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A CONFLICT OF TRADITIONS: CONSECRATION
FOR WOMEN IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

By

Donald Dee Hochstetler

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ABSTRACT

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By

Donald Dee Hochstetler

In the period between the early sixth century and the death of Louis the Pious developments occurred which were instrumental in forming the Western conception of the role of consecrated women in Church and in society. These centuries were marked by continual efforts to reform the practice of consecration on the basis of monastic principles. It is one object of this dissertation to examine the principles and persons which formed and enforced this deal. The religious life of women was affected by more than the ideals of the reformers. The reality of consecration remained considerably different from that desired by the reformers. In order to put the ideal into perspective, the dissertation will consider the religious, social, and economic factors which formed the actual character of early medieval consecration.

Principles of monastic reform were devised by certain bishops in the early sixth century. These ideals were adopted and refined by subsequent generations of bishops. The reformers felt that there

were weaknesses in the practice of consecration that could only be rectified by making monasticism the only form of consecration available to women. Other forms of consecration permitted too many freedoms to consecrated women, resulting in too little separation between religious and secular worlds. In fact, the secular nobility and its attitudes, not religious authorities and ideals, actually determined the character of consecration. The bishops strove to reduce the control of secular nobles over the internal function of religious institutions, and to change the behavior of consecrated women.

The reform movement reached its climax with the accession of the Carolingian kings. These rulers replaced the bishops as the leaders of reform. Now reform was directed by a single person with real power (seldom possessed by bishops) to affect the behavior of the nobility. The Carolingians agreed that a variety of forms of consecration was undesirable; but a variety of monastic practice still existed. The royal program decreed that there must be one form of monasticism: Benedictine monasticism. Therefore, a single form of consecration, Benedictine monasticism, should guide all consecrated women in the kingdom.

A number of factors limited the effectiveness of the reform movement. Most important was the fact that the nobility did not support the reform movement. Noble opinion mattered: the nobility founded and economically supported most communities of women. Most communities were the property of the founding families, used as family economic interest demanded. Success of reform would have meant a drastic reduction in the nobility's capacity to control the

goods connected with the communities possessed by it; control of property was the foundation of the nobility's political power.

Consecrated noblewomen ignored the injunctions of the monastic ideal to reject the attitudes of their class. Class determined one's standing in religious communities, and consecrated women continued to possess property. The primary allegiance of these women was to their families, not to ecclesiastical authorities.

The direction of reform by the kings was a mixed blessing. The kings were the greatest possessors of religious institutions. The kings, despite their pronouncements, did not hesitate to protect their interests in the properties of communities of women. The relationship of the royal family to communities in its possession was usually typical of the nobility as a whole. The limited support of the kings for monastic reform in practice more than any other factor restricted the success of the reform program devised by the Carolingian rulers themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Women dedicated to religious service were of great importance to the Christian religion from its earliest days. It was not until the early Middle ages, however, that the development of a clear conception of the role of consecrated women in the Church and in society took place in the West. In the period between the second decade of the sixth century and the death of Louis the Pious a crucial event took place within the Frankish Church: the definition of a monastic ideal which was intended to guide the practice of all consecrated women. At the same time the leaders of the Frankish Church, the bishops and the kings, continually sought to enforce obedience to that ideal through ecclesiastical legislation. It will be one object of this study to analyze the component parts of this monastic ideal, the reasons for its existence, and the success of attempts to make monasticism the only form of consecration for women. This analysis will be founded on the premise that the meaning of early medieval monasticism for women can only be understood properly if it is looked at in its role as a means to reform the practice of consecration for women as a whole.

A balanced portrayal of consecration for women needs to go beyond the ideal, of course. Reform is after all a reaction to a status quo which a particular group feels to be no longer desirable. Thus, it will be a second object of this study to discuss that actuality of consecration for women which the pro-monastic reformers tried

to change. That consideration will fall into two parts. On an ecclesiological level, it will be necessary to discuss nonmonastic forms of consecration: consecrated widowhood/virginity practiced by the individual in her own home; the diaconate; and the canonical form. On a secular level, there will be an evaluation of the influence of family ties, possession of property, and patronage of communities of women by secular nobles on the character of consecration. A third element in the formation of consecration as it actually existed was the support of the nobility both for nonmonastic forms and for a concept of consecration which did not exclude the intrusion of secular practices and attitudes into the religious life of women.

It was the Frankish bishops of the sixth century who established the first definition of properly practiced consecration for women in the history of the Western Church. It was the innovation of the bishops to create an ideal of consecration which was based on two ideas. First, the bishops rejected the practices of consecration as it then existed because they felt it to be full of abuses which reduced its value as a means of expressing religious devotion. Second, they promoted a single form of consecration, monasticism, as the only solution to these abuses. The bishops presented monasticism as the only means of expressing religious devotion that would permit the individual to achieve successfully those ideals of consecrated virginity which served as the reason for existence of all the various forms of consecration for women. It was necessary for the early medieval proponents of monasticism to define the exact nature of that form as practiced by women, for that had not been done prior to the

sixth century. The goal of the monastic reformers from the sixth to the mid-ninth century was first of all to organize and purify the practice of monasticism so that it could with justice be presented as the only proper form of consecration for women. This purified monasticism was to serve as tool for the reform of consecration as a whole.

The creation of the monastic ideal for women must be placed in its proper context. That context was the multiplicity of forms by which women could express their religious devotion in the early Middle Ages. Monasticism was only one of a variety of such forms, a rather late development in the religious world of women, and one that most likely did not attract even a simple majority of consecrated women in the early Middle Ages. The significance of monasticism for women is that, due to the decision of the leadership of the Frankish Church, it was made the standard by which the practice of consecration was judged. Several factors frustrated the realization of the monastic ideal to the extent desired by the monastic reformers of the Merovingian and Carolingian eras. Among those factors was the undeniable validity of those nonmonastic forms which the supporters of monasticism sought to eradicate. It is essential to examine the nonmonastic forms and their relationship to monasticism in some detail. Without an understanding of that relationship early medieval monasticism is deprived of its proper context, and its true significance as a reforming ideal is lost.

The staying power and attractiveness of nonmonastic forms was due in part to their solid foundation in the practice of the apostolic

and patristic Church. Unmarried women, and widows in particular, were indispensable to the spread of Christianity into the Greek speaking world. The homes of widows were way stations to wandering missionaries. Christian widows served as examples of fortitude and piety to the local communities of believers. The consecrated women of the apostolic Church was not secluded from the world like a nun, but was actively involved in the functions of the Christian community. The practice of the apostolic Church in regard to consecration established a long-lived tradition. The active participation of consecrated women in the functions of the Christian community, their considerable contact with the secular world, continued into the early Middle Ages. In the patristic period of the Church there took place a further development which was to characterize consecration for women: there arose that multiplicity of forms of consecration which was to be so typical of the early Middle Ages as well. One of those forms was monasticism, to be sure. But monasticism was forced to compete for the allegiance of religious women with other forms which were more directly descended from the customs of the New Testament Church.

Out of the consecrated widowhood/virginity of the apostolic and patristic Church there evolved the diaconate for women, and later still the office of canoness. The last two forms added to the active participation of the consecrated widow in the Christian community a close involvement of consecrated women in the sacral functions of the Church. The work of certain consecrated women became tied closely to that performed by the deacons and other male assistants of the priest. While monasticism for women was developing in some circles

of the Christian community, another concept of consecration was growing which worked in directions contrary to those suggested by the monastic ideal. Instead of monastic separation from the world the diaconate provided yet greater participation for consecrated women in the world. Instead of merely meditation, prayer, and study of the Scriptures the diaconal and canonical forms allowed for some type of active participation by consecrated women in the performance of the ritual of the mass.

Again, only in this context of the complex character of consecration can the role of monasticism be understood. Monasticism for women meant reform, a reaction to the reality of consecration as it existed in the Merovingian and Carolingian periods. The sixth century bishops established the pattern of the subsequent approach of the leadership of the Frankish Church to the reform of consecration. The desire for reform was expressed in influential monastic rules and in the decrees of the bishops in their synods. In the early sixth century Bishop Caesarius of Arles wrote his great monastic rule for women, the first such rule in the West. The work of Caesarius was of tremendous importance, for his vision of monasticism for women provided an answer to what many of his fellow bishops felt were the abuses which resulted from the freedoms given to the individual by nonmonastic forms of consecration.

While Caesarius defined the character of monasticism for women, his definition would have produced no results had the time not been ripe for such a work. Other bishops were clearly uneasy about the validity of the traditional means available to women who wished

to enter the religious life. That this is so is proved by the synodal decrees of the period. The first redaction of Caesarius' rule was written c. 512. In 517 the Council of Albon prohibited the consecration of any more deaconesses, a command which was repeated by the Council of Orleans of 533. These decisions were only two of several synodal decrees of the sixth through the mid-ninth century which represented one aspect of the reform of consecration on monastic principles. That aspect was the effort to reduce the active role of consecrated women in the world and to remove them from excessively close connection with the sacral functions of the Church. The reduction of the active role of consecrated women in the important functions of the Christian community would be accomplished by forcing all consecrated women to adopt the monastic life. Thus it was essential for the bishops of the sixth and of later centuries to define the exact character of that monastic life, so that consecrated women would know what was expected of them. The work of definition was accomplished through a series of monastic rules and synodal decrees.

Yet there were weaknesses in the practice of monasticism by women. From the point of view of the reformers monasticism itself was riddled with abuses which reduced its value as a form of consecration. The monasticism of the sixth century was not so different from other forms of consecration that it could justifiably be presented as the only means by which the religious woman could express her devotion to God. Therefore, it was a second aim of monastic reformers to purify monastic practice, to free monasticism as an institution from abuses, to make monasticism significantly different

from other forms of consecration. In this respect as in so many others Caesarius was the pioneer. His rule was a detailed blueprint for the reformation of monasticism. The monasticism of Caesarius was clearly distinct in its practice and in its goals from nonmonastic forms of consecration and from unreformed monasticism. And in this respect as well the work of Caesarius was adopted and amplified in later monastic rules and in the synodal decrees of the Merovingian and Carolingian eras.

Caesarius' definition and reform of monasticism were not the final word. No single synod of the early Middle Ages succeeded in establishing monasticism as the only form of consecration for women. The ideals and problems first faced in the sixth century remained living issues to the death of Louis the Pious. With the accession of the Carolingians to the Frankish throne, however, the attack on nonmonastic forms and on irregularities within monasticism became a centrally directed program. The direction of reform fell out of the hands of the bishops and was assumed by the kings. Under the Carolingians a final element was added to the reform movement. No longer were all forms of cenobitic monasticism equally acceptable. The ideal came to be that all communities of men and of women were to follow the rule of Benedict of Nursia. There can be no doubt that this aspect of the Carolingian reform of religion was due to the close association of the Benedictine reformer Boniface with the rise of the Carolingian house. The descendants of Pippin I did not promote the Benedictine rule out of respect for Boniface's memory, however. Boniface had suggested to the new ruling family a means whereby the

control of the ruler over every aspect of religious life in the kingdom could be greatly increased. The ruler and the bishops worked together to create that order and regularity in the Church which was so dear to the Carolingian concept of royal power.

The Carolingian reform program was the logical culmination of a reform movement which was already old in the mid-eighth century. The Carolingians continued and sharpened the attempt to limit the scope and to define more closely the character of nonmonastic forms of consecration for women. The eradication of such forms was the final goal, but the Carolingians were to find nonmonastic forms as difficult to deal with as had the bishops of the sixth century. Nonmonastic forms were solidly grounded in the customs of the apostolic and patristic Church; they had long centuries of tradition and practice behind them. The idea that only monasticism could properly protect the ideals of consecrated virginity was a bold innovation. The attack on nonmonastic forms was a long process which usually resulted in a compromise which modified those forms but did not lead to their immediate demise.

The theological validity of nonmonastic forms was a significant factor in the continued existence of those forms despite the efforts of the Benedictine reformers. Of more importance in the survival of nonmonastic forms, however, was their association with the attitudes of the Frankish nobility toward consecration for women. It will be the purpose of Chapters III and IV of this study to show that the nobility, whether secular or consecrated, possessed a conception of the meaning of consecration that differed from that of the

Benedictine reformers. The nobles supported the existence of established nonmonastic forms because the existence of those forms facilitated the functioning of the traditional relationship of the nobility to consecration for women. The ideas of the nobility about the role of consecrated women in society was instrumental in forming the character of both of nonmonastic forms of consecration and of unreformed monasticism. The pro-Benedictine reformers sought to establish a type of consecration for women which was directed according to purely religious concepts, as those concepts were defined by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. From the point of view of the reformers the traditional practice of consecration was permeated far too much by the secular assumptions of the nobility.

The reformers were correct in their assessment of the dominating role of the nobility in determining the character of consecration. The nobles' conceptions of the meaning of consecration for women brought internal and external pressures to bear on the world of religion. Consecrated noblewomen did not leave the attitudes of their class behind them upon entering the religious life, but mirrored the assumptions of their unconsecrated relatives. It was this uniformity of conceptions about consecration by nobles within and without the religious world which frustrated the complete application of the reforming ideals of ecclesiastical legislation and monastic rules. There is abundant evidence to show that consecrated noblewomen did not leave behind the attitudes of their class. Injunctions against the removal of consecrated women from religious life for marriage are frequently so phrased as to indicate that the cooperation of the

women in their removal was not unusual. The very repetition of commands that women dedicated to God were to remain in the religious life forever shows that for many women their primary allegiance was to their families and not to their profession.

The cooperation of women in their removal from their religious retreat was a result of their failure to separate their attitudes from those of their secular relatives. One factor in the inability of many women to develop a monastic personality (one separated from the attitudes of the secular world) was that they remained in frequent contact with their families. Neither they nor their relatives desired that extreme limitation on contacts between consecrated women and outsiders that was required by all monastic rules. Those rules themselves suggest that excessively frequent contact between members of religious communities and their relatives was an important problem.

Dissensions arose within religious institutions because some individuals insisted on the privileges of rank which would have been theirs in the secular world. In this regard the insistence of all monastic rules on humility and mutual respect among members of a monastic community takes on a new meaning. Insistence on humility was not primarily a reminder to all the members of a virtue expected of followers of Christ. It was an attempt on the part of reforming bishops to change the mores of the nobles in monastic institutions by demanding a change in behavior on their part, a very practical aspect of the management of a large body of women of differing social gradations.

Many consecrated women of the early Middle Ages have left behind documents which show their concerns and ideals. These documents were seldom saints' lives or other products of pious contemplation. They were charters of donation to religious institutions, in short, records of land deals. The charters of consecrated women show that they continued to possess landed property in great amounts. Through their charters the women claimed usufruct, exchanged holdings, protected their own interests as landlords, and they did not forget their children or other relatives. Noble abbesses who had founded religious institutions did not hesitate to give those communities and all the lands attached to them to other religious institutions. There was no difference between the attitudes of many consecrated women toward property and family and those of their secular relatives.

Unconsecrated nobles treated communities of consecrated women in ways that lessened the ability of those communities to fulfill their religious mission. Religious institutions had little leverage against the nobles who founded them and donated to them the lands which served as their economic support. Most abbesses were members of the families who had founded the communities of which they were the head. These abbesses were clearly in their positions of authority so that they could protect the family's interests in the foundation.

A final concern of an account of consecration for women in the early Middle Ages must be the actual relationship of the kings to consecration. The Carolingian rulers were instrumental in the foundation and enforcement of the ideal of Benedictine monasticism through their capitular decrees. The question is, to what extent did royal

actions match royal pronouncements? One cannot deny the significance of Carolingian support for Benedictine reform of consecration. Without that support, without the program of reform according to Benedictine principles devised by the Carolingian monarchs, monasticism for women would have remained but one of several forms of consecration. On the other hand, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the Carolingian kings' support for Benedictine reform was a matter of organization and rationalization, not of spiritual commitment. The Carolingian rulers were as ready to use donations to religious institutions as investments as were any of their vassals. They did not hesitate to use the possessions of religious communities for the benefit of their own families. Like other nobles the Carolingians placed relatives in positions of authority in religious institutions in order to protect family interests. Despite royal decrees, the Carolingian family was seldom different from other nobles in its treatment of communities of women.

Because they were responsible for governing huge properties and populations attached to their institutions abbesses were very important to the secular government of the Frankish kingdom. Abbesses were ranked among the great political officers of the realm. When the king felt a need to confer with an abbess on political or religious matters his command would spring the bounds of monastic rules and ecclesiastical legislation which required her continual presence in her community. The command of the king obviated ecclesiastical chains of authority which made the bishop the only person who could authorize any exception to the monastic rule of stability.

There was much in the way nobles, both secular and consecrated, used religious institutions of women that ran counter to the ideals of the Benedictine reform movement. Yet almost all Carolingian capitularies and synodal decrees were concerned with the regulation of the internal functions of religious communities. Except when they reacted to the crassest acts of noble oppression the royal capitularies did little to change the relation of religious institutions to the secular nobility. Yet the capitularies were the instruments with which the kings carried out their ancient role of protector of all consecrated women in the kingdom.

Thus the relationship of the ideal of reform of consecration on monastic principles to the actual practice of consecration in the early Middle Ages was as follows: What were seen as abuses by some leaders of Frankish society were accepted by others as usages sanctified by the Scriptures and by centuries of ecclesiastical tradition. The nobility regarded its relationship to communities of women as long established rights accruing to it because of its social position. If that relationship had been as fully altered as was desired by the ecclesiastical reformers the rights and powers of the secular nobility would have been changed out of all recognition. But the reform movement, for all its successes, still had much to accomplish by 840. Traditional forms and relationships continued to meet the needs of people whose opinions mattered. It was no help that the most important proponents of reform, the kings, were not consistent in their application of the principles of that reform. While the character of consecration for women had been significantly modified

by the death of Louis the Pious, the change was far from as great as it would have been had the relationship between the nobility and communities of consecrated women been more fundamentally restructured.

CHAPTER I

MONASTICISM FOR WOMEN: THE CREATION
OF AN IDEAL

The sixth century was one of the two most important periods in the development of consecration for women in the West. Certain bishops, inspired by the work of Caesarius of Arles, propounded the idea that monasticism could not any longer be allowed to serve as merely one of several legitimate forms of consecration for women. The cutting edge of theological thought in the Frankish Church asserted that only monasticism could properly fulfill the ideals of consecrated virginity which were the foundation for all forms of service to the Church in the early Middle Ages. In monastic rules and in synodal decrees of the sixth and seventh centuries the proponents of monasticism presented that form as the only means of saving consecrated virginity from deterioration to the point of uselessness. Each nonmonastic form came to be identified as an abuse in itself.

At the same time the promonastic bishops, again taking their lead from Caesarius, recognized that there were problems within monasticism as it existed in the early Middle Ages. Unreformed monasticism of the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries was far too similar to nonmonastic forms. Nuns shared too much in the freedoms

and lack of seclusion which were typical of consecrated widows and virgins living at home, of deaconesses, and of canonesses. Thus, the object of the monastic rules and ecclesiastical legislation of the sixth and seventh centuries was to purify monasticism so that it could achieve the mission envisioned for it by the reformers. The reform movement consisted of a two-pronged attack. There was the drive to vitiate the validity of nonmonastic forms of consecration and to promote monasticism as the only alternative to nonmonastic forms. On the other hand there was the attempt to define what the character of monasticism for women must be, and to end abuses in communities of nuns. It was this concreteness of definition, the existence of written rules which were meant for the use of more than one community, which separated monasticism from other forms of consecration. Monastic rule emphasized restriction and sacrifice as opposed to freedoms, duties and subordination as opposed to rights.

The logical conclusion of the drive for definition, limitation, and rationality in consecration which was begun by the bishops of the sixth century was taken in the late eighth century. During the reign of Charlemagne the king and his advisers, in their desire to create uniformity in all institution of the Frankish Church, came to feel that the variety of interpretations of monasticism was an abuse. Rationalized monasticism directed by one rule for all nuns and all monks throughout the kingdom would have greater appeal against nonmonastic forms. Diversity of interpretation was characteristic of nonmonastic forms, and the lack of definition made monasticism too similar to those other forms. The decision of the king and his

advisers was to make Benedictine monasticism the only acceptable form of monastic life in the kingdom. At the same time the attack on non-monastic forms was continued, this time directed by the king. What was involved was nothing short of a program of reform for consecration for women. The program was continued in the reign of Louis the Pious. Together the reigns of Charlemagne and of Louis compose the second great era of development of consecration for women. In that period the ideas expressed by the bishops of the sixth and seventh centuries were taken farther and made into a coherent program directed from a single source: the kings and their closest advisers; it was the era of royally promulgated Benedictine monasticism.

Before turning to the development of monasticism for women it will be useful to indicate briefly the concepts involved in that ideal of consecrated virginity which monasticism was meant to protect. The status of women who were dedicated to the service of God was quite high from the earliest days of the Church. By the end of the third century there was in existence a set of terms which were used throughout the early Middle Ages to express the nature and to highlight the importance of the life lived by consecrated women. These terms stressed those factors which were common to all the several forms by which women could serve the Church: virginity, marriage to Christ, a servant relationship to God, personal holiness. Such terms were: Virgines sanctae; ancillae Dei; sponsa Christi; virgines sacrae; famulae Dei; monachae; sanctimoniales; religiosae.¹

Maintenance of virginity was only one of the concepts common to the forms of religious consecration for women. The ancient idea of consecrated virginity on which all forms of consecration--including the monastic--were based went beyond the negative, and emphasized marriage with Christ more than renunciation of earthly marriage. Early in the patristic age of the Church the idea arose that the consecrated virgin might reject earthly marriage but did so to become sponsa Christi, the bride of Christ. It was her status as a bride of Christ and not that of perpetual virgin that gave the consecrated virgin such prestige in the Christian community.² Jerome called consecrated women "lady" ("domina"): "For I should call the spouse of my Lord 'domina.'"³ The terms used by Jerome and by other Fathers such as Ambrose and Augustine show that even when virginity per se was under consideration there was a tendency to see it as a dowry offered to Christ as bridegroom. Maintenance of virginity could not be an end in itself; it needed a holy purpose to make it consecrated virginity.⁴

Ambrose seems to have been the first of the Fathers of the Church to indicate the desirability of a formal profession of consecrated virginity. Ambrose frequently used the verb "profiteri" in connection with consecrated virgins to imply the act of offering oneself to Christ. Ambrose felt that this act should be done publicly.⁵ What kind of public act or ceremony was used by the Church at this time, if any, Ambrose does not say. Hugo Koch has warned us that we must be careful not to read fourth century developments back into the third century, when the ideals and ceremonies surrounding consecration

of women to the service of the Church were just beginning to develop. Koch argues that Joseph Wilpert is guilty of such anachronisms in his citation of Tertullian to prove the existence of public and private vows of consecrated virginity in the third century. Koch shows convincingly that in each instance cited by Wilpert Tertullian was talking about the veil and its role in the life of the virgin.⁶

According to Tertullian, it was the will of God that all virgins, whether consecrated or not, must wear the veil at all times.⁷ This meant that not only were consecrated virgins to wear that veil which made them indistinguishable from matrons, but there was to be no visible difference between consecrated and other virgins.⁸ The rationale behind this command is to be found in Tertullian's De orat., chapter 22, where he said that no female was really a virgin anymore after she had become capable of bearing children and could marry. Some women might have married men, but others chose to devote themselves to God. These latter were also to wear the hairstyle and clothing of the responsible matron. In so doing they did not act falsely, for "you have married Christ, you have given him your flesh; behave responsibly for your husband; if secular marriage requires that you wear the veil, so much more does yours."⁹ Thus, the veil early became the classic symbol of the consecrated virgin, then of the nun. Terms used to describe the assumption of the consecrated life came to emphasize the veil: velare; velamine tegere; velamen accipere, etc.¹⁰ But it must be noted here that to the early Church the consecrated virgin's veil did not represent seclusion from the rest of the Christian community; it was not a symbol which served to

make the consecrated virgin stand out from other women. Instead, the veil symbolized maturity; it made the consecrated virgin an integral part of the Christian commonwealth. The consecrated virgin had made a decision of her own to join the other matrons and to share in the rights of the matron's status. She had decided to become an active member of the local congregation of believers, not to isolate herself from society.

Wilpert aptly points out that consecrated life contained a negative and a positive element, "in that the maiden rejected marriage, denied the world and her friends, and instead offered her virginity to Christ."¹¹ To express this idea Psalm 44 became the anthem of the consecrated virgin. Of greatest importance were verses 11 and 12:

Listen my daughter, and see, and lend your ear; forget
your people and your father's house, for the king desires
your beauty, he who is the Lord your God - adore him!¹²

As Ambrose described here, the consecrated virgin was "Always a spouse, always unmarried, so that love may have no end, nor modesty any curse."¹³

None of the Fathers ever doubted the difficulty of the path chosen by consecrated women. Ambrose considered the life so far beyond the capacities of human nature that the pattern for it must come, he felt, from heavenly inspiration, and that the strength to continue in this supernatural way of life must also come from heaven. "Who could deny that this way of life flows from heaven, and could hardly exist on earth if God had not descended to earth and become human?"¹⁴ To Cyprian a chaste life was like that of the angels. He felt that the physical element was so altered in the consecrated

virgin, so purified by her spiritual aspect, and the spirit in its turn so changed by the supernatural grace of God, that the virgin grew beyond those sinful desires which were a natural part of human nature. The result was that she became more like an angel than like a human being.¹⁵ These Fathers realized that human nature and society set up innumerable powerful barriers to perseverance in the life of consecrated virginity.

In addition to her status as the bride of Christ the position of the consecrated virgin in the Christian community rested on her heroism in assuming the rigors of the ascetic life of her own free will. That made her equivalent to the martyrs. Ambrose declared that the consecrated virgin made herself into a martyr by choosing her life, and Jerome called virginity "a daily martyrdom."¹⁶ It was therefore one of the most important developments in the history of Christian thought when the idea arose that this voluntary martyrdom could only be properly expressed in an organized form: through monasticism. No one has so excellently outlined the components of this life of martyrdom expressed through the monastic form as has Stephan Hilpisch:

Everything that the old asceticism and the old consecrated virginity had already suggested and had practiced to a certain extent--separation from the world and total surrender to Christ--received concrete form in monasticism. Monasticism also provided a certain enhancement and a strengthening through external forms vis-a-vis the dangers which threatened the ascetics and virgins who lived in the world, and despite which many succeeded. That was the total rejection of possessions and of all earthly things; unquestioning obedience to authority; communal life; uniformity in dress; and a life of prayer and work according to an established norm.¹⁷

Proponents of monasticism sought to end those irregularities which arose in the first centuries of consecrated virginity. Those irregularities developed because there were lacking means by which consecrated women were protected from the cares and temptations of the world they had supposedly left. Before examining the problems faced by the proponents of the monastic life, their successes and failures, it is essential to consider the components of those ideals which they sought to enact.

There are a number of specific characteristics of the ideal nun and of the ideal community of nuns to be found in the various monastic rules for women, in the vitae of saints, in synodal legislation, and in the capitularies of the kings. Although these sources vary greatly in sophistication and although the people who drew them up are separated by many years, there is a surprising agreement in all of them about the importance of the monastic as opposed to other forms of consecration, and about the personal and communal qualities to be expected of the followers of the monastic way.

1. Separation from the world was the very basis of the monastic life. It was the raison d'être of monasticism to provide protection for the interior life of community and individual. That is what gave this form of consecration its meaning and purpose--to shield the religious community from the distractions of the secular world. Women entered the monastic life to worship God as they felt he should be worshiped. The monastery was inhabited by people who thought that true Christianity was not possible in the secular world

because that world contained too many temptations or distractions.

Separation had two foundations:

- (a) Personal separation from the world was felt to begin with the individual. The pleasures, cares, and relationships which were typical of the secular person were to have no place in the life of the nun. She was to strive to eliminate those emotions which were based on human as opposed to spiritual desires. To that end she was supposed to limit her contacts with her family and to cut herself off from their secular concerns with wealth and power. She was also to restrict severely associations with all other secular persons, female as well as male, and with male religious.
- (b) Separation of the community depended on the independence of that community. Its religious functions could not be performed properly if outsiders--lay or ecclesiastical--continually interfered in the management of its internal affairs. The management of those affairs was the responsibility of the abbess. Therefore, the abbess was ideally selected from among the members of the community, either by cooption by the ruling abbess or by election by the members, in the absence of any pressure from outsiders. The economic support of the community had to be assured so that religious functions were not neglected while individual members were forced to provide their own support. The ideal community would be able to

provide each member with sufficient food, drink, and clothing. This was essential if the monastic ideals of communal life and individual poverty were to be realized.

2. Certain personal attitudes were expected to evolve out of a mentality which had nothing to do with secular conceptions about life.¹⁸

- (a) Voluntary personal poverty: the true nun had no personal possessions, was indeed supposed to feel contempt for such things. It was not her business to concern herself with the provision of her food and clothing. That was taken care of by the bishop, by the abbess, and by the communal life. All things in the monastery belonged to every member equally, thus to none individually.
- (b) Stability: the nun might not leave the monastery for any reason until the day she died.
- (c) Perseverance: the foundation of stability. Once having put her hand to the plow the nun was never to look back, no matter what trials beset her. Rules and synodal decrees often repeated the warning that went with the exhortation: "Remember Lot's wife" ("Mementote uxoris Loth . . .").
- (d) Chastity: concern for the chastity of the nun in its most obvious sense was not lacking in ecclesiastical legislation. Of the monastic rules that of Caesarius devoted the most space to the issue of sexual temptation.

But in all sources (and this was certainly true of Caesarius' writings) the most frequent mention of chastity was in connection with stability, the family, and illicit marriage. In Frankish society it was much more likely that a nun would lose her chastity through leaving the monastery (willingly or not) as a result of family pressure to get married than through fornication. She thereby showed a lack of stability and perseverance, lost her chastity, the gift she had offered to Christ, and committed adultery, not fornication, because she was already married to Christ.

- (e) Obedience: only through absolute obedience to a regularly elected abbess could regular and peaceful life be maintained in the community.
- (f) A sense of equality and of humility: all were to be social equals within a monastic community. No one was to pride herself on former wealth or status in the secular world, nor was this to be a criterion for promotion to monastic offices. Lack of humility and mutual respect, like disobedience was a source of disruption and scandal. A frequent refrain of the rules was, "You may not go to law" ("Nullas lites habeatis").

3. The collection of individuals formed a monastic community. The personal characteristics of the ideal nun facilitated her operation as a member of the community and destroyed her proud sense of

individuality; she was to have no individuality. The qualities of the ideal community, in addition to those found above under "Separation" were:

- (a) Communal life: as already mentioned, this was essential to the maintenance of individual poverty. Also, since all were equally poor and equally rich there would be no basis for jealousy or oppression due to wealth and the power it brought. Communal life was an instrument to destroy any undue sense of individuality. No one was to have private quarters; all worked together toward a common goal; all ate together at the same time; all worshiped together at the same time.
- (b) Regular life: the accomplishment of personal and community monastic virtues depended on the existence of and strict adherence to a clearly established rule. Monastic life, it was felt, could not be based on ad hoc formulations, nor on a set of rules to which there were continual exceptions. Thus the term "regular life" can be defined as both life according to a written rule and as an orderly, quiet, harmonious life. Defined in the latter sense regular life can be seen as that life which resulted when all the other prescriptions for individual and community were fulfilled by women who understood the prescriptions, agreed with them, and strove to live according to their spirit.

The reformers realized that if monasticism was to be the only valid form of consecration for women it was essential that the separation from the world which made monasticism possible be properly observed. The nun was to be like Radegund who, entering the monastery at Poitiers and being elected abbess, so completely dedicated herself to the religious life that

. . . she gained for herself in heaven much more than she lost on earth. Soon her holy conversion began to express itself in humility of conversation, in abundance of charity, in the light of chastity, in the fatness of fasting, and she gave herself with such total love to her Spouse that, embracing God with a pure heart, she realized that Christ lived within her.¹⁹

But the best of wills could be overwhelmed by secular cares and temptations, and so it was essential that the secular world be kept as far away as possible. The ideal situation would be that demanded by Caesarius in his rule: "Secular matrons and girls or other women, or men in secular dress are to be forbidden entrance."²⁰ Caesarius stood for an extremely severe cloister; he forbade convivia for even the most important people, such as abbots, monks, priests, the parents of the abbess, even bishops, including the bishop of Arles.²¹ Aurelian, a successor of Caesarius as bishop of Arles (546-51), agreed with this strict construction of separation in his own rule for nuns. He excluded secular men and women from the monastery precincts, except for the basilica and the salutatorium.²²

Donatus of Besançon, in his rule for nuns written c. 624, adopted Caesarius' prohibition against the custom of giving convivia for important visitors of monasteries, but with Donatus we see the beginning of compromise in the exclusion of secular persons.²³

Donatus provided that women or girls in secular dress, noble or not, were not to be permitted to enter the monastery, whether to pray, to visit relatives, or for whatever reason, "except those who are religious and godfearing, whom the mother of the monastery judges to be worthy because of the merits of their lives."²⁴

Obviously, there had to be some exceptions to this strict separation from the outside world. Workmen to do repairs were one such exception. According to Caesarius they were to enter in the presence of the provisor, the legal representative of the community, but the abbess must know and approve of their presence.²⁵ Aurelian made it clear that though the provisors were important officers they might not enter the monastery at will, especially if they were secular. The provisors might only enter if they were accompanying repairmen, "and this only if the abbess sees a need for them to enter; as for others, they have no license or liberty to enter."²⁶ Donatus echoed the idea; the provisor might enter only if there was repair work to be overseen, and he had to notify the abbess of his intent to enter.²⁷

The synodal decrees and capitularies did not devote as much space to the specific means by which communities of women were to be protected from intrusions by secular persons as did the rules. Those sources were more concerned with regulating in detail the relations between consecrated women and priests. However, as early as the Council of Epaon of 517 the attitudes expressed in subsequent capitularies and synodal decrees toward both priests and laymen were established:

Men are not to enter monasteries of women for any purpose or ministrations whatever unless they are of virtuous life (probata vitae) and of appropriate age.²⁸

Only the good of the community could justify its entrance by persons who were not members of the institution. This good might have had to do with the upkeep of the buildings or it might have concerned the spiritual welfare of the members. But the admittance of outsiders had to have a purpose; their presence had to improve the situation of the women and facilitate the functioning of the religious life of the community. It was felt that good could not come from evil persons. The bishops at the Council of Arles agreed with their predecessors at Epaon that this was so. In their decrees they copied the statement of the Council of Epaon verbatim.²⁹

Further evidence that this ideal first established in the sixth century was considered valid in the Carolingian period is found in Council of Chalon of 813: "No vassal of the abbess nor any minister nor cleric nor layperson may enter a cloister of the maid-servants of Christ unless the necessity of work (necessitatis operandi) requires it."³⁰ The relatively new status of vassal was added to the old list of those who might enter only with good reason. The bishops at Chalon were determined not to allow political and social developments to create loopholes which would lessen the separation of communities of consecrated women from the secular world.

Since few secular persons (at least those who were not related to members of a community) would have a legitimate reason for entrance into a community of women, they would generally have presented less of a problem than did priests. While priests were indispensable to

a community of women, they were also men and did not live a monastic life. Capitularies and conciliar decrees shared the concern first expressed by Caesarius about the repeated contact between priests and nuns which the service of the mass required. Priests were outsiders, and everyone agreed that they must be approached with care. Like carpenters, priests had a job to perform; once it was done they must leave. The frequent connection of priests with secular persons in synodal decrees and capitularies as individuals who must have good reasons to enter a community of women is instructive. There was no office so exalted that it permitted its holder to enter a cloister as he pleased. The protection which separation from the world afforded to monastic life needed to be absolute if it was to be worth anything. Further, all nonmonastic persons, even priests, needed to understand that they were in the monastery to perform a function, that this was the only reason they had been granted entrance, and that once their function was performed they were totally out of place and no longer welcome.

Caesarius laid the foundations for those attitudes toward priests in his rule. The only men he would allow into the "secret parts" of the monastery were the bishops, presbyters, deacons, subdeacons, and one or two readers, "whose age and life commends them, who ought to read the mass daily."³¹ Not all bishops and priests were acceptable, but only those of proper age and probity. The bishops of the Council of Mâcon of 583 seem to have been inspired by this provision of Caesarius' rule, for they commanded something quite similar: "that no bishop, presbyter, deacon, cleric, or any

layperson is to be permitted to enter a monastery of women unless he is of virtuous life and proper age, and as utility directs."³² It was the purpose of separation to protect probity of life; thus all who came inside the monastic precincts were to be of the highest character. We have already seen that Donatus would permit the entrance of those secular persons who, after careful scrutiny by the abbess, showed themselves to be holy and godfearing individuals.

The continuing importance of the ideal of separation even against priests and monks is illustrated by Rudolf or Fulda's vita of Leoba. The events it related were from the eighth century, but the vita itself was written c. 836. The community at Winburn, where Leoba became a nun, was a double monastery. Such an institution might seem to offer ample opportunity for mischief, but Rudolf assures us that Winburn was a perfect monastery.

Never was a woman allowed into the men's section or men into the women's section except for the presbyters who were allowed into the women's church in order to perform the mass, and once the mass was solemnly finished with a prayer, had to return immediately to their own side. For the women having renounced the world wanted to associate only with their own group, and never entered the exitura unless a rational cause or some great necessity forced them out, and then only with counsel.³³

The source of this strictly kept cloister was the strong leadership of Abbess Tetta.

A rigor of discipline always flourished in that place beyond what was to be found in others, and maintained with such sollicitude that none of the women was permitted access to the clerics. For the virgins, with whom she [Tetta] remained continually, so little desired contact with men that not only laymen or clerics but even their own bishops were denied access to the congregation of women.³⁴

Again and again we find that the bishop himself was considered an outsider, that even his rank was not exalted enough to permit him to ride roughshod over the boundaries of the cloister. The first quotation from Leoba's vita is especially interesting, for it shows a group of women that was totally dedicated to its own monastic society and had no interest for any other (" . . . saeculo renuntians earum collegio sociare voluerat . . ."). The ideal was a group of women so intensely involved in the monastic life that a bishop would be as much an intrusive force as a secular person.

If such was the attitude toward bishops, priests could expect no greater privileges. The basic ideal laid down in most ecclesiastical legislation concerning relations between priests and consecrated women was ". . . clerics and laymen are not to enter monasteries of women, except for a priest to sing mass" ³⁵ The concept was put more indirectly in the requirement that "Concerning monasteries of women, that the priest shall be permitted to come to them at the proper time for the performance of the solemnities of the mass, and then he is to return to his own church." ³⁶ Outside of serving mass the priest had no reason to be inside a monastery of women. It was his duty to appear punctually at the proper times for mass, then to disappear until his services were needed again.

That the services rendered by priests to monasteries of women were at all times carefully defined and limited is illustrated by two sources from the reign of Charlemagne. The Council of Tours of 813 required that

Presbyters, deacons, and other clerics are not to be permitted residence within the cloister of women's monasteries. Nor are they to enter monasteries except at those times when the solemnities of the mass are being celebrated.³⁷

It might seem at first thought that having clerics closely available would have been a convenience for all concerned. Yet the intrusion of nonmonastic persons into the heart of the cloister was considered a spiritual inconvenience by the reformers of consecration for women.

The Council of Fréjus of 796/7 required that the separation of consecrated women from the world be kept inviolate. To this end the Council called on the bishops to act in their traditional role as protectors of the consecrated women in their dioceses. Presbyters who wished to visit or preach at monasteries of women were to obtain the permission of the bishop.³⁸ It was recognized at Fréjus that priests could provide religious services to communities of women other than the saying of mass. But those services were regarded with yet more suspicion than the performance of the mass, which did not require the permission of the bishop. The laudable desire to preach was put on the same level as the desire simply to visit a religious institution of women, and did not create an automatic exception to the severity of separation.

It might be asked if there was a different attitude toward monks, since they were also members of the monastic world. The Council of Paris of 829 established "That access of canons and monks to monasteries of consecrated women is not to be allowed unless there is a good cause to do so."³⁹ This indicates that monks and canons did not have special privileges due to their status. But there was

no definition of what a good cause (causa utilitatis) might be, nor of who was to be the judge of utility.

A solution may have been offered in the Episcoporum ad Hludovicum imperatorem relatio of 829. The issue here was that certain monks and canons, without consulting the bishop, had imprudently gone visiting houses of nuns and of canonesses. From this all sorts of evils had arisen; therefore, "We henceforth forbid such a deed, except for the case of preaching (causa praedicationis), because it is congruous with neither the canonical nor with the monastic profession."⁴⁰

As far as some churchmen were concerned it was the bishop who was to regulate contacts between monks and consecrated women. Of course, monks would not have any justification for regular contacts with consecrated women, as did priests. Also, their reasons for contact had to be of a religious nature, as the Episcoporum . . . relatio foresaw only one reason for monks or canons entering a community of consecrated women, to preach.

In general, then, the ecclesiastical legislators of the whole period from the sixth to the ninth century were at one in maintaining the necessity of a fairly severe separation of consecrated women from the nonmonastic world. But the legislators were not unrealistic, for they did realize that there were legitimate reasons for the contact of nuns with outsiders, or at least reasons that would legitimate the entrance of an outsider into a community of women. There are two sources from the early ninth century which expressed this guarded practicality particularly well. The Capitula ecclesiastica ad Salz of 803-804 states that no one might enter a monastery of women except

for the presbyter, who was to enter at the proper time, "for the good of the monastery according to canonical institution."⁴¹ A capitulary of c. 813 forbade anyone, layperson or cleric, unless he was a presbyter serving mass, to enter a monastery of women, "unless the needs of the monastery require it."⁴²

The separation of nuns from the world was accomplished on two levels. First, entrance of potentially disturbing elements was permitted only under those conditions in which their presence would be least distracting: it must be for the good of the monastery. Second, those outsiders who were admitted must be of the most virtuous type. Unlike the actions and conversation of the average nonmonastic person the behavior of those who were admitted would detract the thoughts of the members of the community as little as possible from their proper lines.

There was a special group of laymen which received much attention in rules and in ecclesiastical legislation: the relatives of consecrated women. However, while the rules were quite concerned about contacts between nuns and their relatives the subject was not touched on at all in synodal decrees, nor in the capitularies. Councils and kings were interested in the removal of women for purposes of marriage, whereas the rules were concerned with the continual contact between consecrated women and their relatives, which prevented the nun from developing a monastic personality and permitted her to be lured away from her religious retreat. It is the latter problem which will be considered here, since it has to do with the ideal relationship of the nun to her relatives. The actual

relationship of consecrated noblewomen to their relatives and the marriage of consecrated women will be considered in Chapters III and IV.

The evidence already presented shows that the strictest bishops did not envision a kind of monasticism that shut consecrated women off totally from any contact with the nonmonastic or even with the secular world. There were legitimate reasons for the contact of nuns with secular persons, and this was certainly true of contact with relatives, particularly with parents. What the rules forbade were secret encounters or gifts, and excessively frequent meetings between consecrated women and their families.

The danger of continual contact between the consecrated woman and her family was most forcefully put by Caesarius in his letter to the nuns of Arles, entitled Vereor (I Fear). In Vereor Caesarius insisted that those devoted to God should avoid familiarity not only with all outsiders but also with their own parents. For vessels consecrated for use at the altar were not removed and used in laypeople's houses, the returned to the church for sacred use. Such use for human needs would defile them.

Just as holy vessels turned to human use cannot and ought not to be returned to the church, so it does not behove, it does not become, it is not advantageous for the religious woman to implicate herself in the many obligations of her parents, or to bind herself to any extraneous person through pernicious familiarity.⁴³

The problem was to define the proper relationship of the ideal nun to her relatives. This ideal relationship, like all monastic ideals, was not created by theorists in a vacuum but was formed in reaction

to a situation which experienced bishops felt to be full of abuses.

Caesarius made it clear that if anyone came to the monastery at Arles desiring to see a relative, he was not to be denied a meeting with her, as long as a senior member of the community was present.⁴⁴ Donatus adopted Caesarius' command for his own rule, as did Aurelian, though Aurelian phrased his chapter in stricter and more general terms: "No one is to go visiting unless she is accompanied by the abbess or the prioress or at least by another senior whom the abbess has chosen."⁴⁵

Here is an element which was common to all chapters of all rules which considered the issue of contacts between nuns and their families, as with any outsiders: a suspicion of secrecy. The abbess herself was not exempt from the need to do all business with outsiders in the open and never alone. Both Caesarius and Donatus insisted that she was not to proceed to the salutatorium without accompaniment--"sine digno suo."⁴⁶ Aurelian and Donatus agreed with Caesarius that no one was to have her own cell or other place that could be locked, but that all should sleep in one place.⁴⁷ This had to do with the maintenance of the communal life, to be sure; but not primarily. First, there is the mention of locks, which would provide secret places. Second, in the Recapitulation of his rule Caesarius makes clear what is in question:

That no one is to have her own cell; so that familiarity or any kind of relationship with laypersons, whether men or women, can take place in secret.⁴⁸

Thus, it was not even a matter of potential sexual misconduct that was uppermost in Caesarius' mind, but of secrecy per se. His feeling was that nothing that must be hidden from the community could be good.

But it was not only secret meetings that were considered evil. Any kind of contact was to take place with the knowledge and permission of the abbess. Caesarius spoke of those who secretly accepted letters or gifts as "Those who, which God forbid, have so far progressed in evil" The sending of letters or of gifts without the permission of the abbess was a sacrilege. The proper way to go about it was this:

. . . nevertheless, for the good will of the parents or other acquaintances, if anyone wishes to send a gift of bread she is to ask the abbess; if the abbess agrees let it be given to the doorkeeper (posticiaria), and she will transmit it in the name of the sender . . . the sender is not to presume either to send or to receive anything without the knowledge of the doorkeeper.⁴⁹

Another chapter of Caesarius' rule seems to be directed more toward the relatives than toward the nuns. If anyone wished to send his relative any necessities such as clothes, they were not to be received secretly. Those who kept watch at the entrance to the cloister were to prevent the entrance into the monastery of anything which was "against the desire or counsel of the abbess."⁵⁰

It is evident from his writings that to Caesarius proper relations between nuns and their families lay at the heart of a correctly ordered monastic life. Aurelian and Donatus adopted Caesarius' requirements in this regard for their own rules, but in briefer form. To neither Aurelian nor Donatus was the relationship between nuns and their relatives a special case. Both stressed the

necessity for openness in contacts between nuns and relatives, and both emphasized the role of the abbess and obedience to her decisions concerning contacts with relatives more than did Caesarius. Aurelian forbade the secret reception of any articles; it was in the power of the abbess to determine if the gift was needed by the person to whom it was intended. If she decided to do so, she might order the gift to be used for the good of the whole community.⁵¹ As for letters, they were to be neither received nor sent without the permission of the abbess.⁵²

Donatus' consideration of the giving and receiving of gifts stressed the importance of absolute poverty and of obedience to the abbess. No one was to have anything, nor was she to give or to receive anything, "neither tablets nor stylus," without the order of the abbess, nor was she to possess even her own will.⁵³ Donatus copied Caesarius word for word on the subject of giving and receiving gifts, but the title of the chapter stressed obedience: "That no one is to receive anything from her parents without permission."⁵⁴

The ideal relationship between nuns and their families was one in which all parties kept the gulf between their ways of life continually in mind. It was the duty of the nun to sever her emotional ties to her brothers, sisters, and parents and to establish new ties with God and with the monastic life. She could not shuttle back and forth between two worlds either physically or emotionally. All the monastic rules agreed that her contacts with her family should not be similar to what they had been in the secular world. Meetings were never private, but always in the presence of the

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consecrated woman's superiors. Meetings might take place only in that part of the monastery set aside for such events, the salutatorium. Even the reception of transmission of letters and gifts was not private, nor was there any guarantee that the abbess would agree to their reception or transmission. It was up to the abbess to decide upon the use of anything that entered the monastery. It was the good of the community that came first, not the pleasure of an individual. These were the means by which the individual and the community were protected from the temptations of the world, signals which repeatedly reminded consecrated women and their families that their relationship had changed drastically. The emotional ties and the obedience of the consecrated woman belonged no longer to her family, but to her abbess and to her way of life.

Caesarius of Arles devoted a large amount of time and effort to establishing the economic independence of the congregation of women which he had founded. He realized that the religious functions of the community would suffer if the nuns were forced to act merely as an economic unit in order to survive, rather than as members of a religious institution. In his rule he gave the abbess the responsibility of seeing to the physical as well as the spiritual well being of the nuns. She was to arrange the supply of food to each member, to transact the business of the community, to oversee the making of wool, etc.⁵⁵

Yes Caesarius' interest in the economic support of the monastery was always set in a context of concern for its independence.

He wanted to make the community at Arles independent of the goodwill of the bishop. Caesarius faced the same problem as did all founders of monasteries: from where was its economic support to come? Many bishops had alienated diocesan properties to support their pet projects, but just prior to Caesarius' foundation of the community at Arles in 512 such alienation has been prohibited by the Council of Rome of 502, and once more by the Council of Agde of 506. The prohibition would be repeated at Rome in 535.⁵⁶ However, Caesarius' task was eased somewhat, since the Council of Agde had conceded that the use of ecclesiastical goods for beneficent ends was permissible. Yet if his monastery were to have the perpetual security for which Caesarius hoped, something less tenuous was essential. In 513 Caesarius boldly asked for a papal bull forbidding the removal of ecclesiastical goods from the use to which they had been donated, unless the properties were to be used for the support of a monastery.

As Leo Ueding points out, Pope Symmachus' reply was not very encouraging.

The pope answered with the desired prohibition, "unless it happens that it becomes necessary to support retired clerics or religious in monasteries, or pilgrims; this is nevertheless to be enjoyed not perpetually but temporally while they live" ("nisi forsitan aut clericis emeritis aut monasteriis religionis intuitu, aut certe perigrinis, si necessitas largire suaserit; sic tamen, ut haec ipsa non perpetuo, sed temporaliter, donec vixerint, perfruantur"). This limitation "while they live" is appropriate for the clerics and pilgrims, but it seems unusual if applied to the monasteries. In any case, for Caesarius it was not a reassuring decision.⁵⁷

Caesarius tried to obtain from the new pope, Hormisdas, a clearer definition of the rights of his monastery. This pope's reply was satisfactory enough to be attached to the rule. Hormisdas rather

testily made it clear, however, that this permission to alienate diocesan properties in order to provide economic support for the monastery of St. John at Arles was a one-time exception for this one monastery.⁵⁸

The community of St. John was almost the only beneficiary of Caesarius' will. Here he insisted on the independence of the community from interference by the bishop or anyone else in its internal economic affairs. Addressing future bishops of Arles Caesarius asked them

. . . nevertheless, that you may not listen to the importunate suggestions of others against our monastery, I adjure you through the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and through the dreadful day of judgement, that the ancient enemy may not prevail over you so that you acquiesce in the oppression of the maidservants [ancillas]; or carry away anything they possess.⁵⁹

Caesarius took the opportunity to transfer more diocesan property to the support of the nuns.⁶⁰

Caesarius' concept that monastic institutions should be free from episcopal control found no favor among his fellow bishops. What they emphasized instead was the importance of responsible management of the goods of the monastery by the internal authorities. They envisioned a continuation of the traditional patronage of the bishops over the communities of women in their dioceses, with the abbess having great responsibility in the day-to-day management of economic affairs. Their ideal was a partnership in which the bishop was the superior but in which the abbess was in most instances the actual manager.

That an abbess had a great deal of economic power even without Caesarius' arrangements is seen in Aurelian's rule, where she was forbidden to give away or sell monastery property or to do anything against the rule.⁶¹ This is an interesting combination, for it made proper maintenance of the economic security of the community a precept of the rule and a quality of the ideal abbess. Caesarius was concerned about the interference of an outside force--the bishop--in the economic affairs of the community. Aurelian saw that an institution's economic security could be sapped by irresponsibility from inside.

Donatus supported Aurelian's view more than that of Caesarius, a significant fact in view of Donatus' strong dependence on Caesarius for the formation of his own rule (a large part of Donatus' rule is composed of verbatim repetition of chapters of Caesarius'). He agreed with Caesarius that it was the responsibility of the abbess to see to the economic benefit of the nuns, but he did not connect her economic duties with her position as head of an independent establishment. He was more explicit than Caesarius about the exact means by which those duties were to be carried out. He insisted on a careful accounting of income and expense.

From whom [the nuns appointed by the abbess to oversee economic matters] the abbess is to receive a brief; and when others succeed their sisters in that post she will know what was given and what was received.⁶²

These problems did not receive any attention by synods nor by kings until the early ninth century. The bishops continued to see their relationship to women's communities in the traditional fashion. They were the protectors and patrons, and they felt that

it was up to them to determine the economic support of those communities as they saw fit. It was not up to the abbess to determine on their own what her attitudes toward the economic support of her community should be. This does not mean that the bishops succeeded in making the abbesses into ciphers in the economic management of their communities, nor that the bishops wanted to do so. The evidence to be discussed in Chapters III and IV will show that the abbesses were seldom as subordinate to the bishops as Aurelian and Donatus would have liked. As a result several sources stressed the duties of the abbesses rather than those of the bishops in maintaining the economic security of their communities.

The Capitulare missorum Niumagae of 806 reminded bishops, abbots, and abbesses to take diligent care of church treasuries so that the gems and vases were not lost through perfidy or negligence.⁶³ After nearly two hundred years the idea was still current that the economic security of religious institutions could be destroyed by the mismanagement of their own authorities. There are numerous sources to bear this out; they will also be discussed in Chapters III and IV. The good abbess was a watchful manager of goods.⁶⁴ The Episcoporum ad Hludovicum imperatorem relatio of 829 reminded abbots, abbesses, and lay possessors of religious institutions of the importance of providing for the physical as well as the spiritual needs of their charges. If the monks and nuns did not receive their stipends because of the negligence of those in charge the divine offices would be abandoned and the congregations forced to live irreligiously.⁶⁵ The Council of Aachen of 836 claimed that communities of women in several

places had become more brothels than religious institutions due to the negligence of those in charge. Therefore,

Those in charge of monasteries are admonished that they are to excell their subordinates in probity of morals and as examples, and that they are not to presume to remove the necessary victuals from their subordinates for their own [the leaders'] use.⁶⁶

A salutary commandment, considering the actuality of the treatment of communities of women by those in control of them.

Beyond these general exhortations to responsibility and virtue the only concrete suggestions ecclesiastical legislators had to offer was that communities not admit more members than their economic endowments would support.⁶⁷ The emphasis was on the thoughtful abbess who considered the good of the whole community in the admission of members.

The Council of Mainz of 813 added a further practical suggestion. It required that the missi along with the bishops examine the monasteries of monks, of canons, and of women in every diocese to make sure

. . . that they are located in likely and appropriate places, where adequate supplies of necessities which are useful to a monastery are available, as is said in the holy rule: "A monastery should be so placed that all necessities can be obtained within the monastery, so that the monks or clerics do not need to go outside, which is not good for their souls."⁶⁸

Concern for the economic support of the communities of women was not only an ancient and practical episcopal tradition. It was commanded by that monastic rule which the reformers of the Carolingian period looked to as a guide in all their provisions about monastic life.

Some of these reformers--and this is definitely true of Benedict of Aniane--were familiar with the works of Caesarius, of Aurelian, and

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of Donatus, and that could not but have helped reinforce their concept of the ideal relationship between monasteries for women and the economic support of those communities.

The ideal of monastic poverty for women is best described by the rule of Waldebert in a chapter significantly entitled, "That no nun should claim any personal possessions."

Nothing personal is to be possessed in a monastery, but rather all such things should be held in contempt on account of the name of the Lord. Of what use would it be for a faithful soul--to whom the world is crucified, and she to the world--to claim as her own things of the world?

Why should another confer material goods on a sister, who has for the sake of Christ given her will over to the abbess?
For all things possessed in a monastery are common to all.
. . . Thus all things are held in common so that no one may
presume to give or to receive unless the abbess permits 69

Individual poverty was not a thing unto itself. It occurred in a context of obedience to the abbess and of full participation in that communal life which made possible the actual absolute poverty of each individual. Seen from the point of view of the internal life of the community clandestine reception and transmission of gifts was an indication of a mind still not separated from the world. Reception and transmission of material goods ignored the submission due the abbess and withdrew the individual from the communal life of the monastery. Such actions confounded the work of a bishop like Caesarius who had taken the time to see to the economic security of the community so that the members would not have to involve themselves in affairs that had nothing to do with the religious life.

Caesarius was as concerned over the personal poverty of the members of the community of Arles as he was over the economic security of the institution as a whole. He seems to have regarded the desire for wealth as similar to lust--a desire which was intrinsic to human nature, one which had to be combatted continually. In his letter Vereor he addressed the nobles among the nuns.

If you were born noble, rejoice more in the humility of religion than in secular dignity; give away your terrestrial substance, so that you do not find that, where you could have had spiritual wings by giving well quickly, by keeping something for yourself or by tardily disposing of your goods you have shackles.

Then he turned to those of poor families.

If anyone was poor before she assumed holy religion she ought to give thanks to God, who has spared her the burden of the goods of this world. For many, which is too bad, are so held by their possessions that they are not able to reach their eternal fatherland.⁷⁰

Caesarius assumed that the possession of wealth would affect the personality even after the property itself was renounced. He forbade those who had been rich in the secular world to boast about it: "What good is it to dispose of goods and by giving to the poor to become poor if your miserable soul is inflated with diabolical pride?"⁷¹ For all were supposed to live in unanimity and mutual respect. Each aspect of the separated life existed in a context composed of all the other elements of that life. It was Caesarius' opinion that where one element was missing a truly monastic life could not exist.

The rule of Caesarius shows some confusion about the best way to dispose of property. In one chapter Caesarius required that widows

were not to be accepted until they had gotten rid of their possessions. The method of disposal was up to the individual; she could dispose of her goods through charter (of donation?), through donation (without a charter to record the deed?), or through sale. At any rate disposal was essential, ". . . because consecrated women who have possessions are not able to gain perfection."⁷² In a later chapter of the rule, however, it was commanded that those women who were not able to dispose of their property while their parents were alive, or those who were minors "are to be compelled to draw up charters, by which they may have possession of the parental goods until they come of age." These women were warned not to follow the evil example of Ananias and Sapphira.⁷³

It is true that, as Hofmeister says,

These decisions assume that the nuns did not lose the capacity to possess goods because of their vows, since otherwise they would not have been able to dispose freely of the goods they inherited from their parents after taking their vows.⁷⁴

On the other hand, the situation was only temporary, and applied only to certain individuals. There came a time when all nuns had to divest themselves of all goods and of any legal claim to them forever. Until then there is no indication in the rule or in any of Caesarius' writings that anyone could benefit from any of the goods she might possess de facto. The spirit and provisions of the rule forbid any such interpretation. The nature of life in the monastery of St. John simply offered no opportunity for the use of personal goods or of money.

Yet another chapter of Caesarius' rule provided a different means of disposal. This method was adopted from Augustine's rule for monks, while the other chapters which dealt with the disposal of wealth were purely the work of Caesarius.⁷⁵ This third method was that the entrant was to give her possessions to the abbess, "for the common use of the community." But in the very same chapter, in his discussion of nuns who injure the harmony of the community by boasting about their former wealth, Caesarius asks, as we have seen, "What good is it to give away one's goods and by giving to the poor to become poor . . .?"⁷⁶

The conflicting passages have two effects. First, the rule suggests several uncoordinated and unrelated ways of disposing of property. More, the two specific means provided by Chapter 21 of Caesarius' rule contradict the freedom he had previously given to entrants in Chapters 5 and 6. Neither of the first two chapters offers any guide to the disposal of goods to entrants who were neither widows nor still under parental control; they must simply rid themselves of property before entering the monastery. As with the widows, all entrants were free to dispose of their property as they wished.

Donation to the poor was the method Caesarius preferred, and he came to regret the freedom he originally gave to entrants in the disposal of their property. That fact is made evident in Chapter 6 of his letter Vereor, which has been discussed in some detail above. It seems from this chapter that Caesarius had attempted to limit the freedom of the nuns to donate their goods to whomever they pleased, and that he had run into strong opposition from certain members of

the community. His attempt at reform had run up against the reality of the Frankish family ties. Certain women had given their goods to their parents rather than to the poor. But the parents already had more than enough, and Caesarius claimed that their souls were endangered by a surfeit of material possessions. Parents were to be honored, to be sure, but Caesarius felt that there were better ways of honoring them than by endangering their souls. One way of honoring parents was to give to the poor in their name. Caesarius reminded the nuns that Jesus had commanded his followers to sell their goods and give the proceeds to the poor; in that way one would win reward in heaven.⁷⁷

Caesarius had come to realize that the freedom he had permitted the entrants in Chapters 5 and 6 of this rule encouraged the continued existence of those ties to the family which he sought to sever elsewhere. It was the purpose of a monastic rule to show the entrant the qualities of the separated mind. The provisions of Chapters 5 and 6 had not put personal poverty into an overall context. In Chapter 21 on the other hand poverty was presented as part of obedience to the abbess, of acceptance of the communal life, and of Christian concern for others--the poor. In Vereor Caesarius tried to drive those ideas home. Here he stressed concern for the poor, care for the spiritual wellbeing of the parents, and separation from human ties. He insisted that the nuns should have thought beyond the obvious solution of giving their goods to those most closely related to them in the human sense. In Vereor Caesarius tried to undo the

damage done by the existence of contradictory and confusing commands in his rule.

Aurelian avoided similar problems by a simple requirement that no one was to be admitted unless she had disposed of her possessions through charters of donation or sale.⁷⁸ That is, he adopted only the basic provisions of Chapter 5 of Caesarius' rule. Donatus, however, adopted all of Caesarius' suggestions for the disposal of property.⁷⁹ Donatus added to Caesarius' ideas a warning that no one was to give or receive anything without the permission of the abbess; the nuns were not to possess their own wills.⁸⁰ The abbess would decide for each member of the community what work she would do; even that was not up to the individual to determine. All work was to be done in common and as the abbess ordered.⁸¹

Donatus was more careful than was Caesarius in his presentation of the need for personal poverty in that that ideal was placed at once in a context of the other component virtues of the monastic life. Those components made personal poverty possible: absolute obedience, communal life, severing of contacts with the secular world. The ideal was clear, but the problems remained because, as with Caesarius' rule, there was no exact definition of the means by which the ideal was to be achieved.

Perseverance was a necessary personal characteristic of every member of a monastic community. Without perseverance individual stability and an orderly life in the community as a whole was impossible. In Vereor Caesarius asserted that salvation was not achieved

through rituals but through continual vigilance and striving.

There were those, "negligent and lukewarm," whose Christianity was only a matter of words. They thought that it was sufficient to put on monastic dress. They were wrong. It was possible to change clothing in a matter of moments

. . . but to retain good morals or to combat the sweet pleasures of this world we must labor as long as we live, with Christ's help: because not he who begins but he who perseveres will be saved.⁸²

This striving in the face of all temptations and adversities was an important characteristic attributed to the saints by the writers of vitae. Radegund had no choice but to marry King Chlothar, for she was a prize of war. Yet, "Ever subject to God and following the admonitions of the priests, she was more an adherent of Christ than the consort of her husband."⁸³ In the tradition of the consecrated virgins of the patristic Church Radegund remained true to her real bridegroom, who to her was Christ, not the king. She was tireless in helping the poor, giving them alms secretly and washing their sores herself.⁸⁴ Though a queen and not a consecrated woman, she was already living up to the spirit of Caesarius' rule by becoming poor through giving to the poor. In addition, though she was married she practiced the virtue of chastity and continually fought against sexual temptations "with her mind intent on paradise."⁸⁵ Radegund always kept her goal in mind. She never forgot to honor Christ, whom she considered her real husband. In short she was already practicing the monastic virtues before she entered a monastery. Chlothar certainly thought so, as Venatius Fortunatus notes with satisfaction: "About her the king said that he had married a nun, not a queen."⁸⁶

Radegund's determination was rewarded at last. She succeeded in convincing the king to permit her to found her own monastery at Poitiers, where she was elected the first abbess.⁸⁷ There Radegund could finally devote herself completely to the life she loved. As has been noted above, her total immersion in the monastic life quickly became evident in her behavior. She excelled in humility, in charity, in chastity, and in fasting. All observers could easily detect her holiness, and she herself felt the presence of Christ within her. It was this kind of personality which the writers of monastic rules and ecclesiastical legislators sought to create.⁸⁸

But Radegund's trials were not over. Influenced by evil counselors the king approached the monastery at Poitiers with the intention of reclaiming his queen. Radegund appealed by letters to Germanus, the bishop of Paris, who was with the king. Due to Germanus' strong intercession with the king Chlothar repudiated his evil advisers and asked for Radegund's forgiveness, then left the area.

Rejoicing that she had been snatched from the jaws of the world, she magnanimously forgave and turned herself to the service of God. Now at last unshackled to follow Christ wherever he might go, him whom she had always adored, she ran to him with a devoted spirit.⁸⁹

The experience of the noblewoman Sadalberga was much less harrowing. She also was faced with the disappointment of her religious ambitions by an unwanted marriage, however, and she too was given many an opportunity to practice the virtue of perseverance. Sadalberga was a widow who had begun to direct her thoughts to religious matters. She was under the spiritual guidance of the great preacher Eustasius. As a result of his instruction she decided

to join the community of consecrated women established in the Vosges by the nobleman Romaricus, who was also a disciple of Eustasius. It seems that women of the upper nobility were required to obtain the permission of the king to withdraw themselves from secular life. At any rate, Sadalberga felt compelled to petition King Dagobert for permission to enter Romaricus' monastery.⁹⁰

But it happened that Blandinus, a royal counselor and a highly respected man, suggested that Sadalberga should not be permitted to enter religious life on her own initiative (sponte), especially since her parents were opposed to the idea. Instead, she should become his wife so that Blandinus could procreate heirs. The king so ordered.⁹¹ The need of a royal counselor for children, the need of a king to please an important ally, and the opposition of her parents to her idea forced Sadalberga to lay aside her own plans. Her marriage was not the total disaster that Radegund's had been. Whereas Radegund had had to do her good deeds secretly and against the opposition of her husband, Sadalberga had found a man who shared her interest in Christian charity. The home of Sadalberga and Blandinus became a center of hospitality to preachers and pilgrims. This couple worked together in serving their God.⁹²

In turn Sadalberga cooperated with the earthly desire of Blandinus to have heirs. Numerous children were born to the couple.⁹³ Yet we find an interesting characterization of their marriage by the anonymous author of Sadalberga's vita:

Since she was married she was therefore mindful of her husband; though each was under the law of marriage (sub iure coniugii), nevertheless both performed Christian works⁹⁴

The situation was not perfect from the monastic point of view. The married person operated "sub iure coniugii," under the human law of marital relationships, not under the law of Christ. Marriage was not the best context in which to do Christian good works. Sadalberga and Blandinus did good works despite--tamen--their distracting situation of secular marriage and raising a family.

It was Sadalberga's perseverance in her ideal despite those distractions which caught the attention of Waldebert, another famous preacher, doer of great deeds, founder of monasteries for men and women, and creator of a monastic rule for women. As a result of his intercession Blandinus agreed that the time had come to permit Sadalberga to consummate her long held desire. She entered the newly founded community for women at Laon, where she became abbess and cut herself off from any claim to her paternal inheritance so that she might claim what she felt would be a more noble inheritance in the afterlife.⁹⁵

Once again, perseverance was rewarded. Both Radegund and Sadalberga were of the noblest extraction, and both made marriages that made them very important in the secular world. Yet both women felt that there was something seriously lacking in their lives. While they both followed Caesarius' command, "If you were born noble, rejoice more in the humility of religion than in secular dignity," neither felt that she could serve God properly while she lived in the

midst of the cares and temptations of the secular world. The vitae, looking at the lives of these women from the monastic point of view, judged their good works as laudable but not adequate, since they were not the expressions of a separated life devoted wholly to religion. The women of the vitae were always painfully conscious of the fact and strove tirelessly toward a life of religious fulfillment. Only when they entered the seclusion of the monastery did their acts have a context which made them meaningful. Even their perseverance took on a different dimension for, sheltered by the cloister, perseverance permitted further progress in the life of perfection rather than merely holding the "jaws of the secular world" at bay.

A more personal view of the ideal of perseverance and the problems connected with it may be seen in several letters by and to consecrated women. In a letter of the period 716-20 the consecrated woman Eaburg wrote to Boniface telling him of her trials and asking for his prayers. She blamed her own weaknesses for many of her problems. She acknowledged that, while she knew it was true, "as it is written, 'The love of man produces sorrow, but the love of Christ illumines the heart,'" she was still overly attached to her family. That is, she had not developed separated attitudes, and the result was that her mind was continually distracted from heavenly to earthly concerns.⁹⁶ Her sister, also consecrated, was much more advanced in the practice of monastic virtue than was Eaburg. Eaburg had heard that this sister was now in a Roman prison.

But the love of Christ, which grows and flourishes in her breast is braver and stronger than chains, and perpetual love expells fear.⁹⁷

The sister had reached her stage of spiritual maturity because she had exercised her faith continually despite all obstacles. She had persevered, and this perseverance had meaning and served to fortify the life of this nun because it took place within the proper context--within the religious life. To Eaburg there must be a spirit of adventure in perseverance. She felt that it was essential to seek out the difficult path so that faith could be exercised through perseverance in the face of difficulty. To be successful in the struggle it was necessary to fortify the mind for combat by meditating on the law of God night and day. Her sister had done all these things; she was living her profession to the full. Because she was weak and had not fully exercised her faith Eaburg remained bound to the law of the flesh. Eaburg was typical of the vast majority of consecrated women of the early Middle Ages; Radegund and Sadalberga were not--that is why their society considered them saints.⁹⁸

This aspect of perseverance, continual preparedness, was echoed by Boniface in a letter of 723-55 to Eaburg ("Bugga"). In his letter Boniface consoled Bugga, who was facing many trials. He pointed out to her that God had called her "daughter." Boniface hoped in this way not only to console and encourage Bugga, but to remind her of the passage in which the term was used: in Psalm 44, verses 11 and 12, the psalm most appropriate for the consecrated woman.

Listen my daughter, and see, and lend your ear; forget
your people and your father's house, for the king desires
your beauty.

Boniface suggested that the trouble might be that Bugga was not quite as emotionally separated from the secular world as she should be. He clearly wanted Bugga to carry out the commands of the psalm, as had Radegund, Sadalberga, and Eaburg's sister.

Therefore, Boniface encouraged Bugga to

against all adversities, whether of the heart or of the body, oppose the shield of faith and of patience; so that, with the aid of Christ your spouse, you may complete to the glory of God in beautiful old age the construction of the evangelical tower which you began in good youth, so that when Christ comes again you may be worthy of going to meet him with the wise virgins with a shining lamp full of oil.⁹⁹

Boniface has given a classical analysis of what was involved in the monastic ideal of perseverance. Both soul and body were protected against adversity by the practice of faith and patience. Patience was important, for it was felt that one must bear up under adversity and continue to work at achieving perfection in the monastic life despite all obstacles. Perseverance, as the vitae of Radegund and Sadalberga show, was not thought of as a passive virtue. It was continual striving that made the good nun equivalent to the wise virgins of the parable; by constant foresight and correctly guided action she made sure that she was ready to meet Christ when the time came.

Alcuin used similar terms in his letter to Aedilburga (Eugenia, as he called her), abbess of Flaedanbyrg, a daughter of King Offa. He encouraged her to continue in the life of chastity by stressing the rewards in the afterlife waiting for those who had persevered. She who hoped to enter heaven dared not slumber, weighted

down with inertia. Instead, she must knock at the gates of the heavenly city night and day with prayers. She must desire above all to leave this prison of the flesh. Her great diligence would open the gates of salvation to her.¹⁰⁰ Aedilburga was meant to think of the wise virgins who were always prepared. Alcuin stressed even more than Boniface the need for the consecrated woman to participate in her own salvation. Her unceasing wakefulness gave her the time for the prayers she offered to heaven day and night, and those prayers made her existence known in the eternal city. Heaven was to be approached with the same unstinting effort as were the trials of daily life.

The last point is illustrated by a second letter of Alcuin to Aedilburga of 797-804, wherein he exhorts her to remain steadfast despite the oppression of the king. His emphasis was on patience in the face of temporal adversity. Adversity, according to Alcuin, gave Aedilburga the opportunity to exercise and perfect her faith. He intimated that the truly devastating experiences of life are good for the soul, in that they teach the patience with which those tribulations may in the end be conquered.¹⁰¹

It is not clear exactly what the king was doing to oppress Aedilburga, but the worry was enough to distract her thoughts from their proper lines. Alcuin urged her not to despair, but to continue to live fully the life she felt was right. He encouraged her to regard adversity in its true light so that it would strengthen her resolve and not weaken it. To Alcuin oppression from the secular world was just another ploy from the devil to lead the nun astray.

If "the old enemy" was not able to stir up temptation within his victim, then he turned to arranging attacks from without, seeking to wear down the fortitude of her spirit.¹⁰² That was why eternal vigilance was necessary. Salvation was not just a matter of achieving obviously "religious" goals such as a chaste body and a pure mind. In early medieval society disruption and failure could be caused by people and forces which theoretically had nothing to do with the monastic world. Alcuin agreed with Boniface that outside forces could do as much to modify the character of consecration for women as the beliefs of the individuals themselves. It was not just as a matter of piety that it was necessary to "oppose the shield of faith and patience against all adversities, whether of the heart or of the body."¹⁰³

Few women could possibly possess the strength of character to live an ideal monastic life. Writers of monastic rules and ecclesiastical legislators sought to ensure that only those with the greatest promise would be admitted to religious communities. That would serve two ends. It would guarantee a monastic population with saintly characteristics. Then, it would protect that population from the distractions of undesirable associates.

Caesarius set up two processes by which the perseverance of the entrant was tested. In the Recapitulation of his rule he required that the prospective entrant was to hear the rule read several times in the salutatorium. If she professed herself willing to abide by the rule "with a prompt and free will," she was to be admitted "as

the abess considers just and reasonable." If she said that she could not abide by the rule she was not to be admitted.¹⁰⁴ Caesarius had already established in the rule itself that the novice was to be placed under the direction of a senior member and tested for a full year "in many experiences" to see if she showed promise of staying with the monastic life.¹⁰⁵

To Caesarius the prospective novice must show perseverance in coming repeatedly to the salutatorium to hear the rule. She was not yet a member of the community in any way, so there was no provision for her to live and sleep within the cloister. It was the duty of the abess to make an initial judgment of the prospective entrant's character: would it benefit the community to admit this woman as a novice member? Even after she was admitted into the monastery the entrant was not a full member of the community. She needed to prove her capacity to endure the hardships of the monastic life for a probationary period. In this more rigorous stage she must confirm the promise she showed in the salutatorium. She must show that she could adapt her spirit to the monastic way. "She is not to be permitted to assume the religious habit immediately, but her will must be tested in many experiences first" ¹⁰⁶

Donatus did not copy Caesarius' twofold system of proving the capacity of entrants but he did adopt Caesarius' one-year novitiate. During that time the entrant was to be tested "in many experiences," and was to show that she could persevere despite all difficulties.¹⁰⁷ She was to read the rule often, "and if she promises to persevere in her stability, then after she has spent a year in the community and

has promised obedience and stability she may be associated with the community."¹⁰⁸

Synodal decrees and capitularies also attempted to limit the population of religious institutions to those who showed promise of perseverance in the religious life. It is interesting that there was suspicion about the motives of widows who sought to enter monasteries. It might have been feared that they were entering religion so that they would have some means of economic support, or because they hoped to find solace in a form of life whose difficulties they had not taken into account. Consecration was not to be assumed lightly, for once entered no form of religious life could be abandoned at the convenience of the individual--at least, not according to canon law. All these factors were in the minds of the bishops at the Council of Tours of 813 when they warned that young widows were not to be veiled hastily; their religious commitment must first be examined.¹⁰⁹

The Council of Paris of 820, in a chapter tartly entitled, "Concerning women who are not fit to be disciples, nor to be made spiritual mothers of consecrated women," prohibited the admission of widows to religious communities unless their sincerity had been examined closely. Such persons too often came into positions of authority and their inferior example had led others to miserable ends.¹¹⁰ The goal of the Council was to protect the members of religious institutions from contact with associates whose attitudes were not separated from the secular world. The presence of such persons was no better than permitting secular individuals to live within the cloister.

The Capitulare missorum generale of 802 considered the admission of acceptable candidates to religious institutions to be so important that it forbade anyone to send his daughter to a monastery unless she had been examined by the bishop. The bishop was to question the candidate diligently to determine "if she desired to remain in holy service to God, and to strengthen her stability."¹¹¹ Charlemagne and his advisers differed from Caesarius and Donatus in that, unlike the writers of rules, they felt that a higher judge than the abbess was necessary. The capitulary did agree with Caesarius that a primary screening process in effect external to the community and its functions was useful. By the capitulary the king sought to make such a system valid for the whole kingdom.

What was desired was some evidence of maturity of character, in some cases before admission to the novitiate, in all instances before full admission to the community. It was therefore logical that there was considerable emphasis on age as a qualification for admission into any form of permanent relationship with a religious community. There was as much wariness about the admission of children as there was about the admission of widows. Rules and ecclesiastical legislation gave parents who wished to send their little daughters to monasteries to understand that this was a permanent donation. Caesarius would not admit little girls until they were six or seven, that is, old enough to learn to read and write and to be amenable to discipline. Girls were to be educated so that they would be good members of the community in the future, not so that they would be desirably finished young ladies. The monastery was neither a nursery

nor a boarding school, no matter what the nobility thought: "The daughters of nobles or of nonnobles are absolutely not to be accepted for bringing up or teaching."¹¹² The mention of nobles in first place is significant; it says much about the reality of consecration for women at the time.

The Capitula ecclesiastica ad Salz of 803-4 matched these sentiments. It encouraged all to feel free to offer a daughter, niece, or parent to a monastery. However, no one was to send his infant to be raised in a monastery unless he understood that the child would stay in the institution in perpetual service to God.¹¹³ There was to be no entrance into or exit out of a monastery at the convenience of the individual or of her family. The quiet of the community would be maintained, and no one would be permitted to offer an example of willful instability.

The Capitulare Theodonis villa of 805 looked at the problem from a different perspective. It forbade placing the veil, the symbol of religious dedication, on a child before she was old enough to know what she was undertaking.¹¹⁴ Each individual must be able to give thought to what she was doing and to decide "with a prompt and free will," as Caesarius put it, whether she could submit herself to the rule. The point was that those in authority were not to assume that growing up in a monastic atmosphere automatically gave the individual the perseverance necessary for success in the monastic life. The binding of children to unbreakable vows was a disservice to the community, for it would provide members with an associate who was not fitted for the life, who was a constant bad example through her

unseparated and unwilling attitude. Care needed to be taken to examine the capacity of those who had grown up in the community, as with those who had not, so that only the strongest personalities were admitted into permanent membership in the community.

The capitularies showed especial recognition that maturity was essential if perseverance and stability were to be expected. The consecrated virgin was to be an adult with some experience of monastic life.¹¹⁵ There was uniform agreement that virgins were not to assume the veil before the age of twenty-five.¹¹⁶ The requirement could be waived if there were compelling reasons for doing so. The Capitulare ecclesiasticum of 818-19, quoting Chapter 93 of the "African Council," listed the legitimate reasons for making an exception:

Item: It pleases us that if any of the bishops has veiled a virgin before age twenty-five because of danger to the purity of her virginity, or because she is threatened by a powerful petitioner [for her hand] or by one who would carry her off by force [raptor]; or if she is in danger of death and has scruples about dying unveiled; or if her parents or those to whose care she belongs demand it; then the council in which this number of years is established shall be no barrier to him.¹¹⁷

Only the most unusual circumstances could justify the bishop in making an exception to a requirement whose purpose was to ensure that only the most responsible, serious, and persevering candidates were admitted as full members of the community. Once the veil had been assumed there was no turning back. The consecrated virgin was to be an example of stability, never leaving the community until the day she died.¹¹⁸

The quality of perseverance, like all other monastic virtues, was never seen as an end in itself. It was a necessary personal characteristic which made it possible for the consecrated woman to achieve her goal of perfection in the monastic life. Stability was the most important outward sign of a persevering personality. As unregulated entrance of nonmonastic persons into the community disrupted the monastic life of that community, so did the entrance of monastic persons into the secular world disrupt the monastic life of the individuals concerned. The consecrated virgin alone in the midst of the secular world was in great danger. It was for that reason that the reformers felt that the ideal form of consecration for women was cenobitic monasticism, wherein groups of like-minded women lived and worshiped communally under the guidance of a senior experienced in the monastic life. The monastic form provided a context within which the individual could both obtain support from and give support to women with the same goal. Thus one can speak of a monastic world. From the monastic point of view there was nothing of value for the consecrated woman outside of that world, only dangers.

The vast majority of nuns would never have a legitimate reason to leave their monastery. The first thing that Caesarius required of entrants was that once they had taken the step of leaving their parents and renouncing the world they were never to leave the monastery until the day they died. They were not to go into the basilica, for here there was a door, the very sight of which might be a temptation.¹¹⁹ King Pippin and his advisers turned their attention to the issue of stability in the Capitulare Suessionense of 744. It

was ordered "That the order of monks and maidservants of God shall remain stable according to the holy rule."¹²⁰ The capitulary established a crucial relationship between the rule of Benedict (the "holy rule") and stability. That was logical, for to Benedict perhaps more than to any other writer of a monastic rule it was stability which was the sine qua non of monastic life.¹²¹ Pippin and his advisers portrayed the rule of Benedict and no other as a sure guide or aid to stability. They implied that study of the rule and life lived according to its precepts would instruct the monk or nun in the true meaning of stability.

As far as the Council of Fréjus of 796-7 was concerned, not even pilgrimages to Rome or to other holy places were legitimate reasons for leaving the monastery. Quite the contrary; there was nothing pious about such journeys. Travel turned pious nuns into followers of Satan. Therefore, no abbess or any other consecrated woman would be permitted to go to Rome or to any other place of pilgrimage. Violation of the edict would lead to excommunication.¹²²

The responsibility of the abbess for every aspect of the well-being of the community required much more contact with the non-monastic world than was permitted any other member of a religious community. The abbess was the intermediary between the community and the outside world, representing the needs of the community to the world as well as screening it from secular distractions. There were those who recognized that her duties would require the absence of the abbess from her community, and they sought to define the circumstances which would legitimate absences. There were more conservative

legislators who issued pronouncements which forbade even abbesses from ever leaving the cloister, but the more moderate stand won the day.

In his rule Caesarius recognized three reasons for the absence of the abbess:

Unless there is some lack [of supplies] or unless illness or business compells it, the abbess is absolutely not to dine outside of the congregation.¹²³

Only the good of the monastery justified the absence of the abbess for as much as one meal, except in the case of sickness, when she was given a privilege accorded no other member. Caesarius did not say what matters of business might legitimately take the abbess out of the monastery. That was for her to decide, and the freedom to initiate the decision to leave was another privilege of her status.

Aurelian was not as liberal as Caesarius. He forbade the abbess to stay outside of the congregation.¹²⁴ In a later chapter of his rule Aurelian modified that command somewhat by permitting the abbess to eat outside of the monastery if there was a lack of food in the community.¹²⁵ The abbess, as the one responsible for maintaining the economic strength of the institution, should do her part to alleviate any problems by absenting herself at mealtimes during periods of dearth. Aurelian did not give the abbess any special rights during sickness, however, and he did not provide for any absence in pursuance of monastery business.

The Council of Ver of 755 is most interesting, for among its decrees was a discussion of the issue of the stability of abbesses from the royal point of view.

We establish that no abbess . . . has license to leave the monastery unless hostility forces her to do so. But the lord king says that he wishes that whenever he orders any abbess to come to him, once a year and with the consent of the bishop of the diocese in which she is, that then she shall come to him, and at his command, if it is necessary; she is not to pass through any villas or any other places, unless thereby she is able to come and return the more quickly. And she is not to move from her monastery until she has sent her own notice to the king. And if the king orders her to come, let her come. But if not she is to remain in the monastery Similarly, no other consecrated woman ought to go outside of the monastery.¹²⁶

King Pippin regarded the abbesses of his kingdom as very important persons. Their proper behavior was so important that stability became a matter for royal legislation. Only the order of the king could legitimize the absence of the abbesses from their communities. To the ruler, the role of the bishop was to second a proclamation of the king; the Council of Ver did not give the bishop any rights to call an abbess out of her monastery on his own initiative. Only the king had the right of initiative in this matter. The abbesses also were denied any right to decide on their own when they would leave their monasteries, nor could they claim that the monastic ideal of stability forbade them to leave their seclusion at the behest of a secular person. If the king called her, an abbess must go to meet him. Here is one of the first legislative expressions of the fact that reform of consecration for women had passed from the bishops to the Carolingian rulers. The king and his advisers, not the local bishops and abbesses would determine what was proper monastic behavior. The abbesses were treated like the royal officials they were, but Pippin did not forget that they were also consecrated women. He defined for them what good monastic behavior in a journey

through the secular world was to be: Pippin acted in the traditional role of the king of the Franks as protector of all consecrated women in the realm. In that role the king declared that the abbesses were to remain as separate from the secular world as possible while they were in it. The final sentence of the king's declaration addressed itself to the other members of religious institutions. In order that their virtue be protected the king commanded that they would never have a reason to absent themselves from their communities, and that they were to stay within the cloister walls forever.¹²⁷

Two capitularies of Charlemagne took a more conservative stand on the stability of abbesses. The Capitulaire Haristallense of 779 and the Capitulaire missorum generale of 802 commanded that abbesses remain with their community. There was no indication that there might be any reason for their absence at all. The Capitulaire Haristallense is of particular interest because it picked up the thread of the Capitulaire Suessionense (see above, p. 66). Charlemagne and his advisers followed the lead set by Pippin in connecting stability with the observance of regular life. It should be noted once more that it was the kings who were making these determinations, not the bishops. The Carolingian kings and their closest advisers decided that only the rule of Benedict could ensure that the individual would fully achieve all monastic ideals. The Capitulaire Haristallense singled out the abbess, the chief example of a monastic community.

Concerning monasteries which have been regular [have been following the Benedictine rule], they are to live according to the rule; and monasteries of women are to keep the holy order, and each abbess is to reside in her monastery without intermission.¹²⁸

The stability of the abbess, and therefore, due to her example, the stability of the whole community, was presented as the natural fruit of holy order--monastic life directed by the rule of Benedict. Seen from another direction one can say that, given the tremendous authority given by Benedict to the head of the monastery, the presence of a watchful abbess would ensure that the rule of Benedict was followed by the members of the community.

The Capitulare Haristallense and the Capitulare missorum generale sought to apply a stricter monastic norm than did other capitularies and synodal decrees. This is not to say that the more conservative declarations can be ignored. They were the occasional assertions of the pure monastic ideal of stability, but the actualities of consecration for women in the early Middle Ages forced the rulers to abandon their ideals in practice. The majority of capitular and synodal decrees permitted the abbess to leave the monastery if she had the permission of either the king or of the bishop. In fact most synods gave the bishop greater initiative in permitting the absence of an abbess than did the Council of Ver.

For example, the Councils of Reisbach, Freising, and Salzburg of 800 forbade abbesses to leave their communities without the consent and license of their bishop.¹²⁹ The companions of the abbess, "Upon returning . . . are not to presume to tell [what they have seen]."¹³⁰ The abbess could not travel about the secular world alone, of course. She was always accompanied by several of the most trustworthy members of the community. Those women were to live up to the trust put in them by the abbess. They were not to be a means by

which the secular world entered and distracted the minds of their associates. If the sight of a door might be a source of temptation, how much more dangerous was a detailed report of what went on in the outside world? The truly monastic mind would always be separated from the world, even if the good of the community required the individual's presence in the world.

It is to be expected that synodal decrees would represent the episcopal point of view. The Council of Chalon of 813 and the Council of Tours of the same year assumed that the permission of the bishop was all that was ordinarily needed for abbesses who wished to leave their monasteries on business. The interference of the king was treated as an exceptional and unwelcome circumstance. The Council of Chalon prohibited abbesses from leaving their communities without the permission of the bishop "unless by chance either an imperial order forces her or the extent of the journey does not permit her to do so."¹³¹ The use of the term "forces" (cogat) indicates that the bishops felt that the command of the ruler interrupted the normal order of things. The ruler forced the abbess to leave her community though he was a secular person, and he forced her to act without consulting the appropriate ecclesiastical authority, the bishop.

The Council of Tours also portrayed the relationship of the ruler to the abbesses as an exceptional one. But this Council expanded the power of the ruler, for it declared that the desire of an abbess to see the king was sufficient to permit her to depart her monastery without the bishop's permission. For any other purpose the license of the bishop was necessary.¹³² Taken together these

two councils gave the abbess some freedom to come and go as she pleased. The Council of Chalon recognized the press of business which must be taken care of at a distance (prolixitas itineris) as a legitimate reason for leaving the cloister without the prior permission of the bishop. The good of the community legitimized a compromise of the ideal.

There was an even greater reluctance to permit consecrated women to leave their communities than to permit nonmonastic persons to enter those communities. However, there was less unity among those in authority about the circumstances under which abbesses could absent themselves than there was about the circumstances under which outsiders could enter a community of women. On the whole there was an acceptance of the fact that the needs of a community would inevitably require that some of its inhabitants leave the shelter of the cloister from time to time. The weight of opinion ran against the independence of decision making given the abbess by the rule of Caesarius. Permission to leave the monastery was required, except in the most unusual circumstances by the highest authorities in Frankish society, the king or the bishop. There was no doubt that the needs of the king to confer with the abbesses as his officials came before the rights of the bishops as the ecclesiastical superiors of the abbesses. In connection with their need to confer with the abbesses the Carolingian rulers took steps to keep the abbesses as separate from the secular world as possible, and in so doing the kings replaced the bishops as those who determine how the monastic ideal of stability and separation could best be achieved.

Membership in a community of consecrated women was a serious matter and was supposed to be the voluntary result of deliberation by a person who knew what she was doing. We have seen the concern expressed by writers of rules and by ecclesiastical legislators about the custom of dedicating children to communities of women. It was an ancient custom to donate children to the religious life, but it was one which contained a definite element of force. The child was not asked her opinion, nor was she capable of forming a reasoned estimation of her capacity for such a life. It was simply assumed that girls would eventually become full members of the community, and they were educated and disciplined with that in mind. That it was not meant to be an automatic process is indicated by the prohibition against giving the veil to anyone before age twenty-five except in circumstances of dire need. Two sources show that there were practical considerations involved in that command.

The problems caused when girls were forced to become members of religious institutions against their wills was alluded to as early as 583 by the Council of Lyon. It was ordered that girls who had, with the consent of their parents, voluntarily dedicated themselves to the religious life and chosen to enter a monastery, and who then quit the monastery voluntarily were to be returned to the monastery they had abandoned and excluded from communion.¹³³ There was no mention of what should be done to those who had not voluntarily chosen consecration. However, the emphasis was on the evilness of the act committed by those who had freely and with the blessing of their parents selected the consecrated life and then had abandoned

it. Once they had entered a religious community they had no right to a will of their own, thus no right to change their minds. The Council implied the existence of consecrated women who had had no choice about their profession; their flight might have been understood if not excused. Those who had the opportunity to decide for themselves whether to accept or to reject consecration found no sympathy in the Council of Lyon.¹³⁴

The Decretum Vermeriense of the period 758-68 solved the problem by permitting those who had been forced to assume the veil to return to secular life if they wished. In that way the religious world would be populated only by those who served with desire--at least, that was the hope. The members would be spared the bad example of an unwilling associate, and the community as a whole spared the crisis of a runaway brought back into its midst by force. The Decretum affected all forms of consecration, for it commanded that in whatever way a woman took the veil, she was to remain with the religious life unless she had been consecrated against her will and protestations by anyone. Even in that case she might remain in religious service if she wished. If a priest had consecrated her against her will he would lose his status.¹³⁵ The last sentence shows how seriously the king and his advisers looked upon those who helped people religious communities with unfit members. The irregularity of her admission could be made right if the unwilling entrant had become a willing member. Such a woman was given the opportunity to make an unconstrained decision to become a true member of her

community, or she could decide feerly to leave a world of which she was not a real part.

Once again, only the most unusual and pressing of circumstances justified an exception to the requirement that once one had been consecrated there could be no turning back. In this instance as in all others the primary consideration was the good of the community. The ideal remained:

Keep watch assiduously and pray that you might never look back. Remember what the gospel says: "No one," it says, "having put his hand to the plow and looking back is worthy of the kingdom of heaven."¹³⁶

The monastery was no democracy. All members, whatever their seniority or social origin, owed absolute obedience to the abbess. It has been noted that the disposal of property by entrants and, even more, the regulation of contacts between members of the community and outsiders involved obedience to the will of the abbess. It was in connection with his prohibition of the giving, receiving, or possessing of anything by nuns without the permission of the abbess that Donatus forbade them to possess even their own bodies or wills.¹³⁷ Caesarius not only required entrants humbly to offer all they possessed to the abbess for communal use, but declared that no one had the right to decide for herself what was hers, whether clothing or anything else.¹³⁸ The very arrangement of the nun's day was dependent not on her own desires, but on those of the abbess. It was the duty of the senior to decide what work each member of the

community should do. It was not just a matter of doing the work commanded by the superior, but of doing it in the proper spirit.

No one is to work on any personal tasks unless the abbess has ordered or permitted her to do so; but let all things be done in common, with such holy eagerness and with such fervent alacrity as if each of you had decided to do it of herself.¹⁴⁰

Caesarius' ideal was that the subordinate eagerly did the bidding of the abbess, as if the desire of the abbess had originated in the mind of the subordinate herself. That was the sign of a truly monastic personality: the individual had no will of her own. The subordinate served with willingness and alacrity because her will and that of the abbess were at one. The inspiration and desire of the abbess was instantly transmitted into action by the obedient subordinate.

The abbess and those she had appointed to assist her were to be obeyed without murmur.¹⁴¹ In his rule Donatus adopted the "degrees of humility" (gradus humilitatis) of Benedict. The first of these steps stressed obedience as a sign of humility: "The first degree of humility is obedience without delay."¹⁴² The subordinate had no right to her own will, a point on which Donatus was especially insistent, so she could have no opinion about any command given her by the abbess or by any other officer of the community. The response to a command was to be instant and uncomplaining obedience.¹⁴³

"The second degree of humility is not to love one's own will and not to want to get one's way"¹⁴⁴ The third degree of humility was the most demanding of all. "The third degree of humility is that for the love of God one submits in total

obedience to a superior, imitating the Lord, of whom the apostle says: 'He was obedient unto death.' (Phillipp. II)."¹⁴⁵ These degrees of humility were both commands and calls to heroic self abnegation. The perfect nun as defined by Donatus had no self, no ego. She did her part to assure the smooth functioning of the monastic life in her community by obeying instantly in body and, most importantly, in spirit. If she did not do so it was the opinion of the writers of monastic rules that she would become a slave of her own desires and lusts. It was to prevent her from going astray that cenobitic monasticism was designed.¹⁴⁶ If she was to be a true member of a monastic community the individual had to remove her mind from the pride and lusts of the secular world; self love had no place in the monastic world.¹⁴⁷ Yet much of what was called pride and self will by monastic rules were actions and relationships typical of the noble class, the very foundation of noble social and political power.

It was for that reason that the authors of monastic rules realized that the obedience they expected must come from a thoughtful and voluntary renunciation of the nun's own will because of religious conviction. Only then would the idea be acceptable to the individual that she must obey the commands of her superiors because it was their place to arrange every aspect of life in the community, not hers. Obedience to the abbess was only part of monastic humility; that virtue was to be seen in the relationships of the individual with her associates. Caesarius insisted on mutual respect and humility in the dealings of the members of the monastery with each other. He would not permit those who had been wealthy in the secular world to

boast about it to those who came from poor families.¹⁴⁸ In his letter Vereor he made an even more pointed comment about the irrelevance of secular social concepts in a religious community: "If you were born noble, rejoice more in the humility of religion than in secular dignity"¹⁴⁹ A religious institution would cease to function as a true community of like-minded individuals if the social gradations of the secular world were permitted to become the basis of relations between members.

Aurelian and Donatus agreed. Aurelian did not permit slaves to become members of the community he had founded. However, a freed-woman could be admitted (though it was up to the abbess to decide if she ought to be admitted) if she had reached adolescence and if she could present a letter of permission from her lord.¹⁵⁰ The first chapter of Donatus' rule required that the abbess be no respecter of persons. The woman of free origins was not to be preferred to the one of unfree origins without rational cause.¹⁵¹

Charlemagne himself ordered obedience to monastic authorities and mutual respect among members of religious institutions in the Capitulare missorum generale. He ordered his missi to watch monasteries of women closely so that they did not wander from the purpose for which they had been founded. There were to be no litigations or contentions within any community, nor was anyone to dare to disobey or behave contrarily to any secular head of a monastery ["in nullo magistris"] or to the abbess.¹⁵² Once again the king was acting to define and enforce purity of monastic behavior. He declared that obedience to the abbess must be absolute. But obedience to the

abbess would only come from consecrated women who genuinely respected their fellows. The king made official for all religious communities in the realm the old monastic principle that humility was the essential outward expression of a mentality that had rejected the prejudicial attitudes of the secular world.

Alcuin supported that view in a letter to none other than Gisla, sister of Charlemagne and abbess of Chelles. In a section which could have been derived from Caesarius Alcuin told Gisla, "Do not glory in earthly nobility," for God had given her such noble ancestry that she might learn humility, not pride.

. . . and above all rejoice in this, that God does not want you to be the spouse of any man, but his own. For there can be no greater glory for you, nor any more sublime honor than to be the spouse of him who is above all kings.¹⁵³

There was much in Alcuin's letter which bore a close relationship to the ideal of humility of the sixth and seventh centuries: the criteria of the secular world had no relevance as a guide for members of religious institutions in their dealings with each other. On the other hand, Alcuin did not forget to whom he was writing, and he was well aware of the position of the upper nobility in the early Middle Ages. He offered Gisla a source of pride, if not in comparison to her subordinates in the monastery, at least in regard to her social position. There was a real difference from the attitudes of the writers of the monastic rules of the sixth and seventh centuries, who told the consecrated women of that time to rejoice in the humility of the religious life. There was no mention of pride, nor any implication that pride in anything could be a virtue in a consecrated woman.

Alcuin, on the other hand, used terms such as gloria and honor. Gisla's position was greater than that of any queen because she was the bride of Christ. The sixth and seventh century ideals were still present, but in Alcuin's letter the consecrated woman's marriage to Christ became the source of a pride which was supposed to serve as a legitimate substitute for "earthly" pride. Alcuin was not trying so much to create an ideal as to put the component concepts of the ideal in terms that a daughter and sister of kings could accept. As always when the monastic ideal was applied, the social realities of the early Middle Ages forced a compromise which favored the status quo, not the ideal.

Monastic rules and ecclesiastical legislation were the instruments used by the bishops of the Merovingian period to define and to reform the character of monasticism for women. As time passed the ideals of reform were increasingly expressed through legislation rather than through monastic rules. The decrees of the bishops meeting in their synods possessed a validity throughout the Frankish kingdom that no monastic rule could have. Through legislation the bishops could return repeatedly to recurring problems, could modify and clarify previous commands in order to strengthen the effect of the reform movement. No monastic rule could be continually revised and still serve as an effective guide for individual monastic communities. Yet monastic rules were indispensable to the success of any attempt to reform monasticism for women. The practice of monasticism in each community was determined by the character of the rule that had been adopted to guide the activities of the members. The

ideals of reform as they were outlined in legislation could only be applied to the various communities, and thus to the individual members, though the medium of a monastic rule.

Monastic rules resulted when certain bishops sought to establish regular, that is, ordered, life in those religious communities for which they were responsible. The whole Church had an interest in the orderly life of those who were supposed to be the epitome of Christianity as it should be lived. The interest of the Church in monastic life lived strictly according to a rule was expressed in ecclesiastical legislation as early as 554. In that year the Council of Arles reminded bishops in whose dioceses there were nuns that it was the duty of the bishop to see that the abbess did not do anything contrary to the rule.¹⁵⁴ It is important to remember that in this period the rule in question would be determined at the local level by the bishop or by the abbess. The bishop was to see to the maintenance of the local rule so that order would exist in all communities of women. The rules of Caesarius, of Aurelian--both of whom founded monasteries and wrote rules to establish orderly life in them--of Donatus, and of Waldebert were in the tradition of episcopal care for the quality of life in the religious institutions of the diocese.

In the Merovingian era the reform of monasticism for women was limited in its scope by the diversity of rules by which monastic life was actually directed. There was in effect a lack of congruence between an increasingly sophisticated and coordinated delineation of reforming ideals in legislation and the means by which ideals could be applied. If the ideals could not be fully applied, then the

practice of monasticism by women would not be reformed to the extent desired by the bishops. Ecclesiastical legislation of the Merovingian period was more successful in creating a definition of reformed monasticism than in enforcing the ideals of reform on the practice of monasticism in the women's communities of the Frankish kingdom. If the monastic form were to be the only ideal form--and in the sixth century that came to be the attitude of the leading bishops of the Frankish Church--then any definition of that form needed to reject certain customs which reduced the value of monasticism as a pattern. This idea reached its climax in the reigns of Charlemagne and of Louis the Pious in the insistence that a multitude of monastic rules was itself a source of weakness.

Eclecticism was typical of rules for women in the early Middle Ages. This eclecticism was closely related to the long established freedom of consecrated women living alone or in communities to arrange their religious practice as they saw fit. Consecrated women of the early Middle Ages felt free to select any of the several rules then extant, or to adapt and combine portions of several.

They chose what pleased them in the writings of St. Jerome, or St. Augustine, in the rules of Searphion, of Macarius, of the holy Fathers, in the Apophtegmata, in the Regula orientalis, in the Historia monachorum¹⁵⁵

Until Caesarius wrote his rule all consecrated women who lived according to a rule followed rules designed for men, or according to one drawn up by an abbess for her particular community.¹⁵⁶ Caesarius' rule, important as it was, was not the final word in rules for

women. Throughout the Merovingian and Carolingian periods women continued to live according to a variety of rules. Caesarius' success in his work with consecrated women seems to have inspired a burst of activity among the bishops of the Western Church; the creation of rules for women became rather a fad among the bishops. By the time of Charlemagne a community of women could select from such codes for the consecrated life as those of Aurelian, of Donatus,¹⁵⁷ of Ferreol, of Leander, written for his sister Abbess Florentina, from the rules of Isidore and of Fructuosus, and even from the rule of Columban.¹⁵⁸

The freedom to select from among rules, or to combine parts of several rules to meet the needs of a particular community, was seen by many consecrated women as a right founded firmly on centuries of use. Of the consecrated women of Rome Philibert Schmitz says:

One of the most striking characteristics of these monasteries, of which many owed their origin to Jerome and his penitents, was liberty in the choice of observances. St. Augustine noted that fact specifically. That liberty undoubtedly came from Jerome himself, the most influential promoter of the ascetic movement in women's circles in the eternal city. Jerome valued that autonomy above all [The consecrated women of Rome] lived in their homes without a fixed rule under the guidance of an elder; but they found their inspiration in the great Egyptian models.¹⁵⁹

The reforming bishops of the Merovingian period made some inroads against the independence of consecrated women. In general, however, the practice of consecration by Frankish women differed little from that of the Roman women of Jerome's time.

So things remained until the great missionary movement of the Benedictine Boniface and the nuns associated with him. Boniface's

missionary and reforming activity coincided with the rise of the Carolingian house, which became increasingly interested in creating order in the whole Frankish Church. As a result of the association of Boniface and his Benedictine reform movement with the Carolingian family the official view of the kings came to be that the Benedictine rule was the only proper monastic rule, and that it must be adopted by all monastic establishments in the kingdom. It is instructive that this ideal was expressed almost exclusively in the capitularies. The decrees of synods had very little to say on the issue. It was the Carolingian kings and their advisers at court who devised the Benedictine reform program and outlined the methods for reaching the goal.¹⁶⁰

There were numerous capitularies which required nuns to live regularly. That is, their lives were to be directed according to the definition of monastic order set down by Benedict. The program was enunciated definitively quite early in the Carolingian ascendancy. In 742 a capitulary of Karlomann required

That monasteries of the maidservants of God are to be ordered to live according to the rule of Saint Benedict, and they are to strive to regulate their own lives [according to it].¹⁶¹

The same statement was made in the Concilium in Austrasia habitum of the same year.¹⁶² The Frankish rulers aimed at creating a single type of monasticism for both sexes, a monasticism that would have the same quality in every monastery in the kingdom.

To that end there followed throughout the eighth and ninth centuries a series of capitularies which equated regular monastic

life with obedience to the rule of Benedict. That rule was the only one through which the Frankish rulers felt they could restore order to the Frankish Church. This idea was put best in another capitulary of Karlomann, the Capitulare Liftinense of 743.

And the whole ecclesiastical order . . . has promised to restore ecclesiastical law in morals, in doctrine, and in ministry. Abbots and monks are to receive the rule of the holy father Benedict in order to restore the norm of regular life. Clerics who commit fornication and adultery and who defile holy places before receiving [this declaration--"ante tenentes"], we order them to be removed and to be made to do penance. And if after this definition they fall into the crime of fornication or adultery, let them undergo the judgement of the former synod. This also applies to monks and nuns.¹⁶³

The rule of Benedict would ensure chastity in communities of women as well as of men. The rule provided the only acceptable definition of monastic purity to the ruler, and he insisted that deviation from the rule be severely punished. The rule of Benedict was the only guide to the kings in their efforts to create order in the Frankish Church. From the point of view of the Benedicting reformers there could have been no part of the Frankish Church that required more reformation than consecration for women, characterized as it was by its multitude of forms and its variety of monastic rules.

It has been noted above (p. 66) that the Capitulare Suessionense of 742 required that monks and nuns remain stable "according to the holy rule." Stability was not defined according to the rule of Caesarius, which was just as strict on the maintenance of stability as was that of Benedict, but according to the latter's rule. As presented in this capitulary monastic life regulated by the Benedictine rule would inculcate the desirable characteristic of

stability. Indeed, according to Benedict's rule the monk was by definition stable.¹⁶⁴

Benedict also stressed the importance of the head of a monastic community: he was to be the example for his subordinates. In this spirit a capitulary of Pippin required bishops, abbesses, and abbots to live "according to holy order,"¹⁶⁵ and the Duplex legationionis edictum of 789 forbade those officers of the Church to keep dogs, falcons, hawks, or jesters.¹⁶⁶ The ecclesiastical leadership was to present an example of wholesome religious life, separated from the pastimes of the secular nobility. The Councils of Reisbach, Freising, and Salzburg commanded all nuns to abstain from another worldly custom, the eating of the flesh of quadrupeds, "as is contained in the holy rule."¹⁶⁷

The capitularies and synodal decrees progressively built up a body of ecclesiastical legislation which gave meaning to the term "regulariter vivere." What was meant was a type of monasticism in which women as well as men strove to achieve the goals outlined by Benedict. The phrasing of the capitularies in particular left no doubt about what was intended. Monks and nuns were usually addressed together, indicating that the rule of Benedict was to be followed by both sexes. The basic pattern followed by such capitularies was thus:

That monasteries, whether of men or of women, are to live regularly according to order¹⁶⁸

In such passages the broad front of the attack against both unreformed and non-Benedicting monasticism was plainly visible. It was the rule of Benedict, and that alone, which made regularity possible.

Two sources addressed themselves to nuns alone. The Capitulare missorum item speciale of 802 commanded that "regular abbesses" and consecrated women following the monastic profession were to understand the rule and to live regularly.¹⁶⁹ Though he wished to enforce universal obedience to the rule of Benedict, Charlemagne understood that obedience must be knowledgeable. As numerous articles of ecclesiastical legislation had already established, consecration could be meaningful only if the individual understood what she was doing. It was Charlemagne's desire that knowledge be put into action in the form of regular monastic life. Knowledge ensured correct action, while action reinforced knowledge with experience.

The Council of Mainz of 813 repeated the requirements of Karlomann's capitulary of 742 (see above, p. 86). Nuns who had professed under the rule of Benedict were to live regularly.¹⁷⁰ They were to remain true to the rule, stable in following it as they were stable in remaining cloistered within their community. The tradition established in the first years of Carolingian rule was not abandoned as the end of Charlemagne's reign approached. The Benedictine order was to be the foundation of monasticism for women in the whole Frankish kingdom.

That there were to be no exceptions for any reason is seen in two capitularies of Pippin, king of Italy. The Pippini Italiae regis capitulare of 782-86 demanded that monasteries of monks and nuns in the mundium of the palace, of any bishop, or of anyone whom-ever were to live regularly.¹⁷¹ The Capitulare Mantuanum primum of

787 expanded on a provision of the Capitulare Haristallense.

Monasteries which had been regular and which were in royal possession were to return to obedience to the rule. Abbesses and abbots who refused to return to regular life as interpreted by Benedict would be removed from office.¹⁷² The ruler was acting as the protector of the purity of consecration for women and as the head of abbots and abbesses in their capacity as officers of the king to enforce his idea of monastic procedure on the heads of monastic communities. In that respect the two capitularies were intended to answer those who might try to exclude the rule of Benedict on the pretext that they as bishop, abbess, or secular patron had the privilege of arranging the life of their community as they saw fit. The establishment of what they felt to be a properly ordered monasticism was too important to the Frankish kings to permit any interference by persons who were their political subordinates.

CHAPTER I: NOTES

¹Philibert Schmitz, Histoire de l'ordre de Saint-Benoît, Tome 7, Les moniales (Maredsous: Les éditions de Maredsous, 1956), pp. 3-4.

²Max Heimbucher, Die Orden und Kongregationen der katholischen Kirche, Bd. I (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1907), p. 156. John Bugge, Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Idea (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 59-79, gives a good brief overview of the concept of the sponsa Christi in the writings of the Fathers. Of particular interest is Bugge's analysis of the influence of the Song of Songs in the formation of a Christian concept of the bride of Christ; and his consideration of the relationship of the concept of sponsa Christi to the treatment of sexual union in marriage in patristic writings.

³Quoted by Joseph Wilpert, Die gottgeweihten Jungfrauen in den ersten Jahrhunderten der Kirche (Freiburg i. B.: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1892), p. 4, n. 1.

⁴Stephen Hilpisch, Geschichte der Benediktinerinnen (Erzabtei St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 1951), p. 1. Tertullian used the terms "Deo et Christo nubere," "Christo spondere maturitatem suam." Cyprian spoke of "Christo se dicare," "tam carne quam mente Deo se vovere." Ambrose: "integritatem pudoris profiteri," "virginitatem profiteri," "Christo profiteri," "Christo se dicare," "se Christo spondere," "carnem policeri servare," "virginem et castitatem profiteri publice." All these terms indicate that consecration was not seen as a passive act on the part of the individual, but that she must act on her own initiative to give herself over in total dedication to her God. See Wilpert, p. 7.

⁵Heimbucher, pp. 156-7; see above, n. 4.

⁶Hugo Koch, Virgines Christi: Die Gelübde der gottgeweihten Jungfrauen in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), pp. 66-76.

⁷Koch, p. 67.

⁸Koch, pp. 68-9.

⁹Quoted by Koch, p. 73.

¹⁰Heimbucher, p. 157; Stephan Hilpisch, "Die Entwicklung des Professritus der Nonnen;" Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige, Bd. 66, I/IV Heft (1956): 28.

¹¹Wilpert, p. 7.

¹²See Wilpert, p. 11, n. 2, on this psalm.

¹³In De virginitatem; quoted by Wilpert, p. 11, n. 4.

¹⁴Philipp Oppenheim, Die consecration virginum als geistesgeschichtliches Problem (Rome: Verlag Officium Libri Catholici, 1943), p. 75; Wilpert, p. 5, especially nn. 4 & 5.

¹⁵Oppenheim, p. 76.

¹⁶Heimbucher, p. 158; Wilpert, p. 5, nn. 2 & 3.

¹⁷Hilpisch, Geschichte, pp. 3-4; Gabriel Le Bras, Institutions ecclesiastiques de la Chretiente medieval, Livre I (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1959), p. 194.

¹⁸See, for example, Alcuin's letter to Gisla, abbess of Chelles:

Primo omnium te de Dei caritate ammoneo: et nobilitatem imaginis illius serva; et cuius viri sponsa esse coepisti, semper rememora. Inclitus est valde et gloriosus sponsus tuus, qui alium ornatum in te non quaerit, nisi spiritualement; non tortas crinium alligationes, sed rectas morum bonorum conligationes; nec vestimentorum vanum exterius nitorem, sed sanctitatis et castimoniae nobilem interius splendorem
MCH Epistolae IV, p. 41.

¹⁹Baudonivia, Vita Radegundis, MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum II, pp. 381-82.

²⁰Caesarius, Regula sanctorum virginum, c. 37. The edition of Caesarius' rule used here is that of Germanus Morin, in Florilegium Patristicum, Fasc. 34 (Bonn: Peter Hansen, 1933), pp. 1-27.

²¹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 34.

²²Aurelian, Regula ad virgines, c. 14. The edition of Aurelian's rule used here is that of Migne, Patrologia Latina 68, 394-406.

²³Donatus, Regula ad virgines, c. 57. The edition of Donatus' rule used here is that of Migne, Patrologia Latina 87, 270-298.

²⁴Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 56.

²⁵Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 36.

²⁶Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 15.

²⁷Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 55.

²⁸MGH Concilia I, c. 38, p. 28.

²⁹MGH Conc. II, I, c. 7, p. 251.

³⁰MGH Conc. II, I, c. 63, p. 285.

³¹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 38.

³²MGH Conc. I, c. 2, p. 156.

³³Rudolf of Fulda, Vita Leobae abbatissae Bischofheimensis, c. 2; MGH Scriptores XV, p. 123.

³⁴Rudolf, Vita Leobae, c. 3, p. 123.

³⁵Concilia Rispacense Frisingense Salisburgense 800, c. 21, MGH Conc. II, I, p. 210; see also the Council of Chalon of 813, c. 60; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 285; and the Capitulare missorum generale of 802, c. 18; MGH Capitularia regum Francorum, p. 95.

³⁶Karoli magni capitula e canonibus excerpta of 813, c. 5; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 295, and MGH Capit. I, c. 5, p. 173; see also the Capitula originis incertae 813 vel post; c. 4; MGH Capit. I, p. 175.

³⁷MGH Conc. II, I, c. 29, p. 290.

³⁸MGH Conc. II, I, c. 12, p. 193.

³⁹Council of Paris, Liber primus; c. 66; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 640.

⁴⁰MGH Capit. II, c. 53, pp. 42-43.

⁴¹MGH Capit. I, c. 5, p. 119.

⁴²Capitula originis incertae 813 vel post, c. 4; MGH Capit. I, p. 175.

⁴³Caesarius, Vereor, c. 5. The edition of the letter Vereor used here is that of Germanus Morin: Florilegium Patristicum, Fasc. 34 (Bonn: Peter Hansen, 1933), pp. 37-46.

⁴⁴Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 40.

⁴⁵Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 57; Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 12.

⁴⁶Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 38; Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 57.

⁴⁷Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 9; Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 6; Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 11.

⁴⁸Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 51.

⁴⁹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 25. See also the Recapitulatio appended to Caesarius' rule, c. 54:

Epistolas nullus hominum, etiam ne parentum, occulte accipiantur, aut sine permissa abbatissae ulli qualescumque litterae transmittantur.

⁵⁰Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 43.

⁵¹Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 3.

⁵²Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 4.

⁵³Waldebert also considers this issue--in one sentence in a chapter of his rule (c. 17) which stresses contempt for property and extols the value of communal life. The edition of this rule used here is that of Migne, Patrologia Latina, 88, 1053-1070. Migne entitled this rule, "Anni saeculi VII incerto; Auctor quidam incertus. De cuiusdam patris regula veterum testimonia." However, the Clavis patrum latinorum (second edition, 1961), p. 414, identifies the author as none other than "Waldebertus abbas luxoviensis c 629-670," the patron of Sadalberga. Therefore, the rule in question will henceforth be referred to as "the rule of Waldebert," rather than by the clumsy title adopted by Migne.

⁵⁴Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 53.

⁵⁵Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 27.

⁵⁶M. Maria Caritas McCarthy, The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1960), p. 11.

⁵⁷Leo Ueding, Geschichte der Klostergründungen der frühen Merowingerzeit (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Emil Ebering, 1935), pp. 56-7.

⁵⁸Ueding, p. 57, and especially p. 57, n. 27. Hormisdas' letter was appended to Caesarius' rule. The edition of the letter used here is that of Morin, Florilegium Patristicum, Fasc. 34 (Bonn: Peter Hansen, 1933), pp. 28-31. Hormisdas (514-23) did grant in chapter 2 of his letter.

. . . ut nullus epsicoporum, successorum quoque tuorum, in ante dicto monasterio audebat sibi potestatem aliquam penitus vindicare, nisi tantum pro dei intuitu pastorem sollicitudinem gerens famula Christi domini ibidem positam congruis quibusque temporibus, iuxta quod condecet, sincero animo cum suis clericis studeat visitare.

Hardly a total victory for Caesarius. Of Caesarius' alienation of diocesan properties for the support of the monastery Hormisdas had this to say in chapter 3 of his letter:

Quod autem venditionem a dilectione tua donationemque in monasterio earundem puellarum dei ante factuam nostra postulas auctoritate roborari, sperans, ut ecclesiasticorum alienatio praediorum non praesumatur in posternum, nostris interdicta decretis, probamus propositum tuum, et desiderium in tantum fatemur esses laudabile, ut gaudeamus vobis quoque eadem non licere. Sed non oportuit distrahi, quod ecclesiae servituris de ecclesiae substantia ratio suadebat prorsus emptione concedi. Boni operis fructum decet esse gratuitum. Expectanda est recti studii merces potius quam petenda, ne per utilitatem venditionis inminuatur remuneratio caritatis. Confirmamus tamen circa monasterium virginum a vobis vel venditum vel donatum, et sub eadem via alienationem ecclesiasticorum praediorum decretis praesentibus exhibemus.

⁵⁹Testamentum B. Caesarii; Migne, PL 67, 1140.

⁶⁰McCarthy, p. 11; Testamentum B. Caesarii; Migne, PL, 67, 1141-42.

⁶¹Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 31.

⁶²Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 62.

⁶³MGH Capit. I, c. 4, p. 131.

⁶⁴Council of Chalon of 813, c. 58; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 285.

⁶⁵MGH Capit. II, c. 30, p. 38.

⁶⁶The section entitled, De vita et doctrina inferiorum ordinum, cc. (36)12 & (37)13; MGH Conc. II, II, p. 713.

⁶⁷Capitula e canonibus excerpta 813, c. 6; MGH Capit. I, p. 174; Council of Arles of 813, c. 8; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 251; Council of Tours of 813, c. 31; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 290; Capit. de monasterio S. Crucis Pictavensis 822-24, cc. 6 & 7; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 302.

⁶⁸The Council is quoting from the rule of Benedict, c. 66; MGH Conc. II, I, c. 20, p. 266.

⁶⁹Rule of Waldebert, c. 17.

⁷⁰Both quotations are from Caesarius, Vereor, c. 6.

⁷¹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 21.

⁷²Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 5.

⁷³Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 6.

⁷⁴Phillip Hofmeister, "Von den Nonnenklöstern," Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht 104 (1934): 21.

⁷⁵Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 21. Chapter 21 was not based on Augustine's "rule" for nuns, that is, his Epist. 211. See D. C. Lambot, "La règle de S. Augustine et de S. Césaire," Revue Bénédictine (1929): 333-41. Lambot points out that Epist. 211 was not considered particularly important even during Augustine's lifetime and never served as the basis for any rule for nuns. But the rule of Augustine for monks was the foundation of several other rules for monks, among them that of Caesarius, which was written around 500 (Lambot, pp. 338-39). It was this rule for monks, and not Epist. 211, which fell into obscurity shortly after it was written, that Caesarius used as the basis for several sections of his rule for nuns.

⁷⁶See McCarthy, p. 41, on the two "traditions" of disposal.

⁷⁷Caesarius' sentiments were repeated within the monastery by his sister Caesaria, who was the abbess. In a letter written to Rade Gund and Richild sometime prior to 587 Caesaria said of poverty:

Give what you can to the poor: "Store up for yourself treasures in heaven," so that the saying may be fulfilled in you, "He disperses his wealth and gives to the poor; his justice will remain from age to age . . ." MGH Epist. III, p. 254.

⁷⁸Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 2.

⁷⁹Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 7, which is a verbatim copy of Caesarius' chapters 5 & 6; Donatus' c. 9 copies Caesarius' chapter 21; and Donatus' c. 10 copies Caesarius' statment on poverty and donation to the poor.

⁸⁰Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 8

⁸¹Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 9.

⁸²Caesarius, Vereor, c. 2.

⁸³Venantius Fortunatus, Vita sanctae Radegundis, c. 3; MGH Script. rer. Merov. II, p. 366.

⁸⁴Venantius, Vita Radegundis, c. 4, p. 366.

⁸⁵Venantius, Vita Radegundis, c. 5, p. 367.

⁸⁶Venantius, Vita Radegundis, c. 5, p. 367.

⁸⁷Baudonivia, Vita Radegundis, c. 5, p. 381.

⁸⁸Baudonivia, Vita Radegundis, c. 5, pp. 381-82.

⁸⁹Baudonivia, Vita Radegundis, cc. 6 & 7, p. 382.

⁹⁰Vita Sadalbergae abbatissae Laudunensis, c. 9; MGH Script. rev. Merov. V, p. 54.

⁹¹Vita Sadalbergae, c. 10, p. 55.

⁹²Vita Sadalbergae, c. 11, p. 55.

⁹³See Vita Sadalbergae, c. 11, p. 55-6, for the children and what became of them.

⁹⁴Vita Sadalbergae, c. 11, p. 55.

⁹⁵Vita Sadalbergae, c. 12, p. 56.

⁹⁶MGH Epist. III, p. 259.

⁹⁷MGH Epist. III, p. 259.

⁹⁸MGH Epist. III, pp. 259-60.

⁹⁹MGH Epist. III, p. 382.

¹⁰⁰MGH Epist. IV, p. 78.

¹⁰¹MGH Epist. IV, p. 458.

¹⁰²MGH Epist. IV, p. 458.

¹⁰³See also Alcuin's letter to the English nun Hundrada, in which he suggests the benefits which would accrue to Hundrada when her perseverance in the monastic life came to the attention of the king (Offa):

. . . ut in palatio regis regularis vitae devotio in tua videtur conversatione; quatenus summi regis pietatis in omni te custodiat prosperitate et in bonis operibus usque in finem vitae remunerare gloria dignetur. MGH Epist. IV, pp. 105-06.

There were temporal rewards for perseverance in the religious virtues, and those earthly incentives were not to be discounted.

¹⁰⁴Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 58.

¹⁰⁵Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 4

¹⁰⁶Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 4.

¹⁰⁷Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 6.

¹⁰⁸Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 6.

¹⁰⁹MGH Conc. II, I, c. 27, p. 290.

¹¹⁰Liber primus; MGH Conc. II, I, c. 39, p. 637.

¹¹¹MGH Capit. I, c. 18, p. 95.

¹¹²Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 7; see also Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 6. where he copies Caesarius' age limits but is not so specific about limiting the educational functions of the monastery to future members of the community.

¹¹³MGH Capit., I, c. 6, p. 119.

¹¹⁴MGH Capit., I, c. 14, p. 122.

¹¹⁵Abandonment of one's vows was always severely punished, but the Council of Tours of 567 implied that if a person over twenty-five left the community it was a more reprehensible act than if a younger person did so. The Council quoted chapter 52 of the decrees of a council held at Arles between 442 and 506, which stated:

De puellae quae se voverint Deo et praeclari decore nominis floruerint, si post viginti quinque praesertim annos ad terrenas nuptias sponte transierint, id custodiendum esse decrevimus, ut cum his quibus se alligaverint communione priventur, ita ut eis postulantibus poenitentia non negetur, cuius poenitentiae communio multo tempore differatur
MGH Conc. I, c. 21, pp. 129-30.

It was to give the entrant some time to think about the seriousness of her step and to permit her to gain some experience in the monastic life that the Council agreed with precedent and set the age at which a woman could assume the veil at age twenty-five. See also note 116, below.

¹¹⁶This was based on chapter 93 of the Concilium Africanum, as specifically stated in the Admonitio generalis of 789, c. 46; MGH Capit. I, p. 57; and in the Capit. ecclesiasticum of 818/819, c. 6; MGH Capit. I, p. 279. Note that among the unusual circumstances which permitted exceptions to the age limit were the threat of forcible marriage and the will of the parents. In the first instance the bishop helped the virgin to gain her end. In the second he was submitting to parental pressure; the threat was directed against him, and he was advised to do the practical thing and submit. The wishes of the virgin could not speed up the process of consecration unless she were in dire straits. The wishes of noble parents could force her to be consecrated against her will.

¹¹⁷MGH Capit. I, c. 26, p. 279. This passage was also quoted as early as 567 by the Council of Tours, which attributed it to the antiquos Meluitanos canones, c. 26; MGH Conc. I, c. 21, p. 130. See n. 116, above.

¹¹⁸See also the Synod of Frankfurt of 794, c. 46; MGH Capit. I, p. 77; the Capit. missorum item speciale of 802 (?), c. 19, MGH Capit. I, p. 103; the Council of Tours of 813, c. 28; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 290.

¹¹⁹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 2.

¹²⁰MGH Capit. I, c. 3, p. 29.

¹²¹See, for example, the Prologue to Benedict's rule:

Processu vero conversationis et fidei, dilatato corde, inenarrabili dilectionis dulcedine curritur via mandatorum Dei: ut ab ipsius numquam magisterio discedentes in eius doctrina usque ad mortem in monasterio perseverantes, passionibus Christi per patientiam participemus, ut et regno eius mereamur esse consortes.

Chapter 1 of Benedict's rule compared the cenobitic monk, "militans sub regula vel abbate," favorably to monks who were not bound to submission to one abbot and one rule forever. Stability was an important issue to Benedict: see also cc. 58, 60, and 61.

¹²²MGH Conc. II, I, c. 12, p. 193.

¹²³Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 41.

¹²⁴Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 27.

¹²⁵Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 33.

¹²⁶MGH Capit. I, c. 6, p. 34.

¹²⁷Note that the abbess could also leave the community if hostility forced her to do so ("nisi hostilitate cogente"). Chapter 6 of the Council of Ver is most valuable, for it gives us an excellent picture of the true condition of consecration for women in the early Carolingian era. Not only were abbesses primarily royal officials from the king's point of view, and not only did the king, a secular person, determine monastic propriety. In addition, it was assumed that the violent conditions within communities of women described by Gregory of Tours (see below, Chapter 2) continued to be typical of the mid-eighth century. An abbess was likely to be chased out of her monastery by her rebellious subordinates.

¹²⁸MGH Capit. I, c. 3, p. 47; Capit. missorum generale, c. 20; MGH Capit. I, p. 95.

¹²⁹MGH Conc. II, I, c. 27, p. 210.

¹³⁰MGH Conc. II, I, c. 27, p. 210.

¹³¹MGH Conc. II, I, c. 57, p. 284.

¹³²MGH Conc. II, I, c. 30, p. 290.

¹³²MGH Conc. II, I, c. 30, p. 290.

¹³³MGH Conc. I, c. 3, p. 154, The rule of Waldebert dealt in detail with the treatment of nuns who abandoned their community and then returned voluntarily:

C. 21 De receptione sororis. Sin ullo tempore, quod absit a Christiana religione, soror a septis monasteriis discesserit, et foras fugiens postea recordata pristinae religionis, et aeterni iudicii pericula timore reversa fuerit; prius omnem monasterio emendationem polliceatur; postea si probabilis eius poenitentia agnoscatur, tunc demum intra septa monasterii

recipiatur. Et si bis aut tertio hoc fecerit, simili pietati foveatur; sic tamen ut in extremo loco inter poenitentes recepta tamdiu examinetur, usque dum probabilis eius vita inveniatur. Si vero post tertiam receptionem fugae culpa maculata fuerit, sciat omnem reversionis aditum esse in postmodum denegandum.

To both the Council of Lyon and Waldebert the connection of the individual with her community was so binding that so great a sin as leaving the community could not break the tie. The emphasis of the rule was more on patience than on force, however. If the runaway returned voluntarily, she was given credit. A spark of the monastic personality still remained, and there was hope. The fallen member was to be reeducated, and if there were signs of progress she would be trusted again. In this regard see the rule of Benedict, c. 57, De ordine suscipiendorum fratrum.

¹³⁴In a letter of 747 to the maior domus Pippin Pope Zacharias said:

Vicesimum septimum capitulum . . .

In libro decretorum beati Leonis papae capitulo xxviii. continetur: Puellae, quae non parente coacte imperio, sed spontaneo iudicio virginitatis propositum adque habitum susceperunt, si postea nuptias eligunt, praeverticantur, etiam si nondum eis gracia consecrationis accessit; cuius utique non fraudarentur munere, si in proposito permanerent. MGH Epist. III, p. 486.

¹³⁵MGH Capit. I, c. 4, p. 40.

¹³⁶Desiderius, bishop of Cahors, to the abbess Aspasia, in a letter written between 630 and 655. MGH Epist. III, p. 201.

¹³⁷Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 8.

¹³⁸Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 21; c. 17; Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 9, copies chapter 21 of Caesarius' rule verbatim.

¹³⁹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 8. This command was adopted by Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 19.

¹⁴⁰Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 29. A similar command is found in c. 16 in regard to the making of wool, which seems to have been an onerous and unpopular task. See also Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 9.

¹⁴¹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 17; c. 35.

¹⁴²Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 37.

¹⁴³Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 37

¹⁴⁴Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 38.

¹⁴⁵Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 39.

¹⁴⁶Donatus, Reg. ad. virg., c. 37.

¹⁴⁷Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 38.

¹⁴⁸Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 21.

¹⁴⁹This section of Vereor was adopted by Caesaria in her letter to Richild and Radegund. Caesaria too emphasized the need to reject the criteria of the secular world, which could not be used as a basis for the monastic life. MGH Epist. III, p. 452. See also Waldebert's rule, c. 22.

¹⁵⁰Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 13.

¹⁵¹Donatus, Reg. ad virg., c. 1.

¹⁵²MGH Capit. I, c. 18, p. 95.

¹⁵³In a letter of 793; MGH Epist. IV, p. 41.

¹⁵⁴MGH Conc. I, c. 5, p. 119.

¹⁵⁵Schmitz, Histoire, Tome 7, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵⁶Hilpisch, Geschichte, p. 12.

¹⁵⁷The prologue of Donatus' rule shows quite nicely (1) the considerations that went into the formation of a conglomerate rule; (2) some of the responsibilities of the bishop as patron of all consecrated women in his diocese; (3) the discontent of women who were bound to a rule which they felt was not applicable to their situation. Donatus was aware that his solution--his rule--would not completely satisfy the nuns for whom it was written: *Quanquam vos iuxta normam regulae, vasa Christi pretiosissime* [he is addressing the abbess, Gauthstruda] *egregie noverim quotidie vitam ducere, attamen qualiter magis excellere debeatis sagaci vultis semper intentione perquirere. Quam ob causam saepius mihi iniungitis ut, explorata sancti Caesarii Arelatensis episcopi regula, quae specialius Christis virginitibus dedicata est, una cum beatissimorum Benedicti quoque et Columbani abbatum, ut puta quibusdam, ut ita dixerim, collectis in unum flosculis ad instar enchiridion excepere vobis, vel coacervare, deberem, ut quae specialius feminem sexui custodienda competerent promulgarem, dicentes quod regulae praedictorum patrum vobis minime convenirent, cum easdem viris potius, et nequaquam feminis, edidissent. Et licet sanctus Caesarius proprie Christi, ut estis,*

virginibus regulam dedicasset, vobis tamen ob immutationem loci in nonnullis conditionibus minime conveniret. Ad haec ego implenda diu multumque renisus sum voluntate vestrae, non ut previcaciter durus, sed mea conscius impossibilitate retentus, dum multorum in hac re minus necessitate rei atque opportunitatis loci intelligentium iudicium pertimesco, ne me temere reprehendant cur de tantorum patrum institutis audeam quidpiam excerpere, vel mutare. At contra devotionem compellor, dum inhianter salutem vestrarum cupio animarum. Donatus, Reg. ad virg., prologus; Migne, PL, 270-298.

¹⁵⁸Schmitz, Histoire, Tome 7, p. 11. For the influence of Caesarius' rule on monastic practice, and for its relationship to other monastic rules, see Friedrich Prinz, Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1965), pp. 76-84.

¹⁵⁹Schmitz, Histoire, Tom 7, p. 6.

¹⁶⁰Prinz, pp. 231-62, discusses the relationship of the Carolingian rulers with Boniface in some detail. Prinz indicates the degree to which royal support affected the progress of Boniface's reforming movement. Prinz shows, pp. 194-98, that the Carolingians' support of Boniface was not without precedent. The Carolingian family had supported previous Anglo-Saxon reformers and missionaries, such as Willibald. Prinz insists that the Carolingian support of Anglo-Saxon missionaries is to be seen as an "alliance of the Anglo-Saxons and the Carolingians against the old-Gallic and at times Irish-Frankish monks associated with the Merovingians." That is, Carolingian support of ecclesiastical reform had political as well as religious implications.

¹⁶¹Karlomanni principis capitulare, c. 7; MGH Capit. I, p. 26.

¹⁶²MGH Conc. II, I, c. 8, p. 4. The Council of Aschheim of 756 encouraged regular life, but it was more practical in view of the actual situation in the mid-eighth century. Abbots and abbesses were to live regularly "secundum possibilitatem et loci administrationem." It was the responsibility of the bishop to establish regular life in the monasteries of his diocese. Council of Ascheim, c. 8, MGH Conc. II, I, p. 58.

¹⁶³MGH Capit. I, c. 1, p. 28.

¹⁶⁴See the rule of Benedict, c. 1: "De generibus vel vita monachorum."

¹⁶⁵Pippini capitulare Aquitanicum of 768, c. 2; MGH Capit. I, p. 43.

¹⁶⁶MGH Capit. I, c. 31, p. 64.

¹⁶⁷MGH Conc. II, I, c. 29, p. 211; Benedict's prohibition of the eating of meat is in chapter 39 of his rule.

¹⁶⁸Council of Ver of 755, c. 5; MGH Capit. I, p. 34. See also the Capit. cum epsicopis Langobardicis deliberatum of c. 780-90, c. 3; MGH Capit. I, p. 189.

¹⁶⁹MGH Capit. I, ca. 35, p. 103; Insistence on intelligent obedience to the rule is also found in the Capit. missorum generale, c. 12; MGH Capit. I, p. 93. In this source as well as the association of monks with nuns leaves no doubt about what rule was meant.

¹⁷⁰MGH Conc. II, I, c. 13, p. 264.

¹⁷¹MGH Capit. I, c. 3, p. 192.

¹⁷²Capit. Mantuanum primum, c. 2; MGH Capit. I, p. 195. In the Capit. Haristallense the subject was raised in connection with the stability of the abbess; her faithful adherence to the rule of Benedict was made visible by her stability. Capit. Haristallense, c. 3; MGH Capit. I, p. 47.

CHAPTER II

THE CHARACTER OF NONMONASTIC FORMS OF CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN: ATTEMPTS TO LIMIT AND ERADICATE THEM

The reform of monasticism was undertaken by succeeding generations of bishops and rulers with two objects in mind. On one level the reformers simply sought to eliminate abuses connected with monastic practice. The reformers felt that those abuses reduced the value of monasticism as a means of achieving salvation. The reformers realized that monasticism was not the only form of consecration for women. Therefore, it was the second and more important object of the reformers to purify monasticism so that it could with justice be presented as the only form of consecration that could lead the individual to salvation. Reforming bishops and kings intended to use a purified Benedictine monasticism as a tool to stamp out all nonmonastic forms of consecration.

Already in the sixth century the actions taken by the reforming bishops against nonmonastic forms showed that the reformers had decided that the very existence of those forms was an abuse. That determination of their illegitimacy did not make the nonmonastic forms easy to destroy, however. While nonmonastic forms shared with monasticism the goal of facilitating the realization of the ideals of consecrated virginity developed by the patristic Church, nonmonastic

forms were each derived from a common institution which was not part of the monastic past.¹ Consecrated widowhood/virginity practiced by the individual in her own home; the diaconate; the canonical form; all were derived from the institution of consecrated widowhood established by the apostolic Church. That derivation gave all non-monastic forms common characteristics which set them apart from the purified monasticism of the reformers. All nonmonastic forms permitted the individual a greater freedom of participation in the functions of the Church and in the Christian community as a whole than was allowed by monasticism. The New Testament assumed for the consecrated woman an important and active role in the community of believers. The New Testament had much to say about consecrated widowhood, the form from which all nonmonastic forms derived, but it had not one word to say about monasticism, which did not exist in the apostolic period.

That nonmonastic forms had a longer tradition of practice by Christians than did monasticism; that the ideals that lay behind all nonmonastic forms, not those which were the foundations of monasticism, were to be found in the New Testament; these facts were stumbling blocks to the reformers as they sought to eradicate non-monastic forms of consecration for women. It is true that the reformers were able to win a decisive victory against the diaconate, which was banned in the sixth century. The evidence indicates that even in this case success was not achieved without effort. The bishops were not able to end the existence of any other nonmonastic form through a simple decree. It was necessary to undermine the

validity of nonmonastic forms by attacking abuses associated with the practice of those forms. It became the object of the reformers to use legislation in order to force nonmonastic forms to increasingly resemble Benedictine monasticism. By using that method the reformers were able by 840 to drastically weaken the institution of consecrated widowhood/virginity by all but destroying its source of recruits and to impose on the canonical form a rule with a strongly monastic character. But the victory of the reformers was far from total. Nonmonastic forms continued to exist and to draw followers. Against their wills the reformers were forced to recognize that these forms were legitimate--albeit dangerous--and that they must compromise in their attempts to rationalize and reduce the number of the forms of consecration available to women.

Unmarried women, and widows in particular, were indispensable to the spread of Christianity into the Greek speaking world. The homes of widows were way stations and refuges to wandering missionaries. Christian widows served as examples of fortitude and piety to the local communities of believers. The ideal consecrated woman of the apostolic Church was not secluded from the world like a nun, but was actively involved in the most important functions of the Christian community. She was like Tabitha of Joppa, of whom we read that she was full of good works and gave alms.²

Tabitha was not an isolated case. Christian widows soon became a distinct group within the apostolic Church, and Christian widowhood became an office, not a situation. Not all widows were

qualified to assume the office of consecrated widow. The author of Acts says that after he had raised her from the dead Peter called in the saints and widows to witness the miracle.³ Peter sought the confirmation of the officers of the Christian community at Joppa that the miracle had occurred. Just as not all who called themselves Christians had the right to the designation of "saint," so only Christian widows who had proved themselves most mature in the faith were entitled to official designation as consecrated widow.

"Official" widows were entitled to support from the Church in return for the services they provided.⁴ Paul sought to rationalize for all Christian communities the standards expected of those who filled an office of such importance. Election by the Church to the status of consecrated widow was the culmination of a long and honorable life as a Christian woman, a reward for perseverance in the faith despite all obstacles. Paul required that the prospective widow be absolutely destitute and without relatives. That condition would guarantee that her allegiance was to her God and to the Church alone; she was to spend night and day in prayer, with no distractions from her family. She was to have no wealth. "For she who is living in the midst of pleasures is a living dead woman."⁵ Paul established an age qualification for consecrated widows: they must be at least sixty, for younger widows he felt were too lazy, curious, and talkative, and above all too prone to marry. Consecrated widowhood was a permanent proposition, and anyone who left it to marry would be damned. Therefore, Paul advised the younger widows to marry again and raise children; that would keep them out of mischief.⁶ The good

candidate for consecrated widowhood would have led an active life as a Christian matron. She would have done good works, raised Christian sons, borne adversity patiently.⁷ It is obvious that many of Paul's qualifications for consecrated widowhood were adopted by later generations as qualifications for consecrated virginity, and later still by writers of rules and ecclesiastical legislators in their definitions of monasticism. But it must be noted again that Paul, like all early Christians, assumed an active role for women in the Church and in the Christian community. That assumption was included in nonmonastic forms of consecration, all of which were more directly descended from the freer, more active concepts of the role of consecrated women typical of the apostolic and patristic Church than was monasticism.

The widow of the early Church, then, did not exercise what could be called an active ministry. She continued to do essentially what she had done as a married person: to serve as an example of piety through the performance of good deeds, such as hospitality, giving alms to the poor, etc. As was the case with Tertullian's consecrated virgins, there was no particular symbol to set her apart from other "unofficial" widows, or from matrons. Her actions while an ordinary member of the community of believers drew the attention of Church officers and led to her recognition through enrollment as a consecrated widow. One is strongly reminded of Sadalberga's experience. It was her piety as a married woman which drew the attention of Waldebert. Sadalberga performed the classic Christian virtues of hospitality and giving alms.⁸

New Testament qualifications for entrance into consecrated widowhood continued to exist into later generations. The Apostolic Tradition required that

. . . if she [the widow] lost her husband a long time previously, let her be appointed. But if she lately lost her husband, let her not be trusted. And even if she is aged, let her be tested for a time, for often the passions grow old within him who gives place for them in himself.⁹

As Roger Gryson points out, there is a "common ground" between widows and consecrated virgins in that appointment as a widow obligated the individual to a life of celibacy and continence. It was for that reason that the Apostolic Constitution followed the New Testament Church in requiring some proof of a capacity to persevere--there was a period of probation.

This [command] makes sense here, of course, only if the remarriage of a widow who had been appointed is considered wrong, a matter which consequently appears as forbidden.¹⁰

Women who insisted on living the religious life in their own homes in the tradition of consecrated virgins and widows caused grave concern to the ecclesiastical legislators of the early Middle Ages. The legislators were quite doubtful about the capacity of such women to persevere.

The general feeling was summed up by the Council of St. Jean de Losne in 673-5. Women who had lost their husbands and wished to live as consecrated widows were placed under royal protection. However, "certainly, if they choose to receive the holy veil they should be secluded in a monastery." A subsequent chapter of the Council made it clear that permission to practice consecration in one's own home was a privilege, not a right. Those women who were known to

their priest to live religious lives were permitted to live in religious retreat in their own homes. If they became negligent of their chastity, however, they were to be locked up in a monastery.¹¹ The Council adopted Paul's idea that the previous behavior of the widow was an indication of her capacity to meet the rigors of consecrated widowhood lived in her own home. If the priest felt that the widow had not given proof of a capacity to practice consecration in the midst of the world, he was to deny her permission to do so. The solution for her and for consecrated widows who proved too weak to withstand the temptations of the world was for them to enter a monastery. Monasticism was the sure protector of consecration, while any attempt to practice consecration out in the world was an unsure proposition which required exceptional determination. The Council of Rome of 826 outlined just what was expected of women who had decided to adopt the veil.

Women who have assumed the religious habit or are covered by the veil of religion because there are powerful men [who might force them into unwanted marriage] are not to be permitted afterwards to associate with men; instead, they should choose a monastery and live regularly or chastely observe the religious life in their own homes.¹²

There was a choice of forms, but the life of the consecrated woman living in her own home was to be regulated according to the same strict standards expected of nuns. Her life was to be directed by the thought that she was living a form of religious dedication. The Council of Rome recognized that women might seek consecration for reasons which had little to do with piety. Nevertheless, once adopted religious life was to be practiced honestly and seriously; it was not to be a sham which covered frivolity and self indulgence.

If chastity and separation from the world were expected of consecrated women living at home, so was stability. The ecclesiastical legislators insisted that these women must realize that they were perpetually bound to the form of consecration they had selected. In that regard the twenty-first chapter of the Council of Tours of 567 was central, for it was the definitive treatise of the early Middle Ages on the relation of all consecrated women to spiritual and carnal marriage. The chapter included consecrated widows among those married to Christ. Therefore, they could not be married nor forcibly carried away by men.¹³ This Council directly addressed the problems raised by consecrated widowhood.

Some ask, "Since widows have not received benediction, why may they not marry?" But others know that there is never any mention of a benediction of widows in the canonical books because their status is sufficient, as established in the canons of Epaon [c. 21] by Pope Avitus and by the other bishops: "The consecration of widows, who are called deaconesses, we totally ban from our religion [sic];" and it is expressly decreed in the Synod of Arles: "Professed widows, if they connive [in their removal from their religious retreat] are to be punished with their raptor."¹⁴

This is certainly a radical if not very clear statement. There could be no formal ecclesiastical ceremony to initiate a woman into the status of consecrated widowhood; the mere assumption of the status (how it was assumed is not said) was enough to bind one to perpetual celibacy ("solus propositus illi sufficere debet").¹⁵ The Council of Orléans of 549 had already provided that those women who left their monasteries, or those practicing consecration in their own homes, "whether virgins or widows," who abandoned that life to marry were to be excommunicated.¹⁶ The Council of Paris of 614 also addressed

consecrated women living at home, both virgins and widows, and provided the same penalty for those who left religious life for marriage.¹⁷ Pope Gregory II (715-31), in a letter to Boniface written between 715 and 731, considered this problem. He based his position squarely on the teachings of Paul and "on many holy fathers" in asserting that consecrated widows who married again were adulteresses and should be excommunicated. Gregory insisted, as did the bishops at Tours, that consecrated widows were already married to Christ and betrayed their heavenly spouse if they married men. If virgins who had not assumed the veil were punished if they committed fornication, so much more should widows be punished who had decided for themselves to live in perpetual chastity, then reneged on their promises. These women were not girls, but adults of mature age and wisdom, with the counsel of bishops and priests available to them. They had no excuse for what Gregory called their apostasy.¹⁸

To emphasize the fact that consecrated widows were indeed involved in a form of religious service Gregory used terms such as "velari" and "habitum religionis assumere" to refer to them. These were terms which were commonly used to refer to all consecrated women, not merely to nuns. All consecrated women of the early Middle Ages assumed some form of dress which publicly declared their relationship to God. Gregory's point was that consecrated widows were expected to live up to the declaration they made about themselves by assuming their distinctive dress. Above all, Gregory stressed the voluntary character of consecrated widowhood. No one had forced any widow to be consecrated, they themselves had permitted themselves to be veiled

and had assumed the religious habit on their own initiative. However, once the decision had been made the widow was as bound to it as was any nun. The consecrated woman, no matter what her form of service, lost the right to decide for herself once the act of consecration was completed. Consecrated virgins and widows living at home did not need to submit themselves to the daily direction of an abbess, to be sure. That was recognized as a major weakness with this form of consecration, for there was no one to nip temptation in the bud if the individual would not. Yet the will of the consecrated widow or virgin must be submissive to the requirements of religious life and to the bishop.

The Council of Tours denied the consecrated widow any special benediction, and insisted that the mere assumption of that form, perhaps the very assumption of religious dress, was in itself sufficient to bind the widow to her vow forever. It may have been something similar to this that Pope Zacharias had in mind when he wrote his letter to Pippin and to the abbots, bishops, and princes of the Franks in 742. In a chapter of his letter entitled, "Concerning widows, if it is possible for them to save their souls in their own residences," Zacharias said:

Item, in the same book 21 of the decrees of Pope Gelasius it is stated: "That widows shall not be veiled, and if they have changed their status and then tread on their professed continence they are to give an account to God for their acts."¹⁹

Gelasius' prohibition against veiling widows is also repeated in the Admonitio generalis of 789, where, on the authority of Gelasius' injunctions, bishops were forbidden to veil widows.²⁰ Still, both

the Council of Tours and Pope Zacharias indicated the existence of some type of profession whereby widows could enter a life of consecration within which they must remain.

All this was too inexact for other councils. The lack of a definite ceremony with which the seriousness and irrevocability of her step was impressed on the entrant and on the Christian community caused confusion. As the Council of Tours pointed out, many people were asking, "Since widows have not received benediction, why may they not marry? While the Council of Tours brusquely shrugged off the issue of consecrated widows, other councils continued Pope Gregory's attempt to provide a more specific definition of what it meant to be a consecrated widow. Councils subsequent to that of Tours, like Gregory, spoke of "veiling" widows to enhance the religious elements in this form and sought to establish criteria for admission to it. There were also attempts to assert episcopal control over a form of consecration which had for a long time existed with no directing force over it.

It was evident that one abuse that had become connected with nonmonastic consecrated forms was the idea that entrance into them was not a permanent affair, but that one could leave consecration for secular marriage at any time. Another abuse from the episcopal point of view was that many women felt that they could enter religious life on their own initiative. The Council of Tours seems to allude to and accept that manner of entrance into consecrated virginity/widowhood. This freedom was an old custom which became associated with that particular nonmonastic form.

While ecclesiastical legislation of the eighth and ninth centuries considered assumption of the consecrated life without consultation with and permission of a bishop as highly irregular and sought to stop the practice, there was a reluctant acceptance of the validity of a fait accompli and an insistence on stability. Typical of this attitude was the declaration of the Council of Fréjus of 796-97:

. . . concerning women of any condition, virgins or widows, who . . . taking on the proposition of virginity on their own initiative ("spontanee"), have been emancipated by God and have put on the black robe of continence like a religious woman ("quasi religiosam"), as was the ancient custom in these regions: if it happens that they have not been consecrated by a priest, nevertheless, we demand that they are to remain in their consecration perpetually. If afterwards they fall secretly or marry publicly . . . they are to be deprived of communion²¹

The bishops at Frejus associated the black dress with a more acceptable form of consecration, for the women in question dressed quasi religiosam. They were not fully accepted as true religiosae. No matter how irregular their entrance into religion may have been, once they had entered it these women were to act like the consecrated women they were and to remain in their profession forever. We see that spontaneous assumption of religious dress was an ancient custom among the women of the area; that was clearly a factor in the acceptance of this particular way of entering religious life.

The Council of Rome of 826 also spoke of consecrated women ("sanctimoniales feminae") who "spontaneously" devoted themselves to God "and showed themselves in the habit of the religious before the eyes of men." They were to strive to persevere in the religious

life.²² In this case the women were addressed with respect--they were indeed sanctimoniales feminae. As in the Council of Fréjus an important issue was that the women had shown themselves in public in religious dress. They had decided to enter religion on their own, and they had made their own announcement of the fact.

To other bishops this spontaneity was abominable. The Capitula ab episcopis in placita tractanda of 829 spoke of women who "irrationally" assumed the veil for themselves.²³ In their Relatio of the same year to Louis the Pious the bishops reprehended the negligence which had led to a situation in which women were "incautiously" assuming the veil on their own initiative.²⁴ Also in 829, the Council of Paris suggested that there was more than a tradition of freedom of entrance connected with consecrated virginity/widowhood which encouraged women to take the veil in that way. The Council stated that women assumed the veil on their own "so that under the pretext of this veil they might become guardians ("excubatrices") and administrators ("administratrices") of the churches."²⁵ It would seem that not all consecrated virgins and widows sat quietly at home in prayer, and that the parishoners did not expect them to. The assumption of this old and respected office entitled women to participate more openly and actively in the life--indeed in the running--of the Church than if they became nuns. Such an active role was also a part of the traditions associated with services to the Church originally performed by women. But the Church increasingly frowned on unregulated entrance into any form or religious service.

The answer of many bishops was to assert their own authority over entrance into consecration, based on the traditional status of the bishop as patron of all religious women in his diocese. The bishops in their councils declared that only they had the right to consecrate women to any form of religious service. An abuse had developed whereby certain priests had usurped the bishops' rights and had consecrated widows and virgins. This was forbidden by the Council of Paris of 829, and by the Episcoporum ad Hludovicum imperatorem relatio of the same year, which adopted the provision of the Council of Paris.²⁶ Both documents punished disobedient priests with loss of status.

The Council of Paris and the Relatio also revoked the freedom of a widow or virgin to assume the veil on her own initiative.²⁷ The bishop was to be consulted. The veil was not to be assumed indiscreetly, since "A widow who is living in the midst of pleasures is a living dead woman." That was an objection which could be raised against any nonmonastic form of consecration. Since they required the individual to practice consecration in the midst of the distractions of the world, nonmonastic forms "required a will more strongly tempered than that needed for monastic life."²⁸ It might be said that these forms, not the monastic, expected the all but impossible of people. Therefore, those women who wished to practice consecration in their own homes were to consult the bishop. It was his duty to determine the suitability of candidates for this as for all forms of religious service.

The Council of Paris of 829 instructed both bishops and women in their duties in assuring that only the most likely candidates were admitted to the consecrated life. In addressing the bishops the Council said:

This kind of consecration [women taking the veil on their own initiative] is to be restrained so that it may not be even more indiscreet: and the women are to be examined and instructed in such a way, that if they wish to consecrate themselves to God they should be diligently admonished that they should be consecrated in such a way that their consecration may be preserved in chastity and humility.²⁹

The consecrated woman living in her own home was to be as aware of the responsibilities she was undertaking as was the nun. She was not only to be examined but instructed. The Council envisioned some form of novitiate during which the prospective consecrated virgin or widow learned what was expected of her and how she was to act so that she might succeed in the form of religion she had chosen.

The Council of Paris plainly told the bishops what the purpose of the "novitiate" was:

Noble women who, having lost their husbands, have assumed the veil and are not in monasteries under the direction of a spiritual mother, but have delighted to reside in their own homes with their children and goods at hand, and to wallow in their own wealth and in the allurements [of the world]; since, according to the apostle they are living dead women, it is necessary that the bishops admonish and instruct them with paternal sollicitude and should consider their salvation to the extent that they might not live indiscreetly and not yield to earthly acts typical of their sex and thereby lose eternal life. And from now on we require that it shall be observed by all that widows having lost their husbands are not to be veiled thoughtlessly, but with the advice of the bishop are to wait for thirty days, as has been already established by our glorious prince lord Louis with the consent of the venerable bishops; [30] after that time they may either marry or, if they decide instead to devote themselves to God, they are to be admonished and

instructed that they should not do so in their own homes but should submit themselves to the direction of spiritual mother in a monastery.³¹

The purpose of the period of instruction was to change the candidate's mind, to persuade her of the dangers of living in the midst of the pleasures of the world. The reformers of consecration felt that consecrated widowhood/virginity was not a real form of religious service at all, that it did not provide the protection from the temptations and material goods of the world which was to be found only in monasticism. Its origins in the New Testament Church and its long existence made consecrated widowhood/virginity difficult for the reformers to deal with. But the reformers did make it the duty of every bishop in the Frankish kingdom to destroy this form bit by bit through discussions with each woman who wished to assume it. Recruits were to be cut off at the source. Women could no longer take the veil on their own initiative, nor could widows enter religious life immediately upon the deaths of their husbands. A waiting period was established and the permission of the bishop must be obtained. Yet the bishop would do his best to dissuade women from becoming consecrated widows and to encourage them to become nuns instead. The terms used to describe the two forms are instructive. Consecrated widowhood/virginity is life in deliciis, life in the midst of the pleasures of the secular world. Women who practiced consecration at home were viventes mortue, living dead women. However, consecration practiced in a monastery is lived properly, since it is directed "under the direction of a spiritual mother." That one brief phrase contains all the concepts which made monasticism the single ideal

form of consecration to its supporters: concrete spiritual direction from an elder to which all members of a community submitted themselves.

The Relatio contained provisions closely related to those of the Council of Paris, but even more harshly worded. Here also the consecrated widow was portrayed as living in the midst of worldly pleasures. Such women were ordered not to live indiscreetly, nor to follow "their own noxious liberty," which would endanger their souls.³² The Relatio implied that the attempt to live any form of religious life in the world did nothing more than encourage indiscretion because the individual had at her disposal a personal liberty to which no consecrated woman had a right. It suggested that any attempt to practice consecration outside of a monastery was impractical and doomed to failure because excessive freedom would inevitably lead the individual astray.

The passage of time brought increasing regulation of consecration practiced at home. Yet there was always compromise. The very fact that women were allowed to claim that they were consecrated to religious service and still live in their own residences in possession of their own goods, with no regulation of their daily lives and no superior to prevent contact with secular persons was a significant compromise in itself. This was especially so in the reign of Louis the Pious, which was so strongly marked by the Benedictine reforms of Benedict of Aniane. The continued existence of religious women living in their own homes was but one instance of the limitations of any religious reform in the early Middle Ages. There were still in

existence many ancient religious institutions, systems, and customs. These could not be swept away by a single unifying concept of ecclesiastical reform, but could only be attenuated slowly. The old ways continued to draw the support of many people, as the bishops at Fréjus were forced to admit.

Not all the benefits of the old forms were spiritual. We have seen that consecrated women might perform functions of some importance: they might become guardians or administrators, probably of the wealth of the local church. At an earlier period they might have been elevated to the rank of deaconess, and the association of consecrated widows with the diaconate must have lent a tradition of active participation in the functions of the local Christian congregation to consecrated widowhood which was relevant to many people even in 829. The Council of Paris did not abolish the offices of excubatrix or of administratrix; it merely criticized the actions of certain women who used consecrated widowhood as a tool for furthering their ambition rather than as a means of expressing personal piety.

The Council of Epaon of 517 provided that

The consecration of widows, who are called deaconesses, we absolutely abolish from our region; if they wish to convert only penitential benediction may be given them.³³

At that time consecration of widows was one of the most important functions of the Church, for it meant that all consecrated widows were automatically granted rights of fairly active participation in the Church. The legislators at Epaon wished to reduce that involvement of consecrated women by granting them only the benediction of penitents. As such consecrated women would still be a special group

within the Christian community, but their function would be changed to that more monastic life of withdrawn contemplation and prayer which was the ideal of the consecrated widow or virgin later on.³⁴

The proceedings of the Council of Orléans of 533 show that the command of the Council of Epaon had not been universally heeded. The Council of Orléans spoke of women who had received the benediction of the diaconate "contrary to the interdicts of the canons." They were to be excommunicated if they tried to marry again. Therefore, it was taken for granted that deaconesses were widows. There was a parallel here to the reluctant acceptance by later councils of the validity of spontaneous assumption of the veil. Once any form of consecration had been entered in any way it could not be abandoned. The bishops at Orléans decided that women were too weak to successfully practice consecration in the midst of the secular world. They required that "after this no women are to be granted the diaconal benediction because of the fragility of their condition."³⁵ This was by no means the deathknell of the diaconate for women.

K. Heinrich Schäfer has established that "the canonesses are the successors of the consecrated women of the early Church, a later form of the diaconate for women."³⁶ This means that in its origins the canonical form is the diaconal form. The canonical form for women resulted when the more "clerical" diaconal form was finally so weakened that it was no longer an attractive alternative to monasticism.³⁷ The canonical form represented the

. . . free consecration of early Christianity, which deteriorated and faded in the course of the centuries; it had not been limited by any force, but was granted clerical rank and authority under the bishops, and had a role in the divine service and in the community life of the Church, as well as in the Christian education of girls.³⁸

It was the opposition of certain bishops to the open participation of women in the sacral functions of the Church, but more especially the influx of Eastern concepts of strictly cloistered religious life in the fifth and sixth centuries which gradually sapped the strength of the canonical form of consecration as an expression of piety.

The old form was forced to contain more and more monastic elements.³⁹

The means by which the diaconal/canonical form came to the West is not clear. J. G. Davies finds the "earliest explicit references to deaconesses as forming an order" to come from the mid-third century.⁴⁰ Schäfer finds the term "canonica" used by such Fathers as Antiochus, Basil, Macarius, and Chrysostom; it was used in Justinian's Novels. He does not find the terms used in Italy before the Carolingian period and so maintains, "The term (and institution?) therefore came to Gaul not through Rome but [directly] from the East."⁴¹ Gryson finds the deaconesses were "essentially a creation of the East;" they were not to be found in the West until the fifth century and "were not accepted by Rome until the end of the eighth century."⁴²

Gryson claims that in the West there never was a true diaconate for women like that of the East, wherein women performed a "liturgical and social ministry" similar to that of deacons. What we have is another case of Westerners borrowing Greek terms about whose full meaning they were not clear.

Here "deaconess" was probably an honorary title associated with a particular liturgical blessing rather than with a real function.⁴³

That may have been the interpretation which some bishops put upon the diaconate, or it may have been the meaning they wished the diaconate for women to have. It may have been for that reason that Bishop Medard first consecrated Radegund as a deaconess, not as a nun. Medard did not wish to consecrate Radegund at all because she was married to the king; he feared to displease both God and the king, and hesitated.

Recognizing this the holy woman entered the sacristy, put on monastic dress, and proceeded to the altar, saying to the blessed Medard: "If you refuse to consecrate me and fear man more than God, the soul of your sheep, pastor, will be required of your hands." At which he placed his hand upon her and consecrated her a deaconess.⁴⁴

Radegund was admitted to some form of religious service, but it was not the full entrance into the monastic life which she was seeking. Medard wanted to please this importunate woman who had already assumed the veil on her own initiative and yet not insult the king too much. That he felt it to be a consecration which was more a blessing than a symbol of a binding vow might have been the reason Medard consecrated Radegund a deaconess.

Whatever the theory may have been, sufficient evidence exists to show that in practice Gryson's portrayal of a nonfunctional diaconate for women is not correct. The clerical atmosphere of the diaconal/canonical form continued to cling to it. The Western bishops may not have been aware of every nuance of the historical development of the diaconate for women, but their actions show that

they were aware that this institution brought with it implications that they considered undesirable. If, as Schäfer says, the diaconal/canonical form came to Gaul direct from the East, a proposition which Gryson does not deny, then the tradition of active participation of women in the Church must have come with it.

Davies suggests that the origins of deaconesses as an institution are to be found in "a group of active widows." These women did not limit themselves to passive service as examples of Christian piety and as recipients of charity. The third century was the crucial period in the evolution of the concept of consecrated widowhood. In that century consecrated widows who sought a greater participation in every aspect of the functions of the Church in effect forced the acceptance of their status as a recognized institution within the Church.⁴⁵ Schäfer sees the source of the diaconal/canonical form in the consecrated temple virgins, among whom was the Virgin Mary--according to the Gospel of James and by the Gospel of Pseudo Matthew of the second and third centuries. While this is not as satisfying as Davies' suggestion, it is interesting that to Schäfer also the third century was an important period in the development of the diaconal/canonical form for women.⁴⁶

The Syriac Didascalia first gave "official" acceptance to the more active role of consecrated women in the Christian community by adding to the duties of the widows visitation of the sick, "laying their hands on them and praying with them."⁴⁷

According to the Apostolic Church Ordinances there are to be three widows in each congregation, "two to persevere in prayer for all those who are in temptation, and for the reception of revelations where such are necessary, but one to assist the women visited with sickness" It is to be noted that the third of this trio is indistinguishable, save in name, from a deaconess.⁴⁸

The Apostolic Constitutions included consecrated women in the lower clergy.⁴⁹ They were "appointed unto ministry."⁵⁰ They were of the same rank as exorcists and confessors, or in that group of "persons who were charismatically gifted and who worked voluntarily for the Church." As such these women did not receive the episcopal laying on of hands but were coopted to the status or office of virgins.⁵¹ It was the duty of the deaconesses to serve the women of the community in the same way as the deacons served the men, except that deaconesses could not serve at the altar. Yet the deaconess was involved at times in the administering of the Eucharist. In the case of a woman too ill to come to mass the Eucharist would be conveyed to her by the deaconess.⁵²

That there was something about the diaconate for women that many Western bishops could not accept is evident from the fact that the first mention of the institution in the West is a prohibition against its existence. The Council of Orange of 441 required that

Deaconesses are not to be created in any way; if there still are any, they are to bow their heads to the benediction which is given to the people [as a whole].⁵³

These bishops were not sure if there were still any deaconesses, but they were uneasy enough about the office that they took the time to destroy its validity.⁵⁴

From the Council of Epaon (above, p. 122), we learn that by 517 there was no doubt that deaconesses did exist, and once more they were attacked. The provisions of the Council of Orléans of 533 (see above, p. 123) are even more instructive. First, the bishops at that Council assumed that all deaconesses were also consecrated widows. This shows that the association between consecrated widowhood and the diaconate which had existed in the earliest days of the diaconate had been retained when that form was imported from the East. Second, the bishops at Orléans were aware of the connection and saw it for what it was: an area in which two separate forms of consecration overlapped. Their task was to end the connection by destroying one form, the more dangerous and unacceptable of the two--the diaconate, which to them was a perversion of religious service for women. If the only problem had been the frailty of women and their tendency to leave the consecrated life for marriage one might ask why consecrated widowhood itself was not banned. Instead, women were simply not to become deaconesses anymore.

The legislators of these and later councils were aware that the tradition of an active role for women in the Church was far from forgotten. They themselves had certainly not forgotten it. The traditional duties performed by widows, deaconesses, and canonesses gave those women a status in the Christian community and a rational accessibility to the altar which easily led to abuse. Widows and deaconesses gave hospitality in their homes, showed charity through alms, visited the sick, etc. Since canonesses provided choir service to the cathedrals, like the deaconesses they were closely attached

to the individual Christian communities which were centered on the various cathedrals. Even members of the monastic world were not immune from the temptation to assume a more active role. Some abbesses gave the sign of blessing to men as if they were priests. Others--and even some nuns of lesser rank--usurped the rights of the bishop in the consecration of virgins and widows.

In his letter to Pippin Pope Zacharias told the Frankish leadership that, as established by Pope Gelasius, it was an abomination for women to serve at the altar or to presume to do any of the offices which were the responsibility of men.⁵⁵ No office or form of consecrated life entitled any woman to serve at the altar. No woman was to touch the altar or any of the sacred things on it for any reason. Those who did so in order to serve the mass committed a most serious offense. It is certain that only consecrated women would have held such a position of authority in the Christian community that they would be able to participate so directly in the most important ceremony of the Church despite their sex.

The last point is illustrated by the Capitula ecclesiastica Haitonis episcopi Basillensis of the period 807-23. Haito forbade women to approach the altar, "and not even consecrated women are to meddle in any service at the altar." Haito was concerned with two offenses. One was simply the touching of the altar by women. The other, only briefly mentioned, was the participation of consecrated women in the services performed at the altar. That would involve touching the altar, of course, but as an offense it was secondary to that of serving the mass. Haito maintained that not even consecrated

women had a special call to approach the altar, nor did they have any right to participate in the services performed there. He was most concerned with keeping women parishoners away from the altar, however. If the altar cloth needed washing the priest was to remove it and give it to the women who were to clean it. If women offered a gift the priest was to receive it and take it to the altar himself.⁵⁶

Other sources were concerned purely with the meddling--as they saw it--of women in the serving of the mass. For these sources as well the touching of the altar was offense enough, but even worse was that women were actually performing the mass as if they were priests. The most explicit description of what went on at such services is found in the decrees of the Council of Paris of 829. The offense was widespread: it was found that in several provinces women

. . . have of their own accord forced themselves up to the sacred altars and have imprudently touched and administered the sacred vessels in the sacerdotal dress of the priest and, what is even more indecent and tasteless than all that, they have given the body and blood of the Lord to the people and done other such things which are shameful to relate.

The legislators at Paris went on to ascribe the abuse to the negligence and lack of attention of the bishops and to attack the priests who had so far abandoned their duties that they would let women do such a thing. This chapter was repeated in briefer and less vehement form in the Relatio of the bishops to Louis the Pious in the same year.⁵⁷

The mention of complaisant bishops and priests is interesting. Whatever the role of the bishops may have been, it is obvious that the women could not have gained access to the altar without the acquiescence of the parish priests. The congregations took the bread and wine from the hands of the women, so the parishoners accepted the authority of the women to administer the sacraments.⁵⁸ There was no mention of scandal, except among the bishops at Paris. The Admonitio generalis had already dealt with a related problem in 789. It had been heard that several abbesses had dared to give the benediction over the heads of men "with the imposition of hands and with the sign of the cross."⁵⁹ This does not seem to have been an unusual custom, just as the administering of the sacraments by women whom the congregation thought authorized to do so was not unusual. Both the blessing of men and the participation in the service of the mass were aspects of the freedoms associated with nonmonastic forms of consecration for women which bishops and Carolingian rulers sought to bring into bounds.

Nuns would have had no opportunity to take any part in the masses performed at the cathedrals or parish churches. There is no indication that the abbesses gave their blessings in a church, at least not in any unconnected to a monastery. Otherwise there would have been some mention of their lack of stability. These abbesses were charged with another serious offense which seems to have been common among abbesses. They had dared to consecrate virgins, thus usurping an exclusive prerogative of the bishop. Some abbesses may have done so because they considered the bishop an outsider to their

community and decided to do without his interference in the abbesses' management of the affairs of the institution. Some may have tired of waiting for negligent bishops to make their rounds. Whatever the reasons, the bishops were determined to prevent further encroachments on their rights to consecrate women.

The consecration of women by abbesses had no legitimate ancestry comparable to "spontaneous" assumption of the veil. Consecration of members of religious communities had always been a prerogative of the bishops, and they meant to share it with no one, whether priests or abbesses. It was for this reason that Lul excommunicated the abbess Suitha. She had consecrated two women

contrary to the statutes of the canons and of the holy rule, without my consent You have fallen into a trap of the devil because you have pleased the arrogance and pleasure of laymen⁶⁰

Not only had Suitha disobeyed the canons of the Church and the rule. She had feared men more than God, for she had caved in to the pressures applied by laymen, probably the families of the two women: she had become a respecter of persons. The two women were also excommunicated and expelled from the community. It may have been the role of the laity in this case that so irritated Lul that he decided to make an exception to the general opinion that the consecrated life once entered, by whatever means, could not be abandoned. From the first the Benedictine reform movement struck at customs associated with consecration for women which deviated from the Benedictine concept of the role of women in religions. Some customs had some legitimacy behind them and required compromise on the part

of the reformers. Others, like the consecration of women by unauthorized persons, or the behavior of consecrated women like priests, were strictly contrary to canon law and were banned outright.

Legislation did not make abuses go away, however. Consecration of women by unauthorized persons was not simply an act of willfulness, but answered a need in Frankish society. As with consecrated women serving as priests, consecration by unauthorized people was a widespread custom of considerable age. As might be expected, the great Council of Paris of 820 considered the problem. Here the complaint was not only against abbesses but against other consecrated women who had consecrated both widows and virgins. The Council declared that "you may find women veiled in this manner in almost all monasteries." From the bishops' point of view many consecrated women were not consecrated at all. There were so many that the bishops at Paris did not attempt to excommunicate them. They declared that "after this definition" all who allowed themselves to be consecrated by women were to do penance to the satisfaction of their bishops.⁶¹ Again, the Relatio of the bishops to Louis the Pious repeated the injunction of the Council in briefer form. In the Relatio the bishops discussed a further problem with irregular consecration. Some women were aware of the irregularity of being consecrated by an abbess, "and since they do not consider themselves consecrated they think that they are free to follow their own carnal desires and to fulfill their wishes."⁶² In neither the Council nor the Relatio was there any discussion of the expulsion of irregularly consecrated women. The Relatio copied the Council's requirement that such women were to

do penance as laid down in the canons until their bishops were satisfied that amends had been made. In whatever way a person entered the religious life, she was bound to it. For that reason she was to consider her step seriously before she took it.

The diaconate as such was banned. Spontaneous assumption of the veil was permitted with serious reservations for some time, then prohibited. Nonmonastic forms were gradually deprived of their original meaning and forced to resemble the contemplative character of monasticism. Customs which had flourished for many years were defined as abuses, their unacceptability explained through citation of Scriptures and of canon law in ecclesiastical councils and royal capitularies. Penalties for transgressions were established. The goal was to limit the activities of consecrated women who were not cloistered away in monasteries to those listed in the Councils of Reisbach, Freising, and Salzburg: "Consecrated women are permitted to ring the church bell and to light the candles."⁶³ It would appear that the attack on the participation of consecrated women in the ceremonies of the Church had gone so far by 800 that a special edict was necessary to permit them to do anything in a church building remotely connected with the service. At the same time the edict sought to reestablish consecrated women in that relation to the service which had originally been envisioned for them by the apostolic and patristic Church: as cleaning women who prepared the church building for the mass.

There can be no doubt that the increasing definition and regulation of consecration for women had its effect, for example, in

the case of the diaconate. But it all took much time and created considerable tension. Schäfer may overstate his case when he implies that the diaconate was totally destroyed. The canonical form caused problems enough. It must have been almost exclusively canonesses who were acting as priests in the ninth century; but perhaps not only they. Consecrated virgins and widows continued to exist, and they had a high standing in their local communities. And there is some evidence that deaconesses as deaconesses, that is, as women with some official sacral function, did continue to survive.

In the declarations of the Council of Rome of 743 there is a remarkable prohibition:

. . . that no one is to presume to join himself to a presbytera, deaconess (diaconam), nun (nonnam aut monacham) or to any other spiritual mother (spiritualem commatrem) in nefarious marriage.⁶⁴

This was an attempt to cover all possible terms for the various kinds of consecration for women. The unusual term "presbytera" has a definitely clerical appearance. The Council of Rome of 826 warned all men that they must not knowingly marry a "veiled deaconess."⁶⁵ It may be suggested that both councils were using the term "diacona" to mean canoness. Even if this were so--and it is a possibility--that would still leave the term "presbytera," and the clerical import of that term cannot be explained away. Further, diacona was not a word used in the eighth and ninth century sources to refer to canonesses. They were referred to by the same terms as were used for nuns: "Deo sacrata," "ancilla Dei (Christi)," "famula Dei (Christi)." These were general terms that could be applied to any consecrated

woman. Canonesses were also referred to more precisely as those living "sub ordine canonico," "sub habitu canonico," "secundum canonicam institutionem," terms which stressed the fact that these women lived according to the canons or legal prescriptions of the Church. This contrasted them with those who lived "sub ordine sancto," under the holy monastic rule of Benedict.⁶⁶ To refer to canonesses as deaconesses would have been an anachronism in both 743 and 826, and would have misrepresented the functions of canonesses as opposed to those of deaconesses. While the vast majority of the irregularities at the altars of the Frankish Church must have been committed by canonesses, we must reckon with the continued existence of deaconesses in the full and ancient meaning of that word.

Schäfer maintains that the canonical form was "the oldest and the most widespread form of cloistered communal life." The Roman synod of 1059, which banned the canonical form, declared that it existed only in a small corner of Germany and had never existed in Europe, nor in Asia, nor in Africa. On the contrary, in the early Middle Ages it was found all over Germany and Belgium, as well as in Italy and France, and perhaps even in England.⁶⁷ What set the canoness apart from the nun?

. . . the freedom from a vow of abstinence . . . the characteristic canonical dress . . . the existence of personal possessions and servants, individual benefices, and special stipends. The existence of years of grace, of yearly vacations, and above all the right of free return into the world, as well as the specific lack of solemn vows; all this tells us that we are dealing with canonesses.⁶⁸

The outward appearances might have been somewhat similar, but the worlds of the canoness and of the nun were quite different. Both lived in groups, for example, but there was nothing really communal about the canonical way of life. Each canoness received a stipend from the Church and could receive income from her own properties in addition. She was supported by the Church, yet she also supported herself as an individual. Stability was not expected of her, and in fact there was continual coming and going in canonical communities. There were no vows of celibacy, and each member could take leaves of absence. Ecclesiastical legislation of the early Middle Ages, especially in the Carolingian period, sought to regularize the canonical form. The structure of the canonical form offered the reformers some help in that it was already based on community if not communal life. Each canonical community was lead by an abbess.

The reason for the popularity of the canonical form lay in the freedom it offered to the individual. It was a means of serving the Church without becoming an ascetic and without renouncing forever a return to secular life. The form also offered a more active role for women in the Church. Schäfer suggests that the destruction of the diaconate for women caused women to turn to the canonical way of life. As the higher consecration of the diaconate was weakened by the actions of such councils as that of Epaon and of Orléans, there ceased to be any binding duty for women to remain in the clerical status and to remain celibate.⁶⁹ The "clerical virgins," as Schäfer calls them, assumed the way of life of the canonical clergy rather than of the higher clergy. But the ranks below that

of subdeacon were not bound to celibacy. Men of the lower orders of the clergy did give up their positions to get married, and they could do so legitimately.⁷⁰

Just as ecclesiastical dress and tonsure did not hinder the cleric from a legal marriage which was recognized by the Church, so widow's dress and veil could not prevent the consecrated woman--that is, the clerical virgin--from the returning to the world as long as she had not taken a public ecclesiastical vow.⁷¹

Such freedom was never looked upon with favor by the bishops and they acted to fill the loophole in Church law. Their goal was to establish stability, celibacy, separation, and a more communal life as characteristics of the canonical life.

The Council of Orléans of 549 was the first to deal with communities of canonesses. That fact supports Schäfer's theory. In the sixteen years since the previous Council of Orléans the ban on the creation of more deaconesses had begun to have its effect. Women who wished to practice consecration in the freer patterns of the patristic Church were joining canonical communities in sufficient numbers to require the attention of ecclesiastical authorities. The Council of 549 provided that those entering monasteries were to serve a novitiate of one year. That was in contrast to those who entered communities "where one is not bound perpetually," whose novitiate was to last for three years. After that time the entrant was to receive religious dress "according to the statute of her monastery." Any who left their communities to marry were to be excommunicated.⁷²

From 549 all communities of women in the Frankish kingdom were to examine the perseverance of an entrant for a specific period.

The Council of Orleans left no doubt which form of consecration was the preferred one among the reforming bishops. The freer canonical form offered too many temptations to permit any but the most determined and stable persons to take the final step of permanent entrance. The Council made the first limitations on the canonical form. It established for canonesses a novitiate like that of nuns, but showed its disapproval of the canonical form by making the length of the novitiate much longer for canonesses than for nuns. Further, canonesses were required to be celibate forever. That did not amount to the exact equivalent of a vow of stability, for a canoness could still leave the religious life for other reasons than to marry, and she still enjoyed the right to temporary leaves of absence. Still, the requirement of celibacy seriously limited the freedom of canonesses to enter and leave religious life as they pleased. Marriage was the primary reason that all consecrated women returned to the secular world, whether they did so voluntarily or because of family pressure.

Canonesses were left to their own devices for over two hundred years. The next set of regulations pertaining to them came in the early years of Carolingian ascendancy, and were in fact decrees from the ruler. The Decretum Compendiense of 757 and the Decretum Vermeriense of 758-68 (?) were sweeping and programmatic pronouncements that stability was expected of all consecrated women, no matter how they received the veil. As long as they had entered religious service voluntarily they were to remain in it always.⁷³

The Council of Chalon of 813 forbade canonesses to ever leave their communities "unless the abbess sends them out because of some necessary business." Those who did not have servants (it was characteristic of canonesses that they were permitted to have servants, who lived within the cloister) were allowed to go as far as the cloister entrance to purchase food and other necessities.⁷⁴ The Council established that as with nuns, only the good of the community legitimated the absence of any of its members. The old freedom of canonesses to come and go as they pleased was eradicated. Further, the authority of the abbess of a community of canonesses was strengthened by the Council of Chalon. Only she was given the power to authorize an absence of any of her subordinates. At the same time the Council put bounds on the authority of the abbess in that respect: the reasons for the absence must be of the most important, and must have to do with the business of the community. The freedoms of canonesses were still quite great compared to those of nuns. Not only could canonesses have servants, but they were allowed to approach the very borders of the cloister and to deal with the outside world on their own for their own benefit. It was a far cry from a situation in which nuns were not even permitted to see doors.

As the eighth century progressed ecclesiastical legislation demanded increasingly monastic behavior from canonesses. Synodal and capitular decrees often legislated for canonical and monastic communities at the same time, discussing both forms of consecration in conjunction with each other. The reform legislation of the Carolingian period made less an attempt to illustrate a contrast

between the two forms, as had been the case in the Council of Orleans of 549, than to insist that the two forms be as similar as possible in what they required of their adherents. In such decrees the monastic form was the pattern to which the canonical form was to adjust itself. Yet the compromise of the reformers is evident. The existence of the canonical form was accepted. There was no attempt to destroy it, as there had been in the case of the diaconate. What could be made monastic was made so; what could not was regulated so that abuses would not occur. However, from the monastic point of view there were certain institutions at the very core of the canonical form that were abuses in themselves.

The Duplex legationis edictum of 789 addressed canonical communities in terms like those directed to monastic communities.

Concerning small monasteries where consecrated women ("nonnanes") reside without a rule, we desire that they be in one place which is regular . . . and that no abbess may presume to leave the monastery without our order . . . and that no one may presume to write or send letters of friendship ("winileudos").⁷⁵

All congregations of women were to be of reasonable size so that they could be properly supported and regulated. Their daily existence was to be regular, that is, orderly and directed according to a written guide, so that the life in those institutions would have a purpose. The abbess of a community of canonesses was, like an abbess of nuns, to be an example of stability, and might only leave her community if the king ordered her to do so. There was no hint that any other member of a canonical community might leave her seclusion for any reason. The king insisted on separation from the world for canonesses

as he did for nuns. The separation of canonesses was so strictly defined that they were forbidden to write letters.

The several points raised by the Duplex legationis edictum were considered individually in other capitular and synodal decrees. The Council of Frankfurt of 794 announced that abbesses who did not live either canonically or regularly be removed.⁷⁶ The Council of Reisbach, Freising, and Salzburg required that

no one . . . whether bishop or abbot or presbyter or monk . . . or consecrated women shall presume to deviate from the right path, and those who ought to be living the canonical life are to live correctly and according to order and shall conserve the canonical life without any transgression, as shall those who have vowed to live the monastic life.⁷⁷

The Capitulare missorum of 802 demanded that canonical abbesses and canonesses of lesser rank live "according to the canons," and added that their cloister must be arranged according to rational order ("ordinabiliter").⁷⁸ That idea was repeated by the Council of Mainz in 813, in a chapter significantly entitled, "Concerning holy virgins." Those who had made their profession under the rule of Benedict were to continue to live regularly. If consecrated women were living canonically, they were to practice that form diligently and with all care, and to remain permanently within their cloister.⁷⁹

The proponents of reform demanded the same high standards of dedication of canonesses as they did of nuns. Reform for nuns meant that they were to follow the rule of Benedict to the letter. For canonesses the canons of the Church took the place of a monastic rule. As such reform for canonesses meant that the canons must be

as carefully obeyed as was the rule among nuns. Beyond general exhortations to respect the canons kings and bishops established specific requirements which were to be carried out daily by each canoness. The old freedoms of the canonical form were limited, and the limitations were expanded and defined by succeeding councils and capitularies.

An example of the increasing limitations placed on the independence of canonesses is found in the Council of Chalon of 813. Canonesses were permitted to reside in their own dwellings during the day. The dwellings of canonesses were located within the cloistered area, but they provided places where any kind of secret mischief could be carried out. The Council sought to make this situation more amenable to the monastic ideal of separation. The canonesses were forbidden to eat or drink in their dwellings with any man, cleric or lay, relative or not. There was to be no contact with men at all except in the auditorium, and then before witnesses. The private dwellings were brought into actual cloister. They no longer caused gaps in the defenses of the community against the outside world. The relationships of canonesses with outsiders were made to be more like that of nuns; even relatives were excluded from easy and private contact with canonesses. The canonical community must now provide itself with an auditorium (salutatorium), and the members become actively involved in protecting the separation of the community by serving as witnesses to all conversations between their associates and outsiders.⁸⁰

The Episcoporum ad Hludovicum imperatorem relatio was also concerned with the separation of canonesses from the world. Certain monks and canons had gone to monasteries of consecrated women, "whether of nuns or of canonesses," without consulting the bishops. The result had been many irregularities in the communities of women. The point was that canonical communities were no more open to unauthorized entrance by outsiders than were monastic houses. That idea was no innovation by 829. There must be a legitimate reason for any man to enter any community of women. The only legitimate reason for a priest or canon to visit a community of nuns or of canonesses was that he wished to preach there.⁸¹

The foundation of the canonical life lay, as the very name implied, in the canons of the Church. For a community of women the canons could be a source of problems as well as a guide. There were many canons and their interrelationship, interpretation, and relevance to a community of religious women could not always have been clear. The canons were not designed to provide solutions to the daily problems faced by consecrated women. Therefore, repeated definitions in synodal and capitular decrees were necessary. The canons established an ethos, they portrayed an ideal. While the canons did suggest some specific means for the realization of the ideal, they did not provide the answer to several important issues. They did not say, for example, how an abbess should be chosen, nor what principles should lie behind her selection. Nor did the canons suggest how it might be arranged so that an entrant could retain control of her property and yet be as little distracted by its possession

as possible. All these things had to be laid out in rules designed or modified for each community by the abbess or by the bishop.

It was important that such a rule, like a rule for nuns, be written. Caesarius and those who followed him, whether in rules or in ecclesiastical legislation, maintained that a religious community run on an ad hoc basis would never properly serve the Church. Each member must know exactly what was expected of her in every situation. It was in this tradition that the Council of Chalon of 813 insisted that it was as important for a community of canonesses to have a written rule to guide it as it was for a community of nuns. The Council commanded that a rule should be written for each house of canonesses.⁸² The example to be followed by canonesses was here, as always, the monastic way of life. The cenobitic form of monasticism could not exist without a written rule. A written rule guaranteed order. It permitted the individual and the community to live the religious life to the fullest possible extent. In 816 at Aachen a rule was designed for all canonesses in the Frankish kingdom. The canonical form could not be eradicated, at least not soon. It was too closely associated with a long and legitimate tradition of service to the Church by women. Further, the canonical form met the needs of and found support among many people whose opinions counted. The ruler and the reforming bishops were determined to achieve as much uniformity in the Frankish Church as possible, however. The time had long passed when communities of women, monastic or canonical, would be permitted to map out their own way to practice consecration. The rule of Benedict was not applicable to the canonical form, nor

was the rule of Caesarius, nor that of Donatus. No monastic rule could be adapted to the canonical form without losing its meaning as a monastic rule. A specific rule was designed to guide those women who insisted in living according to the ideals of the canonical form.

The Institutio sanctimonialium Aquisgranensis of 816 was the climax of ecclesiastical legislation dealing with nonmonastic forms of consecration for women. It and its companion, the Institutio canonicorum, were both unique among early medieval rules in that they were acts of legislation. Both were the result of a synod in which the ruler took a leading role. The Institutio sanctimonialium is similar to Donatus' rule; it is composed of selections from various rules and from the writings of the Fathers. The reasons for the creation of the two rules was different, however. In the prologue to his rule Donatus says that he wrote his rule as an answer to the dissatisfaction of the nuns of his diocese with the rules available to them. In the seventh century it was taken for granted that consecrated women had the right to select whatever they as a community deemed best. Donatus did not deny them that freedom; he designed a rule which he hoped would meet their needs, yet one more rule from which the nuns could choose. The Institutio arose from the dissatisfaction of the ruler and of reforming bishops with the canonical form. It was an attempt to fill a gap. After 816 all orders of the Church had a written rule to guide them.⁸³ The Institutio was drawn up because

those precepts which the bishops wished to give the consecrated women were few and dispersed, especially since there was extant no rule which was relevant to their way of life.⁸⁴

The Institutio took to the logical end the attitudes toward the canonical form which had been expressed in previous legislation. It was more than an attempt to regulate a way of life. The Institutio was the ultimate expression of a program which sought to make the canonical form as similar as possible to monasticism. That was clearly the purpose of the first six chapters of the Institutio. Those chapters consist of selections from the writings of some of the greatest men of the Church. While at first glance these selections may seem to be merely exhortative, a closer reading will show that they were carefully made to create a strong monastic foundation for the canonical form.

The legislators at Aachen lost no time in constructing their foundation. Chapter 1 of the Institutio was an excerpt from Jerome's letter to the consecrated woman Eustochium. The first sentence of the Institutio is:

Hear, daughter, and see, and give your ear, and forget your people and your father's house, for the king desires your beauty⁸⁵

The canoness was to give up her traditional freedom of continued close contact with her family. Like the nun she must separate herself from all human ties. Jerome felt that separation from the world was a matter of attitude. Therefore, it was necessary to fight temptation at all times, since it was of no use to lock oneself away from the world if one's mind was still worldly. He stressed the importance of fasting in disciplining the mind, because eating and

drinking aroused evil inclinations, especially lust. The theme of this selection was the means by which a real separation from the world, a cloistered attitude, could be developed and maintained.

That concept was developed further in Chapter 2, which was a series of excerpts from Jerome's letter to Demetriadis. Jerome asserted that the way to fight temptation, particularly lust, was to keep busy and above all to fast. "Fasting is not a perfect virtue, but it is the foundation of all the others" In addition to fasting the consecrated woman should always be attending the canonical hours, reading the Scriptures, saying the psalter, etc. The separated mind must avoid distractions from the goal. With that in mind it was necessary to pick as companions those who were also seriously seeking to live a consecrated life. One's companions should be "serious women: Flee the lasciviousness of girls who decorate their heads, letting down their hair onto their foreheads." Canonesses must realize that they had entered a consecrated way of life. They were to live every minute in service to God and were to avoid that indolence which led to wandering minds. Only the most spiritually mature women were to become part of the community. Thus, Chapter 2 contained this section of Jerome's letter:

Happy is that conscientious and blessed virginity whose heart meditates on the love of no other than the love of Christ, which is wisdom, chastity, patience, and justice and the other virtues, which does not long after the remembrance of any man, nor desires to be seen, nor wish to lose the status of the holy virgins or the glory of the heavenly household and of the angels.

The canonesses were reminded that they too belonged to the "status of holy virgins." As such they were to serve and love only God, and

they could do that only by separating themselves from all human relationships.

Chapters 3 and 4 both had a theme particularly suitable to the canonical form: "All things are permitted, but not all things are expedient; all things are permitted, but not all things are edifying." A better summation of the attitude of ecclesiastical legislators toward nonmonastic forms of consecration could not be found. Chapter 3 was a series of excerpts from another letter of Jerome to a consecrated woman, this time to Furia. Once more Jerome warned that excessive eating and drinking would lead to lust. This thread did not run through the first three chapters of the Institutio by accident. Canonesses were not bound by monastic regulations about food and drink. All legislative prohibitions about the eating of meat were only directed toward monks and nuns. The contrast between what could be found on a canonical as opposed to a monastic table is made most evident in Chapter 13 of the Institutio. There are specific directions on the amounts of wine and bread to be given each member of the community. From the monastic point of view the selection of food allowed is truly amazing. The abbess was to be diligent to make sure that each individual got her share of meat, fish, vegetables, and oil, as well as of firewood and other necessities, so that all would be prompt in their service to God. It was the duty of the canonical abbess to keep her charges not just fed, but well fed. The legislators at Aachen conceded the variety and quantity of food and drink, for it was one of the freedoms intimately connected with the canonical form. The bishops were concerned about the abuses to

which this freedom might lead. Thus they selected the opinions of one of the greatest of all the Fathers to assure the canonesses that they were given no license for gluttony.

Chapter 4 consisted of excerpts from Cyprian's De habitu virginum, which was an exhortation to virgins to keep themselves pure. At the same time they had a duty not to make their task harder by inciting men to lust after them. Cyprian's commands came from a time when the difference between consecrated virgins and other young women of the Christian congregations were not marked by a special form of dress, and when consecrated women were not secluded from the rest of the world. Cyprian demanded that consecrated virgins keep their dress simple and unadorned, pure like themselves. What pleased men, according to Cyprian, disgusted God; ornaments and fine clothes befitted prostitutes, not Christian women. This chapter was most appropriate for women whose form of consecration was directly descended from the practices of the patristic Church. Like the consecrated women of that time, canonesses continued to possess their own property. As with the greater freedom in the use of food and drink, the right to possess worldly goods was not to be abused.

Chapters 1 through 4 of the Institutio stressed the virtues traditionally associated with monasticism: fasting, simplicity, physical and mental separation from the world. Those chapters were meant to illustrate the contrasts between the monastic virtues and the dangerous freedoms associated with the canonical life. In that way canonesses were encouraged to reject even the freedoms which the Institutio left them for the discipline of the monastic virtues. If

the freedoms of the canonical form could be traced to the practices of the apostolic and the patristic Church, the first four chapters of the Institutio proved that arguments against those freedoms could be drawn from sources of those same periods.

Chapter 5 was central to the impression the king and the bishops sought to make with the Institutio. It was composed of Caesarius' Sermo ad sanctimoniales, which was a series of excerpts which Caesarius made from his letter Vereor, along with additional comments.⁸⁶ If Chapters 1 through 4 left the reader with any doubts about the monastic predisposition of the bishops at Aachen, the inclusion of the Sermo was bound to disabuse him. In his Sermo Caesarius repeated the most important points he had tried to make in Vereor. Particularly important in regard to canonesses was Caesarius' contention that actions, not religious dress, made a consecrated woman truly consecrated. It was possible to change one's dress in a brief time, but the real object of entering the religious life was to gain and keep good morals despite the temptations of the world. It was those who persevered, not those who began who would be saved. Perseverance was required of canonesses as it was of nuns. They also must be sure of what they were doing and strive to conquer the blandishments of the secular world. The Sermo, like the previous selections, called upon the consecrated women to act.

In the Sermo Caesarius repeated one of the most emphatic sections of Vereor. The consecrated woman must live in strict separation from all nonmonastic persons. She was to avoid any familiarity with all such people, including her own parents. Vessels consecrated

to the use of the Church were not taken from the altar for secular use, then returned for sacred use. This was the answer of the bishops to any who thought that the old freedom of periodic vacations from the community might be continued. The effect of the passage on a canonical reader must have been great:

it does not behoove, it does not become, it is not advantageous for the religious woman to implicate herself in the many obligations of her parents, nor to bind herself to any extraneous person through pernicious familiarity.

The bishops undoubtedly meant the "many obligations" to remind the canonesses to avoid entanglements in the properties they were permitted to possess. Finally, the Sermo repeated the command of Vereor to rejoice in the humility of religion rather than in noble birth.

Chapter 6 contained the observations of the Pseudo Athanasius' Exhortatio ad sponsam Christi (Exhortation to a Bride of Christ), which in 816 was attributed to Athanasius himself. This was a series of observations on what it meant to be a bride of Christ. The theme of the Pseudo Athanasius was:

Flee evil . . . and do good. If you do flee evil but do not do good you transgress the law, which is fulfilled not only by abominating evil acts but also in the perfection of good works.

This was yet one more passage which stressed the need for the consecrated woman to act, to participate in her own salvation. The point was once more driven home that entering a cloister was not sufficient, that one's attitude must be as separate from the world as one's body. The Pseudo Athanasius provided a good companion to the Sermo.

The Pseudo Athanasius presented a twofold path to one's own salvation through action. The consecrated woman must not allow the members of her body to become instruments of evil, just as she, a member of the Church, must not become a corrupt element or a means to evil (one is strongly reminded of Caesarius' image of the vessels). There was a more active aspect, however. The consecrated woman was to fast, study the Scriptures, conquer anger, say the psalms not by rote but with understanding, and in general to serve God in the daily routine of the consecrated life in a sincere and attentive way. The purpose of it all?

For the apostle says: "The unmarried woman thinks about those things which are of the Lord, how she might please God, so that she might be holy in body and spirit; the married woman, however, thinks about those things which are of the world, how she might please her husband.

The lesson was that unless she was truly separated from the world the consecrated woman was living a lie. She was no more a consecrated woman than if she had been married, since her attitudes were still worldly. She was still thinking of those things which pleased human beings and not God.

The goals of the first six chapters of the Institutio were to identify abuses which arose from the freedoms allowed canonesses, and to define exactly the characteristics of the canonical form as it would exist in its reformed state after 816. The dangers which the reformers saw in the canonical form stemmed from what appeared to them to be a lack of discipline and from excessive contact with the world. Those problems in their turn arose because there had not been enough emphasis on the fact that canonesses were virgines

Christi, sanctimoniales married to Christ. There had been no coordinated definition of what it meant to be a bride of Christ, a consecrated woman, in a nonmonastic community. There were freedoms which lay at the core of nonmonastic forms which did not exist anywhere in monasticism. Some of those freedoms, such as the lack of stability, were not acceptable to the pro-Benedictine reformers of the Carolingian period. Others were acceptable in themselves, but tended to produce abuses. It was the purpose of the Institutio to make a final definition of what was acceptable in canonical life, what was unacceptable, and how abuses were to be prevented.

The rest of the Institutio was as conglomerate in its makeup as were its first six chapters. The requirements embodied in chapters 7 through 28 were derived from the rules and writings of such ecclesiastics as Caesarius, Gregory, and Jerome, and were arranged according to the pattern of chapters 115 through 145 of the Institutio canonicorum.⁸⁷ Of the rule for canonesses Werminghoff, its editor, says pointedly.

. . . the Institutio sanctimonialium served as a companion to the Institutio canonicorum, taking its order and content from the latter, as well as its vagueness of expression. One has the impression that the synod lacked the desire, if not the ability, to avail itself of the opportunity to work out an original rule from the ground up.⁸⁸

These are valid criticisms of the Institutio. It was certainly not one of the great rules. Still, one is reminded of what Donatus had to say in the prologue of his own rule. There were already in existence several useful rules and writings to guide the

religious life of women, written by the greatest men in the history of the Church. It was all but impossible not to be influenced and perhaps intimidated by these. The bishops at Aachen may have lacked the energy or the ability to devise a rule out of original concepts. On the other hand, the bishops may have consciously sought to avoid innovation in the creation of the Institutio. The purpose was to make a nonmonastic form resemble monasticism as closely as possible; the greatest innovation would have been to abolish the canonical form altogether, but the king and the bishops realized that this was impossible in 816. They were not great innovators, perhaps, but they were careful selectors. They drew on rules and writings which were addressed to women, not to men. The way of life demanded by the Institutio was distinctly monastic in tone, yet there were compromises which allowed the continued existence of the canonical form.

Chapter 7 established a strong role for the abbess, thus making good a weakness which had been characteristic of communities of canonesses. The abbess was to be the prime example of how the canonical life should be lived. It was through her that the members of the community were led to God. Therefore,

By what authority or in what documents of the holy fathers do these [abbesses] find license to travel outside [of their monasteries] or to reside in villas or to wear silk dresses or to be addicted to pomp?

The influence of Caesarius is evident. The abbess was to be an example of stability. Her place was in the community. She was not to live like a great lady, traveling and residing in the midst of the temptations of the secular world as she wished, nor was she to

dress like a great woman of the world. These injunctions were references to the abuses which the bishops felt were typical of women who maintained their own wealth and some of the freedom of movement of secular persons.

There was an answer to these abuses:

But because no one can by any authority do this licitly especially since it is completely forbidden to consecrated women by the holy fathers in the above chapters, it stands that hereafter behavior of this kind is to be avoided by all, as much as God gives them strength, because, although women in positions of secular authority are accustomed to make use of many kinds of delightful allurements, in monasteries in which the brides of Christ are regulated communally in [the use of] ecclesiastical goods (sumptibus dominicis) [such behavior] is absolutely forbidden by the judgement of equity.

Life in a community of consecrated women was not to resemble secular life in the least way. Secular pleasures were to have no place in such a community. The members of a religious institution were always to keep in mind that they were not brides of Christ, and they were to act accordingly. Even the lives of canonesses were to be communal in most respects. The abbess of a canonical community was to be the chief proponent of these essentially monastic values, teaching her subordinates the way to live a communal existence separated from the instability, pride, and lust for power and wealth of the secular world.

In order to accomplish these objectives the abbess of canonesses, like that of nuns, must act as a buffer between the community and the world. For that reason she was to reside with her subordinates. She could not perform her educative and protective functions if she was absent. Like the monastic abbess the canonical

abbess would be in the most frequent contact with secular persons of any member of the institution, and thus in greatest danger. To guide her the synod of Aachen included in chapter 7 of the Institutio Caesarius' Epistola ad [abbatissam] Oratoriam. Caesarius offered suggestions on fortifying the spirit so that Abbess Oratoria would not be led astray through her meetings with secular persons. One way to prevent contamination was to get through secular business as quickly as possible; "then you should immediately return to prayer or to reading as to a mother's breast." The abbess was to be at all times mindful of the fact that "No one fighting on the side of God implicates himself in secular business." If she was called to a conversation with outsiders the abbess was to go forth armed for spiritual warfare.

. . . first arm your brow with the memorial of the cross,
and strengthen your breast with the banner of Christ, so
that Christ will deign to accompany his little virgin
(virguncula).

All a dramatic way of saying that wherever her body might be the mind of the abbess--and by implication of all consecrated women--was to be removed from the ideals and assumptions of the nonmonastic world.

Chapter 8 of the Institutio turned to the responsibilities of the abbess in admission of new members of the community. It was the duty of the abbess to see that the whole community was orderly and protected from the distractions of the outside. The best way to make sure that she admitted only those "whose probity of morals commends them and who are rationally able to sustain their ecclesiastical stipends." All members must earn their stipends by being

worthy participants in the functions of the institution. The eighth chapter of the Institutio announced to all what was expected of them. Standards of admission were to be stiff enough to weed out weak personalities

because, after they have joined themselves to Christ in the battle, it will never be licit for them to follow their own counsels, nor to implicate themselves in secular affairs, nor to associate with men, nor to converse with acquaintances unless there is an unavoidable necessity.

Chapter 8 took a stand against the traditional canonical freedom to follow one's own counsels. Obedience was expected. Members of a canonical community were no longer free to decide on their own what they would do and with whom they would speak. The canoness was to separate herself from secular affairs and from contact with men; she was to enter the cloister mentally as well as physically.

Chapter 9 warned the abbess about the admission of adolescents, as well as of those "whose clashes and dissensions monasteries are not able to withstand." This note of caution was closely related to Jerome's point, copied in Chapter 2 of the Institutio, that the consecrated woman was to choose as her companions sober women, and to avoid the lascivious talk which was to be expected from girls. Girls were admitted to canonical institutions as well as to monastic communities. With that in mind, Chapter 22 gave directions for their education. That education stressed the inculcation of monastic virtues rather than intellectual matters. Girls were to be trained so that they would not be disobedient, but pious and stable,

. . . so that they will never have the right to travel here and there, or to be stained with sloth or lasciviousness, but should rather be filled with the holy teachings to such an extent that, bound by them, they lack the leisure to wander.

Property was regarded as an evil by the proponents of the monastic form because it distracted the mind from the contemplation of religious matters. Those who wrote monastic rules devoted considerable space to the discussion of means by which entrants into the monastery could dispose of their goods. Canonesses were not required to dispose of their property, and this was the single greatest difference between them and nuns both before and after 816. However, the Institutio did seek to reduce the amount of direct involvement of canonesses in the management of their properties as much as possible, and it was in this regard that the synod at Aachen showed its greatest innovation. Canonesses were to arrange their affairs so that "those who are striving to achieve eternal life might suffer no opportunity for distraction." In Chapter 9 three ways were offered in which the property affairs of canonesses could be settled.

Canonesses like nuns received support from the Church. The first method, the ideal because it was the most monastic, was that the canoness live like a nun in total dependence on ecclesiastical stipends. Those in charge of the community had a duty to make sure that she was sufficiently provided for: "huic sufficienter in congregatione stipendia largiantur necessaria." A second choice open to the canoness was that she could hand direct control of her property over to the Church and receive the usufruct. In that case

a "quaestor ecclesiae" would be appointed to defend the interests of the canoness. The canoness was free to refuse to give up her property or to let the Church administer it. She might prefer to have it administered by someone she knew personally. In that case the arrangement would be put in the form of a public charter which would name the person who would defend the interests of the canoness at law. The abbess and other members of the community were to witness the charter. One is reminded of the means of disposal provided by Caesarius. The bishops at Aachen likely drew their arrangements from his rule.

Scores of charters which record the land transactions of consecrated women have survived. The significance of those charters will be considered at length in Chapters III and IV below. Suffice it to note that almost no consecrated women divested themselves of all their properties. It is clear that the bishops at Aachen had hoped to create a separation between canonesses and their properties which was closer to the monastic ideal. The result would also be a greater distance between canonesses and their families, since in the early Middle Ages possession of land was as much a family as an individual matter. Whatever the hopes of the bishops, the charters show that canonesses kept close contact with those who saw to their property rights, who in many instances were relatives of the canonesses, and that the canonesses were careful to secure the interests of their families in all their land transactions. The evidence of the charters shows that there were many widows in canonical institutions. The canonical form not only allowed them to show their

devotion, but widows could be supported by the Church while retaining some say in the management of their properties. These canonical widows frequently appointed their sons to protect their interests in the lands of which they were disposing; there was a great reluctance to let the management of family lands out of the hands of close relatives. The charters record several shrewd business deals involving land, and the advantage of the canonical form was that, even after 816, it did not prevent canonesses from benefitting from such transactions. Indeed, there was much in the nature of an investment in the decisions of these wealthy women to enter canonical institutions.⁸⁹

Two means of isolating the canonical community were thus to admit only those who showed greatest promise of success, then to limit the amount of direct control of the members over their property. A third was to prevent all but the most essential contact with men. Excessive contact with men was considered to be one of the peculiar weaknesses of canonesses, a suspicion aroused by the freedom of canonesses to come and go as they pleased before the Benedictine reform movement required stability of them. Chapter 8 of the Institutio indicated that among the disruptive individuals within a canonical community were those who associated with men without permission. In answer to that problem Chapter 10 demanded of all that they avoid "large groups of men and familiarities and conversations with them." The Institutio repeated these prohibitions several times. Chapter 19, based on the rule of Caesarius, required that the abbess avoid contact with men. If dealings with them were

absolutely essential she was to be accompanied by members of her community whose age and virtues commended them. Chapter 20 also forbade the contact of canonesses with men. If a conversation with a man was unavoidable there was to be a body of three or four members of tried dependability present. If the dwellings of any of the canonesses needed repair the members were to absent themselves, "so that there might be no occasion for distraction from prayer or for sinning in this business," while the workmen were present. The bishops at Aachen were as practical as were their predecessors in their regulations for separation of consecrated women from outsiders. There were legitimate reasons for the entrance of secular persons into the cloister of canonesses. There was a special suspicion of the private dwellings of canonesses, as was to be expected of those who took the monastic life as the norm of consecration for women. For all the legislation to limit their privacy, the mansiones could still be misused to create private places where the communal life of the institution could be excluded.

Chapter 27 dealt with priests who entered the cloister to celebrate mass. The limitations placed on priests by the Institutio were derived from the commandments of previous ecclesiastical legislation. The priest and his assistants were not to live in the cloister. The priest could not enter the cloister except at the proper time for mass, accompanied by a deacon and a subdeacon who lived holy lives. "And they were not to stay longer than the celebration of the mass or a public sermon to the consecrated women requires." Strict cloister was established to counteract that

excessive accessibility which the reformers thought was typical of canonical communities. Outsiders (and they must be of the best character) could only enter if the good of the community was served by their presence. Once they had served their function they must leave. Even priests must perform their business publicly; there were to be no secret contacts between men and canonesses, whether the men were there to repair a dwelling or to preach.

Canonesses were permitted to have servants. Servants were a serious potential for trouble, for they lived within the cloister and thus were secular persons with whom the consecrated women could not avoid daily contact. Once again the bishops at Aachen found guidance in the work of their predecessors. Only the most religious secular persons were admitted into communities of consecrated women. Therefore, it could be demanded of the servants in Chapter 21 of the Institutio that they be the sort of women who "are more interested in the salvation of their souls than in the things of the world." If a servant misbehaved she would be expelled, either by the abbess or by the members themselves.

There was no economic foundation, no vow of poverty, for a truly communal life in houses of canonesses, and the possession of individual houses and personal servants also worked to prevent the full establishment of communal existence. Nevertheless, the Institutio set up in its tenth chapter as complete a communal organization of the canonical form as was possible. The individual dwellings were used only during the day. At night all slept in a common dormitory in separate beds. Meals were taken together in the

refectory, though a member might be excused from the common meals because of illness or old age. All the canonesses were to go to chapter ("ad collationem") daily, where they would hear the Scriptures and be corrected for faults. All were to attend the canonical offices. Chapter 10 also insisted on the equality of all members: "Those of noble derivation are not to think themselves better than the nonnoble, knowing that God is not a respecter of persons."

Chapter 12 shows that not all communities had operated under that principle in the past. It had come to the attention of the bishops that in some communities there had been a disparity in the amounts of the stipends given to different members. Such behavior was the result of avarice and respect for persons, and it was to cease.

For it is right and just in the eyes of God and of man that all who have proposed to live in partnerships in the status of chastity for the love of Christ should be separated from avarice and from the fear of persons, and that all should receive food and drink equally.

The point once more was that canonesses must realize that they too were consecrated women, and that therefore they too were expected to reject the principles on which the secular world operated. They could no longer live for themselves, but must work together so that their institution would truly be a community of like minded women. Their goal of a religious community could only be achieved if all members worked together in mutual respect.

Until 816 there was only scattered and uncoordinated regulation of the canonical form. There was ad hoc compromise with the concept that monasticism, in particular Benedictine monasticism, was

the only correct form of service for all consecrated women. In 816 compromise was defined, ordered, limited. Canonical life for women was accepted, along with its possession of private property by consecrated women and the resulting attenuated communal life. At the same time abuses were defined and prohibited, and the old freedoms either abolished (lack of stability; lack of total subordination to an abbess; absence of any meaningful communal life at all) or limited (control over private property; use of private dwellings). The rule of Benedict was to be the guide for all nuns, the Institutio for all canonesses in the kingdom. The Institutio was the last of the important turning points in the regulation of nonmonastic forms of consecration by the Benedictine reform movement. It was preceeded by the abolition of the diaconate for women and by the prohibition of women assuming the veil on their own initiative.

The importance of the compromise of 816 lay in the acceptance of a form of consecration which, even after the Institutio, permitted more contact with the secular world than did monasticism, and whose very purpose gave a large group of consecrated women a more active role in the most important functions of the Church than did monasticism. Canonesses were the most numerous living reminders that there was more than one way for women to serve the Church. In addition, there were probably some deaconesses still to be found in some places. There were consecrated women living in their own homes at the death of Louis the Pious, following no rule, maintaining a direct relationship with their bishops in the ancient fashion. The services performed by these women made them important in local Christian

communities, so important that they were able to serve as priests in many localities. Nonmonastic forms of consecration met the needs of the nobility to remain in contact with their consecrated relatives, and for consecrated women to have the protection of male relations. These factors combined to reduce the effect of the rules and legislation of the Benedictine reform movement of the Carolingian period.

CHAPTER II: NOTES

¹Caesarius based his concept of monasticism for women on the patristic ideals of consecrated virginity, as M. McCarthy suggests: the "core of [his] rule seems to be the patristic concept of the consecrated virgin." M. Maria Caritas McCarthy, The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1960), p. 47.

Caesarius did reject the freedom of consecrated virgins to determine the circumstances of their religious service on their own initiative. It was this freedom to determine the way in which one would express one's piety that separated nonmonastic forms of consecration from Caesarius' vision of monasticism. To the tradition of freedom for consecrated women Caesarius opposed another, the responsibility of the bishop to oversee the behavior of all consecrated women in his diocese. Therefore, "Around this core [the patristic concept of consecrated virginity] Caesarius develops his special means for realizing the ideal of consecrated virginity--adaptation of cenobitic life to women chiefly through a strict cloister, economic self-sufficiency for the convent, a complete system of government under an absolutely binding rule, a detailed program for the celebration of the divine office." McCarthy, p. 47.

To Caesarius the tradition of consecrated virginity could only continue to exist as a worthwhile religious form for women if it were given a well defined structure from which there were not deviations. It could not continue in its old unregulated pattern, for without definition and organization, without a purpose to guide it the consecrated virginity of ancient tradition was of no value.

²Acts 9:36.

³Acts 9:41.

⁴Acts 6:1.

⁵I Timothy 5:3.

⁶I Timothy 5:9; 5:11-15.

⁷I Timothy 5:10.

⁸Vita Sadalbergae, cc. 10-12; MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum V, pp. 55-56. This discussion of the widows of the early Church is based on Roger Gryson, The Ministry of Women in the Early Church, Jean Laporte and Mary Louise Hall, trans. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1976), pp. 9-10. See also J. G. Davies, "Deacons and Deaconesses and the Minor Orders in the Patristic Period," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 14 (1963): 4-5.

⁹Gryson, p. 24; Gryson is quoting the Apostolic Traditions, c. 11.

¹⁰Gryson, p. 24.

¹¹MGH Concilia I, cc. 12 & 13, p. 218.

¹²MGH Conc. II, II, c. 29, p. 579.

¹³MGH Conc. I, c. 21, pp. 128-29; note especially p. 129, 6-8, where the argument is based on the New Testament concept of widows.

¹⁴MGH Conc. I, c. 21, pp. 130-31; the Council of Epaon took place in 517. The citation should read: "The consecration of widows, who are called deaconesses, we totally ban from our region--ab omne regione nostra . . ." MGH Conc. I, c. 21, p. 24.

¹⁵See Gryson, p. 108, on this passage.

¹⁶MGH Conc. I, c. 19, p. 107.

¹⁷MGH Conc. I, c. 15, p. 190.

¹⁸MGH Epistolae III, pp. 432-33.

¹⁹MGH Epist. III, p. 482.

²⁰MGH Capitularia regum Francorum I, c. 59, p. 57.

²¹MGH Conc. II, I, c. 11, p. 193.

²²MGH Conc. II, II, c. 7, p. 557.

²³MGH Capit. II, c. 2, p. 7.

²⁴MGH Capit. II, c. (49)15, p. 42.

²⁵Council of Paris, Liber primus, c. 42; MGH Conc. II, II, p. 638.

²⁶Council of Paris, Liber primus, cc. 40 & 41; MGH Conc. II, II, pp. 637-38; Episc. ad Hlud. imp. relatio, cc. (47)13 & (48)14; MGH Capit. II, p. 42.

²⁷Council of Paris, Liber tertius, c. 7; MGH Conc. II, II, p. 673; Episc. ad Hlud. imp. relatio, c. (49)15; MGH Capit. II, p. 42.

²⁸Gryson, p. 108.

²⁹Council of Paris, Liber primus, c. 42; MGH Conc. II, II, p. 638.

³⁰In the Capit. ecclesiasticum of 818/19, c. 21; MGH Capit. I, p. 278.

³¹MGH Conc. II, II, c. 44, p. 639.

³²MGH Capit. II, c. (51)17.

³³MGH Conc. I, c. 21, p. 24.

³⁴Gryson, p. 107.

³⁵MGH Conc. I, cc. 17 & 18, p. 63. The arguments of Gryson pp. 107-08, about the different perspectives of these councils make a fairly simple matter complicated, and do not logically follow from the information provided by the council records. Chapter 17 of the Council of Orleans merely, as Gryson says, "handled a new question concerning women who had received a diaconal ordination" Chapter 18 merely repeats Chapter 21 of the Council of Epaon and adds the reason for the prohibition: the condition of women was thought to be too fragile to permit them to successfully live consecrated lives in the world. They tended to leave the religious life for marriage.

³⁶K. Heinrich Schäfer, Die Kanonissenstifter im deutschen Mittelalter (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1907), p. viii.

³⁷Schäfer, pp. 44-46.

³⁸Schäfer, p. x.

³⁹Schäfer, pp. x-xi.

⁴⁰Davies, p. 4.

⁴¹Schäfer, p. 27; p. 27, n. 7.

⁴²Gryson, p. xiii; pp. 100-102; Davies, p. 6.

⁴³Gryson, p. 102.

⁴⁴Venantius Fortunatus, Vita Radegundis, c. 12; Script. rev. Merov. III, p. 368.

⁴⁵Davies, p. 5.

⁴⁶Schäfer, p. 30.

⁴⁷Davies, p. 5; see also p. 3.

⁴⁸Davies, p. 5.

⁴⁹Schäfer, p. 29.

⁵⁰Davies, p. 3; p. 3, n. 5.

⁵¹Schäfer, pp. 29-30.

⁵²Davies, pp. 3-4.

⁵³Council of Orange of 441, c. 25; Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 148 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1963), p. 84.

⁵⁴Gryson, p. 107.

⁵⁵MGH Epist. II, c. 5, p. 482.

⁵⁶MGH Capit. I, c. 16, p. 364.

⁵⁷Council of Paris, Liber primus, c. 45; MGH Conc. II, II, p. 639; Episc. ad Hlud. imp. relatio, c. (52)18; MGH Capit. II, p. 42. Both sources found themselves solidly on biblical and canonical teaching: Macabees II; Decretalia Gelasii, c. 26; Council of Laodicea, c. 44.

⁵⁸This was an old custom in 829. Gryson, p. 106, gives an example of women administering the sacraments to the people in the early sixth century. That this happened in the countryside is instructive. Here, far from the control and teachings of the better educated and more orthodox bishops the attitudes of the people toward consecrated women could develop without hindrance for many years.

⁵⁹MGH Capit. I, c. 76, p. 60.

⁶⁰MGH Epist. III, pp. 415-16.

⁶¹MGH Conc. II, II, p. 636.

⁶²MGH Capit. II, c. (50)16, p. 42.

⁶³MGH Conc. I, c. 22, p. 211.

⁶⁴MGH Conc. I, c. 5, p. 13.

⁶⁵MGH Conc. II, II, c. 8, p. 557.

⁶⁶Schäfer, p. 120; p. 120, n. 2; pp. 122-12; p. 122, n. 5; p. 126; p. 125, nn. 2, 3, 4, 5; where the examples are mostly from the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, or exactly from that period under consideration.

⁶⁷Schäfer, pp. 2-3; p. 3, n. 3.

⁶⁸Schäfer, pp. 14-16.

⁶⁹Schäfer, p. 44.

⁷⁰Schäfer, p. 45.

⁷¹Schäfer, p. 45.

⁷²MGH Conc. I, c. 19, p. 107. This chapter of the Council of Orleans of 549 contains the first mention of monasteries of women in Merovingian ecclesiastical legislation. See Carlo de Clercq, La législation religieuse franque de Clovis á Charlemagne (Louvain & Paris, 1936), pp. 33-34.

⁷³Decretum Compendiense, MGH Capit. I, c. 14, p. 38; "in qualicumque modo mulier velum sanctum acceperit sponte, in eo permaneat ne dimittat." See also Decretum Vermeriense, MGH Capit. I, c. 4, p. 40.

⁷⁴MGH Conc. II, I, c. 62, p. 285.

⁷⁵MGH Capit. I, c. 19, p. 63; Schäfer, p. 31, on the meaning of the term *nonnanes*. Small communities of women living without order (whether they were groups of canonesses or of nuns is not clear) were a problem through the Carolingian period. The Capitula ab episcopis in placita tractanda of 829 devoted two brief chapters (cc. 3 & 4) to this issue; MGH Capit. II, p. 7.

⁷⁶MGH Conc. II, I, c. 47, p. 171.

⁷⁷MGH Conc. II, I, c. 2, p. 210.

⁷⁸MGH Capit. I, c. 34, p. 103.

⁷⁹MGH Conc. II, I, c. 13, p. 264.

⁸⁰MGH Conc. II, I, c. 61, p. 285.

⁸¹MGH Capit. II, c. (53)19, pp. 42-43.

⁸²MGH Conc. II, I, c. 53, p. 256.

⁸³Albert Werminghoff, "Beschlüsse des Aachener Concils im Jahre 816," Neues Archiv. 27, Heft 3 (1092): 631.

⁸⁴Albert Werminghoff in his introduction to the Institutio; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 421.

⁸⁵The Institutio is in MGH Conc. II, I, p. 421-56. In regard to Jerome's letter to Eustochium, it is of interest that Eustochium was the daughter of that Paula who founded the famous monastery for women in Bethlehem. See J.N.D. Kelly, Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 92-93, for the relation of Paula and Eustochium to the incipient religious life for women in Rome, and for their association with Jerome. Kelly analyzes Jerome's letter to Eustochium in pp. 99-103 of his book. The full letter (Epist. 22) is to be found in Migne, PL 22, 394-425.

⁸⁶The Sermo is in Migne, PL 67, 1121-25. See the comments of Morin in his edition of Caesarius' sermons under "Gaudemus f. c. et Deo gratias agimus; CCSL 104, p. 968.

⁸⁷Albert Werminghoff in his introduction to the Institutio; MGH Conc. II, I, pp. 421-22.

⁸⁸Werminghoff, "Beschlüsse," p. 631.

⁸⁹Schäfer, p. 203, n. 3, provides several selections from the charters of consecrated women which illustrate the points made here.

CHAPTER III

MODIFICATION OF THE MONASTIC IDEAL: THE EFFECT OF NOBLE PATRONAGE ON CONSECRATION FOR WOMEN

Attempts to define and purify monasticism for women represented a reaction to the character of consecration as it existed in the early Middle Ages. The reformers, whether bishops or kings, sought to create a monasticism whose elements set it apart from all nonmonastic forms. Yet nonmonastic forms and unreformed monasticism continued to exist, though in increasingly attenuated condition as time passed. One major reason for that continuance was that nonmonastic forms were derived from the practices of the apostolic and patristic Church. As a result of long centuries of use nonmonastic forms could not easily be eradicated.

A second obstacle faced by proponents of Benedictine reform was that what they considered undesirable customs and forms of consecration met the needs of the most important social group in early medieval society. The nobility had adapted all forms of consecration for women to its concepts of family relationships and ownership of property. The nobility's interpretation of the meaning of consecration for women was not founded on any deep theological analysis. Few nobles, whether secular or consecrated, could have been aware that the expressions of piety had roots in the customs of the early Church.

What was important was that those forms were the traditional means by which noble women had always shown their piety. Above all, however, was the fact that nonmonastic forms met the practical needs of the noble family to protect its interests in property and to maintain some control over all its relatives.

The interest of the nobility in maintaining the existence of nonmonastic forms of consecration was a powerful hindrance to the success of any reformers. The movement to eradicate nonmonastic forms and to substitute for them a reformed monasticism required changes in the relationship of the nobility to consecration. Among the most important changes demanded by pro-monastic reformers was a drastic reduction in the rights of the nobles to decide how they would use the properties they had bound up in communities of women through donation. In an age in which political power and social prestige was based on control of land, any reduction in the ability of the nobles to control the large amounts of properties connected with religious institutions meant a lessening of noble power. The status of communities of women as the properties of noble families, and the treatment of communities and the lands connected with them by the nobles, was the primary force in determining the character of consecration. Nonmonastic forms were based on a conception of the role of consecrated women in society which was most amenable to the needs of the nobility to maintain its control of properties connected with religious institutions. It was this useful congruence between the religious ideals of nonmonastic forms and the secular needs of

the nobility which led the nobles to support those forms as strongly in 840 as they had in 500.

In their attempts to reduce the role of the nobility in determining the character of consecration, the proponents of reform must be seen as innovators of a new conception of the meaning of religious service for women. To the extent that the practice of consecration had been changed by 840, to that extent had the reformers been successful. To the extent that the ideals of reform were themselves modified or unsuccessful, to that extent had the nobility managed to defend its interpretation of consecration. The reformers, whether bishops or kings, justified their demands for reform of consecration on grounds that must have been all but incomprehensible to consecrated and secular nobles alike. The noble practice of consecration was justified on grounds of traditional practices and the good which accrued to the individual and to her family through those practices. The noble view was not defended in any coherent written program, but was to be found in the actions of the nobles. There are numerous documents which show the relationship of both secular and consecrated nobles to consecrated life. From these sources the assumptions and ideals behind the practice become quite clear.

The nobility had controlled the organized religious life of women from the patristic period of the Church. Noble women provided the most important and probably the largest number of recruits to all consecrated forms, and the acceptance of a particular type of consecration by the nobility was an essential factor in the growth and

survival of that form. As might be expected, almost all consecrated widows or virgins were from the aristocracy, since only they could afford to practice religious retreat in their own homes. This in itself cast consecrated virginity/widowhood in a bad light. If it were to be the only means by which women could serve the Church, then only the rich could afford to seek their salvation in the most effective way. The poor could not isolate themselves from the world and could at best devote a small part of their time to prayer and meditation. The rest of their day would have to be spent in contact with the world as they sought by begging or working to support themselves. It is fair to say that the major obstacle to classical consecrated virginity/widowhood was that its proper performance depended on an economic support which few Christians could manage.¹

To those bishops who felt that all Christian souls should have the right to pursue their salvation through consecration this first way of practicing consecration was an abuse because it ran counter to the Pauline doctrine that in the eyes of God all are equal and have the right to seek salvation in the most perfect way. The logical solution was to group consecrated women together under the leadership of an experienced elder. This would provide the individual with guidance and the company of like minded women to encourage her, as well as an economic support which did not require her to come into contact with the secular world or to leave her prayers.²

As with most Christian precepts the ideal of equality within a religious community ran afoul of social reality. Communal life was in practice no more egalitarian than consecrated life practiced by

individuals on their own homes. It was almost impossible for people who had grown up in a strongly class conscious society to forget what they and their parents had been in the secular world. Not until Caesarius drew up the first redaction of his rule in the early sixth century was there any serious attempt to change the social attitudes of members of religious communities of women. Neither Caesarius nor any later reformer met with any real success in this regard. Though women of nonnoble extraction were not excluded from monastic communities, the leadership always came from the consecrated daughters of the aristocracy. That was an essential factor in the success of monasticism for women in the West.³

Until it was accepted as a valid way to express one's piety by the aristocratic ladies of Rome monasticism few adherents in the city, and none of any social importance. Monasticism was for the lower classes; women of rank lived as consecrated virgins or widows in their own homes. In his article, "La première communauté de vierges à Rome," Philibert Schmitz makes some interesting points about the social provenance of nuns at Rome. At the time the article was written it was a generally held notion that Marcella was the first consecrated virgin in Rome; Schmitz disagreed. He maintains that Jerome's panegyric of Marcella spoke not merely about the ascetic life but about the monastic--"the monastic status . . . , the monastic discipline of Pachomius." Jerome said that before Marcella no noble woman had entered the monastic form of consecration because it was associated with the lower classes.⁴ No noble woman

was willing to participate in an innovation which had no connection to the dominant classes, as Jerome explicitly said:

At that time none of the noble women of Rome entered the monastic profession nor, because it was thought by the people of the time to be an ignominious and vile innovation, did any dare to assume the name [of nun].⁵

Because monasticism for women was an unheard of innovation it was not accepted for some time by the educated upper classes. Monasticism was not mentioned in the Bible, nor was it part of the apostolic and early patristic Church. Thus it seemed a questionable way for one to show one's devotion. The women of the upper classes showed their piety as they had always shown it, and as only they could afford to do, in their own homes among their own families. When upper class women finally decided to enter the monastic life they brought their aristocratic attitudes with them. The entrance of aristocratic women into monasticism changed the character of that form. From a preserve of the lower classes monasticism became a form whose organization and daily functions were determined by nobles. The monastic community then mirrored the hierarchical secular world.

Cyprian asserted that it did not do for any Christian to respect earthly class differences, and that such respect for secular honors was especially inappropriate to a consecrated virgin.⁶ Yet Jerome tells us that Paula's famous monastery at Bethlehem was based on a strict segregation of the classes. There was a section set aside for the residence, dining, and work facilities of each class, upper, middle, and lower. Only in saying the psalms and in times devoted to communal prayer did the classes meet. Outside of these

periods the women of each class stayed strictly within their own parts of the monastery. Each group had its own abbess. While the classes were segregated, no group was treated better than the others. All received equal shares and quality of food, all were obligated to work, and the nobles were explicitly forbidden to keep servants. All classes were to be satisfied with the food and clothing given them, for as Paul said, the Christian was to be content if he had food and clothing, and should ask for nothing more.⁷

Later bishops such as Caesarius would doubtless have been shocked at this blatant admission of secular social arrangements into a monastery, but in its favor it might be said that by separating the classes within her monastery Paula prevented the oppression of members of the lower classes by those of higher class and could thus guarantee more equality of treatment than might be found in monasteries where women of all classes were forced to associate daily. Caesarius and other purists would argue that the artificiality of Paula's system defeated the purpose of cenobitic monasticism, which sought to impress on all Christians their equality with all others in the community of fellow believers.

Medieval churchmen were aware of the long association of all forms of consecration with the nobility, and many thought it was a good thing which brought glory to the individual and to the consecrated life. The anonymous author of Sadalberga's vita places her squarely in the tradition of the great noblewomen of the past who did so much to spread the idea of consecration for women. Sadalberga's discreet obedience to the rule was a direct result of her

imitation of noble women like Melanie and Paula. Jerome informs us that Melanie was of a very noble Roman family; her father Marcellinus had been consul. She left all the secular glory to which her birth entitled her and sailed for Jerusalem, where she assumed the name Thecla and lived in humility and charity. Likewise Paula rejected her patrimony in Greece for the Palestinian backwater called Bethlehem, where she lived in humility and the highest goodness according to Christian concepts of charity.⁸ The writer of Sadalberga's vita stressed the humility and charity of the great women who had served the Church. He seemed even more impressed with the noblesse oblige of these very noblest of women in taking the time to show such virtues, which were not expected of their class. He praised them not merely for following Christ but for leaving the material wealth and power which was due them because of the class into which they were born. While membership in the monastic life reflected glory on them the presence of such women in the monastic life reflected a glory on it that it would not otherwise have, and made it worthy of the attention of others.

Such attitudes ran directly counter to the ideals of equality expressed in all Frankish monastic rules. The equality of all members under the abbess was assumed by the rules as a factor without which cenobitic monasticism did not exist. Caesarius was especially concerned that the peace of the community would be destroyed by the arrogance of the members of upper class extraction.⁹ The election of the abbess should also be free of any secular considerations. When it became necessary to elect a new abbess no earthly

considerations were to enter into the deliberations of the community. Birth, wealth, and parentage had nothing to do with anyone's qualifications for the abbatial office. The nominee was to be the one whom the members felt would best direct the community in the unadulterated observance of the rule.¹⁰ The needs of the community and the criteria of the monastic life were as relevant in the election of the abess as in the regulation of the relationships of the members to each other. Secular criteria were more than irrelevant, they were harmful. From the abess to the most recently admitted novice, all members of the community were to direct their lives according to monastic criteria, the most basic of which was the social equality of all.

Benedict was more succinct and specific than Caesarius on the subject of the social equality of all members of a monastic community. In his chapter "Qualis debeat abbas" he insisted that there was to be no respecting of persons in the monastery. No one was to be preferred over another unless one was better in good deeds and more prompt in obedience than the other. In particular the free man was not to be preferred to the man of servile background unless he was superior in the monastic criteria. Benedict reminded his charges that Paul had said that under Christ there could be no slaves and no free men, but that all were equal. All served equally under God, and God was no respecter of persons.¹¹

Benedict agreed with Caesarius that there could be no cenobitic monasticism where the social and economic criteria of the secular world were used to regulate relations among members. The

purpose of monasticism was to enable the individual to live the perfect Christian life, which it was felt could not be done as a secular person. Among the distractions of the secular world was the inescapable necessity of judging others not as fellow followers of Christ but as social superiors or inferiors.

There was no evidence of any attempt to make equality of all members of the religious world a legislative program, as was the case for example with separation from the secular world. The ideal of equality was found only in rules and in letters by religious writers to consecrated readers, and does not seem to have been regarded by the proponents of Benedictine reform as a practical matter for synodal or capitular decrees.¹² The application of the ideal of equality was dependent more than any other issue on the attitudes of the local abbot and of the members of each community.

One abbess, Caesaria, abbess of the nuns of Arles, supported Caesarius on the ideal of the social equality of all members of a monastery. In her letter to Radegund and Richild she copied almost verbatim Chapter 6 of her brother's letter Vereor. Not only had those of noble extraction no right to pride themselves on their former secular dignities, they had no reason to do so. The poor would have an easier time in achieving salvation since they were not held back by longing for the material things they once possessed.¹³ Pope Zacharias went farther still in a letter of 751 to Boniface. Boniface had asked whether it would be proper for consecrated women, like men, to participate in the ceremony of foot washing which was part of the commemoration of the Lord's Supper. Boniface was

obviously concerned about the possible compromise of the women's modesty. The reply was surprisingly liberal: the participation of women in the ceremony was prescribed ("Hoc dominicum preseciptum est . . .") and was to be praised because both men and women had the same God. When people were meeting as a Christian community there were no sexes. Zacharias quoted the famous Pauline declaration that for Christians there was neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. In the perfect Christian community all were equal.¹⁴

Alcuin's letter to Gisla, abbess of Chelles, has already been discussed. It is of interest here because it combines the attitudes found in the rules and in the letters of Caesaria, Caesarius, and Zacharias with those of the vitae. While Alcuin insisted on the superiority of the religious life, he did not attack noble pride. There was no reference to Gisla's social equality with her subordinates at Chelles. Alcuin almost consoled Gisla for what she had lost in entering religion by assuring her that through her renunciation of secular glory she had gained a status of which she might be even prouder than of her social origins.¹⁵

The vitae provide answers to certain crucial questions that must be dealt with if we are to understand what communal consecrated life meant to the Franks. One might first ask, whose life was considered worthy of attention? It was not enough for an individual to have lived an edifying life. To be a worthwhile subject for a saint's life it was necessary for the individual to be worthy of attention in the first place. To be of noble birth added importance and grace to the simplest acts of piety. The important vitae of the

Merovingian and Carolingian period have to do exclusively with nobles. Radegund was the daughter and granddaughter of kings. She was captured by the Franks in a raid and given as booty to King Chlothar, who forced her to marry him.¹⁶ Leoba was of noble birth. She was given by her parents to the double monastery where Tetta, sister of the king, was abbess.¹⁷ Sadalberga was also of noble birth, was known personally to the king, and was married off to one of his favorites.¹⁸

Their noble status was of immense help in the progress of all these women in their profession. The vitae give a clear answer to the question, who became abbess? The facts as presented in the vitae show that in few cases could monastic rules have had anything to do with the selection of the abbess. Baudonivia went out of her way to defend the validity of Radegund's ascension to the abbacy of the community at Poitiers. Radegund does seem to have always been a stickler for form. The community at Poitiers, however, had been built for Radegund by her husband the king; the election of a cofoundress and queen whose associates would have been nobles or lesser rank than she was a matter of course.¹⁹

Leoba did spend many years as a subordinate nun, developing maturity in the monastic life. That fact was due to circumstances beyond Leoba's control, and not necessarily the result of her own desires. First, Leoba had been dedicated to religion while still a child; that in itself precluded her assuming any authority within the community for some time. More importantly, the monastery into which she was placed was a foundation of the royal family, not of

Leoba's. Her role in spreading monasticism among the women of Germany suggests that Leoba was not inclined to live a quiet life forever subordinate to her social superiors within the monastery at Winburn. Leoba's piety soon came to the attention of her kinsman Boniface, and he invited her to join him in Germany. The noble family connection was one that Tetta could well respect--it was after all due to that connection that she was an abbess--and she permitted Leoba to leave for the continent. Here Leoba's relationship to Boniface and her nobility ensured her a high position in the incipient German Church. She was forthwith made abbess of Bischofsheim. Bischofsheim served as a base of mission operations for Leoba and her noble associates. She was a preceptor of many future abbesses. These women were all of noble provenance, for Leoba was respected among the nobility of Germany to such an extent that many lords sent their daughters to Bischofsheim, and many matrons joined the community. Leoba's vita makes no mention of women of lower class joining the community at Bischofsheim. While some surely did so Leoba's biographer did not think them important enough to consider. Because of their class they could not have become abbesses, missionaries of Christianity, and proponents of Benedictine monasticism. Leoba's noble disciples became all these things.²⁰

There is reason to think that Sadalberga would not have come to the attention of the evangelist Eustasius if she had not been a noble widow. As a result of Eustasius' influence she had intended to enter the community founded by the "venerable lord Romaricus," another of Eustasius' disciples. Her plans were interrupted by her

forced marriage to the king's favorite. There is no better example of the fact that entrance into what was considered the most effective means to salvation was for all practical purposes the prerogative of a small elite circle. The nobles who formed that circle all knew of each other and shared common assumptions about the organization of society and of religion. Again, the vita says that Sadalberga's virtues came to the attention of the great preacher and founder of monasteries, Waldebert. The attention of such an important figure would hardly have been drawn to the piety of a nonnoble woman. Waldebert was certainly of the noble class, for he knew how to address Sadalberga's husband, how to counsel him to permit her to enter the consecrated life, where she became an abbess.²¹

If we ask to whom the vitae were supposed to appeal, it is clear from the evidence presented by the vitae themselves that their target was women of noble extraction. Further, the vitae of consecrated saints were directed particularly at those noblewomen who were already consecrated. There are several facts to support this contention. The promotion of individuals in the religious hierarchy due to family connections was presented as the natural order of things, to be sure. But while the authors of the vitae did not advocate any change in that regard, they did issue subtle qualifications and warnings. The heroines of the vitae did not depend on secular criteria alone to gain status within the religious life. They went through all the proper forms. They were virtuous women sincerely interested in the consecrated life and in their subordinates. If their rise to power in the religious world was not strictly

according to the monastic ideals of the rules, they were not underserving of their positions. These women were neither time servers nor tyrants. Once they had achieved the abbacy they lived according to the rule of their communities in every way. For this reason the picture of consecrated life given us by the vitae is as unreal as that presented by the rules. Not all women were saints who could strike a workable balance between the assumptions of their class concerning consecration for women and the ideals of consecration expressed in monastic rules and ecclesiastical legislation.

The basic act in the formation of a monastic mentality was to limit the amount of contact between consecrated women and secular persons, especially with parents. Caesarius was concerned with the common tendency of consecrated women to keep in regular contact with their relatives either personally or through letters. His concern was justified, for it was the custom of the nobility to keep control over its consecrated female relatives, and for the women to desire contact with their secular relatives. The result was that members of religious institutions did not develop that set of attitudes which were thought by the promonastic reformers to mark the consecrated personality, but continued to share the outlook of their secular relatives. If secular criteria such as social standing, wealth, and family ties became the accepted means of judging members of religious communities, which they usually did, a situation would develop like that against which Caesarius warned in his rule. The abbess would be elected because of her secular qualities, not for her fitness in

the monastic world, and secular ideals would become the guiding premises for the governance of the community.

The rules of Caesarius and Donatus suggest that there was a significant amount of furtive passing of notes and gifts between consecrated women and their relatives. Clearly, both consecrated and secular relatives felt the importance of continual contact with each other. So important was this contact that consecrated women rejected the ideal of the separation of consecrated women from the world. The secret transmission and reception of letters and gifts was as strongly attacked as any illicit act in Caesarius' and Donatus' rules.²² Written communication was in fact the only alternative left to members of communities where the personal contacts to which consecrated noblewomen were accustomed were severely limited. Whatever the bishops may have felt, insistence on some form of regular communication with their relatives was not a matter of caprice on the part of the women. Consecrated women wanted to maintain their rights to participate in the economic and political activities of their families, and many simply refused to comply with the extreme and permanent separation from family interest required by monastic rules.

The specific effects of that refusal on the nature of consecration for women will be examined below. First it is necessary to examine what might be called the psychological reasons for the refusal of consecrated women to separate themselves from their families completely. Several sources indicate how difficult it was for women to isolate themselves from their families as totally as

monastic rules commanded. Such isolation deprived women of the protection of their kinships group, and in particular removed them from male protectors. They felt alone in a hostile world and completely without defense. The women correspondents of Boniface and Lul, all consecrated, often expressed an acute sense of isolation, and most of their letters were petitions for aid. They wanted Boniface to assume the role of male protector of which they had been deprived. The letters show that consecration did not protect noble women from sharing the political and social vicissitudes of their kin.

The letter of Eaburg to Boniface written 716-20 has already been examined in some detail. She admitted that her faith was much weaker than that of her sister, who was suffering in a Roman prison because of her adventurous seeking after perfection. Though she realized that "the love of man produces sorrow, but the love of Christ illuminates the heart," Eaburg was oppressed by the loss of her only male relative. She begged Boniface to take his place. She asked for the right to call Boniface not only father but brother so that he could replace the dead Oshere, who was her protector and dearest to her of all living beings.

For that reason, my beloved, already my brother for a long time--but now I call you both father and brother in the Lord of lords--now that bitter and cruel death has separated him from me whom I loved above all others, my brother Oshere, I feel for you a love and affection more than for any other man.²³

Eaburg was honest, but from the monastic point of view her attitudes were not what was desired of a consecrated woman. Oshere was more important to her than her abbess, her bishop, her religious

associates, or her religious service. He was dead now, and she needed to replace him for her peace of mind. Eaburg was not separated from the world, for separation was a matter of attitude more than of physical barriers. It is obvious that Boniface could do nothing to protect Eaburg from physical danger; what she wanted was psychological support, and only a relative could offer that support. Thus Boniface became her foster brother.

A letter of the period 719-22 from the abbess Eangyth and her daughter Heaburg (Bugga), who was also consecrated, reveals yet more of the attitudes of the consecrated upper classes toward their situation. The letter gives an insight into the heavy burdens carried daily by an abbess of a large community. She had to be a political as well as a religious leader, and she was not able to escape the repercussions of being an important part of the political and social elite. Eangyth and Bugga asked Boniface to become their protector. These women, like the majority of the female correspondents of Boniface and Lul, were English, and they were disturbed by the unsettled political conditions in England at the time. In addition to the problems of running a large community of defenseless women domestic affairs and internal disputes had soured the relationships between all people in their society and had made personal peace impossible. Not only was the community suffering from lack of necessities, but unfriendly persons had turned the king and queen against the two women. Only one male relative remained, and he was mentally defective. Meanwhile the king continually increased his persecution of the unfortunate family.

Added to all these other miseries is the loss of friends and of a veritable host of close relatives. We have neither son nor brother, father nor paternal uncle, except for a single daughter, who is destitute . . . and her one sister and aged mother and the son of their brother, who is most unfortunate because he is mentally ill ("et illum valde infelicem propter ipsius mentis") and because our king hates his family exceedingly. And there is no one who could be of help to us.²⁴

So the women turned to Boniface.

External events prevented Eangyth and Bugga from becoming truly monastic personalities. The political leaders of their society did not respect their consecrated status. What interested the king and other nobles was not Eangyth and Bugga's membership in a monastic community. What was of relevance was the fact that the women were members of a family whose political power was declining. An abbess was perforce an important political and social force in her society. She was both a buffer against the secular world and a representative of her community to the outside. Her problems were magnified by her connection to a noble family and by her political functions in the kingdom.²⁵ The letters of Eaburg and of Eangyth illustrate the two sides of the failure of consecrated women to separate themselves from their noble attitudes. Eaburg was mentally incapable of doing so; Eangyth and Bugga were not permitted to do so. The problem was both internal and external to any institutionalized form of consecration. In any case the actual implementation of strict monastic separation would have meant the isolation of the individual from the protection of her family just as surely as did the death of male relatives. She would be vulnerable to the attacks of unscrupulous secular and consecrated enemies who did not hesitate to call on the aid of their kin.

The effect of any monastic isolation of the mental peace of consecrated noblewomen is underlined by a letter of Bugga to Boniface, written in 720-22. Again Bugga asked for Boniface's protection:

Therefore, I again humbly request that you might deign to offer your intercession to God with zeal for such an insignificant person such as me, seeing that his grace will make me safe with your protection.²⁶

Bugga suggested that it was the duty of Boniface as the substitute head of her family to pray for his adopted sister. Boniface was more than a brother and father in Christ, as Eaburg had pointed out in her first letter to him ("iam olim frater, nunc autem ambo pariter in Domino dominorum abba et frater"). The Christian relationship strengthened the bonds of the desired secular familiar relationship of protector to protected.

Rudolf praised Leoba's virtue in forgetting her native land and her people. He assumed that failure to do so was a common weakness among consecrated women, and he held Leoba up as an example to be followed. She was so imbued with virtue and with the desire to fulfill the duties of the consecration she had assumed that Rudolf took it for granted that she thought of nothing but religious matters. One might suggest that Leoba could face the trials of mission work in Germany because she had a powerful relative close by to act as her protector. A letter of Leoba has survived to show that this was not always so, and that Rudolf exaggerated. Sometime after 732 Leoba wrote Boniface asking him to pray for her parents; her father was dead and her mother was very ill. Leoba reminded Boniface that he was a relative on her mother's side, then asked to

be treated as a yet closer relative. Leoba was an only child, and she felt the lack of a brother to replace her father as a protector. She asked Boniface to consider her worthy of being treated and protected like a sister, since there was no man of her clan to whom she felt closer, and all her hope was placed in him.²⁸

Thus did Leoba join the list of consecrated women who gained Boniface's protection. What these women sought was more than a brother-and-sister-in-Christ relationship. In fact, they made it clear that such a relationship was the least of their desires, though it might serve as a pretext for imposing on such a powerful and important man. It was his importance and power, not his saintliness, that drew women in distress to Boniface. The fact that he was a figure in their religious world facilitated entrance into the relationship they really sought. But Boniface was a power to be reckoned with in secular and ecclesiastical politics. As such he could act to solve the problems which arose because of the social and political significance of those women. The letters exist only because the writers lacked the protection of a powerful relative. But consecrated women who did possess such protection have also left their mark on the sources of the period.

The consecrated woman showed her rejection of the secular world and its values by severely restricting her contacts with her family as with all consecrated persons. All persons who were not part of her world were the same to her, even those who according to secular values should be closest to her. The other face of the

separated mentality was positive: an acceptance of the hierarchy and the criteria of the religious world. The outward expression of the positive aspect was absolute obedience to the abbess and her assistants. The officers of the community were supposed to have achieved their positions because of their success in meeting the requirements of the religious world. These criteria were indigenous to the religious world and had nothing to do with what was required for success in secular society. Absolute obedience was due to the abbess because she was the abbess, not because of her social provenance.

The consecrated woman had no right to initiate any act at all, but must wait for orders from the abbess or her assistants. Caesarius repeatedly stated that obedience must be instant and without murmur.²⁹ All were socially equal within a monastery but success in achieving the goals of the religious life made some members of the community superior to others. All were subordinate to the abbess, who was to be obeyed second only to God.³⁰ Absolute subordination of all to the abbess meant that she alone was responsible for regulating the interpersonal relations of the members of the community. She was responsible for discipline and for the resolution of any conflicts between members, who were not permitted to appeal to any outside source for the resolution of their disputes. Caesarius and Aurelian went beyond exhortations to mutual respect among the members of the community. Lawsuits between consecrated women were absolutely forbidden: "Lites nullas habeatis."³¹ Lawsuits were characteristic of secular persons. Not only did going to law run counter to the

spirit one would expect of those living the true Christian life; lawsuits would also cause the bringing of secular persons and concepts into the religious community. Conflicts were to be settled within the community according to the criteria and procedures of the religious world. Anyone who injured her sister through malicious gossip was to give full satisfaction as the abbess directed, and the penance was of the severest kind.³²

The fact is that the Frankish nobility did not accept the rationale behind the ideal hierarchy of a religious community as established by monastic rules. At the heart of all monastic rules lay an attitude toward interpersonal relationships that ran directly counter to that on which secular society was founded. That there was indeed a practical value in electing an abbess that member of the community with the highest social standing is well illustrated by the well known revolt of the consecrated women of Poitiers against their abbess. Gregory of Tours devoted considerable space in his History of the Franks to the revolt of Chrodield against the abbess Leubovera, which began in 589 and lasted well into 590. The conflict began because Chrodield and her cousin Basina felt that as daughters of kings they did not need to submit to any discipline, especially not from any social inferior. The controversy was so long lived and so serious because the rebels knew that they could rely on the support of their families. There is no mention of Leubovera's family in Gregory's account. It was either of no importance or had died out; or Leubovera may have adhered strictly to

monastic principle and refused to add to the intrusion of secular persons and attitudes into the community.³³

Chrodiel organized her revolt in a manner typical of medieval nobles. She surrounded herself with associates whom she bound to herself by an oath, accused the abbess of crimes which justified the insurrection, and claimed leadership of the community, which in turn she justified because of her social status. In short, she offered a stark contrast to Radegund, who had founded the community at Poitiers not long before. In many respects, however, what Chrodiel did differed from Radegund's behavior only in degree and crassness. The result of Chrodiel's act was to split the community between her supporters and those who continued to obey Leubovera. Chrodiel claimed to be the daughter of the former king Charibert, and Basina was the daughter of King Chilperic. The reason for their revolt was that they felt that they were not being treated like the daughters of kings in the community of Poitiers. Chrodiel put her case thus: "I am going to my royal parents, and I will let them know of our injuries, because we have not been treated like the daughters of kings but have been humiliated as though we were lower class" ("quia non ut filiae regum, sed ut malarum ancillarum genitae in hoc loco humiliamur . . .").³⁴

Chrodiel did go so far as to take her complaint to Gregory of Tours, but she was not satisfied with his assurances that he and his fellow bishops would look into her accusations against Leubovera and would punish the abbess according to ecclesiastical law if she were found guilty. Chrodiel insisted that she was going to appeal

her case to the kings, who were her relatives. Gregory threatened her with excommunication and gave her a letter to read which had been written to Radegund by a group of bishops around 567.³⁵ The bishops stressed the need for strict obedience to the rule of Caesarius by all who chose to become members of Radegund's foundation. Nothing was to be done at Poitiers which was not consonant with Caesarius' concept of consecration for women, and no one was to presume to act contrary to the letter and spirit of his rule.

. . . therefore we specifically establish that, as has been said, if anyone from places put by the providence of God in our sacerdotal governance is worthy to become a member of your monastery in the city of Poitiers, founded according to the blessed memory of Caesarius, lord bishop of Arles, she may have no permission to leave, as is contained in the rule, if she was known to have entered voluntarily, so that the turpitude of one may not lead into dishonor as a crime what shines forth as an honor to others.³⁶

Gregory sought to impress on Chrodiel through this letter that she was breaking every commandment Caesarius had laid down about stability, patience, charity, and settlement of all disputes between members within the community. Chrodiel remained unimpressed and stood on her rights as a noble to take her case to her royal relatives. Chrodiel, by her adherence to secular noble attitudes had disobeyed the rule, her abbess, and a bishop.

Chrodiel did go to King Guntchramn, who honored her with gifts but did nothing else to help her cause. Then she returned to Tours to await the bishops whom the king had ordered to meet there to decide the case. The bishops did not arrive soon enough to suit the rebels, who advanced on Poitiers and locked themselves in the basilica of St. Hilary. Here the women gathered around themselves

thieves, murderers, adulterers, and other criminal types, "preparing themselves for war and saying, 'We are queens, and we will not return to our monastery until the abbess is thrown out.'" ³⁷ These noble-women were so determined to assert their rights that when Gregory's associate bishop Maroveus came to the basilica to excommunicate them Chrodiel set her hired thugs on him and his deacons and priests, putting them to flight with bloodshed. ³⁸ The rebel forces proceeded to occupy the properties of the community and to threaten the abbess.

The effect of such behavior on the community was disastrous. Those who could depend on their families or who had their own homes to return to left the cloister. Those who were poor had no choice but to go to other communities of consecrated women. ³⁹ The rebels, having turned their revolt into a full-fledged military action, decided to take the final step and to take over the whole institution. They broke into the cloister, savagely attacked Leubovera, and took her prisoner. To Maroveus' command that she release Leubovera Chrodiel replied that if anyone attempted to rescue the abbess she would be killed.

When King Childebert heard of this threat he contacted King Guntchramn, and it was agreed to call together a board of bishops from the two Frankish kingdoms. Gregory of Tours, Maroveus of Poitiers, and Ebrigisil of Cologne were selected to handle the matter. The bishops declared that they could not administer the ecclesiastical penalties until the rebellion was suppressed. Chrodiel had by now added kings to the list of defied authorities. Her actions were those typical of obstreperous medieval nobles; she

was reacting to her situation in the only way she knew, in the manner of her class. The kings in turn made no exception for her because of her consecrated status--a status that did not guide Chrodiel's actions in any case--but treated her as they would any noble who disturbed the peace of the realm. Count Maccone was sent to reduce the insurrection with military force. Only then did the bishops, none of whom had acted in a very edifying manner throughout the crisis, dare to institute legal proceedings. Leubovera was acquitted of Chrodiel's charge of adultery. Chrodiel and her cronies were punished according to canon law, but were unrepentant to their dying days.⁴⁰

The revolt of Chrodiel says much about the effect of the nobility and its assumptions on the character of consecration for women in the Merovingian and Carolingian periods. Conflicts involving consecrated nobles almost automatically brought secular political and power concepts into the religious community. Gregory and the other bishops acting in their capacity as churchmen were ineffective when members of a religious institution chose to act as nobles in their own interests, interests based on family power. That was so because the rebels thereby transcended the religious world, and thus the powers of religious authorities to enforce religious ideals. Consciousness of family interest supported and facilitated revolt against the hierarchy and the ideals of the religious world. In this sense "revolt" refers not primarily to the kind of physical assault perpetrated by Chrodiel, but to the mentality that lay

behind it: a refusal to accept the principles and behavior expected of consecrated women by ecclesiastical authorities.

The bishops could assert ecclesiastical authority only after they had called on the aid of the heads of the secular hierarchy, the kings. The kings acted against the consecrated rebels as they would have against any group of nobles who disturbed the royal peace. They used military and secular legal force. Consecrated nobles, as we have seen in the letters of consecrated women to Boniface, were nothing else to the rulers of the early Middle Ages than nobles whose profession was religious rather than military. As far as secular nobles were concerned there was nothing about consecration that set off an individual so that she was not amenable to secular law. The behavior of consecrated nobles shows that they accepted that interpretation. The king was the final protector of religious propriety for consecrated women, not the bishops or abbesses. The argument was one between nobles over the management of an institution which was a noble preserve. That management was directed by the nobility according to its own concepts. At bottom neither a monastic rule nor any other purely religious concept had anything to do with the matter. The kings for their part were reacting against disquiet in their kingdoms and against a revolt which defied the officers of the kingdoms. Among those officers were the bishops and the abbess of the community at Poitiers.

The problems caused by the failure of members of religious communities to leave behind the attitudes of their class plagued ecclesiastical leaders throughout the Merovingian and the

Carolingian periods. The result was not always violence, but the fact that consecrated noblewomen continued to behave much as they would in the secular world caused serious tensions within religious communities and prevented consecration for women from having the significance in Frankish society desired by the proponents of monastic reform.⁴¹

One of the most important of the monastic rules, that of Donatus, owed its existence to unrest within a community of women for which Donatus was responsible as bishop. Donatus states in the prologue to his rule that he would not have written his rule at all but for the importunities of the consecrated women of Besançon.⁴² The women felt the need for a new rule, for none of the rules that then existed was really a relevant guide for them. Donatus was not pleased with this attitude. Consecrated women were presuming to determine for themselves what was and was not suitable for the proper practice of their way of life. Donatus replied to the women rather sharply. The rules of which they complained had been devised by great bishops. Therefore, Donatus refused to try to make something better than they. However, to please the consecrated women in his charge he did provide them with a selection of the best of the several extant rules. Donatus did not seem very hopeful that he would be able to please the women.

Given the circumstances that led to the writing of Donatus' rule it is not surprising to find such strong insistence on obedience. More than any other rule written in the Frankish kingdom that of Donatus stressed the need for absolute obedience in the monastic

life. Donatus adopted Caesarius' strictures on the need for obedience, but the core of his rule was the twelve degrees of humility which he borrowed from Benedict. Benedict was more concerned with strict subordination and obedience than was Caesarius, and in that respect his rule was more applicable to the situation faced by Donatus than was Caesarius'. The first four of the degrees of humility had to do with obedience. The first degree of humility, the very foundation of humility, was obedience without delay. The second degree consisted in not loving one's own will, and not expecting to have one's own way in anything. Nothing so raised Donatus' ire as did the very thought of a self-willed nun. One's own will was a possession, the most vile of all possessions, and a consecrated woman had no right to such a possession. The third degree of humility was that for the love of God one submitted oneself in all things to the command of one's superiors. The fourth degree of humility was reached when the individual did not complain even to herself if her superiors seemed to require the impossible of her, or if their treatment of her seemed unjust or unduly harsh. The subordinate had no right to question the validity of her superiors' commands.⁴³

Donatus was determined to change the attitudes of the consecrated noblewomen in his charge. These women, like typical nobles, were standing on their rights to judge for themselves the circumstances under which they would practice consecration. They had judged the validity of the rules drawn up by several of the greatest bishops of the Christian Church. Such questioning of authority was

more than insubordination. Given the social provenance and family connections of consecrated women, questioning easily led to disobedience, and disobedience to revolt. The purpose of Donatus' rule was to scotch any potential disobedience among the consecrated women of the see of Besançon. There would be no revolt against the religious order of Besançon, but the sources of trouble were there, as they were in every house of consecrated noble women.

Communities of consecrated women were clearly as far from the religious ideal as was the rest of the Merovingian Church. But it must be kept in mind that communities are composed of individuals. The reason for the deviation of communities as a whole from the ideals of the bishops is to be sought in the refusal of most members of those communities to reject the attitudes of the noble class. As the case of Chrodiel shows, a single individual could have a significant effect on the tranquility of a whole community. The consecrated woman Agnes was in the tradition of Chrodiel, though circumstances prevented her from creating the havoc wreaked by Chrodiel. Agnes was excommunicated by the Council of Mâcon in 583, that is, some years before the outbreak of Chrodiel's revolt. She had run away from her monastery and had been returned, evidently by force. She then used the properties she still retained in her possession in an attempt to bribe certain secular potentates.⁴⁴ To what end the Council did not say, but Agnes could have had no other purpose in mind than to use bribery in order to bring secular pressure to bear on the religious institution so that her status in the community would be improved.

Such disrespect for orderly religious life and for the authorities of the religious world finally became a matter of royal interest in the Capitulare missorum generale of 802. The Missi were ordered to examine the communities of women carefully to make sure that none of them were wandering from the right path. In particular any kind of litigation or contentions within them was forbidden, and none of the members was to presume to disobey or behave contrary to the will of the abbess or of any secular heads of monasteries ("magistris").⁴⁵ The ruler, in the tradition inherited from the Merovingian kings, was the final arbiter and protector of religious propriety for all consecrated women in the realm. In that guise he did not hesitate to use secular officials to maintain that propriety. He moved against members of religious communities who brought the litigiousness, contentiousness, and independence of attitude typical of the nobility into religious institutions. If secular attitudes were brought into religious communities the application of the Benedictine reform to them would be frustrated.

Another reason that the ruler could not tolerate disobedience and contentions within religious institutions was that, as the revolt of Chrodiel had shown, disagreements between nobles involved whole families and could disturb the peace of the realm. The abbess was not only the head of a monastery, but an officer of the king, and he demanded obedience to someone so important to the governance of the kingdom. Instructive in this respect is the phrase, "let no one dare to be disobedient or contrary to the magistri or to the abbesses in anything ("in nullo magistris et abbatissis inhobedientes vel

contrarie fieri audeant"). The magistri were most likely the secular possessors of monasteries, the kings, queens, and nobles of both sexes who founded and endowed the communities. Noblewomen and queens often served as secular abbesses or patrons, and they in turn appointed a consecrated woman as the "religious" abbess, who was usually a relative. The secular heads were the real powers in the direction of the communities, and it was in recognition of the actualities of Carolingian religious custom that they were placed before the consecrated abbesses as the persons to be obeyed without question. The command of the Capitulare missorum generale shows that the king did respect the ideals of the religious world as expressed by several generations of synodal decrees. There was more than a little self interest involved, however, for the capitulary was one of many means of securing the hold of the secular nobility over communities of consecrated women.

Gregory of Tours' account of the conflict between Ingtrude and her daughter Berthegund epitomizes almost every aspect of the proprietary attitude of the nobility toward communities of consecrated women. Gregory tells us that Ingtrude had founded a community for women at Tours. At the same time she wrote to her daughter telling her to leave her husband and to come to Tours to become abbess. Berthegund did so, leaving her husband to care for their children and declaring that no married person would ever get to heaven. The husband complained to Gregory, who went to the community and read what he called the appropriate part of the Nicene

Creed (actually Chapter 14 of the Council of Gangres of 340).⁴⁶

That particular canon provided that anyone who said that married people could not enter heaven was to be anathema. Berthegund, afraid that she would be excommunicated for heresy, returned to her husband immediately.

Ingitrude would not give up so easily. She waited several years and then repeated her command to her daughter. Berthegund once more came to Tours, this time accompanied by her sons. Ingitrude realized that she had overreached herself this time and sent Berthegund to Bertram, bishop of Bordeaux; he was Ingitrude's son and Berthegund's brother. When the injured husband confronted Bertram, the bishop declared that though they had been married for thirty years the man had married his sister without her parents' consent and that therefore the marriage was void. The husband then applied to King Guntchramn, who forced Bertram to promise to return Berthegund to her husband. The king claimed his right as a relative of Berthegund to punish her if she had committed any wrong against her husband. Bertram sent a message to Berthegund telling her to go to St. Martin's in Tours to do penance. This she did, and when her husband came to retrieve her she appeared wearing a nun's habit and refused to go with him.

So things remained until Bishop Bertram died. His death shocked Berthegund into a change of mind. Her brother was dead, and she was cut off from her husband and children. She was isolated from those in her family who could give her meaningful support. She left the convent despite her mother's opposition. Now a conflict

developed between mother and daughter over the right to the inheritance to the estate of Ingitrude's husband. Maroveus and Gregory were ordered by the king to settle the issue. But the bishops got no more respect than they were to receive from Chrodiel. Ingitrude went directly to the king, who decided that she should get three quarters of the inheritance and Berthegund the rest. Berthegund did not accept the king's judgment and the dispute continued.

Ingitrude appointed her niece to be her successor as abbess. That displeased the women of the community and they began to complain. Gregory refused to listen to the complainants and they gave in. In other words, Gregory accepted the right of the noble patron/foundress both to appoint herself as abbess and to appoint her own relative, who does not appear to have been a member of the community, as her successor with no concern for the opinions of the members. He accepted this Frankish custom despite the fact that he knew of the work of Caesarius and Caesaria at Arles and of Radegund at Poitiers. Gregory shows us the reality of consecrated life for women in the Frankish kingdom, and it is a picture as valid for the Carolingian as for the Merovingian period.

Ingitrude died, and her daughter sought to enter the community at Tours, but was not permitted to do so. Ingitrude's niece and her supporters were determined to keep their hold on power. Berthegund appealed to King Childebert. The king reversed the previous decision and declared that Berthegund was to inherit all of her mother's and father's properties, including everything Ingitrude had bequeathed to the religious community she had founded.

Berthegund stripped the building which housed the community bare. Like Chrodield she gathered a group of criminals about her and seized all the goods from estates donated to the support of the community and then returned to Poitiers in triumph.

These incidents add to the information about noble attitudes toward religious institutions which is to be found in the account of the revolt at Poitiers. While that revolt illustrates the fact that consecrated life and communities of consecrated women were both noble affairs, the behavior of Ingitrude and Berthegund shows that management of a religious institution was a family affair. The foundress assumed that she had the right to be the abbess (recall Rade Gund) and to appoint her successor to that office. Gregory accepted that attitude, and used his power as bishop to make sure that Ingitrude's wishes were carried out. The importance of the family connection is a significant element in Gregory's story. Bishop Bertram as a son and brother served as a protector. He faced the angry king and devised a ploy to permit his mother and his sister to get their way after all. Yet the king also claimed a right to judge Berthegund not just as king but as a relative. This noble family did not accept the limitations which Caesarius would have put on their contacts with those relatives who happened to be living in a community of consecrated women. Bertram's death left Berthegund isolated and without an effective male protector. Now the consecrated life was no refuge but a source of weakness in her position in the secular world which she had left behind. Since the management of the community was a family matter in this period family economics could not be but a

matter of extreme interest to women like Ingitrude and Berthe Gund. They fell out over inheritance, a matter which would not interest a truly separated personality. Ingitrude had already wanted her daughter to inherit the abbacy. Then the two women fought over the bequest of Ingitrude's husband as would any two noblewomen, despite the monastic injunction against litigation between consecrated women. Ingitrude gave the abbacy to her niece as the next available heir to that position in her family; there was no question of letting the abbacy of the family religious foundation out of family hands. When Ingitrude died the king was scrupulous to avoid meddling directly in the appointment of an abbess of a consecrated community. But he deprived the abbess of any real power over her cousin by giving inheritance of the economic support of the institution to Berthe Gund. That fact flew in the face of the proposition that what was donated to a religious institution belonged to it forever. Though nothing could be farther from the ideal of monastic independence Gregory had not one disapproving word for any of it.

Gregory and Maroveus were as ineffective in this conflict as they were to be in the revolt at Poitiers. No one paid any attention to them, for they would judge the case according to the laws and interests of the Church, not according to the interests of the noble family involved. The women went to their kinsman the king or to Bishop Bertram, not because he was a bishop but because he was the head of the family. The king determined the disposition of the properties of the community after Ingitrude's death. He did not consult Gregory, nor was he concerned that his decision destroyed a

community of consecrated women by depriving it of any economic support. The king found in favor of a family member--Berthegund--and against another family member--Berthegund's cousin, the abbess.

Also typical of noble attitudes toward consecration was that Berthegund entered and left that state as she pleased. Like Rade Gund she assumed monastic dress on her own initiative, though in this case with the approbation of her family. Gregory did not seem upset that she had left her husband and children, but that she had done so for a heretical reason. It was not true that married people could not go to heaven. Outside of the theological issue Gregory had nothing critical to say about Berthegund's entering and then leaving the community for which he was responsible as bishop of Tours. The Frankish nobility had always seen consecration and marriage as two nonexclusive ways of life whose validity for members of their families depended on the needs of the family at a given moment. Neither state was necessarily permanent, but if one of the two was more permanent than the other it was marriage, not consecration.

The role of the family in determining the admission of female relatives and in founding communities of consecrated women cannot be overemphasized. The desire of families to keep control over their female relatives was a prime factor in preventing monasticism from achieving the character desired for it by writers of rules and by the Benedictine reform movement of the Carolingian era. That desire was also an indispensable support for the continued existence of nonmonastic forms such as consecrated widowhood/virginity practiced at home and of the diaconal/canonical form.

To be sure, a need was often turned into a good deed, and more than one cloister of the early Middle Ages owes its creation to the desire of a paterfamilias to make a home for his daughter where she could rule and hold sway, where she was safe. One was thus spared the trouble of finding a suitable husband for her.⁴⁷

The earliest ceremony of presentation of girls to consecrated virginity shows that from the first the interest of the family in the process could not be denied. The Ordo Romanus assumed that the parents would present the girl at the altar and turn her over to the control of the bishop. In lieu of parents the girl was to appear with her adstipulator, a man who had paterfamilial powers over her. He had to give her express consent to the consecration of his ward.⁴⁸ There was no time when the consecrated virgin was free from authority. Her father gave her over to the authority of Christ as her husband, which meant in reality that she was henceforth under the control of the bishop.⁴⁹

That it was the duty of the parents to be responsible donors of daughters to religious communities had been noted above. Parents were not to give infants to religious communities, nor to expect religious institutions to serve as a school for their children. Parents must realize that donation of a child to a religious community was permanent. Many sources indicate the importance attached to parental decisions to donate a daughter to religious service. Three councils supported the right of parents to decide for their children and required the girls to accept that decision and to remain in the profession chosen for them. The Council of Orléans of 549, in establishing periods of novitiate for monastic and canonical

communities, required that in monastic communities an entrant was to remain a novice for a year, whether she had entered the community voluntarily or had been offered by her parents. The novitiate for prospective canonesses was set at three years. After the novice had entered fully into the consecrated community she was never to leave it.⁵⁰

The Council of Lyons of 583 addressed itself to girls who had with the consent of their parents voluntarily entered religious institutions. If they left the cloister of their own wills they were to be returned and excommunicated.⁵¹ The agreement of the parents to their daughter's decision to enter the religious life added to the seriousness and permanence of her move, for the entrant could not excuse her flight on the grounds of family opposition.

The Council of Paris of 614 considered the other form of consecration available to aristocratic women: consecrated widowhood/virginity practiced at home. Widows and maidens who had assumed that form of consecration, whether on their own initiative or because of parental decision, and who married afterwards were to be excommunicated.⁵²

These three councils recognized the central role of parental decision in the entrance of women into all forms of consecration. The consecrated woman had no basis for complaint if she had been dedicated to religion by her parents. The decision of the parents was put on an equal footing with an independent decision by the individual by each of the councils. Entrance into the consecrated life was permanent no matter who made the final decision. The

Council of Lyon seems to have taken it for granted that parental permission was necessary for consecration to take place. At any rate the bishops at Lyon felt that entrance under such circumstances made the status of the entrant especially permanent and the abandonment of her vows particularly reprehensible.

Rudolf's vita of Leoba further underlines the central role of the noble paterfamilias in the entrance of daughters into religion. As a result of Leoba's pious example many nobles and potentates sent their daughters to Leoba's monastery in perpetual service to God, and many matrons rejected their secular existence for consecration as nuns. The matrons, as long as they were widows, were free to enter Leoba's community as they pleased. As for unmarried girls and women, Rudolf was careful to assure his readers that they had entered the monastery as a result of their fathers' decisions. The head of the noble family had the final say in determining the future of his daughters. The daughters of the German nobility were donated to religious service by their fathers; Rudolf did not consider the wishes of the girls as a factor worth mentioning. Yet Rudolf did not forget to insist on the validity of the monastic ideal in his account. The dedication of these noble girls was permanent: "Multi enim nobiles et potentes viri filias suas Deo in monasterio sub perpetua servitura tradiderunt"53

The essential role of the parents in the admission of children to religious communities is supported by two capitularies, both from the years 818-19. Both simply forbid any Church official to consecrate any child without the permission of the child's parents.

The Capitulare a legibus addenda declared that if anyone tonsured a boy or veiled a girl without parental authorization he would have to pay three times his law, either to the child if it was of age, or to the parents if it was not.⁵⁴ The Capitulare ecclesiasticum repeated the prohibition, and referred to the penalties established in the Capitulare a legibus addenda.⁵⁵ The extreme harshness of the fine indicates that the removal of a child from the direct control of the family was a serious business which only the head of the family could undertake, keeping in mind the needs of the family at the moment. The loss of a marriageable daughter was a particularly important matter. It was in the interest of the noble family to determine for itself which of its children, if any, were to enter religion. The nobles were determined to prevent the Church from controlling admission to those religious institutions which the nobility had after all founded and patronized with economic support.

The right of the Church to determine the vocation of an applicant for admission to a religious community was severely limited by these decisions of secular law. The qualifications of an applicant could no longer even in theory be based purely on religious considerations. The first and foremost question was, did her parents permit her entrance? The rights of the family over those of the Church, even more over those of a postulant who might feel a sincere vocation or who might be seeking in the Church a refuge from an unwanted marriage, were established by the ruler as the real head of the Frankish Church.

The Capitulare ecclesiasticum reinforced the hold of the family over all of its female relatives who considered entering the religious life. The capitulary expressed disapproval of the freedom with which widows entered religion. It has already been noted that widows were not encouraged to assume the veil, especially if they intended to reside in their own homes. The Capitulare ecclesiasticum sought to recruit the noble family in the effort to end the continued existence of consecrated widowhood. Widows were required to wait for thirty days after the death of their husbands before they decided whether to be consecrated or not. After the thirtieth day the widow was to consult her bishop, but also her family and friends as to what she should do.⁵⁶ The noble family and its connections were added to the filtering process which was meant to discourage widows from entering what the Benedictine reformers thought to be an undesirable form of consecration. Despite his pro-Benedictine attitudes toward religion Louis the Pious recognized the control of the noble family over admission to religious communities by making that control the law of the kingdom. In doing so he did no noble family a greater favor than he did for the royal family itself. The cases of Ingitrude and Berthegund; the procedures established by the Ordo Romanus; the provisions of the Councils of Orléans in 549, of Lyon in 583, of Paris in 614; and finally the commands of the Capitulare ecclesiasticum, all lead to one unavoidable conclusion. That conclusion is that in practice the desires of the noble family were more effective in forming the decision of a woman to enter consecration than the desires of any bishop or of the individual herself.

Foundation and patronage of religious institutions gave noble families much say in determining the character of those communities. The greatest of the nobles, the kings, led the way in both foundation and in donation, and that gave them the power to regulate every aspect of the internal management of religious institutions. The role of the kings as founders and patrons will be considered in Chapter V. Here the emphasis will be on the nonroyal nobility. Many a community of women owed its existence to a noble who having decided to enter religious life used his or her wealth to found a religious institution. In that way the individual could show his or her piety and still remain in control of the properties involved. This was the case with the nobleman Romaricus, whose foundation Sadalberga hoped to enter before she was forced to marry.⁵⁷ Sadalberga herself followed the example of Romaricus after her husband permitted her to be consecrated. She founded a community in the suburb of Laon on property inherited from her father. Sadalberga's was a typical noble foundation in which the founder/abbess used her own property as the economic base for her community. The community at Laon was also a typical noble institution in that its founder/abbess surrounded herself with persons of her own class: Sadalberga's foundation was almost exclusively for the daughters of the nobility.⁵⁸

The records of the bishopric of Salzburg provided us with an unusually detailed description of another type of foundation, one which was the result of the piety of a secular noble. Duke Theodebert was responsible for the construction of St. Erintrude (Nonnberg) in

Salzburg in about 790. The record of foundation is worth examining in some depth, since it shows more clearly than do most accounts of foundations what was involved in establishing the economic support for an institution of women. The vitae give the familial, political, and religious aspects of foundation; the Salzburger Urkundenbuch adds the economic dimension.⁵⁹

The first sentence of the record of the foundation of St. Erintrude proves that even a powerful archbishop like that of Salzburg was dependent on secular assistance and permission in the construction of a religious community. According to the record of foundation the cloister was built "with the counsel and will of the lord Duke Theodebert . . . in the upper fortress" The first abbess was a niece of Archbishop Rupert. While Erintrude was not specifically called abbess in the record, she was the only member of the community named in the document, which says that she was placed in the community "through the license and will of the lord Duke Theodebert" The admission of an ordinary member to the community, whatever her rank, would not likely have required the permission of one of the founders, but the selection of the abbess would have necessitated such permission. Further, the institution was later known as St. Erintrude, indicating that Erintrude had a very high standing in her community. Erintrude's importance stemmed not only from her uncle's office but also from the high nobility of her family. The record of foundation has this to say about the creation of the new community:

Then the blessed bishop with the counsel and will of the lord Duke Theodebert began to construct in the upper fortress of the abovementioned town of Salzburg a church and a monastery which was to be inhabited by holy virgins in the service of God . . . and placed there in service to God with the license and will of the lord Duke Theodebert his own niece Erintrude, a consecrated maidservant of God, with other women devoted to God.

Again, the head of the religious hierarchy of Salzburg was dependent on the cooperation of the head of the secular hierarchy if the proposed foundation was to be successful. In fact, Archbishop Rupert realized who the real founder of St. Erintrude was, and so did the writer of the record. It was one of Theodebert's acts of piety that he permitted his lesser cofounder to install a member of his (Rupert's) family as abbess and did not place a member of the ducal family in that position. As a result the record is entitled, "De constructione claustris sancti Erintrudis Iuvavo, et de bonis que contulit illuc Theodebertus dux." Though the convent church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the community came to be known by the name of its most important member, who was promoted to sainthood. Erintrude was the most important member because she was the niece of one of the founders. For that reason her acts of piety came to the attention of those in control of the Church, and Erintrude was deemed worthy of sainthood. Lesser members of the community were not considered worthy of attention, and their acts of piety went unmarked and unpraised.

The donations of Theodebert to the community are also worthy of note. Of especial interest is the large number of people attached to the support of all religious communities of any size, and that not

only farmland was donated, but whole villages, fishing rights on rivers, and timber lands. St. Erintrude was typical of most communities of women in that it possessed a diversified economic backing which permitted it to consume and market a variety of products, to obtain tax money from the people who worked its lands and lived in its towns, and to demand labor services from a large population of diversified skills.

And the duke with pious zeal gave . . . as support for the maidservants of God and for the grace of his ancestors his own villa which is called Einheringa, with the serfs attached to it and with thirty other men liable for military service ("et aliis exercitalibus hominibus xxx"), with all they had above the river Salz, that it might support the monastery of the women of God. And the same Duke Theodebert also gave a villa above the Salz, called Glasa, with the men paying tribute ("cum tributalibus viris"), and another villa called Marciago. And he gave 116 tribute paying "Roman" coloni ("tributales Romanos . . . colonos cxvi"), located in various places within the same villa. And he also gave a church and a meadow and a forest and fisheries in Talgo. In Cucullas [he gave] six coloni and meadows and a wood and four mountain pastures ("alpes"). And the same Duke Theodebert gave to the same monastery of women six homesteads and a mill and a meadow and a wood. And he gave at Salinas nine domainal bakeries ("loca fornacium viiii") with the servants belonging to them. And he gave to the same monastery of women for the purpose of paying tribute all who lived in Salinas and in Mona and Nana, so that each of them shall on the Saturday of every week from the middle of May until the mass of St. Martin donate one modium of salt, except for four serfs. And he also gave to the monastery a villa called Waninga, with forty homesteads and all that belonged to that villa; also another villa in the same district called "at Chamren," with fourteen serfs and all their belongings. In the same district near the river Trun in Trunwalha at Teitrammingen above the river Salz [he gave] a house and a farm with all their belongings and sixty homesteads owned among the serfs and those who payed tribute and also those who were liable for military service. And in Artergov he gave three men who paid tribute with their coloni. And the same Duke Theodebert gave to the same monastery of women the game in the woods and mountain meadows which is called Keizperch as far as Stegen, and he confirmed all these things in perpetuity.

Communities of consecrated women were constructed to house members of noble families. Such massive endowments of communities would naturally create the desire to have a representative of the founding family in a significant position within such an institution to protect the considerable interests of the family.

Detailed records of the persons and economic donations involved in foundations have not survived in any large numbers. Enough information has come down to us to prove the overwhelming importance of the secular noble as opposed to the episcopal role in the foundation of religious institutions for women. That fact is proved most concretely by the research of M. Regintrudis von Reichlin-Meldegg and Franz J. Bendel.⁶⁰ Their comprehensive survey of the medieval German communities of women is of immense value in any attempt to understand the actual forces which shaped the character of religious life for women in the Middle Ages. Their study allows us to follow the respective roles of the secular and of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the foundation of monastic and canonical communities. Of the sixty-one foundations that took place prior to 1000 whose founders are known thirteen were due to secular support, and of that group three were royal foundations.⁶¹ Five foundations can be attributed to bishops alone,⁶² and two to a combination of secular and ecclesiastical founders.⁶³ But attribution of a foundation to a bishop alone is problematical. One must always ask, where did the economic support come from? Bishops could not legally alienate diocesan lands for the support of religious communities, and must always have been dependent on the donations of secular

nobles, the only group in Frankish society that had large holdings of land at its disposal. That we must be suspicious of von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel's attribution of foundations to bishops alone is borne out by the fact that they attribute the foundation of St. Erintrude to Bishop Rupert alone, a foundation that clearly belongs in the "combined founders" category. The role of bishops as either actual or ostensible founders of communities of consecrated women was small by any criterion.

The importance of secular patrons to the proper functioning of religious institutions was repeatedly recognized by churchmen in their councils and by kings in their capitularies. The Admonitio generalis of 789 repeated a command of the "African Council" that consecrated virgins be in the diligent custody of serious persons.⁶⁴ Whatever may have been the intention of the "African Council" there was no specific limitation of the royal command to abbesses and bishops. The command was directed to all ("Omnibus"), and must be taken to include secular as well as religious officers. The responsibilities of secular possessors of religious communities of women was as great as those of the abbess. The duties of the secular possessors, according to the ruler, contained a moral element. Their relationship to the members of the community was to be one which facilitated the growth of a proper religious atmosphere within the institution. The possessor was to serve as a diligent promoter of religion.

The Council of Paris of 829 was more specific about the responsibilities expected of secular and ecclesiastical heads of religious institutions. They were to present a pious and religious

example and to make sure that their behavior did not become negligent and thus diminish the congregations committed to their care. Secular as well as ecclesiastical patrons were to make sure that their communities did not lack temporal necessities and a wholesome religious atmosphere. The patron was to take care to administer all the stipends necessary to the support of the community; otherwise the divine offices would be neglected and the community would be forced to live irreligiously.⁶⁵ The Episcoporum ad Hludovicum imperatorem relatio of the same year copied this chapter verbatim.⁶⁶ The ability of the abbess to administer the economic foundations of her community was limited. The cooperation of the secular possessor was essential if a religious institution was to achieve its goals. It was disagreement over what those goals were and how they should be accomplished that caused tension between the nobility and the proponents of Benedictine reform.

The importance of the nobility in determining the character of consecration for women was physically expressed in the population of religious communities. The heroines of the vitae did not enter their newly founded communities alone, nor did Leoba come to the wilds of Germany unattended. The leaders were always accompanied by associates, women of their own class who thought as the leader did about the religious life. The associates subordinated themselves to a particular leader not primarily because of her piety but because of her status in the secular hierarchy. Once established these

communities began to draw other noblewomen, as did Leoba's community in Germany.

Noble parents wanted their daughters to be brought up in what they considered a proper atmosphere among girls and women of their own social group. The Frankish religious communities were the best places for such an upbringing. The English were so impressed by the Frankish communities that according to Bede, "many who wished to enter the conventual life went to France or Gaul for that purpose" because there were so few religious institutions in England at the time.

Girls of noble family were also sent there for their education, or to be betrothed to their heavenly Bridegroom, especially to the houses of Brie, Chelles, and Andeleys; among such girls were Saethryd, step-daughter of King Anna of East Anglia . . . and Ethelberga, his own daughter. Although both foreigners, they were of such merit that they became abbesses of Brie.⁶⁷

Sadalberga's community at Laon could also offer the proper surroundings for the young women of the nobility of Europe. Her vita assured readers that her concern was almost exclusively for the salvation and education of the daughters of the nobility. At Laon were gathered more than a hundred young women, from the nobility as well as those who were there "ex proprio officio puellis."⁶⁸ In a later passage the biographer repeated the fact that Sadalberga had gathered a large number of young noblewomen in her community, this time with no mention of those who were "ex proprio officio puellis."⁶⁹ As Schulte says, the meaning of that phrase is obscure. However, since girls in that condition were added to the noble group it would seem that it was a reference to nonnobles: "Ibique adunatis centum seu

amplius TAM ex nobilium liberis QUAM ex proprio officio puellis, Christo domino dicavit." There would seem to have been some division of the girls according to their class, after the pattern of Paula's community in Bethlehem. The aim of the sentence was to stress the significance of Sadalberga's preference for noble girls as opposed to those from other groups. That preference added luster and importance to the community at Laon and made it an attractive place for the nobility to send its daughters and gifts.⁷⁰

Among the most blue blooded of all the Frankish communities for women was St. Julia in Brescia. It was founded c. 753 by Ansa, queen of that Desiderius who would soon become the last king of the Lombards. Both the founder and her son amply provided for the support of the community.⁷¹ St. Julia became the private property of the Carolingian family. The abbess was usually a very close relative of the king, and royal wives were generally the actual possessors or secular abbesses of the community. That the population of such an institution was of the highest birth may be taken for granted. The oblation book of the community is of great use in determining the social provenance of the members. While the first entries were from the last half of the ninth century the evidence it provides, especially concerning the involvement of the royal family, is consistent with what is known about the character of the community to 840. If anything had changed at St. Julia it would have been that entrance became even more exclusive than it had been in the early Carolingian period, a common development in all religious communities of women as the Middle Ages progressed.

In the oblation book we find that the emperors Lothar I and Louis II had each donated a daughter named Gisla to St. Julia. Other donors were two counts, Adaelbert and Rambert, Duke Eberhard, as well as a presbyter Dominicus; the status of the other donors is not known.⁷² In all twenty-nine daughters, six sisters, and seven nieces of noblemen of importance were donated. There can be no doubt about the high status of these girls. Persons of subordinate classes would necessarily have obtained the permission of their lords to enter any religious institution, and this would have been entered into the records of oblation.⁷³

It is difficult to determine whether, in addition to these oblates of riper years still others did not enter, and among them some of unfree birth. That is not to be denied absolutely, but it seems unlikely that one would be strict in oblation but lax in other means of acceptance.⁷⁴

Schulte's point is applicable to the whole world of consecrated women in the early Middle Ages. While not all houses were as exclusive as St. Julia, it is reasonable to assume that nonnobles were a minority in the total population of consecrated women. The presence of specific nonnoble individuals in particular communities is all but impossible to determine. If the number of such women had been significant they would have left some mark on the character of consecration for women by force of numbers alone. The nobles would have been forced to deal with them in some way, to make some accommodation for their social inferiors. It was simply very difficult for nonnoble persons to enter a religious community of any kind. Once there the prospects for advancement were minute. Caesarius' command that members of the community who were from rich families should not lord

it over those from poor families suggests that conflicts between classes did break the monastic harmony of communities of women. The revolt of Chrodiel against Leubovera shows that class conflict arose not merely between nobles and nonnobles, but also between upper and lower levels of the nobility.

It was noble custom to which Waldebert must have referred in the chapter of his rule entitled, "That one must not defend one's neighbor or relative in the monastery." The problem resulted inevitably from the noble tradition of patronizing certain communities and turning them into preserves for the women of specific families. Members of these large Frankish families would associate primarily with each other. Bonds of relation and subservience established in the secular world were brought into the religious community. Cliques would form, and conflicts between individuals would easily become warfare between family and dependency groups. A Chrodiel could quickly find support from a cousin Basina and others, perhaps daughters of families related by marriage or political interest. "Thus she will love her relative more than another sister to whom she is not joined by blood."⁷⁵

The effect of noble patronage and foundation on the ideal of free election of the abbess from among the members of a community was profound. If free election did exist in any Frankish religious community, it was the result of permission from the founder or patron. Even then the presence of relatives of the founding family in the community must have been a practical limitation and a source of

tension. As we have seen, Caesarius addressed himself to the problem. Chapter 61 of his rule required that when the abbess died a successor was to be selected without consideration of any human criteria, such as birth, wealth, or the status of her parents. The members were to wait for inspiration from Christ, and to elect one of their number who was best able to direct the community in the spirit of the rule. Caesarius' ideal was, as will become evident, seldom applied in most communities of women in the early Middle Ages. The actuality almost always was that situation against which he had spent a lifetime working and protesting. The monastic ideal of free election of the abbess was as well known to secular as to consecrated nobles. That the ideal did not become reality was due to a refusal to apply it on the part of the patrons and possessors of communities of women.

That the secular nobility was not ignorant of the ideal of free election is proved by the fact that several charters guaranteed that freedom to communities of women, either at foundation or as an act of favor to existing institutions.⁷⁶ The point to keep in mind is that the right of a community to elect its own abbess was of necessity the result of an act of grace by the patron. No community in the Frankish kingdom was in a position to dare to elect its abbess on its own initiative. Free election was not assumed by anyone, secular or consecrated, to be the natural course of things.

In fact, the abbesses generally belonged to the family of the founders, kings or princes, and one finds in most houses that the abbacy was kept in that line, that veritable dynasties of abbesses were created: nieces succeeded aunts through long periods of time.⁷⁷

Schmitz is too reticent; it was not unusual for daughters to succeed their mothers as abbess.

The role of family connections in the selection of abbesses was no figment of the imagination of fussy bishops, nor is it a construct of overly critical modern historians. Pope Zacharias was well aware of the way in which the leadership of religious institutions was determined, and he knew that any attempt to seriously alter the process was doomed to failure. In a letter of 748 to the Frankish nobles Zacharias said:

Concerning the monasteries which have been founded by you or which have been constructed by the devotion of the faithful, it is necessary that if a monk or consecrated woman from your family is put in charge, that he or she should be consecrated by the bishop of the city, whether as abbot or abbess. And if a congregation is established, and if after the death of the abbot or abbess, the congregation elects whomever it will as successor, he or she is also to be consecrated by the bishop and not by the founder of the monastery. Because, what has once been consecrated to God ought to remain intact under the direction of the bishop. It is necessary, however, that the one ordained abbot or abbess should first be educated in the whole divine law and in sacred scripture so that since he has learned to be submissive he might afterwards know how to rule moderately.⁷⁸

Zacharias' letter is very important, for each sentence contained either an assumption about the character of consecration in the Frankish kingdom, or a program for increasing the religious element in the governance of religious institutions.

In his first sentence Zacharias assumed that foundation and patronage of religious communities were common noble activities. He accepted the fact that nobles placed their own relatives in command of these communities. It also appears that it was not unusual for nobles to ignore the rights of the Church in foundation, patronage,

and in selection of abbots and abbesses. This Zacharias did not accept; he reasserted the rights of the bishops in ordaining candidates for the abbacy. There was no suggestion that the nobles did wrong in choosing relatives as abbesses or abbots; where they erred was in not respecting the established procedures of the Church in incepting ecclesiastical officials. Zacharias' practicality is evident in his second sentence as well. The key word here was if. If, after the death of the abbess or abbot a successor was appointed by the community and not by the founder, then the successor was to be consecrated by the bishop and not by the founder. Zacharias was not naive enough to assume that election of the successor would take place, as his first sentence shows. He merely sought to establish the right of the bishops to consecrate the successor in his or her office if such an unlikely event as free election did occur, just as he had assured the rights of the bishops in the more likely event that the successor was handpicked by the patron. The pope was aware of the powers of the patron over the selection of abbesses or abbots. If the patron claimed the right to consecrate the nominee of a "free" election, the election would be a sham. The new abbess or abbot would still have to be acceptable to the patron, else he could refuse to consecrate the nominee of the community. In his third sentence Zacharias insisted on the stability of the newly elected abbess or abbot under the guidance of the bishop. Whatever the means of selection, once chosen the head of a community was to be under the control of the bishop as chief of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the diocese, not under the control of the patron family.

Zacharias did more to reform the selection of abbesses and abbots than to apply pressure on the secular nobles. He realized that a major reason for the frustration of any monastic ideal was the fact that the attitudes of the members of religious communities did not differ from those of their secular relatives. To alter that situation Zacharias commanded that the new abbess or abbot study divine law and the Scriptures assiduously. The result would be a monastic leader whose attitudes would be separated from those of his or her class, an abbess or abbot as the monastic ideal defined those terms. Such an abbess or abbot would be steeped in religious mores and would accept religious rather than secular control. Only in that way could Zacharias' goal of episcopal control over the selection of abbesses and abbots be achieved.

The daily reality of religious life served to make impossible the implementation of even such moderate reforms as Zacharias envisioned. It was not uncommon for an abbess to be a relative of the bishop, and the two did not hesitate to work together to guard family interest in the management of religious life in the diocese. In a letter written between 754 and 782 Bishop Magingaoz asked Lul for advice. Magingaoz's sister Juliana, abbess of the community of women at Wenkheim (Mattenzell) was dying, and both she and the bishop were burdened over the issue of succession. Magingaoz realized that the existence of the community depended on the ability of his family to find a relative who would be a suitable abbess. There was no question of permitting a nonrelative to take control of the family monastery. It was true that there were family members in the

community, nieces of Megingaoz and Juliana, but they were too young and lacking in sense to assume the burden. On the other hand, no one else seemed suitable. What did LuI think should be done?⁷⁹ While Megingaoz and Juliana sincerely cared about the existence of the community and were determined to find a good leader for it, the problem reduced itself to a matter of finding the proper authority based on secular conceptions. Only a member of a specific noble family would have had the force of command which was founded on those secular concepts of power which the women of the community could understand and thus obey. The members of the community had no initiative; they had to wait for the decision of their social superiors. Yet since Magingaoz and Juliana could conceive of only one way to settle the succession, they were in a quandry when problems with that method developed.⁸⁰

The Frankish aristocracy expected the heads of religious communities to perform duties which were not envisioned by Caesarius or by the other writers of monastic rules. The secular leaders, the kings in particular, required that abbesses participate in the governance of the kingdom. Abbesses were reckoned among the great lords of the kingdom. Those who ruled royal institutions were responsible for the management of a free imperial institution independent of the control of temporal lords other than the king and his officials. As a "lord" of the kingdom such an abbess had the right of ban; she called her contingent of troops to arms; she issued summonses to appear in her court, which was presided over by her advocate or proctor.⁸¹ Even

abbesses of lesser communities were continually busy with secular politics. All communities were endowed with some land and the peasants who lived on it. Any sizeable community was responsible for fulfilling its military obligations and for regulating the affairs of the soldiers once the campaign was underway. Abbesses were expected to act like members of their class rather than as members of a religious institution. Since the duties of an abbess required that she perform functions which were the perquisites of aristocrats it was necessary that she be a noble. In fact more was required of abbesses than of most noblewomen.

While much of the actual work of governance was supposedly done by the abbess' proctor or advocate there can be no doubt that her secular duties were a serious distraction from her religious work. We have seen that Pippin, Charlemagne, and Louis the Pious favored regular conferences with the abbesses, just as they did with all political leaders of the kingdom. Abbesses who preferred the religious as opposed to the secular aspects of their work found these conferences most uncomfortable, but due to their position there was no way to avoid such contacts with the secular world. Leoba was a favorite among everyone at court. Charlemagne often invited her to visit, and since Queen Hildigard loved her very much she could not very well refuse. Leoba and Hildigard were close friends, but Leoba hated the tumult of the court and sought to leave as soon as decency permitted.⁸²

Abbesses were bound like all other landlords to see to it that their military contingents came to the aid of the king on time

and in proper order. In his Capitula de rebus execitalibus in placito tractanda of 811 Charlemagne ordered his subordinates to send home those persons, such as falconers, merchants, tax collectors, deacons, etc. who were not essential to a military operation. The order was specifically addressed to bishops, abbots, counts, and abbesses.⁸³ Such passages give a better idea of the kinds of people with whom abbesses had to deal than does any rule.⁸⁴ A capitulary of Louis the Pious, the Capitulare missorum of 819, also placed abbesses securely in the military hierarchy of the empire. Louis notified his own vassals and the vassals of the bishops, abbots, abbesses, and counts that if they had not been present in the army that year they were subject to the heribann.⁸⁵

In addition to their military duties the abbesses also had to manage the legal affairs of the lands and people subordinated to their communities. Legal matters were handled by the abbess' advocate or proctor. The selection of the advocate was an important issue. While monastic rules required the abbess to select men of good moral standing, Louis the Pious was concerned to prevent the selection from causing tension in the hierarchy of the empire. In the Capitulare missorum of 819 he forbade bishops, abbots, or abbesses to have the hundredman of a count as advocate.⁸⁶ It may be that the problem arose because a hundredman would have prestige and experience. Despite the desirability of employing a man with powerful associates conflict of interest could easily develop. The abbess and other ecclesiastical lords were not to contribute to the unrest of the empire; she must take the time to select an advocate who could

freely serve her interests in every case without detriment to another lord.

Once he was appointed the advocate would not only oversee the daily legal business of the community but would periodically represent the community in the general pleas court called by the king. The abbess was responsible for her advocate's presence with her at the court sessions.⁸⁷ The presence of the abbesses was required at the legal proceedings, as was that of all officers of the kingdom, lay or ecclesiastical. And indeed, it would have been a poor abbess who felt that she or her community could afford to be ignorant of what went on in these important gatherings of the Frankish nobility. Both for the sake of form and because an abbess was a woman, the advocate would probably have been the more publicly active of the two, but he and the abbess were a team; they worked together to devise legal strategy.

In his Capitulare Olonnese ecclesiasticum primum of 825 Louis the Pious conceded to bishops, abbots, and abbesses the right to have two advocates.⁸⁸ That concession would suggest that the legal aspect of the ecclesiastical lords' work was growing so much that an increase in their legal staff was warranted. The proper management of the legal work of the ecclesiastical lords was far too important to the smooth functioning of the empire to permit it to deteriorate for want of sufficient personnel. It was the bishops, the abbots, and the abbesses, not their advocates, who were in the final analysis answerable for the quality of the legal work which was assigned to them.

As far as the kings were concerned the abbesses were seldom more than important feudal landlords. The importance of abbesses to the ruler in that respect is evident in the Capitulare de iustitiis facendis of 811-13. The capitulary required that a description of the benefices of bishops, abbots, abbesses, and counts be sent to Charlemagne, in addition to an account of his own fisc, "so that we will be able to know how much we possess in each legation."⁸⁹ Once again the abbesses were listed among those officials of the kingdom who were in charge of sizeable landholdings. Abbesses controlled so much territory that the ruler could not govern successfully if he lacked some idea of the wealth and people controlled by them. Election as abbess meant not only assumption of those religious duties listed in the monastic rules, but more importantly the assumption of political, military, and legal duties connected with one of those conglomerations of land which served as the basis of authority in the Frankish world. That in turn meant that only a person from the highest levels of the aristocracy was acceptable as abbess. Sources which spoke of the duties of the leaders of the kingdom mentioned abbesses as a matter of course along with counts, royal vassals, bishops, and abbots. All these leaders had responsibilities in common. All were essential to the government of the kingdom, and ecclesiastical leaders were expected to perform their secular functions in addition to their ecclesiastical ones. Their political superiors would accept no skimping of political and military work by ecclesiastical lords on the grounds that religious duties came first.

The actions of abbesses as noble landlords often affected the communities in their charge. Such actions resulted from the social provenance of the abbesses. They behaved no differently from secular noblewomen in similar positions of authority. Founder/abbesses in particular continued to treat the lands they had donated to the support of their communities as personal property. The abbesses were as ready to alienate such lands from the communities as they had been to donate them to the institution. Founder/abbesses in all but the rarest cases considered the community--at least its physical elements--as her private property to do with as she pleased.

In a charter of 732-33 Adela, daughter of the former king Dagobert and abbess of Pfalzell gave to her community her villa at Pfalzell (which she had obtained through an exchange of lands with the mayor of the palace, Pippin) with all the houses, buildings, fields, vineyards, plains, meadows, adjoining forests, waters, etc. In addition she donated two other entire villas and parts of seven others.⁹⁰ The very existence and economic support of this community depended on the bounty and personal wealth of its royal abbess. It was not only in economic matters that the will of the abbess determined the fate of a religious institution. Adela, this time in consultation with the members of the community, decided under the control and protection of what bishop the community and its possessions would be placed.

It pleases us, with the counsel of the abovementioned congregation that the monastery should belong to and be under the governance of the bishop of Trier . . . for all time and should be under the protection and legal authority ("mundi-burgio") of the cathedral church at Trier and of the bishop of that cathedral.⁹¹

Adela controlled every aspect of life in her community, whether it was a matter of economic support or of settling on a particular bishop who could provide the most useful political protection ("sit sub defensione et mundiburgio . . .").

In 789 Aba, abbess of the community at Rotha, donated the community and all its lands, some of which she had given it, some of which had been donated by godfearing men, to the monastery at Lorsch. She also gave all of her personal property to Lorsch.⁹² Aba even more than Adela left the reader of her charter with no doubt that she was disposing of the community as a private possession and for her own good. She explicitly stated that she had made the donation to Lorsch for the good of her own soul.⁹³ Nor was her donation without condition. She was to keep the usufruct of everything until she died, though she promised not to give any of the properties to another party or to diminish its value in any way, but to add to it if she saw fit: "et nichil exinde minuere, sed addere aut meliorare potuero" She would also give ten solidi to Lorsch once each year at the commemoration of that monastery's patron saint.⁹⁴ Aba expected temporal benefits as well as heavenly reward for her donation. It was not the good of the community she had in mind, but her own.

The independence of a community depended on the will of the abbess. Aba, in typical noble fashion, saw to the interests of her family in the monastery; the donation would not change that in any way. Upon her death the abbot of Lorsch in consultation with good men of Aba's family and other religious and godfearing men were to

select a new abbess from among her relatives. This abbess was to rule according to God or according to the world: "que casam dei gubernare valeat secundum deum vel secundum seculum." This seems to mean that the abbess could be consecrated as a full member of the community or she could be a secular abbess, a far from unusual situation in the Carolingian period.⁹⁵ The main concern to Aba was that the head of the community be related to her. If an abbess was unworthy of her position she was to be removed and another of Aba's family placed in her stead.⁹⁶ This was the only section of the charter which showed any concern on Aba's part for the proper management of the communal life of the religious institution of which she was the head.

Very similar was the donation of Hiltisnot, abbess of Alirinbach. She donated her community, which she had founded on her own land, and all its holdings to Lorsch. While she phrased her charter in more diplomatic terms than did Aba, there is no question of who was in charge of every aspect of the management of the community of Alirinbach. Hiltisnot made the donation in her own right ("de iure meo"). She reserved control of the donated lands as long as she lived without prejudice ("per beneficium vestrum absque preiudicio").⁹⁷ Hiltisnot also wanted her successor to be selected from among her relatives, but she was more considerate of monastic principles:

If after my death any female of my family has been brought up in that monastery, which congregation I have brought together because of the name of the Lord, and is able to govern as God wishes, she is to be constituted abbess

through election by the abbot of St. N [Lorsch], and this is to follow as long as anyone of my family is found worthy in that place.⁹⁸

The contrast in attitudes shown by Aba and Hiltisnot, small though it was, is instructive. The personality of the abbess, not the rule, was paramount in determining to what extent monastic ideals became reality within a given community. A founder/abbess was able to set up a monastic or a canonical community. She could draw up her own rule to regulate life in the community, or adapt a preexisting rule to the needs of her foundation as she saw fit. The Benedictine reform movement strove to end the freedom of the abbess to determine the character of the religious functions of her community. But if the abbess had the power to donate her community and all its possessions to another religious institution, one of men; to add lands to the support of her foundation or to take them away; to select the bishop to which her community would be subordinate; it was only with the greatest difficulty that any outside force could influence the religious atmosphere of what was in actuality a private institution.

The abbess of the important community of women at Milz in the late eighth century was Emhilt, a relative of Charlemagne. Emhilt was involved in many exchanges of control over land, some of which involved only herself, and others which directly affected the community which she had founded. In her treatment of the community Emhilt's absolute control was never in question. She did as she saw fit with her own property. In 783 or 784 Emhilt donated for the good of her soul the property she had inherited from both sides of her

family to the church and congregation of women at Milz; the gift included the cloister itself.⁹⁹ Emhilt took pains to stress that her community was a true monastery guided by Benedictine ideals, and to portray herself as a good Benedictine abbess. The rule was to be observed without compromise, and after her death the nuns were to elect their own abbess from among themselves without let or hindrance.¹⁰⁰

All of the donated lands, without prejudice of any man and with sound mind and good counsel, as I have said above, I give, donate, and transfer completely to the omnipotent savior our God, and to the holy mother of God Mary and to the maidservants of Christ, who serve in that monastery correctly and regularly and faithfully according to the rule of the monks of God without falsity, and who desire no power to wander away from that monastery, but who remain stable and firm: with this reservation, however, that while I live I might have this monastery without any contradiction from any man; and after my death . . . this congregation shall have, hold, and possess this donation.¹⁰¹

It was a personal decision of the founder/abbess to create a strict Benedictine community, to allow freedom of election of the abbess, and to give control of the donated properties to the congregation. Emhilt protected her control over the monastery and its properties while she was alive. The community had no right to a share in her personal properties, though by the time of the charter she was an abbess of nuns and was supposed to rid herself of all her property before entering the monastic life.¹⁰²

In 800 Emhilt decided for the good of her soul and of those of her subordinates to donate Milz and all its holdings to the monastery of men at Fulda. She did this with the advice of twenty-two nuns of the community. Throughout the charter of donation, however,

Emhilt referred to Milz and its lands as her property. She was mindful of the command of Christ to give alms:

Therefore, I Emhilt, a maidservant of Christ . . . that the portion given to me on the land of the living might be all the greater, give, hand over, and concede equally with the other sisters this land on which we live temporally, belonging to me part and parcel, located in various places, whether it was acquired from my father or my mother, or from anyone else.¹⁰³

Emhilt, for all her well meaning insistence on the equal role of her subordinates in the decision, and despite the charter of 783-84 which gave the monastery and its properties to the nuns, still regarded the whole thing as belonging to herself. Some of the property came to her from her parents, some from other sources, but she still spoke of it as "belonging to me part and parcel," not to the community. Emhilt had initiated the decision to transfer Milz to the control of Fulda. Proper form demanded the participation of the sisters of the community, for the charter of 783-84 did give the lands to them, and now their status as independent landowners was to be destroyed. Emhilt assured herself lifelong usufruct in the charter of 800, one more proof that she was indeed disposing of her own property. As for the congregation at Milz, it was placed under the mundiburdium of the abbot of Fulda.¹⁰⁴ What the founder and abbess had given the nuns of Milz in 783-84 she had revoked in 800.

A further example of the way in which an abbess could affect the economic independence of her community is found in a charter of 786. It was drawn up at the instance of Gundrada, who was undoubtedly the abbess of Lauterbach, though she refers to herself only as "Gundrada humillima deo dicta." For no one else in the community

would have had the authority to do what she did.¹⁰⁵ The charter was addressed to Sigismund, his wife Nandila, and "a certain presbyter Ebracharus." These three persons had previously donated properties and serfs to Lauterbach, a community of women in the Black Forest; whether they were Benedictine nuns or not is uncertain.¹⁰⁶ Now the donors had petitioned Gundrada that they might be given the usufruct of the donated properties and the services of the serfs while the donors lived. Gundrada granted their request, but required that each Christmas the group must pay a tax of four denarii at the basilica of Lauterbach.¹⁰⁷ At the wish of the abbess (and she made it clear that the arrangement was the result of her expressed will--"et me decrevit voluntas") the control of the community over considerable forests, lands pastures, buildings, and many serfs was drastically reduced. There was no indication that this abbess had asked for the advice of her subordinates in making her decision.

Like all landlords of the time abbesses were continually looking for better investments. Many abbesses were not as sanguine as Caesarius had been about the capacity of the bishops to see to the economic support of the religious institutions under their authority. The abbesses felt free to act on their own initiative to improve the landed wealth of their communities. Part of the incentive was that by adding to the wealth of their communities the abbesses were in effect adding to their own wealth. Donations were the most important source of additions to the possessions of religious institutions. Another important method was the transfer of landholdings between an abbess and another potentate. In this

way the community could acquire lands and towns which produced the kinds of goods it needed, or it could consolidate its holdings. Shrewd abbesses were careful to obtain a charter of confirmation from the king.

In 787 Charlemagne confirmed an exchange of lands between Eufemia, abbess of the community of St. Peter at Metz, and Abbot Fulrad of St. Denis. With the consent of her subordinates the abbess had turned over to Fulrad two "little places" ("locella") and had received in return a single bloc of land in a more desirable location.¹⁰⁸

In 831 Louis the Pious, at the request of Empress Judith and of the seneschal Adalhard, gave to Abbess Hruthrud of Hohenburg five families of serfs with the labor services to which they were bound ("cum labores eorum") to use as she saw fit.¹⁰⁹ Hruthrud knew what she wanted and how to go about getting it. She approached the emperor through the proper chain of command. Yet she did not deal with insignificant servants. As a magnate of the realm she was justified in addressing herself to the empress (who may have been the secular abbess or patron of Hohenburg as she was of so many other communities of women) and the seneschal.

Seven years later Louis gave the abbess Tetta of Hereford the churches in three villas, along with the rights to taxation and the labor services of the dependents who were attached to the churches. Adalhard had represented Tetta's case before the emperor.¹¹⁰ A year later, in 839, Louis confirmed a transfer of lands between Abbot Hilduin of St. Denis and Abbess Ermentrude of St. Jouarre.

Ermentrude turned over two farms to the control of Hilduin and received three farms in return.¹¹¹

Two things immediately strike the reader of these charters. One is that the abbesses only dealt with authorities of the highest level. They knew to whom in the court hierarchy to appeal for aid in presenting their cases. Their social provenance combined with the importance of their office in the secular hierarchy to entitle them to approach such important personages. A second fact of importance is that while the abbesses had actively sought the acquisitions, they all involved relatively small pieces of land and few people. Only Tetta's acquisition approached a respectable addition of land, people, and power to her community. Abbesses, like all nobles, must have spent much of their time following the land transactions within the kingdom closely. They were willing to snatch up desirable bits of land here and there as they became available, using their contacts among noble families and friends to find out what was to be had, then using their advantages at court to secure possession. Thus did abbesses add to the economic security of their communities, and thus did they add to their own power and importance as magnates of the Frankish kingdom. Neither Caesarius nor Benedict would have approved.

All sources agreed that the abbess could not be as cloistered from the secular world as other consecrated women. If she were the business of the community would not have gotten done. However, none of the rules, including the Institutio sanctimonialium, envisioned an abbess who was an important political figure. Involvement of abbesses in political affairs was symptomatic of the noble attitudes

toward consecration for women that Caesarius had sought to end through his monastic rule. The abbess of a monastic community was supposed to concern herself with the immediate needs of the community and with nothing more. She was to be a good steward of what was provided to the institution by the bishop. Since it was the responsibility of the bishop to provide for the economic support of religious institutions in his charge, from the point of view of the monastic reformers the abbess had no reason to involve herself in land deals with the great men of the realm. Her main function according to the rules was to regulate the relations between the members of the community as guided by Christian principles. To this end she must possess charity, knowledge of the Scriptures, of the writings of the Fathers, and of canon law. The monastic abbess was to understand human weakness and yet not be too lax in enforcing monastic discipline.¹¹²

Synodal and some capitular decrees reinforced those ideals. The ecclesiastical councils in particular sought to limit the involvement of abbesses in secular affairs. They, like the rules, required that the concerns of the abbess be limited strictly to the needs of her community. The abbess was to be a good manager of monastic income and properties so that the members of the community would not be reduced to want and the religious life of the institution suffer. Any absence of the abbess was a serious matter and was considered legitimate only if the good of the community was served by it. The need of the ruler to consult with such important political leaders as abbesses was seen by some bishops as an exception to the rule

forced on the religious world from outside. The abbesses had no choice to come when called, but the bishops in their councils and even the kings in their capitularies sought to limit the damage to the ideal of stability. Monastic rules, conciliar decrees, and some chapters of capitularies were in many respects a defensive reaction against what was required of abbesses by the needs and assumptions of the nobility.

It is essential to keep this last point in mind if one is to evaluate the work of the monastic reformers properly. The attempts of the reformers to change the character of the practice of consecration for women were a reaction to the actuality of that practice. The reformers, in both the Merovingian and the Carolingian periods, were innovators. The secular and consecrated nobility of both periods supported a concept of consecration for women that must be seen as representing the status quo. It is true that the reform movement of the Carolingian period was far more successful than was the episcopally-directed reform movement of the Merovingian era. That was so because the reform was guided by a single set of ideals: Benedictine monasticism. More important still was the fact that reform was directed from a single powerful source: the kings. But royal attitudes toward communities of women were not as different from that of other nobles as some of the kings' pronouncements might lead one to expect. The kings were concerned about the stability of abbesses, and about their separation from the world. More important than those concerns was the need of the kings to meet regularly with abbesses in their capacity as lords of the kingdom. The abbesses

were essential to the proper governance of the realm because they controlled large landholdings and many people. The importance of the functions expected of an abbess by the kings and by other nobles made it mandatory that the abbatial office be filled by a woman of high social standing. That fact in itself reinforced the validity of all noble conceptions about the character of consecration for women. That is, to the nobility, whether secular or consecrated, there was no reason that the practice of the consecrated life should not be founded on the same assumptions about class, family relationships, and family interest in property and political power that guided secular life. It was the object of the reformers to change those assumptions. However, the needs and assumptions of the nobility, not the ideals of ecclesiastical purists, formed the real character of consecrated life for women in the Merovingian and Carolingian eras.¹¹³

CHAPTER III: NOTES

¹Philibert Schmitz, Histoire de l'ordre de Saint-Benoît, Tome 7, Les moniales (Maredsous: Les éditions de Maredsous, 1956), p. 5.

²Schmitz, Histoire, Tome 7, p. 5.

³Stephan Hilpisch, Geschichte der Benediktinerinnen (St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 1951), pp. 11-12.

⁴Philibert Schmitz, "La première communauté de vierges à Rome," Revu Benedictine 38 (1926): 193.

⁵Schmitz, "La première communauté . . . ," p. 193, n. 1; the source in question is Jerome, Epist. 127; J.-P. Migne. Patrologia Latina 22, 1087.

⁶Joseph Wilpert, Die gottgeweihten Jungfrauen in den ersten Jahrhunderten der Kirche (Freiburg i.B.: Herders'sche Verlagshandlung, 1892), p. 44, n. 2.

⁷Wilpert quotes Jerome at length on the subject of Paula's monastery; Wilpert, p. 46, n. 3; see J.N.D. Kelly: Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 129-32, for an analysis of the foundation of Paula's monastery. Kelly's assertion (p. 130) that it was Paula who paid for the construction of the monastery out of her immense wealth is reasonable, and shows the continuity of the nobility's relationship to consecration for women throughout the Roman and early medieval periods. That continuity is further illustrated by the fact that upon Paula's death in 404 her daughter Eustochium became abbess of the monastery at Bethlehem. The possessory attitude of the Frankish nobility toward communities of women had a long tradition behind it.

⁸Sadalberga was: in regulari norma discreta, imitans sanctarum feminarum, Melanie videlicet et Paulae, vitam, quarum Melanie, ut beatus Ieronimus ait, nobilissima Romanorum feminarum fuit et Marcellini quondam consulis filia, Ierosolimam navigavit, ubi tantum humilitate et caritate insignis extitit, ut Theclae nomen accepit. Paula vero, relicto patrimonio urbano, Graecorum orta prosapia, Bethlehemita rura expentens cum summa bonitate et humilitate vitam degens, sacrum spiritum Domino fudit. Vita Sadalbergae, c. 25; MGH Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum V, p. 64. Marcella and Paula were both widows. Paula was an aristocrat with five children.

Like Sadalberga she had submitted to her husband's desire to have children. But after the birth of the fifth child she, like Radegund, would have no sexual relations with her husband. Paula, like so many married religiously inclined women of the Roman and early medieval periods, practiced as many of the virtues of the consecrated life as her situation permitted. The most basic of those virtues was to recognize that Christ, and no man was one's bridegroom, and to behave accordingly in one's relationships with men. Paula's home became a meeting place where "a whole group of upper class women and girls inspired by the same ideals" gathered to put their devotion into practice. Kelly, pp. 92-93. Melania the Elder was also an aristocratic widow with children. She preceded Paula to Palestine and founded a double monastery in Jerusalem. Her community was clearly in the tradition of the consecrated widows of the apostolic Church. It was noted as a place of hospitality for travelling Christians. Kelly, p. 121.

⁹Caesarius, Regula sanctorum virginum, c. 21; and especially Caesarius, Vereor, c. 6.

¹⁰Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 61.

¹¹Benedict had this to say in the chapter, "Qualis debeat abbas:" Non ab eo [the abbot] persona in monasterio discernatur. Non unus plus ametur quam alius, nisi quem in bonis actibus aut obedientia invenerit meliorem. Non convertenti ex servitio praeponatur ingenuus, nisi alia rationabilis causa existat. Quod si ita iustitia dicante, abbate visum fuerit, et de cuiuslibet ordine id faciet; sin alias, propria teneant loca, quia sive servus sive liber, omnes in Christo sumus et sub uno Domino aequalem servitutis militiam baiulamus; "quia not est apud Deum personarum acceptio." The edition of Benedict's rule used here is, Benedict, Regula monachorum: Textus critico-practicus sec. cod. Sangall. 914, ed. Philibert Schmitz, 2nd. rev. ed. (Maredsous, 1956). See also Aloys Schulte, Der Adel und die deutsche Kirche im Mittelalter (Stuttgart: Verlag Ferdinand Enke, 1922), pp. 83-84.

¹²Donatus, Regula ad virgines, c. 1, "Qualis debeat esse abbatissa," which is clearly borrowed from Benedict's chapter on the abbot, and c. 10; Aurelian, Regula ad virgines, c. 13.

¹³MGH Epistolae III, p. 455.

¹⁴MGH Epist. II, p. 371.

¹⁵MGH Epist. III, p. 41.

¹⁶Venantius Fortunatus, Vita Radegundis, cc. 2-3; MGH Script. rer. Merov. II, p. 386; Baudonivia, Vita Radegundis, c. 1; MGH Script. rer. Merov. II, p. 381.

- ¹⁷Rudolf of Fulda, Vita Leobae, c. 6 (Leoba): c. 3 (Tetta); MGH Scriptores XV, p. 124; p. 123.
- ¹⁸Vita Sadalbergae, c. 1; MGH Script. rer. Merov. V, p. 53.
- ¹⁹Baudonivia, Vita Radegundis, cc. 5 & 6, pp. 125-16.
- ²⁰Rudolf, Vita Leobae, c. 7, pp. 124-25; cc. 9-11, pp. 125-26; c. 16, p. 129.
- ²¹Vita Sadalbergae, c. 9, p. 54; c. 12, pp. 56-57.
- ²²Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., cc. 25, 29, 30, 43, 54; Vereor, c. 5; Donatus, Reg. ad virg., cc. 53-57, 58.
- ²³MGH Epist. III, p. 259.
- ²⁴MGH Epist. III, pp. 261-62.
- ²⁵Almost all letters of consecrated women to Boniface and Lul were from English nuns living in England. As will soon become evident, the problems the English women faced were common to the Frankish kingdom as well.
- ²⁶MGH Epist. III, p. 264.
- ²⁷Rudolf, Vita Leobae, c. 11, p. 126.
- ²⁸MGH Epist. III, pp. 280-81.
- ²⁹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., cc. 17, 29, 32, 35.
- ³⁰Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 18; see also Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 19.
- ³¹Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 32; Aurelian, Reg. ad virg., c. 29.
- ³²Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg., c. 33.
- ³³Gregory of Tours' account of the revolt is in his Historia Francorum, Book 9, cc. 39-43; and Book 10, cc. 15-20. Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum; MGH Script. rer. Merov. I, ed. altera.
- ³⁴Hist. Franc., Bk. 9, c. 39.
- ³⁵According to B. Krusch and W. Levison, editors of the Hist. Franc., MGH Script. rer. Merov. I, ed. altera.

³⁶Hist. Franc., Bk. 9, c. 39. The bishops assumed that Caesarius' rule was used at Poitiers. There is little reason to doubt that the rule was followed there, but exactly when it was introduced is not certain. Caesarius' rule may have been followed under Radegund and then fallen into disuse after her death. (The contact between Arles and Poitiers is proved by Caesaria's letter to Radegund and Richild, a letter composed of excerpts from Caesarius' writings, and that contact makes it reasonable to assume that there was at least a strong Caesarian atmosphere at Poitiers under Radegund.) The situation at the time of the revolt is impossible to determine. The purpose of Gregory's showing the letter to Chrodiel was primarily to remind her of the need for obedience and charity in a religious institution. There must have been some knowledge of Caesarius' attitudes among the women of Poitiers or the significance of a letter which was strongly in favor of his point of view would have been lost. Yet Gregory assured Chrodiel, as he says in Hist. Franc., Bk. 9, c. 39 that

Si abbatisa delequit aut canonicam regulam in aliquo praetermisit accedamus ad fratrem nostrum Meroveum episcopum et coniuncti arguamus eam; emendatisque negotiis, restituamini in monasterio vestro, ne disperatur luxoria, quod sancta Radegundis ieiuniis et oracionibus crebris aelimosinisque frequentibus adgregavit.

This is a prime example of the confusion that reigned in consecration for women in the early Middle Ages. The terms referring to nuns and to canonesses could be the same--both groups were sanctimoniales feminae. What Gregory meant by canonica regula he did not explain. But he was insisting on obedience to whatever rule was used at Poitiers. The rule would judge Leubovera, not Chrodiel. Schäfer presents an excellent discussion of the possibilities, and suggests that the revolt may have been the result of the introduction of a stricter form of life. This might well have drawn limits on Chrodiel and Basina that they could not abide because they no longer had the freedoms of the daughters of kings, but the restrictions of serfs. An interesting but unprovable idea. K. Heinrich Schäfer, Die Kanonissenstifter im deutschen Mittelalter (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1907), pp. 70-73; and especially p. 71, n. 1.

³⁷Hist. Franc., Bk. 9, c. 40.

³⁸Hist. Franc., Bk. 9, c. 41.

³⁹Hist. Franc., Bk. 9, c. 43.

⁴⁰Hist. Franc., Bk. 10, c. 15.

⁴¹Violence within communities of women was not unusual in the early Middle Ages. As late as the Council of Ver of 755, c. 6, "hostility" was recognized as a legitimate exception to the monastic ideal of the absolute stability of the abbess. MGH Capitularium regum Francorum I, p. 54. See also p. 229, above.

⁴²Donatus, Reg. ad virg., prologus; Migne PL 87, 270.

⁴³Donatus, Reg. ad virg., cc. 37-40; see also cc. 5, 8, 9, 52, which are mostly borrowed from Caesarius. The rule of Waldebert, c. 22, strongly emphasizes the importance of the subordination of junior members to those with greater experience and authority.

⁴⁴MGH Concilia I, c. 20, p. 160.

⁴⁵MGH Capit. I, c. 18, p. 95.

⁴⁶Gregory of Tours History of the Franks, trans. Louis Thorpe (London: Reading and Fakenham, 1974), p. 519, n. 47. Gregory's account of the course of the incident is in Hist. Franc., Bk. 9, c. 33; and Bk. 10, c. 12.

⁴⁷Leo Ueding, Geschichte der Klostergrundungen der Merovingerzeit (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Emil Ebering, 1935), p. 51.

⁴⁸Philipp Oppenheim, Die consecratio virginum als geistesgeschichtliches Problem (Rome: Verlag "Officium libri Catholici," 1943), pp. 68-69; p. 68, n. 95.

⁴⁹Oppenheim, p. 69.

⁵⁰MGH Conc. I, c. 19, 107.

⁵¹MGH Conc. I, c. 3, p. 154.

⁵²MGH Conc. I, c. 13, p. 190.

⁵³MGH Script. XV, c. 16, p. 129.

⁵⁴MGH Capit. I, c. 21, p. 285.

⁵⁵MGH Capit. I, c. 20, p. 278.

⁵⁶MGH Capit. I, c. 21, p. 278.

⁵⁷Vita Sadalbergae, c. 9, p. 54.

⁵⁸Vita Sadalbergae, c. 12, p. 56. See Schulte, p. 196, for the aristocratic character of St. Maria at Laon.

⁵⁹Wilibald Hauthaler, Salzburger Urkundenbuch, Bd. I, Traditions-codices (Salzburg, 1910), c. 4, pp. 22-24.

⁶⁰M Regintrudis von Reichlin-Meldegg and Franz J. Bendel, "Verzeichnis der deutschen Benediktinerinnenklöstern," Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige 35, Heft I (1914): 1-45.

⁶¹Bergen (p. 5); Fischbeck a.d. Weser (p. 11); Haeslingen (p. 15); Herdecke, a royal foundation, by a niece of Charlemagne (p. 16); Hillersleben (p. 17); Hornburg (p. 18); Calbe a.d. Saale (p. 19); Königsdorf, supposedly founded by Charlemagne (p. 21); B. Maria V. in Mainz (p. 25); Mattenzell (p. 26); Metten, a double monastery founded by Charlmagne (p. 27); Milz (p. 28); Vergaville (p. 42). All page citations are to von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel.

⁶²Eichstätt (p. 9); Grauftal (p. 14); Katzis (p. 19); Oldenstadt (p. 31); Salzburg-Assumpta or St. Erintrude (p. 36). All page citations are to von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel.

⁶³Alhaldensleben (p. 3); Möllenbeck, founded in 896 by the matron Hilding and a priest (!) Folhart (p. 28). All page citations are to von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel.

⁶⁴MGH Capit. I, c. 40, p. 56; the Admonitio cites the "African Council," c. 11.

⁶⁵Council of Paris, Liber tertius, c. 18; MGH Conc. II, II, p. 676.

⁶⁶MGH Capit. II, c. 10, p. 38.

⁶⁷Bede, A History of the English Church and People, trans. Leo Shirley-Price (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 150-51.

⁶⁸Vita Sadalbergae, c. 12, p. 57.

⁶⁹Vita Sadalbergae, c. 18, p. 60.

⁷⁰See Schulte, p. 429, for a discussion of St. Maria in Laon; the first paragraph is of most relevance here.

⁷¹Schulte, p. 423.

⁷²Schulte, p. 424; his analysis of the oblation book and problems connected with it covers pp. 424-25.

⁷³Schulte, p. 424, n. 1.

⁷⁴Schulte, p. 424.

⁷⁵Rule of Waldebert, c. 23.

⁷⁶Schmitz, Histoire, Tome 7, p. 23.

⁷⁷Schmitz, Histoire, Tome 7, p. 23.

⁷⁸MGH Epist. III, p. 365.

⁷⁹Edmund Stengel, Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda, Bd. I (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1958), pp. 221-23. See Stengel, p. 221; and von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 26, for the identification of this community.

⁸⁰Magingaoz and Juliana belonged to the powerful Mattonid family; see Stengel, pp. 221-22; pp. 299-301; von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 26.

⁸¹Lina Eckenstein, Woman under Monasticism: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), pp. 152-53.

⁸²Rudolf, Vita Leobae, c. 18, p. 129; see also Hilpisch, Geschichte, pp. 18-19, for the role of abbesses in Germanic culture. Hilpisch's assertion that abbesses were advisers in public forums and that they inherited the traditional role of wise women in Germanic society is plausible; but is it correct? Hilpisch does not offer any examples to support his contentions, and he does not provide any citations.

⁸³MGH Capit. I, c. 4, p. 165.

⁸⁴It is obvious that falconers were not essential to any aspect of an abbesses' duties. Some of her associates and possessions were the trappings of the noble way of life and were officially forbidden her. The Duplex legationis edictum of 789 prohibited bishops, abbots, and abbesses from keeping dogs, falcons, hawks, and jesters (ioculatores); MGH Capit I, c. 31, p. 64. Ecclesiastical lords not only came from the aristocracy; they often performed the same functions as secular lords. They could have seen little reason to deny themselves the pleasures and trappings enjoyed by secular lords who were responsible for the same duties as themselves.

⁸⁵MGH Capit. I, c. 27, p. 291.

⁸⁶MGH Capit. I, c. 19, p. 290.

⁸⁷Capitula de iustitiis facendis; c. 20; MGH Capit. I, p. 295.

⁸⁸MGH Capit. I, c. 4, p. 326.

⁸⁹MGH Capit. I, c. 7, p. 165.

⁹⁰C. Wampach, Urkunden- und Quellenbuch zur Geschichte der altluxemburgischen Territorien bis zur Burgundischen Zeit, Bd. I (Luxemburg, 1935), pp. 22-26.

⁹¹Wampach, p. 26.

⁹²Karl Glöckner, Codex Laureshamensis, Bd. I (Darmstadt: Verlag des historischen Vereins für Hessen, 1929), pp. 289-90.

⁹³Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 389.

⁹⁴Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 290.

⁹⁵Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 290

⁹⁶Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 290.

⁹⁷Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 291.

⁹⁸Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 292.

⁹⁹Stengel, pp. 228-29.

¹⁰⁰Stengel, p. 229.

¹⁰¹Stengel, p. 229.

¹⁰²Emhilt had founded Milz in 783; von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 28. The authors express some doubt whether Milz was founded originally as a house of Benedictine nuns. The charter may represent a change of Emhilt's mind subsequent to the foundation. It was the right of the founder/abbess to decide on what basis the religious functions of the community would be regulated.

¹⁰³Stengel, p. 376, column A.

¹⁰⁴Stengel, pp. 377-78.

¹⁰⁵Nor was it unheard of for an abbess not to refer to herself as "abbatissa." See for example Burad's charter in Karl Glöckner, Codex Laureshamensis, Bd. II (Darmstadt: Verlag des historischen Vereins für Hessen, 1933), p. 16. Burad was an abbess, as Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 16, n. 1, points out; yet she referred to herself only as "ego Burath deo sacrata."

¹⁰⁶See von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 23, for Lauterbach.

¹⁰⁷Württembergisches Urkundenbuch, Bd. I (Aalen, 1972), pp. 30-31.

¹⁰⁸MGH Diplomata I, pp. 186-87.

¹⁰⁹J. F. Böhmer, Regesta imperii I: Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern 751-918: Neugearbeitet von Engelbert Muhlbacher (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1966), nr. 895.

¹¹⁰Böhmer, Reg. imp. I, nr. 977.

¹¹¹Böhmer, Reg. imp. I, nr. 986.

¹¹²See, e.g., Caesarius, Reg. sanct. virg. , c. 27; Donatus, Reg. ad virg., cc. 1 & 4; Rule of Waldebert, c. 1.

¹¹³The danger in assuming that monastic rules and synodal decrees represent the actuality of consecrated life rather than a seldom achieved ideal is exemplified by an assertion of Gabriel le Bras:

Les problemes de la puissance ont beaucoup moins agité les moniales que le religieux: l'autorité ne s'exerce que sur un communauté restreinte, la richesses a peu d'ampleur les occasions de prestiges sont rare.

Le Bras is correct in saying that problems connected with the spiritual life of the community (discipline, separation from the world, relationship of the community to the clergy) were of central importance. He is not correct, however, in saying that these spiritual issues were more important than the secular; quite the contrary. Gabriel le Bras, Institutions ecclesiastiques de la Chretiente medieval, livre V (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1964), p. 194.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTINUED ASSOCIATION OF CONSECRATED WOMEN
WITH SECULAR SOCIETY: THE ISSUES OF PROPERTY
AND MARRIAGE

The use made of religious institutions by the nobility and the noble definition of consecration for women were affected most strongly by the insistence of the nobility that the use of property and the life of the individual were to be regulated in the interests of the family. Those attitudes were accepted by members of religious communities. It was the agreement between secular and consecrated nobles which modified the religious ideal as expressed in monastic rules and conciliar decrees. Consecrated women defined their position in the religious and in the secular world according to the criteria of their class. The idea that religious communities should be the private possessions of particular noble or royal families and that therefore such institutions should figure highly in the secular politics and economic management of the kingdom caused no recorded opposition within the communities. Quite the contrary: the acceptance of stricter religious ideals by the Carolingian kings hindered but did not prevent consecrated and secular nobles from defining the character of consecration for women in their own ways. Where nobles could not ignore the strictures of the Benedictine

reform movement they turned to forms of consecration which were less constricted by monastic regulations.

Members of religious institutions brought the assumptions of their class about the use of family and personal property and about stability into the cloister. The status of the abbess in the politics of the kingdom was not the result of external pressures alone. Her subordinates were often as involved in caring for personal and family property as was a founder/abbess. Dispositions of property affected not only the individual but also her family. Property was the single most important factor in causing continuing contact of the consecrated woman with her family.

Commands that the individual should remain stable in whatever form of consecrated life she had chosen were meant to cut the normal connections between a noble woman and her family. Stability was also essential to protect the institution of religious service for women from disruption by continual comings and goings by members of religious communities. Permanent stability was required to impress on the entrant and her family the seriousness of the step she was contemplating. Religious service was not supposed to be one of several phases or professions in a young noblewoman's life. It was not meant to be an experiment that could be tried and then abandoned at the convenience of the woman or of her family. Yet that was precisely how consecration for women was viewed by the early medieval nobility. That nobility accepted the ecclesiastical interpretation of stability no more than it accepted the Church's regulations of the possession of private property by consecrated

women. The true nature of consecration for women in the Carolingian period was the result of a conflict between two strongly held concepts concerning the meaning of consecration for a woman and the role of communities of consecrated women in society.

Repeated prohibitions of the marriage of consecrated women in conciliar and capitular decrees of the period between the sixth and the ninth centuries prove that the nobility was adamant on its right to withdraw its female relatives from consecration in order to marry them off. Possession of land and family connections were the two foundations of noble power in these centuries, and to lose control of its lands or of any of its relatives was an inconceivable blow to the position of any noble family. The senior members of the family always assumed that it was their right at all times to determine the future of its junior members, particularly the unmarried women, for the good of the family as a whole. The family leadership might at one moment determine that the family interest would be served if one of the female relatives were consecrated, but might later decide that the woman would be more useful as an instrument in establishing an alliance with another family. Just as one should not think of all abbesses as involuntary participants in secular governance of the kingdom, neither should one think that all consecrated women removed from their religious retreats for marriage went unwillingly. Ecclesiastical councils and capitularies make it clear that many consecrated women cooperated with their removal from the religious life. Such women were punished with exceptional severity, along with their illicit husbands. It is significant

that there was nowhere a provision for the punishment of secular persons involved in the escape of their consecrated relatives. Despite growing pressure from Church and rulers the consecrated and the secular nobility continued to act according to the traditional conception of the meaning of consecration for women.

The sharp difference between the ideal of a consecration for women as it was envisioned by the Benedictine reformers and the concept of consecration held by the nobility is illustrated by the issue of possession of property by consecrated women. The possession of property by consecrated women was a major factor in preventing the application of all aspects of the monastic ideal to the practice of consecration in the early Middle Ages. Since possession of property was as much a family as a personal matter, the possession of material goods by consecrated women did more than frustrate the monastic ideals of personal poverty and communal life. Possession of property entailed considerable contact with secular relatives, with the result that the ideal of separation from secular relatives could not be put into effect.

The basis for monastic poverty lay, of course, in Christ's command to his disciples to rid themselves of distracting material wealth so that they could fully follow him. We have seen that the bishops of the patristic Church were not satisfied that the actual practice of consecration for women in their time made it possible for the individual to live up to Christ's command. The forms of consecration typical of the patristic period--consecrated

widowhood/virginity practiced in the individual's own home--could only be carried out successfully by very wealthy women. As early as the patristic period consecration for women had become a preserve for the nobility. Yet if the consecrated life was the surest way to salvation, then consecration should be available to all Christians. Wealth should be no criterion for entrance into consecration, and poverty should not prevent the individual from living the most Christian life possible. The bishops' solution to the problem was to encourage a communal form of consecration founded on a pooling of individual wealth, which would then be shared equally by all. Common wealth would make possible the kind of individual poverty desired by Christ. Since all members of the consecrated community would be equally poor and equally rich all, no matter what their class, would have an equal chance to live the kind of life which it was felt would lead to salvation.¹ Monasticism was an attempt to end the unfortunate association of wealth with the capacity of the individual to live a life totally dedicated to religion.

It was in the tradition established by the bishops of the patristic period that the synods of the bishops of the early Middle Ages simply forbade monks and nuns to possess any property. The Council of Auxerre held between 573 and 603 reflected the growing influence of the rule of Benedict. For the first time in medieval ecclesiastical legislation monks were forbidden to own property. The Council stated that if a monk committed adultery or presumed to have his own property or stole, he was to be sent to another

monastery to perform his penance.² Possession of personal property was put among very serious offenses and was meant to appear as reprehensible as were truly antisocial acts like adultery and theft. Possession of private goods had no place in a Benedictine monastery, which was to be a community of like minded individuals dedicated to reaching a common goal in a uniform manner.

In this regard it is relevant to recall the example of the consecrated woman Agnes, who was excommunicated by the Council of Mâcon in 583. Agnes was not excommunicated because she owned property but because she used it to get support from secular magnates so that she could continue to lead her dissolute life.³ Hofmeister feels that the reason for Agnes' excommunication represented a modification of the principle created at Auxerre that monks and nuns should not own property. But the Council of Auxerre said nothing about nuns or any type of consecrated women. It limited itself strictly to monks. The excommunication of Agnes by the Council of Mâcon was not a modification of any previous piece of legislation but a first warning, a limited application of the principle of monastic poverty to consecrated women for the first time in medieval ecclesiastical legislation.

For the nobles possessions, particularly of land, were of political and social value, the basis of their power in the secular world. Agnes was an example of the problems that arose when consecrated women kept possession and control of property. If she were not forcibly separated from her possessions, the consecrated noblewoman would never cease to think of herself as a noble with

all the rights belonging to that status. She would never develop a separated and monastic personality. Agnes may have been singled out because she was a notorious example of the evils that came from possession of property by religious women in an age when property had political significance. The Council of Mâcon did not modify the work of the Council of Auxerre, and in fact the bishops at Mâcon may well have felt that they were amplifying the work of their predecessors.⁴ Mâcon may represent the first legislative acceptance of Caesarius' ideal of personal poverty for nuns.

Agnes, like her contemporaries the rebellious nuns of Poitiers (the revolt covered the years 589-90), represented the extreme--consecrated women who defined the terms of their consecration for themselves and who used their personal wealth to support that interpretation, by violence if necessary. Another aspect was represented by those women who assumed consecration on their own initiative and used their wealth to live according to their own interpretation of consecration in their own residence. One advantage to such irregular behavior was that it was easily recognized and could legitimately be held up to scorn. As a result steps could be taken to prevent the repetition of such acts. Such a step was taken by the Council of Verneuil in 755. For the first time monks and nuns were addressed together in a prohibition of possessions. Once more monastic poverty was associated with stable monastic life directed by a superior under the guidance of an established rule. Men and women who claimed that they were serving God and who still possessed their own goods or money and had not

submitted themselves to the direction of a bishop or to regular life in a monastery were to be placed in monasteries under monastic or canonical order: "placuit ut in monasterio sint sub ordine regulari aut sub ordine canonica." Failure to abide by this command would lead to excommunication.⁵

The Council of Verneuil was one of the first legislative results of Boniface's pro-Benedictine labors. There was to be one monasticism for both sexes, and the nature of that monasticism was to be formed by the Benedictine rule. That this was to be the case from that time on was announced in a comprehensive chapter of one of the first ecclesiastical councils held under the aegis of the new ruling family, patrons of Boniface and of Benedictine monasticism alike. The legislation of Verneuil sought to bring an end to a situation by which wealth permitted consecrated women to circumvent the monastic ideals of communal life, personal poverty, subordination to an elder, and stability.

But what concerned Caesarius, in his letter Vereor, for example, was a more subtle and insidious attitude among the nuns of Arles. They instantly associated property with family interest. If they were to rid themselves of all personal property, it seemed a matter of course to them to look out for the interests of their families in the matter and to give the properties to their parents. What seemed natural, just, and good to the nuns seemed to Caesarius to be a sign of nonmonastic attitudes. The truly monastic, fully Christian woman would, he said, think of the welfare of the poor; the parents of the nuns already had more than enough. The nuns

replied that Caesarius was expecting them to show disobedience to their parents, which, from a secular point of view he was. To show disrespect to the interests of their elders in the noble family was not something the nuns found congenial. Caesarius' reply was that a nun no longer belonged to her biological family. She should be dead to them.⁶

It is significant that the only recorded conflict between Caesarius and the nuns of Arles arose over the thorny problem of the relation of a consecrated woman to property. The record of the conflict, embodied in the letter Vereor and in the contradictory commands of the rule concerning the disposal of property, suggests that Caesarius did not succeed in imposing his will on all the nuns in his charge. To ask a noblewoman to forget that she was part of a family which held a certain position within Frankish society, a position which must be defended by every member of the family, was to ask the impossible. This was all the more true when possession of land was involved, for land ensured power and status for the individual and for her family. Change of ownership was a matter of vital interest to both. It is clear that Caesarius had difficulty in finding a solution to the problem of what an entrant to a monastic community should do with her wealth. On the subject of the disposal of property Caesarius' prescriptions lost the singleness of direction which was so typical of his work.

An examination of the contents of the charters of donation drawn up by consecrated women will illustrate that close relationship of the consecrated woman to her property and to her family

which frustrated Caesarius and all later reformers. The very existence of these charters indicates that consecrated noblewomen did not reject the attitudes of their class. The largest number of documents produced by consecrated women have nothing to do with religion. When most consecrated women took the time to have a written record made the result was a charter which registered the transfer of possession of land. Two important facts stand out after a perusal of these documents. In only a few cases does any donation possibly represent the surrender of control over all of her lands by an entrant to the monastic life. Most donations specifically stated that the donor was reserving in her own possession land which was not involved in the donation. Or, some donors insisted on the usufruct of the donated properties while they lived. Second, it is impossible to ascertain in every case whether the donors were canonesses or nuns living in communities where complete disposal of property was not required. The women referred to themselves by terms such as "Deo sacrata," or "ancilla Dei." As was pointed out in the discussion of canonesses, the same terms could be used to refer to canonesses or to nuns. In the last analysis, however, it is not vitally important to determine what percentage of the documents cited in this chapter came from canonesses and how many from nuns, as instructive as that would be. The point is that there is still extant a large body of records which shows us the importance of land tenure, of land transfer, and of control over land to consecrated women. These documents and not monastic rules show us the true character of consecrated life for women in the Merovingian and

Carolingian periods. Even by 840 most consecrated women were not nuns following the rule of Benedict. Many, perhaps most, consecrated women were not nuns at all. These are the impressions one gets from the attitudes toward property, family, and stability evident in the documents of the sixth through the ninth centuries.

Late in the reign of Charlemagne a young woman named Bleonsuind decided to enter the monastery of the "venerable abbess Abhilt." Bleonsuind took her decision seriously, and she gave all of her worldly goods to the monastery of Fulda. Bleonsuind's donation charter was not typical of such documents. It is one of the few of which we can say with certainty that it was devised by an entrant to a religious institution. It is one of the few instances in which it is certain that the donor was ridding herself of all her possessions as Caesarius and Benedict had commanded. More important for the present purpose is that Bleonsuind has left a uniquely detailed account of what was involved when a member of a noble Frankish family changed her relations with her family and wished to alienate lands from its control. Entrance into Abhilt's community and donation of the lands which Bleonsuind had inherited from her parents came only after her relatives had given their permission:

With the consent and congratulations of my brothers and sisters and with no contradiction from my parents or relatives and before suitable witnesses and my relatives. . . .⁷

Bleonsuind rejected the vainglory of the world and freed herself of all her material wealth. She was so determined to leave the secular

world and to hear no more about her former properties that she had her charter made out in the presence of Abbot Baugulf and of Charlemagne himself, who sealed the charter with his signet ring.

No other charter of donation so explicitly shows such care to placate all relatives. Indeed, many donors were mature women with children and solid positions as senior members of the family. But every donation must have had behind it discussion and negotiation among relatives. Numerous charters illustrate the fact that consecrated women continued to see themselves as integral parts of their families. Most such charters were not the result of disposal by novices of all their possessions. Instead, it is obvious that most charters came from women who had been consecrated for some time, but who nevertheless continued to work with their secular relatives to secure personal and familiar interest in the possession of land.

The cooperation of those relatives whose interests were most directly affected by a donation of land and serfs to an ecclesiastical institution was essential. Even a matron like Alpun "ancilla Dei" needed to obtain the permission of her son "and his brothers" to donate her own alod to the bishopric of Freising.⁸ The sons' interests were affected because Alpun did not arrange for any usufruct either for herself or for her sons, and the whole alod was alienated forever from the inheritance of the sons and of their children. It would have been in the interests of the donor and of the religious institution to have such specific permission from the family, and careful bishops and abbots took the time to have such clauses included in case of future disputes.

In fact, most charters do not show that care, and relatives did take advantage of the situation to call donations into question in order to claim the properties back into the control of the families. In 802 the "deo sacrata" Engelfrit and her brother Kundpert took a bishop Atto to court at Regensburg. Sister and brother claimed that the bishop had unjustly seized their paternal inheritance, which included a church at Paldilinkirka.⁹ Caesarius and subsequent writers of rules had prohibited consecrated women from participating in lawsuits, and all rules demanded obedience to ecclesiastical superiors above all else. But here was Engelfrit, looking out for her own and her brother's interests in worldly possessions, suing a bishop, in short behaving like any secular noblewoman. She was named first throughout the court record, which was entitled, Interpellatio Englefrita. It was she then, not her brother, who was recognized as the representative of family interests. One can be sure that Caesarius would have been pleased at least with the outcome: Engelfrit lost the case.

Many donation charters show consecrated women acting as members of a family consortium which disposed of land it owned as a group. The group might have been large, or it might have consisted of a brother and sister, of two sisters, or of a mother and daughter. In every instance the consecrated status of one of the participants was irrelevant to the actions of the group, as it was to the behavior of the individual. The consecrated woman was acting in her own and in her family's interest as she would have had she been a secular noblewoman, and she was often not averse to getting

some personal temporal benefit from the transaction. As in all ages the wealthy could afford to be most generous in pious donations. In the late eighth century the powerful Mattonid family of Bavaria made a donation to Fulda. Abbess Juliana, founder of Mattenzell, joined her brothers Count Matto and Bishop Megingoz (as his name was spelled in the donation charter) in donating the properties which they had jointly inherited from their parents at Wenkheim and any later acquisitions there to Fulda. The properties included a church and the little monastery ("monasteriolum") of which Juliana was abbess. Juliana's permission was necessary not only because she was an equal partner in possession of the lands in question but because the donation meant an end to the independence of her monastery. As founder/abbess and as co-owner of its lands Juliana had the legal right to dispose of the monastery and its independence as she saw fit.¹⁰

The Mattonids could afford to make their donation with no strings attached. That was not unusual, but it is doubtful that donations of this type represented the total wealth of any individual or group, especially when the donation was rather small.¹¹ At least as common as outright donation was donation with conditions, that is, with a right to usufruct or to some form of income from the donated lands for the life of its donors. In charters drawn up by family consortia donation without a reservation or rights or lands was not common.¹² The lands actually donated to an ecclesiastical institution might be given without reservation, but the charter might specifically deny the institution a particular parcel of

land which lay within the donated properties. For example, in the period 780-96 the "famula Dei" Folmuot and her sister Frohunt donated two unfree persons and forty iugera of land and all animals and goods on them except for one farm. Fulda was to come into possession of the donated properties when both sisters were dead.¹³ The sisters owned and disposed of their land jointly. That one of them was a consecrated woman made no difference in their behavior. They reserved part of their holdings from ecclesiastical control, probably to give it as an inheritance to a relative.

Folmuot was almost certainly a canoness; she was not a follower of Benedict or of Caesarius. In the donation of Soanpurc "Deo sacrata" we come face to face with another type of consecrated woman. Soanpurc may well have been one of those women who assumed the veil on her own initiative and lived in her own home. She was not a nun of any kind, for she made her donation in cooperation ("pariter") with her advocate Hatto for herself, her son Alprih, and her husband Hadun. Soanpurc gave to the bishopric of Freising her inherited property at Tisinghusir "except for eight iurnales and one place which consists of a medium sized farm and one servant."¹⁴ Soanpurc was a woman of much wealth. She gave some of it away but retained much of it for her own and her family's support. She may have been living at home or she may have been a canoness, and she was concerned enough with her religious status to hire an advocate to help her with business matters. She did not let the advocate work alone, however; she worked pariter with Hatto. Soanpurc

was what the nobility had in mind when it thought of consecrated women.

Married women were a tiny minority in the religious world. More typical was the widow who despite her consecrated status served as important elder or even as head of a noble family. In 834 Heilrat donated all of her own and her brother's lands which they held in common near the river Clana. The conditions which Heilrat put on her donation show us the noble family in action almost as specifically as does Bleonsuind's charter. But Heilrat asked no one's permission. She was the one who made the decisions, and she made her grant with the condition that she had the right to visit and improve the properties which she was donating to the bishopric of Freising until she died. If her nephew, whom she had adopted as her heir, outlived her he was to inherit the donated lands as a benefice from the bishopric of Freising, just as Heilrat was receiving it in benefice now.¹⁵ The bishopric of Freising had little hope of enjoying absolute control over the donation for some time to come. Monastic ideals of stability were as alien to Heilrat as was the ideal of monastic poverty. She was determined to visit the donated lands periodically and to improve them. She was interested in looking out for her own and for her favorite relative's interests, not in Caesarius' or Benedict's interpretation of the consecrated life. Heilrat may have been one of those widows living in deliciis, or she may have been a canoness. At any rate the evidence of the donation charters and of other contemporary sources proves that Heilrat, Engelfrit, and Soanpurc were more typical

representatives of consecrated women than were Caesaria, Rade Gund, or Chrodiel.¹⁶

Even powerful women like Heilrat, Engelfrit, Soanpurc, and Juliana formed associations with men. The woman may have been the dominating force in the group, but the presence of male names in the charter gave an added security to the undertaking. Quite often donation charters did not indicate the cooperation of a man, whether related to the women involved or not. It was not unheard of for two women related to each other, one consecrated, one secular, to dispose together of jointly held land. There was never any indication that the secular partner was married. These women were probably in the same predicament as some of Boniface's correspondents--left without any close male relatives to protect them. For such women donation of lands to an ecclesiastical institution was a wise investment. Land hungry neighbors might be less likely to seize properties protected by a powerful religious institution. A similar consideration may have inspired the widow Heilrat. Like her unattached women with no families to protect them would reserve usufruct of the donated lands while they lived, thus drawing a double benefit from the donation.

Between 776 and 796 Sessa "ancilla Christi" and her sister Waltun gave four villas and thirty unfree persons to Fulda with the stipulation that they enjoy usufruct as long as they lived.¹⁷ In 823 the "ancilla Christi" Lustrat and her sister Sahsinna donated to Fulda their holdings in the villa Eschinabach and ten serfs.¹⁸ The sisters were to have rights to income from the lands until

they died. In an unusual transaction from 744 the consecrated woman Beata and her mother Hatta sold properties to St. Gall.¹⁹ Again, in each of these operations the consecrated status of one of the women involved had no effect in causing or in modifying any aspect of the donations. What was involved in every instance was an arrangement which benefitted the individuals and the families who made the donations. Of the charters cited here only Bleonsuind's differed in wording, goals, and atmosphere from charters made by secular nobles.

The evidence presented by the charters suggests that associations among relatives for the management of land included only those most closely related: brothers and sisters, mothers and sons, aunts and nephews, sisters, mothers and daughters. The result was that other relatives were not closely involved in the decisions the groups made for the disposal of land. The excluded relatives might feel that their interests had been damaged. Division within the family might erupt and cause a lawsuit like Engelfrit's, or the injured party might try to seize the lands from the ecclesiastical institution to which they had been donated.

Several donation charters specifically mentioned the relatives of the donors and put them on notice that they had no right to reclaim the family lands which had been given to ecclesiastical institutions. Typical of this group of charters was that of Ata, which declared that any encroachment by anyone, including Ata herself or any of her descendants, would be legally invalid.²⁰ Whether through personal piety or because of pressure from the

institution to which the donation was being made the donors often included themselves in the clauses prohibiting seizure of the donated land. The individual saw herself as a member of a family with past, present, and future interests in land. All loopholes must be plugged so that present and future relatives would not be able to regain desirable properties.²¹

Most charters did not deprive the donor and her relatives of any right to the donated properties in such definite terms. Many more accomplished the same thing by assuring the recipient institution that it was to hold the property "without any contradiction,"²² "firmly and without contradiction by anyone," or "contradicted by no one."²³ Bleonsuind, unique in this as in most other things, had Charlemagne himself seal her charter "so that this donation might suffer no injury."²⁴

Donors were well aware of the troubles their pious acts might create within their families and with greedy neighbors. Some relatives might feel that the donation reduced the wealth and political importance of the family. Younger relatives might resent the donation because it reduced the amount of inheritable land. Neighbors might regard lands no longer in the direct control of a powerful family as an easy mark. The women who drew up charters were not naive enough to think that a mere demand that their donations be kept inviolate would be sufficient to ward off incursions. Of the women already mentioned only Alpun and Fastburg threatened those who violated their charters with divine wrath.²⁵ Other donors were more practical and more in the noble tradition. They did not even

mention God, but set up stiff fines for those who dared go against their desires. The size of the fine was specifically listed in almost every case. It was usual to require violators of charters to pay a certain amount of gold and another amount of silver.²⁶

Who benefitted from the fines? In almost every charter which established a fine the fisc figured prominently as one institution to which the fine was to be paid. In some charters the fisc alone was the beneficiary. The usual phrase was, "tunc inferat [the violator of the charter] una cum cogente fisco"; then the sum to be paid was laid down.²⁷ The fisc might be associated ("sociante fisco") with the offended ecclesiastical institution as beneficiary. If that was the provision, one sum was designated for the fisc, and a separate amount, often "twice the value which this charter provides" for the fisc was to go to the ecclesiastical institution.²⁸

The fisc did not appear as a beneficiary prior to 768, that is, not before the accession of Charlemagne to the throne. The donors were aware of Charlemagne's program of reform of the Frankish Church, and while they may not have supported most aspects of the program, donors did seek to attract royal protection for their donations by designating the royal treasury as a beneficiary of the fines. The result was that the ruler had more than theological reasons for a continual interest in the enforcement of pious donations. It is interesting that the fisc never shared a fine with a religious institution. Whether this was a policy of the king or an attempt on the part of donors and institutions to make the prospect of protecting the donation more attractive to the king cannot

be known. In any case the fisc possessed its own predetermined interest in the protection of the terms of many a donation. The amount attributed to the fisc might serve as the criterion for determining the fine to be paid to the institution. An ecclesiastical institution sometimes claimed as the fine accruing to it an amount twice as large as that established by the charter for the fisc.²⁹

The charters of donation, documents originating from the consecrated women themselves, support the contention that they shared with their secular relatives a conception of the meaning of consecration which differed significantly from that of any established ecclesiastical ideal. It was customary for the consecrated donor to reserve usufruct from the properties while she was alive. Only when she died did the recipient of the donation assume full control of the lands and of the services of the serfs. In this way the donor could protect the interests in properties that had been hers and her family's for so long. In addition, she continued to receive income and services so that she could continue to live in the manner to which she was accustomed.³⁰

The effect of these arrangements on the economic security of a religious community can be seen in a rather unusual donation charter. In 804 the "Deo sacrata" Rachild gave several properties to Lorsch. While she kept usufruct from the lands, she limited her authority over them. She promised not to do anything to reduce the value of the properties, but to improve them and add to their worth. Each year at the feast of St. Martin she would give twelve denarii

to Lorsch.³¹ Rachild's promise to limit her authority was quite rare. Only Aba, who donated lands to Lorsch in 789, also limited herself in that way. A consecrated woman who depended on the income from her properties would be most interested in the way they were managed. In caring for her own interests she might take actions which reduced the value of her gift. Donations which reserved usufruct did not fit in with the monastic ideal of a consecrated soul freed from cares about wealth and the other distractions of the secular world. Further, the monastic ideal was that commonly shared wealth would make possible the personal poverty of each member of a monastic community. But reservations of usufruct meant that a considerable amount of the economic support of a religious institution would be unavailable for the common use of the members. The consecrated women who received usufruct would not participate in any communal life, for they would have seen to their own economic support, each in her own way. They were not dependent on the bishop nor on the abbess for their upkeep, and that in turn reduced the authority of the bishop and the abbess over the consecrated women in their charge.

There is a sizeable group of charters which did not reserve usufruct or stipulate any other conditions which limited the control of the recipients over the donations. These charters must be used with care. We cannot assume that we are dealing with charters whereby entrants to a monastery disposed of all their worldly goods. If that were the case the donors did not say so in their charters. In lieu of concrete evidence to the contrary charters which did not

claim usufruct are best treated as no more than the records through which consecrated women gave parts of their properties for religious use. A careful examination of the charters proves that caution in evaluating their significance is justified.

In 793 Burath "deo sacrata" donated land and two serfs to Lorsch.³² She did not reserve usufruct, and gave over legal control of lands and people to Lorsch on the very day the charter was signed. But in another charter we find that Burath was an abbess.³³ She was a veteran of the religious life and a leader. She was merely making a pious gift of some of the possessions she had kept in her control throughout her career. Nor did the donation to Lorsch exhaust her supply of goods. In 800 Blidrat "deo sacrata" gave part of her possessions to Fulda. In the description of the boundaries of one of the donated sections of land the charter states: "ab uno latere habet Burat" ("on one side lies Burath's property"). So Burath continued to hold property and among her neighbors was reckoned as another landed noblewoman who had incidentally been consecrated.³⁴

In 771 Hite "deo sacrata" donated several sections of land and seven serfs to Lorsch.³⁵ She did not claim any usufruct, but neither did she rid herself of all her possessions. In 774 Hite (her name was spelled "Ida" in this charter) "nonna" made another large donation of lands and serfs to the same monastery, and again she did not claim usufruct.³⁶ Did the change in the terms by which she referred to herself mean that in Hite's charter of 774 we have the record of the disposal of all her goods by a woman who had decided to totally reject the world and become a nun after the

Benedictine pattern? That such was the case is not likely. It was not uncommon for donors to refer to themselves as "nonna," but given the lack of definition in the terms used to designate consecrated women one should not read too much into that word. The evidence of the charters proves that one must beware in interpreting the meaning of terms associated with the consecrated women of the Middle Ages. Sometime between 767 and 783 Gundrada "nonna" donated land to Lorsch. Yet in 771 she made another gift to the same monastery.³⁷ Gundrada was not a "nun" in the Caesarian or Benedictine sense. It might appear that in the donation of Uda "deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 772 we have the charter of an entrant to a monastic community. Lorsch was to take perpetual and unlimited possession of Uda's lands on the day the charter was signed.³⁸ The absolute terms by which Uda turned her property over to Lorsch are impressive; but her donation did not exhaust Uda's supply of goods. Seven years later she made another donation to Lorsch, expressly stating that she was keeping some lands for her own use.³⁹ In both cases Uda had taken care to keep some property in her personal control. In 772 she had not made any express mention of the retention. In 779 Uda clarified her relationship to Lorsch and to her possessions by delineating which lands were donated and which remained her personal property.

Uda was no exception. Several charters removed some property of a donor from the list of lands given to an ecclesiastical institution. Blidrat drew up such a charter. She donated a farm with its buildings and a serf to Fulda. In addition she gave the monastery parts of two other farms, a sixth of one and a

third of the other. The undonated lands remained at Blidrat's disposal to enjoy as she wished.⁴⁰ In 768 Richlind "deo sacrata" gave land to Lorsch, and she too reserved two iurnales for herself.⁴¹

Of the other charters drawn up by consecrated women only a few are relevant to this chapter. The donation of Ota is of special interest, for it is quite likely that it was the charter of a woman who was disposing of all her possessions in order to enter religious service. Ota was a widow. In the period 754-68 she made a donation to Fulda, including her own house and her serf Thancrat, his wife and child.⁴² If Ota did not rid herself of all her properties, she certainly came closer to the monastic ideal than most other donors. She made a real sacrifice by depriving herself of her house and servants. Ota was not one of those widows who tried to live as a consecrated woman at home surrounded by her family and all her material possessions. Her behavior was exceptional, and Ota was aware of the stir her actions would create. Her charter threatened her relatives and others who were tempted to violate its provisions with the anger of the omnipotent and triune God, with excommunication from all holy places, and with a fine of one pound of gold and of four pounds of silver. Nothing of the sort was found in the donation of another widow, Fastburg, who in 804 made a gift of several properties to Fulda. Except for the fact that the only punishment threatened against those who broke the charter was the anger of God and of St. Boniface Fastburg's charter read like that of any secular donor.⁴³

The intent of some charters concerning usufruct is not clear. There might be an implication of some right to usufruct or, because usufruct was not specifically reserved, none may have been expected. In 825 Sigiloug "ancilla Dei" gave land and numerous serfs to Fulda with the understanding that "after my death you or your successors shall receive all benefits [of the property] firmly and without contradiction by anyone."⁴⁴ The status of the property between the signing of the charter and Sigiloug's death was not laid down. Essentially the same condition was written into Trudhilt's donation to Fulda of 830. The donation of four serfs was made with the stipulation that "after my death they will return ("redeant") to the control of St. Boniface and will remain in his power forever without any contradiction."⁴⁵ It is a reasonable assumption that Trudhilt would continue to benefit from the services of the serfs, particularly since she had made a donation to Fulda in 822 in which she had reserved the right of usufruct.⁴⁶

It is not necessary to discuss the remaining charters of donation drawn up by consecrated women in detail. Whether they represent an implementation of Caesarius' ideal that entrants to monasteries should dispose of all their goods is impossible to determine.⁴⁷ The evidence of other charters makes it unlikely that that was the intent of most donors. The charters of donation of consecrated women did not differ significantly from those of their secular relatives except in a few instances. But for the religious verbiage some of these charters, including those which did not reserve usufruct or property, read much like any record

of land transfer, and recognition of family interest was not lacking.⁴⁸

The issue of the marriage of consecrated women, like the subject of the possession of property by consecrated women, was one of those points at which the ideals of the Benedictine reformers met serious opposition by the nobility. From the ecclesiastical point of view the marriage of a consecrated woman was one of the most heinous acts imaginable. Such a marriage was evidence of an insubordinate will which had refused to remain stable within the consecrated life. More important was the defilement of the virginity or chastity which was the dowry offered to Christ. The marriage of a consecrated woman was more than instability; it was adultery with Christ as the injured party. Adultery was always a serious offense in canon law, but it was considered much worse if a bride of Christ who had taken on the vestments of the Virgin Mary was involved.⁴⁹ The Capitulare ecclesiasticum of 818/819 cited the decretals of Pope Gelasius to the effect that marriage with a consecrated woman was incest as well as sacrilege.⁵⁰ Needless to say, such connections were void and the couple must be separated as soon as their sin was discovered.⁵¹ The issue of these marriages were considered bastards.⁵²

Women did not leave religious life for no reason at all. While one cause of instability was dissatisfaction with the consecrated life, the major cause surely was that a marriage had been arranged. Conciliar decrees and capitularies had much to say about the insubordinate attitudes which caused instability. Those

discussions were general, however. No single cause for instability received so much attention as did marriage. Indeed, the lack of an oath of stability and perpetual chastity and the ability to retain private property were the factors that differentiated nonmonastic forms from the monastic. The nobility preferred to support non-monastic forms of consecration because those forms permitted greater contact with female relatives, less disruption of control over property, and less restriction on the number of females available for marriage alliances. The women themselves preferred the non-monastic forms because those forms allowed them to continue much as they had been accustomed to live, and they could leave religious service without stigma.

The frequent repetition of prohibitions of marriage for consecrated women indicates that the nobility did not accept limitation on their traditional right to enter and leave the religious life as they pleased. As early as the Council of Paris held between 556 and 573 it was forbidden to marry consecrated virgins either by seizure ("per raptum") or by petition ("per competitionis").⁵³ The object of the petitions was clarified by the famous Edict of Chlothar II of 618. Here it was forbidden to petition the king to use his power to help anyone to remove a consecrated woman from her religious retreat. It did not matter whether the object of the petitioner was merely to remove her from the consecrated life, or to do so in order to marry the consecrated woman. Not only nuns living in monasteries were protected from such pressures, but also consecrated virgins and widows living in their own homes.

Concerning virgins ("puellis") or religious widows or consecrated women ("sanctaemunialis") who vow themselves to God, whether they live in their own homes or are placed in monasteries: no one is to presume to petition us that through our order he might force [any of them] out nor associate [any of them] with himself in marriage.⁵⁴

Even at this early date an attempt was made to include all forms of consecration. What was meant by "sanctaemunialis" is not certain; it may refer to canonesses. Nuns were very often called "pullae"--girls--for they were perpetual maidens. Or the "puellae" might in this case have been the younger members of monasteries and the "sanctaemunialis" the older women, the full members of the communities. Perhaps the idea was that not even the younger more marriageable inhabitants of a community were permitted to leave for secular purposes.⁵⁵

The sixth and early seventh centuries were the most important periods in the struggle of the Frankish Church against the marriage of consecrated women. Long before there was a comprehensive definition of the meaning of consecration for women synod after synod and numerous capitularies agreed on one point: no consecrated woman must be allowed to marry.⁵⁶ That idea was a foundation for subsequent legislation about stability. By combatting the major cause of women leaving the consecrated life a significant step had been taken in the development of a concept of consecration whose only standard was monasticism. The Council of Orange of 549 not only created periods of novitiate for monastic and canonical houses but also provided that those who, driven by worldly ambition, left religion for marriage were to be

excommunicated along with their illicit spouses. Consecrated women who lived in their own homes and widows who had been consecrated were specifically included along with the "puellae" who lived in communities.⁵⁷ For the first time a Frankish council provided a penalty for women of every type of consecration who married. Stability in itself was not the issue. There was a peculiar moral element involved in the marriage of consecrated women which was not associated with other kinds of willful misbehavior.

In 744 the Pippini principis capitulare Suessione prohibited any secular man from marrying a consecrated woman. The rising Carolingian family put itself in the tradition of the Merovingians. The king was responsible for the protection of consecrated women and for determining the character of consecration for women in the Frankish kingdom.⁵⁸ In his letter to Pippin dated c. 747 Pope Zacharias encouraged the leader of the Franks to continue in this path. Basing his assertion on the decretals of Pope Innocent, Zacharias said that a woman who wedded Christ and then married a man secretly or publicly was not to be allowed to do penance unless the man entered a monastery.⁵⁹ The illicitly married couple was to be separated completely and any chance of renewed temptation removed before it was worthwhile to consider the penance to be meted out to the fallen woman. The man's punishment was lifelong penance in a monastery.

It is instructive that in their letter of 567 to Radegund the bishops associated leaving the monastery with marriage. The bishops assumed that anyone who left the monastery--"like Eve

ejected from paradise"--did so through willfulness. She wanted to obey her own wishes rather than those of the abbess: "suam voluerit disciplinam, gloriam et coronam." The rebel was to be removed from the communion of Christians, forced to bear the harsh wound of anathema. If she wished to leave Christ and marry a man not only the fugitive but also he whom she married would be punished.⁶⁰

To the bishops the desire to make a good marriage was an important cause of insubordination among consecrated women; but they did not say that this desire originated with the individual alone. As Eve was led to sin by bad counsel, so might a consecrated woman be encouraged to act on her natural human inclinations. Where did evil counsel come from? It came, according to the bishops, from the family. It was the family that arranged the marriage which drew so many women out of the consecrated life. It was to limit the opportunity for the family to press their bad advice on its consecrated relatives that monastic rules, following Caesarius, limited the amount of contact between consecrated and secular relatives.

In a letter of 513 to Caesarius Pope Symmachus addressed the problem of the marriage of consecrated women. He demanded that those who attempted to marry consecrated women be excommunicated. It made no difference if the consecrated woman had been willing to leave her religious retreat or not; the penalty for the prospective husband was separation from the Christian community. Turning to the women themselves Symmachus forbade both widows who had been consecrated for a long time ("diuturna") and virgins who had lived in monasteries for many years ("annis plurimis") to

marry.⁶¹ Symmachus' attitude was similar to that expressed in other sources that there was a period during which a consecrated woman was not considered to be a full member of the religious life. If during that time she found that she was incapable of spending the rest of her life in religious seclusion then she was free to go. However, there was also a sense that there was a point of no return; after that point was reached the novice became a full participant in the religious life and could not leave that life until she died.

The Council of Tours of 567 was more specific than was Pope Symmachus in establishing a point after which a consecrated woman was bound forever to the religious life. Chapter 21 of that Council was the definitive statement of the Frankish Church on the subject of marriage and consecration. It has been noted that the Council forbade consecrated widows to marry. The bishops at Tours also considered the marriage of consecrated virgins. They pointed out that for any man to rape or marry a consecrated virgin or widow was punished by death in the Theodosian code. Therefore it was the decision of the bishops that if a virgin had passed the age of twenty-five and then decided to marry she was to be excommunicated along with her husband. Twenty-five was generally accepted by the Frankish Church as the age after which the consecrated woman was considered a full and permanent part of the religious world. The sinful couple was not to be cut off from any hope of rectifying their wrong, but if they persisted in living as man and wife they were to be left in the damnation of excommunication. Any bishop,

deacon, or subdeacon who offered either of the offenders communion was also to be excommunicated.⁶²

If the Council of Tours sought to destroy the diaconate and to prevent consecrated widows from marrying, Pope Zacharias in his letter to Pippin sought to limit the freedom of action of women who spontaneously assumed the veil. Zacharias quoted the decretals of Pope Innocent concerning those women who were not really covered by the sacred veil but who had always claimed to be consecrated virgins: "que, necdum sacro velamine tectae, tamen in proposito virginali semper se simulaverunt permanere." In truth these women were not consecrated, but if they married they were to do penance because they had claimed to be brides of Christ.⁶³ Spontaneous assumption of consecration was reluctantly accepted, but the pope in effect set a trap for women who dared to consecrate themselves rather than joining a monastery or consulting their bishop. They had removed themselves from any chance of legitimate marriage.

It is obvious that the noble custom of designating certain female relatives for religious life without consulting the wishes of the individuals was a source of problems in Frankish society. The creation of novitiates and the establishment of a rather late age of twenty-five for final consecration were means devised by the bishops to alleviate the problems. Not all malcontents could be weeded out, however. There were those who claimed that they had been consecrated against their wills and that this legitimized their leaving their communities for marriage. Two councils

addressed themselves directly to those women, and both gave them short and merciless shrift.

The Council of Mâcon of 583 declared that if a woman had devoted herself to God, had reached the age when she knew what she was doing ("praeclara decoris aetate"), and then abandoned religion for marriage she was to be excommunicated along with her husband. It did not matter whether she had entered the religious life on her own initiative or because her parents had asked her to do so. The decision had been made by her or for her by those with the authority to do so, and there was no way out after the age of religious majority (twenty-five) had been reached.⁶⁴ The Council of Paris of 614 repeated the idea. Widows and virgins who had been consecrated, whether because of their own desires or because of their parents' would be excommunicated if they married. This time there was no way out at all; nothing was said about age.⁶⁵

On the other hand there were women who were not satisfied with their positions as pawns in the political marriage policies of their families. To women like Radegund consecration was a refuge from an unwanted marriage or from a secular life whose values they did not share. In those cases also a religious community might find itself in the middle of an argument between members of a powerful noble family. The ill will of such a family could be very dangerous. Radegund's royal husband was quite willing to invade the sanctity of a monastery in order to reclaim his wife. She was in that monastery and its abbess only because she had gained Chlothar's reluctant permission to separate from him. He had built the monastery for

her. But now the situation had changed and the king as copatron of the institution had determined that it was more convenient to have the abbess of the foundation by his side as his wife and queen. Only the intercession of Bishop Germanus prevented Chlothar from carrying Radegund back into the secular world by force.⁶⁶ The community would most likely have disintegrated once it was deprived of its founder and abbess. Other sources recognized the possibility that consecrated women might be forced out of the religious life, either by a raptor, by royal edict, or by tempting offers of marriage.

Sadalberga wanted to enter the monastery of Romaricus, but a favorite of the king saw that marriage with her would be advantageous. The king needed to stay on good terms with this powerful noble and thus rejected Sadalberga's petition to enter the monastery. She was forced to marry instead. The need of a noble to procreate in order to strengthen his family's position in the politics of the kingdom and the need of a king to satisfy one of his most important supporters interfered with Sadalberga's plans. Only after her husband had agreed to permit her to separate from him and to enter a monastery could Sadalberga finally do as she pleased.⁶⁷

The Council of Tours of 567 permitted the consecration of women younger than twenty-five under certain conditions. The conditions established by the Council were as follows: if the parents or guardians demanded the consecration; if the woman felt that she was in danger of dying unconsecrated and her mind would be set at rest if she were consecrated; or if the bishop was

convinced that the candidate's chastity was being threatened by someone who might forcibly remove her from the consecrated life. The Church and its officials were to help women who feared violence or forced marriage and to provide a refuge for them. But women were not to think that they could solve all their problems by becoming consecrated virgins or widows. If they assumed the veil they would be expected to persevere, so they must be sure that they had a true calling ("nam que se veste mutaverit absque dolo in eo proposito, quod disposuit, perseverare procuret").⁶⁸ Such was the service performed, however reluctantly, by Bishop Medard for Radegund when he consecrated her, a fugitive from her husband.⁶⁹

Medard had cause for uneasiness. Whatever was the case with unmarried women who were trying to avoid their families' plans for them the situation for women who were already married was more complicated. If the husband was a powerful lord he could do serious harm to the community and officials who had consecrated his wife without his permission. In fact the law of the kingdom came to support Sadalberga's actions and not Radegund's. The wife was her husband's property and had to obtain his permission if she wanted to be consecrated. The Decree of Compiègne of 757 declared that if a wife assumed the veil without her husband's consent he might reclaim her if he desired.⁷⁰ This was the only circumstance under which voluntary entrance into consecration by an individual of proper age could be abrogated without injury to the Church or to God. Unless her husband reclaimed her, the consecrated woman was to remain stable within the form of religious life she had chosen.

The Decree reminded her that she had no right to leave religion on her own initiative.⁷¹ A later chapter of the Decree of Compiègne expanded on these points. If a husband gave his wife permission to enter a monastery or to live the consecrated life outside a monastery, he was allowed to marry again. The wife could marry if her husband joined a monastery.⁷² The Decree of Verberie of 758-68 repeated the commands of the Decree of Compiègne. In whatever way a woman assumed the veil she was to stay with it forever, unless she had been consecrated against her will. If she had presumed to assume the veil without her husband's consent it was up to him to decide if he would claim his wife or allow her to continue as she was.⁷³

The effect of these decrees of the secular government was to severely limit the role of the monastery as a refuge for women who refused to accept the decisions of their elders. The decrees, whether they were consciously designed to be so or not, were a support to the secular nobility in its attempts to thwart ecclesiastical decrees which attempted to limit the right of the nobles to place their daughters in and remove them from consecrated life as they saw fit.

An important source of disruption in Frankish religious life was that many consecrated women did not see service to the Church as a permanent profession. Nonmonastic forms of consecration continued to exist because they were more congenial to the needs of the nobility than was monasticism. The interests of the family and of the individual might at one time be served by the consecration of an individual. Later on the same family and the

same individual might prefer a return to secular life, especially if an advantageous marriage was available. Given that attitude it is understandable that many noblewomen would be reluctant to enter a form of consecration which deprived them of all their property, isolated them from their families, and required a vow of perpetual chastity, violation of which resulted in lifelong excommunication and penance. The documents of the early Middle Ages make it clear that even nuns and consecrated virgins were not deterred by the threat of excommunication from leaving consecration for marriage.

The growing pressure put by the pro-monastic reformers upon nonmonastic forms to conform to monastic ideals was in fact an attempt to limit the influence of traditional noble conceptions in the practice of consecration. The interests of the nobility in maintaining the status quo in the practice of consecration made the actuation of the monastic ideal an exceedingly difficult task. That task would have been even more arduous had it not been for the support of the Carolingian dynasty for the reform of consecration.

CHAPTER IV: NOTES

¹See, e.g., Philibert Schmitz, Histoire de l'ordre de Saint-Benoît, Tome 7, Les Moniales (Maredsous: Les éditions de Maredsous, 1956), p. 6. See also Chapter 3, pp. 177-179 on the character of consecration in the patristic age.

²MGH Concilia, I, c. 23, p. 187.

³Hofmeister, p. 22; Council of Macon, c. 20; MGH Conc. I, p. 160.

⁴The editor of MGH Conc. I dates the Council of Auxerre between 573 and 603. Hofmeister, p. 22, n. 4, puts the date at 578. Hofmeister thus accepts the date suggested by von Hefele, Conziliengeschichte (1873 ed.). The Council of Mâcon may in fact have taken place before the Council of Auxerre.

⁵MGH Capitularia I, c. 11, p. 35.

⁶Caesarius, Vereor, c.8.

⁷Edmund Stengel, Urkundenbuch des Klosters Fulda, Bd. I (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1958), pp. 321-24. Bleonsuind's charter is also to be found in Ernst F. J. Dronke, Codex diplomaticus Fuldensis (Aalen: Otto Zeller Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), nr. 189.

⁸The charter is from 772. Theodor Bitterauf, Die Traditionen des Hochstifts Freising, Bd. I (774-926) (Munich: M. Riegers'che Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1905), pp. 71-72.

⁹Bitterauf, p. 174.

¹⁰Stengel, pp. 299-301.

¹¹See for example the donation of the "ancilla Dei" Aba of 803. She along with her brother Hadupraht and her nephew Elbrih gave lands on two places and four unfree persons to Fulda with no reservation of usufruct or rights to income. Dronke, nr. 214.

¹²In addition to Aba's donation (n. 10) see the donation of properties by the consecrated woman Beata and her mother Hatta to the community of women at Lützelau, which may likewise have been without any reservation. However, the brief notice of the existence of this charter in Paul Ladewig and Theodor Müller, Regesta episcoporum

Constatiensum, Bd. I (Innsbruck, 1908), p. 6, may not include all provisions of the donation.

¹³Stengel, p. 307.

¹⁴Bitterauf, p. 278.

¹⁵Bitterauf, p. 520.

¹⁶Heilrat was immensely wealthy. As an afterthought she added thirty-one serfs to her previous donations, which were huge; Bitterauf, p. 521.

¹⁷Stengel, p. 302.

¹⁸Dronke, nr. 409.

¹⁹Ladewig and Müller, p. 6. See n. 12 above for another donation by these women.

²⁰Württembergisches Urkundenbuch (Aalen, 1972), p. 152.

²¹See also Fastburg's donation, which is even more detailed: si ego ipsa . . . aut aliquis de heredibus meis vel proheredibus seu quislibet ulla opposita persona Manfred Stimming, Mainzer Urkundenbuch, Bd. I (Darmstadt, 1932), p. 54. The donation of Herchennone "deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 770 contains these same provisions, Karl Glöckner, Codex Laureshamensis, Bd. II (Darmstadt: Verlag des historischen Vereins für Hessen, 1933), pp. 93-94, as does that of Aba (n. 11). It is interesting to note that while Juliana, Matto, and Magingaoz forbade their relatives to break the terms of their donation they felt no need to include themselves, Stengel, p. 301. Their attitude seems to have been that whatever one might suspect about their relatives the behavior of such great personages as themselves did not need any regulation in a charter drawn up by themselves.

²²Aba and Hadupraht's donation, Dronke, nr. 214; Lustrat and Sahsinna's donation, Dronke, nr. 409; Heilrat's donation, Bitterauf, p. 520; Gundrada "Deo dicata" made a donation in 786 which was to be held by the recipient "absque alicuius contrarietate aut impedimento," Württembergisches Urkundenbuch, pp. 30-32; Soanpurc's donation, Bitterauf, p. 278; Juliana, Matto, and Magingaoz's donation, Stengel, p. 301.

²³Donation of Trudhilt "Deo sacrata" of 822 to Fulda, Dronke, nr. 394; in 830 Trudhilt "sanctimonialis" made another donation to Fulda, Dronke, nr. 481; donation of Sigiloug "ancilla Dei" to Fulda in 825, Dronke, nr. 458; donation of Gisalhilt "sanctimonialis" to Fulda in 830, Dronke, nr. 480.

²⁴Stengel, p. 324, column B, Dronke, nr. 189.

²⁵Alpun's donation is in Bitterauf, p. 72; for Fastburg see Stimming, p. 54; Fastburg added the threat of St. Boniface's displeasure.

²⁶In some charters there was a fine mentioned, but no amount was stipulated. For example, the charter of Uda "deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 779 warned any potential violator that he would have "much to pay" ("ad multam sustinendam"), Glöckner, Bd. II, pp. 18-19. Perhaps Uda and Lorsch felt that an appropriate fine had already been set by her previous donation to the same monastery in 772, wherein a fine of one pound of gold and two pounds of silver was required of violators, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 27. See also the donation of Ida "nonna" to Lorsch in 774, which merely said "Si quis vero quod futurum esse non credo, et reliqua usque . . .", Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 178.

²⁷See the donation of Hiltisnot "abbatissa" to Lorsch in 788, Karl Glöckner Codex Laurehamensis, Bd. I (Darmstadt: Verlag des historischen Vereins für Hessen, 1929), 292; the donation of Icha "Deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 782, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 12; the donation of Eufemia "Deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 776, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 13; of Burada "deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 793, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 16; of Herchennone, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 94.

²⁸Donation of Aba "abbatissa" to Lorsch of 786, Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 290; the donation of Rachild "deo sacrata" to Lorsch of 792, Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 293; the donation of Richlindis "Deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 786, Glöckner, Bd. II, pp. 29-30; of Ata, Württembergisches Urkundenbuch, p. 52.

²⁹There are charters in which there was no indication to whom the fine was to be paid. That was the case with both of Uda's donations, and also with Ida's; see n. 27.

³⁰The charters which reserved lifelong usufruct were many: donation of Burat "deo sacrata" to Fulda in 777, Stengel, p. 148; of Mina "ancilla Christi" to Fulda in 776-96, which reserved to Mina the benefits of the labors of the serfs she had donated, Stengel, pp. 310-11; the donation of Ata "deo sacrata" to St. Gall in 797, Württembergisches Urkundenbuch, p. 52; donation of Uuarmont "ancilla Dei" to Fulda in 812, Dronke, nr. 272; of Trudhilt to Fulda in 822, in which seven serfs and all their belongings were donated, Dronke, nr. 398; in the donation of Gisalhilt to Fulda of 830 the services of four serfs were involved, Dronke, nr. 480.

³¹Glöckner, Bd. I, pp. 293-94. Rachild was another very wealthy consecrated woman, as the size of her donation shows. She could afford to donate a basilica located at Scarra. Rachild's

limitation of her own rights over the properties from which she continued to receive income was an act of piety which originated only with herself.

³²Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 16.

³³Dronke, nr. 156; and also Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 16, n. 1.

³⁴Stengel, pp. 371-72; note especially Stengel's introduction to the charter, p. 371.

³⁵Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 337.

³⁶Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 178; also Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 337, n. 1140-41.

³⁷Both charters are in Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 362. In the donation of 771 Gundrada did not refer to herself by any religious title. Glöckner attributes the donation of Gundrada "nonna," however, and it is reasonable to do so, since both involve properties in the same villa, Ascmundesheim.

³⁸Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 27.

³⁹Glöckner, Bd. II, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁰Stengel, pp. 371-72.

⁴¹Glöckner, Bd. II, pp. 129-30.

⁴²Stengel, pp. 83-84; p. 83, n. 49-II.

⁴³Stimming, pp. 53-54; Fastburg's donation was made for the good of her soul and for the good of her son Otbert's soul as well; there was no mention of a husband.

⁴⁴Dronke, nr. 458.

⁴⁵Dronke, nr. 481.

⁴⁶Dronke, nr. 398.

⁴⁷In addition to those already cited the following donations did not reserve usufruct or personal property: donation of Hiltwar "Deo sacrata" to Fulda in 976-66, Stengel, p. 358; of Burgrat to Fulda in 798, Stengel, pp. 364-65; of Gundrat "sanctimonialis" to Fulda in 780-802, Stengel, p. 470; of Rihsuint "ancilla Christi" to Fulda in 780-802, Stengel, p. 500; of Contanuui "ancilla Dei" to St. Gall in 796, Württembergisches Urkundenbuch, p. 11; of Icha to Lorsch in 782, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 12; of Eufemia to Lorsch in 776, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 13; of Luitburg "Deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 802,

Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 22; of Herchenonne to Lorsch in 770, Glöckner, Bd. II, pp. 93-94; of Theodrat "deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 815, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 115; of Willisunt "Deo sacrata" to Lorsch in 765-68, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 169; of Adaltrud "monialis" to Lorsch in 772, Glöckner, Bd. II, p. 389.

⁴⁸See the donation of Rachild to Lorsch in 792, Glöckner, Bd. I, p. 293.

⁴⁹See the letter of Bishop Gregory (dated 786) to Pope Hadrian I; MGH Epistolae IV, c. 16, p. 25.

⁵⁰Virginibus sacris temerare se quosdam sociare cognovimus, et post dicatam Deo propositum incesta foedere sacrilegique miscere MGH Capit. I, c. 25, p. 279. The capitulary was quoting the decretals of Gelasius, chapter 20.

⁵¹See, for example, the Capitulare cum Italiae episcopis deliberata of 790-800, c. 1; MGH Capit. I, p. 202.

⁵²See Bishop Gregory's letter to Pope Hadrian: "Adulterinos namque filios ac sanctimonialium auctoritate spurios et adulteros iudicamus." This was the decision of two English synods at which representatives of Charlemagne were present. MGH Epist. IV, c. 16, p. 25.

⁵³MGH Conc. I, c. 5, p. 174.

⁵⁴MGH Capit. I, c. 16, p. 23.

⁵⁵See also the interesting group of laws entitled the Chlotharii II praeceptio of the period 584-628; MGH Capit. I, c. 8, p. 19. The Praeceptio simply forbade anyone to marry a "sanctimonialis." If the Praeceptio was enacted prior to the Edict of 614 then it, not the Edict, was the first capitular prohibition of marriage for consecrated women. If the Praeceptio was later than 614 it was merely a shortened version of the command of the Edict. An earlier date than 614 would suggest that the Praeceptio was the capitular version of chapter 5 of the Council of Paris of 556-73 (see n. 53).

⁵⁶The Council of Clichy-la-Garenne of 626-27, c. 26, forbade anyone either through the authority of the king or by any other power to seize or force out ("rapere vel trahere") consecrated widows or "puellae" from their religious seclusion; MGH Conc. I, p. 200. This chapter was copied word for word in the Concilium sub Sonatio episcopo Remensi habitum of 627-30, c. 23; MGH Capit. I, p. 205. The Council of Rome of 826, c. 8, warned men that they should be careful not to marry a consecrated woman ("velatam") or deaconess ("diaconam") knowingly. Thus the diaconate was recognized as a

legitimate form of consecration for women at Rome, and the responsibility of stability was attached to it. MGH Conc. II, II, p. 557.

⁵⁷MGH Conc. I, c. 19, p. 107.

⁵⁸MGH Capit. I, c. 9, p. 29.

⁵⁹MGH Epist. II, c. 20, p. 485; Zacharias referred to the decretals of Innocent, chapter 19.

⁶⁰Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, Bk. 9, c. 39; MGH Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum I, ed. altera.

⁶¹MGH Epist. II, pp. 38-39.

⁶²MGH Conc. I, c. 21, pp. 129-30; the bishops at Tours referred to the Theodosian Code, De raptu vel matrimonio IX, 25, cc. 1 & 2. The Council of Orleans of 583 established excommunication as the penalty for consecrated women who cooperated with their raptor; widows were included in the prohibition. Priests were threatened with excommunication if they gave communion to the offenders; MGH Conc. I, c. 19, p. 79.

⁶³MGH Epist. III, c. 21, p. 485; the pope cited the decretals of Innocent, chapter 20.

⁶⁴MGH Capit. I, c. 12, p. 158.

⁶⁵MGH Capit. I, c. 15, p. 190.

⁶⁶Baudonivia, Vita Radegundis, cc. 6 & 7; MGH Script. rer. Merov. II, p. 382.

⁶⁷Vita Sadalbergae, cc. 9 & 10; c. 12; MGH Script. rer. Merov. V, pp. 54-55; pp. 56-57.

⁶⁸MGH Conc. I, c. 21, p. 130. The Synod of Frankfurt, c. 46, adopted this provision of the Council of Tours. It permitted the final consecration of virgins before age twenty-five if necessity compelled it. MGH Capit. I, p. 77.

⁶⁹Venantius Fortunatus, Vita Radegundis, c. 12; MGH Script. rer. Merov. II, p. 386.

⁷⁰MGH Capit. I, c. 5, p. 38.

⁷¹MGH Capit. I, c. 14, p. 38.

⁷²MGH Capit. I, c. 16, p. 38.

⁷³MGH Capit. I, c. 4, p. 40.

CHAPTER V

THE CAROLINGIAN RULERS AS POSSESSORS OF COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PRACTICE AND THE BENEDICTINE IDEAL

The importance of the Carolingian rulers in the reform of consecration for women cannot be denied. Yet the reforming zeal of the kings was not without its limits. Despite the monastic ideal of the role of the abbess, the relationship of the king to the abbesses was primarily that of a feudal overlord to his subordinates. The abbesses of the Frankish empire were above all important officers of the king. That position of the abbesses within the kingdom had significant effects on the character of consecration and on the role of the abbesses as religious leaders. The ideal of stability applied to abbesses only to the extent permitted by the king. The ruler, not the bishop, was the actual superior of an abbess. The command of the king that an abbess must meet with him countermanded the monastic ideal of stability and reduced the authority of the bishops to direct the religious lives of all consecrated women in their dioceses.¹

It will be the purpose of this concluding chapter to examine other ways in which royal actions diverged from the royal program of reform. The emphasis here will not be on those actions of the kings in their official capacities which served to limit the application of

reform. Rather, the present purpose will be to look at the behavior of the kings as personal possessors of communities of consecrated women. It will soon become evident that the kings seldom differed from any heads of noble families in their treatment of religious institutions. The kings were as concerned to protect their own and their family's interests in the properties connected with religious institutions as were any other nobles, and their use of those properties was typical of the nobility. The rulers could not afford to apply the Benedictine ideal completely in their dealings with the abbesses because the result would have been a reduction of the ability of the kings to govern effectively. At the same time, the kings could not fully apply the Benedictine ideal in their treatment of religious institutions in their personal possessions because the result would have been a reduction of control over a great deal of land and over many people. That in turn would have reduced the power and influence of the kings vis-à-vis other nobles.

The central principle guiding the kings in their usage of the religious institutions in their possession was that all goods connected to those institutions belonged to the king and not to the community. A change of dynasties did not alter that fact. Religious institutions founded by members of any ruling family were ever after recognized as royal possessions. For this reason the Carolingians inherited control over communities founded by the Merovingians. Some of these communities were among the most powerful in Europe: St. Crux in Poitiers, founded by Radegund, daughter and wife of kings;

Chelles, founded by Balthild, queen of Chlodewig II (639-57), where Charlemagne's sister Gisla was abbess;² St. Salvator in Brescia, the last major religious foundation of the Lombard royal house.³ The inheritance of Merovingian institutions by the Carolingians was due to royal policy: if a community ceased to exist, its belongings reverted to the king and not to the bishopric in which the community lay.⁴ Like all founders of religious institutions, the ruler reserved the right to set the conditions under which the community would be held of him, to benefice it to whomever he pleased, or to exchange the community and its property for other holdings. That was how all kings saw their rights, but it was on this issue that the kings met resistance from the reforming bishops of the Frankish Church. What was especially distressing to the bishops was that the Carolingian kings, following the precedent set by Charles Martel, parcelled out the holdings of religious institutions to royal vassals. The economic support of religious institutions was undermined by that policy. The bishops reacted by passing legislation which sought to make inviolability of lands dedicated to religious communities of a piece with the reform of religious life in the Frankish kingdom.⁵

In answer to the pressure applied on him by scandalized bishops, Karlomann decreed in the Concilium Germanicum of 742 the restoration of Church lands and a return to respect for the legal rights of the Church as it defined those rights in its canons.⁶ Serious reform was not to be, for the next year Karlomann was forced to take back his promise due to the threat of war and his resultant need for the revenues of the lands of the Church.⁷ Direct royal

control of the lands of religious institutions would continue to be a central policy of the Carolingian rulers. At the same time, in his part of the kingdom Pippin, at the Council of Soissons of 774, imposed the idea that properties which were not absolutely essential to provide the necessities of monks and nuns were to be used as the ruler saw fit.⁸ The Carolingians did not limit themselves to the lands of religious communities which fell into their control as a result of the decree of 744, but continued to remove and divide lands of religious institutions for as long as they were on the throne.⁹

Charlemagne asserted strict control over the disposition of ecclesiastical possession which he had given in benefice. In the Forma langobardica of the Capitulare Haristallense he declared that ecclesiastical lands given in benefice to secular men by the king were to go directly to their descendents unless the king expressly permitted the properties to revert to the Church: "ut inantea sic habeant, nisi per verbo domini regis ad ipsas ecclesias fuerint revocatas."¹⁰ This legislation flew in the face of the desire of the Church as presented by the Council of Estinnes of 743, which said that after the death of the secular possessor the properties of ecclesiastical institutions were to revert to the Church and could only be rebeneficed at the command of the king. Karlomann may have agreed to that principle as a sop to the Church for his revocation of his promise to free Church lands from secular domination. Charlemagne had no need to compromise. In the Capitulare Haristallense he legally separated the lands of religious institutions which had been beneficed to a secular lord by the king from those possessions of the

communities which were still under the direct control of the bishop, abbot, or abbess. The latter properties could be disposed of as the religious authority saw fit. If it was beneficed it would return to the religious institution on the death of the vassal: "ut liceat eis, quandoquidem eis [the bishop, abbot, or abbess] placuerit, aecclesiae recipere facientes, ut unusquisue homo ad causa Dei in honore Deo fideliter et firmiter deserviat."¹¹

All kings showed some consideration for the needs of the inhabitants of religious communities, yet the size and wealth of the lands left to their support depended on the will of the ruler. Louis the Pious forbade the division of the possession of religious communities for his own reign and for those of his successors. Not only did his successors not honor Louis' command, but he himself divided ecclesiastical holdings as the need arose to create benefices to attract supporters.¹² Piecemeal division of Church lands meant that much time was spent and much ill feeling caused by the necessity of determining what properties belonged to the secular lord and what pertained directly to the economic support of the members of the community. The problem was never solved in the Carolingian period, and this is proved by the variety of terms, titles, and legal arrangements used to denote the relationship. There was in particular a lack of clarity in terms used to indicate a change of control over religious institutions when the purpose of the change was to establish feudal ties between kings and nobles. Terms such as "dare," "donare," "conferre" were most inexact in describing the character of the act. Further, those terms were used interchangeably,

adding to the sense of inexactitude. There are many examples of the kings beneficiting persons of the most disparate status--churchmen and laymen and women, dependents of the royal house. "But even here there is a failure to more accurately characterize the legal status created by the act of benefice."¹³

The important communities of consecrated women were generally placed under the control of female relatives of the ruling house. These women might have been the abbesses of their communities, or the possessor might have been a politically important secular woman, such as the queen. In the last situation the abbess was not necessarily a social or political cipher, for she also might be a member of the royal family, and she would certainly be from an important noble family. Women of the royal family were put into possession of religious communities through the usual terms of benefice contract; in this way Empress Judith held St. Salvator in Brescia.¹⁴ Possession could also be for life. Theodrada, sister of Louis the Pious, was both abbess and possessor of Argenteuil. She had obtained possession from Charlemagne through benefice, and the benefice had been renewed by Louis when he had assumed the throne. In a charter of 828 Theodrada petitioned Louis to return the community at Argenteuil to the control of the monastery of St. Denis and to permit her to possess Argenteuil for life. Precarial tenure was turned into life tenure, and as a quid pro quo the abbess/possessor permitted her community to become subject to the royal monastery of St. Denis upon her death.¹⁵ The independence of Argenteuil was ended by two members of the family that possessed it. Theodrada was interested in improving

the conditions of her tenure, not in the situation of the community after her death.

It was customary for the king to give possession of certain important communities to his queen. The king remained the actual possessor and final authority over the community in that case. Only he could guarantee the inhabitants their economic support, defend the institution's lands from predatory nobles, and make it economically and administratively independent if he desired. Most petitions from abbesses were addressed directly to the king, and even those that mention the queen are so phrased that the primacy of the king is evident. In 837 Lothar granted the petition of Abbess Amalberga of St. Salvator to confirm the possessions of the community in Brescia and in twenty-seven other places. The petition was addressed to both Lothar and Queen Irmingard, but the king answered for himself.¹⁶ In addition to confirming St. Salvator in its possessions the king granted to it free election of its abbess after Amalberga died.¹⁷ Irmingard was the ostensible possessor; she should have had the right to appoint Amalberga's successor or to grant free election.¹⁸ There was no reservation of any rights for Irmingard in the charter, nor any mention of her consent. St. Salvator was a preserve of the Carolingian family, which had inherited control over that foundation of the Lombard royal house when Charlemagne had assumed the office of king of the Lombards.¹⁹ Only the head of the family in Italy, Lothar, could reduce the control of the royal house over its possessions.

A community of consecrated women possessed by the royal family was thus governed on two and sometimes three levels. The

ultimate possessor was always the king, and in his hands lay the fate of the community. The Carolingian tradition of promoting the ideals of Benedictine monasticism also gave the king significant authority over the religious aspects of the community's functions. The queen was often the ostensible possessor; only in the most important instances was her authority as secular governor abrogated, and then only by the king. She could take as much or as little interest in the actual management of the institution as she liked. Queens may have been given possession of communities of women because it was felt that it was more appropriate for a woman to govern such a community. It was at any rate her responsibility to serve as a mediator between the community and the king. The abbess saw to the day-to-day regulation of the economic, legal and religious affairs of the community. She brought the needs of the community to the attention of the king, often through the medium of the queen and other court officials, oversaw the work of the advocate, and directed the religious functions of the members of the community according to the rule, a rule which might be imposed by the king.

It is evident from what has been presented thus far that the treatment of communities of women by the Carolingian rulers was typical of the Frankish nobility. Further proof of the truth of that statement is to be found in the fact that the kings were as ready as their subordinates to donate whole communities of women to other religious institutions. In 752 Pippin gave the community at Kesselring to the monastery of Prüm as a gift. The men of Prüm do not seem to have been very interested patrons, for the women's institution

soon died out.²⁰ The possessions of Kesselring were undoubtedly absorbed by Prüm. Pippin showed no concern for the possible effects of his donation on the viability of Kesselring; he was only interested in adding to the wealth and power of Prüm as a sign of favor. Yet it was his responsibility to serve as patron and protector of all consecrated women in the kingdom. The immediate interests of Pippin came before any religious ideal. It was his right as possessor to do with Kesselring and its properties as he saw fit.

The traditional support of the Carolingian rulers for Benedictine reform could itself serve as a pretext for acts that benefited members of the royal family to the detriment of religious institutions. In 840 Lothar granted the petition of Abbess Rothild of Faremoutiers to confirm his father's unification of the little community of Gy-les-Nonains with her own. Rothild was Charlemagne's daughter, and Lothar plainly stated that while it was his duty to care for all communities of women, it was natural that he paid special attention to those institutions bound to him by consanguinity: "precipue tamen illarum, que consanguinitatis nobis vinculo sunt coniuncte, affectum et religionis diligentiam observemus."²¹ Rothild clearly counted on the ties of consanguinity to increase the power and wealth of her community. She would thereby increase her own power and wealth as a feudal lord. Family ties had already led Louis the Pious to permit the unification of Gy-les-Nonains with Farenoutiers. One is reminded of Louis' agreement to Thedodrada's treatment of Argenteuil. In both cases the interests of a relative had led the king to end the independent existence of a religious institution. The result of the

family connection between king and abbess was more serious for Gy-les-Nonains than for Argenteuil, however. Argenteuil lost its administrative independence; Gy-les-Nonains ceased to exist.

Argenteuil was a royal foundation and all its properties were royal possessions. Its immediate administration was turned over to the monastery of St. Denis, another royal possession. At no time did final authority over Argenteuil leave royal hands.

The situation of Gy-les-Nonains was different. It does not appear to have been a royal foundation, but a small community which fell into the hands of the abbess of Faremoutiers. Rothild was interested in the properties of Gy-les-Nonains, but she did not want to possess them indirectly as overlord of an autonomous institution. Therefore, she requested the dissolution of the smaller community and its unification with her own. We have seen that small communities of women had come under attack in the reign of Charlemagne. He had ordered the dissolution of small communities where the members lived without any rule; the members were to be gathered into a single institution which was to be directed according to the Benedictine rule.²² Charlemagne had distrusted small communities of women. Their small size made it easy for them to escape the attention of the king and his officers, and their economic support tended to be insufficient. Both factors led to abuses within small institutions. Under what pretext Louis granted the unification of Gy with Faremoutiers is not known. Lothar put himself squarely in the tradition established by Charlemagne. In his confirmation of the unification Lothar sought to lessen the element of simple family interest in the

dissolution of Gy by declaring that the women of that community had been transferred to Faremoutiers so that they would have sufficient food and clothing. The implication was that Lothar was guaranteeing the ability of the women of Gy to practice the religious life properly by assuring them sufficient economic support. Lothar used his position as guarantor of the purity of consecration and promotor of Benedictine reform²³ to end the independent existence of one community and to add to the wealth of another, a royal possession headed by one of his relatives.

Acts of royal favor to individual communities of women were in the tradition of expressions of piety which had been made by wealthy Christians from the earliest days of the religion. The king could show his favor in two ways. He might make a donation of properties or of rights which improved the economic foundation of a royal community. Or he might grant the community some degree of administrative autonomy in the form of immunity from his own officers. More rare was the grant of free election of the abbess to the members of the community. Grants of any form of administrative autonomy were uncommon, and were reserved for the most powerful institutions in the kingdom. The status of all but a few communities of women was not one of independence, as was assumed by monastic rules, but of subordination to the founding families. Ecclesiastical legislation had much to say about the importance of adequate economic support for religious institutions, but nothing on the issue of economic or administrative independence. Independence in those spheres depended

as completely on the will of the possessor as did adequate economic support. Any change in the usual subordination of a community to its founders removed the institution from the status it had shared with the vast majority of all religious institutions in the Frankish kingdom. It was the theory that donations of lands reduced the wealth available to the noble family, that grants of administrative freedoms reduced the legitimate control of founders over the management of their creation. It was for those reasons that donations of wealth and grants of administrative freedoms were seen as true acts of sacrifice. In fact, donations gained more for the donor than the approbation of God and man. The king could act as a good patron to religious institutions and still protect his own interests in the communities to whom he showed favor.

The primary duty of a patron of a community of women was to establish adequate economic support for the institution. In this respect the position of the king was different from that of any other noble, for he was the ultimate patron and protector of all consecrated women in the kingdom. The Carolingian rulers did not ignore the economic implications of their status as universal patron. We have seen that capitular and synodal decrees required that communities be founded in economically suitable places, and that those in charge of monasteries be responsible stewards of the communal wealth, so that each member would receive adequate food and clothing. Royal charters prove, however, that in practice the kings limited their donations of goods to communities in their personal possession. The king could have had little interest in increasing the wealth of an institution

which belonged to another noble. The king, like all nobles, did not intend to lose control of the properties he donated to religious institutions.²⁴ One means of retaining control was to place members of the royal family in positions of authority within communities possessed by the king. Another means was the charter of donation. The charter was the instrument through which the king announced his continuing interest in the community and all its possessions.

In 834 Lothar gave the community of St. Maria Theodata in Pavia the right of taking wood from the forest of Carbonaria, as well as fishing rights in the Po and Ticino Rivers. The king was giving direct control of lucrative trading enterprises to St. Maria. Lothar, as possessor of St. Maria, had a continuing interest in the enterprises he had ostensibly given up, however. Any increase in the wealth of St. Maria would increase the value of that institution as a property of the royal family. The economic value of St. Maria was dependent on the maintenance of its trading activities. Thus, if the bridge was destroyed the women were given permission to use either their own boat or the public craft provided by the king in order to cross the river ("quando pons destruitur, navem eorum discurrere sicuti et nostram publicam"). No one was to molest the women in any way.²⁵ The possessions and economic privileges of St. Maria must have made it a tempting target for encroachment by its neighbors. Lothar's charter added to what must already have been a very wealthy community rights to important staples of the medieval economy. Therefore, Lothar not only ensured to the community the continual access to the outside world which was essential to the success of the

trading activities which served as its support. He also acted in his guise as protector and patron to prevent neighboring nobles from lessening the value of St. Maria to the royal family by interfering with the trading activities of the community.

Five years later Lothar gave St. Maria some land strategically located between the city wall and the wall of the suburb ("inter murum civitatis et antemuralem"--the "forewall"). He also granted the request of Abbess Asia to confirm an exchange of goods between herself and Teutberga, abbess of the new community of St. Agatha. Abbesses of important royal communities, like all abbesses, did not wait for the beneficence of the king to improve the economic standing of their communities. The wealth of her community was not always a blessing to Asia, however. The temptation to seize some of St. Maria's properties for their own good had led some of its neighbors to ignore Lothar's previous warning to leave the community in peace. In his second charter Lothar repeated his commands in terms that could leave no doubt about his intentions. In 834 Lothar had forbidden anyone to molest the women of St. Maria. In 839 he clarified that statement: no one was to molest any of the properties of the community. Lothar announced to all his continuing interests in St. Maria by reminding his readers that he had conferred St. Maria's possessions on it for the perpetual support of that community. Any future violations would be punished by a fine of sixty pounds of gold.²⁶ The implications were clear: any violation of the properties and rights of St. Maria were a violation of the properties and rights of the king. The king was ready to avenge an encroachment

on his possession--the lands connected with St. Maria--by an exceedingly stiff fine.

A greater mark of favor than any donation of property was the grant of administrative autonomy or independence to a religious institution. The king was typical of all nobles in that he rarely granted free election of the abbess, but the right of immunity was an important step in bringing the governance of a religious institution closer to the Benedictine ideal. Grants of some degree of administrative independence were typical acts of piety of the Carolingian rulers. As early as 769 Karlomann confirmed the immunity of the royal community of Argenteuil given it by previous kings ("quod antecessoris nostri quondam regis per eorum manus roboratas"). No royal judge was to enter the properties of the community for any reason, since it was exempt from paying taxes to the fisc and from providing men for the host. The judges were also prohibited from building houses on the lands of the community.²⁷ Karlomann's charter was not merely an expression of personal piety. Karlomann was asserting his authority as a representative of the Carolingian family over a foundation of the Merovingian house. Karlomann's confirmation of immunity established the control of the current ruling family over a possession of the previous dynasty. As successors to the Merovingians as possessors of Argenteuil, the Carolingian family assumed the right to determine the relationship of the community to the kingdom and to the possessing family.

Charlemagne was not behindhand in acting as a good patron to communities of women in his possession. Around the year 781 he

granted immunity to St. Salvator in Brescia. All possessions of St. Salvator were placed outside the purview of royal judges. They were forbidden to perform any legal or military functions within the lands belonging to the community, and they were not to erect any houses on those lands. The abbesses of St. Salvator were to rule and live under the immunity quietly and unmolested by any demands of secular officials.²⁸ It was to this charter that Louis the Pious referred when in 819, at the request of Empress Judith, who possessed the community of him in benefice, he confirmed the immunity of St. Salvator and took it under direct royal protection.²⁹

Taken together the charters of Charlemagne and Louis illustrate the limitations of immunity as a means of achieving the monastic ideal of the role of a religious institution in society. Immunity did free a community from interference by public officials. Immunity released a religious institution from its position as part of the administrative system of the kingdom; as a result, the abbess was freed from many of her duties as an officer of the king. In that respect a grant of immunity did give a religious institution a status in society closer to that desired by the Benedictine ideal. From another point of view the effect of immunity was not as liberating as it might first appear. No grant of immunity lessened the hold of the royal possessors on a religious institution; quite the contrary. The removal of a community from its role in the governance of the kingdom meant that the royal family's possession was all the more a private affair. The removal of the interference of public officials meant that the king did not have to share the administration of the

community with anyone. The institution would be governed by royal relatives or by the servants of the royal family. Immunity did not mean that the community would be permitted to administer its own affairs, nor that secular authorities were excluded from the properties of the institution. The royal family continued to protect its interests in a community with immunity as it did in all of its possessions.

Louis' charter shows the continuing interests of the royal family in St. Salvator. Charlemagne's grant of immunity had removed the community from its duties to the kingdom, but that did not exempt St. Salvator from incorporation into the feudal system. Louis did keep the feudal administration of St. Salvator a family matter by benefiting it to his wife, Judith. It was Judith who requested the confirmation of immunity. As immediate possessor of St. Salvator it was in Judith's interest to see to the exclusion of any public officials who might compete with her authority over the lands and people attached to the community. Judith's feudal authority over St. Salvator was not altered by the charter, but confirmed. Her status as direct guardian of royal interests in the community was reduced by Louis' assumption of that role. It was Louis' right as head of the possessing family to determine the conditions under which St. Salvator would be held of him. The fact that the community was ultimately possessed by him did not give St. Salvator that closeness to the ruler necessary to protect it from harrassment by its neighbors. By taking it into direct royal protection Louis established between himself and the community an especially close relationship which had not

been created by his status as feudal overlord of the ostensible possessor, Judith. Now any encroachment on the properties of St. Salvator would be a direct affront to the king.

Lothar's association with St. Maria Theodata was similar to the relationship between Louis and St. Salvator. Lothar's donation charters of 834 and 839 have already been examined. We have seen that Lothar was careful to protect his continuing interests in the wealth and economic rights he donated to St. Maria. The significance of those charters is heightened by the fact that in 833 Lothar had granted immunity to St. Maria. More, he gave the women of the community the freedom to elect their own abbess. Finally, the king took St. Maria under his direct protection.³⁰ By taking St. Maria under his direct protection Lothar accomplished two aims. First, he protected his control over the properties he had donated to the community from seizure by other nobles. The community was no longer held of him by anyone, but was in his direct possession. The sizable fines subsequently established by the charter of 839 was a warning to all nobles of the penalty for tampering with the king's property. Second, his direct protection served to limit the effect of the administrative freedoms given to St. Maria. The grant of immunity had removed competing authority of all public officials. As possessor it was the right of the king to appoint substitutes for those officials from among his family or his servants. By assuming the direct protection of St. Maria Lothar enhanced his power over the community by himself replacing the public officials as defender of its legal rights. As its direct protector the king had yet another pretext to interfere

in the management of St. Maria in order to protect his interests in the community. In this way Lothar could counteract the independence of an abbess over whose selection he had no direct control.

Lothar's charter of 833 limited the authority of the abbess even in the role in which she was supposed to be supreme. Lothar insisted that the members of St. Maria be obedient to the Benedictine rule. In doing so he was protecting the interest of his family in the Benedictine reform program. Just as he did not permit the monastic leadership of St. Maria to administer the properties of the community, so Lothar did not entrust the abbess to enforce obedience to the rule. Instead, he appointed an Abbot Gisram to make sure that the rule was obeyed. Lothar had granted the community freedom from interference from public officials; he had guaranteed it free election of the abbess. He had not promised freedom from intervention by the king or his personal representatives. The abbess might be elected without any consultation with the king, but that freedom did not endow the abbess with any real powers to direct the affairs of the community. It was the right of the king as possessor to determine the powers of the abbess.

Lothar asserted his authority over St. Salvator in 837. His charter combined the various provisions of previous donations and grants given to St. Salvator by Lothar's family over the years. Lothar confirmed the community in its possession of its lands. Lothar forbade anyone to molest the nuns in their possession, and he declared that he would hear no objection to his confirmation of their possession. The members were granted free election of the abbess,

but she was to be elected according to the Benedictine rule.³¹ It would seem that some of St. Salvator's neighbors had been disputing the rights of the community over some of the lands it claimed. Now Lothar had stepped in to confirm the validity of the donations made by his ancestors to the community. Once more the king warned other nobles to leave the properties of a royal possession in peace by declaring that his decision was final, and that he would hear no appeals of his confirmation.

Once more, Lothar showed his desire to protect all of his family's interests in St. Salvator. The application of the Benedictine rule to communities of women in their possession was important to all Carolingian rulers. It was for this reason that Lothar insisted that the abbess of St. Salvator be elected according to the Benedictine rule. The free election of the abbess was granted to the community only on the understanding that the members practice monasticism on the terms desired by the possessors. Thus, the degree of administrative freedom granted to a community depended on the will of the king, and was never so absolute that the community was completely freed from the control of the possessor.

The principles which guided the rulers in their application of the Benedictine ideals to individual communities are especially evident in a capitulary from the year 822. The Capitulare de monasterio S. Crucis Pictavensis was drawn up by King Pippin and his advisers to facilitate the adoption of the Benedictine rule at Poitiers by outlining the proper relationship of a Benedictine community to the secular world.³²

Three chapters of the capitulary sought to establish the separation of the community and its members from the secular world. Chapter 1 prohibited anyone from oppressing and condemning the nuns. Chapters 2 and 4 were more specific in their definitions of the meaning of oppression. Chapter 2 forbade anyone from requiring temporal service from the community except for that demanded of it by the Notitia de servitio monasteriorum of 817. This meant that the community was not required to perform any temporal service at all, not even for the emperor. St. Crux was in the third group into which the notitia divided the religious institutions of the empire. As a result, it did not need to send troops or gifts to the emperor, but was to pray for his health and for the health of his sons, as well as for the stability of the empire.³³ Chapter 4 was more concerned with individuals than with the community as a whole. No one was to expect the nuns to do temporal service "in opere femineo" (what was meant by that term was not explained), "for if this sort of thing is permitted the order of the rule will not be able to survive."

One purpose of these chapters was to promote the growth of a monastic mentality in the members of the community at Poitiers by separating them from the cares of the world. To that end the community was protected from the demands of secular lords, including those of the king. The women of Poitiers were not to be distracted by the need to perform any kind of temporal service for anyone. At the same time, chapters 1, 2, and 4 protected the interests of the king in this royal possession. Chapter 1 was clearly directed at any nobles who might be tempted to encroach on the rights or

properties of St. Crux. Other chapters of the capitulary established a legal procedure to defeat those who oppressed the community at law. According to Chapter 5, any legal problems were to be settled, as was the custom, before the count and his assistants. The count was, of course, a representative of the king's interests. The nuns had an advocate to handle their affairs, but if they had any trouble in obtaining justice, Chapter 8 assured them that the king would send a certain Ramnulf to make sure that their cause would prevail. The implications are clear: the king had established the equivalent of a private legal system to protect his interests in St. Crux. Anyone who tried to attack the institution through the law would find himself drawn into a legal arrangement which was presided over by servants of the king at every step. The king was determined that the women of his community would win every legal case brought against them.

Chapter 2 emphasized the close relationship of the royal family to St. Crux. It was the right of the possessor to determine the kind of service owed him by his possession. St. Crux served the royal family with prayer. It was for the emperor and his sons that the women of St. Crux were to pray, and for no other nobles. The members were also to pray for the stability of the empire. The prosperity of the empire and of all its people was the responsibility of only one family, the Carolingian family. By stressing the exclusive and peculiarly spiritual association between St. Crux and his family Pippin served notice to other nobles that he and his relatives intended to retain their control over that institution.

That the royal interest in St. Crux included a concern in the economic security of the community was underlined by Chapter 3 of the capitulary. That chapter forbade anyone to remove any goods from the monastery without first justifying his intention before Pippin and the count of the palace. Related to Chapter 3 were two other provisions whose goal was to protect the economic foundations of St. Crux. Chapter 6 limited the population of the community to a hundred; Chapter 7 held to thirty the number of clerics who were to be appointed to serve the community. As was his right, the possessor was giving specific instructions to the abbess on the management of St. Crux. The wealth of the community was not to be sapped by poor management on the part of monastic officers.

Monastic isolation was established not only by prohibiting the interference of secular persons in monastic affairs, but by providing adequate economic support for the community. Without proper food and clothing the members would be distracted from their monastic duties by physical discomfort. Adequate economic support would remove the nuns from contact with secular persons, since they would not have to beg or work in order to survive.

In addition to these religious considerations it is obvious that Chapters 3, 6 and 7 were intended to protect the investments of the royal family in the economic support of St. Crux. That was most certainly the purpose of Chapter 3. All properties connected with St. Crux belonged to the king. Therefore, his personal permission was necessary if anyone wished to remove any royal goods from the properties administered by St. Crux. Pippin took his possession of

the community's goods seriously indeed. Thus, we can be sure that he had his own interest in mind, in addition to that of the members, when he limited the number of people to be associated with the monastery. Pippin was not about to let the value of his family's properties be drained by an excessively large monastic population. It seems that he knew quite well exactly how many nuns and priests the economic underpinnings of St. Crux could support. Pippin did not trust any abbess to avoid straining those underpinnings, so he set the maximum number of persons himself.

The capitulary for St. Crux at Poitiers breathed the very spirit of Benedictinism in its insistence on separation from the world. In that regard the Capitulare de monasterio facilitated the adoption of the Benedictine rule by a community whose great holdings and whose possession by the ruling family made it a significant force in the secular political and economic management of the kingdom. On the other hand, the capitulary served to protect the interestss of the royal family in the monastery. The king as head of the family, and he alone, determined the amount of separation from the world to be enjoyed by the community. He determined the economic and legal relationship of the community to the royal family and to the rest of the nonmonastic world. Above all, anyone who might be tempted to use the properties connected with the community was warned away. The peculiar relationship of the Frankish ruler to consecration for women permitted him to act in his capacity as defender of consecration and also as protector of his interests in a community of women.

In St. Crux as in other communities of women in royal possession it was the king as head of the possessing family who determined the character of consecration. It was the king as possessor who determined to what degree--if at all--the ideals of the Benedictine reform movement would be applied in each religious institution belonging to him. The documents of the Carolingian period prove that in every case the Benedictine ideal was modified by the need of the ruler to serve his own interests and those of his family. The Carolingian ruler could not permit his support for the reform of consecration to detract from his own and his family's ability to control the landed wealth that meant political power. In their pro-Benedictine legislation the Carolingian rulers were attempting to create the ideal form of consecration, and to enforce the practice of that form by consecrated women. This legislation was general in character in that it was supposed to apply to all consecrated women in the Frankish kingdom. Specific communities of women were seldom mentioned; specific means by which the ideal was to be implemented were not often suggested.

In their donation charters the kings were dealing directly with individual communities possessed by themselves. In those charters the kings spoke in terms familiar to themselves and to the members of the communities as nobles. The terms used in the charters had to do with the management of noble properties. Family interest, economic rights, and administrative arrangements were at the heart of the matter. The Carolingian rulers consistently used their charters to display their support for the ideals of Benedictine

reform. Those same documents suggest that in the actual application of reform to specific institutions the kings were primarily interested in the reform movement as a means of increasing their control over those institutions. In their treatment of communities of consecrated women there was seldom a significant difference between the Carolingians and any other noble family. The divergence between royal pronouncements of support for reform of consecration and the actuality of royal practice played a crucial role in limiting the effectiveness of the Benedictine reform program.

CHAPTER V: NOTES

¹The authority of the king over the abbesses was first established in written form by the Council of Ver, c. 6, in 755; MGH Concilia I, p. 34. Here the king asserted his right to order abbesses to leave their communities to meet with him. The permission of the bishop was also necessary, but was clearly secondary to the command of the king. The superiority of the king's command over that of the bishop was also assumed by the Council of Chalon of 813, c. 57; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 284. This council forbade abbesses to leave their community without the bishop's permission "unless . . . an imperial order forces [*cogat*] her to do so." The implication that the king's order was a form of force which changed the ordinary state of affairs within the religious world suggests that the bishops at Chalon were not altogether happy about this power of the king. It was essential for the king to confer with the abbesses on a regular basis not only because abbesses were responsible for the management of large amounts of land and many people. Like all ecclesiastical lords abbesses were bound to provide military contingents to the king's army. If for no other reason, the yearly arrangements for calling, gathering, and provisioning these contingents required at least one meeting a year with the abbesses or their advocates. Sending out her contingent in itself made the work of an abbess considerably different from that proposed by the king's own program of religious reform. See the Capit. de rebus exercitalibus in placito tractanda of 811, c. 4, MGH Capitularia regum Francorum I, p. 165; and the Capit. missorum of 819, c. 27, MGH Capit. I, p. 291. The strongest statement of the authority of the king over the abbesses, however, was that of c. 30 of the Council of Tours of 813; MGH Conc. II, I, p. 290. According to that council, the relationship between king and abbesses was so special that the mere desire of the abbess to meet with the king was sufficient cause for her to leave her community. Not only did she not need permission from the bishop, she did not need to obtain the permission of the king himself!

²See Alcuin's letters to Gisla of 793, 798, and 800, to be found in MGH Epistolae IV, p. 41, p. 294, and pp. 324-25, respectively. See also the letters of Alcuin to Arn, archbishop of Salzburg, and to Charlemagne, both from the year 799, MGH Epist. IV, p. 267 (to Arn) and p. 292 (to Charlemagne). All of these letters show how closely relations were maintained between members of a noble family and its associates. Gisla was an important person for several reasons, and it was essential for her to keep in touch with her brother and his advisers. Gisla was at this time the premier abbess in the kingdom, not because of her superior holiness, but because she

was the king's sister and abbess of a large monastery. Here is another dichotomy between the religious program of the king and his acts.

³Aloys Schulte, Der Adel und die deutsche Kirche im Mittelalter (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1922), p. 195; p. 195, n. 1; p. 197; also p. 423, for the early history of St. Salvator. St. Salvator was founded by Ansa, wife of Desiderius in 753, that is, before he became king. The king as usual provided the economic underpinning for his queen's community, and their son Adelchis also added some gifts to the institution. St. Salvator was from the beginning a typical noble family foundation. The royal couple's daughter Anselperga became the first abbess. The Carolingians inherited the close connection of the ruling house to St. Salvator. A succession of Carolingian wives and daughters were possessors and members of the community.

⁴Karl Voigt, Die karolingische Klosterpolitik und der Niedergang des westfränkischen Königtums (Amsterdam: Verlag P. Schippers N.V., 1965), p. 4. For the religious institutions--for both men and women--founded by the Merovingian family, see Friedrich Prinz, Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1965), pp. 152-85. The role of secular family interests in the foundation and control of Merovingian religious institutions is evident in Prinz's presentation. The Carolingians did not only inherit control of the foundations of other dynasties, but were founders in their own right. For the factors and personalities involved in Carolingian religious foundations see Prinz, pp. 185-231.

⁵Voigt, pp. 5-6.

⁶MGH Conc. I, c. 1, p. 3; on this and what follows see Voigt, p. 6.

⁷Karlomann's revocation is to be found in the Council of Estinnes of 743, c. 2; MGH Conc. I, p. 7.

⁸MGH Conc. I, c. 3, p. 34.

⁹Voigt, p. 6.

¹⁰MGH Capit. I, c. 14, p. 50.

¹¹MGH Capit. I, c. 14, p. 50; see also Voigt, p. 6, n. 2.

¹²Voigt, pp. 7-8.

¹³Voigt, p. 175; see also pp. 170-72.

¹⁴F. J. Böhmer, Regesta imperii I: Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Karolingern 751-918; Neugearbeiter von Engelbert Mühlbacher (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1966), nr. 318; Voigt, p. 180.

¹⁵Böhmer, nr. 848; Voigt, p. 180.

¹⁶MGH Diplomata Karolinorum III, p. 113.

¹⁷MGH Dipl. III, p. 114.

¹⁸That Irmingard was the possessor of St. Salvator is seen in the Vita Walae, Bk. 2, c. 24; MGH Scriptores II, pp. 568-89. On the death of Wala Queen Irmingard sent letters to various places to inform her subjects of the great man's death. Among the recipients were the women of St. Salvator, the queen's personal possession: "Inter quae, quod miserit etiam ad monasterium suum valde egregium, quod est inter moenia Brixiae civitatis . . . in quo sanctimonialium multitudo Domino famulatur . . ." But St. Salvator was so important that angels had already announced the death of this royal relative to the community. The author of chapter 24 (Pascasius) naturally assumed that the members of the community would be interested in events affecting the family which was their patron. See also Voigt, pp. 189-90.

¹⁹Schulte, p. 197.

²⁰M. Regintrudis von Riechlin-Meldegg and Franz J. Bendel, "Verzeichnis der deutschen Benediktinerinnenklöstern," Studien und Mitteilungen zur Geschichte des Benediktiner-Ordens und seiner Zweige, Bd. 35, Heft I (1914): 20.

²¹MGH Dipl. III, pp. 142-43.

²²MGH Capit. I, c. 19, p. 63. It is likely to this edict that Rhabanus refers in a letter of 816-17 to "a certain bishop." Rhabanus petitioned the bishop for permission to make some changes in the small monasteries belonging to Rhabanus but located in the jurisdiction of the bishop: "ut sibi liceat monasteriola nonnarum in eius parrochia ad se pertinentia mutare." This is a fine example of the overlapping jurisdictions by which communities of women were governed. Rhabanus wanted to remove women who were not living according to the rule to another place "according to the rule of the emperor." MGH Epist. V, p. 518.

²³Charlemagne insisted that the members of small communities be grouped into communities following the Benedictine rule.

²⁴In addition to the royal institutions already mentioned in this chapter, most of whom were inherited from the Merovingians, note these other communities, all foundations of the Carolingian

family: we have seen that Emhilt, a relative of Charlemagne, founded the community at Milz; von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 21; Herdecke was the site of a community of women supposedly founded by Friderun, a niece of Charlemagne; von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 16. It is most likely that Herdecke was indeed founded by Friderun, as one of the patron saints of the community was St. Friderun, the others being St. Mary and St. Benedict. Unless she had a very close relationship with the institution, there seems to be little reason for the members to have adopted so obscure a saint as their patron. Charlemagne himself founded two communities for women, one for canonesses at Königsdorf, von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 21; and a double monastery at Metten, von Reichlin-Meldegg and Bendel, p. 27.

²⁵MGH Dipl. III, pp. 92-93; see especially p. 93, n. 22g.

²⁶MGH Dipl. III, pp. 117-19.

²⁷MGH Dipl. I, pp. 68-69.

²⁸MGH Dipl. I, pp. 185-86.

²⁹Böhmer, nr. 802.

³⁰MGH Dipl. III, pp. 76-78.

³¹MGH Dipl. III, p. 114.

³²The Capitulare de monasterior S. Crucis Pictanvensis is in MGH Capit. I, p. 302. It is interesting that though the community at Poitiers had been a royal possession since its founding by Rade Gund, it had only accepted Benedictine monasticism c. 817. Despite Charlemagne's commands that all monasteries in royal possession should adopt the Benedictine rule, the king had evidently not done all he could to actually enforce the rule on all communities in his control. See MGH Capit. I, p. 302, n. 2, for the possible date of St. Crux' adoption of the Benedictine rule.

³³MGH Capit. I, p. 302, n. 1. The duties of St. Crux are to be found in the Notitia, MGH Capit. I, p. 351. Emile Lesne has put the Notitia in the context of the monastic reform that marked the early reign of Louis the Pious. The Notitia was yet another means to achieve uniformity in all aspects of monasticism for women and for men, a tool by which Benedictine monasticism could be established and protected. Emile Lesne, "Les ordonnances monastiques et la Notitia de servitio monasteriorum," Revue d'histoire de l'église de France, Tome 6, n. 31; Avril-Juin, 1920: 161-75; note especially p. 172 and p. 172, n. 2.

CONCLUSION

Consecration for women in the early Middle Ages was characterized by the variety of forms through which the individual could express her religious piety. Monasticism was one of those forms. However, monasticism had not achieved among consecrated women that importance which it had already gained among men. Instead, monasticism was forced to compete for the allegiance of religious women with other forms of consecration. Nonmonastic forms arose out of the practice of the apostolic and the patristic Church; therefore, the legitimacy of these forms was founded solidly on centuries of acceptance and support by the Christian community. Further, there could be no doubt that all nonmonastic forms shared with monasticism the same fundamental reason for being. At the heart of both monastic and nonmonastic consecration lay those ideals of consecrated virginity which had been developed by the Fathers of the patristic Church. It was in the assumptions with which they applied the ideals of consecrated virginity in practice that the proponents of monasticism differed from the adherents of nonmonastic forms.

There was some common ground between monasticism and nonmonastic forms, but there were also fundamental differences. All nonmonastic forms held in common certain elements that none of them shared with monasticism. Unlike monasticism, all nonmonastic forms were derived from the practices of the apostolic Church in that all

evolved out of the consecrated widowhood of the New Testament. Due to that derivation all nonmonastic forms assumed for consecrated women a more active participation in the functions of the Church and of the Christina community than any form of monasticism would allow, at least theoretically. By the sixth century monastic communities often closely resembled nonmonastic groups of consecrated women in the freedoms they permitted their members.

The sixth century movement to reform consecration for women developed because a number of articulate and determined bishops in the Frankish Church came to feel that consecration as it then existed was not capable of achieving the goals of consecrated virginity. Indeed, the bishops felt that consecration as it was then practiced made it impossible for any woman to gain salvation through religious service. The importance of the sixth century reform movement lies in the daring broadness of its scope. The reforming bishops concluded that merely to improve the practice of monasticism was not enough. They sought to change every aspect of consecrated life for women. The bishops of the sixth century decided that only one form of consecration for women was an adequate means to reach the ideals of consecrated virginity: that form was monasticism. This conclusion vastly increased the burden of reform which the bishops put on themselves, but they did not hesitate to enter on their task. The bishops simultaneously attempted to purify monasticism itself and to attack the validity of nonmonastic forms.

The attack on abuses within monasticism and on nonmonastic forms was complicated by several factors. From an ecclesiastical

point of view the foundation of nonmonastic forms in the customs of the early Church and in longstanding practice by the Church in succeeding centuries made the eradication of those forms a delicate business. To change the character of consecration was the work of centuries. It is true that there was one form of consecration, the diaconate, that could be declared void with relative ease and with some justification, since a number of abuses unavoidably arose from it. But other forms of consecration could not so easily be attacked as abuses in themselves. The object of the reform was to attack abuses connected with consecration for women, to make monasticism a more attractive form of consecration than others, and to force non-monastic forms to increasingly resemble monasticism. While the seventh century saw the creation of yet another important rule for women, that of Donatus, in that century the rising influence of the rule of Benedict began to make an impression on ecclesiastical legislation concerned with monasticism for women. Donatus' rule, written early in the seventh century (c. 624) was itself a sign of things to come. Donatus included many chapters of Benedict's rule in his own. Ecclesiastical legislation of the seventh century began to associate monastic ideals such as "regular life" and stability with the Benedictine rule, which came to be referred to simply as "the rule."

The bishops met with some success in their attempts at reform, especially in their drive to change the character of monasticism for women and to legitimately present monasticism as the only form by which a consecrated woman could properly practice consecrated virginity. But the nobility felt that there must be other considerations

involved in the practice of consecration than those suggested by the bishops. It was therefore an inestimable boon to the cause of reform when the Carolingian rulers took upon themselves the direction of reform. The Frankish ruler was the true head of the Frankish Church. He had a recognized right to speak authoritatively on religious matters. The king was the protector and patron of all consecrated women in the realm, and the guarantor of the purity of consecration as an institution of Frankish society. The king was also the most powerful noble in the kingdom. As such he was able to deal with the nobles in terms comprehensible to them. The ability of the ruler to function in both the secular and the religious world was crucial to the success of reform. It was the nobles, the founders and patrons of communities of women, not the bishops, who formed the actual character of consecration.

The directions which the Carolingian reform would take were suggested by some of the ecclesiastical legislation of Pippin I. It was under Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, however, that the ideals of reform enunciated by the bishops of the sixth and seventh centuries became a clearly defined program directed by one source: the king and his closest advisers. The bishops had worked at the reform of consecration with amazing singlemindedness and increasing sophistication since the early sixth century. Their ability to make meaningful changes was reduced by their limited powers over the people who were responsible for creating the kind of consecration of which the bishops did not approve.

Now the various elements of the reform outlined by the bishops were brought together, coordinated, and applied by the ruler. The whole was subordinated to a single guiding concept: Not only was monasticism the only proper form of consecration for women, but that monasticism must be Benedictine monasticism. The strong Benedictinism of the Carolingian rulers was their contribution to the reform of consecration. The adoption of Benedictinism gave the movement a unity of purpose, an ideological clout that the bishops were never able to provide. Nonmonastic forms had heretofore been judged by a general monastic standard, which had perforce been extrapolated from the specific commandments of a number of rules. After the accession of the Carolingians there could be no question about what the term "monasticism" meant for women. This in itself was an important contribution to the reform of monasticism. Since there was only one acceptable definition of monasticism monastic life no longer shared with nonmonastic forms a variety of custom in the actual performance of the ideal of consecrated virginity. Again, such was the theory. The ideal of monasticism was freed of an abuse which had made it too similar to nonmonastic forms. Monasticism presented a united front to competing forms of consecration. It was directed according to a single rule, a rule whose superiority over all others had been established by the command of the king.

There were more obstacles in the way of reform than the validity of nonmonastic forms. The nobility of the early Middle Ages had developed a concept of consecration for women which was founded in its understanding of class division of society, the

subordination of the actions of the individual to the needs of her family, and the use of property to maintain social status and political power. A strictly defined monasticism of any kind would have required a serious alteration of noble custom. Caesarius was perhaps the first reforming bishop to experience the gap that existed between episcopal concepts of a purified monasticism and the traditional relationship between the nobility and consecration for women. Caesarius ran into determined opposition from the nuns of Arles on the crucial issues of the disposal of property by novices and of the separation of consecrated women from their families.

Caesarius' experiences were a symbol of things to come. Gregory of Tours found that the attitudes of consecrated noblewomen differed from those of the bishops so much that Church officials had almost no means to control rebellious consecrated women. It was for these reasons that the proponents of reform realized that it was essential to create a new mentality among consecrated women, one that rejected the principles on which noble life was based. If the reformers had succeeded in effecting that change they would have taken a decisive step toward establishing the kind of consecration they desired, for to the nobles consecration did not require a substantially different attitude toward family, property, or social class than that of secular persons. It was in the attempt to divide consecrated from secular nobles that the reformers failed signally. The actuality of consecration for women in the early Middle Ages always differed from the ideal of the bishops and of the kings because most consecrated women agreed with the attitudes of their

secular relatives. To consecrated as to secular nobles consecration was one of several opportunities open to a noble woman. It was her own and her family's interest that determined which of the several forms of consecration a woman might choose, and how long she remained consecrated. The idea that the noble woman should choose only monasticism was as alien to noble conceptions about consecration as was the insistence of the bishops that all forms of consecration bound the individual to perpetual celibacy.

If the bishops had been able to deal with consecrated women as religious superiors to religious subordinates according to the precepts of canon law there is no doubt that consecration for women would have been completed in a relatively short time. That would certainly have been the case after the kings stepped in on the side of reform. That nonmonastic forms and unreformed monasticism continued to exist in the Frankish kingdom to the death of Louis was largely due to the support of the nobility for those forms. Monastic rules and most ecclesiastical legislation represented an innovative ideal, a program of change. The donation charters and other documents which arose out of the actual relationship of the nobility to consecration for women show the reality against which the ideal was constructed.

Where there was a congruence between ideal and reality the causes are to be sought either in the effectiveness of royal pressure or in the voluntary piety of individual nobles. Such congruence was not unheard of, but it was not typical. Sainthood came to a select few noble women because they had of their own free will followed the

dictates of the reformers. The behavior of such women was notable because they had not acted in ways to be expected of persons of their class. The actions of saints was not expected of consecrated noblewomen, and in reality few saw their religious duties in the same light as did Radegund and Leoba. Synodal and capitular decrees turn again and again to the issues of the marriage of consecrated women; to "spontaneous" assumption of the veil; to widows and virgins who claimed the right to practice consecration in their own homes; and always there was the question of what to do with canonesses. Donation charters prove that consecrated women, like their secular relatives, saw communities of consecrated women as a preserve of the nobility, to be done with as they pleased. Protection of the property interests of the individual and of her family were issues of primary importance to consecrated noblewomen.

It was both its strength and its weakness that the reform movement fell into the hands of the Carolingian rulers. The kings added an important dimension of their own to the reform, and they were able to enforce adherence to many of the reforming ideals of the bishops. That ability to enforce reform came not only from the political authority of the rulers but also from the clarity and unity of purpose which the Benedictine program of the kings lent to the reform movement. It must be remembered that the kings were the most important patrons of communities of women in the realm, however. The full application of Benedictine reform to communities in the control of the royal family would have lessened the authority of the kings over vast areas of land, over many people, and over the abbesses

who were responsible for the direction of what were in effect important economic and military enterprises. The result would have been a reduction in the capacity of the ruling family to maintain its position in regard to the other nobles, in its capacity to keep them subordinate to itself. It was essential for the secular interests of the kings that they make sure that control of royal communities of women never slip out of their hands. Grants of administrative freedom came as rarely from the kings as they did from other noble lords, and such grants in some respects created a closer bond between the royal family and religious institutions than had existed before.

By the death of Louis the Pious significant changes had been made in the character of consecration for women. These changes had come about largely due to royal pressure, though one must be careful not to underrate the accomplishments of the bishops of the sixth and seventh centuries. There was much in the nature of consecration for women in 840 that could not have pleased the reforming bishops, however. There is no reason to believe that most consecrated women fully practiced the Benedictine rule, or that most of them were nuns. The effect of royal pressure was not only to strengthen Benedictine monasticism, but to increase the attraction of the canonical form for the nobility. To the nobles the canonical form represented the last viable nonmonastic form through which they could maintain that relationship to consecration for women which was at the heart of the noble conception of religious service for noble women. The compromise--for as such it must be seen--of Louis the Pious in 816 was a victory for the traditionalist elements in Frankish society. While

the Institutio sanctimonialium hedged the canonical form about with monastic precepts and regulations, there was no denying that a major competitor to monasticism for the allegiance of consecrated women continued to exist. Furthermore, the king, the leading proponent of Benedictine reform, had been forced to recognize the validity of the canonical form by granting it a rule. That rule was to be followed by all canonical communities throughout the kingdom. The canonical form continued to thrive, a reminder that there was from the earliest days of the Christian religion an acceptance of a more active role for consecrated women in the functions of the Church and of the Christian community than that envisioned for them by the proponents of monasticism. The canonical form of consecration for women owed its strength to the support of the nobility, who saw in it a way to express religious devotion and yet to protect the secular interests of the individual and of her family. Again, in the early Middle Ages monasticism was an ideal espoused by a group of innovators, kings and bishops, not the norm of religious practice among those who actually had the power to determine the character of consecration for women.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

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The ideals of the reform movement are to be found in the monastic rules and in the ecclesiastical legislation of the period 500-840. The monastic rules used here are those indigenous to the area ruled by the Frankish kings. The rules of Caesarius (in its final redaction of 534); of Aurelian of Arles (bishop 546-551); of Donatus of Besançon (written c. 624); and of Waldebert (written between 629 and 670) were primarily from the southern part of Gaul. Here the Church continued the Roman traditions of episcopal authority and emphasis on organization. It was in this area that the concept of the reform of consecration for women developed. The monastic rules for women in southern Gaul were the first such rules in the West, and those rules did more than any other written sources, at least prior to the Carolingian period, to establish the components of the ideal of monasticism for women. Compared to the rules of Caesarius and of Donatus those of Ferreol, of Leander of Seville and of Isidore of Seville were of secondary importance in the history of consecration for women in the West. The great Spanish rules were known and used in the women's communities of the Frankish kingdom, and they were occasionally cited by Frankish synods. Yet the Spanish rules did not influence the formation and direction of the movement to reform consecration for women, which was a contribution of the Frankish Church.

That contribution is clearly visible in the ecclesiastical legislation of the Frankish bishops in their synods and of the Frankish rulers, particularly the Carolingians, in their capitularies. The collections of the editors of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica are of course indispensable for anyone who wishes to trace the comparative effects of synodal decrees and of capitular pronouncements over a long period of time. A comparison of the topics treated by the two types of legislation shows that in the Merovingian period the ideals of reform were worked out primarily in the synods; the public declarations of the kings played a minor role. The balance between synodal and capitular decrees became more nearly equal in the Carolingian period. While the synods were still the primary means of reform, the stricter control of the kings over the work of the leaders of the Frankish Church meant that the decisions of the synods reflected the desires of the kings. That this is so is illustrated by the fact that synodal decrees were frequently adopted word for word in capitularies of the Carolingian rulers dated the same year as the synodal decrees. The interests of the bishops and of the rulers did not always mesh perfectly, for what was of concern to the ecclesiastics was not always congruent with the point of view of the kings and their advisers. Except on the issue of the right of the king to command abbesses to leave their communities to meet with him there is no evidence in the synodal or capitular decrees that there was a serious clash between the Carolingian rulers and the bishops over the need for reform, let alone on the methods by which reform should be accomplished.

While the emphasis of monastic rules and of ecclesiastical legislation was on the enumeration of the components of the ideal form of consecration for women, these same sources could not ignore the reality of consecration as it existed in the early Middle Ages. The decrees of synods and of capitularies in particular are of great help to those who wish to find out how the proponents of reform identified problems and devised solutions. The collections of capitularies and of synodal decrees are of especial use in following the progress of attempts to purify monasticism and to eradicate non-monastic forms of consecration. It is only through the capitular and synodal decrees that the existence of some practices, such as the spontaneous assumption of consecration, the continuation of consecrated widowhood/virginity practiced in the individual's home, and the assumption of priestly and episcopal powers by consecrated women can be known. All of this ecclesiastical legislation and the monastic rules in particular must be used with care, for they give only a limited picture of the successes and failures of the reform movement. To assume that the expressions of the monastic ideal actually describe how nuns and other consecrated women lived would be a serious mistake.

The actual character of consecration for women at any given time can best be found in sources which deal with the specific behavior of specific people in specific situations. The vitae or saints' lives, for all their religious propaganda, can be valuable in suggesting the status of consecrated women in Frankish society. An attempt has been made to select from the better known vitae those which were written by authors who show some insight into the workings

of human relationships, and to present women of varied experiences and from different levels within the nobility. We are fortunate to have two vitae of Radegund, one by the litterateur and man of affairs Venantius Fortunatus, and one from the hand of a woman, Baudonivia, who could write with the perspective of a person who had like Radegund entered the consecrated life. Of more interest to a modern reader than the vitae are the often pathetic letters of consecrated women, most of them English, to Boniface. These letters prove that the secular nobles of the early Middle Ages did not operate under the assumption that consecration put a noble woman in a special realm apart from ordinary life. Even more important is the fact that consecrated women felt exactly the same way. The letters to Boniface indicate that, whatever had been the case with the secular nobles their consecrated sisters and daughters were aware of the ideals of the way of life they had undertaken. The women simply found the demands of the religious life too burdensome; they could not abide the isolation from their relatives and from male protection that communal religious life entailed.

There is ample evidence that many consecrated women refused to even try to endure such a sense of helplessness. It is interesting that almost all of the letters of consecrated women to Boniface were from women whom fate had deprived of the protection of their families. Women whose relationship with their kin remained intact had no need of his assistance. In a large number of collections charters of donation and also in the records of land transfers collected by the editors of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica under

the rubric Diplomata the true operating assumptions of the nobility toward consecration become clear in ways afforded by no other documents of the early Middle Ages. In the charters the fact that consecrated noblewomen by the hundreds continued to possess property is immediately evident. One sees consecrated women drawing up donations to religious institutions or removing properties from the control of those institutions; always they keep their own interests or those of close relatives in mind. Founder/abbesses grant lands to their foundations, then destroy the independence of their own communities for the good of the founder/abbess and of her family. In the charters the contrast between the kings' support for Benedictine reform of consecration for women and their actual behavior comes most definitely to light. If one is to get a true picture of the character of consecration, one should play off the information gleaned from the charters of the consecrated nobles and of the kings against the ideals of reform enunciated in monastic rules and in ecclesiastical legislation.

There is only a limited number of secondary sources which deal in any valuable way with any aspect of consecration for women in the early Middle Ages, and few of those are wholly devoted to the subject. On nuns there is surprisingly little of value. Philbert Schmitz's Histoire de l'ordre de Saint-Benoît, Tome 7, Les moniales remains the definitive work on nuns for the whole Middle Ages. Noreen Hunt in her Cluny under Saint Hugh 1049-1109 characterizes Schmitz as a pioneer in the writing of the history of nuns (p. 186); the characterization remains as valid today as it was in 1967.

Despite its age K. Heinrich Schäfer's Die Kanonissenstifter im deutschen Mittelalter remains the definitive study of the canonical form. Schäfer's discussion of the origins of the canonical form, his convincing association of the canonical with the diaconal form, and his analysis of the significance of the canonical form make his work more broadly applicable than its title would suggest. Roger Gryson's The Ministry of Women in the Early Church is most valuable, for it deals with religious service for women in its formative years. Of greatest importance for the purpose at hand is Gryson's perceptive and usually convincing discussion of the development of the diaconal form out of consecrated widowhood. Gryson's book makes an excellent companion to Schäfer's work, supporting and illuminating some of Schäfer's suggestions. Together the two works form a good antidote to most considerations of monasticism for women, for it is too often assumed that the only form of religious service for women was monasticism. By so doing such works misvalue the significance of monasticism for women. It is the strength of M. Maria Caritas McCarthy's The Rule of St. Caesarius of Arles that she puts Caesarius' concept of monasticism into its proper context as one of several forms of religious devotion. She shows the importance of Caesarius' concept of monasticism as an innovative reform by which the ideals of consecrated virginity could be achieved with a completeness available by no other form of consecration.

Two works, one by a French scholar and one by a German, are useful guides through the forest of Frankish religious legislation. Carlo de Clercq's La législation religieuse franque de Clovis à

Charlemagne is the most valuable directory on the subject, for his clear and objective presentation makes it easy to follow the transmission of important ideas through the legislation. Karl Stosiek's Das Verhältnis Karls des Grossen zur Klosterordnung mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die regula Benedicti is a more specialized work, but complements certain aspects of de Clercq's guide. One advantage of Stosiek's presentation is that the programmatic character of Charlemagne's approach to reform of consecration for women comes through quite clearly.

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