The masculine voice in the "Visio monachi de Eynsham" 1196 (England, gender).

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The Masculine Voice in the Visio monachi de Eynsham, 1196

by

Jamie Zettle

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
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of the Requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

The mystical literature of twelfth-century England provides an unique insight into the conceptions and construction of gender in the Middle Ages. For the purpose of this thesis, these ideas are particularly evident in the *Visio monachi de Eynsham* (1196). The vision, recorded in the monastic environment of late twelfth-century England, details a journey through the three levels of Purgatory by a young novice, Edmund of Eynsham.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* is important because it is a clear example of a "gendered" text. The androcentric focus of the text, in its construction of Purgatory, the nature and expiation of sin and in its treatment of women, was designed to instruct a male audience. The text was necessarily gendered male to appeal to a monastic audience and to lead men to salvation. The text is particularly concerned with the salvation of men, its lessons always admonishing and guiding men, spoken of and reflected upon with masculine images and experiences.

Throughout the text, one is constantly aware of the various aspects of monastic masculinity. Feminist theory has sensitized researchers to a female or feminine voice. This same scholarship provides the necessary tools to examine the expressions of various monastic masculinities in the literature. The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* (1196) provides a superb illustration of the expressions of monastic "maleness" and male behaviour.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The study of medieval visionary literature is crucial to the contemporary understanding of twelfth-century symbolism, religious thought and social conditions. Medieval mysticism was a charismatic and subjective element of the religious culture of medieval Europe. The genre of visionary literature which emerged from all parts of Europe and in all centuries was an attempt to give voice to the experiences and yearnings of the heart. This literature is full of joyful celebration, sorrowful mourning of the mysteries of the Resurrection and harsh warnings for the faithful. Medieval mystics experienced the world as whole, the spiritual and physical worlds mingling and converging, colouring their society with a richness of exultation and pain.

The twelfth century was a period of great change and religious revival. The period following the Norman invasion of England (1066) until the end of the twelfth century was characterized by expansion, conquest and a reorganization of society. Medieval women and men pushed the limits of the geographical, intellectual, scientific, economic, literary and religious barriers which structured medieval society. The twelfth century witnessed a religious revival. The Crusading spirit enabled medieval Christians to "re-conquer" the religious terrain which had been neglected in the preceding two centuries.
The Crusades provided an outlet for religious fervour, but more importantly, they represented the desire to re-invent religious culture. The Cluniac reforms called for a return to the strictness of monastic life. The laity became more involved in the life of the Church. Penance and confession became more systematized and important as a sacrament in the spiritual journey of Christians. The twelfth century was a renaissance of religious fervour, intellectual activity and economic expansion.

It is this environment in which Edmund of Eynsham dictated his Visio monachi de Eynsham. Edmund's vision of Purgatory was influential throughout England three centuries after its composition. In this vision, Edmund travels to Purgatory with St Nicholas as his guide and there witnesses the torments of Purgatory and the process of the expiation of sins. He returns, however, not downcast, but with a message of hope. His vision is a call to conversion, to penance, to confession. The vision, composed in 1196, may be seen as an indicator of the changes which would be implemented in the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Moreover, the 1198 Council of Paris included instructions for confessions, albeit brief ones. The Visio monachi de Eynsham reflects the movement toward sacramental penance and confession and is an important, lucid and engaging piece of twelfth-century

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visionary literature. A brief historiographical survey of the
visionary literature, and particularly the Visio monachi de
Eynsham, is useful to provide the background on which to build an
understanding of the revelation. The scholarship concerning the
origins, development and popularization of Purgatory must also be
examined to elucidate the foundations of the creation of the
Visio monachi de Eynsham.

The Visio monachi de Eynsham was widely circulated and
available in the Middle Ages and needs to be assessed in light of
its historiographical treatment and usefulness. The original
manuscript was composed in 1196. There are sixteen or seventeen
manuscripts of the vision surviving in various libraries
throughout Europe. An edition of the Latin version of the Visio
monachi de Eynsham appeared in 1903 in the Analecta
Bollandiana.² Herbert Thurston, working on the phenomenon of
mystical experience, published this version in the hope of
generating interest in what he felt was an important, if
neglected, work of religious literature. Thurston also published
an important article concerning the identity of Edmund of Eynsham
linking him with Edmund of Canterbury who was later beatified.¹
H. E. Slater, in 1908, included a discussion of the vision in his
introduction to the Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham in which he

²Adam of Eynsham, "Visio monachi de Eynsham," Analecta

¹Herbert Thurston, "A Conjectural Chapter in the Life of St.
included a complete version of the text.  

To this point, the vision was available only in Latin and largely only to academics. Recognizing the popular value of the vision, Valerian Paget published a modern English translation of the Visio in 1909 under the title, *The Revelation to the Monk of Evesham*.  

Interest in the vision proper seems to have had a hiatus until the 1960s. In 1966, there appeared a reprint of the 1482 Middle English version originally printed by William de Machlinia on the continent. Edward Arber had it reprinted in 1869 and the English Reprint Society again published it in 1966 under the title of *The Revelation to the Monk of Evesham 1196*.  

The supporting primary material for the vision was also published in the 1960s as interest in medieval mysticism and literature increased. Decima L. Douie and Hugh Farmer edited Adam of Eynsham's *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis* in which he narrates the biography of Hugh of Lincoln.  

This survey represents the extent of the study focused on the vision and its publication history. With the exception of Nancy Partner's article in

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4Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961.)
Speculum where she mentions Edmund as a case of male hysteria⁸, the Visio monachi de Eynsham has not been well explored by scholars of medieval visionary literature.

Numerous scholars have devoted their attention to the history of mysticism in medieval Europe and particularly medieval England. An overview of recent scholarship concerning the mystics of the church must begin with the monumental and ground-breaking work of Evelyn Underhill. Her book entitled The Mystics of the Church drew attention to the rich heritage of visionary literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.⁹ In this text, Underhill explores the works of the medievals including Bernard of Clairvaux, the Victorines, Hildegard of Bingen, Richard Rolle and the later Renaissance mystics including Meister Eckhart. Conrad Pepler's The English Religious Heritage and Ray Petry's Late Medieval Mysticism represent contemporary studies examining the Middle Ages anticipating the work done by Knowles.¹⁰ David Knowles' works, The Monastic Order in England and The English Mystical Tradition, originally published in the 1930s, mark the beginning of a sustained and scholarly interest

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in medieval mysticism and religious culture.\textsuperscript{11} K. W. Southern's \textit{Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages}, published in the 1970s, signalled the rise of literature devoted to the place of the church in culture and the role of mysticism in the life of the church.\textsuperscript{12} Finally, Wolfgang Riehle's \textit{The Middle English Mystics} acknowledges the legitimacy of the study of mystical literature as valid and important and localized by geography.\textsuperscript{13}

There emerged various studies concerning the psychology and symbolism of mysticism. This interdisciplinary approach to the medieval mystics represents clearly the changing academic environment of the 1970s and the "coming of age" of the study of visionary literature. James Leuba's \textit{The Psychology of Religious Mysticism} was Freudian in its approach and marked the beginning of a concerted interest in the psychological effects of a cloistered, solitary lifestyle on the spiritual experiences of a monastic.\textsuperscript{14} Robert Hollander's \textit{Allegory in Dante's Commedia} and Charles Singleton's commentary on \textit{The Divine Comedy} witnessed the analysis of visionary literature from a strictly allegorical and


\textsuperscript{12}R.W. Southern, \textit{Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages} (New York: Penguin Books, 1970.)

\textsuperscript{13}Wolfgang Riehle, \textit{The Middle English Mystics} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981.)

\textsuperscript{14}James Leuba, \textit{The Psychology of Religious Mysticism} (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972.)
metaphorical viewpoint. Adolf Katzenellenbogen added to this study, examining the use of allegory in medieval illuminated manuscripts and art in *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art*. H. Flanders Dunbar promoted the study of medieval symbolism as a medium through which the scholar may gain insight into the signs and symbols which constituted the meaning in medieval society in *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in the Divine Comedy*. These works are instrumental for understanding the symbolism and allegories which play such an important role in instructing Edmund’s listeners.

Studies surrounding the origins and development of the concept of Purgatory help our understanding of Edmund’s vision. Ernest Becker, at the close of the nineteenth century, published a comparative analysis of the medieval visions. This work, *A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions*, was indispensable in beginning the comprehensive analysis of the medieval visionary literature and the manner in which this literature borrowed from various other sources, including secular and religious poetry, mythology, history and

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ancient philosophy, in order to evolve into an unique genre. More recently, Jacques LeGoff's exhaustive study, The Birth of Purgatory, presents a startling analysis and focus and has profoundly influenced our understanding of the development of a doctrine of Purgatory. More than any other author, LeGoff's analysis offers insight into the need for the creation of Purgatory and the functions it served in medieval society. Moreover, this work provides the literary and historical background against which one may assess the Visio monachi de Evnsham. The Visio is a part of this process of an evolving purgatorial literary genre. Its ideas informed the medieval conception of Purgatory and helped to define its nature and attempted to provide an explanation of how to expiate sins.

The work of Paul Anciaux entitled, The Sacrament of Penance, was instrumental in illustrating the development and functions of penance in the medieval and renaissance Church. Handbooks of penance also received attention during the 1960s with the work of John McNeill and Helena Gamer who focused on the early medieval period and the development of this literary genre. Oscar Watkin's influential work, A History of Penance, published in 1961, details the evolution of public penance and obligatory

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18 Ernest J. Becker, A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions (Baltimore: John Murphy Company, 1899.)


confession and its effect on the medieval church.\textsuperscript{21} Thomas Tentler and Leonard Boyle respectively added to the dialogue concerning the function of penance in medieval Europe.\textsuperscript{22} Tentler contended that penance functioned as a form of social control while Boyle saw penance as primarily aimed at "conformity" to God's law as the goal. The history of penance is intrinsically wrapped up with the composition of the Vi
dio monachi de Eynsham for the vision seems to be calling for Christians to take up penance and confession as part of their spiritual journey. The changes in the Church's attitude toward penance and confession may be seen in the thrust of the lesson of the vision.

Literary analysis also played an important role in providing the historiographical framework in which to examine Edmund's text. G. R. Owst, in the 1960s, published Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England and Preaching in Medieval England, which explored the relationship between the development of a uniquely English literary heritage and the influence of sermons and homilies in this emerging genre.\textsuperscript{23} These studies are

\textsuperscript{21}Oscar D. Watkins, A History of Penance (New York: Burt Franklin, 1961.)


particularly important when viewed with Edmund's text in mind with its instructional and evangelizing functions. R. Howard Bloch's work on misogyny in medieval literature begins the analysis of the manner in which authors shape literature for specific purposes and how literature becomes the proponent and champion of various social structures and genders and conceptions. Leonard Boyle's work concerning the Summa for confessors as a genre and Emero Stiegman's study of the literary genre in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermones super Cantica canticorum reflect the reality of definite literary styles in religious writing which permeated medieval literature. Moreover, as Robert Sweetman has demonstrated, medieval visionary literature may have been instructive in nature and may have been a variant on the popular style of medieval preaching.

Finally, recent work in feminist scholarship and women's studies has done much to illuminate the religious context of medieval mysticism. Caroline Walker Bynum must be recognized as


26 Emero Stiegman, "The Literary Genre of Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermones super Cantica canticorum" in Simplicity and Ordinariness (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980.)

a leading scholar in this field. Her work on women mystics and eucharistic devotion, the significance of food to religious women and the body of Christ in late medieval devotion attests to the innovation and originality of her scholarship. Judith Brown's work on lesbian sexuality and John Boswell's study of homosexualities in the Middle Ages broadens the perspectives of sexual activity which has been examined. Sharon Farmer's study of women and the female voice in persuasion in the thirteenth century expands the researcher's understanding of the gendered nature of the medieval text and the manner in which medieval clerics interacted with the written and spoken word. Jane Schuelenburg looks at sacrificial mutilation among religious women in the Middle Ages. Sherry Ortner theoretically discusses the binary opposites of male and female in philosophical terms in


Richard Kieckhefer has begun the difficult task of deconstructing the culture of devotion of late medieval male saints, carefully using feminist theory to reveal the dynamics of the edification of male saints. The recent surge in scholarship concerning the medieval religious heritage invites the contemporary scholar to look again at the existing texts for new insights.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham*, however much a product of the heritage of medieval visionary literature, reflects a decisive movement toward instruction in its style and focus. The vision, like sermons and preaching, functions to educate and guide the listeners to lead a holy mode of life. In the case of the *Visio*, Edmund urges his audience to accept penance and confession as prerequisites to salvation. The text admonishes sinners and deftly describes the consequences of sin through its discussion of the purgative nature of the afterlife.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* is androcentric in its focus and instruction. The text is gendered. The vision was constructed to reflect the needs of men in religious life and reflects male conceptions of medieval society and religious

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culture. This gendering of the text is purposeful since Edmund aims his treatise specifically at the members of his monastic community. Furthermore, the text was shaped by male perceptions of social interactions and appropriate retribution. The Visio monachi de Eynsham is important because it represents a clear example of the androcentric nature of clerical religious literature and reveals certain aspects of a monastic masculinity or masculinities.

Joan Scott views gender as a way of referring to the social organization of the relationship between the sexes. This statement will serve to initiate a discussion of the gendering of Edmund's text. The vision reflects the distinctions of gender in social organization through its androcentric focus, based in the reality, the lived experiences, of the different sexes. The literary nature of the text further complicates the explanation of its gendered nature. Post-structuralists emphasize the centrality of language in communicating, interpreting and representing gender. Language, according to post-structuralists, does not mean words but systems of meaning—symbolic orders—that precede the actual mastery of speech. Edmund's text is informed by his language, which shapes the direction and focus of his argument. Lacan argues that gendered identity is constructed through language. Language, and in this case the written word, can in turn serve to re-enforce those identities. The categories

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33 Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review vol 91, no 5, (December, 1986), 1053.
of "man" and "woman", however, are problematic since masculine and feminine are not inherent characteristics but subjective constructs. This fluidity allows Edmund to shape his vision to make it specifically accessible to his monastic audience. Moreover, Edmund's construction of monastic masculinities, or perhaps more accurately the aspects of monastic masculinity which are revealed through Edmund's vision, depends on his ability to utilize the fluid nature of gender in order to create systems of male and female in his account of Purgatory.

To pursue meaning, one needs to deal with the individual subject as well as the social organization and to articulate the nature of their relationship. Here Edmund's text reflects both his personal inclination and the nature of monastic life in the twelfth century. This relationship between Edmund and the constraints of his monastic community necessitates a historical examination of the text for its traces of social commentary, theological and scriptural meanings and the parameters imposed by the genre of visionary literature itself. The Visio monachi de Eynsham was designed to give power to the monastics in its audience. The knowledge imparted by the text enabled those monastics to more fully pursue salvation.

Gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated. Indeed, gender becomes implicated in

\[34\] Ibid, 1062, 1063, 1064.

\[35\] Ibid, 1067.

\[36\] Ibid, 1069.
the conception and construction of power itself. Attention to
gender is often not explicit, but it is nonetheless a crucial
part of the organization of equality or inequality. The *Visio
monachi de Fynsham*, through its androcentric focus, signifies the
prevalence of male power in the religious culture. The gendering
of the text embodies in it the power of persuasion and authority.
Its male character lends itself to being accepted as valid and
accountable. In some ways, the gendering of the text is a
fiction which enables it to be promoted within the monastic
community. This "necessary fiction" is requisite for reaching
its male audience and serve to instruct a male ecclesiastical
hierarchy. The alternative would be to construct a text focusing
on women and their agency in striving for salvation. This
gynocentric focus, however, would have been inconceivable given
the contemporary understanding of woman as inferior and more
likely to sin. Woman was inherently an inferior model of a man
and to the medieval mind a gynocentric focus was definitionally
inferior to an androcentric viewpoint. Consequently, the
gendering of text as male became almost a ritualized practice in
medieval religious writing.\(^{38}\)


\(^{39}\) Medieval authors wrote for selective audiences and often with
a clear intention to instruct. Men wrote for other men, especially
if the authors were also clerics. For a more detailed discussion
of this gendered orientation in medieval literature, see R. Howard
Ritual is the medium which, by symbolizing these social divisions, transforms them into concepts and in so doing reciprocally creates them. Ritual is essential not merely to give birth to categories, but also to maintain them, so that society can conceptualize itself and the world. This process is an essential function that religion performs. Edmund’s religious environment would have profoundly influenced how he viewed the gendered relationships in medieval society and the manner in which his immersion in religious culture reinforced these distinctions. Religion performs its essential functions of establishing conceptual thought for men only. This conceptualization is the basis for the gendering of Edmund’s text. Edmund can only conceive of Purgatory and its nature in male terms and consequently would structure his discussion to enable a male-conceived, male-represented understanding of the expiation of sins. Social institutions shape contemporary thought and Edmund was deeply influenced by the tradition of male dominance in the religious culture in his composition of the vision.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* is first and foremost a piece of literature informed by its historical context. But if one

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43 *Ibid*, 43.
sees language not as a reflection of the world but as constitutive of that world, that is, as generative rather than mimetic, then the gendering of Edmund's text takes on new importance. It is to the construction of social meaning that the exercise of literature is directed. The vision, then, aims at giving meaning to the notion of Purgatory. But to view language as constituting impersonal codes governing individual expression radically disturbs traditional notions of the author as a centred subject. Edmund was incidental to the construction of the text in that the codes governing expression dictated the ways in which he expressed his understanding of Purgatory. Although Edmund centred and structured his vision for the education of male monastics and definitely employed certain preaching techniques to make the text more accessible to his audience, the text itself supports the symbols and conceptions of a male-dominated society. Edmund's thinking is constrained by this gendered way of thinking about society. His text would necessarily and inescapably be androcentric. The creation of the Visio monachi de Eynsham, while certainly containing elements of misogyny, reflects the predominant position of men in the

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46 Ibid, 61.

systems of power and the androcentric focus of medieval society in general. An examination of this androcentricism and the various aspects of a monastic masculinity evident in the vision is important. It will provide insight into how medieval clericals saw themselves as men, how this androcentricism affected their relationships with other men and how this environment shaped how they understood and expressed their masculinity.

The intention of this study is to examine the manner in which the Visio monachi de Eynsham was constructed specifically to educate a male audience. The gendering of this text, with its androcentric focus, is an important component of the understanding of the conception of Purgatory in England. Edmund moulded his text to make it accessible to his male monastic audience by employing examples of male sinners, historical and local personages easily identified by his audience and by contrasting the experiences of male and female sinners in order to instruct his fellow monks. The androcentric focus of the vision is worthy of study since it reveals something of the manner in which religion in the Middle Ages was gendered. Indeed, the whole conception of Purgatory might be androcentric, though this topic is beyond the confines of the present study. The discussion, description and explanation of Purgatory, however, is not beyond the scope of this paper. How and to whom this information is presented is important for elucidating the ways in which Purgatory was conceived and for identifying who
gained power from this knowledge.
Chapter Two:

Christian Mysticism and Edmund of Eynsham

No other subject arouses as much speculation, astonishment, debate and scepticism as the study of mysticism. The phenomenon of mysticism is difficult to define. Its nature escapes precise definition. Mystical experience has the ability to encompass all manifestations of the human spirit while functioning independently and externally to the self. Further, it attaches supreme importance to a sense of the immediate presence of the divine. In attempting to comprehend clearly the intricate and deeply personal attributes of the mystical experience, certain methodological problems arise. The study of mysticism will be plagued by the author's preconceived understanding of the nature of the divine, personal religious upbringing and the influence of the scientific and logical nature of the contemporary educational system.

Often our contemporary world outlook does not include a notion of the supreme. The supernatural is not the fount from which answers to human quandaries regularly flow. In fact, our heavy dependence on the infallibility of science inhibits our ability to understand a culture in which religious sentiment and a deeper sense of the immediacy of God in daily life played critical, indeed indispensable, roles in informing the cultural, social and spiritual lives of its actors. Mystical union was a
grace-filled moment completely socially accepted and sanctioned. It was not seen as a psychological abnormality. This point is intrinsic to the following study. Indeed, it is necessary to state emphatically the assumptions upon which this paper will be built in order to fully digest the argument.

First, the acknowledgement of a higher spiritual being as existing externally and independently of the recipient of mystical union is essential to the understanding of the development of the personal relationship of the religious with the divine. The scholar must accept that the mystic believes this relationship to be true. The individual and society believed this union to be authentic and we must accept this as a given. The distinction between the world of the natural and supernatural was blurred, thus facilitating the transposition of events and personages inter alia with ease. The mystical experience, however, was necessarily coloured by the psychological, sexual and cultural determinants which informed the mystic's personality. Our ability to recognize the personal attributes in an account of mystical revelation provides the scholar with the essential tools to investigate the sexual expression which is embedded in these texts. The historical and cultural context in which he was formulating his questions and from which he was drawing his answers needs to be explicated. Edmund himself demands animation in our minds. We must engage in a discussion with him in order to gain access to his past.

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Generally, the notion of mysticism denotes an experience of God as the divine being immediately present to the individual. Historically, mysticism was connected with the mystery cults of the Greeks.¹ Conceptually, it is the attitude of mind which "... divines and moves toward the spiritual in the common things of life, not a partial and occasional operation of the mind under the guidance of far-fetched analogies."² Yet mysticism is more than a perception of the rational faculties of the mind. Inge has remarked that of all kinds of human thought, mysticism is almost always and everywhere the same.³ A certain commonality pervades the accounts of mystical union across temporal, cultural and religious barriers. Everywhere, a mystic is one who cultivates communion with God, ultimately achieving union with God.⁴ Scholars such as Inge, Underhill and Butler have argued that the definition of mysticism may be philosophical, psychological or historical in orientation.⁵ A sense of mysticism as an abstract construct is unhelpful for the purpose of this study which is not concerned with mystical union


⁵Ibid, 13.
generally but rather with the experiences of Edmund of Eynsham in a specifically Christian context.

The roots of Christian mysticism are found in Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism and Neoplatonism. In these impressive constructions of the human spirit, mental and moral discipline were enlisted for the encouragement of the soul's growth, freedom and vision.\(^6\) Judaism is full of mystical prophets including Abraham, Moses and Ruth. Neoplatonists believed that humans had a special faculty, by the exercise of which one could pass behind the phenomenal world and gain intuitive knowledge of the Absolute.\(^7\) Both philosophical and theological schools of thought contributed to the development of an uniquely Christian mystical theology.

The mystical experience is based in three independent and complementary ideas. First, the soul can see and perceive by a spiritual sense. Second, the soul must be a partaker of the Divine nature in order to know God. Finally, it assumes none can attain a direct knowledge, \textit{transcendence}, except by purification from self.\(^8\) Self conquest and renunciatory devotion lead most directly to the mystic vision. Most medieval mystics were monastics because monastic life lent itself to the cultivation of


\(^7\) Ibid, 21.

\(^8\) Margaret Smith, \textit{The Way of the Mystics The Early Christian Mystics and the Rise of the Sufis}, 4-5.
a varied spirituality and institutionalized ascetic discipline. The mystical state requires renunciation of will, of self, of control, not submission but a surrendering. The discipline of the mystic way must be, moreover, not only physical and moral but also intellectual, since its aim is the Vision. In the viapurgativa, a spiritual journey of purgation and a rejection of the world, desire is permanently centred on the supreme reality and thus the soul is delivered over to the divine attraction, while the basis of the viailluminativa, a spiritual journey of divine enlightenment, is in the theory of knowledge.

Medieval monastics pursued their spiritual life along both these paths which were readily available to them. Indeed, the chief mark of medieval mysticism is an intensification of the mystical life already destined for or available to all Christians by the inherent nature of Christianity itself. This peculiar equipoise of contemplation and action, with its major response to human need in the name of the Divine, was the primary

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characteristic of medieval mysticism.\textsuperscript{14} The spirit of God and the mystic's spirit are always mingled in the union.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, Christian mysticism is highly personal. The resulting vision must include traces of the individual persona of the mystic which inform the expression which the revelation will take. From the unspeakable vision, the mystic returns to the accomplishment of a divine mission among humankind.\textsuperscript{16} This outward seeking nature of the mystical experience found special relevance and fluency during the medieval period. Edmund was caught up in the religious fervour and trends of twelfth-century England and thus reflected the socio-religious milieu in which he dictated his vision.

The explosive spiritual awakening which characterized the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may be recognized as one of the high periods in Christian mystical experience, theology and vision. It was an age in search of vision amid radical change. This period has become synonymous with an heightened awareness of the individual.\textsuperscript{17} This individualism spilled over into the

\textsuperscript{14}Ray C. Petry, \textit{Late Medieval Mysticism}, 22.


\textsuperscript{17}Rufus M. Jones, \textit{The Flowering of Mysticism The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century} (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1971), 18. Important work has been done on the rise and development of a notion of individualism in the twelfth century. This development would have profound influence on the pietistic and religious expression of medieval society. Indeed, the mystical union itself encapsulates only the individual. Often these
comprehension of the divine reality. Christocentric spirituality is a medieval phenomenon which coincided with the emergence of the notion of the individual. Its romantic and intensely erotic nature had a powerful influence during the twelfth and following centuries. It was an age of exploration of doubt and despair; simple faith no longer possessed universal quality. The individual was more personally involved in the exploration of the divine. Theological interest was more widespread in a culture which was becoming increasingly theologically conditioned. The twelfth century was the turning point in the history of many of the practices that shaped


For an examination of the relationship of the individual with the afterlife, see Aaron Gurevich, "Perceptions of the Individual and the hereafter in the Middle Ages" in Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 65-89.

Oliver Davies, God Within The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe, 2.


ibid, 21.
The popularization of religious practices carried with it the emphatic interest in humanity for its own worth and for its own sake. This bold and daring principle stressed the direct approach to God by the inward pathway.

The twelfth century, however, resplendent in the cloak of religious fervour, also was an age of codification, expansion and scientific exploration. The literary expression of the mystical vision takes the colour, mood, philosophical climate and coinage of language current in this period. Edmund's *Visio monachi de Eynsham* in 1196 reflects this manner of literary expression. Edmund, like the scholars and religious of the twelfth century, confronted the sensual, natural world in which he lived. These thinkers perceived the universe as an entity within which a symbiotic relationship of natural phenomena and the mystic self was requisite for a complete understanding of the complexity of the universe.

Philosophy mingled with theology in aiding these monastics

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24 Ibid, 25.


26 Ibid, 6.
to discover the truth of the mystical union. A powerful stream of French mysticism emerged in the twelfth century focused around the abbeys of Clairvaux and St Victor in Paris. This mysticism was inspired by the Gospel of John and the Song of Songs. Bernard of Clairvaux preached eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs and the two great Victorines, Hugh (1037-1141) and Richard (d. 1173) wrote treatises on natural phenomena and the mystic path. The overriding theme of medieval mysticism was its diversity and complexity; numerous paths offered a route to divine enlightenment. The medieval custom of severe forms of mortification spawned the development of a kind of mysticism called Brautmystik (bride or nuptial mysticism) which Bernard of Clairvaux's commentary on the Song of Songs influenced. Wesensmystik (from wesen, essence or inner nature) emerged from the Plotinian conception of the flight of the alone to the Alone. This shedding of self, called apophatic spirituality or via negativa, had a profound influence on the twelfth-century

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28 Oliver Davies, God Within The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe, 2.
mystics. Intellectual mysticism, originally explicated by Plato, emerged in the Middle Ages from the thought of Plotinus and Origen. Love mysticism emerged through the fourth-century Cappadocian Father, St Gregory of Nyssa. The writings of Dionysius the Areopagite were perhaps the maturest form of Neoplatonism. Clearly, amid this blur of theological expressions of the same phenomenon, the twelfth century witnessed an explosion of interest in the mystical state. Although these theological and philosophical elements will be discussed more fully later, it is important to recognize that the twelfth century was an era of explosive questioning and that Edmund was caught up in it.

The theology of the medieval schools from the twelfth century on reflect the influence of Aristotle. Hugh of St Victor in Paris may be cited as a prime example of the outpouring of intellectual ferment which so informed mystical theology. Philosophy, for Hugh, is the investigation of the rationes of things human and divine, seeking the final wisdom, which is knowledge of the primaeva ratio. The world in its truest reality is a symbol, a path to knowledge through the activities

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29 Ibid, 3.


31 Oliver Davies, God Within The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe, 19.

of cogitatio, meditatio and contemplatio. Hugh classifies sciences in the usual Aristotelian way and shows that Christian theology is the end of all philosophy. He emphasizes the limitations of the intellect and ardently recognizes the heart's yearnings and immediacy of the mind perceiving itself as a conscious agent.\textsuperscript{33} The mystic spirit became an essential part of all piety or religion which relates always to the rationally unknown and therefore mysterious.

The contemporary education reinforced the pursuit of the mystical union. As the constructive imagination works, the intellectual faculty is illuminated and impelled by emotions to pursue truth.\textsuperscript{34} The symbolism and allegorical interpretation of these mystical visions were obviously apologetic when confronted with the increasing preponderance of logic in academic argumentation. This allegorical style however became part of the very spirit of the medieval time. It functioned as the universal vehicle for pious expression, at once co-extended with all medieval piety. Hugh of St Victor's \textit{De sacramentis}, hailed as a monumental intellectual achievement, showed the balance of intellectual and pietistic interests and the Platonic quality of the mind's sure sense of the reality of the super-sensual.\textsuperscript{35} The educational world was at once grappling with the reality of the spiritual and theological tradition in which it was based.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid}, 393.
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid}, 394.
\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid}, 395.
while responding to the new learning in logic and ethics arriving from the East.

The medieval church at this time was also colourful and dynamic. The multi-hued pluralism of the early medieval period absorbed all manner of non-Christian practices and thoughts into the institutional church. These years saw the Concordat of Worms (1122) which augmented the power of the papacy and was gorged on the passionate rhetoric calling for the Crusades. The Cluniac movement allowed for monastic reform, a revitalization of liturgical life and a more cohesive and regularized monastic life.\textsuperscript{35} The dominant ideal of the monastic world was personal sanctification through asceticism, prayer and monastic obedience within the context of community life.\textsuperscript{37} This selfsame church, in flux, chaotic, passionate, vibrant, affirmed the congregation of several ideas and schools of thought into a uniquely Catholic mystical theology.

Contemplation is the central term and concept of mystical theology. The theology of contemplation originated from the convergence of various philosophical and theological thinkers. Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus speculated on yearning of the human soul to return to Nous (Mind) from whence it had come and to contemplate with Nous, the Mind itself, exemplar of life and

\textsuperscript{35} Oliver Davies, \textit{God Within The Mystical Tradition of Northern Europe}, 8.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid}, 11.
truth and being. As early as the third century, Origen attested to the superiority of the life of contemplation. Augustine discussed the relationship between the active and contemplative lives in his sermons. Indeed, this issue became the locus classicus of his commentary on the Gospel of John.

The Neoplatonic teachings of Dionysius the Areopagite accentuated the stages in the ladder of denial to be climbed by the soul in its ascent to God. All these systems show the ambiguity of "being," built upon the Plotinian model. "Being," or the realization of authentic or self-identified "being," came to be understood through the process of complete self-denial and degradation while, at the same time, sensing acutely this process of denigration. The works of Dionysius were influential with the Cistercians and Victorines. Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Canticle and Richard of St Victor's Benjamin Major and, more importantly, his Benjamin Minor became classics in every library, blending the thoughts of Augustine and Dionysius. All systems were founded in renunciation and mortification. Asceticism played a formative role in shaping the religious life of this era. Moreover, this severe discipline may have been essential to the mystical experience.

The upper reaches of spiritual life, including "infused contemplation," contemplation during which the divine fills to


\[39\] Ibid, 28.
soul of the mystic and imparts truths, lie in the normal progress of the Christian in the ascent to God. Ascetic theology concentrates on the early stages of Christian living while mystical theology is concerned with the final stages of the normal progress of the disciplined soul to sanctity. Although closely linked, asceticism is an active choice of the individual. Mysticism tends to be more passive in nature. An objective attitude toward spiritual life was predominant throughout the Middle Ages but another current more personal, perhaps more individualistic, appears, most notably, in Bernard of Clairvaux as well as in the Victorines and the Franciscans. Strict asceticism facilitated a personal questing for God through its rigorous self-denial and discipline of the will and desire. The ascetic quality of monastic spirituality in the medieval period profoundly informed the expression and consequences of life in a cloistered, single sex, religious community.

Benedictine spirituality was influenced by the cloistered, single sex mode of life. The monastic regimen was instrumental in shaping, regulating and guiding the spiritual lives of the

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41 For the division of the spiritual life between the object attitude of natural ascension to God and the mystical transformation of the soul through a super-sensual union, see Dionysius the Areopagite *Celestial Hierarchies*, iii, 2; St. Augustine *De Ordine*, i, 2, *Confessions*, i, 13; St. Gregory *Moralia*, I, 24, 7; St. Bernard *Canticles*, Sermons 3,4; Hugh of St. Victor *De Gradibus Caritatis*; St. Bonaventure *Pharetra*, i, 1.

religious. Following the systematization of the theory of the ascent during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, the Benedictines were caught up in the tide of the ascetic and mystical flowering of the twelfth century. Important Benedictine centres, including Cluny and Citeaux, felt the questing of the spirit and from such centres a subtle symbolic mysticism emerged. This mysticism was considered a grace from God and had miraculous consequences.

This era was indeed aware, expectant and susceptible to miracles. Gerald of Wales believed that one could find miracles and wonders inherent within nature as created by God. By the

43 A more detailed analysis of the structure, regulation and liturgical lives of monastics in the Middle Ages would help in clarifying the very austere, disciplined routines which filled each day. Of particular interest for this paper is the treatment of penance and abbatial rule in the monasteries. For an excellent study of this issue see David Knowles, The Monastic Order in England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963.)

44 Félix Vernet, La spiritualité médiévale (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1929), 7.

45 Ibid, 10. Benedictine authors who investigated the spiritual or mystic quest were numerous and influential in shaping the spirituality of their co-religious. Such scholars include Peter Damien (d. 1072), Othlon of Ratisbonne (d. 1080), Anslem of Canterbury (d. 1090), Peter of Celle (d. 1183), Edbert of Schönau (d. 1185), Elisabeth of Schönau (d. 1165), Hildegarde of Bingen (d. 1179), Hervé de Déols (d. 1150) and Jean Sarrazin (d. 1180), principal translator of Dionysius the Areopagite.


twelfth century, writers had made the distinction between miracles and magic. Yet the magical arts continued in the twelfth century and onwards as witnessed by the penitentials. Dreams could be prophetic. The Eucharist was a mystery made more personal and spiritual through the miracle of transubstantiation. In fact, Edmund stated that he had seen the host transformed into the aspect of a boy. Adam, Edmund of Eynsham’s brother and the official biographer of St Hugh of Lincoln, often said that Hugh saw a beautiful child between his hands at consecration. Even more astonishing, cures were regularly affected in Oxford. The cult of St Frideswide grew up around these miraculous cures and the nearby people of Eynsham were known to have regularly made the pilgrimage in hopes of receiving favour.

Thus was the religious, social and cultural environment in which Edmund lived. It was chaotic, passionate, complex and dense. This milieu formed the cradle of Edmund’s perceptions of himself, his surroundings, social position and relationship to God. Edmund of Eynsham must not, however, be relegated to the margin amid the recollections and events. He was a man who struggled with and nursed the society in which he lived.

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48 Ibid, 10.
51 Ibid, 87.
In the twelfth century, the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham in Oxfordshire was under the right of patronage of the Bishop of Lincoln. This Anglo-Saxon community of Benedictines was made famous by Aelfric, philosopher, theologian and teacher. The abbey was re-founded by Remigius in 1036, the first Bishop of Lincoln. The brethren were transferred to Stow in Lincolnshire and then sent back to Eynsham, finally settling down to a quiet and relatively uneventful existence. In 1189, Roger Norreys was appointed Abbot of Eynsham, without canonical election, by Archbishop Baldwin and King Richard of England after having been deposed from the priorship at Canterbury. Roger, however, was unfit for the position or for any spiritual office since he adored wealth and power and was motivated by greed and self-interest. Thomas de Marleberge records that Roger maintained that the king gave him the position for services rendered without ever outlining the details of these services. Baldwin left England 6 March 1190 for Crusade, having blessed Roger on 13 January 1190. Roger consequently became abbot at

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52 Aelfric of Eynsham and his teachings will receive greater attention in the section concerning the philosophical and theological precepts which informed Edmund's thoughts. Aelfric was perhaps the most famous son of Eynsham before its dispersal. See the following discussion.


54 Ibid, ix.


56 Ibid, 332.
Eynsham.

The brothers, however, did not accept this appointment. In 1188 the monks at Eynsham had confined Roger for abuses against the abbey while he was treasurer at Christ Church. Roger had escaped in March of that year to become the enemy of his former brothers. Then in 1190, Roger became their abbot despite the monks' hatred for him. His cruelty, extravagance and mismanagement led to a deterioration of the abbey. The monks sought redress for their grievances with the authorities.

Meanwhile, Abbot Roger had befriended Geoffrey fitzPeter, the Justiciar of the See of Worcester. Worcester changed hands three times between 1190-1196 resulting in instability and corruption. The monks had no court of appeal since they desired to be exempt from taxation. Consequently, they could not appeal to the Ordinary nor could they appeal to King Richard who was on Crusade. Finally, in 1195-1196, the monks appealed to Hubert Walter, Bishop of Worcester (1196-1198), to rid them of Roger. Abbot Roger avoided punitive measures by relinquishing his use of the pontificalia (the symbolic priestly dress of authority) but he remained the head of Eynsham. Edmund lived in this strife-filled world at Eynsham and, in the same year as Hubert Walter's elevation to the see, he had his vision of purgatory.

The events of Edmund's life are recorded in the meticulous writings of his brother, Adam. Edmund, Adam and another brother called Willelmus de Oxonia belonged to an Oxford burgher family.

\[57\] Ibid, 334.
of some considerable wealth. Their father, Edmundus Medicus, owned property in Oxfordshire and later died in the Holy Land between 1185 and 1190.\textsuperscript{58} Edmund was a student at Oxford and then entered the Abbey of Eynsham as a novice to devote his life to the monastic order. Little else is known about Edmund's life, especially the period after the 1196 Visio, although another earlier visionary experience was also recorded.\textsuperscript{58} Adam, Edmund's chronicler, notes that the abbey numbered about thirty monks in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Adam became abbot of Eynsham in 1213 and was deposed in 1228.\textsuperscript{59} He recorded Edmund's celebrated Visio monachi de Eynsham and later made the vision public with the approval of St Hugh of

\textsuperscript{58}Decima L. Douie and Hugh Farmer, eds., "Introduction," \textit{Magnae Vita Sancti Hugonis}, viii.

\textsuperscript{59}Although the details of the life of Edmund are sketchy, there has been some speculation about his true identity. In an article by Herbert Thurston entitled "A Conjectural Chapter in the Life of St. Edmund of Canterbury," \textit{The Dublin Review} (October 1904): 229-257. Thurston proposes that Edmund of Eynsham and St. Edmund of Canterbury are the same individual. The author cites various factors which he believes support his claim. He argues that they were the same age, being born in 1170, came from the same neighbourhood, both were familiar with Eynsham, both were clerics but not in holy orders and both had dead fathers. These characteristics may be common to the age and not the individual. But Thurston continues to demonstrate that they both had an university education in England and abroad, were keenly interested in the recovery of the Holy Land and had the practice of reciting the entire psalter. This practice, however, was quite common in the Middle Ages.

\textsuperscript{60}Ernest J. Becker, \textit{A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven of Hell, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions} (Baltimore: John Murphy Company, 1899), 94.
Edmund's early propensity for mystical experience is found in his regular liturgical celebration and worship. His mystical experiences were found in the ordinary ritual of the Mass and did not require exceptional circumstances. Like many other mystics, including Hildegard of Bingen, Edmund had mystical experiences during the ritual of the Mass. The sacredness of the liturgy and the real presence during the Eucharist were cause enough for rupture.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* occurred from Holy Thursday to Easter Eve, 1196. Edmund fell into a trance and remained in this condition for two days. During the course of his trance, he was visited by a spiritual being who beckoned to him. The guide was an old man, clad in white, who was later revealed as St Nicholas. Together, they travel toward the East. The East, in medieval lore, suggested Jerusalem and the holy places of the New and Old Testament and ultimately heaven. First, they see a horrible plain upon which there are numerous souls, tormented according to the nature of their crimes, yet all hoping for salvation. Edmund asks St Nicholas the name of this place, which the saint identifies as the First Purgatory. Next, they arrived in a deep valley hemmed in by rocks. At the centre of the valley

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62 Ernest J. Becker, *A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell*, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions, 94. This date is confirmed in Matthew Paris' *Chronica Major*, Rolls, Ser II, p. 243 ff.
is a lake which bubbles with fetid odours. On the surrounding mountains fires burn. Souls are plunged into the lake, then into the fire, then thrown into the air and finally onto the rocks. There, they are beaten with snow, hail and wind. The souls are gathered together for punishment according to their sins. St. Nicholas identifies this locale as the Second Purgatory. Edmund continues to gaze upon the scene which then transforms itself into an immense, horrible plain upon which reptiles feed on the miserable souls with their pincers. Here, the perpetrators of crimes against nature are tormented and left to be judged on Judgement Day. Finally, Edmund enters the Abode of the Blessed in which everyone is clad in white. This area is heaven itself characterized by a wall of crystal. After this last revelation, Edmund awakes in the chapter house and begins slowly to relate what he has seen to his brothers, although not without some coaxing.63

The Visio monachi de Eynsham draws heavily upon the literature of purgatorial visions, despite its apparent originality. The Visio contains some unique additions which are absent from earlier medieval visions. There are, however, many similarities between this Visio monachi de Eynsham and earlier accounts of the afterworld. The Vision of Drihthelm, recorded by Bede, is followed more closely than any other. The Vision of

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63 For a complementary summary of the vision see Ernest J. Becker, A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions, 94-95.
Drihthelm possesses the common characteristics of a medieval visionary work. Furthermore, it links the continental stories with those of English provenance.\textsuperscript{64} It specifically mentions purgatory as a place of probation, distinguished from hell.\textsuperscript{65}

In the Vision of Drihthelm, a handsome man in a shining robe was the guide to a deep valley filled with raging hail and bitter snows. The souls were tormented and thrown from side to side. After passing through a nocturnal and solitary gloom, the pilgrim saw a dim, dark pit from which flames spewed and emitted an indescribable stench of burning souls. There was a hideous and desperate lamentation of the souls and devils threatened the souls with glowing tongs. Finally, the pilgrim was led to a clear bright light where he saw a tremendous wall of infinite length and height. There the pilgrim learned from the guide that the first place was for souls to be punished who failed to amend their ways, the second place for eternal torment and the last for those who did good and received immediate entry to Heaven. The parallels with the Visio monachi de Eynsham are clear. Indeed, the editors have suggested that Edmund may have read Bede and would consequently have been influenced by his narrative.

The influence of other visions is apparent as well. The Vision of Tundale (1149) is the best known and most elaborate of

\textsuperscript{64} Ernest J. Becker, A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions, 52.

\textsuperscript{65} The Vision of Drihthelm is related in Book V, chp. 12 of the Ecclesiastical History of Bede, 290-292, also in V, 13 and V, 14.
the medieval visions. The tearing of flesh is reminiscent of the Vision of Tundale, section eight. The wall of crystal is inspired by the Book of Enoch, XIV, 10, perhaps through the Vision of Tundale, sections 16;20. This account details the wall of crystal surrounded by tongues of fire and the house of crystal behind the wall. The house was as hot as fire and as cold as ice and in the palace of God there was a great fire amid the splendour of the throne of crystal. The raiment shone more brightly than the sun and was whiter than snow. Flaming fire was around the Great Glory and great fire stood before him.

Finally, the torment according to the nature of the crime is found in both the Vision of Paul and the Revelation of Peter written in the early third and fourth centuries respectively. The latter is a vision of the torments of the wicked, in which various classes of sinners were represented as punished in a manner suitable to their offenses. The influence of the

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65 This vision is found in Vincent de Beauvais’ Speculum Historiale, B, XXVIII, chp. 88;3 and Edmond Martene, Thesaurus Novus Anecdotorum, I, col. 490 (1717).

67 Ernest J. Becker, A Contribution to the Comparative Study of the Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell, with Special Reference to the Middle-English Versions, 96.


69 The extant version described by Augustine of the Vision of Paul is found in Jean Paul Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus series latina, XXXV, col. 188.

Apocalypse of Paul can be found in almost all late medieval visions including the Divina Commedia of Dante. This apocryphal book is mentioned in list by Nicephorus (c. 850 A.D.) while writing at Jerusalem. In Palestine, in the fifth century, it was still read on Good Friday in church. There is no doubt that it was popular, though its popularity seems to have been confined to the less educated Christians. Here, too, two men are before the Lord facing East where all is whiter than the snow and redder than a rose. There was chastisement in the dark, including being hung by the tongue for blasphemers. A great lake full of flaming mire, pitch, and blood was the destination for men and women hurled down from a great cliff for their sins.\(^{71}\) Dante is himself an excellent exemplar of this genre of vision and appears to have utilized the Revelation of Peter in composing his Divine Comedy.

The Visio monachi de Eynsham represents the infancy of the acceptance of the doctrine of Purgatory in England. Under the patronage of Hugh of Lincoln, the vision was circulated widely across England and its popularity was immediate. The vision was popular by the time of its translation into English because it had enduring themes which were still relevant in the late fifteenth century. The historical significance of the revelation lies in the light it throws upon the religious life and problems

of the twelfth century, a period dominated by the political
conflicts between the powers spiritual and temporal.72 Despite
his scathing denunciation of the corruption of the religious
community and its demoralizing effect on the laity, Edmund delays
passing judgement on the inherent good and necessity of the
Christian Church.73 Yet the vision's popularity was immediate.

The Visio remained popular throughout the next three
centuries. The original manuscript, no longer extant, was
written in 1196 in the reign of Richard Lion Heart.74 The
translation into English by William of Machlinia on the Continent
in 1482 witnesses the vision's enduring popularity with the
laity. It was one of Machlinia's manuscripts that found its way
from the library of King Henry VII to the British Museum.75

Thus the vision had broad popular appeal. The vision
satisfied the same need in the medieval mind as the instructive
morality plays of the time. These morality plays enacted the
tortures and suffering of Hell in order to educate the audiences
in the nature of the afterlife and redemption from sins. Art
reflected this preoccupation with the nature of Hell and eternal
suffering.

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72 Valerian Paget, The Revelation to the Monk of Evesham Abbey, 8.
73 Ibid, 9.
74 Ibid, 19.
75 Ibid, 19.
Like Dante in his *Divina Commedia*, a century later, this English author who writes to instruct the soul through a discussion of the pains of the afterlife, sketches out the topography or map of the other world. Edmund’s speculation on the nature of Purgatory is noteworthy since it was not until 1438, at the Council of Florence, that the concept of Purgatory as an item of faith was approved and officially incorporated in the Roman Catholic faith. The *Visio monachi de Evnsham* was influential in disseminating the notion of Purgatory in England. The English translation (1492) has several noteworthy features. The syntax reflects an attempt to make the work more approachable. Its language is common and contemporary. It evokes a specific mood, using motifs common in the English countryside to aid in explaining its ideas. It reads quickly without losing its impact and the prose is personal and inviting. The clarity of Edmund’s voice invites the reader to engage with the work and be instructed. Edmund’s familiarity with the souls in Purgatory, most of whom he knew while they were living in Oxfordshire, even in his childhood, lends to the text a sense of a diary, a personal reminiscence about the fate of one’s

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⁷⁶ For a discussion of the purgatorial literature before Dante, see Aaron Gurevich, "The Divine Comedy before Dante" in *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 104-152.

childhood friends. For combined grandeur and majesty of spiritual prose, it is hard to find anywhere an equal to the concluding pages of the Revelation which are devoted to the description of Paradise.\textsuperscript{78}

Moreover, Edmund's vision would have had a significant impact on his audience when it was read aloud in the cloister. The desire of the monks to attain the forbidden or secret knowledge of the text animated the individual impulses of the monk. Their desire for this information reflects an attempt to gain an advantage in salvation, the ultimate aim of a religious life.

The monk, however, must submit to the communal experience of the tale. The medieval practise of reading Holy Scripture or edifying texts aloud, in this case the Visio, would make the experience of the vision an act of community. The reading would be subject to the interpretation of another, the individual listener, and the collective response of the community while listening to the account. The collective sighs, gasps or nods of agreement would profoundly influence an individual's response to the lesson. This medieval style of reading would assault the eyes and ears of the reader at once.\textsuperscript{79} The listeners would have their ears and their mind's eyes confronted by the tale. The reader would feel his mouth moving and would feel the bodily

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid, 16.

touch of his fingers on the text.

Because ancient and medieval societies were predominantly oral cultures, philosophers and theologians in those societies felt the full impact of speech as a sensuous and physical phenomenon. Medieval people lived in an oral universe that knew the immediacy of the sensuous power of words as sounds. Moreover, medieval Latin, the language of the clerics, was not learned as they had their mother tongues, through total immersion in the oral-aural realm. Rather, they learned to read, write, and speak Latin simultaneously. It was from the beginning a written language which they experienced as a text, through a visual medium, its words were more removed. Consequently, when a monastic heard the vision only, without the textualized speech in front of him, the message would assault his senses and would have been imprinted vividly in his memory. The text would become more alive, more comfortable, more personal.

When the vision had been read through, each monk would be confronted with the decision of weighing the validity of the tale. The pressure of the monks around the individual would

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81 Ibid, 119.

82 See Caroline Walker Bynum, "'Discovery of the Individual' or 'Discovery of Self'" in Jesus as Mother Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982:85-90.) In this article, Bynum responds to Colin Morris' criticisms concerning the role of the concept of the "individual" in the religious life of the medieval cleric. See
inform his decision if only through a desire not to be alienated from the group. Monks would have been accustomed to accepting divinely-inspired literature as truth. As the idea of Purgatory became doctrinal, further pressure would be placed upon the monk to accept its authenticity. By rejecting the vision, a monk would be cast out of his community both symbolically and physically. Suspicions would have been cast at the dissenter who would have been considered wayward or even heretical. The direction and focus of the text is androcentric and the experience of the text in this setting would be definitively masculine.

Finally, the monks, both communally and individually, would have a socio-bodily response to the narration. Typically, groups of monks discussed what had been read to them and might do so quite emotionally. Many would be spurred on to action in the form of penance, prayers or good works. The narration would continue to live on in the imagination and thoughts of the monks as they continued their daily tasks and prayers. The text continued to guide and shape physically and spiritually the actions of the monks who heard it. The images presented in the text shaped the disposition of the group and their perceptions and understanding of the nature of Purgatory. The use of vivid descriptions and horrific tales would have augmented the impact of the text on the clerics who were listening to it. Monks would

have listened to the vision and have possessed enduring memories of it. In a culture which still depended heavily on memory in education, the vision would have effectively transmitted its message in a form which would have been lasting and memorable.

This method of instruction was not uncommon or unusual in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and reflects an attitude of docere verbo et exemplo. In this case, however, the teaching by word and example would take on fresh meaning. The words would be inspired by a man, discussed among men for the salvation of men. The examples in the vision are male-defined in order to be accessible to the male listeners. The vision would live on in the minds of the monks, thereby being further influenced by the masculinity of the monks and would have informed how they understood their expressions of monastic sexuality and masculinities. This newly acquired information would in turn shape their religious direction. This direction would be male-defined from without, in the form of abbatial censure and the monastic culture, and from within, through the memories of the teachings of the vision with its androcentric focus.

Primarily designed for a monastic community, the *Visio monachi de Eynsham* found a ready audience in the emerging secular and commercial elements of society who were ultimately concerned with their salvation but had not entered religious orders in order to satisfy this desire. Prior to its translation into English in 1482, the vision was disseminated throughout English monasteries, beginning first with Hugh of Lincoln and then later
bishops. It was used to instruct monks and was popular among the Latin-reading, educated monks. Purgatorial literature became a favourite theme in the devotional and penitential works composed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Like the work by Dante, the *Visio monachi de Eynsham* is an intimate portrait of the dealings and interactions of medieval people and their sufferings. Its enduring popularity with the English attests to the brilliance of its composition, the artistry of its images and its profound spiritual message. Suffused with medieval ideology, cultural and ethical values and social behaviour, the text allows the reader to garner insight into the nature of male relationships in this period. It provides a clear example of the encoded constructions of gender, social roles, behavioural patterns and monastic conceptions of sexuality and masculinities in medieval society.
Chapter Three:
An Androcentric Focus

in the Visio monachi de Eynsham 1196

The Visio monachi de Eynsham is an important twelfth-century example of the literature which gave rise to the notion of Purgatory. The vision itself reflects the twelfth-century developments in law, for example the Decretum of Gratian, as well as the religious revival and spiritual awakening manifest in the Cluniac reforms and the crusading spirit. The Visio is deeply rooted in its theological and doctrinal background. It examines the nature of humanity, the virtues and vices which characterize the human endeavour, and the religious responses to such accomplishments and failings. The vision, moreover, is a mirror of the social structure and the prevailing values in medieval society.

The text demonstrates the privileged position of men in society. The Visio actively promotes an androcentric conception of Purgatory. In the vision, Edmund seems less concerned with male privileges than with exhibiting the naturalness of male-defined salvation history. The institutionalized nature of patriarchy may have indeed informed the creation and suppositions of the visionary literature, but the overall unconcious
assumption of the text seems to be the correctness of male dominance in a spiritual conception of the world. The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* allows one to pose two related hypotheses. First, the conception of Purgatory in the text is focused on men, despite specific passages relating to women. The partiality to men in Purgatory functions to reassert the male definition of salvation history. Second, sin and the penance and expiation in Purgatory are focused on the actions and experiences of men.

Edmund's account of Purgatory is an example of medieval preaching, an apostolate, an example of *docere verbo et exempla*.¹ The *Visio* is a preaching exercise, a model for teaching and calling forth penance and contrition on the part of sinners. In many ways, the *Visio monachi de Eynsham* parallels in literary form the biography of Christine Mirabilis, which details her living a purgatory *in via*.² Ultimately, the *Visio* is an instructive work which in its utilization of the preaching style of the twelfth century and its examples and development supports an androcentric conception of Purgatory.


²For a more complete understanding of the method used to deconstruct Thomas of Cantimpré's biography of Christine Mirabilis and the manner in which her life was a preaching apostolate and teaching method, see Robert Sweetman's article "Christine of Saint-Trond's Preaching Apostolate: Thomas of Cantimpré's Hagiographical Method Revisited," *Vox Benedictina* 9, 1 (Summer 1992), 67-97.
Yet the *Visio monachi de Eynsham* reflects the androcentricism of medieval conceptions of social, ideological and political systems of dominance and suppression. Experienced and recorded in a single-sex, cloistered male environment, the vision reproduces an androcentric focus through its writing style, male imagery and topical choices. Unlike the mystical literature of twelfth-century religious women who presented a more balanced and "woman-friendly" conception of the spiritual life, Edmund's vision addressed men alone. Perhaps Edmund included women's humanity in the generic word "man" but this absence or invisibility further serves to isolated women from his discussion of Purgatory. Moreover, the invisibility of the "female voice" in the text added to the clear male focus. The vision was recorded in a single-sex, thoroughly male, cloistered environment in which there were no women, no contact with the female at all. The text is, perhaps, understandably or inescapably androcentric. But this androcentricism will provide a guide into understanding monastic perceptions of male sexuality and masculinity. This discussion will follow in the subsequent chapter. For the current discussion, it is enough to examine the nature and extent of the penetration of an androcentric focus in the vision.

The mystical literature written by twelfth-century religious women presents a more balanced and "woman-positive" conception of the spiritual life. Perhaps the best example of a twelfth-century female mystic is Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard's works
profoundly influenced the society in which she lived and her opinions on matters of doctrine were sought by ecclesiastical and secular authorities alike. Hildegard is unique in the manner in which she conceptualized man and woman. The divine work entrusted to humankind was performed in a sexed universe. It was carried out by man and by woman for without the latter there would be no humanity.³

Hildegard conserved the traditional opposition of man as strength and woman as frailty, but she gives it a much more positive interpretation. Hildegard had a very wide view on the role of women. Woman was born of man as his love, to whom God had given form.⁴ At a period when misogynous descriptions prevailed, in Hildegard one notices an attempt to break free of traditional patterns. Hildegard included the feminine element in her theology and, indeed, it may be said that Hildegard tried to move beyond the exclusively masculine concept of God and the values traditionally attributed to man and woman.⁵

Unlike Hildegard, Edmund presented a vision which did not attempt to challenge traditional conceptions of man and woman. In his prologue, Edmund addressed both men and women, urging them


⁴Ibid.

⁵For a clear example of her work at equalizing the roles of man and woman, see Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans., Bruce Hozeski (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1986.)
to learn from his vision and draw its benefits. His subsequent discussion, however, relegated women to marginality. In fact, women and their roles were largely invisible in his text.

The vision overwhelmingly investigated the nature of men's sins and the relationships between men. More than two-thirds of the vision examined cases of male sinners. Knights and abbots, kings and archbishops, goldsmiths and sodomites received detailed discussion under Edmund's gaze. Moreover, his analysis of these cases filled the first two-thirds of the vision. The discussion of women and their sins was relegated to the final sections of the vision so that even the analysis of women's sins was marginalized.

Throughout the text, the absence of women is obvious to the modern reader. There emerges a kind of androcentricity based on women's absence or marginality. Edmund only utilized examples of women in order to shame his monastic audience into correcting their behaviour. This manipulation of women is a different kind of sexism from a text focused on women, devaluing or attacking them. Edmund simply accepted as true and natural, unlike Hildegard, a male-dominated society and male-segregated environment.

The account of the wife of a poor man epitomizes how Edmund uses women to awaken his male audience to the need for conversion and further elaborates his understanding of sexual relations. Her status as wife was all that was given, although Edmund knew

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⁶Paget, The Revelation, prologue.
her and was pleased to see her faring well.

Her great fault had been a habit of impatiently
scolding and upbraiding any who wronged her, and she
had allowed sourness and rancour to linger in her heart
against them, and therefore she had suffered these
pains.\footnote{Ibid, 191.}

She, however, was remorseful for her actions and \ldots{} often
wept that she could not overcome it.\footnote{Ibid, 191.} Consequently, she was
devout in her prayers and in her alms-giving. Because of her
contrition in life, she was relieved some suffering in Purgatory.
The woman's sins \ldots{} by confession and satisfaction done for
them, God grants to be changed and counted among venial sins.\footnote{Ibid, 193.}

Women were associated with sins of language as this wife of
a poor man obviously was. Medieval theologians felt the full

Medieval people found speech seductive, in a way that moderns do
not, because they lived in an oral universe that knew the
immediacy of the sensuous power of words as sounds.\footnote{Ibid, 116.} Medieval
clerical men were predisposed to associate the power and
seduction of the spoken word with their mother tongues and with
women. Consequently, sinning through speech was associated with women.

This example continues the definition of sin as androcentric. A woman's sin is defined in relation to a man and her speech is accountable to a man. Her natural use of language becomes sinful when it is used against a man or in opposition to the wishes of a man. It also suggests that an aspect of a woman, her natural use of language, with which she is associated, was sinful. This sin was based solely on her sex, on some biological or essential aspect of her femininity. This sexism based on biology, in contrast with the male or male speech which was not sinful, highlighted the androcentric nature of sin. This story maintains the androcentric focus of the vision. Moreover, Edmund through this example, is able to demonstrate how the contrition of this woman eased her purgation. The recurring theme of a call to contrition and conversion is reaffirmed through this example. The male audience would be urged to perform a similar act as this lowly woman. Furthermore, clerics would be urged to work together for the expiation of the sins of the souls in Purgatory in a similar fashion as women. There is an inherent sexism present in the suggestion that men would have been able to recant for their sins if women could have done so.

Moreover, women in Purgatory worked together to ease each other's suffering. An abbess spoke to Edmund:

She requested me to tell many things to her own natural

\[12\] Ibid, 119.
sisters, . . . She told me certain tokens by which to distinguish them, and said the news would be gracious and pleasant to them; but she bade me tell it only to those she commanded me. She said she had received much relief and help in her pains by the devout prayers and psalms of her sisters, . . . to whom she had been a spiritual mother. . . . Therefore let them know that without doubt they shall have great rewards, and I have escaped many sharp pains. If they persevere as they have begun, I hope to escape the remainder of my sufferings.

People believed that souls often remained at the scene of their sins or of their deaths, and appeared to the living, at least in dreams, to request Masses and prayers. Women seem to aid each other in the easing of their sufferings and provide secret knowledge. This practice was not uncommon. About 1150, the mystic Elizabeth of Schonau entered into a dialogue with the souls of dead nuns who requested the assistance of her convent in paying the penalties that remained from their earthly sojourn. Completely separate from the influence or direction of men, these women actively participated in the expiation of the sins of other women. Edmund again highlights the communal notion of the prayers of the living to ease the purgation of all souls.

From this point, Edmund devotes his examples to his call for conversion and confession in the Church. His focus, however, changes. He uses female Christians to illustrate his argument, yet these examples remain curiously androcentric in orientation.

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13 Paget, The Revelation, 252.
14 Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, 153.
They are used primarily to instruct the male audience through the use of contrast and shame. Edmund contrasts the lives, virtues and vices of women with those of the men he has already discussed. The women are an essential component of Edmund’s rhetorical strategy.

In contrast to the passage on the prior who neglected the cure of the souls of his monks and who was punished for the sins of those for whom he was responsible, Edmund relates an example of an anchoress whom he saw in the same place. The anchoress’ pains were light and "... hastened her speedily on the journey to paradise."16 Her holy mode of life made her purgatorial sufferings less severe than those of the prior.17

Indeed, women were more aware of their accountability to the divine order and thus shaped their lives in order to attain salvation. Of two leprous nuns, Edmund had much to say.

They suffered that plague of leprosy patiently and gladly, and thanked God for the chastisement and disease, and were as delighted with it as if they had received gracious gifts and adornments from Him. A little while ago they were pained in this world by a long martyrdom; now they blessedly follow the Heavenly Lamb, their Spouse, Jesus Christ, without any spot, wheresoever He goes.18

The contrast between the sufferings and physical ailments of

16Paget, The Revelation, 183.

17For further information concerning the role and function of anchoresses in English religious life, see for example Eileen Power, Medieval English Nunneries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922) and Sally Thompson, Women Religious The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

18Paget, The Revelation, 255-256.
these nuns and the excessive bodily health in the case of the lawyer-sodomite, discussed more fully in Chapter Four, is clear. Perhaps women could have served as better models of humility since they were already subordinated in life. To the medieval mind, physical illness in this world was regarded as penance and often the illness was welcomed as a forum in which virtue and devotion could be nourished. Furthermore, suffering in this world mitigated suffering in the next. The duration and extent of purgation might be lessened as a result of the trials of physical illnesses during one's life. These leprous nuns, with the anchoress, serve to heighten the interdependence of the living and the deceased in easing the pains of Purgatory. The merits of a life's work, moreover, would profoundly influence how the soul would progress through Purgatory.

This comparison is subtle. Edmund's monastic audience would have the example of the prior fresh in their minds and they themselves would draw the comparisons. This technique makes the male audience more active in interpreting the lessons of his message. This anchoress, who by her nature was seen as weaker and more lustful than men, achieved salvation through her superior life devoted to good works and holiness. How much more could be expected of a man who by his nature is more spiritual

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and rational? The medieval conception of the religious experience was focused on binary oppositions of male and female. The male was rational, spiritual and strong, the female, weak, emotional and earthy. This example only serves to heighten the horror of the peril of the prior who should have known better by his very nature. Edmund utilizes this example not so much to display the virtue of the anchoress but rather to shame his male audience. The androcentric focus of this argument, through its use of the subtle comparison to the story of the prior, continues to reinforce the call to conversion among the male clergy. Edmund uses female examples to contrast directly with male behaviour.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* sets up various sexual relationships. Monks are urged to suppress the needs and affections of the biological family in favour of the monastery. This rejection of the concerns of the patrilineal family was eased by transferring into a monastic setting similar kinship bonds and friendships. This framework of behaviour, however, had several difficulties. Particular friendships could lead to affective or sexual feelings among monks. Sodomy in the vision was one example of the institution of particular relationships with a clear, carnal aspect. The emotional and sexual tension in an all-male environment led to manifestations of sexual and

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exclusive relationships. Edmund's examination of the relationships between men and women and among women demonstrates an androcentric understanding of the gender differences in the twelfth century. Edmund's vision ultimately reflects a male understanding of the cloistered environment and social relationships.
Chapter Four:
Monastic Masculinities in the
Visio monachi de Eynsham 1196

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* set out a definite understanding of sexual and gender relations. Familial bonds, spiritual friendship and sodomy were central themes in Edmund's examination of the relations between men in a monastic setting and in secular society. A close examination of the examples of penance reveals more fully the underlying psychological motivations of monks in their relationships one with another. Finally, Edmund's reactions to a bleeding crucifix before he began his journey through Purgatory represented a symbolic example of the expressions of a monastic masculinity. His understanding of the relations between men and women suggested an androcentric social viewpoint and a strict, traditional adherence to clearly defined gender roles of the dominant male and the submissive female. Ultimately, the sexual relations in the *Visio monachi de Eynsham* are important for what they reveal to the researcher about the sexual, social and spiritual relationships among men in a monastic setting and how monks expressed various
aspects of a monastic masculinity.

A large part of the vision is devoted to examining the consequences for religious men and women who forsake their vows for worldly delights. One of the primary concerns found in the third section of the vision centred on the continuing ties of the monk to his biological family. The discussion of the appropriate relationship of the monk with his biological family was the beginning of Edmund's examination of sexual relations in the vision.

For example, Edmund discusses a prior whom he knew was in Purgatory. The prior was in great pain, submerged first in fire and then in stinking baths of brimstone and pitch. He was there "... not only for my own sins and excesses, though I offended in many ways, but also for the wickedness and misrule of the people that I had the charge and care of in my life." This statement is the first indication of the responsibility among monastic officials for the care of their charges.

Of those sins, what grieves me most is the carnal affection and love that I had for my friends, my father and mother, and others of my kindred, for some of whom I got benefices of the church when they were quite unworthy to have them; and to others I gave most indiscreetly, gifts from the property of the monastery of which I was prior. Now they scarcely remember me or do anything for me in my need."

This enduring attachment to familial ties was not uncommon in the Middle Ages and profoundly moulded the shape of monastic and

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2Ibid, 174.
religious life. Individuals who attained positions of prominence in the monastic order would help their biological family, both economically and politically. Consequently, there developed a conflict of interests between the needs of the monastic "family" and the advantages which could have been acquired by the biological family of the prominent monk.

This concern for familial advancement often caused the prior in Purgatory to neglect the care of his charges while alive. Their organized lifestyle, devoted to attaining salvation, was subordinate to the concerns of the biological family of the prior. Edmund further describes how the prior admitted he:

\[\ldots\] loosed the bridle of correction over the wills of my subordinates, and allowed them to follow their desires and lusts, as though my eyes had been closed, fearing that if I corrected and restrained them from their folly, they would become my enemies and endeavour to turn me out of my prelacy.\footnote{For further information concerning the enduring family ties in religious and monastic institutions, see for example Jack Goody’s *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Goody argues that the emerging incest taboos and inheritance restrictions enacted by canonical legislation were in fact a subtle, if not purposefully, erosion of familial power and cohesion. The result of this extension of family ties and restrictions on marriage eroded the family unit’s ability to marry to its political and economic advantage. Eventually, the family line would die out and the land, resources and wealth of the family would be left to the Church. In this way, Goody argues, the Church was able to increase its power and prestige.}

This passage reveals the weakness of the prior in his conviction to guide and censure his charges. It was an apparent neglect of responsibility on his part. The prior seems to have been more

\footnote{Paget, *The Revelation*, 175.}
concerned with keeping the peace and winning friends than in censuring their behaviour in order to ensure their salvation.

The prior was personally responsible for the souls of those monks entrusted to him. Now that he is in Purgatory, "... the first day after my death was easier than any day since, for all the sins they commit now, after my death, which were contracted through my negligence, increase my pains still more." The prior's sins continued to multiply after he died even though he no longer sins personally. Consequently, his neglect of their care and his responsibility towards them endures after his death. Presumably, the prior could have changed their behaviour. If the prior had corrected their indiscretions, his own purgatorial experience would have been lessened and eased. This relationship between the actions of the prior during his life, the continued influence of his charges while they live and his purgation are closely and inextricably linked.

The monks' sins accrue to him because he neglected his charges while he was alive. The actions of the living still profoundly influence the souls in Purgatory.

Some who are dead and some still living have succumbed to that abominable sin that ought not to be named; and because I put them under no correction, I now dread nothing so much as the fear of being compelled to experience the foul stench which is suffered by those who fall into this abomination; ...  

Edmund notes the fear of retribution on the part of the prior and

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5 Ibid, 177.
6 Ibid, 177.
his fear of having to suffer this same sin, sodomy, as a result of his inability to correct it among his charges when he was alive. Indeed the prior muses about why "... I was more ashamed to bear public censure, than abashed at the knowledge in secret of the shameful dishonour of the order." ¹ The contrition of the prior serves as a guide to the audience in the appropriate form of penance and conversion for the neglect of his duties.

The use of the example of a prior in a monastery would seem personal and easily comprehensible to Edmund's monastic audience. The prior's loyalty must necessarily be to the monastic community rather than his biological family. Otherwise, his negligence leads to the depravity and laxness of the whole community. Edmund, however, not only criticizes the actions of monastics but also reproaches prominent ecclesiastics of the twelfth century, including the contemporary Archbishop of Canterbury, Hubert Walter.²

¹Ibid, 178.

²For a chronological listing of the archbishops of Canterbury for this period, see Charles G. Herbermann et al, ed., The Catholic Encyclopedia, volume three (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913), 299. This archbishop may be identified as Hubert Walter who held the position from 1193 to 1205. Alternatively, Edmund may be discussing an earlier archbishop, Baldwin (1185-1190). The likelihood of Edmund using Baldwin as his reference, however, is marginal. First, Edmund would have only been a child when Baldwin was the archbishop. It seems unlikely, therefore, that Edmund would have a keen understanding of Baldwin's tenure, his strengths and abuses. More likely, Edmund is discussing Hubert Walter. The archbishop is Edmund's contemporary. His tenure would be more available to Edmund intellectually when he experienced the vision. Finally, the monks of Eynsham had appealed to Walter to solve the abuses of Abbot Roger Norreys against their monastery. Edmund, then, would have had a personal recollection, experience, and criticism of the archbishop.
Elsewhere Edmund continues his criticisms of the state of the Church, secularism and the continued adherence to familial ties in the monastic setting. For example, the chapter concerning a certain abbot focuses on the state of the church and the vices of the clergy. An abbot's suffering in Purgatory was eased by the continual prayers of poor people to whom he had given alms from his estate. Many Christians believed that their prayers and good works would intervene in lessening their languishing in Purgatory.  

The abbot was still in suffering, chiefly for excessive love to his kinsfolk, to whom he gave too much from his monastery, and spent more on them than he ought to have done. That vice, carnal love of kindred, has been a snare to many people professing religion, and also to dispensers of the goods of holy church, as bishops and others, who distribute them probably in other uses than they should.  

Here the word carnal referred to worldly, not sexual love. It suggests strong family ties taking precedence over clerical ties. This abbot used the Church for his family's advancement. His recurring theme centres on the clergy maintaining too strong attachments to their biological family. The institutional Church from the tenth century onward was working toward lessening the familial ties between clergy and biological family. Theologians of the eleventh century, and particularly Cistercian thinkers, began to formulate an understanding of spiritual family and spiritual friendship which superseded the bonds of the biological family.

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9 Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 152.
This conceptualization, however, presented certain difficulties. The needs and demands of the biological family, with its inherent secularism and a sexuality directed toward the continuation of the family, were often in conflict with the teachings and aims of a monastery. The monastic environment demanded a renunciation of these aims. The suppression of carnality, at least in the official literature, had its origin in the monasteries.\textsuperscript{11} The suppression of familial ties among the monks inevitably led to the development of strong personal ties among them inside the cloister. The monks replaced one set of strong emotional feelings in the family to a network of emotional bonds within the monastery.

Yet, monastic authorities generally discouraged close personal friendships from developing among or between monks or nuns.\textsuperscript{12} The terrors of the flesh and the turning away from one's spiritual journey were the chief characteristics of the monastic attitude toward the renunciation of particular relationships. The dangers to the spiritual life of pseudo-friendships, leading to factions and the danger of sexual temptation, had led most authors to stress the exclusive desire for God at the expense of emotional satisfactions of love of

\textsuperscript{11}Aaron W. Godfrey, "Rule and Regulation: Monasticism and Chastity," \textit{Acta} vol xiv (1990), 54.

neighbours and friends.\textsuperscript{13}

The concept of spiritual friendship itself in the cloister entered the monastic tradition in the eleventh century. The twelfth-century proliferation of new orders of monks and canons, with their fervour and enthusiasm, helped spread and encourage the devotion to spiritual friendship.\textsuperscript{14} This friendship, or \textit{amicitia}, had more in common with modern romantic love than with modern asexual friendship because \textit{amicitia} was founded on strong emotional, even loving, feelings which shaped the friendship. It was at once highly emotional and asexual. Twelfth-century friendship was based on companionship, affection and similarity of interest but excluded physical attraction.\textsuperscript{15} Aelred of Rievaulx, whose text \textit{Spiritual Friendship} dealt with this very issue, made it clear that spiritual love was only good so long as it remained untainted by carnal desire. Aelred was no more tolerant of homosexual than of heterosexual carnality. For a monk, either one was a sin.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite its dangers of temptation, the notion of friendship eased the transition from the secular to the sacred by transferring already known patterns of friendship into a monastic


\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}, 37.

\textsuperscript{15} Ruth Mazo Karras, "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints," 306.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid}, 311-12.
The patterns of feudal life with their emphasis on kinship bonds, which were familiar to adult novices, as well as a new sensibility of the dynamics of personal experience, functioned to make a same-sex environment understandable and familiar. Male friendships functioned at least in part to determine the monk's new status in the monastic hierarchy. Friendship among monks, however, was only justified if it was geared toward a goal, as a means to reach greater spiritual perfection. For Edmund, the most apparent consequence of the temptations of spiritual friendship would have been the sin of sodomy. The vision discusses in detail examples of sodomy and Edmund used these examples to criticize this sin of waywardness among clerics.

Sodomy was placed within its own sphere of Purgatory and it warranted a detailed and lengthy examination by Edmund. The sodomites are alienated by topography from the other sinners. This alienation of sodomy from the other sins in the vision is interesting. Edmund used the examples of sodomy in his argument to suggest that sodomy was a consequence of the laxness of medieval people in their quest for salvation. Edmund did not

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18 Ibid, 94.

explore this sin to understand its nature but rather saw it as the final result of moral depravity. Sodomy, for Edmund, was the consequence of the unrestricted enjoyment of other sins and vices, of a laxness of vows or morals and, as a consequence, sodomy was employed to demonstrate the pinnacle of moral depravity. Sodomy, however, was also an indication of the manner in which monk related one to another. One cannot say that all monastics were sodomites, but the case of sodomy examined in this vision is important.

Sodomy was the only sexual sin which Edmund discussed in the vision. Considering he lived in a cloistered, all-male environment and had no contact with women, it is important that Edmund examined this issue. Presumably Edmund discussed sodomy because it was common enough to be considered a serious moral problem in monasteries. Moreover, it suggests an aspect of a monastic sexuality or masculinity or, more accurately, it reflects expressions of a monastic masculinity.

Sodomy in the Middle Ages often referred to any unnatural sexual activity, that is to say, any sexual activity which was not procreative in nature.\textsuperscript{20} The term sodomy was ambiguous since its meaning was not always confined to \textit{coitus in ano} or between men. Sodomy transgressed both natural and divine law and yet theologians failed to agree on a clear definition. The canons of the Council of London (1102) dealt with moral abuses

and mentioned sodomy in two canons but failed to define it. The canons state that if a person found guilty was an ecclesiastic he should be deposed, and if a layman, deprived of his legal status and dignity. Albertus Magnus (1206-1280) listed sodomy as the worst possible sin since it was not only a sin against nature but a sin against man. According to Albert intercourse had been invented and the sex organs formed for the procreation of offspring, the natural end of intercourse. Sexual activity was conceptualized with a strict adherence to traditional gender understandings of men and women. The dominance of the male in the sexual encounter and the passivity of the female were the chief gauges of the propriety of the sexual act. In the practice of sodomy, however, a man must become passive and receptive. To medieval theologians and medical writers, passivity was a characteristic of the woman who served only as a vessel to contain the lusts of men and to provide the environment in which pregnancy could occur. It represented for the medieval mind a rejection of the natural superiority of the male and a willing assumption of the weaknesses and passivity of the female. The acceptance of this weakness and the passive behaviour on the part

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21 Ibid, 63.
22 Ibid, 64.
of a man was seen as contrary to natural law.\footnote{24}

Sodomy, for Edmund, is a male and clerical sin. This homosexual sodomy was strictly censured by the ecclesiastical hierarchy since it went in direct opposition to natural and divine law. Clerical sodomy received a detailed discussion in Peter Damian's \textit{Book of Gomorrah} written between 1048-1054 during the pontificate of Leo IX. The commonly accepted date of composition, however, was 1049 thereby placing the \textit{Book of Gomorrah} after the Council of Riems (fall 1049).\footnote{25} Damian attacked the incidents of homosexual activity which had taken place among the clergy of his region. Given the general decline of sexual morality among the clergy at the time, the specific situations dealt with by Damian, and the response to the \textit{Book of Gomorrah} from Leo IX, it would seem reasonable to accept Damian's assertion of the existence of sodomy among the clergy.\footnote{26}

Whether or not the work succeeded in reversing the spread of homosexual practices in the areas which were of concern to Damian is unknown.

Edmund treated male homosexual activity almost exclusively in the vision. Edmund mentioned female homosexuality obliquely.

\footnote{24}{See John Boswell, \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.)}


\footnote{26}{Ibid, 22.}
in his vision, but failed to discuss it or attempt to correct it. The manuscript of the vision by William de Machlinia, circa 1482, translates Edmund’s text as:

And yeffe y hadde sene and consyderyd the cause namely nowe in tyme of crystendame cowde not in any wyse hauve beynyd that such a foule synne and wyse myght haue be presumed and done speyally of women the whych naturellly schuld be more schamfull thenne other. I neyvr herd before nether hadde any suspycyon hetherto that the kynde of women hadde be deprauyd and desoyled by suche a foule synne. Paget’s 1909 translation, however, states only: "All those who were thus punished and pained, had committed, while they lived in this world, that foul sin which cannot be named by Christians or by heathens." The fifteenth-century addition, including a reference to lesbianism or the practice of heterosexual anal sex, might suggest a new understanding and recognition of female

27 For more information concerning lesbian sexuality, see for example Judith C. Brown, "Lesbian Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past (New York: A Meridian Book, 1989), 67-75. Brown, in this article, examines the reasons for a relative lack of concern over lesbianism and how it both contributed to and was in turn reinforced by conflicting male notions about female sexuality. She explores the cases of lesbianism which came before the courts and concludes that the severity of punishment was related to concerns about women’s gender behaviour rather than sexual object-choice. A further discussion of female homosexuality in convents is found in Vern L. Bullough, "The Sin against Nature and Homosexuality" in Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982), 64. See also Judith C. Brown, Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).


sexuality that Edmund may not have noted. Paget's translation in 1909 is sanitized and does not attempt to decipher Edmund's intention. Edmund had tremendous difficulty in acknowledging female homosexuality. Medieval clergies could not conceptualize the existence of female homosexuality since their understanding of sex required the presence of a phallus and female homosexuality is defined not in relation to a penis or a man. The treatises concerning female sexuality were phallocentric and viewed women as lustful, earthy and uncontrollable but only in a relationship with a man. This omission on the part of the scientific and medical professions was not exclusive. Medieval canonists and ecclesiastics were equally unable to suppose medieval lesbianism. Ultimately, for Edmund, male homosexuality was the only sodomitical activity which he could have conceptualized and thus male homosexual activity is the only expression of the sexual relationship that was examined.

His opening remarks on the vulgarity of the sin suggest that Edmund related the example to illustrate his abhorrence of the sin and to reveal the penance for such action. A lawyer received rents and benefices from the church and was esteemed by secular and religious authorities alike. He, however,

... was over careful of his bodily health, ... he never confessed his sins for the health of his soul, and especially his soul sin of unclean living, which is the first deed of alms that a man should do. Neither had he any compassion on poor people, to give alms to them... 10

10 Paget, The Revelation, 162.
Throughout Edmund's discussion, there is an attempt to equate sodomy with hard-heartedness and neglect of the commandments. True to the thrust of his developing argument, Edmund recognized the weakening of vows and duties. This lack of responsibility led the sinner into more peril. Sodomy was seen to be symptomatic of a lessening of the moral certitude and commitment to a life of righteousness of medieval Christians. He noted the lawyer's misuse of his body and his lack of contrition.

In fact, "[a]ll those who were thus punished and pained, had committed, while they lived in this world, that foul sin which cannot be named by Christian or by heathens."\(^{31}\) The sin of sodomy, mentioned in the above passage, is inextricably wound up with the neglect of the poor, the failure to provide alms and an inappropriate concern for the welfare of the body. Medieval theology stressed the subjugation of the body to the life of the soul. It constructed a dichotomy between the body and the soul in which the body was transitory and weak, the pleasures of which ought to have been willingly foregone while the penitent concentrated on the welfare and life of the soul as eternal and good.\(^{32}\) These sins seem to Edmund to be against natural law as well as divine law as though the failure to give alms is contrary to the nature of humanity. The inclusion of sodomy in this discussion represents Edmund's assumption of the moral depravity

\(^{31}\)Ibid, 157.

\(^{32}\)See for example John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.)
of the twelfth century and the contemporary transgressing of the natural order.

Sodomy was among the sins of the lawyer but not his chief sin. He also had not confessed his sins at the end of his life and thus had done no penance for them:

... I was ashamed to confess such a horrible sin, lest I should be despised and dishonoured amongst those to whom I appeared illustrious and honest. I confessed my little sins to an honest and worshipful priest, whom you know well. And when he asked me if I had anything else to confess, I bade him go his way, and if any other thing came to my mind, I would send for him and tell him. Directly he was gone, and scarcely arrived at his church, I began to die.

Here it seems evident that his foulest sin was not sodomy but his refusal to confess this sin. This omission on the part of the sinner would condemn him to a prolonged period of purgation and alerts one to the growing importance of sacramental confession to ensure salvation. By this period, confession to the laity had been suppressed and consequently the only legitimate forum for absolution was within the church with an ordained priest in the confessional.34 This omission to confess on the part of the lawyer was Edmund’s chief point in this tale. Confession was a central theme in his vision and the absolute necessity of confession seems to be what Edmund was attempting to demonstrate. Edmund has begun to more closely focus his discussion on the absolute necessity of confession and utilized this example to

33 Paget, The Revelation, 164-65.

Yet, this sexual sin signifies various other important issues. This male homosexual activity suggests the breakdown of the mechanics of spiritual friendship. These particular male friendships, aimed at achieving greater spiritual perfection, had succumbed to carnal temptation. The erotic, affective elements of the spiritual friendships in the monastery could have easily fallen into the same circumstance as the case of the lawyer. It is significant that Edmund used the example of the lawyer rather than a monk. In this way, he was able to teach by example rather than highlighting the problems in his monastery and thereby causing his fellow monks to feel his personal censure. Edmund was urging his fellow monks to resist this carnal desire. The intense focus of feeling on Christ, during this period of greater humanization of his image, and the development of affective relationships between the monks made the possibility of homosexual activity in the monasteries more likely. The monks, in suppressing their biological familial bonds while living in an environment which mimicked them, would have been susceptible to intense same-sex feelings, sexual or otherwise in the cloistered setting. The emotional intensity in the monastery would have had to find an outlet and, for Edmund, sodomy was the consequence.

Now that the lawyer is in Purgatory, he is "... actually compelled to indulge the same foul passion."35 The lawyer’s purgatorial punishment is to be sodomized in the sight of the

35 Paget, The Revelation, 165.
other souls. There is thus a continuation of the pattern of the punishment of the sinner being directly related to the nature of the sin. Moreover, it is worth noting that what was a secret sin in life is public in death. The viliness of this particular sin aids in drawing attention to the absolute necessity of sacramental confession for the salvation of the soul. Without it, the soul is left to languish in the same vices of the physical world and is denied the grace of Heaven.

Besides the horrible pain with which he is afflicted, the lawyer is "... confounded by shame, and made cursed and abominable in the sight of all men by the same sin."\(^{35}\)

Pride seems to be at the centre of his ultimate humiliation. Now meditate on what has been said of this clerk, and previously what was said of the goldsmith[ a drunken man who failed to correct his sins], ... That goldsmith, though he was a sinner, never presumed on his wit or any other virtue, but was meek and lowly in his own sight, and knew himself foolish and insecure, because of his sins. ... This clerk, on the contrary, presumed on the wit and riches he possessed and continued in his wickedness; and because he thought himself exempt from the common labour of men in this world, he is now made a bitter and cruel example, and punished beyond others.\(^{36}\)

His secret male vice, once hidden, is now visible and his true filth shows. His pride prevented the lawyer from confessing the sin when he had the opportunity. This lawyer trusted in himself over the deliverance of Christ’s word and so in his pride and lack of penance is damned. Pride was his worst sin. Within Edmund’s framework, the sexual sins were actually minimized

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\(^{35}\)Ibid, 165.

\(^{36}\)Ibid, 167-68.
within a hierarchy of vice. The worst sin in this example was the pride which prevented the lawyer from confessing his sodomitical activity. It was his pride which interfered most with his salvation and lengthened his purgation. The sin of sodomy was superseded by his sin of pride.

Edmund's absolute conviction of the necessity of confession in the salvation process led him to see pride, a vice which might limit a full and cleansing confession, as more detrimental to the welfare of an individual's soul than the sin of sodomy. Community of spirit and of action seems instrumental in Edmund's understanding of salvation and the manner in which all Christian souls move through the various stages of the afterlife into Paradise. Sodomy, on the other hand, set up particular relationships between monks or between abbot and monk that detracted from the larger monastic community.

Moreover, this discussion of the example of sodomy suggests for the modern reader certain aspects of a monastic masculinity. The suppression of familial emotional bonds had a considerable impact on the psychological state of the monk. This isolation from the biological family caused monks to develop strong personal and affective relationships with their brothers. The sense of spiritual friendship between monks provided an outlet for these displaced affections. The monk drew his emotional support from his friendships with his fellow monks, some of whom were strangers and some of whom could have been biological brothers. Certainly, one aspect of a monastic masculinity was a
monk's need to satisfy his emotional demands in the relationships which he could have developed within the cloister.

These affective relationships between monks informed male behaviour in the monastery. Whether these bonds led to a platonic relationship between an older monk and a novice or led to a carnal, sexual relationship, the bonds of spiritual and emotional friendship in the monastery limited the expressions of monastic sexual relations and the construction of monastic masculinities.

Another aspect of monastic masculinities evident in these relations between men concerns the descriptions of the penance which Edmund received from a senior monk before he began his journey through Purgatory. An examination of corporeal penance in the monastery further elucidates the relations between men.

In the first section of the Viesio monachi de Eynsham, Edmund examined the nature of corporeal penance within the community of monks itself. Prior to his rapture, Edmund approaches a senior monk from whom he received penance, saying "When I saw him

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I made a sign to him to discipline me as he had done before.  

Having received his discipline and having approached the altar,

... [I] put off my shoes and knelt on my knees on the pavement, and bowed my head many times to the ground, and then went behind the altar to seek the cross that I had been told of. Behind this altar he [Edmund] found a crucifix which he did not know was there. ... Soon I was dissolved in tears of devotion, and lying all prostrate I worshipped that holy cross full devoutly, ... often kissing the feet of the crucifix, and busily watering them with my tears. 

Then Edmund moves to his confessor, an authority figure, to receive punishment and discipline and guidance. There is a sense that alone Edmund does not know how to make this supplication but rather must be initiated into the process of submission. Next, there is a very physical action of kneeling and bowing which acknowledges the superiority of the fatherly confessor. Finally, there is a bodily experience with Edmund’s tears and the watering of the feet of the crucifix. Traditionally, it is at the feet of a master that one receives instruction and one must recall the anointing of Christ’s feet by Mary Magdalene. Therefore, it is not surprising that this action is manifest.

Edmund’s narrative suggests a system of an older man initiating the younger into the ways of the spiritual fulfilment. The younger man seeks the leading male authority in order to determine the correct means to submit to the system. This submission of the personal male voice to the larger social Male

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39 Paget, The Revelation, 76.
40 Ibid, 76-77.
voice or androcentricity is the result of Edmund's desire to view Christ as the archetypical Male voice. This procedure is delineated by Edmund as a form of instruction for the male audience. Edmund preaches the necessity of penance and confession. Absolution of these sins is only conferred by a male priest. The androcentric focus in this passage, including the confessor, Edmund's supplication and the image of Christ, denotes the importance of men in this monastic penitential activity. Although monastic penance was not yet sacramentalized and was limited to ordained priests, nonetheless, the participation of monastics in this process re-enforced the preeminence of men in absolving sins.

Edmund goes on to note how he felt some drops falling from the crucifix.

I put my fingers there and knew by the redness it was blood. Also I beheld the right side of the image of Our Lord's body, and it welled out with blood, as a man's flesh bleeds when it is cupped. . . . Then I took in my open hand, I know not how many drops of that precious blood, and diligently anointed my eyes, ears, and nostrils. Lastly I put one drop of that blessed blood to my lips, and through the great desire and devotion of my heart, I swallowed it.\[\footnote{Ibid, 79.}

Edmund viewed this "blood" as the origin, or generative force, in his salvation, just as in the symbolism of the Eucharist. The Catholic identification of regeneration with the inner grace of baptism was viewed not as conversion but rather as new birth.\[\footnote{Mary Anita Ewer, \textit{A Survey of Mystical Symbolism}, 197.} EDMUND was relating to the personal Christ and being reborn.
This rebirth was requisite for his spiritual passage into Purgatory.

In the twelfth century, theologians pointed to a reawakening of the incarnational aspect of the image of man which facilitated Edmund's ability to empathize with the suffering of Christ. In smearing himself with the blood from the wounds, Edmund is imitating the blood of the body which would have trickled down the side of Christ. The blood-smeared body of Christ was the instrument of humanity's salvation. Edmund is cleansing the sensory organs which led him to sin. Moreover, by covering his face, and especially all of his individual sensory organs, Edmund is negating his personal identity in order to fully identify with the blood-smeared image of Christ. Here, Edmund in fact dies symbolically, mirroring the resurrection mystery of Christ.

Edmund's submission to the corporeal system is found again in an example of penance. He was worshipping at the altar when he heard the voice of

... the same old father that I met last in the church porch, of whom I desired to receive penance, ... When I had said my Confiteor, as the custom is, ... he gave me penance six times, as before. I desired him again to let me repeat my confession and take penance of him, for at every stroke that he gave me instead of sorrow and pain, there came inestimable and incredible sweetness of joyful comfort. But he would give me no more, ... He went in his albus and sat down in the abbot's seat in the Chapter House, and I came and lay

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Thus this senior confessor has assumed the position of authority in this story, both in his dominance in the penitential lashing and in his position of superiority, symbolized by his seating in the chair of the abbot. The practice of auricular confession became regularized during this period and the practice in England and Ireland originated in the monastic environment and spread out later into the rest of society. Moreover, the physical penance which Edmund desires, and wishes to repeat, does add a sado-masochistic element to this encounter, even if there is no sexual undertone. The corporeal system is further highlighted by the lashing of a young man by an older monk.

The process of initiation of novices into the monastic life and regimen relied heavily on senior men guiding and instructing the novices in the procedures and practices of the order. The senior monks would administer discipline, provide an exemplar of living and instruct the young in their duties. Monks did not differ psychologically from their contemporaries. Violence was commonplace in medieval society and aggressive impulses were

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44 Paget, The Revelation, 83-84.


given free expression in the social milieu. Often the monastic life and the eternal life were presented as the continuation of the secular military environment. The continued interest in the medieval romances of love proved by a feat of arms was part of the psychological baggage of monks. Edmund used this familiarity with violence in addressing his audience through the terrible punishments and suffering in order to elucidate his lesson.

In reaction to this milieu, Bernard of Clairvaux propounds a theology of restrained violence. Bernard’s pedagogical method and his training of monks was based on their past experiences. He believed there was a need for an aggressive outlet for their impulses. Their memories of personal acts of violence are still alive in their unconscious, ever ready to surface to a conscious level, even if only in disguise. These memories of personal violence may have been the background for Edmund’s imagined punishments in Purgatory.

The aggressive aspects of this masculinity were evident in various other forms of literature written by men. One need only mention the torments described in the earlier examples of purgatorial literature, including the Vision of Drichtlem, the Vision of Tundale, St. Patrick’s Purgatory and The Revelation of

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48 Ibid, 89.

49 Ibid, 97.
Peter, to witness the emphasis on pain and torture in clerical literature. Women mystics did not record visions filled with pain but rather with erotic love and mystical marriage. Hildegard of Bingen and Margery Kempe are excellent examples of women's visions animated by love and eroticism. Only Christine of St. Trond's vita mentions her suffering on earth. Perhaps her life reflects this focus, not as an accurate depiction of her life or as a choice on her part to highlight her pains, but as an authorial choice by Thomas of Cantimpré who wrote the detailed examination of the life of Christine of St Trond. Male religious writing concentrated more on pain and suffering than women's. This emphasis on pain suggests an important aspect of a monastic masculinity.

Edmund's actual description of Purgatory continued this emphasis on the painful aspects of the afterlife. The second third of the Visio monachi de Eynsham treats the nature of Purgatory proper and the sins which are expunged there. Edmund observes the diversity of sins found in Purgatory and the infinite number of pains which souls undergo including roasting in fire, frying in a pan and assault with nails of fire.⁵⁰ In medieval allegories of the virtues and vices, three virtues drive nails through the hands and feet of Christ while a fourth pierces his chest with a lance or catches the blood in the chalice.⁵¹

Failing came to symbolize the voluntary sacrifice of the Son of God.\textsuperscript{52} Other sinners were soaked in baths of pitch and brimstone with a horrible stench or gnawed upon by the venomous teeth of fantastic worms. Finally, the souls could be skewered upon burning stakes.\textsuperscript{53}

In medieval symbolism, fire represented God as all consuming love. The soul, as fuel, was transmuted into fire by the touch of the Divine fire.\textsuperscript{54} Fire signifies the idea of gradual purification through purgation. God as water, light and air infuses every crack, swims in the waters of baptism and breathe into the soul.\textsuperscript{55} Fire is complete immersion and saturation. Hugh of St Victor discussed purgatorial fire, noting that it was reserved for those who will be saved, the elect.\textsuperscript{56} Fire not only evoked a place but was the spatial embodiment of the purgative phase through which souls passed after death.\textsuperscript{57} The roasting of food is also important. Food symbolism was viewed as the transmutation of power. The Eucharist was elevated nourishment, food with metaphysical properties.\textsuperscript{58} Thus the fire and the roasting images were significant for their connotations.

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Ewer, A Survey of Mystical Symbolism}, 147.

\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Ibid}, 149.

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Jacques LeGoff, The Birth of Purgatory}, 142.

\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Ibid}, 154.

\textsuperscript{58}\textit{Ewer, A Survey of Mystical Symbolism}, 160.
with cleansing and nourishment. Furthermore, Edmund utilized extreme metaphors whose gruesomeness was likely to be remembered by his listeners. One immediately recognizes that the violence which was suggestive of a monastic masculinity was maintained in Edmund’s exploration of the pains of Purgatory.

The interplay of monastic masculinities was at the centre of these expressions of aggressiveness and pain. The purpose of the initiation of novices was to sublimate the dynamics of aggression through recourse to the Bible, to examine the struggle of the characters and to suppress the yearnings of the body through physical penance. Bernard gave hidden and spiritual significance to the external social manifestation not only of man’s compulsions to aggressiveness and love, but also to the conflict between his spontaneous self-centredness and a Christ-oriented desire for God. Likewise, Edmund felt at ease with this relationship of violence and spiritual questing since it was rooted in his secular background and social milieu. The submission, in the initiation process, mirrored the apprenticeship of secular youths at the estates of various nobles or relatives and was with militaristic and aggressive terminology to which the monk, or indeed any noble man, could relate.

Thus, Edmund would have been comfortable with the notion of the physical dominance of his elders. The sadomasochistic element is important. The physical penitential lashing provided

59 Jean Leclercq, Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France, 98.
60 Ibid, 106.
an outlet for the aggressive tendencies prevalent in medieval society. Edmund's repeated desire for penance suggests a masochistic character. He clearly enjoyed the physical lashing and its accompanying pain. The older monk's willingness to perform the penance suggests a sadist authority. Here, power, domination, authority, aggressiveness and the sexual converged in the penitential activity. The lashing of the penitent with the rod, a phallic member, expressed the release of sexual frustration and aggressiveness in an all male environment or to assuage guilt over aggressive feelings. In secular society, these men would have been antagonistic toward one another in their military, commercial and feudal affairs. This antagonism was transferred to an acceptable form of "fighting" or a means through which to assert a hierarchy of dominance and privilege within the monastery. The monastic penitent, like female religious, had a desire to suffer. Monks, however, suffered through the self-infliction of pain upon the other while women suffered most through illnesses. One aspect of a monastic masculinity must recognize this acceptance of inflicting pain on

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61See Jessie Laidlay Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (New York: Peter Smith Publishers, 1941). Weston’s classic discussion of the symbolism in medieval literature helps to elucidate this point. Weston equates a sword, lance or rod with men and a cup or a bowl with women. The rod, Weston argues, is directly associated with men and with male aggressiveness.

other monks. This masculinity included the voluntary submission of one monk to another in order to be physically abused for penance. Edmund’s masochistic tendencies were perhaps not uncommon in monasteries. This form of penance was regularly utilized by senior monks throughout medieval monasteries. This universality of monastic penance suggests a buried indication that this form of penance was both reflective of and influenced by medieval conceptions of clerical masculinity.

With this final example of submission, Edmund was approached by his spiritual guide, St Nicholas, who summoned Edmund to follow him. In fact, "... he took me by the right hand, surely and softly clasping my hand in his." Edmund’s mystical journey began. It seems that before this occurred Edmund already had a special relationship with this saint. Indeed, the preeminence of sanctified men in the worship of monastics reasserts the androcentricism of monastic devotion. Extraordinary attention to prayer and devotion is a common theme in the lives of male saints and pious male religious in the Middle Ages.

Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of Purgatory. The

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65 The cult of Nicholas was promoted by the prior of Worcester, also named Nicholas (d. 1124). St. Nicholas became the patron of mariners, travellers, merchants and bishops. His patronage of travellers was instrumental in the transition to patronage of Purgatory. There is evidence that St. Nicholas Day first appeared
cult of St. Nicholas gained prominence in England in the late tenth century. The image of Nicholas was more secular than religious. The rise of the cult was coincident with the rise of trade and the bourgeoisie but the legends appealed to every class to the extent that it was interested in the sensational rather than spiritual. The appearance of Nicholas for the purpose of administering a flogging is a very common motif in the legends but seems uncommon in legends of other saints. Edmund may have drawn the element of flogging in his penance from the Nicholas legends. The masochistic characteristics of Edmund, and his repeated desire for physical penance, suggests that Edmund may have had a particular predilection towards Nicholas. The fact that his spiritual guide through Purgatory is Nicholas, who is associated with flogging and thus pain, is an important correlation between Edmund's physical spirituality and his

in England in the southwest in the years before the Conquest, and was a product of Anglo-Saxon, not Norman, activity. The Princeton Index of Christian Art shows the legend of Nicholas the Bishop as being one of the most popular of all Nicholas legends in medieval art -- an indication that the cult was more clerical than claustral. The Nicholas liturgy originated in cathedral, not cloister, and was considered frivolous and impious by conservatives. The text was regularly given in manuscripts of the twelfth century but was not probably in wide circulation before 1060. The Normans popularized this cult and there was a flourishing cult of St. Nicholas in Bavaria between 960 and 1060. Indeed the only saint whose legends are treated in Church plays that are extant and complete is Nicholas. This fact alone points to his popularity. From southwest England, the cult rapidly swept the island so that by the year 1100 Nicholas was venerated by special services in virtually every diocese. For more information, see Charles W. Jones, The Saint Nicholas Liturgy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) and Jacques LeGoff, The Birth of Purgatory Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).
hagiographic counterparts. St Nicholas was associated with flogging. Thus, Edmund's progress through Purgatory was imbued with the memories of physical mortification and constantly reminded of his masochistic longing for lashing by Nicholas, his guide.

The preeminence of the authority on Purgatory as the guide would aid in making this revelation more authoritative, definitive and acceptable. Moreover, with Nicholas as his guide, Edmund's journey through Purgatory was imbued with sado-masochistic overtones and a constant reminder of the necessity of self-mortification in order to receive divine knowledge.

The symbolism surrounding the sado-masochistic aspects of penance suggested the aggressiveness evident in the relations between monks. Edmund's account of his reaction to a bleeding crucifix provides further insight into the underlying masculinities which informed monastic behaviour.

By considering the nudity of Christ and indeed, the circumcision of the Lord, as touchstones for the resurrection mystery for a male mystic, it is possible to gain a deeper insight into the mystical sexual experiences of the medieval monk and his unique devotion to the cross. An explication of the mystery of the circumcision in medieval culture would facilitate an understanding of the symbolism of the cross and how it affects the mystic's experience.

The penis of the Christ Child was assigned a crucial, positive role in the redemption, not only as the proof of
Christ's humanation, but as the earnest of his self-sacrifice. Theologically, Christ's circumcision served as a connection between Abraham's covenant with God and as an instrument of grace for the remission of original sin. Christ's blood paid the ransom for Adam's sin--his circumcision became a first instalment, a down payment on behalf of humanity. Moreover, Christ's submission to circumcision was understood as a voluntary gift of his blood, prefiguring and initiating the sacrifice of the Passion.

Various medieval commentators grappled with this mystery. Bede saw the circumcision as the ultimate cleansing from all stain of mortality while Bernard of Clairvaux viewed the circumcision as proof of Christ's true humanity. The first pain of circumcision marked the beginning of the path of suffering to attain spiritual enlightenment. This idea gave rise to a devotion to the holy foreskin and the Feast of Circumcision in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The "humanization"

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65 Leo Steinberg, The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion, 49.
67 Ibid, 50.
68 Ibid, 52.
69 Ibid, 53, 55.
of Christ for the medieval monk meant "enfleshing" Jesus.

"Christ was fully male in gender and sexuality, even to the involuntary movements of his penis, and as such he represents the salvation of the totality of what we as [male-defined] human beings are." 71 This "enfleshing" of Christ for Edmund could have taken on various interpretations. The cult of the foreskin became very popular among women mystics. In fact, some female mystics understood their marriage to Christ as sealed with the ring of his foreskin. 72 The humanization of Christ affected medieval people's understanding of their relationship with him on many levels.

Yet medieval people saw Christ's penis not primarily as a sexual organ but as the object of circumcision, the wounded bleeding flesh. This association of blood and pain with salvation was intrinsic to the resurrection mystery. Edmund would have understood the pain of circumcision, even if the procedure had not been performed on him. 73 What was critical for Edmund was the voluntary gift of the circumcision of Christ. This shedding of blood at infancy signalled the lifelong sacrifice of Christ.

71 Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," 84.


73 Edmund would have been knowledgable about the practice of Jewish circumcision in the twelfth-century. For an important twelfth-century discussion of Jewish circumcision, see Moses Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed trans., Shloma Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).
Although theologians of the twelfth century focused the concern for humanizing conceptions of Christ in the circumcision, it was the blood and suffering that was important and not Christ's sexuality, for what humanity shared with Christ was vulnerability and pain, not a penis. Yet his circumcised foreskin was important to Christ's identity. Medieval thinkers were certain that the body was necessary to "personhood" and sometimes even argued that resurrection was "natural." Christ's identity was as dependent on the fate of his circumcised foreskin as it was on his corporeal body and sacrificial crucifixion. Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi and Angela of Foligno were acutely aware that the body could reveal the divine and that material continuity was crucial to identity. The humanization of Christ and the new emphasis on a personal relationship with God would have profoundly informed Edmund's personal spiritual life.

Prior to receiving his vision, Edmund recounted his personal spiritual experiences in his everyday life. In order to receive absolution one morning before his mystical journey through Purgatory, Edmund called to him two of his brothers who had the power to hear his confession. Edmund made a "... full confession of all his sins, of the least omission in his religion or in the commandments of God, and with great contrition and many

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tears he desired absolution and obtained it." This effusion of tears was not abnormal. Margery Kempe was similarly known for her excessive weeping. Indeed, all Christians were supposed to confess with weeping as a manner of showing contrition for their sins.

One morning before his vision, Edmund was worshipping and saw

.. not without great astonishment, that the figure of Our Lord's body affixed to a cross -- which figure and cross are wont to be devoutly kissed and worshipped yearly in the convent in remembrance of Our Lord's passion, -- was found freshly bleeding from the great wound in the right side, and also at the right foot. .. All the brothers came together into the Chapter House greatly astonished at these things, and after consultation all that were there took penance with great contrition of heart, and, lying prostrate and weeping in the church, said the seven penitential psalms ..

Edmund later spoke of worshipping the cross on Good Friday, the day on which his purgatorial vision began. After being told that in two days it will be Easter, Edmund "... began to weep still more, and said, 'Oh! brethren, should we not have worshipped Our Lord's cross on Good Friday? And yet we have not worshipped it together.'" Edmund was then brought "... a silver cross.

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75 Paget, The Revelation, 37.


77 Ibid, 45-46.

78 Ibid, 54.
which he reverently clasped, and with tears watered the foot of the cross . . . "

Medieval theologians often associated the cross in later medieval and Renaissance painting and imagery with male sexuality. The cross was shown bare or nude, without the drapery of royalty and victory, and the image of Christ on the cross was often naked as well. Edmund's prologue and introductory remarks to the vision are filled with references to the cross.

The cross, in general symbolism, was denuded after the resurrection of the body of Christ. In later medieval and Renaissance paintings, this cross was accompanied by a nude Christ. The lack of modesty concerning the genitalia displays the very work of redemption which promised to free human nature from its Adamic contagion of shame. Delivered from sin and shame, the freedom of Christ's sexual member bespeaks that original innocence which in Adam was lost.

Edmund's reaction to his vision of the bleeding crucifix revealed how he understood his relationship with Christ and the Cross. The blood on the right side and on the right foot

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79 Ibid, 54.
80 Leo Steinberg, The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion (New York: A Pantheon/October Book, 1983), 18. See, for example, Michelangelo's commission to carve a Risen Christ for a Roman church in 1514.
81 Ibid, 20, Thomas Aquinas' Summa theologiae, Suppl. q. 81, art. 3 where he asserts that the resurrected, both male and female, shall not be ashamed in heaven.
82 Ibid, 23.
represented the fluid of salvation, the blood of rebirth and nourishment. Edmund and his fellow monks prostrated themselves in front of the altar and wept. All the monks had taken penance one from another. One can imagine the emotional energy in the church after the monks had penitentially lashed one another, followed by the worship of this miraculous blood and the weeping while praying. The hysteria of these monks provides another insight into the expressions of masculinity in the monastery. The monks fed on each others' emotional states and depended on one another to serve as guides to appropriate behaviour in a situation. Edmund devotedly worshipped this miracle and then called together his fellow monks to include them in this ritual.

The spilling of the blood from the crucifix would have further proclaimed the humanity of Christ and his voluntary sacrifice. The monks, aware of Christ's humanity and his nudity on the cross, would have recognized his sacrifice and his woundedness. The resulting emotional hysteria and the penitential activity dictated how these monks related. Worship among monks was emotional, devout and, at times, clearly hysterical. The emotional climate of monastery was volatile. Affective relationships, incidents of sodomy, penitential lashing and hysterical worship characterized the relationships between men in the *Visio* and provide insight into certain expressions of monastic masculinity.
Chapter Five:

Conclusion

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* is an important example of twelfth-century English visionary literature. The *Visio* reflects the emerging regulation of spiritual life in the Middle Ages. The growing importance of confession and penitential practice, the separation of familial and ecclesiastical ties, and the development of preaching to instruct monastics: these elements inform the composition and style of this vision. Edmund's vision is a work of literature reflecting the changes in ecclesiastical doctrine of sacramental penance and confession.

The *Visio* is aimed primarily at instructing monks of Edmund's own abbey of Eynsham. Edmund tailors his discussion to his audience. The text is full of allusions to English historical and legendary figures as well as contemporary examples from life in the monastery proper. Moreover, his discourse is overwhelmingly androcentric in its use of examples, didactic method and aims. The text was written by a man for the education of men by men. Edmund's *Visio monachi de Eynsham* is a personal account, reflecting his own experience. It involves persons well known to himself and his contemporaries. This familiarity aids in instructing the monks in the need for contrition, penance and confession in their spiritual lives.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* may be examined on many levels.
One component of the vision is the personality of Edmund himself and his influence on the ultimate presentation of the work. First and foremost, the vision is a deeply personal exhortation on values and ethics. It is a judgement on the state of the morality of the twelfth century. It is an individual's call to his society and his contemporaries to a conversion of heart. The vision is passionate, a mingling of anger, joy and love, a mournful sobbing of the heart of one monk for the state of his brothers. The words of the vision are those of a man in the wilderness, alone with his God and his emotions. Edmund's voice carries across the barriers of class, geography and time to demand conversion, confession and penance and reconciliation with God. Edmund's language and text, however, are tailored to the understandings and needs of a male audience.

The masculine voice, therefore, is present in the male-defined sexual imagery and Edmund's understanding of sexual and gender relationships. The masculine sexual imagery found in the first section of the Visio suggests some important aspects of the emotional and psychological environment within the monastic setting. A monk's interaction with a more humanized image of Christ in the twelfth century began to create more emotional and personal relationship for the monk with the image of Christ and with religious symbols. Consequently, Edmund's intense feelings of spiritual love were transferred to the symbol of Christ on a crucifix. This love, however, was not untainted by Edmund's masculinity and androcentric worldview. The bleeding crucifix
came to represent a symbol of sacrifice and woundedness.

Moreover, Edmund's actions revealed an important aspect of medieval penance and his own psychological composition. The sado-masochistic characteristics, found in his account of his lashing before his vision, suggest an intense emotional environment in the monastic setting. The suppression of sexuality, desire and carnality in the monastic tradition led to an unspoken and inexpressible aggressiveness. Physical penance was an outlet for this sexual aggressiveness or to assuage guilt over aggressive feelings and a means through which to reassert hierarchies of dominance and privilege.

Edmund's construction of sexual and gender relationships in the vision are also important. One of Edmund's primary concerns was the suppression of the concerns and bonds of the biological family on the monk. A new "spiritual family" with similar kinship bonds and friendships was needed to ease the transition from secular to sacred. Highly affectionate, emotional spiritual friendships among or between the monks replaced the emotional support of the biological family. These spiritual friendships, however, were always subject to carnal temptation which Edmund examined in the form of sodomy.

Edmund's examination of sodomy represented the failure of spiritual friendships to provide an asexual forum in which a monk could strive for greater spiritual perfection. Sodomy was a rejection of natural and divine law and a breakdown of acceptable behaviour between monks. Yet sodomy was particularly a clerical
The close friendships which the cloister engendered, with the tensions of a suppressed sexuality, made the monastic environment charged with emotion. Meanwhile a monk was beginning to have a greater emotional reaction to the humanized image of Christ. These factors made sodomy among the monks perhaps not inevitable but at least understandable.

Edmund's construction of the gender relationships between women and men was completely in agreement with contemporary understandings of their respective roles. Men were dominant, rational and spiritually superior while women were submissive, weak and defined in relation to a woman. Edmund continued to use examples of women to instruct his male audience. Edmund's use of female acts of piety and worship were appropriated in his discussion to further educate men. Women in his vision were instruments of service to instruct wayward men in the path of righteousness.

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* contains a clear masculine voice which colours and directs the narration of Edmund's journey through Purgatory. Edmund's use of male sexual imagery and his androcentric understanding of sexual and gender relationships further heightened the masculinity of the text. The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* is an important medieval source which reveals the prevalence of the masculine voice in medieval mystical literature and in the religious environment of twelfth-century England.
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