Adalbero of Laon's *Poem to King Robert* (1023-25/7): A Discourse against Cluniac Reform or a Commentary on Monastic Hypocrisy?

Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to nuance the traditional interpretation of Bishop Adalbero of Laon's* satirical Carmen ad Rotbertum regem *as a rebuttal of Cluniac reform and its disruptive effect on early eleventh-century society. Study of the text's literary antecedents reveals that its criticism was rooted in a tradition of commentaries on the conduct and attitudes of a much larger monastic cohort. Furthermore, comparison of its argument with evidence about the context and with a number of polemical statements regarding the relations between bishops and monastic leaders since the 990s indicates that the author's focus was on cautioning against abbots' hypocrisy rather than against a programmatic reform.*

The stellar rise of Cluniac monasticism in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries turned it into the most revered and at the same time most reviled monastic cohort of the Latin West. Factors that contributed to this trend were the gradual accretion of monasteries and estates under the ecclesiastical lordship of Abbot Odilo (994-1049); a series of lay and papal privileges that progressively exempted the abbey and its subsidiary institutions from episcopal oversight; Odilo's efforts to align the observance of other monastic houses to that of his main institution; and finally also the Cluniacs' successful promotion of a redemptive form of lay spirituality.[1]

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Similarly impactful were the monks' propaganda efforts, which defined their observance as a distinct and superior strand of Benedictine spirituality; represented their main institution as a second Rome; and depicted its leaders as the latest members of a 'charismatic genealogy' of abbots whose moral authority was second only to that of the pope.[2] But contrary to what some scholars have suggested, this transformation was not the result of a programmatic effort to realise a wholesale reform of monks' spirituality and governance, let alone of Christian society as a whole. Instead, it derived from a combination of deliberate actions by Odilo and his associates, entangled with a series of unpredictable events and fortunate contingencies over which they had little control. Although later generations of Cluniac authors crafted a narrative of the movement's emergence and subsequent development that suggested otherwise, at the

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[1] B.H. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1049* (Ithaca, NY, 1989); J. Vigier (ed.), *Odilon de Mercœur. L'Auvergne et Cluny. La "Paix de Dieu" et l'Europe de l'an mil* (Nonette, 2002); D. Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000-1150),* trans. G.R. Edwards (Ithaca, NY, 2002); G. Constable, 'Cluniac Reform in the Eleventh Century', in *The Abbey of Cluny. A Collection of Essays to Mark the Eleven-Hundredth Anniversary of its Foundation* (Münster, 2010), pp. 81–111; and S. Bruce and S. Vanderputten (eds), *A Companion to the Abbey of Cluny in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2022).

[2] D. Iogna-Prat, 'La geste des origines dans l'historiographie clunisienne des XIe-XIIe siècles', *Revue bénédictine* 102 (1992), pp. 135–91.

time it would have been impossible to accurately predict the long-term outcomes of these trends.[3]

Even so, many observers correctly sensed that Cluniac governance and spirituality were in a fundamental state of transition. A fair number of positive commentaries survive from the decades on either side of the year 1000, not in the least because the movement's members produced a substantial amount of self-laudatory literature.[4] By contrast, very few critical statements from that period remain. Some were actively suppressed by the Cluniac abbot and his sympathisers. According to Abbot Abbo of Fleury (r. 988-1004), Odilo himself rid Cluny of 'historiographers' and 'satirical slanderers' (*historiographi* [...] *satyrici criminatores*) who had spread lies about him.[5] Other statements of a critical nature likely ended up being discarded because their topical content was lost on later generations, or because they had originally been circulated in media that were typically not earmarked for long-term preservation.[6] However the

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[3] Steven Vanderputten, 'The Emergence of the Ecclesia Cluniacensis', in Bruce and Vanderputten (eds), *A Companion to the Abbey of Cluny*, pp. 34–49, esp. 35–41.

[4] E. Sackur, *Die Cluniacenser in ihrer kirchlichen und allgemeingeschichtlichen Wirksamkeit bis zur Mitte des elften Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols (Halle a.d. Saale, 1894), II, pp. 89–90; Iogna-Prat, 'La geste'; and (by the same) 'Panorama de l'hagiographie abbatiale Clunisienne (v. 940–v. 1140)', in M. Heinzelmann (ed.), *Manuscrits hagiographiques et travail des hagiographes* (Sigmaringen, 1992), pp. 77–118.

[5] Abbo, *Epistolae*, *PL* 139, cols 437–8; also Sackur, *Die Cluniacenser*, II, pp 93–4.

handful of negative sources that do survive tell us that West Frankish agents, bishops in particular, watched the Cluniacs' rise with a mixture of reluctant admiration and utter dismay. Furthermore, they reveal that commentators' preferred method of criticizing the Cluniacs was through satire, and that in practising the genre these authors laid the foundations for a rich tradition of anti-monastic literature in later centuries.[7] The most elaborate of these early works is a long hexametric poem that Bishop Adalbero of Laon (r. 977-1030/1) addressed to the French sovereign Robert II (996-1031).[8] Known under the apocryphal title *Carmen ad Rotbertum regem* or *Poem to King Robert*, the text contains a number of implied references to historical events

[6] For a later example, see S. Vanderputten, '*I Would be Rather Pleased if the World Were to be Rid of Monks.* Resistance to Cluniac Integration in Late Eleventh- and Early Twelfth-Century France', *The Journal of Medieval History* 47 (2021), pp. 22–41.

[7] S. Steckel, 'Satirical Depictions of Monastic Life', in A. Beach and I. Cochelin (eds), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2020), II, pp. 1154–70.

[8] The most recent edition is that in *Adalberon de Laon. Poème au roi Robert*, ed. C. Carozzi (Paris, 1979). Due to a number of debatable choices for the transcription and translation (on which see Otto G. Oexle, 'Adalbero von Laon und sein "Carmen ad Rotbertum regem". Bemerkungen zu einer neuen Edition', *Francia* 8 (1980), pp. 628–38), it is best used alongside that in G.-A. Hückel, 'Les poèmes satiriques d'Adalbéron', in A. Luchaire (ed.), *Mélanges d'histoire du Moyen Âge*, 2 vols (Paris, 1901), I, pp. 49–184 (with corrections in Carl Erdmann, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens* (Stuttgart, 1935), pp. 338–47, at 345–6). The line numbers cited here correspond with those in Carozzi's edition.

and circumstances that allow us to situate its creation in the final years of the bishop's life. Jean-François Lemarignier proposed a dating of around 1023 or in 1025-7, while editor Claude Carozzi favoured the slightly later 1027-31.[9]

Scholarly opinions on the *Poem*'s literary merit and its early reception are divided. Carozzi noted Adalbero's extensive use of rhetorics and dialectical reasoning, which to his mind bears witness to the author's training in the sophisticated intellectual environment of Reims cathedral. From study of the sole extant manuscript (Paris, BNF, Latin 14921, fols 32v-43r), the French scholar also inferred that the work was unfinished at the time of the author's death and that its readership was likely limited to the bishop's circle at Laon.[10] In contrast, Franz Brunhölzl was less than impressed by the many opaque passages and the numerous instances of convoluted reasoning, which he saw as evidence of the elderly bishop's poor Latinity and inability to clearly express his thoughts.[11] Meanwhile, building on earlier observations made by Carl Erdmann, Otto Gerhard Oexle maintained that the *Poem* in its extant form probably found an early audience of Cluniac monks in northern France, possibly at Gigny, shortly after its creation.[12] But despite these differences of views, Adalbero's text is notorious to students of the

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[9] J.-F. Lemarignier, *Le gouvernement royal aux premiers temps capétiens (987-1108)* (Paris, 1965), pp. 79–81, n. 53 and *Adalberon de Laon. Poème au roi Robert*, ed. Carozzi, pp. cxv–xix.

[10] *Adalberon de Laon. Poème au roi Robert*, ed. Carozzi, pp. cliii–viii.

[11] Franz Brunhölzl, *Histoire de la littérature latine du Moyen Âge,* 2 vols (Turnhout, 1996), II, p. 235.

period as a scorching invective against those who think that they can turn the world on its head, blurring social roles and corrupting Christian morals in the process. Facing the collapse of Carolingian conceptions of royal ministry and authority, the prelate was looking to instil into his readership a tripartite vision of society, in which lay noblemen, clerics, and farmers all knew their place, acted the part, and tailored their appearance in such a way that fellow humans would be able to understand their role.[13] In his view, the obsession of Odilo and his followers with retooling long-tested modes of monastic governance and spirituality amounted to no less than an assault against social order and 'power, virtue, all honour and the glory of the Church'.[14]

It is easy to see why Bishop Adalbero was so critical of the Cluniacs. Odilo's charismatic leadership style, his monks' involvement in pastoral action and their promoting of lay

[12] Erdman, *Die Kreuzzugsgedanke*, pp. 344–5 and Oexle, 'Adalbero von Laon', pp. 631–7.

[13] Esp. C. Carozzi, 'Les fondements de la tripartition sociale chez Adalbéron de Laon', *Annales* 33 (1978), pp. 683–702 and O.G. Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung der "Gesellschaft" bei Adalbero von Laon. Deutungsschemata der sozialen Wirklichkeit im früheren Mittelalter', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 12 (1978), pp. 1–54. Further discussions of note are those in G. Duby, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire de la féodalité* (Paris, 1978); Dominique Barthélemy, *L'an mil et la paix de Dieu. La France chrétienne et féodale 980-1060* (Paris, 1999), pp. 463–5, 481–2; and R. Delle Donne, 'Nel "vortice infinito delle storicizzazioni". Otto Gerhard Oexle, Adalberone di Laon e la 'scienza storica della cultura', n G. Rossetti and G. Vitolo (eds), *Medioevo Mezzogiorno Mediterraneo. Studi in onore di Mario Del Treppo*, 2 vols (Naples, 2000), II, pp. 329–75.

[14] *Carmen,* ll. 61–6: 'Disciplina, vigor, virtus, mox et decor omnis/Aecclesiae fulgor'.

conversion, and their tendency to emancipate their institutions and its subjects from bishops' authority all brutally clashed with Adalbero's own principles.[15] As a former trainee at Gorze abbey and the cathedral milieus of Metz and Reims, Adalbero had from an early age adopted a view of ecclesiastical organisation that placed bishops at the head of the regional churches, established their role as advisers to secular rulers, and limited monks' action to the inner world of the cloister.[16] At that stage of his life he may also have witnessed the authoritarian interventions in monastic communities by his relatives Bishop Adalbero of Metz (929-62) and Archbishop Adalbero of Reims (969-89), and absorbed the literary and oral rhetorics that accompanied these.[17] Moreover, during his subsequent tenure as bishop of Laon, he undoubtedly viewed the Cluniacs' rise to prominence with suspicion, even more so when he became aware that they were promoting their own interpretation of Benedictine observance as distinct from that in other strands in monastic life, and that they were experimenting with new ways of expressing that distinctiveness through their liturgy, their clothing, and in other aspects of their spirituality.[18] Finally, as someone who had probably been chancellor to the West

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[15] Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion,* p. 15.

[16] R.T. Coolidge, 'Adalbero Bishop of Laon (977-1030)', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 2 (1965), pp. 1–114 and O.G. Oexle, 'Adalbero, Bf. v. Laon', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters,* 10 vols (Stuttgart, [1977]-99), I, p. 93.

[17] Jason Glenn, *Politics and History in the Tenth Century. The Work and World of Richer of Reims* (Cambridge, 2004).

Frankish King Lothar (954-86) briefly in the mid-970s, Adalbero must also have felt a great deal of resentment at Odilo's recently won influence at the court of Robert II.[19] Indeed, except for a brief phase in the mid-1010s, relations between the Frankish ruler and the Burgundian abbot were very cordial. Robert I not only actively supported Cluny's exempted status, but also singled out specific Cluniac sites (in particular Souvigny) for devotional purposes, entrusted prominent monasteries to Odilo's care, and regularly relied on the abbot for moral and political support.[20]

Accordingly a number of modern commentators of the *Poem* (most recently Magnus Borg in a 2019 study) have maintained that it must be understood as a cautionary tale about Cluniac reform.[21] To explain why Adalbero made no effort to tell his readership about what the

[18] D. Iogna-Prat, *Agni immaculati. Recherches sur les sources hagiographiques relatives à saint Maieul de Cluny (954-994)* (Paris, 1988), pp. 20–9.

[19] Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung', p. 17. Odilo's biographer Jotsald wrote that the abbot was so friendly and helpful towards sovereign rulers, that King Robert and his peers all 'loved him in a wonderful manner and famously venerated him, as if he were another Joseph'; Jotsald of Saint-Claude, *Vita Odilonis*, ed. and trans. J. Staub, *Iotsald von Saint-Claude, Vita des Abtes Odilo von Cluny* (Hanover, 1999), pp. 155–56 ('Principibus et potestatibus christianis secundum apostolicam sententiam in nullo restitit, sed ita amicabilem et se offitiosum reddidit, ut tamquam alter Joseph ab omnibus mirabiliter amaretur et celebriter veneraretur').

[20] J. Hourlier, *Saint Odilon, abbé de Cluny* (Louvain, 1964), p. 81 and Ch. Pfister, *Etudes sur le règne de Robert le Pieux (996-1031)* (Paris, 1885), pp. 305–7.

reform entailed and why he objected to it, Borg speculates that this implicitness was in fact a common feature of tenth- and eleventh-century anti-reformist literature.[22] Yet although his and other scholars' reading of the *Poem* may seem self-evident on first inspection, a closer look at the context and the bishop's argument reveals several reasons that compel us to look for a more nuanced interpretation. Although 'Cluniac reform' used to be ubiquituous in discussions of late tenth- and early eleventh-century religious history, in recent decades the concept has fallen from grace, unmasked as a historiographical construct that overstates the programmatic and forward-looking nature of the trends and actions that influenced the Cluniacs' destiny.[23] Already in the late 1970s Oexle had warned that it would be misguided to think of Adalbero's views as typical of a conservative or even reactionary cohort of West Frankish bishops, simply on account of the fact that Cluniac propaganda and modern historiographical tradition has conditioned us to think of Odilo's movement as a progressive forerunner of the eleventh-century Church reform.[24] In a similar vein Dominique Iogna-Prat avoided the term reform when he tried to

[21] Sackur, *Die Cluniacenser*, II, 91; Hückel, 'Les poèmes satiriques', pp. 51, 53–4; and M. Borg, 'Good Men Gone Bad? Resistance to Monastic Reform in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', *EME* 29 (2021), pp. 366–93, at 381–6.

[22] Borg, 'Good Men Gone Bad?', p. 386.

[23] Note 3 above.

[24] Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung', p. 19 and (by the same) 'Adalbero von Laon', p. 629.

pinpoint the cause of the bishop's ire. Instead, he argued that the *Poem*'s purpose was to serve as

> a response to the monks' attempts to gain independence [and to represent the view that] the function of prayer resided with the clerics, who were subject to the bishops' power of order and jurisdiction. Moreover, within Christian society, the bishops fulfilled the role of guides and tutors to the monarchs, who by virtue of their anointing were similar to bishops.[25]

As both Iogna-Prat and Oexle saw it, Adalbero's objections were not about a programmatic reform effort in the modern sense of the word. Rather, Adalbero was complaining that Odilo and his followers were recklessly challenging a social order willed by God.

In this paper I build on these criticisms to investigate two further reasons for nuancing the *Poem*'s interpretation as a rebuttal of Cluniac reform. Although Adalbero's anger at Odilo and his followers was no doubt very real, study of the text's literary antecedents reveals that his criticism was rooted in a tradition of tenth-century commentaries on the problematic conduct and attitudes of a much larger monastic cohort. Furthermore, comparing the *Poem* with contextual evidence and polemical arguments about relations between West Frankish bishops and monastic leaders from the 990s onwards, suggests that its author's focus was on cautioning against abbots' hypocrisy rather than against a programmatic reform. As such, this study hopes to show that beneath Adalbero's explicit assault on Odilo there lurked a fiercely critical argument about hypocritical abbots generally. In doing so it reveals the *Poem* to be a testimony

[25] Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion,* p. 15.

to the shifting relationship between bishops and monastic leaders in late tenth- and early eleventh-century France, instead of one that merely documents how a supposedly conservative author responded to the progressive threat of Cluniac reform. A further point that this revisionist approach adds to the historiographical debate on this important source is that it pays more attention to where Adalbero got his ideas from, and to how he would have been understood by his contemporaries and intended audience.

Literary Antecedents on Transgressive Monastic Conduct

Earlier scholars have insisted on the *Poem*'s many allusions to a range of rhetorical, philosophical, and didactic works, and to the fact that it references an intellectual environment that is heavily centred on each of these three disciplines.[26] The link with Reims cathedral, where Adalbero received his advanced education, is easily made, for its educational priorities in that respect are well documented.[27] In contrast, Adalbero's reliance on literary and ideological antecedents has so far received little attention, despite Brunhölzl's suspicions that the ideas in the *Poem* were quite common in the author's intellectual environment'.[28] This is certainly the case for Adalbero's tripartite view of society, which reminds us of fellow Reims alumnus Gerard

[26] *Adalberon de Laon. Poème au roi Robert,* ed. Carozzi, pp. xxxv–lxxiv and Borg, 'Good Men Gone Bad?'.

[27] J. Lake, *Richer of Saint-Rémi. The Methods and Mentality of a Tenth-Century Historian* (Washington, D.C., 2013).

[28] Brunhölzl, *Histoire de la littérature latine,* II, p. 235.

of Cambrai's (1012-52) famous speech on the Three Orders.[29] But the same is also true of Adalbero's account of an incident in which a monk had caused an uproar at the episcopal court –an account that has so far eluded detailed study. Fretting over the perilous state of the realm and over new laws that went against religious tradition, the bishop had selected an unnamed monk, who was known for his intelligence and strict observance of 'the laws of our ancestors', and told him to go and consult Abbot Odilo, 'the grand master of monks'. But after only one night's absence the monk returned, bewildering onlookers with his inappropriate appearance and conduct:

> [...] promptly he jumps from the foam-covered neck of his horse: 'Hey, hey, hey, where is the bishop? Where is our good housewife? My little boy? My wife?' His clothes are an utter mess, for he has shed his former dress. He wears a large hood made from the skin of a Lybian bear, his long robe is cinched up to his knees, it is split in the front and likewise does not cover him in the back. He has put around his haunches an embroidered girdle that is tightened as much as possible. From his belt hang a diverse range of objects, including a bow with its quiver, a hammer and pincers, a sword, a flint stone and the iron piece to strike it with, and an oak branch to light a fire. His braies, which extend to the full length of his legs, stick to the skin. He hops; his spurs prick and burrow the earth; he extends himself to stand on the top of his feet, which he has clad in shoes

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[29] T.M. Riches, 'Bishop Gerard I of Cambrai-Arras, the Three Orders, and the Problem of Human Weakness', in J.S. Ott and A.T. Jones (eds), *The Bishop Reformed. Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 122–36.

> with curved beaks. He enters: (but) his brothers who know him best struggle to recognise him. A mass of people gather and fill the huge palace. In this grotesque getup, see how he is brought to the presence of the bishop: 'Is it really you, my monk? Is it you that I have sent [...].' The monk tightens his fists, sticks his arms in the air, lifts his eyebrows, arches his neck, rolls his eyes, (and says): 'I am a soldier now, and if I stay a monk, it will be to change my manners. No, I am no longer a monk, but I fight at the orders of a king, for my master is Odilo, king of Cluny'.[30]

According to Adalbero, Odilo had instilled in the unnamed monk a lack of respect for his superiors and a tendency to question their and his own ritual purity in public, as well as an inability to show restraint in his emotions and actions. But most offensive of all, the abbot's

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[30] *Carmen,* ll. 94–114: 'Et festinus equi spumantia colla reliquit:/"Quo quo quo praesul, bona nutrix, heus, puer, uxor?"/Est incompositus, posita iam veste priori/Pilleus excelsus, de pelle Libystidis ursae/Et vestis, crurum tenus est talaris adempta/Finditur anterius, nec parcit posteriori/Ilia baldringo cingit strictissima picto/Multiplices et res multae per cingula pendent/Arcus cum furetra, forceps et malleus, ensis/Ignitusque silex, ferrum quatiens, simul ilex/Ossa superficium stringit diffiusa deorsum/Saltibus impressam pungunt calcaria terram/Coepit summa pedum contortis tendere rostris/Ingreditur, noti fratres quem nosse laborant/Concurrunt cives et larga palatia complent/Pontificem sic deformis tunc sititur ante/"Esne meus monachus tu quem misi [...]?"/Pugnos declinat, cubitos extendit in altum/Erexit cilium, torquens cum lumine collum/"Miles nunc: monachus diverso more manebo/Non ego sum monachus, iussu sed milito regis/Nam dominus meus est rex Oydelo Cluniacensis"'.

rejection of divine law was materialised in the man's garments and accessories. They sent an ambiguous message about his social role and morals, to the point that neither his peers, onlookers, nor (most shockingly) the monk himself was certain anymore who he was, and if his future fight in life would be a spiritual or a worldly one. Monks turned into soldiers, abbots into kings, and bishops into housewives. There was no doubt, the bishop let his royal addressee know, that Odilo's arrogance presented a catastrophic threat to social order.

The *Poem*'s description of the monk-messenger is indebted to a long-standing tradition of commentaries on the need for boundaries between the monastic world and its secular counterpart. Building on a range of Carolingian accounts, these tenth-century writers insisted that monks adopt the right repertoire of behaviours and modes of self-representation to both project and interiorise their distinct moral and social status.[31] In their optic, appropriate conduct and especially the wearing of correct clothing for their cohort were essential to achieving that aim. Accordingly, such commentators insisted that monks uphold a normative tradition that early ninth-century lawmakers and monastic leaders (Abbot Benedict of Aniane in particular) had established.[32] And they also explained to their readership what were the dangers of deviating from that tradition, for example by experimenting with the length and colouring of tunics and habits, or wearing various accessories, or generally adopting visual cues that might

[31] L.L. Coon, *Dark Age Bodies. Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia, PA, 2011), pp. 98–133 and V. Garver, '"Go Humbly Dressed as Befits Servants of God": Alcuin, Clerical Identity, and Sartorial Anxieties', *EME* 26 (2018), pp. 203–30.

[32] P. Engelbert, 'Grundlinien einer Geschichte des Benediktinischen Habits', *Studia Monastica* 41 (1999), pp. 277–302, at 283–5.

have an adverse impact on how their peers identified with them and what outsiders thought of their morality.

As far as we can tell, it was Abbot Odo of Cluny (r. 927-42) who set the tone for the discussion. In his *Conferences* he warned monks who disregarded the 'instructions of the Fathers' concerning clothing that the consequences of their misconduct would be grave, for 'grace is awarded through the monastic habit'.[33] But as he saw it, the problem was not just one of loss of grace, but also one of social cohesion within monastic communities. To illustrate his point, the abbot submitted to his readers the account of a dying man's vision of a monk who begs his abbot for forgiveness: but the abbot fails to recognise the monk as one of his own because he is wearing a blue tunic; the abbot refuses to absolve him.[34] And in the outside world too, these 'apostates' were likely to be ostracised, for Odo was confident that the laity disapproved of luxurious and modified clothing styles and considered them a sign that a monk was 'living according to the flesh'.[35] Such a shameful spectacle compromised the visual rhetoric of monastic masculinity, a concept that was intimately linked to notions of ritual purity and ascetic resolve. Odo underscored his point by citing Jeremiah III.3, 'Thy forehead became that

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[33] Odo of Cluny, *Collationes* (henceforth referred to as *Collationes*), *PL* 133, col. 554; also C.A. Jones, 'Monastic Identity and Sodomitic Danger in the Occupatio by Odo of Cluny', *Speculum* 82 (2007), pp. 1–53.

[34] *Collationes*, col. 606.

[35] Ibid., col. 607.

of a whoring woman'.[36] Although the *Conferences*' reliance on rhetoric and satire is more understated than in Adalbero's *Poem*, evidently the two texts have a great deal in common. Both authors, for instance, argue the destructive impact of inappropriate appearances on how a monk was viewed by his peers and how he was perceived by society at large. Further matches include the two authors' insistence on a link with the individual's failure to uphold strict moral boundaries with the secular world, the fact that they submit arguments about compromised gendered identities, and their referring to a normative tradition based on divine will.

On the basis of these matches one might be tempted to speculate that Adalbero's *Poem* was intended as a parody of Odo's *Conferences*, in the same way that Magnus Borg has suggested that it parodies Odo's *Life* of the 'monkish' nobleman Gerald of Aurillac.[37] Admittedly there is something to be said for the possibility that Bishop Adalbero deliberately lampooned the late abbot's argument in order to demonstrate the Cluniacs' hypocrisy in light of their recent moves to make their clothing style more distinctive.[38] But we also need to consider an

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[36] Ibid., col. 562.

[37] Borg, 'Good Men Gone Bad?', p. 388.

[38] K. Hallinger, *Gorze-Kluny. Studien zu den monastischen Lebensformen und Gegensätzen im hochmittelalter*, 2 vols (Rome, 1950-1), II, pp. 675–9. Adalbero's satire may or may not refer to monastic criticism over the fact that some members of the higher clergy had recently adopted a more exuberant clothing style; on this phenomenon see M. Miller, *Clothing the Clergy: Virtue and Power in Medieval Europe, c. 800-1200* (Ithaca, NY, 2014), pp. 89–140.

alternative explanation, which claims that Odo's ideas had resonated strongly within his own movement and with prominent churchmen. Some three or four decades later, Archbishop Bruno of Cologne (r. 953-65) – according to his biographer – chided his monks and clerics for their superfluous clothing style, which compromised their monastic masculinity to such an extent that (he claimed) they looked effeminate.[39] And another generation later, John of Saint-Arnoul in his 970s-80s *Life of Abbot John of Gorze* (d. 974) praised his late hero for his refusal to trade his monastic habit for splendid vestments or to compromise otherwise on the monastic customs he had promised to uphold on entering the cloistered life.[40]

John of Saint-Arnoul's text also crucially added a new argument to the discussion, and in doing so brought it one step closer to Adalbero's discourse. He stated that having converted from being a cleric to a monk, John of Gorze's monastic vestments – the woollen tunic, cowl, and cincture[41] – had anchored his new moral identity. The biography thus defined these vestments as a site of both personal memory and the means of transformation to a new,

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[39] Ruotger, *Vita Brunonis archiepiscopi Coloniensis*, ed. I. Ott, *MGH SRG ns 10* (Weimar, 1951), p. 22.

[40] John of Saint-Arnoul, *Vita Johannis Gorziensis* (henceforth referred to as *Vita Johannis*), ed. P.C. Jacobsen, *Die Geschichte vom Leben des Johannes von Gorze* (Wiesbaden, 2016), pp. 454, 456.

[41] G. Constable, 'The Ceremonies and Symbolism of Entering the Religious Life and Taking the Monastic Habit from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century', in *Segni e riti nella chiesa altomedievale occidentale*, 2 vols (Spoleto, 1987), II, pp. 808–16.

monastic identity.[42] A compelling variant to that argument is found in the anonymous 980s *Life* of Abbot Caddroë of Waulsort and Saint-Clément in Metz, where it says that Caddroë had 'dressed himself in the habit and spirit of a monk'.[43] Inherent to this line of reasoning is the notion that an individual's failure to adopt the correct visual tokens of monastic identity will inevitably plunge him into an identity crisis not unlike that which the monk in Adalbero's *Poem* allegedly went through. With these two Metz authors we have arrived at an ideological setting with which Adalbero was undoubtedly familiar due to his upbringing at Gorze and Metz. However, there remains a double gap between his text and those earlier works: a stylistic one that relies on rhetorics and satire, and a thematic one that portrays the bishop as the ultimate judge of the social and moral boundaries appropriate for the monastic cohort.

Both of these gaps can be resolved if we shift our attention to the next institutional context that was influential in Adalbero's training, namely the cathedral milieu of Reims. In

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[42] R. Krawiec, '"The Holy Habit and the Teachings of the Elders": Clothing and Social Memory in Late Antique Monasticism', in K. Upson-Saia, C. Daniel-Hughes, and A.J. Batten (eds), *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity* (Farnham, 2014), pp. 55–73, esp. 73.

[43] *Vita Caddroe abbatis Walciodorensis*, ed. J. Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum veteris et maioris Scotiae seu Hiberniae sanctorum Insulae*, 2 vols (Louvain, 1645), I, p. 498*: '*habitum et animum monachilem induit'. On the common allusion to Ephesians IV.22–4, refer to K.A. Smith, 'Ungirded for Battle: Knightly Conversion to Monastic Life and the Making of Weapon-Relics in the Central Middle Ages', in R. Kotecki, J. Maciejewski, and J.S. Ott (eds), *Between Sword and Prayer: Warfare and Medieval Clergy in Cultural Perspective* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 182–206, at 187.

Richer of Saint-Rémi's late 990s *Histories* we find an account of how Adalbero's uncle, Archbishop Adalbero of Reims, had 'distinguish[ed the order of monks] from the secular habit'.[44] The chronicler put his rhetorical skills and feeling for satire on full display when he described the proceedings of a 971/2 meeting of abbots under the presidency of the archbishop to discuss the monastic order's 'neglected virtue and [...] disgrace of immoral conduct'.[45] In a lengthy speech, Abbot Rodulph of Saint-Remi allegedly denounced monks for having special friendships with men and women, casting doubt over their ritual purity. He claimed they left the monastery without informing their brethren, raised questions about their vow of poverty, and said that they dressed in a luxurious and exuberant manner. This raised questions about their sexual purity, their soberness, and generally their reputation. Here, as in Odo's and Adalbero's commentaries, a gendered undertone is evident, with Rodulph refering to monks with a preference for undergarments woven in the finest transparent fabric as 'little harlots' (*meretriculae*).[46] Another similarity with the statements by Odo and Adalbero is the assertion in Richer's text that these misbehaviours went against the *Rule of St Benedict* and (more generally) against divine law. And a further match with Adalbero's *Poem* in specific is Richer's description

[44] Richer, *Historiae*, ed. H. Hoffmann, *MGH SS* 38 (Hanover, 2000), p. 32: 'Monachorum quoque mores quanta dilectione et industria correxit atque a seculi habitu distinxit'.

[45] Ibid., p. 187: 'Vestri ordinis antiqua religio, ab antiquitatis honestate ut fama est supra modum aberravit [...] virtus neglecta [...] et pravitatis dedecus'.

[46] Ibid., p. 189.

of the monk's clothes, including the reference to tight drawers, cinched up tunic, and shoes with long points.[47]

This kinship between Richer and Adalbero's arguments tell us that the latter was not strictly relying on his own imagination when he crafted his portrait of the monk-turned-failed-knight. Instead, the passage in the *Poem* is revealed to be an assemblage of tropes in didactic and satirical literature that the bishop must have encountered during his early years in Metz and (especially) Reims, decades before he wrote the *Poem*. Furthermore, the strong similarities between Adalbero's and Richer's arguments also help us to dispel (or at the very least to nuance) the notion that Adalbero built his own directly on Odo's work. Furthermore, comparison of Adalbero's text and those of earlier authors from the Metz and Reims regions reveals a progressively growing sense of urgency about the need for clear moral and behavioural boundaries. Arguably this trend should be brought into connection with the fact that monastic leaders at the time were increasingly welcoming adult converts to the monastic life, some of whom would have been barely literate.[48] Surely it is no coincidence that Richer's satirical account, and to an even greater extent that by Adalbero, reminds us of the fact that laymen who converted wore the visual tokens of their warrior identity until the last moment before entering their new life. Indeed, the last act of a noblemen before being vested with the monk's habit was to lay his weapons on the altar.[49] Previously Odo and John of Saint-Arnoul had warned their

[47] Ibid., pp. 189–90 and *Carmen*, ll. 98, 103, and 106.

[48] M. Breitenstein, *Das Noviziat im hohen Mittelalter. Zur Organisation des Eintrittes bei den Cluniazensern, Cisterziensern und Franziskanern* (Münster, 2008), pp. 40–3, 66–7.

[49] Smith, 'Ungirded for Battle', p. 183.

readers that monks who came to the cloister as adults often struggled to shed both the memories and morality of their previous status.[50]

But Richer and Adalbero both added a further dimension to these concerns, by insisting that these personal struggles of adult converts, unless they were contained, inevitably also had an impact on the entire monastic cohort. Richer argued that if even only a handful of monks chose to adopt inappropriate clothing or behaviours, all their peers would eventually fall with them.[51] Adalbero even cautioned his readers that those who had no personal memories of life outside of the cloister (in other words, former child oblates) were especially vulnerable to the hypocrisy of those with problematic memories of their worldly past. Readers of the *Poem* who grew up in the same intellectual setting as its author would have had no difficulties in recognizing the ideological and literary roots of his argument. And they must also have understood how it fitted with his depiction of the monk-messenger, allowing Adalbero to suggest that by overstepping the social and moral boundaries, Odilo and his followers were like a disease that was about to infect the entire monastic cohort. To support his argument about the dangers of accepting adult converts and allowing secular arguments of identity overtake monastic ones, the bishop further drew upon a range of metaphors that he had no doubt encountered in early eleventh-century Cluniac propaganda, such as the reference to Odilo as

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[50] *Collationes*, col. 554 and *Vita Johannis*, pp. 286, 294.

[51] Richer, *Historiae*, ed. Hoffmann, p. 190: 'Quorum numerus cum ex locis diversis plurimus esset, a pluralitate malorum bonorum paucitati id persuasum est'.

'king' and to his monks as a militia whom he had cluelessly led into battle against the Muslims.[52] Another layer of metaphors alluded to Adalbero's feeling that the Cluniacs were ignoring the need for lenghty training of Churchmen (including monks) and for respecting boundaries between ecclesiastical cohorts. Drawing directly from satire's conventional tropes, he wrote that if Odilo and his supporters had their way, bishops would soon be chosen from shepherds and fishermen (a somewhat ironic commentary given the apostolic origins of the office), and preference would be given not to scholars but to those who knew the alphabet only by counting the letters on their fingers.[53]

Through combining of these three metaphorical layers about monks' appearance, secular self-understanding, and lack of interest in education, Adalbero constructed a devastating critique of the Cluniacs and their leader, who himself had only turned to the monastic life after pursuing a career as a cleric. But were the Cluniacs the only ones that the Laon bishop and liked-minded critics blamed for being so catastrophically forgetful of their mission in life and so blatantly dismissive of traditional roles and boundaries? And were they the only ones that risked 'infecting' the rest of the monastic cohort with their misguided ideas about monks' identity and their order's role in society? Even a cursory glance at the broader context in which the bishop

[52] *Carmen*, ll. 119–54; also Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung', pp. 22–3.

[53] *Carmen*, ll. 44–9. This passage in the *Poem* likely alludes to Adalbero's fears that King Robert would be inclined to appoint Cluniac or other monks as bishops, which is not inconceivable given the sovereign's active interest in controlling episcopal successions and his close association with prominent members of the monastic cohort; Pfister, *Etudes*, pp. 193–206.

was writing and the polemical literature it had yielded in previous decades tells us that the targets spread far beyond Cluny's walls.

Literary Antecedents on Clerical and Monastic Hypocrisy

Evidence from the later tenth and early eleventh centuries tells us about charismatic abbots without formal connections to the Cluniacs. Like Odilo, they drew a great deal of criticism for challenging bishops' traditional roles, disrupting the inner harmony of monastic houses through their ill-advised interventions, compromising boundaries between the cloister and the secular world, and unnecessarily exposing monks to intense public scrutiny.[54] One of the figureheads of this trend (which some scholars have referred to as a 'reform') from Adalbero's home region of Lotharingia was Richard (d. 1046), a former cantor at Reims cathedral who became abbot of Saint-Vanne in Verdun in 1004. Richard quickly became a well-known figure in the wider region, due to the fact that he was entrusted with over a dozen abbacies. Overall the Saint-Vanne abbot's relationship with the clerical authorities was less confrontational than either Abbo's or Odilo's, but still less than warm, cooling considerably when he insisted on enforcing his main institution of Saint-Vanne's rights against the interest of the local bishop of Verdun. And like the Cluniac leader, he also preached to the laity and actively promoted adult conversion, surrounding himself with talented former clerics and laymen who, following their conversion to

[54] P. Jestice, *Wayward Monks and the Religious Revolution of the Eleventh Century* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 173–90.

monkhood, ascended to leading roles in monastic institutions across Lotharingia.[55] Richard's biographers suggest there was a definite Christological streak in his self-portrayal, which is reminiscent of the way that Odilo's biographers wrote about their late master. It is no wonder that Richard faced criticism during his lifetime, including from a monk of Sankt Gallen, who noted of him and his follower Poppo (d. 1048) that 'both claimed that they were the Holy Benedict'.[56] Their contemporary, William of Volpiano (d. 1031), who as abbot of Saint-Bénigne in Dijon intervened in a range of institutions in Lotharingia and Normandy, for similar reasons was accused of thinking of himself as standing 'above the Rule' (*supra regulam*).[57] Clerical commentators were especially eager to voice their criticism of these and other charismatic abbots, and of their experimental attitude with regard to monastic normative tradition. Richer,

[55] Steven Vanderputten, *Imagining Religious Leadership in the Middle Ages. Richard of Saint-Vanne and the Politics of Reform* (Ithaca, NY, 2015). While none of the institutions in which Richard and his disciples became abbot were situated in Adalbero's diocese, over the course of the first three decades of the eleventh century several of these men took up a leading position in the dioceses of Cambrai, Noyon, Liège, and Châlons, all of which were part of the same archdiocese of Reims.

[56] Notker, *Commentarii in Psalmos*, ed. P. Piper, *Die Schriften Notkers und seiner Schule 2. Psalmen und Katechetische Denkmäler nach der St. Galler Handschriftengruppe* (Freiburg i.B., 1883), p. 70: 'quorum uterque dicit se sanctum Benedictum quidem esse'.

[57] Jestice, *Wayward Monks*, p. 190 and Raoul Glaber, *Historiae*, Book III.6, ed. J. France, N. Bulst, and P. Reynolds, *Rodulfus Glaber Opera* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 120, 122 ('detrahebatur insidiabaturque a fraudulentis et impiis').

in his *Histories*, claims that Adalbero of Reims did not mince words when he chastised his abbots for not respecting 'the laws of our Fathers', while the anonymous *Chronicle of Mouzon* states that Adalbero on another occasion exhorted the abbot and brothers of Mouzon abbey to be 'a mirror of the *Rule of St Benedict*'.[58]

A similarly acute cause for concern in the bishop's mind was that several prominent abbots and their associates had been working to upset a long-standing tradition in which bishops acted as the king's principal partners in managing the affairs of the Church, and in making sure that its different members fulfilled their assigned roles. Besides the influence that King Robert allowed Odilo and his subjects to have at the royal court post-1016 (when he and Odilo reconcilied following a period of high-running tensions) and his support for the Cluniac movement's expansion, Adalbero's eye had no doubt been drawn to reports that other abbots, too, were actively forging direct links with the sovereign. Richard's role as emissary of Emperor Henry II (Lotharingia being a part of the Empire at the time) may also have given him an opportunity to connect with King Robert, who like Richard had been trained in the cathedral milieu of Reims. According to Richard's biographer Hugh of Flavigny, on three separate occasions in the 1020s or 30s Robert tried to bestow on Richard the abbacy of Corbie.[59] William of Volpiano's ties with the king are more securely established. Beginning in 1016 the ruler confirmed several properties and donations to William's main abbeys at Saint-Bénigne in Dijon

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[58] *Chronique ou livre de fondation du monastère de Mouzon*, ed. Michel Bur (Paris, 1989), p. 165: 'sit vobis bonae imitationis fama et speculum beati Benedicti regula'.

[59] Hugh of Flavigny. *Chronicon*, ed. G.H. Pertz, *MGH SS* 8 (Hanover, 1848), pp. 288–502, at 377.

and Fruttuaria, and in 1026 appointed him abbot of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. An increasingly close relationship developed, only glimpses of which we can see: in 1025, William travelled to the court to help Robert process the death of his heir apparent, and in 1030 they had another encounter.[60] All these things would have definitely irked Adalbero as much as anything that pertained to Odilo's successes.

The most strident criticism by a bishop, however, was aimed at Abbo of Fleury.[61] In a recent study Justin Lake has highlighted how the abbot's tenure was marked by a series of incidents that each time put him on a collision course with Bishop Arnulf of Orléans (r. 970-1003).[62] Although Fleury's status as immune from outside interference was in principle guaranteed by royal protection, the removal of the Carolingians from the West Frankish throne and Arnulf's support for the accession of Hugh Capet as the new king led Abbo to look for alternative support.[63] After several failed attempts Abbo managed to obtain a papal grant of

[60] Pfister, *Etudes,* pp. 309–11 and N. Bulst, *Untersuchungen zu den Klosterreformen Wilhelms von Dijon (962-1031)* (Bonn, 1973), pp. 274–7.

[61] M. Mostert, *The Political Theology of Abbo of Fleury. A Study of the Ideas About Society and Law of the Tenth-Century Monastic Reform Movement* (Hilversum, 1987); Annie Dufour and Gillette Labory (eds), *Abbon, un abbé de l'an mil* (Turnhout, 2008); and Elizabeth Dachowski, *First among Abbots. The Career of Abbo of Fleury* (Washington, D.C., 2008).

[62] J. Lake, 'Arnulf of Orléans and the De Cartillagine', *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 31 (2021), pp. 79–105.

[63] Ibid., pp. 83–4.

independence from Gregory V (r. 996-9), in which the pope stated that no secular cleric could enter the abbey without prior authorisation from the abbot and referred to Abbo as 'first among the abbots of Gaul' (*primus inter abbates Galliae*).[64] This was, however, only the drop that spilled the proverbial bucket for Arnulf and his West Frankish colleagues, who over the years had come to know Abbo as a tenacious advocate of monastic independence and papal authority, a champion of Cluniac expansion, and a staunch critic of bishops. In the early 990s the two leaders clashed over a dispute regarding a property of the abbey that was being harassed by Arnulf's nephew, who was the local castellan. And at the 991 Council of Verzy, which was entirely dedicated to the delicate matter of the deposition of Archbishop Arnulf of Reims, Abbo proposed to call on the pope and branded bishops as moral degenerates. Arnulf of Orléans, who presided over the meeting, rejected the abbot's interference in what he considered was a matter to be discussed strictly among bishops.[65]

Subsequently Abbo paid dearly for his assertiveness. Towards the middle of the decade he travelled to the diocese of Tours to assist with an attempt by the Cluniacs to bring the abbey of Marmoutier (which had previously adopted Cluny's customs in 982) within Odilo's multi-abbacy. His intervention ended in failure, and he and several of his monks were assaulted by the bishop's men (either during that journey or another to Saint-Martin in Tours). Bishop Arnulf, as

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[64] *Recueil des chartes de l'abbaye de Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire*, ed. M. Prou and A. Vidier, 2 vols (Paris, 1900–7), I, nr. 7, pp. 185–6; also L. Roach, *Forgery and Memory at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NY, 2021), pp. 153–92.

[65] Lake, 'Arnulf of Orléans', pp. 87–92.

the local *ordinarius*, sent only a few of the culprits to Abbo for punishment and declined to investigate the matter in depth.[66] Arnulf's muted response can be easily explained by a previous incident that had given Abbo the reputation of inciting violence. At a synod held at the abbey of Saint-Denis in 993 or 994, an assembly of bishops stated its intention to end the alienation of tithes by laymen and monks. But the meeting descended into chaos and several participants were physically assaulted: Abbo was suspected of being behind the riot.[67] On being told of these suspicions, Abbo promptly wrote to Hugh Capet and his designated successor Robert (the same to whom Adalbero of Laon addressed his *Poem* three decades later), to clarify his motives and perhaps also to justify his impending intervention in the royal demesne of Tours.

In this pamphlet known to scholars as the *Liber apologeticus*, he explained that among the three orders of monks, clerics, and laymen, the first were superior because – contrary to bishops – they were not embroiled in worldly affairs. Abbo also criticised the buying and selling of bishoprics, denied any accusations Arnulf had made against him, and rejected the notion that he had overstepped his role as abbot. Furthermore, he also prepared an extensive collection of excerpts drawn from patristic and canon law sources, known as the *Liber canonum*. This he sent to the two sovereigns, Hugh and Robert, in 994-6 by way of apology for the defence of Fleury's exemption from the local ordinary's oversight. To another compilation of his that likewise dealt with monastic exemption, Abbo gave the form of a letter (known to scholars as *Epistola XIV*)

[66] Ibid., p. 85.

[67] Ibid., pp. 92–3.

that he addressed to an unnamed abbot.[68] In order to buttress his argument, which revolved entirely around the idea that the clergy was morally corrupt and that a good bishop was an absent one, he relied on a careful selection of passages drawn from a range of patristic works, most notably Gregory the Great's letters.[69]

Bishop Arnulf was incensed by this glut of polemical statements. In reply he wrote a letter known to scholars as *De Cartillagine*, which in retaliation for Abbo's creative use of Gregory's letters extensively relied on Gregory's *Moralia in Job.* The extant fragment of the archbishop's text preserves only part of a larger chain of arguments. As such it rejects the false presumption of monks who resist subordination to their local bishop, and dismisses Abbo's claim that bishops had no right to imprison fugitive monks who wished to enter Fleury.[70] But fortunately the text also contains a blistering statement that makes clear the overall purpose of *De Cartillagine*, which was to condemn Abbo and his followers' brash assertiveness, insubordination, avarice, and hunger for worldly power. Evidently Arnulf could barely contain his anger when he wrote that the monastic order's hypocrisy had turned it into a mere caricature of its former self:

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[68] Ibid., pp. 93–6 and F. Roumy, 'Remarques sur l'oeuvre canonique d'Abbon de Fleury', in Dufour and Labory (eds), *Abbon*, pp. 311–41.

[69] M. Mostert, 'L'abbé, l'évêque et le pape. L'image de l'évêque idéal dans les oeuvres d'Abbon de Fleury', in D. Iogna-Prat and J.-C. Picard (eds), *Religion et culture autour de l'an mil. Royaume capétien et Lotharingie* (Paris, 1990), pp. 39–45, at 44.

[70] Lake, 'Arnulf of Orléans', pp. 96–8.

> The monastic profession teaches that they should be subordinate in all the grades of humility, inasmuch as they are removed from all worldly activity, (but) they are puffed up to such haughtiness of avarice that through their teachings they strive to obscure the power that has been granted by God to bishops. As we have learned, the head of the abbey of Fleury is the pernicious (author) of this presumption.[71]

Even in its fragmentary condition, Arnulf's letter comes across as a rhetorical predecessor to Adalbero's *Poem*. While it is impossible to know if Adalbero ever saw the text by his Orléans colleague, it is not too farfetched to think that the ideas it expressed were shared widely among their cohort shortly after its publication. Nor does it seem at all unlikely that some of the arguments we encounter in the *Poem* were already being turned over in Adalbero's mind, even as the tense relationship between Abbo and Arnulf was unfolding. As a member of the West Frankish kingdom's episcopal elite in the late tenth century, Adalbero was definitely partial to the polemical arguments that both sides had launched at each other.[72] And presumably they also influenced his own views as he expressed them in the satirical poem.

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[71] Quoted from Ibid., p. 104, after the original Latin edited on p. 103: 'humilitatis gradibus omnibus fore subiectos regularis docet professio, utpote a seculi actibus alienos, in tantam avaritiae extolluntur superbiam ut potestatem episcopis a eo collatam suis traditionibus obfuscare contendant. Cuius praesumptionis pestifer, ut comperi, exstat praepositus coenobii Floriacensis'.

[72] On Adalbero's involvement in 990s politics and subsequent reputation as a traitor, see J. Lisson, 'The Dark Side of Remembrance: How Medieval Chroniclers Demonized Bishop Adalbero

This may well be the reason why Adalbero's statements regarding the tripartite structure of society, royal power, and episcopal authority read like a riposte to that posed by the Fleury Abbot.[73] As with the *De Cartillagine*, we do not know if Adalbero ever saw any of Abbo's writings. Nevertheless, a comparison of the *Poem* with Abbo's *Epistola XIV* is highly instructive if we want to get a sense of the kind of monastic rhetoric that the Laon bishop was responding to.[74] Following a brief discussion of monastic exemption, Abbo's letter quickly moves on to a trenchantly critical argument about the behaviour of the clergy and their interference in the morally superior cohort of monks. Thus he complains that 'the footfall of clerics destroys the holy sites of monks', and indicates that the only remedy is to make sure that ordained priests who serve monastic communities actually belong to that community and observe its customs.[75] Bishops ought neither to interfere with the pastoral functioning of clerics in monastic settings,

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of Laon (911-1033)', in S. Boodts, J. Leemans, and B. Meijns (eds), *Shaping Authority: How Did a Person Become an Authority in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance?* (Turnhout, 2016), pp. 281–324.

[73] Hückel, 'Les poèmes satiriques', pp. 95–9 and Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung', p. 26. The *Carmen* at ll. 278–9 uses the same concept *imperium* to designate royal power as in Abbo's works and in King Lothar's charter for Fleury; Mostert, *The Political Theology*, p. 132 and 179, n. 8.

[74] Abbo's *Epistola XIV* is edited in *PL* 139, cols 440–60.

[75] Ibid., cols 443–5, quoted from col. 443: 'ego nullo modo patiar loca sacra monachorum ut per clericorum ambitum destruantur'.

he argues, nor prevent these institutions from organising masses and funerals.[76] These prohibitions gradually lead Abbo into an argument about the depravity of the clergy, whose ritual impurity is revealed through the fact that they live together with women. In a passage quoted from Pope Gregory he argues that every priest

> ought to read the holy canon law, and to reassure at the time of his consecration he who carries out that ritual, that he is able to uphold anything that the divine canons ordain: and if he states that he is unable to do so, then he should not be consecrated.[77]

Abbo makes it clear that these statements are designed to confront bishops with their own hypocrisy. In a passage that is brimming with ill judgment of that cohort, he cites Isidore of Seville's *De ecclesiastiis officiis*:

> Whoever accuses another of sin, ought himself to be a stranger to sin. Otherwise, when he would be able to accuse his subjects to their face, would the accused be able immediately to throw back at him: 'Teach yourself beforehand what things are right, O bishop!' For that reason whoever neglects to do right things should desist from teaching

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[76] Ibid., col. 445.

[77] Ibid, col. 452: 'Legere autem debet et sacros canones, eoque tempore quo consecratur, consulatur eum is qui consecrat, si possit facere atque custodire omnia quae divini praecipiunt canones, et siquidem negaverit se posse custodire, non consecretur'.

> right things. First he should correct himself who endeavours to admonish others to live well, so that in all things he himself might provide the model of living and stimulate all to good action by his own teaching and acting [...].[78]

Set against the tone and argument of Abbo's letter, the anecdote at the beginning of Adalbero's *Poem* is revealed as having two distinct purposes. One is to depict a monk who had been 'infected' with Odilo's lack of concern about upholding moral and social boundaries with the secular world. And the other is to lampoon the worldview on which this lack of concern was grounded, as well as to counter the polemical attacks they had launched in previous decades against the clergy, bishops in particular. Long tired of the sanctimonious criticism of these men – Cluniacs and non-Cluniacs – against his cohort, Adalbero, by crafting the *Poem* as a satire, had found a way to brand them as hypocrites without having to directly answer any of their arguments about episcopal hypocrisy. And by setting the scene of the encounter with the monk at his home ground in the episcopal court of Laon, he also metaphorically reclaimed his authority as bishop, entitled to judge monastic morals.

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[78] Ibid., col. 456: 'Qui enim alium de peccatis arguit, ipse a peccato debet esse alienus. Nam cum qua fronte subjectos arguere poterit, cum illi statim possit correptus ingerere: "Ante te doce quae recta sunt, o episcope!" Quapropter qui negligit recta facere, desinat recta docere; prius quippe semetipsum corrigere debet qui alios ad bene vivendum admonere studet, ita ut in omnibus semetipsum formam vivendi praebeat, cunctosque ad bonum opus et doctrina et opere provocet'. The translation is quoted from T.L. Knoebel, *Isidore of Seville: De ecclesiasticis officiis. Translation and Introduction* (New York/Mahwah, NJ, 2008), pp. 75–6.

Comparison of Abbo's and Adalbero's commentaries also yields a second clue that the bishop was thinking of a cohort of hypocritical monastic leaders broader than explicitly stated in his text. In an often-quoted and crucial passage at the *Poem*'s beginning, after Adalbero is done singing the king's praises, he makes a revealing comment about his real target:

> Decrees circulate that have been issued by the famous *Crotoniatae*. Behold the title written above them: 'The most ancient law'. They prescribe that violence ought to enforce what is refused spontaneously, as it pleases power that the order (of society) is changed thus.[79]

In these lines Adalbero attacks what he identifies as a new doctrine that pretends to be a 'most ancient law' and that asserts violence can be legitimately used to enforce a transformation of social order (*transformatio ordinis*). By 'violence' he presumably means the combination of actions which both offend and outright attack social order, including those in which monks try to overrule episcopal authority by appealing to the pope. And by the decrees he is clearly referring to a written statement with a normative ambition, the most obvious candidate being one of Abbo's works.[80] The scholars who have commented on this passage are in agreement

[79] *Carmen*, ll. 33–6: 'Scripta patent, celebres quae mittunt Crotoniate/Desuper est titulus: *Lex antiquissima*, scriptus/Praecipiunt: vi cogatur quod sponte negatur/Ut placet imperio, sic se transformet et ordo'. On the Augustinian meaning of *ordo* in this context, Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung', p. 28, n. 138.

[80] Hückel, 'Les poèmes satiriques', p. 132 and Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung', p. 21.

about this interpretation, namely that it refers to the polemical output of the Fleury abbot. But at the same time this interpretation clashes with how they have understood the reference to the Ciceronian allusion to *Crotoniatae* (*Pythagoreans*) as being about the Cluniacs only.[81] Admittedly Abbo had been an ardent admirer of the Cluniacs: in a letter to Gerbert of Aurillac he referred to Odilo as the monastic order's 'standard-bearer' (*signifer*).[82] But that still did not make him a Cluniac, as Adalbero and his peers surely knew. We therefore have every reason to believe that in the *Poem*, Odilo and his monks functioned as figureheads or, indeed, standard-bearers for a monastic order that was riddled with the disease of hypocrisy. That disease, Adalbero at the same time implied, had multiple origins and multiple culprits.

The bishop's focus in the *Poem* on Odilo and his movement seems perfectly understandable given the context at the time. As we have seen, the *Poem* likely originated in 1023-25/7. Since the mid-1010s the Cluniac abbot had successfully enlisted both the papacy and the Frankish king to support his movement's cause. Robert was present in Rome when Pope Benedict VIII issued a bull in which he fulminated against the alienation of Cluny's properties,[83] issued a privilege in favour of the abbey in 1017/25,[84] and in 1026 took receipt of a privilege by

[81] Oexle, 'Die funktionale Dreiteilung', p. 21. The allusion to Cicero's *De inventio* is discussed in *Adalberon de Laon. Poème au roi Robert*, ed. Carozzi, p. xxiii.

[82] Abbo, *Epistolae*, *PL* 139, col. 431.

[83] Pfister, *Etudes*, p. 305.

[84] D. Méhu, *Paix et communautés autour de l'abbaye de Cluny, Xe-XVe siècle* (Lyon, 2010), p. 57.

Pope John XIX that proclaimed the immune status of Cluny's properties.[85] In 1024, Odilo also sought and obtained a privilege from Pope John XIX that extended Cluny's exemptions from outside interference to all Cluniac monks regardless of their station and regardless of their previous membership of non-Cluniac institutions.[86] In practice this meant that all institutions that belonged to Odilo's multi-abbacy became part of a network of monastic dependencies directly subjected to the mother abbey of Cluny and its leader.[87] A further consequence was that the abbots of these places and their subjects were no longer bound by any form of obedience to the local bishop. And yet another consequence was that introducing Cluniac monks into a non-Cluniac institution, a common practice in the context of institutional or spiritual reform, meant that episcopal control over that institution's membership would be gradually eroded.[88] Observers' anxiety over these changes would have only increased when it transpired that Odilo interpreted the privilege's meaning very broadly to include all institutions that were informally linked to Cluny. Indeed, throughout the rest of his tenure the Cluniac leader tried to subordinate to his authority all those houses where he had previously introduced his main institution's

[85] Hourlier, *Saint Odilon*, p, 95.

[86] G. Constable, 'The Reception-Privilege of Cluny', in *The Abbey of Cluny*, pp. 163–78. The privilege built on three earlier ones from 998; Méhu, *Paix et communautés*, pp. 79–82.

[87] Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion*, p. 27 and Constable, 'Cluniac Reform', p. 88.

[88] Vanderputten, '*I Would be Rather Pleased*'.

customs.[89] And the anxiety of observers would hardly have abated when it became clear that Odilo's status at Robert's court had only grown. By the end of the decade the abbot was actively involved in the king's politics, and when the king invited a number of bishops to attend the dedication of Saint-Aignan in Orléans in June 1029, Odilo's status was confirmed when he was included as if he were one of their peers.[90] It was an obvious choice to attack Odilo for these and other ways in which he infringed on the episcopacy, whether bishops' authority over monastic houses, their pastoral role, or their involvement in secular politics.

But in the course of more than five decades on the episcopal throne of Laon, Adalbero had had plenty of opportunities to witness or hear about incidents deriving from the unwarranted tendency of abbots to challenge traditional roles, whether within or beyond Cluny's direct sphere of influence. The conflict between Abbo and Arnulf was a case in point, and as we already saw, Adalbero's views and arguments were surely influenced by how these men had fought their verbal battles. And judging by Helgaud of Fleury's *c*. 1033 biography of King Robert, the monks at that institution at the time were still celebrating King Robert's legacy as a staunch defender of monastic interests and postulating monasticism's pre-eminence over bishops as advisers to the sovereign.[91] For a long time after Abbo's demise, Adalbero and like-

[89] Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion*, p. 56 and D.W. Poeck, *Cluniacensis Ecclesia. Der cluniacensische Klosterverband (10.-12. Jahrhundert)* (Munich, 1998), pp. 59–61.

[90] Hourlier, *Saint Odilon*, pp. 96–97.

[91] Helgaud of Fleury, *Vita Roberti*, ed. R.-H. Bautier and G. Labory, *Helgaud de Fleury, Vie de Robert le Pieux* (Paris, 1965); also C. Carozzi, 'La Vie du roi Robert par Helgaud de Fleury: historiographie et hagiographie', in *L'historiographie en Occident du Ve au XVe siècle* (Tours,

minded bishops may well have worried that the abbot's successors were trying to emulate his involvement in affairs of the state. And such worries would definitely not have been unjustified, given Robert's relationship with Odilo, William, and (more distantly) Richard, and given his track record of bestowing highly favourable privileges on monastic institutions.[92] All three of these men had been in office for decades at the time of the *Poem*'s writing, and were nearing the apogee of their influence in the secular world.

Another influence on Adalbero's mindset would also have been the countless (and often poorly documented) smaller tensions and irritations with less prominent monastic leaders and their subjects. At the time of writing, Adalbero was definitely able to cite a range of past incidents with that cohort that either involved himself or one of his West Frankish peers, and even some ongoing ones.[93] And in his own diocese, too, he had faced the challenge of dealing with assertively independent abbots, particularly at Laon's urban abbey of Saint-Vincent.[94]

1980), pp. 219–35 and especially B. Dufal, 'Royauté capétienne et idéologie bénédictine dans la Vie de Robert le Pieux par Helgaud de Fleury', *Paris et Île de France. Mémoires* 57 (2006), 7–46, at 34–46.

[92] Hückel, 'Les poèmes satiriques', p. 67.

[93] Pfister, *Etudes*, pp. 313–21. See also the discussion of the conflict between the then-incumbent Archbishop of Orléans and the monks of Marmoutier, discussed in S. Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin. Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), pp. 41–2.

[94] For an overview of the region's monastic landscape, see J. Lusse, 'Le monachisme en Champagne des origines au XIIIe siècle', in *La Champagne Benedictine. Contribution à l'année*

According to a twelfth-century charter forgery dated 961, Adalbero's predecessor Rorico (r. 949-76) had re-established the abbey with a view to turning it into a representative institution of episcopal power and a burial site for the holders of that office, the urban clergy of Laon, and the Church's lay vassals.[95] Soon, however, the local abbot let it be known that the Laon bishop was short-changing his institution. In 973 Abbot Malcallan told Rorico that the abbey's incomes were insufficient to sustain a community of twelve monks, and insisted that the prelate intervene.[96] Some scholars have also speculated that Malcallan authored the *Dialogus de statu sanctae ecclesiae,* a pamphlet that denounces the bishop's vassals for alienating ecclesiastical

Saint Benoît (480-1980) (Reims, 1981), pp. 24–78, at 30–35. Unfortunately, Adalbero's relationship with Benedictine abbeys in the Laon diocese is very sparsely documented except for the first few years of his tenure; on this see J. Lusse, *Naissance d'une cité: Laon et le Laonnois du Ve au Xe siècle* (Nancy, 1992) and the title referenced in the next note. Of note is the absence of evidence that any Laon institutions that had previously been the subject of a reform intervention by members of a major 'reform centre' posed any special difficulties to the prelate. Nor do we have any reliable indications that charismatic abbots and their associates from nearby 'reform centres' were agitating against the prerogatives of Adalbero or his colleagues in neigbouring dioceses.

[95] *Actes des évêques de Laon des origines à 1151,* ed. A. Dufour-Malbezin (Paris, 2001), nr. 6, pp. 76–9.

[96] Ibid., nr. 9, pp. 82–3.

property.[97] Subsequently his successor Berland also pressured Adalbero to further expand Saint-Vincent's estate, as well as to bolster its prestige and income via the translation of the relics of St Boithian.[98] Berland further complained that Adalbero's servants at the abbey of Saint-Hilaire were invading one of Saint-Vincent's neighbouring properties, and insisted that the bishop intervene to end the harassment.[99]

Presumably these local issues were resolved without major incident. Indeed, the fact that Adalbero was interred at the abbey church of Saint-Vincent suggests that the relationship between him and the monks evolved in one of two possible ways. Either cordial relations were established in the second half of his tenure, or (perhaps more likely) he was able to impose his authority on the community in such a way that his predecessors' use of the sanctuary as an episcopal necropolis could continue.[100] Whichever of these is correct, memories of an earlier

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[97] H. Löwe, '*Dialogus de statu sanctae ecclesiae*. Das Werk eines Iren im Laon des 10. Jahrhunderts', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 17 (1961), pp. 12–90.

[98] *Actes,* ed. Dufour-Malbezin, nrs 13–4, pp. 85–8.

[99] Ibid., nr. 15, pp. 88–9.

[100] R. Wyard, *Histoire de l'abbaye de Saint-Vincent de Laon* (Saint-Quentin, 1858), pp. 267 and 272–3. On the Saint-Vincent monks' relationship with the Laon episcopate in the middle of the eleventh century, see now P. Chaffenet, 'Un acte inédit de Guy, archevêque de Reims, en faveur de l'abbaye Saint-Vincent de Laon (vers 1048)', *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 93 (2015), pp. 619–45, at 638–40.

phase in their relationship must have flooded back to Adalbero's mind towards the end of his life, when tensions between the French episcopate and the monastic cohort were on the rise generally. And although his region had been relatively free from incidents, nothing reassured him that it would remain so in the future. Because the *Poem* was intended to serve as a direct response to the Cluniacs' changing status and to influence King Robert into limiting their expansion, it made little sense for Adalbero to list these local incidents or to even name the abbots behind them. Yet for those who were familiar with the general context in which the *Poem* was created and the decades of tensions and preceding strife, it must have been clear that the 'monastic problem' Adalbero wanted to address was far from being limited to the Cluniacs' direct sphere of influence.

Conclusions

While Adalbero's *Poem to King Robert* has often been interpreted as a cautionary tale against Cluniac reform, study of the literary antecedents of the text and real-life interactions between monastic leaders and bishops in West Francia allows us to argue that the author's concerns about monastic actions and attitudes ranged more widely. As a witness to the conflicts and violence that had shaken ecclesiastical life since the closing decades of the tenth century, the Laon bishop was deeply convinced of the need for his cohort of bishops to assertively state its authority over the monastic order. In his view, he and his peers were *ex officio* obliged and entitled both to point out the risk that monks might overstep social and moral boundaries, and to intervene to drastically limit their involvement in secular society. Although there is no reason to doubt that Odilo and his followers were Adalbero's principal target, especially given the rapidly changing status of the Cluniac movement in the 1020s, a closer look at the literary and political antecedents of the *Poem* reveals his belief that over the past decades monks in a wide

variety of institutional settings had become ‘infected’ with the disease of hypocrisy. Presumably readers at the time understood that the bishop’s words were intended as a clear warning that every regular leader was under the episcopal watch, on suspicion of having lost sight of their mission in life and of disrupting the social order.