, the Rule excluded no group in society from membership. Slaves and freemen were admitted,7 as well as children and adolescents.8 The Rule also assumed that there would be sick and aged members of the community.9 Rich, middling, and poor could be members.10 Laymen provided most of the recruits, but priests and other clerics could join provided that they did not demand privileges because of their possession of holy orders.11 Even a monk from another community could be received, but if he came from a known monastery, permission or a letter of recommendation was required from his abbot.12

Benedict's Rule contained some important silences about entrants. It laid down no minimum or maximum age for entry, no educational requirement, no specific arrangements about the state of health of the new member. In addition, it made no comment on his marital status. Indeed, the sole expressed requirements for entry were of a moral nature. The entrant had to be persistent, sincere, willing freely to give up his own will and to promise the observance of obedience to the abbot, lifelong stability in the mon-
astrophy, and conversion of his life style. The Benedictine abbot was a powerful figure—indeed, a monarch—and could no doubt exercise considerable discretion in admitting new members. But from the letter of the Rule, any male could join Benedict’s monastery if the abbot found him acceptable on the grounds of sincerity and other personal moral qualities.

When a person chose to enter religious life, the disposition of his property was a socially important decision. Benedict’s Rule demanded no contribution from the new member. Unlike some monastic rules that forbade any gift at all to the monastery, it did, however, permit the recruit the choice of offering his property to the poor or to the monastery. When a family offered a boy to the monastery, the Rule asked it to disinherit the child, and only if it wished to do so was a gift to be given along with the child. Thus a gift at entry was a possibility, but by no means a requirement.

Because of its social importance, monasticism was not permitted to develop in a vacuum. Both secular rulers and the episcopate in the later Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages attempted to specify more clearly who could and who could not enter a monastery. Benedict’s Rule was, of course, not rewritten; but on many matters, including that of recruits, legislation and custom modified significantly its provisions and filled in its silences. By the eleventh century the norms for entry were much developed and elaborated.

The right of an unfree person to enter religious life was a threat to the property rights of his owner. The Council of Chalcedon (451), legislating even before Benedict’s lifetime, forbade the reception of a slave without the permission of his master. Subsequent secular and canon law reconfirmed that prohibition in various forms, sometimes more favorable to the master and sometimes to the slave-religious. Serfs, who were not slaves in the Roman sense but were unfree because of the serious burdens upon them, were also affected by the prohibition of free entry. After the Carolingian period religious life was open only rarely to serfs and other unfree persons.
In its attempts to guarantee essential services, the late Roman Empire had placed restrictions on certain groups of free persons, especially by fixing them permanently in their occupations. Soldiers, curiales, and others could enter a monastery only under restrictions that served to guard the state against any loss that might result. Merovingian and Carolingian rulers also attempted to check the entry of free men and nobles into religious life without permission. However, such attempts at control failed, and by the eleventh century the archaic restrictions on the freedom of those with public responsibilities to enter religious life had disappeared in practice.\textsuperscript{19}

In the eleventh century marriage had developed into the most important restriction on the right of a free man to enter religion. If a married person with a living spouse sought to join a religious community, the status of the partner who remained in the world had to be decided. Justinian had been inclined to view the entry of one spouse as the equivalent of a divorce. His legislation allowed the person left in secular life to remarry after one year.\textsuperscript{20} However, Pope Gregory I and the canon law after him had rejected Justinian’s solution because it undermined the permanence of marriage. By the eleventh century both spouses had to agree to the separation, and refusal on the part of one was sufficient to prevent entry into religious life by the other. The bishop normally encouraged both spouses to enter religion. Failing that, he sought for a vow of chastity from the spouse remaining in the world. The sole situation in which a married person could enter religion without the consent of his spouse was when the spouse was guilty of adultery.\textsuperscript{21}

Passage by a monk from one monastery to another, called transitus, was also marked by certain restrictions. Benedict’s Rule had provided that if a monk from a “known” house sought to join his monastery, he was not to be received without permission from the monk’s present abbot.\textsuperscript{22} In the eleventh century that restriction still remained, though the law governing transitus evolved considerably in the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus in the eleventh century Benedict’s provisions for the recep-
INTRODUCTION

tion of new members had been modified by subsequent legislation and custom so that slaves, serfs, married persons, and religious from other houses could be received only after legal requirements peculiar to their respective situations had been observed. Beyond these restrictions, in the eleventh century there were still no formal requirements about education, age, or state of health. Hence a considerable spectrum of individuals could and did enter religious life in that century.

One of the most important developments in the procedure for obtaining entry into religion had not been the subject of legislation, but had arisen out of custom. Benedict had offered his adult entrant the option of giving his property to the poor or to the monastery, and he had not specifically ruled out the possibility that the entrant would give it to his family. In the case of children offered to the monastery, Benedict had recommended disinherithance of the child by his parents. If the parents were unwilling to go so far as to disinherit their child, Benedict permitted them to make any gift that they chose to the monastery. Benedict’s younger contemporary, the emperor Justinian, had included provisions in the civil law that were more favorable to the economic interests of religious houses. Before Justinian the Roman law had left to the individual religious the right to make a will and to exercise some control over his or her property. Justinian’s legislation diminished the religious’ control of his property in favor of the religious house. According to Novella 5, issued in April 535, a person was free to dispose of his property up to his formal entry into a religious house. Thereafter, any property that he still possessed at the moment of entry passed automatically into the control of the religious house. These provisions apparently appeared to do an injustice to the sons of the entrant. In Novellae 76 (538 A.D.) and 123 (546 A.D.), Justinian softened the provisions of Novella 5 so that the sons of a man entering religion could receive their share of his property, called the legitima in Roman law, even if he had entered religious life without giving it to them beforehand. Any property over and above the portions due to children still passed into the control of the monastery. In spite of
Justinian's attribution to the religious house of any undisposed goods in the possession of an entrant, his legislation in no way demanded that an entrant give property to the house that he entered.

Thus both Benedict and Justinian treated the gift at entry as optional, according to the choice of the entrant. By the eleventh century the optional or voluntary nature of the gift at entry had virtually disappeared. With few exceptions an entrant was expected to bring a gift of some sort. The gift was not a dowry in the post-Tridentine sense of a fixed sum required of all entrants. Instead it could vary significantly in size and nature from one entrant to the next. There was no written legislation about the gift in the eleventh century, and the situation was very fluid. But if a family refused to give a gift or an acceptable gift, it risked rejection of its candidate. For most of the eleventh century there was no criticism of this practice as simoniacal, that is, as the buying or selling of a holy thing. Indeed, there was little criticism at all. The monastic charters and other texts repeated over and over again the admonition of Jehovah in Exodus 23:15: "You will not appear in my presence empty-handed." The gift at entry, in fact, became the focus around which certain serious economic and social problems were worked out between a religious house and its neighbors.

INTRODUCTION


7. Sancti Benedicti Regula, chap. 2.

8. Infantes: Sancti Benedicti Regula, chaps. 31, 37, 45, 70; adolescentes: ibid., chaps. 22, 30, 63.


10. Ibid., chap. 59.

11. Ibid., chap. 60.

12. Ibid., chap. 61.

13. Ibid., chap. 58.


15. Sancti Benedicti Regula, chap. 58.

16. Ibid., chap. 59.


19. Figueras, De impedimentis, pp. 29-44; McLaughlin, Le très ancien droit, pp. 60-61.


22. Sancti Benedicti Regula, chap. 61.


25. Ibid., chap. 59.


27. "Ingredientem namque simul secuntur omnino res, licet non expressim quia introduxit eas dixerit, et non est dominus earum ulterior ullo modo" (Corpus iuris civilis 3, Novella 5, chap. 5).

28. Ibid., Novella 76 and Novella 123, chap. 38.

29. The assumption that an entrant would make a gift was implicit in charters that specified that a particular gift would suffice for a future entry: Aniane, no. 293, 1060-1108; no. 219, 1115; Gellone, no. 288, 1103; St. Sernin, no. 349, 1140-41; Vaux de Cernay, p. 34, ca. 1162. At times a charter specified that a particular gift would not suffice for future reception, but had to be supplemented: Gellone, no. 471, 1103; Conques, no. 475, 1105; St. Sernin, no. 598, 1175-74.

31. "Non apparebis in conspectu meo vacuus." The admonition was cited as a proof-text in defense of gifts at the entry of oblates by Rudolph of Saint Trond: MGH, SS, 10: 321. St. Victor, vol. 1, no. 589, 1069, cited it in relation to entry gifts. Redon, no. 384, 1095, said that a man offered a gift because he was unwilling to enter the Lord's sanctuary with a closed hand and wished to enter with a gift to hand over. See also Redon, no. 371, 1114-39, and St. Vaast, p. 399.