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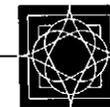
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MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

I N P R A C T I C E

Miri Rubin, Editor



PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS

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PRINCETON AND OXFORD

The Life of the Hermit Stephen of Obazine

György Geréby and Piroška Nagy

After, however he had been elevated to the grace of priesthood by God's dispensation, he totally abandoned the life of the world and what he previously despised in spirit, he now renounced in deeds and habit. For now laughter and those jests of old turned into mourning, and happiness into grief, the chasing of wild animals into the capturing of souls. For now the cultivation of precious garments was abandoned, and the acquisition of sweet dishes was looked down upon. Instead of a soft shirt he wore a rough hair shirt on his flesh, and instead of pleasant food he *took his bread with tears and his drink with crying* (Ps. 79:6). What is more, he treated his body with such severity that he nearly killed it with cold and fasting (2 Cor. 11:27). Since indeed in the middle of the winter, when icy cold and frost put fetters on everything, he broke the ice open with a hatchet, and submerged himself in the water up to his head, and stayed there so long that the power of the cold penetrated all his body, saying with the psalmist: *For I have become like a wineskin in the frost, yet I have not forgotten thy statutes* (Ps. 118(119):83 sec. Vulg.). He excelled in fasting, was steadfast in the vigils, and was always ready for prayers, which he did not offer for the divine ears by the arrangement of words but by the devotion of tears. His talk, seasoned with deep good sense and burning with charity inflamed his listeners with divine love and provided them with the seasoning of wisdom.

He was assiduous in reading the divine Scriptures, especially the commentators of the gospels, and by this both for himself in reading and for his audience in listening he provided eternal bliss. And while he found there much on the contempt of the world and on the glory of the coming world, his mind was mightily inflamed with the disdain of things present and with the desire of the future things, saying with the prophet: *When shall I go and arrive before the face of God* (Ps. 41:3 sec. Vulg.), or again, *Mine eyes fail for thy speech, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?* (Ps. 118(119):82).

Inflamed by such desires, he disposed himself daily for the rejection of the world, casting off all earthly cares (Luke 21:34), in order that he might continuously follow the poor Christ in poverty and nakedness, and destitute, with free and easy strides. He also wanted to avoid, however, being regarded as doing it rashly and without counsel, so he went to see a certain devout and honorable man, Stephen Mercoeur, who was a disciple of Saint Robert, as he was reared by him, and whose saintly fame was celebrated throughout the region. And when he came to him, and explained to him the desire of his soul, not being uncertain about resolution but asking for counsel, the venerable old man answered him thus: "Beloved, it is necessary that you not defer your divinely inspired desire, nor postpone it from day to day, for you should know that postponement is always harmful for the ready. On the contrary, as soon as you conceived in your mind, cast off all worldly cares (Luke 21:34) and follow joyfully in the footsteps of Christ, so that many other may be converted to God by your example." By this answer he became reinforced in his design as if by a divinely inspired oracle, and returned happily to his place.

[After this, Stephen says goodbye to the world and leaves for eremitic life together with his friend, another priest, Peter.]

(6) He constructed a little wooden hut next to a convenient tree, with a shabby roof, in which he pursued continual prayer and the singing of psalms heedless of day or night, together with his venerable friend. It was in this place that after modest rest, by which they refreshed their weary limbs somewhat, they got up to sing the divine lauds. As soon as they felt themselves being weighed down by sleep, they grabbed a handful of sticks and exposing their sides smote and flogged each other. In this way the flesh, exhausted by fasting and wearied under the weight of vigils and works, was also gashed by the protracted flagellations, and by this coerced into servitude brought forth not carnal, but spiritual fruits. It was indeed, what the Apostle said: *but I pummel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified* (I Cor. 9:27).

[Somewhat later they decided to ask for the authorization of the bishop of Limoges to celebrate the mass and they constructed a monastery.]

(7) Already some disciples, converts to God, came to his school and submitted themselves to the yoke of his discipline. They led a very hard and austere life in his company. That's why there were so few who imitated them; only those followed them who, enemies of their own flesh, thought no longer of this present life.

They received wisely what came from God, and refused what came from the world, and as for the offices, they conformed themselves to the canonical rules, and they led an eremitic style of life.

After prime, prostrate on the ground and having sung the seven psalms with the litany, they immediately followed with the holy mass, unless, as often hap-

pened, [the footwear was missing]. Having finished the singing of the mass, the monks went out for manual work, while the man of God often stayed behind in the monastery.

In such a place who would dare to imagine by what kind of tears, by what kind of sighs or afflictions he satisfied his fervent desire, when being alone he had to fear neither a witness nor a judge? Who could possibly think that at this moment he would sleep or he would take a rest, he who growing impatient even of a short rest, spent the night praying and recited the psalms in advance of the nocturna? But we will refrain from describing these things that happened in concealment in more detail, lest we would be found writing about opinions rather than facts.

(18) After compline, the friars having returned for sleep as usual, the man of God frequently stayed behind in the oratory and spent the whole night in sedulous vigils, prayer, and tears.

The grace of tears was conceded to him from heaven in such a way that whenever he prostrated himself for prayer, torrents of tears streamed out of his eyes. I remember that one day, I entered one of his churches without him noticing it, not for prayer, but to do some private business. He was then speaking about some affair with secular people outside, in the porch of the church. Then, suddenly he left them and entered the church; knowing that there was no one, he prostrated for prayer in front of a lectern with such simplicity and modesty that no one present could have heard him properly. Then, as he lowered his head toward the earth, tears started to pour out of his eyes, not drop by drop, but so to say, like a stream. I was witness to this scene and I saw the tears pour from his nose to the earth, without any sound of a cough, spitting, or sighing.

I stayed there, like a thief, as if bound to the place, full of fear and trembling, him not noticing me, as long as after having wept enough, he left with the same simplicity as was his worship, of which no one took notice, as if he would have had to go out because of natural necessity. We relate this in order to make the ardor he put in prayer publicly acknowledged, and so that one could judge the intensity of the grace he had when he was free of all occupation, such that he was not kept away even by so many burdens from the spiritual exercises.

Source: *Vita sancti Stephani Obazinensis* (BHL 7916): *Vie de saint Etienne d'Obazine*, Texte établi et traduit par M. Aubrun (Publications de l'Institut d'Etudes du Massif Central, fasc. VI) Institut d'Etudes du Massif Central, Clermont-Ferrand, 1970, 46-48, 52-54, 56, 72.

The life of St. Stephen of Obazine (d. 1159) leads us to the world of the twelfth-century eremitic movement in the central region of France. Coming from a well-to-do family, Stephen was ordained a priest after his studies. Following the call to a more perfect life, he became a hermit. Finally, as adherents gathered around him, he became a monastic founder: the solitary was transformed into an abbot, the leader of

his own community. This story contradicts the genuine image of a medieval hermit whom one would imagine as a solitary man living a remote, lonely, and saintly life, near only to God, who disappears almost without any trace. Some medieval hermits were well known, even celebrated; that is why their *fama sanctitatis* has survived. Recent historiography shows well that a hermit whose *fama* has come down to us was certainly not an isolated, unknown man.¹ As it is the case of Stephen, his links with society were sufficiently strong to attract disciples, lay worshippers, and even a biographer to record and commemorate his life.

Although Stephen of Obazine was far less famous than some other reputed hermits of his time, such as Robert d'Arbrissel or Saint Romuald, he did not remain in the shadows. His biography, written by an unknown contemporary monk who knew the saint but wrote the *vita* at the command of his superiors, was a typical product of the medieval hagiographic tradition. People of the twelfth century were not fond of originality; instead, they wanted saints' lives to conform to the rules tested and witnessed by the "authorities," that is to say, the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, and some later Christian authors. In his biography Stephen is described according to the conventional pattern of the hagiographic genre. The style of the rather sober *Vita*, considered as a literary text, is far less sensational concerning the deeds of Stephen than many other *vitae* of the period. However, it provides not only a report on the life and deeds of a saintly hermit and a monastic founder but also a model of religious life. It emphasizes the leadership qualities of its hero, according to the prescriptions for an abbot in the *Rule* of St. Benedict; and it spells out the life of Stephen as a true follower of Christ.² Thus, this *vita*, the only source we have for him, does certainly not depict a nuanced image of the *real* Stephen, the one we will never know, but at least it gives us a picture of how his contemporaries expected an ascetic religious leader to live.

Stephen's vocation can best be understood in the framework of a large movement that we can describe as the "desert call," which touched many men (and women)³ in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This movement referred back to the tradition of the Desert Fathers, to the legendary heroes of Eastern Christian asceticism between the third and the sixth centuries. Their model emerged in this period as one that offered an alternative to older religious patterns. They had never been forgotten; but their memory survived rather as a number of texts⁴ than as a living paradigm, while the West produced its native Fathers, saints, and religious heroes. From the fifth century on, western monasticism gradually took an autonomous form, and received a long-lasting framework in the *Rule* of Benedict of Nursia (d. 547/560), which had a delayed but decisive impact. Benedictine monasticism became dominant only in the ninth century, with the Carolingian reform of the Church, which imposed its *Rule* on all the monasteries of the Empire. This model, oriented toward a strictly coenobitic form of monasticism, fitted for very different conditions, but left little place for personal religious experience. While it alluded to the eremitic form as a more perfect way and texts on the Desert Fathers, like those of John Cassian (d. 430/5), were prescribed readings for the

monks, this alternative remained marginal and unregulated. It is mostly known as an eremitism *prope monasterium*, near to the monastery, a place for short-period retreats of monks.

The revival of the desert model, providing an individualist religious lifestyle and focusing on personal spiritual and ascetic achievement, was a response to the general economic development of the West, and not only to what Carolingian-style monasticism had become in the tenth century, as contemporary propaganda would have wanted. It was certainly true that far from the monastic ideal of separation from the world in order to worship God, lay donations and the imbrication in power networks made monasteries strong and wealthy institutions that Carolingian power used as its intermediaries. The end of the Carolingian order brought a mixture of institutional heaviness, local lay influence, and decline of discipline in the monastic world that was pointed out by contemporaries, for whom mainstream Benedictine monasticism no longer represented the choice of real spiritual retreat. But at the same time, society started to change; the revival of towns and new economic dynamism starting around the millennium rendered the contrast between the apostolic ideal of poverty and everyday reality even sharper. Monasteries and especially new orders like that of Cluny, which the landowning aristocracy both protected and benefited, were also the first to get involved in money economy and to get extremely rich. This context helps explain the widespread and striking return to the sources of monasticism and of Christianity. The ideal of evangelical poverty that had characterized the life of the apostles and of the first ascetic monks seemed to belong to a faraway past; it was known only from the books of the Fathers. In this period of dissatisfaction with existing institutional forms and of spiritual quest, the model of the Desert Fathers inspired many individual vocations, independent or not of existing institutions, and explains the remarkably great number of new monastic foundations and the birth of new orders in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

While in the earlier Middle Ages hermits were rather rare in the West (with the notable exception of Ireland, southern Italy, and the Byzantine frontier), we observe a movement of eremitic revival from the tenth century on, spreading from Italy and the Empire to Central Europe, France, and the British Isles. In Central Europe, the first wave of eremitic movement was frequently linked to the conversion of this area of Europe to Christianity; its main figures were missionary bishops who finished in martyrdom, like Bruno of Querfurt (d. 1009), Adalbert of Prague (d. 997), and Gerhard, bishop of Csanád (d. 1048). In older areas of Christendom most of the hermits we are fortunate to know frequently became monastic founders: Saint Romuald (d. 1027); Robert of Tourlande, founder of La-Chaise-Dieu (1043); Johannes Gualberto, founder of a community in Vallombrosa (1037); Bruno of Cologne, founder of the Chartreuse in 1084, or the well-known founder of Citeaux, Robert of Molesme (d. 1111). These new communities and orders were all characterized by an austere life compared to traditional Benedictine monasticism. The communities of Camaldoli and Vallombrosa, as well

as Carthusians and Grandmontains, can be described as communities of quasi-hermits, while the Cistercians wanting to import austerity into the very life of the community also projected themselves as *fratres eremitae*.

Thus, even if eremitic retreat and lifestyle had some precedents in western and central France, the location of Stephen and his area of Obazine, the inspiration and life of Stephen could have occurred elsewhere in western Christendom during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But this new eremitic movement no longer resembled its ancestor and model of the desert hermits, known or imagined by medieval monks from their early literary texts. The eremitic ideal proved to be a powerful moving force for shaping social and institutional alternatives to older religious patterns.

An important motive in Stephen's time was the *fuga mundi* (escape from the distractions of the world), to allow subjection to the sole reign of God. As we learn from his *vita*, Stephen converted his life to God gradually, in two steps. At the beginning of his path, when consecrated as a priest, Stephen had already renounced the lay way of life. His conversion from profane life to that of a secular cleric is in fact described according to the rules of a monastic conversion: a way to abandon "totally" the "life of the world." Such a conversion is twofold, and contains an exterior and an interior side: it is a substantial transformation of habits and feelings. From luxury, hunting, and garments, Stephen turned to an austere, penitential life, and abandoned pleasures and happiness for grief. Fasting, vigils, tears, and icy baths instead of the pleasures of earthly life express the choice of the *contemptus mundi* (detesting the world), the choice of a life focused on the world to come instead of this one, despised; these penitential practices helped him merit salvation. This lifestyle is notable in the case of a priest; according to his biographer, Stephen already lived a quasi-eremitic life. Thus, we are not so surprised to read in the *vita* that dissatisfied with the life of a secular cleric, Stephen underwent a second conversion: leaving all the burdens of the world and becoming a real hermit.

Why this second conversion? The text tells us clearly: although the "capturing of souls" replaced the aristocratic habit of hunting in Stephen's life, and although his reading of the Scriptures and its commentaries made him a highly esteemed preacher, he remained dissatisfied. His longing for the world to come and the "disdain of things present" became too pressing for him to stay between two worlds. His retreat had to become perfect. We find a clue to this shift in the writings of Peter Damian (d. 1072), the great reformer of the eleventh century, himself first a hermit whose model was Romuald, then a cardinal-bishop who lived and worked near the pope. As he explains, even the cure of souls is still a way to remain in the world, not to consecrate oneself entirely to otherworldly thoughts. Stephen wanted to "follow poor and naked the steps of the poor and naked Christ," to be entirely destitute of any cares that linked him to this world. This choice implies at the same time a continuity and a clear distinction between two ecclesiastical *status*, that of the secular cleric and that of those who renounced the secular world, becoming monks or hermits.

A Hermit in Society: Seeking Authority

Leaving his secular clerical ties, Stephen's move was not toward total isolation. On the one hand, he tried to loosen the links that belong to this world; on the other, as a hermit, he sought an institutional framework. First, he needed a guide, the support of a spiritual authority. That was why Stephen went to meet Stephen of Mercoeur, an abbot of great authority of the monastery of La-Chaise-Dieu, a recent monastic foundation of eremitic style. To make the next, decisive step of his life, he needed the urging of the abbot to finish his conversion and not to waste any time. With his support, Stephen left the priesthood and, together with his friend Peter, another priest, he said farewell to the secular clerical life. After a preparatory stay of ten months with Bertrand, an established (but unknown) hermit, they went their own way, and wandered in search of a place to settle. They were looking for a religious order that would be "perfect enough" as the *vita* says, to serve God; and this kind of order did not exist in their region. That is how they arrived in the dark forests of the region of Obazine, where they decided to stay.

Now, one could ask, what kind of retreat, eremitism, and *fuga mundi* are we speaking about if Stephen never stayed alone? Leaving the priesthood he went wandering with a friend. Together they associated with the hermit Bertrand. In the woods of Obazine, people living nearby helped them; their strict eremitic life seems rather populous. It was their asceticism and devotion, however, that attracted so many disciples so quickly, who settled with them. This spontaneous group became the foundation of a new, eremitic community, shaped and led by Stephen. The converts came from every social background, rich and poor, male and female, as the *vita* says. Based on his experience, the hermit became a leader and an authority, a kind of public institution in the region, close to Peter Brown's late antique "holy men." Later, his monastery became a shelter for the population in times of famine or war; the *vita* records that the intercession of Stephen saved the countryside from a military conflict.

The foundation of a new community, for a man like Stephen, appears then as a logical consequence of his successful conversion. The life of the new community had to be given rhythm and regulated. Stephen obtained the authorization of Eustorgius, bishop of Limoges, to construct a monastery-like establishment so they could live their eremitic, disciplined life according to the daily rhythm of canonical liturgy. However, the choice of the rule and lifestyle involved a theological and political decision. Seeking the answer, Stephen wandered again and thought to join the Carthusians. The Carthusian prior, Guigues, advised Stephen on the most appropriate way for him to follow: the "royal way" introduced by the recently founded Cistercians.⁵ Rather than a refusal, this advice can be explained by the fact the Carthusians had strict rules limiting the number of members allowed in their eremitical communities; the community of Stephen was probably already too large. The choice had to be monastic, not eremitic any more. Carthusians were also rather

opposed to the penitential self-castigation that characterized Stephen's life. Thus the original spirit of the eremitic movement continued to shape the lifestyle of the new community that remained near to eremitism, centering on work, loneliness, and on a personal and affective relationship to God. This evolution of religious forms informs monasticism and more widely, the renewal of western religious experience to which the eremitic communities contributed in the period.

As an end of the process of institutionalization, in 1142 Stephen again asked and received the authorization and help of Bishop Gerald of Limoges for the consecration of a double monastery, male and female, of Obazine and Coyroux. We see here Stephen's constant care for the orthodoxy of his community—a care that can be well understood in a period when wandering hermits and preachers, easily suspected of heretical opinions or beliefs, mushroomed all over Europe. Stephen lived in a region very close to several centers of heresy in southwest France. In any case, the Church was also constantly concerned with keeping its new communities under control. The integration of the two monasteries into the Cistercian Order was a final important gesture chosen by Stephen to embrace the institution of the Church.

The *vita* informs us not only about the life of Stephen and his community but also about his ascetic achievements and spirituality. The rhythm of the life of the community was maintained by the singing of psalms and prayers. At an early date the bishop of Limoges authorized them to live according to the hours of the offices and to celebrate a daily mass. This rhythm was reinforced by fasting and vigils. Purification of the soul was also served by self-castigating practices like flagellation. It was the responsibility of the hermit who cared about his soul to concentrate his efforts on the constant war against laxity: "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41, Mark 14:38). Ceaseless prayer (1 Thess. 5:7, cf. Luke 22:46) had to lead to focus on the work of self-salvation, expressed in the denial of earthly cares, including the most fundamental needs like food, shelter, and sleep.

The text is clear on the aims: it was to "coerce" their flesh "into servitude," in order to bring "not carnal but spiritual fruits." The ascetic regime of Stephen required following the strict advice of the Scriptures, like plunging into icy water according to 2 Cor. 11:27: "in weariness and painfulness, in vigils, in self-afflicted hunger and thirst, in fastings, in cold and nakedness." Hard asceticism⁶ characterized his spiritual choice, which was not a universal feature of eremitic life. Some could argue, like Carthusians, against physical hardships as an obstacle to the worship of God. But Stephen concentrated in this way on what we can consider as the first goal of all eremitic austerity: to subjugate the flesh, that is, first, bodily needs. This fight against oneself, one's bodily nature, is linked to a conception of the flesh (*caro*) that is not exactly the same as the body as such, since according to Saint Paul, and stressed by Augustine, flesh is the name given to the desiring part of the self.⁷ Conversion to God implies uprooting earthly desires for the sake of desiring God. This interior, psychological process is the inner side of the conversion of life, present in monastic conversion, that can be found at the

very center of the individual spiritual choice of an eremitic lifestyle. Just like his ascetic practices aimed at "killing the flesh," Stephen's frequent weeping aimed to achieve his conversion by the spiritualization of the self.

Stephen's spirituality was characterized by his "gift of tears."⁸ This motif is intended to describe the success of his inner conversion and the purity of his desire, entirely turned to God. We see Stephen weep four times in our text: at the very beginning of the *vita* the quotation of Psalm 79:6 shows his daily practice of weeping, accompanying his meals, as a part of his conversion. We have already seen what it meant that Stephen, according to a *topos*, left joy and laughter for eschatological longing and tears. These tears show that his thoughts went beyond this world, to the yet unattainable happiness of heaven. The next tears in the text accompany his prayers, addressed to God not "by the arrangement of words, but by the devotion of tears." Praying in tears was considered to be more sincere than praying with words; while words, rationally formed, can imitate a feeling and be fake, tears in medieval Christian anthropology come directly from the heart. The basis of this belief is the Bible itself, which recommends praying to God not openly so everyone can see, but in the secret of the heart (*in abscondito*—Matt. 6:6; *occulta cordis*—1 Cor. 14:15). Therefore, the weeping of Stephen in prayer illustrates the purest sincerity and depth of his devotion to God.

Two other passages show him crying outside the daily order of the new community's life. He wept instead of working, and instead of sleeping as well. Before it became a hagiographic *topos*, it was an old religious ideal and even a habit to pray instead of sleeping—one of the most difficult hardships a man could endure. Stephen's tears are described in the *vita* as lonely tears wept in the church out of the needs of his heart, as a way of "satisfying his fervent desire," a kind of "natural necessity," that replaced other bodily needs. Religious tears were reputed to have an important spiritual effect: the pure water of tears was reputed to wash one's heart of sins, and thus to contribute to preparation for salvation. Although this idea had been well known in the monastic world since the patristic times, frequent weeping came back in fashion in the eleventh century as a special feature of eremitic spirituality. Around the millennium, Saint Romuald and Nilus of Rossano wept a lot, and from their model, religious weeping and the highly praised gift of tears was diffused in the West by the eremitic movement and monastic reform. According to their models, as for the earlier Desert Fathers, weeping was a way to spiritualize their flesh. Beyond the frequent metaphor of washing away sins by tears that we find in any medieval religious text, there was an anthropological conviction coming from antiquity concerning the composition of the man, body, and soul. In ancient and early Christian times, a clear certitude established the circulation of the liquids of the body, which could leave the body in different sinful or sinless ways.⁹ The natural product of earthly desire was sperm; but with renouncing sexuality when pronouncing the monastic vows—a vow that was so much in evidence in the twelfth century that our text does not even mention it—the production of sperm and involuntary erection became a difficult moral problem for monks, who had to fight the "will" of their sinful flesh.¹⁰ In the anthropological

logic that sustains our text, the formation of salvific tears could also prevent the formation of sperm, as spiritual desire replaced sexual desire.

But to weep or not was not only a question of devotion or will. While one has to ask in prayer and with tears the grace of God as Stephen did, God's grace is manifest when those holy tears that relieve the suffering of spiritual desire appear. Stephen's tears are described as a divine gift: the "grace of tears," given by God to help his transformation. Thereby God personally assisted Stephen on his spiritual path. His grace of tears, a personal gift given to some of the saints, was a special sign of God's intervention in one's heart, a sign of His personal love. This feature of Stephen's spirituality was especially venerated by his contemporaries, who saw there a sign of his divine election, a real charisma. The gift of tears, sought by many at least from the eleventh century onward in the West, was only found by the most perfect of them. This gift indicated the onset of a new kind of spirituality and relationship to God. In the same way as Stephen, not content with coenobitic, collective, and ritual devotional forms, they wanted to follow "naked the path of the naked Christ" in a very personal way. Stephen's tears showed the personal guidance of God in his life, his special relationship to God. The beautiful weeping scene of the *vita* witnessed by the biographer by chance, shows that the tears of Stephen did not belong to his public devotion, but to a private space between him and God, in the loneliness of prayer in an abandoned church—in a way conforming to the injunction of the Gospel already referred to (Matt. 6:6). It was his love for God, and God's love for him, that is expressed in those tears—a love that had its equivalent in the strong affective relationship that linked him to his friend Peter, who accompanied him everywhere. So, if the companionship of Peter seems at first a limitation on Stephen's eremitism, it can also be understood as an earthly manifestation, a double, of his love relationship with God and of his spiritual affectivity.

The eremitic movement must have been so widespread and attractive that fraudulent hermits were also frequent; their bad reputation explains the local suspicion of Stephen's community.¹¹ Such success as contemporary evidence frequently records can only be explained by the wide range of social functions offered by eremitism. The lives of the above-mentioned hermits invariably point to the fact that the eremitic choice was not a life-long decision, but appears rather as an intermediary element in an ecclesiastical career. In this rarely appreciated sense, eremitism was not only an alternative for radicals to reform the establishment of the Church but also a training ground for missionaries and organizers. Rather than a short solitary retreat to repose oneself in the middle of long monastic years, it functioned as a template for experiments, institutional alternatives, or protest according to the personality and invention of the hermits themselves, who ventured on an individualist religious lifestyle and focused on personal spiritual and ascetic achievement. The choice of eremitism resembles other social schemes of the period. It appears as a time of abandoning the social order and its boundaries, a probationary and preparatory period, aiming at the acquisition of the spiritual authority necessary to found a community of one's own. A sentence from the

Vita of Stephen suggests such an aim: "God omnipotent did not want them [Stephen and his follower] to be subjected to anyone's authority, in order to fulfil what he had predestined for the holy man."¹² With such a reference to personal divine election, an eremitic search could serve as an elitist answer to the Church establishment, as a school for would-be monastic leaders, and a place for exercising unlimited innovative leadership. Interpreting the developments in this way there seems to remain no room to consider the transformation in coenobitic communities of the eremitic foundations of the period (like Arbrissel, Tiron, or for that matter, Obazine) as falling away from the "original purity" of eremitism.

Looking at this typical pattern of his career, the wandering of Stephen as a hermit, we can discover that it corresponds in an interesting way to the long period of the life of a knight described by Georges Duby as a period of "wandering."¹³ His analysis concerns the same period, the twelfth century, and roughly the same region of Christendom. The young knight-errant already dubbed had to prove his chivalrous qualities before settling as a lord on his own property. For some ten to fifteen years, the young knight-errant wandered, seeking experience, adventure, fortune, and a wife, together with his companions, the members of his *meisnie*, young knights of the same condition and age. He arrived home when his reputation as a warrior was established, and he was considered as a man accepted in his social category, the aristocracy. In the same way, when Stephen established his own monastery of Obazine, his reputation, his spiritual authority, was recognized. Thus, in both cases, wandering with a *socius*, a friend of the same condition, has the same goal and social meaning: a kind of test or proof in order to attain social recognition upon which to establish one's own power—as a landlord in one case, as a monastic leader in the other.

Notes

1. Cf. for the Late Antiquity, the famous article of Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1982), 103–52.

2. This program is reflected in events imitating the events of the life of Christ, in direct reference to the Gospels. Stephen is a model follower of Christ and produces miracles according to the topoi of the miracles of Christ. He tells the heavy stone to move, and it moves, in accordance with the saying of Christ: "If ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (Matt. 17:19, 21:21; Mark 11:23). Stephen meets Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–39 (*Vita* 2, chap. 42, 164); finds water, in allusion to the water of life (Rev 22:1; 17); makes peace (Matt. 5:9; *Vita* 2, chap. 39, 158); gives food to the poor (Matt. 25:35; *Vita* 2, chap. 26, 142–43); and cures the sick (e.g., Acts 28:9; *Vita* 2, chap. 43, 166).

3. See notes 11 and 13 below. One of the interesting features of the foundation of Stephen was that it was a double monastery, one for monks and one for nuns in Obazine and Coyroux, like Fontevrault (1100), which was originally also a "double monastery." There were similar developments among the Premonstratensians, or in the movement of Gilbert of Sempringham (around 1150).

4. The memory of the Desert Fathers was known in the West mainly through the compilations of various collections of the *Apophthegmata patrum*, which circulated under the title *Vitas patrum*.

5. *Vita* 1, 26, 80–82.

6. E.g., *Vita* 1, 16, 68.

7. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988).
 8. Piroška Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Age: Un instrument spirituel en quête d'institution (Ve–XIle s.)* (Paris, 2000).
 9. Cf. Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge, 1951), part II, chap. 6; Nagy, *Le don des larmes*, 62–74.
 10. See Brown, *The Body and Society*.
 11. Cf. *Vita* 1, 5, 52.
 12. "Sed Deus omnipotens noluit eos tunc alicujus magisterio subdi, ut quod de beato viro predestinaverat adimpleret," *Vita* 1, 3, 48.
 13. Georges Duby, "Les 'jeunes' dans la société aristocratique dans la France du Nord-Ouest au XIIe siècle," in *Hommes et structures du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1973), 213–26.
- The authors thank Judith Rasson and Matthew Suff for their help in correcting our English; Damien Boquet and Barbara Rosenwein for their valuable comments.

Further Reading

- Introduction to *Vie de saint Etienne d'Obazin*, ed. and trans. M. Aubrun, Publications de l'Institut d'Etudes du Massif Central, fasc. VI (Clermont-Ferrand, 1970), 7–31; a bibliography on Stephen and Obazine can be found on 32–35.
- Ermîtes de France et d'Italie (xie–xve siècles)*, ed. André Vauchez (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2003).
- Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000–1150* (London, 1984).
- Giovanni Tabacco, "Eremo e cenobio, in *Spiritualità e cultura nel Medioevo: Dodici percorsi nei territori del potere e della fede* (Napoli, 1993), 159–66.

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Creating an Anchorhold

Alexandra Barratt

This indented writing, made at Whalley, the sixteenth day of December, in the thirty-fourth year of the reign of King Edward, the Third since the Conquest, between Henry, Duke of Lancaster, Earl of Derby, of Lincoln and of Leicester, and steward of England, on the one part, and the Abbot and Convent of Whalley, on the other part, WITNESSES that the said Duke, by special license obtained from our Lord the King concerning this, has given and granted, and by this present document confirms, to the said Abbot and Convent and to their successors for ever, two cottages, seven acres of land, one hundred and ninety-three acres of pasture land, and two hundred acres of woodland, with appurtenances, called Rams Grove in his chase by Blackburn. And also that the said Duke by the same license has GRANTED that two holdings, one hundred and twenty-six acres of land, twenty-six acres of meadow, and one hundred and thirty acres of pasture, with the appurtenances called Standen, Hulcroft, and Greenlech, in the towns of Pendleton and Clitheroe together with the sheepfold of Standen, and the foldage of the same sheepfold, with all the profits coming from them and the attachments of the said foldage as was the custom formerly. Which holdings, land, meadow, pasture, sheepfold, and foldage with their appurtenances and the profits of the above mentioned, William of Yves holds for his whole life, by the lease and grant of the said Duke, and which, after the death of that same William, were to revert to the said Duke and to his heirs, SHOULD ENTIRELY REMAIN, after the death of the said William, to the said Abbot and Convent and to their successors for ever, to have and to hold the aforesaid holdings, cottages, lands, meadows, pastures, woodlands, sheepfold, and foldage, with all their easements, franchises, severalties, commons and with all other profits and appurtenances, to the said Abbot and Convent and their successors, from the said Duke and from his heirs, for ever, also should be as entirely, freely, fully, quit of rent, and peaceably in all points and in all profits as the said Duke and his ancestors at any time formerly held or had them: for the services that follow: