Female Religious Life in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

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The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a remarkable diversification of forms of the *vita religiosa*, and women were often at the forefront of these developments. Inspired by the gospel, and often open to the participation of the laity, many of the emerging modes of religious life combined the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa,* and their religious members occupied a liminal space between the cloister and the world. In many ways, these innovations can be seen as a response to the demands of a changing world.[1] Already in the twelfth century, it became clear that traditional monasticism alone could not meet the needs of a shifting spiritual climate. Innovative experiments within the boundaries of traditional monasticism, such as the Paraclete community of Abelard (d. 1142) and Heloise (d. 1164) in the 1120s, were no longer an adequate response to a new female religiosity.[2] Thanks to the research of Herbert Grundmann,[3] and to the increasing importance of gender history as a subject of research,[4] the topic of religious women, particularly in the

[1] Cristina Andenna, "Neue Formen der Frömmigkeit und Armutsbewegung," in *Verwandlungen des Stauferreichs. Drei Innovationsregionen im mittelalterlichen Europa*, ed. Bernd Schneidmüller, Stefan Weinfurter, and Alfried Wieczorek (Darmstadt, 2010), 246–63; still useful is Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1978); see also the article by Magnani in this volume.

[2] Franz J. Felten, "Verbandsbildung von Frauenklöstern: Le Paraclet, Prémy, Fontevraud mit einem Ausblick auf Cluny, Sempringham und Tart," in *Vom Kloster zum Klosterverband. Das Werkzeug der Schriftlichkeit. Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums des Projekts L 2 im SFB 231 (22.–23. Februar 1996)*, ed. Hagen Keller and Franz Neiske, 277–341 (Munich, 1997), http://digi20.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00042683_00001.html. See also the article by Griffiths in the volume.

[3] Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN, 1995).

[4] Elizabeth L'Estrange and Alison More, "Introduction," in *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe: Construction, Transformation, and Subversion, 600–1530*, ed. Elizabeth L'Estrange and Alison More (Farnham, 2011), 1–14; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and History* (Basingstoke, 2012).

twelfth and thirteenth centuries, has attracted growing scholarly interest.[5] As recent research has shown, many women, especially from the twelfth century onward, managed to organize themselves into smaller, less formal communities, and to position themselves outside the boundaries of ecclesiastical institutions.[6] This article explores the institutional responses to spiritual developments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, taking into account the variety and importance of new forms and ways of women's religious life, and particularly papal concerns about the risks that life outside the cloister held for female religious.

To mitigate the perceived dangers, the papacy made repeated efforts to recast these new forms of life in the image of traditional monasticism.[7] As a result, innovative "double communities" were increasingly expected to observe traditional rules and, more importantly, to accept enclosure. Further, the male members of these orders gradually tried to free themselves from their female counterparts, or at least to ensure that authority rested in male hands. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, many women still drew inspiration from the climate of radical penitence and renewal, and embraced new forms of religious life based on radical poverty and active charity. But these new female communities were often regularized, institutionalized, and steered toward traditional cloister walls.

Diversification in the Twelfth Century

While diverse forms of women's religious life had existed since late antiquity and the early Middle Ages,[8] the twelfth century brought a new phase of rapid expansion and experimentation. Women from all backgrounds—virgins, widows, wives separated from their husbands, and young women of "ill repute"—sought to abandon their old lives in favor of a new and radical *vita religiosa* characterized by penance, asceticism, and charity. Some took their inspiration from and attached themselves to preachers such as Robert

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[5] For an overview, see Annalisa Albuzzi, "Il monachesimo femminile nell'Italia medioevale," in *Dove va la storiografia monastica in Europa? Temi e metodi di ricerca per lo studio della vita monastica e regolare in età medievale alle soglie del terzo millennio*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna (Milan, 2001), 131–89; *Vita religiosa al femminile (secoli XIII–XIV). Atti del Convegno di Pistoia (19.–21. maggio 2017)* (Rome, 2019).

[6] See the article by Magnani in volume 1 and the article by Mulder-Bakker and More in this volume.

[7] James Arthur Brundage and Elizabeth M. Makowski, "Enclosure of Nuns: The Decretal *Periculoso* and Its Commentators," *JMH* 20 (1994), 143–55.

[8] See the articles by Giorda, Réal, Magnani, Lifshitz, Bitel, Leclercq, and Beach and Juganaru in this volume.

of Arbrissel, Stephen of Obazine, Vital of Savigny, Bernard of Tiron, and Norbert of Xanten, espousing forms of religious life modeled on a fresh interpretation of the apostolic life. In the eyes of the ecclesiastical authorities, however, the unregulated contact between men and women that could result presented a danger to both groups. To minimize the peril, it was seen as necessary to find new ways to organize this spreading religious desire: some women were guided toward traditional monastic communities; those who were opposed to enclosure were encouraged to marry.[9] At the same time, emerging models of religious life that included both women and men within a single community could allow women to play a more central role.[10] For example, in the early days of Robert of Arbrissel's community at Fontevraud, which was home to subcommunities of religious men and women, lay women, and lepers, the nuns were responsible for all temporal administration, as well as for maintaining the spiritual discipline of the community. The male community was in charge of manual labor and liturgical functions.[11]

Robert of Arbrissel was not the only innovator. In southern Italy, William (d. 1142), a pilgrim and hermit from Vercelli, decided to lead a life of voluntary penitence in the first decades of the twelfth century. His zeal and charisma attracted a number of men and women seeking to follow his example. After settling in the Apennines, William established several monastic communities, the most significant of which was the male monastery of Santa Maria di Montevergine (Avellino). Owing to conflict among the clerics of the community, he took refuge in another mixed, but predominantly female, community that he had founded near San Salvatore al Goleto. There, he decided to entrust the women with a central authoritative role. This situation lasted for at least two generations, until the monastery was transformed into an exclusively female establishment.[12]

In England, Gilbert of Sempringham (d. 1189), who originally attended to the *cura* of women who desired to dedicate themselves wholly to God,[13]

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[9] See the article by Jasper and Howe in this volume.

[10] On double monasteries, see the article by Beach and Juganaru in this volume.

[11] Jacques Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel: Sex, Sin, and Salvation in the Middle Ages*, trans. Bruce Venarde (Washington, DC, 2006); see also the article by Griffiths in this volume.

[12] Jean-Marie Martin, "Le Goleto et Montevergine en Pouille et en Basilicate," in *La società meridionale nelle pergamene di Montevergine. I Normanni chiamano gli Svevi* (Montevergine, 1989), 101–28; F. Panarelli, "Tre documenti sugli esordi della comunità di San Salvatore al Goleto," in *Mediterraneo, Mezzogiorno, Europa. Studi in onore di Cosimo Damiano Fonseca*, ed. Giancarlo Andenna and Hubert Houben (Bari, 2004), 799–816.

[13] Glyn Coppack, "'And then he added canons': Gilbert of Sempringham, and the Developing Framework of Gilbertine Life," in *The Regular Canons in the Medieval British Isles,* ed. Janet Burton and Karen Stöber (Turnhout, 2011), 291–311.

founded two double monasteries, Sempringham and Haverholme, between 1130 and 1150. The men and women in these two houses lived in communities that embraced the ascetic and contemplative life, while still taking care of those in need. To regularize this form of coexistence, Gilbert was compelled to compose a rule and statutes that the Church approved in 1178. The structure of the new order of Sempringham was based on double monasteries, in which, at least initially, both women and men played important leadership roles.[14]

The military orders, which had initially refused to admit women, also began to accept *sorores* and *consorores* (women who had made a partial religious profession) in the twelfth century. Although men and women were not originally separated, they were soon forbidden to live within the same houses. The women were then given a choice: they could live in physically divided double communities in which governance was sometimes entrusted to them, or they could choose to live in traditional female monasteries in which it was generally not possible for them to engage in the charitable and hospital activities so central to the vocation of the military orders. For the ones who chose the former, there were many double houses, including the Templar commanderie in Rouell near Tarragona, that were directed by a *preceptrix*. In the thirteenth century, two other military orders, the Teutonic Knights and the Order of St. John, also began to accept *sorores* and *consorores*.[15] From the very beginning, the Order of Santiago had included female houses and double communities, such as Santa Eufemia de Cozuelos and San Mateo de Avila, led by a woman called the *commendadora*. Some houses comprised married couples who had taken vows of chastity. These couples would live with their children except in times of war, when men were called to fight, or during times of fasting, when both men and women would withdraw to separate houses.[16] A similar situation existed among the Humiliati, who admitted married couples alongside more traditional communities of men and women.[17]

[14] Katherine Sykes, *Inventing Sempringham: Gilbert of Sempringham and the Origins of the Role of the Master* (Zürich, 2011).

[15] Alain Demurger, *Chevaliers du Christ. Les ordres religieux-militaires au Moyen Âge (XIe–XVIe siècle)* (Paris, 2002), 96–111; Alan J. Forey, "Women and the Military Orders in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Hospitaller Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anton T. Luttrell and Helene J. Nicholson (Aldershot, 2006), 43–70; Myra Miranda Born, *Women in the Military Orders of the Crusades* (New York, 2012).

[16] María Echániz Sans, *Las mujeres de la orden militar de Santiago en la Edad media* (Salamanca, 1992), 57–8.

[17] See the various publications by Maria Pia Alberzoni, including "Sub eadem clausura sequestrati: uomini e donne nelle prime comunità umiliate lombarde," in *Uomini e donne in comunità*, ed. Giuseppina De Sandre Gasparini (Verona, 1994), 69–110, and "Die Humiliaten zwischen Legende und Wirklichkeit," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für*

In his thirteenth-century *Historia Occidentalis*, Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) wrote about the complexities and variety of the *vita religiosa,* emphasizing the exceptional character of these "mixed" forms of life, and evincing fascination with several of the new female religious experiments.[18] On the one hand, he criticized traditional forms of female religious life, both monastic and canonical.[19] Among his targets were the secular canonesses, particularly in the Low Countries (modern Belgium, the Netherlands, and part of Germany), whose way of life he considered to be old-fashioned and very elitist. In keeping with conciliar provisions of the twelfth century, Jacques condemned the canonesses for what he considered their lax form of life—particularly citing the temporary nature of their vocation, as they did not make a solemn profession.[20]

On the other hand, Jacques praised at length many of the new forms of female religious life that had emerged in the course of the twelfth century. He spoke positively, for example, about the experiment at Fontevraud[21] and about the beguines, discussed below. He also praised the women who gathered around Norbert of Xanten and the Premonstratensians, and those who gravitated toward the Cistercian world. Among the Premonstratensians, communities of women lived close to, but physically separate from, the men, although the two groups were united for liturgical celebrations.[22] The *cura mulierum* presented two difficulties: not only was it necessary to deal with the care of the sisters' souls, but the men also had to manage the administration of their worldly goods. From 1137 on, the Premonstratensian general

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Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 107 (1999): 324–53; see also Francis Andrew, *The Early Humiliati* (Cambridge, 1999).

[18] Jacques de Vitry, *The Historia Occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry: A Critical Edition*, ed. John Frederick Hinnebusch (Fribourg, 1972), 20 and 130; Maria Pia Alberzoni, "'Regulariter vivere': le nuove forme duecentesche di monachesimo femminile," in *Vita religiosa al femminile*, 13–30.

[19] Franz J. Felten, "Geschichtsschreibung *cum ira et studio*: zur Darstellung religiöser Gemeinschaften in Jakob von Vitrys *Historia Occidentalis*," in *Christliches und jüdisches Europa im Mittelalter. Kolloquium zu Ehren von Alfred Haverkamp*, ed. Lukas Clemens and Sigrid Hibordian (Trier, 2011), 83–120.

[20] Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis* 31, 156–8; Franz J. Felten, "Wie adelig waren Kanonissenstifte (und andere weibliche Konvente) im frühen und hohen Mittelalter?" in *Studien zum Kanonissenstift*, ed. Irene Crusius (Göttingen, 2001), 39–129. Among the rare studies on secular canonesses, see Hedwig Röckelein, ed., *Frauenstifte. Frauenklöster und ihre Pfarreien* (Essen, 2009); Sabine Klapp, "Negotiating Autonomy: Canons in Late Medieval 'Frauenstifte'," in *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100–1500*, ed. Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin (Turnhout, 2014), 367–400.

[21] Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis* 20, 130.

[22] *Ibid*. 22, 134–5. On the Premonstratensians and women, see also Bruno Krings, "Die Prämonstratenser und ihr weiblicher Zweig," in *Studien zum Prämonstratenserorden*, ed. Irene Crusius and Helmut Flachenecker (Göttingen, 2003), 73–106.

chapter intervened increasingly to prohibit "dangerous" double communities, although recent research has questioned the reach and efficacy of these efforts. At the end of the century, Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) allowed the Premonstratensians to refuse the reception of women in general, and only existing female monasteries could still benefit from the *cura monialium*.[23]

At the same time, Jacques de Vitry relates that widows and married women, as well as powerful women from noble families, had abandoned the world to serve Christ in poverty and humility. He recounts that these women often joined the *cisterciensis ordinis religio sanctimonialium*, which had multiplied "like the stars in the sky."[24] According to Jacques, unlike women in traditional monastic life, which was afflicted with a general *dissolutio*, women affiliated with the Cistercian order were remarkable for their deliberate choice to live a strict and irreproachable life, allowing them to be true to their vow of poverty. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, forms of female Cistercian life had spread, not only within France, but also in Hainaut, Germany, England, Spain, Denmark, and Italy.[25]

The problems that had afflicted Premonstratensian women soon came to trouble the Cistercians. In the first half of the thirteenth century, the general chapter placed limits on new female communities being admitted to the order. Initially, women could only be accepted if they possessed sufficient means of support and if they observed strict enclosure. In 1228, the general chapter decided to forbid the reception of new women's communities. This prohibition ensured that male Cistercians were no longer responsible for any aspect of *cura animarum* and visitation for female communities.[26] Those that had already become affiliated with the order by the will or the political authority of the pope or the bishops were exempt from this decision. Recent research

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[23] Alexis Grélois, "L'institutionnalisation des religieuses dans les ordres de Prémontré et de Cîteaux (XIIe–XIIIe siècles)," in *La place et le rôle des femmes dans l'histoire de Cluny. En hommage à Ermengarde de Blesle, mère de Guillaume le Pieux. Actes du colloque de Blesle des 23 et 24 avril 2010*, ed. Jean-Paul Renard et al., 251–68 (Saint-Just-près-Brioude, 2013).

[24] Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Occidentalis* 15, 117.

[25] Constance Hoffman Berman, "Were There Twelfth-Century Cistercian Nuns?" in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance Hoffman Berman (New York, 2005), 217–48; Franz J. Felten, "Der Zisterzienserorden und die Frauen," in Franz J. Felten, *Vita religiosa sanctimonialium. Norm und Praxis des weiblichen religiösen Lebens vom 6. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Christine Kleinjung (Korb, 2011), 199–274; see also the article by Jamroziak in this volume.

[26] *Statuta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786*, ed. Joseph Marie Canivez, vol. 1 (Louvain, 1933), 405 (1213) and 517 (1220); vol. 2 (Louvain, 1934), 36 (1225) and 68 (1228). See also Alexis Grélois, "Clairvaux et le monachisme féminin, des origines au milieu du XVe siècle," in *Le temps long de Clairvaux. Nouvelles recherches, nouvelles perspectives (XIIe–XXIe siècle)*, ed. Arnaud Baudin and Alexis Grélois (Paris, 2017), 155–82.

has shown, however, that women were still free to choose. If attracted to the rigor of the Cistercian way of life, they could adopt Cistercian customs in the knowledge that the men of the order would have neither authority nor cause to intervene in their affairs, whether economic, moral, or religious. Despite the repeated provisions of the general chapters and the Roman Curia, the spectrum of female Cistercian religiosity in the thirteenth century ranged from formal incorporation, to varying degrees of informal association, to identification without any institutional link.[27] Even with these problems of incorporation, however, many women who were affiliated with the order—including Mechtild of Magdeburg, Lutgard of Aywières, and Mechtild of Hackborn—wielded considerable influence from within the walls of their cloisters, both in the Church and society, through their visions and writings.[28]

New Experiences in the Thirteenth Century

From the early thirteenth century, the Roman Curia again focused its attention on new forms of religious life characterized by apostolic poverty and living in the world rather than within the cloister. In particular, the papacy continued to steer women to religious expressions more suited to the monastic world. Contemporary clerics used sermons to curb unregulated forms of religious life, but they also recognized their benefit and sought to inspire and encourage new movements.[29]

Mulieres devotae *and* sorores penitentes

The efforts of such preachers often focused on a large group of women in northern Europe known as beguines. In particular, these women could be found in the dioceses of Liège, Brabant, Artois, and Flanders, and, from 1223, in Germany, Rhineland, Thuringia, and Saxony. These *mulieres devotae* lived communally in beguinages, which were individual houses sometimes arranged around a court. They devoted themselves to prayer, contemplation,

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[27] On the process of incorporation and the creation of a complex feminine Cistercian identity in France, see Anne Elisabeth Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne* (Ithaca, NY, 2011). For northern Italy, see Guido Cariboni, "Cistercian Nuns in Northern Italy: Variety of Foundations and Construction of an Identity," in *Women in the Medieval Monastic World*, ed. Janet E. Burton and Karen Stöber (Turnhout, 2015), 53–74.

[28] Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum. Zur Vorgeschichte und Genese frauenmystischer Texte des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1988).

[29] Nicole Bériou, *L'avènement des maîtres de la Parole. La prédication à Paris au XIIIème siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1989); on monastic preaching in this period, see the article by Baker and Kienzle in this volume.

charity, and care of the sick and poor, often without following a canonically recognized rule or professing religious vows.[30] Jacques de Vitry and Thomas de Cantimpré (d. 1272), among others, sought ways to have these women officially recognized within the framework of traditional ecclesiastical structures. Both by preaching and writing saints' Lives, they attempted to validate these models for female religious devotion and to offer some guidance as to the role that the clergy should play in the spiritual direction of the beguines.[31]

Preaching was also seen as a means of curbing the problem of prostitution, which had become alarmingly widespread in urban areas during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The female audiences of itinerant preachers such as Robert of Arbrissel included a number of repentant prostitutes. After their conversion, which was often represented as the result of intense spiritual care, these women were generally faced with a choice between marriage or a monastery. Thanks largely to popular preaching, however, prostitution received increased attention from theologians and canonists who sought new ways to convert these women and lead them toward a Christian life.[32] In northern France, Fulk of Neuilly (d. 1201) worked toward the conversion of *publice meretrices* and their rehabilitation within society. Fulk's example was followed in Paris by the creation of a community that observed the Cistercian *institutiones* at the monastery of Saint-Antoine, and by the foundation of the *filiae Dei* by the bishop of Paris William of Auvergne (d. 1249) in 1226.[33] Ideas of morality were also circulated

[30] See the article by More and Mulder-Bakker in this volume; Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia, PA, 2001), 48–60; Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200–1600* (Oxford 2018). For Germany, see Jörg Voigt, *Beginen im Spätmittelalter. Frauenfrömmigkeit in Thüringen und im Reich* (Cologne, 2012); Letha Böhringer, "Beginen und Schwestern in der Sorge für Kranke, Sterbende und Verstorbene: eine Problemskizze," in *Organisierte Barmherzigkeit. Armenfürsorge und Hospitalwesen in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Artur Dirmeier (Regensburg, 2010), 127–55.

[31] Cristina Andenna, "Ein besserer Weg zu Gott: Freundschaftskonzepte und Freundschaftszeichen in den Viten weiblicher Heiliger des 13. Jahrhunderts," in *Freundschaftszeichen. Gesten, Gaben und Symbole von Freundschaft im Mittelalter*, ed. Marina Münkler, Antje Sablotny, and Matthias Standke (Heidelberg, 2015), 179–206.

[32] Guido Cariboni, "Una prostituta in famiglia: uno spazio di redenzione per le pubbliche meretrici a cavallo tra XI e XII secolo," *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo* 7 (2010): 391–405; Cristina Andenna, "Il fenomeno delle 'convertite': reti di comunità di 'sorores penitentes' e esperimenti di organizzazione istituzionale fra Europa, Terra Santa e Italia meridionale nel secolo XIII," in *Vita religiosa al femminile*, 55–75.

[33] Nowacka, "Networks of Ideas, Networks of Men: Clerical Reform, Parisian Theologians and the Movement to Reform Prostitutes in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century France," in *International Religious Networks*, ed. Jeremy Gregory and Hugh McLeod (Woodbridge, 2012), 55–66; Keiko R. A. Nowacka, "Persecution, Marginalization, or Tolerance: Prostitutes in Thirteenth-Century Parisian Society," in *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*, ed. Meredith Cohen and Justine Firnhaber-Baker (Farnham, 2010), 175–96.

by crusade preachers in Germany. For example, Rudolph of Worms (d. after 1227), canon of Hildesheim and chaplain of the Cistercian cardinal Conrad of Urach (d. 1227), initiated a movement of conversion and rehabilitation of "fallen women." Following his initiatives, penitent women who wanted to lead a religious life could now do so. Their lives were organized in *claustra* ("enclosures"), and they were known as the *sorores penitentes de Alemania*. In 1232, Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227–41) institutionalized this new form of female religious life as the Order of St. Mary Magdalene (*ordo Sancte Marie Magdalene*).[34]

A wider movement, though not institutionally related to the *penitentes de Alemania*, also took hold in the thirteenth century in Europe and the Levant. In 1231, Archbishop Andrea of Acerenza (d. after 1237) brought a community of women of "dubious origins" from the Holy Land to Matera in Puglia in southern Italy. He called this community the women of the New Penitence (*moniales novarum penitentium*). Two privileges issued by Gregory IX December 1237 reveal that the foundation of Matera was part of a small network of women's houses that became known as the Enclose Penitent Sisters (*sorores penitentes inclusae*). At the heart of this network was the church located in the city of Acre and dedicated to St. Mary and all the saints, and there were other foundations in the East, located in Cyprus, the Holy Land, and present-day Lebanon.[35]

Mendicant Examples

The Roman Curia did not limit its efforts to regularizing the religious lives of "fallen women." It also sought to control other female communities that were based on apostolic models of absolute poverty while living in the world, and particularly those that were connected in various ways to the two most important mendicant orders: the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Throughout the thirteenth century, the popes repeatedly sought to place women firmly under the spiritual care of the friars.[36]

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[34] Guido Cariboni, "Gregorio IX e la nascita delle 'sorores penitentes' di Santa Maria Maddalena in 'Alemannia'," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico di Trento* 25 (1999): 11–44; Jörg Voigt, "Der Hildesheimer Bischof Konrad II. (1221–1246/47) und die Anfänge des Ordens der hl. Maria Magdalena in Deutschland," *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 87 (2015): 33–60.

[35] Cristina Andenna, "Da 'moniales novarum penitentium' a 'sorores ordinis Sancte Marie de Valle Viridi': una forma di vita religiosa femminile fra Oriente e Occidente (secoli XIII–XV)," in *Da Accon a Matera. Santa Maria la Nova, un monastero femminile tra dimensione mediterranea e identità urbana (XIII–XVI secolo)*, ed. Francesco Panarelli (Berlin, 2012), 59–130.

[36] Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Papato e nuovi ordini religiosi femminili," in *Il papato duecentesco e gli ordini mendicanti. Atti del XXV Convegno internazionale della Società internazionale di studi francescani (Assisi, 13–14 febbraio 1998)*, ed. Enrico Menestò (Spoleto, 1998), 205–61; Alberzoni, "'Regulariter vivere'," 13–30.

The house of San Sisto in Rome represents a special case of papal engagement in regulating and regularizing female religious experience. Here, Innocent III attempted to create a *universale coenobium* that would be home to all the female religious in Rome, including not only the nuns but also the female penitents who had not yet made a profession. He also sought to impose strict enclosure on them. As Maria Pia Alberzoni has shown, this example includes all of the main elements of the reform of female religious life that would be undertaken by subsequent popes. Innocent III first asked the help of Gilbert of Sempringham. This was unsuccessful, however, and Honorius III (r. 1216–27) placed San Sisto under the direction of Dominic (d. 1221) and his brothers, who took responsibility for the spiritual care of the monastery and first introduced the *institutiones* of Prouille.[37] The "Constitutions of San Sisto" were created on the basis of this text and the *Rule of St. Augustine* (*RA*) for the sole use of this Roman monastery; Gregory IX would give these same constitutions to the German Order of Mary Magdalene in 1232.[38]

The role of Dominic of Calaruega and his brothers in the 1206 foundation of Prouille in Languedoc, often regarded as the first monastery of Dominican women, is well known. Two other female monasteries also sought a privileged connection with the emerging order, and, like Prouille, adopted the Dominican form of life adapted for women: the monastery of Sant'Agnese in Bologna, which had its origins in the connection that its foundress, Diana d'Andalò (d. 1236), had with Dominic and later Master General Jordan of Saxony (d. 1237);[39] and the communities of Madrid and Montargis, the latter founded by the Countess Amicie de Montfort (d. 1252/3), who had a similarly close relationship with Dominic and his brothers.[40]

After Dominic's death in 1221, the general chapters of Dominicans were concerned with the growing number of requests from women's communities

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[37] *Ibid.*; Guido Cariboni, "Problemi d'identità: le prime comunità femminili legate ai predicatori tra distinzione e appartenenza," *Revue Mabillon* n.s. 20 (2009): 151–72.

[38] Alberzoni, "Papato e nuovi ordini religiosi femminili," 244–6; see also Guido Cariboni, "Zur Datierung der Interpolationen in den 'Institutiones Sancti Sixti de Urbe': die normative und institutionelle Entwicklung der 'sorores penitentes' der Heiligen Maria Magdalena in 'Alemannia' im 13. Jahrhundert," in *"Regula Sancti Augustini." Normative Grundlage differenter Verbände im Mittelalter*, ed. Gert Melville and Anne Müller (Paring, 2002), 389–418.

[39] Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Jordan of Saxony and the Monastery of St. Agnese in Bologna," *Franciscan Studies* 68 (2010): 1–19; Andrea Löther and Birgit Tramsen, "'Du liebst mich mehr, als Du von mir geliebt wirst': Jordan von Sachsen und Diana von Andalò," in *Meine in Gott geliebte Freundin. Freundschaftsdokumente aus klösterlichen und humanistischen Schreibstuben*, ed. Gabriela Signori (Bielefeld, 1998), 88–97.

[40] Julie Anne Smith, "Prouille, Madrid, Rome: The Evolution of the Earliest Dominican Instituta for Nuns," *JMH* 35 (2009): 340–52.

to join the order. In particular, the order felt that the duties related to caring for religious women constituted an obstacle to their own theological studies and preaching. They adopted the same solution as the Premonstratensians and Cistercians, refusing to admit new female communities and forbidding brothers to receive women into the religious life, to accept their profession, or to cut their hair.[41] The resistance of Amicie de Monfort, however, marked the beginning of a new development; she refused to accept the master general's decision not to incorporate her community into the order. She turned to Innocent IV (r. 1243–54) in 1245 and obtained his permission to have her house incorporated.[42] From that moment onward, the papacy forced the order to accept female monasteries and to take responsibility for their spiritual care, even though, as we will see, these monasteries did not all follow the same regulations.

The Dominicans first took a definitive position on the inclusion of women during the generalate of Humbert of Romans (r. 1254–63). In 1257, the general chapter of Florence decreed that female monasteries were to be incorporated and proclaimed their dependence on the order, not only *de facto* but also *de jure*. The nuns were henceforth required to make profession to the master general, and were subject to the constitutions of the order and its liturgy, as well as to visitation by brothers chosen by the masters general or provincial priors. They were also exempt from the jurisdiction of the local bishop; they were not subject to him in their choice and consecration of their superiors, nor were they required to pay him tithes.

This permission to incorporate radically changed the perception of women within the order. The general chapter of Valenciennes of 1259 approved the *Liber constitutionum sororum ordinis Praedicatorum*, a text for women that was modeled on the constitutions of the brothers, but that did not include the requirements of preaching and study. In concrete terms, however, the Dominican sisters within communities formally incorporated into the order were virtually indistinguishable from their counterparts in other women's monasteries. Strict enclosure, visitation, pastoral care, and the issue of individual, rather than communal, poverty were fundamental and obligatory in all female houses.[43]

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[41] For a counterexample that shows women seeking freedom from the Dominican order in the late Middle Ages, see the article by Hirbodian in this volume.

[42] Raymond Creytens, "Les constitutions primitives des sœurs dominicaines de Montargis," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 17 (1947): 41–84.

[43] Cariboni, "Problemi d'identità," 168–71; Guido Cariboni, "Osservazioni sui percorsi normativi per le comunità religiose femminili nell'ambito dei Predicatori fino a Umberto di Romans," in *Il velo, la penna e la parola. Le domenicane. Storia, istituzioni*

In his *De eruditione predicatorum*,[44] written between 1263 and 1277, Humbert of Romans explained this change of attitude regarding the incorporation of women into the Dominican order. To give legitimacy to the change of policy, he asserted that Dominic himself had created a female order. In the second half of the thirteenth century, the Dominicans thus reimagined the role of Dominic and his first female disciples, inventing fictive histories. By authoring new hagiographic texts, they created, *a posteriori*, a narrative that insisted that the presence of women within the order stemmed from close friendships between Dominic and certain of his female followers.[45]

The situation, however, never became completely stable, as can be seen in Clement IV's (r. 1265–8) 1267 bull, *Affectu sincero*, which allowed other women's communities to be associated with the order in a more flexible manner. As a result, the relationship between sisters and brothers regarding the *cura animarum* and other matters were always handled on a case-by-case basis. In theory at least, the nuns affiliated with the Dominicans had to be subject to the *RA* and to the observance of the *Liber constitutionum sororum*, but there were numerous exceptions to this practice. Nevertheless, women in the Dominican sphere of influence were all known as the *moniales Ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura and instituta fratrum praedicatorum viventes* ("nuns of the order of St. Augustine, living under the care and the constitutions of the preachers"). According to *Affectu sincero*, it was the responsibility of the brothers to carry out the mandated annual visitation to ensure that the order's constitutions were being observed. Beyond these visitations, the *cura monialium* was reduced to preaching, confessing, and celebrating the sacraments by Dominican chaplains; the latter, however, were not required to reside in the female monasteries. Moreover, the material assets of the women's communities did not have to be overseen by the brothers.[46] This flexible spiritual *cura* did not need official approval and thus paved the way

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e scritture, ed. Gabriella Zarri (Florence, 2009), 31–48; Isnard Wilhelm Frank, "Die Dominikanerinnen als zweiter Orden der Dominikaner," in *Fromme Frauen—unbequeme Frauen? Weibliches Religiosentum im Mittelalter*, ed. Edeltraut Klueting (Hildesheim, 2006), 105–25.

[44] See Simon Tugwell, "Humbert of Romans's Material for Preachers," in *De ore Domini: Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Leslie Amos, Eugene Green, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Kalamazoo, MI, 1989), 105–17.

[45] Guido Cariboni, "Domenico e la vita religiosa femminile: tra realtà e finzione istituzionale," in *Domenico di Caleruega e la nascita dell'Ordine dei Frati Predicatori. Atti del XLI Convegno storico internazionale (Todi, 10–12 ottobre 2004)* (Spoleto, 2005), 327–60.

[46] Sylvie Duval, "Les Dominicains et les femmes (fin du Moyen Âge–début de l'époque moderne)," in *Les Dominicains en France (XIIIe–XXe siècle)*, ed. Nicole Bériou, André Vauchez, and Michel Zink (Paris, 2017), 21–38.

for other women's institutions, including houses of penitents, beguines, and Cistercian nuns, to use Dominican brothers for their *cura animarum*.

The example of Clare of Assisi (d. 1253) and the Order of San Damiano is another useful case in point in the context of the problems facing communities of women religious.[47] Clare was born in Assisi, where, unlike Francis, her family belonged to the urban aristocracy. Fascinated by Francis's message, she received the tonsure at his hand and began a life of penance based on the model of the first Friars Minor. After spending some time as a penitent in two female monastic communities, Clare settled with a small group of women, the *pauperes sorores*, in the monastery of San Damiano near Assisi. At first, these women lived a life grounded in the Franciscan ideal of poverty with the support of Francis and his male followers. The Franciscan concept of evangelical radical poverty, considered dangerous by the Roman Curia, was particularly controversial for female communities. It was thus not long before San Damiano was steered in a more traditional direction and Clare was made abbess of her community.

While life at San Damiano would gradually be regularized, another new form of religious life first emerged under the influence of Cardinal Hugo of Ostia, the future Pope Gregory IX. During his legations in northern and central Italy between 1218 and 1219, the cardinal regularized several women's communities that had previously lived an apostolic and penitential life. He gave these sisters a *forma vitae* based on the *Rule of St. Benedict* (*RB*) and influenced by Cistercian regulations. Papal letters describing this are addressed specifically to four monasteries: Santa Maria di Monticelli near Florence, Monteluce near Perugia, Santa Maria outside Porta Camollia near Siena, and Santa Maria di Gattaiola near Lucca. Any donations made to them were to be handed over to the Curia, which in this way became the guarantor of their poverty. At the same time, Hugo granted these communities both apostolic protection and freedom from episcopal jurisdiction. The cardinal's project, however, conflicted profoundly with the original intentions of the women concerned: radical poverty and charitable activities were forbidden to these communities and strict enclosure was imposed upon them. This new group of monasteries was approved by the Roman Curia under the name of the Religion of the Poor

[47] Maria Pia Alberzoni, *Clare of Assisi and the Poor Sisters in the 13th Century* (St. Bonaventure, NY, 2004); Leslie S. Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* (Leiden, 2008); Bert Roest, *Order and Disorder: The Poor Clares between Foundation and Reform* (Leiden, 2013); Catherine M. Mooney, *Clare of Assisi and the Thirteenth-Century Church: Religious Women, Rules, and Resistance* (Philadelphia, PA, 2016).

Ladies of the Spoleto Valley or Tuscany (*religio pauperum dominarum de Valle Spoleti sive Tuscia*). The female network that was slowly being created was initially entirely independent of Clare and her monastery. Papal documents show, however, that the community of Monticelli in 1219, and then also a group of women in Milan in 1223, developed closer ties with San Damiano of Assisi.[48]

After becoming pope, Gregory IX promoted his *forma vitae* outside the Italian peninsula and sought to connect it with the order of the Friars Minor. In December 1227, he entrusted the *cura animarum* within this female network to the order in the letter *Quoties cordis*. The model adopted was very different from either that of San Damiano in Assisi or anything directly inspired by Clare's example. Tradition holds that, while in Assisi for Francis's canonization in July 1228, Gregory invited Clare and her community at San Damiano to join the network of his monasteries.[49] For Clare and San Damiano, this would have meant renouncing the radical poverty of Francis's teaching that had characterized the life of the *pauperes sorores* from the beginning. In September 1228, after much protest, Clare secured the right to live in keeping with her commitment to absolute poverty in a Franciscan manner. She was granted a papal privilege of poverty, which was also granted to the monastery at Perugia, Monteluce, in the following year.[50] Now closely linked to the Friars Minor and having been granted a privilege of absolutely poverty, Clare had ensured that San Damiano would hold a unique place in the new papally sanctioned order, which would assume the name of the Order of St. Damian (*ordo Sancti Damiani*) after 1235.[51]

The bull *Quo elongati*, issued on 28 September 1230, addressed, among other things, the question of women's monasteries, and made their access to the

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[48] Alberzoni, "Papato e nuovi ordini religiosi femminili"; Cristina Andenna, "Dalla 'Religio pauperum dominarum de Valle Spoliti' all''Ordo Sancti Damiani': prima evoluzione istituzionale di un ordine religioso femminile nel contesto delle esperienze monastiche del secolo XIII," in *Die Bettelorden im Aufbau. Beiträge zu Institutionalisierungsprozessen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum*, ed. Gert Melville and Jörg Oberste (Münster, 1999), 429–92.

[49] Alberzoni, "Papato e nuovi ordini religiosi femminili"; Maria Pia Alberzoni, "Curia romana e regolamentazione delle damianite e delle domenicane," in *"Regulae – Consuetudines – Statuta." Studi sulle fonti normative degli ordini religiosi nei secoli centrali del medioevo (Bari-Noci-Lecce, 26–27 ottobre 2002 / Castiglione delle Stiviere, 23–24 maggio 2003)*, ed. Cristina Andenna and Gert Melville (Münster, 2005), 501–38; but also Mooney, *Clare of Assisi*.

[50] Maria Pia Alberzoni, "'Servus vestrum et ancillarum Christi omnium': Gregorio IX e la vita religiosa femminile," *Franciscan Studies* 64 (2006): 145–78.

[51] Maria Pia Alberzoni, *Santa povertà e beata semplicità. Francesco d'Assisi e la Chiesa romana* (Milan, 2015), 171–93; Werner Maleczek, *Das "Privilegium paupertatis" Innocenz' III. und das Testament der Klara von Assisi. Überlegungen zur Frage ihrer Echtheit* (Rome, 1995).

Franciscan brothers dependent on a license from the Apostolic See. Clare's reaction compelled the pope to acknowledge the special bond that existed between San Damiano and the Friars Minor, thus exempting the community from the bull's prescriptions. Once again, San Damiano was recognized as having a distinct and preeminent place among houses of women in the Franciscan sphere.

The systematic regularization of the other female monasteries initiated by the pope, however, was not yet complete. In 1247, Innocent IV wrote a new rule for the so-called Damianite monasteries. Inspired by Gregory's *forma vitae*, this new rule strengthened the connection of the women's communities to the Friars Minor. The vow of profession in the *forma vitae*, which initially had conformed to the *RB*, was now to be taken "according to the *regula Sancti Francisci.*" The *sorores* of the *ordo Sancti Damiani* were placed under the control and jurisdiction of the general minister and the provincial minister of the male order, to whom the responsibility for visitation was also entrusted. Like the *forma vitae* of his predecessors, Innocent IV's rule stipulated that female communities were to own property.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Clare and San Damiano refused to submit to this new rule. Instead, with the help of some friars and the guidance that Francis had given her, she herself wrote a normative text that was to be followed at San Damiano. This new text required absolute poverty, both individual and communal. On the eve of Clare's death in 1253, a letter from Innocent IV gave official approval for this new *forma vitae*, but its use was restricted to the *ordo sororum pauperum*—that is to say, it was to be used only at the monastery of San Damiano.[52] Although Clare was made a saint by Alexander IV (r. 1254–61) in 1255, the Franciscan general chapters that met in the years immediately following ignored the canonization; it was considered dangerous in light of the tensions that divided the order, particularly around the issue of the friars' duties regarding the *cura mulierum*. It was not until 1260, in fact, that Bonaventure (d. 1274), then minister general, added Clare to the list of Franciscan saints.

But the Curia's creation of a female religious order was still not complete. In his 1263 letter, *Beata Clara virtute clarens*, Urban IV (r. 1261–4) ordered that all of the different communities that followed the various papal *formae vitae* should be united into a single *ordo Sanctae Clarae*. To this end, with the support of a commission of cardinals and the Franciscan minister general, Bonaventure, Urban IV wrote yet another rule, inspired by the *formae vitae* championed by

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[52] Alberzoni, "Curia romana."

his predecessors—a text that had nothing to do with the one written by Clare. Under Urban's rule, communities were forced to accept both enclosure and the ownership of property, and the responsibility for their spiritual care was placed directly, not in the hands of the Friars Minor, but rather in those of the cardinal protector of the male order. Even so, Clare herself was still held up as an ideal model of religious life for women.[53] In 1296, Boniface VIII (r. 1294–1303) confirmed that the Friars Minor were to undertake the *cura monialium* for the Order of the Poor Clares (*ordo Sanctae Clarae*) and all of the various other female communities influenced in different ways by Clare.[54]

The twelfth century witnessed a remarkable diversification of forms of religious life, inspired in particular by the example of Christ and the apostles. Both women and men were drawn to these new expressions of radical asceticism, absolute poverty, and devotion to caring for the poor and sick. As the experiences of women among the Gilbertines, Premonstratensians, and Cistercians show, however, women were generally only able to engage in these new modes of religious life with the support and assistance of men. During the thirteenth century, this process of diversification culminated in the development of many forms of new female religious life, such as the *sorores penitentes de Alemania* and those of Acre, but also communities of female Dominicans, Damianites, and Clarissans.

As these examples show, the papacy consciously pursued an institutionalizing agenda with regard to women's religious life. The papal goal of regularization gradually pushed women who desired to live according to the gospel and to embrace radical poverty into more traditional communities that were subject to strict enclosure and the ownership of communal property. The popes sought support for this effort among privileged allies and advocates within the mendicant orders. The Dominican and Franciscan general chapters, however, often resisted the duty of providing pastoral care to these female communities. In the second half of the thirteenth century, the

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[53] Giancarlo Andenna, "Urbano IV e l'istituzione dell'ordine delle clarisse," in Andenna and Melville, *Regulae – Consuetudines – Statuta*, 539–68; Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi*, 57–86; Roest, *Order and Disorder*, 54–60; Cristina Andenna, "Women at the Angevin Court between Naples and the Court of Provence: The 'Struggle' for a Female Franciscan Life," in *Queens, Princesses and Mendicants: Close Relations in a European Perspective*, ed. Nikolas Jaspert and Imke Just (Vienna, 2019), 29–51.

[54] Cristina Andenna, "'Secundum regulam datam sororibus ordinis sancti Damiani': Sancia e Aquilina: due esperimenti di ritorno alle origini alla corte di Napoli nel XIV secolo," in *Franciscan Organisation in the Mendicant Context: Formal and Informal Structures of the Friars' Lives and Ministry in the Middle Ages*, ed. Michael Robson and Jens Röhrkasten (Berlin, 2010), 139–78.

papal drive for institutionalization was aided by the Dominican creation of what amounted in practice to a "double order." In addition, the Clarissan order that seems to have emerged through this process was, in fact, an institutional fiction; the diversity of expressions of female religious life was not compatible with the creation of a single form. Clare's experience, on the one hand, and the normative intentions of Hugo / Gregory IX and Innocent IV, on the other, had led to the creation of different 'institutional' forms of life, which survived and were continually reconceived in the course of the later Middle Ages. Nor were ties with the Friars Minor uniform or always binding. Consequently, there was no "female Franciscan order" in the strict sense of the term.

The desire of women to lead religious lives entirely according to the gospel message always came into conflict with the needs and limits imposed by ecclesiastical structures. But the papacy was increasingly forced to acknowledge this desire and to conceive new institutional solutions for women that took into account the variety of their original objectives. In the fourteenth century, with the help of her confessor, Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373) composed a rule for the new order that she had founded (*ordo Sancti Salvatoris*) and for which she had obtained papal approval in 1346. In the wake of previous religious experiences, however, the new institutional reality she conceived was not limited to women but again had to include a constitutive male component.[55] This tension between the diversity of female religious impulses and the desire of the papacy to institutionalize them continued into the following centuries, although women managed to win ever greater autonomy.

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[55] Brigit Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge, 1999).

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