Women in Power: Fontevrault and the Paraclete Compared

Robert of Arbrissel's Order of Fontevrault is credited in historical writings with being both a large order for women and a unique example of women's self-rule in conventual affairs during the twelfth century.[1] Among scholars studying Fontevrault, Penny Schine Gold gives less attention to its size and, instead, finds more significance in the dominant position held by women at Fontevrault. When men were present at the convent, they served under the women. Although she concedes that some twelfth-century abbeys, such as Savigny and Sempringham, were "women-centered," Gold brings the critical difference to the surface, declaring that "the participation of women at Fontevrault was not unusual for the first half of the twelfth century, but the formal structuring of an arrangement dominated by women was."[2] Gold argues that Fontevrault's status as an independent order, its inclusion of a strong abbess, and its recruitment of male laborers in the form of *conversi* express Fontevrault's uniqueness.[3]

Yet Gold's thesis fails to recognize that the Paraclete of Abelard and Heloise, like Fontevrault, possessed the same institutional expression of women-centeredness. Although Gold mentions the Paraclete, the prospect of a serious comparison is relegated to the footnotes, where she merely mentions that Abelard and Heloise considered adopting a *conversi* system.[4] As we shall see in the cartulary of the Paraclete, the letters of Abelard and Heloise, and Heloise's rule for the convent, it was much more than a *conversi* system that the Paraclete shared with Fontevrault.[5] Like Fontevrault, the Paraclete was an autonomous order unattached to any male house. And although the Paraclete was not as large as Fontevrault, that it had six daughter houses represents a notable achievement, since no other independent orders for women existed in the early twelfth century.[6] So, too, the abbess of the Paraclete ruled the convent in fact and in name, for Abelard, like Robert, was only an adviser to his daughters, entrusting the convent's management to Heloise. In reevaluating the role of the noncloistered nun, Abelard and Heloise shared a monastic philos-

ophy quite similar to that of Robert of Arbrissel. In view of these striking similarities, the Paraclete's own autonomy and institutionalized women-centeredness are worth considering; and perhaps in the course of comparison, the Paraclete's method of administration will render it as equally significant as Fontevrault.

The growth and parallel direction of Fontevrault and the Paraclete were merely part of a more general picture. In response to the population growth of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the newly formed Augustinian, Cistercian, and Premonstratensian orders accommodated the increased number of men seeking the monastic life.[7] As a result, their houses easily multiplied. Between 1075 and 1125 the Augustinian houses grew to six hundred, while the Cistercians established some five hundred monasteries from 1098 to the close of the twelfth century.[8] For women, however, the opportunities for monastic life were not as prominent as those for men. Nunneries remained limited in number and overcrowded.[9] Women who sought the perfect life from either spiritual need or family pressure almost always needed money or property as a dowry to gain admission into an established order.[10] Yet, since the demand from women seeking the cloistered life remained high, the Cistercian, Premonstratensian, and Cluniac orders felt compelled to establish houses for women and administer pastoral care to them.

As founder of Marcigny, the Cluniac house for women, St. Hugh was concerned with the sisters' spiritual well-being. As a result, strict enclosure was enforced, so much so that it has often been referred to by historians as a veritable prison.[11] The nuns were under the direct control of Cluny and its law; and although the sisters had a prioress to represent them, their female authority-figure was the Virgin Mary, who actually held the office of abbess.[12] For some houses this type of life sufficed, yet the population explosion in convents, coupled with the growing opposition among women of the period to the notion of total enclosure, made life under male procurators intolerable for others.

Like Hugh, Robert of Arbrissel was concerned that his daughters live an exemplary spiritual life free from accusation.[13] Nevertheless, Robert did not find nuns' total enclosure and strict supervision from male canons the answer. At Fontevrault's foundation, Robert set forth that the women would manage the convent under the abbess's direction. The men of Fontevrault would be servants to the women—not authority figures. This situation was quite different from that of the traditional double houses of the period. In fact, at Norbert of Xanten's double house of Prémontré,

the male canons took charge of all administrative affairs, and the sisters served the men, occupying themselves with prayer and the household tasks of sewing, weaving, and laundry.[14] Instead, Robert chose to make Fontevrault an independent order, quite possibly because, if Fontevrault had sought admission into an order as a double house, the women's influence and well-being would have been severely limited. The attachment of a convent to a male house made it secondary and expendable, so that the male house at its choosing could disband a convent or release itself from any bond with the convent and thus jeopardize the welfare of the nuns.[15] Therefore, despite the exemplary spiritual life that Fontevrault could have attained as a traditional double house, Robert's decision to have the convent remain independent was perhaps the best alternative in creating a monastery for and by women.[16] Moreover, Fontevrault became the alternative to the Premonstratensian double house, for Robert actively sought to increase the size of the order as he traveled throughout southwestern France, preaching and establishing priories.[17] The order of Fontevrault grew from Robert's simple hermitage in the forest of Craon to include almost one hundred priories by the end of the twelfth century, with houses in England as well as on the Continent.[18]

Surprisingly, Fontevrault gathered little disapproval for its innovations. The critics remained silent both about Fontevrault being ruled by an abbess and about its autonomy. The reason could be either that male monastic attitudes about women managing convents were changing or that Robert successfully gave the impression that he was in charge of Fontevrault. Whatever the case, Robert never functioned as the sole administrator. In fact, Abbess Hersende and then Prioress Petronilla were left in complete charge of the order. After Fontevrault's foundation, Robert left to resume his life as an itinerant preacher and offered instruction only by means of letters to Hersende and Petronilla.[19] Moreover, Robert saw no need to place the nuns under another male patron or abbot were he to die. In Robert's rule for Fontevrault (1116 or 1117),[20] he emphasized the need that Fontevrault remain under the new abbess Petronilla's control, a decision of which the lay monks approved:

> Petronilla, chosen by master Robert and constituted abbess by the common will and by the devoted request of the nuns as well as of the religious brothers, is to have and maintain the power of ruling the church of Fontevrault and all the places belonging to that same church, and they are to obey her and venerate her as their spiritual mother, and all the affairs of the church, spiritual as well as secular, are to remain in her hands, or to be given to whomever she assigns, just as she decides.[21]

Thus it becomes clear that in Robert's role as father and founder he demonstrated a great trust in the nuns—one that other male patrons of the period were unwilling to confide.[22]

Another thing that sets Fontevrault apart from the other abbeys of the period was the way in which the cloistered and noncloistered nuns were regarded. During the twelfth century, the cloistered nun was viewed as an occupant of an earthbound prison, one who was only waiting to be freed in the life thereafter.[23] The abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, often referred to his Marcigny as a "joyous prison," praising the virtues of cloistered life.[24] This attitude was so instilled in the nuns that on one occasion, when parts of Marcigny were aflame, the archbishop of Lyon had great difficulty in persuading the nuns to flee. The nun Gisla responded to the Archbishop's pleas,

> My father, the fear of God and the command of our Abbot keep us enclosed within these limits until we die. Under no pretext, in no circumstances, can we pass the bounds assigned to our penitence, unless he who enclosed us in the name of Lord should permit it. Therefore order us not to do that which is forbidden; but rather command the fire to draw back in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.[25]

Luckily for the sisters, the flames subsided.

Although Robert does not ascribe as much virtue to the role of the cloistered nun as Peter did, nonetheless Robert's rule emphasizes the cloistered life. A cloistered nun was not allowed to see former friends, lay or secular, or to conduct business with a secular without the abbess's presence.[26] But, as business and religion often require, there were exceptions. Robert believed a noncloistered nun, such as a widow who had previous experience with the secular world, would be beneficial to the convent. Therefore, his selection of Petronilla of Chemillé as abbess is not surprising. Petronilla had come to the monastic profession late in life, and she possessed skills in secular affairs, as she demonstrated in her trips with Robert and in her own journeys outside the convent to take charge of business concerns.[27] Robert apparently felt very strongly about the value of a noncloistered nun and clearly saw what both types of nuns could offer. In later commenting on his choice of a noncloistered nun for abbess he said, "Let Mary continue to gaze to the heavens, and let Martha be chosen, who knows how to minister effectively to the outside."[28]

One of the most important ways that Fontevrault maintained its self-sufficiency was the introduction of lay monks, *conversi*, to perform manual labor and execute some types of business. By the twelfth century the *conversi* system had become an accepted practice in most male houses and,

for that matter, women's houses.[29] But what made Fontevrault exceptional in this regard was that the abbess recruited her own lay monks.[30] And as put forth by Robert, the *conversi* would collect rent, tend fields, and serve as messengers, while the nuns could remain in the cloister. Thus the nuns could manage the convent through the *conversi*.[31] Again, even though the *conversi* system was unavoidable, in view of Fontevrault's independence, its unique form at Fontevrault merits attention. For instance, Gold concludes that in addition to the practical implications of a *conversi* system, the use of lay monks raised the nuns from a dependent to a supervisory position, thus reinforcing the women's position of authority.[32]

Much of the evolution of Fontevrault is explained by its independent state, in which the *conversi* system and the reconsideration of the noncloistered nun were products more of practical circumstance than of women actually resisting male monastic rule. Nevertheless, Gold's argument that the *conversi* system underscored Fontevrault's female direction remains compelling. It could as easily be argued that the desire for nuns to manage their own house through lay monks and for noncloistered nuns to be at the forefront of administration was the primary cause that necessitated the formation of an independent order. In light of the paucity of sources involving Fontevrault, such motives may never be defined. What remains certain concerning Fontevrault, however, were its independence from male monastic control and its establishment of strong abbatial rule. Both show a highly unusual situation during a period in which women monks were still cloistered and silent.

Peter Abelard was well aware of the example of Fontevrault. In fact, he may have been one of its few critics. In noting how Fontevrault's abbesses were chosen to rule single-handedly with no male supervision, he declared, "I am much surprised that the custom should have been long established in convents of putting abbesses in charge of women just as abbots are set over men."[33] Ironically, despite Abelard's surprise, the abbess of the Paraclete was put in charge of not only the women but the men as well, reviving what had been common practice in double monasteries some five hundred years earlier.[34] Further still, the eventual Order of the Paraclete greatly resembled Robert's model and was as eloquent as Fontevrault in expressing its autonomy and the prominence of women in its community. As is evident in her rule for the Paraclete, Heloise took much of Abelard's advice, included some of her own, and in administrative matters followed the example of Fontevrault—not Cluny, Cîteaux, or Prémontré.

Before Heloise reached the Paraclete in 1129, she lived perhaps much like Robert's Martha. After an illicit love affair that resulted in pregnancy and a subsequent marriage at the insistence of Heloise's uncle Fulbert, a canon at Notre Dame, both Abelard and Heloise entered the monastic life.[35] Abelard went to the first of his many homes at St. Denis, and Heloise was removed to her childhood home of Argenteuil, where she later became prioress. Peace eluded them both, however. In 1140, Abelard suffered more attacks at the Council of Sens as a result of his writings, and Heloise, along with her sister nuns, was evicted from Argenteuil in 1129 at the insistence of Abbot Adam Suger of St. Denis, who accused the sisters of immoral acts.[36] Abelard placed the orphaned nuns who remained with their prioress Heloise at his former stone oratory of the Paraclete, and it was here that Heloise began her convent.

The abbey of the Paraclete was officially founded in 1131, when Pope Innocent II recognized it as an abbey.[37] By 1163, however, the Paraclete had acquired six daughter houses and had become, in effect, the *Ordo Paraclitensis*.[38] The houses that Alexander III listed as part of the Paraclete and under its authority included the Abbey of La Pommeraie (Yonne) and the priories of Ste. Madeleine de Traînel (Aube), Laval (Seine-et-Marne), Noëfort (Seine-et-Marne), St. Flavit (Aube), and St. Martin de Boran (Oise).[39] Unlike Robert of Arbrissel, Abelard was not prominent in the expansion of the Paraclete. At the time of the Paraclete's first major expansion in 1142, Abelard had already retired to Cluny, where he later died (1143).[40] Thus he may not have been able to instruct Heloise in matters relating to the increasing size of the Paraclete. In addition, in the Paraclete's cartulary all gifts and lands were granted to Abbess Heloise and her daughters, and Heloise herself, not a male protector, appears to have been the force behind the Paraclete's expansion.

The letters exchanged between Abelard and Heloise can give some insight into motive and possibly explain why they chose to establish an independent order. For example, there is no mention in the letters of the Paraclete's possibly joining an existing order or even imitating the life of a well-known monastery. In fact, Abelard was quite critical of most existing orders, and Heloise does not appear to have favored one order over another, despite her numerous associations with other male houses.[41] Thus, although she was a friend of the Cluniac abbot Peter the Venerable, she never openly sought admission to the order, a fact that Peter himself later lamented.[42] Moreover, she received a visit from Bernard of Clairvaux and included some Cistercian elements in the Paraclete liturgy but never applied for admission during the period in which other Cistercian houses for women were being established (1125–1147).[43] She also included some

Premonstratensian elements in the portion of the Paraclete rule addressing liturgical practices but still chose to keep the Paraclete separate.[44] Therefore, in the operation of the Paraclete, as in its expansion, Heloise appears to have been a determined abbess who sought to solidify her house's autonomy, drawing inspiration from other orders but resisting their authority. Like Robert of Arbrissel, Abelard and Heloise possibly realized that, for the Paraclete to be truly an abbey for women, it had to remain independent of Cîteaux and Cluny.

Like Fontevrault, the Paraclete institutionalized its autonomy by establishing strong abbatial rule. As we saw earlier, however, Abelard disliked houses whose abbesses governed as abbots. Thus, we would not expect the Paraclete to follow Fontevrault's example and establish an abbess who would rule the convent single-handedly. But in fact, despite Abelard's preference, Heloise's own rule for the Paraclete clearly states that the abbess would administer the order. Noting the increasing size of her order, she begins her rule as follows: "The Lord in his care for having bestowed upon us certain habitations we have sent thither some of our members in sufficient number for the divine service. But we are setting down the customs of our good way of life, so that what the mother has unchangeably held, the daughters too may uniformly maintain."[45] If Abelard did not want the Mother to rule, it is surprising that he advocated an abbess who could indeed govern. Abelard instructed Heloise that an abbess, in addition to knowing Scripture, should not hesitate in discovering "letters."[46] He also preferred an older woman who had lived in the world as abbess instead of a younger sister dedicated to the order from childhood. Using the words of Timothy, Abelard described the ideal abbess as a widow over the age of sixty who had been faithful in marriage, had given birth to children, and had shown good deeds throughout her life.[47] These qualifications are identical to Petronilla's, which Robert so highly praised. Furthermore, if Abelard had wanted a man to rule the Paraclete, he never offered a choice in abbots other than himself—and even then his influence remained minimal. His sole presence at the Paraclete appears to have been by way of advice through personal letters to Heloise, advice that Heloise did not always follow.[48] As a result, the example of Fontevrault was adopted at the Paraclete, and, like Petronilla, Heloise assumed identical authority at the Paraclete in her master's absence.

If being an independent order and establishing a strong abbess made Fontevrault exceptional, then the Paraclete indeed shares the spotlight. But the Paraclete also expressed its independence and women-centeredness in recognizing the consequences of self-rule. As a result, Abelard and Heloise reevaluated the noncloistered nun and elevated her status. Like

Robert, Abelard praised the virtues of the cloistered participant but recognized the value of the noncloistered nun in administrative and secular affairs. Aside from the portress, cellaress, wardrober, infirmarer, chantress, sacristan, and abbess, Abelard instructed that all other sisters were to be cloistered and would "perform their service for God promptly, like soldiers."[49] Thus the officers of the Paraclete were clearly set apart and were given the authority to rule within and without.

Since the Paraclete had six daughter houses and numerous properties, it was vital that noncloistered nuns be allowed to leave the convent. Abelard instructed that appearances by the abbess and other noncloistered nuns must be infrequent, and that if the convent needed emissaries, Heloise was to use lay monks as messengers.[50] Nevertheless, without mentioning the *conversi* as emissaries, Heloise granted permission for noncloistered nuns to leave the abbey and perform business in the public domain, perhaps in circumstances in which the *conversi* were not able or authorized to conduct business.[51] Moreover, like Petronilla, Heloise herself left the abbey. In the *Historia*, Abelard remembers Heloise's travels outside the abbey: "The more rarely she allowed herself to be seen (so that she could devote herself without distraction to prayer and meditation on holy things in a closed cell) the more eagerly did those outside demand her presence and her spiritual conversation for their guidance."[52] As this passage reveals, Heloise apparently left the convent to minister to the laity—an unusual practice for a twelfth-century abbess. Therefore, it appears that not all of Heloise's time outside the abbey was spent in practical matters, which suggests not only that monastic independence had its material consequence, but that it entailed a spiritual responsibility to the outside world as well. Thus, like Robert's Martha, Heloise knew how to minister to the outside.

As mentioned earlier, the only point of comparison that Gold saw between the Paraclete and Fontevrault was the *conversi*, though she does not elaborate the similarity. In addressing the problem of her abbey's continued self-sufficiency, Heloise needed to obtain labor for menial tasks and for conducting some form of business. Thus she asked Abelard where, within the precepts of Benedict's Rule, women are allowed dispensation from some types of labor normally performed by monks. She commented, "For if in certain respects (St. Benedict) is obliged to modify the Rule for the young, the old and weak, according to their natural frailty or infirmity, what would he provide for the weaker sex whose frailty and infirmity is generally known?"[53] Abelard responded in letter 7 that "monks and lay monks" from nearby monastic houses could perform

duties that call for outside assistance.[54] Perhaps Abelard did not realize the difficulties in procuring lay monks from a nearby male house if that house had no formal association with the Paraclete. Yet, like the abbesses of Fontevrault, Heloise was forced to face the practical needs of the order, so she later instructed in her rule that *conversi* and *conversae* from the outside community, not a nearby monastery, would be admitted to perform work and thus free the sisters to concentrate on their spiritual duties.[55] Even if lay monks from another monastery had been available, Heloise preferred instead to call on the services of those to whom she had ministered and those who had supported the Paraclete in its early years.[56]

As we have seen, the Paraclete and Fontevrault show vivid parallels in all critical aspects. It is unfortunate that Gold placed the comparison in her footnotes. Both houses held the status of independent orders. Both established roles for strong abbesses and noncloistered nuns. And both had male founders who were willing to let the women rule the male *conversi*. In addition, Heloise seems to have been the abbess that both Abelard and Robert of Arbrissel had in mind.

Yet, in assessing Fontevrault, Gold is correct to stress its institutionalized autonomy.[57] Beyond Fontevrault's ostensible achievement in size, which other historians have noted, Gold reveals the critical difference to lie in Fontevrault's "independent" status and powerful abbesses, which made the order unusual and appealing. As Fontevrault's ideological mate, the Paraclete—despite its small size—likewise followed suit, placing women in positions of power. Within the Paraclete's six houses, Heloise, like Petronilla, gradually opened the convent door to the outside world, gave women more control over their spiritual lives, and offered an alternative to women who no longer found Peter the Venerable's idea of a "joyous prison" an inspiration.

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Notes

1. Penny Schine Gold, "Religious Life: The Monastic Experience," *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 93–115, and "Male/Female Cooperation: The Example of Fontevrault," *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes*, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 151–168; Jacqueline Smith, "Robert of Arbrissel: *Procurator Mulierum*," *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (London: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 175–184. Gold has used the biographies of Robert of Arbrissel by Baldric and Andrea, along with the "Rule of Fontevrault" by Robert himself as a basis for her conclusions. See Baldric, "Vita B. Roberti de Arbrissello," *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* 162 (Paris: Migne, 1854), 1043–1058, hereafter *PL*; Andrea, "Vita Altera B. Roberti de Arbrissello," *PL* 162.1057–1078; Robert of Arbrissel, "Regulae Sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi," *PL* 162.1079–1086.

2. Gold, *Lady and Virgin* (n. 1 above), 112.

3. Ibid., 111–113. Gold adds that the institutional expression of Fontevrault's women-centeredness was unique.

4. Ibid. The Paraclete appears in two footnotes: "One of the most extensive twelfth-century discussions of the appropriate working relationship between male and female religious can be found in the correspondence of Abelard and Heloise," 109 n. , and "Compare Abelard's recommendations to Heloise regarding the role of monks in taking care of the external needs of nuns," 106 n.

5. The Paraclete cartulary is to be found in Charles Lalore's series of medieval cartularies, *Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes, vol. 2: Cartulaire de l'abbaye du Paraclete* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1878). The letters of Abelard and Heloise, *Historia calamitatum*, and several letters of Peter the Venerable can be found in English in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974). Radice's translation is based on J. T. Muckle, "Abelard's Letter of Consolation to a Friend (*Historia calamitatum*)," *Medieval Studies* 12 (1950): 162–213; and J. T. Muckle and T. P. McLaughlin, "The Letters of Abelard and Heloise," *Medieval Studies* 15, 17, 18 (1953, 1955, 1956). For the Rule of the Paraclete, see Heloise, "Excerpta e Regulis Paraclitensis Monasterii," in *Petri Abelardi Opera*, ed. Victor Cousin, vol. 1 (Paris, 1849; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970), 213–214.

6. Outside of a few priories and hermitages supported by a single patron, independent orders established for women were nonexistent.

7. It is clear from various studies that population in western Europe greatly increased during the later Middle Ages. For example, Norman Pounds attributes the doubling of Europe's population between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries to the cessation of invasions, an improved diet resulting from land development, and a downward trend in the age of marriage; see *An Economic History of Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1974), 128–130, 135.

8. R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 249, 254.

9. It should be noted that, by 1200, we first discern an imbalance in the number of women over men, with women more numerous and living longer; see Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, ed. C. G. Crump and E. F. Jacob (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), 411.

10. Most women's houses until the late twelfth century were aristocratic institutions, comprising mostly wealthy and notable women. It was not until the thirteenth century and the advent of urban convents, *béguinages*, that more lower- and middle-class women could enter monastic life. See Power (n. 9 above), 413. This assessment has changed little in the past sixty years. See Clifford H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (London: Longman, 1984), 176–191.

11. Lawrence (n. 10 above) called it Peter the Venerable's "jocund prison," 179; and Richard Southern (n. 8 above) referred to it as a "glorious prison," 311.

12. Lawrence (n. 10 above), 178, notes that an empty stall was held in the choir for Mary, the invisible abbess.

13. Before founding Fontevrault, Robert received much criticism from various ecclesiastics about his communal habitat in the forest of Craon. Marbod, bishop of Rennes, commented on Robert's commune, "Divine and human laws are both clearly against this association [men and women living together in a religious habitat]. Sin began with a woman and it is through her that death comes to all of us. Without a doubt, you cannot long be chaste if you dwell among women"; see "Marbodi Redonensis Episcopi Epistolae," *PL* 171.1481–1482, as cited and translated in Lawrence (n. 10 above), 179.

14. A. Erens, "Les Soeurs dans l'Ordre de Prémontré," *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 5 (1929): 14.

15. Gold has a similar argument, noting that Robert's decision to institutionalize Fontevrault as an independent order freed it from the dangers of being a peripheral attachment to a male house (*Lady and Virgin* [n. 1 above], 111. Heloise herself was a victim of such a peripheral association when she and her sister nuns were evicted from the convent of Argenteuil by their protector monks of St. Denis; see "Charta Mattaei de episcopi Albanensis & sedis apost. legati pro coenobio beatae Mariae de Argentolio Sandioyfrancis monachis restituendo," *Gallia Christiana* 7 (Paris: Ex Typographie Regia, 1744), Instrumenta 63.

16. Incidentally, after the Premontstratensian decision in 1140 to eliminate double houses, the Prémontré nuns were dispatched to Fontenelle, where they became choir nuns; the sisters of Val-des-Lys de Hombeek were transplanted to Malines; and the double convent of Saint-Michel was disbanded to Santvlivet; see Erens (n. 14 above), 20; also Raymonde Foreville, introduction and commentary to *The Book of St. Gilbert*, ed. Raymonde Foreville and Gillian Keir (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), xliv.

17. What was often considered a priory was a tract of land occupied and farmed by several nuns. See Gold, *Lady and Virgin* (n. 1 above), 95 n.

18. Between twenty-six and forty-seven of that number are English. See David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales* (New York: St. Martin's, 1971), 493.

19. Smith (n. 1 above), 182.

20. Johannes von Walter dates the rule between 1116 and 1117; see Gold, *Lady and Virgin* (n. 1 above), 98 n.

21. "Ut Petronilla electa a magistro Roberto et constituta abbatissa communi voluntate, et devota petitione tam sanctimonialium quam religiosorum fratrum habeat, obtineatque postestatem regendi ecclesiam Fontis Ebraldi, et omnium locorum eidem ecclesiae pertinentium, et obediant ei: veneruntur eam ut suam matrem spiritualem in ejusque prudentia omnia ecclesiae negotia tam spiritualia quam saecularia permaneant, aut quibuscunque attribuerit et prout constituerit," Robert of Arbrissel, "Regulae Sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi," *PL* 162.1083–1084, V. Translated by Gold, *Lady and Virgin* (n. 1 above), 99.

22. Even St. Gilbert's Sempringham, which has often been compared with Fontevrault, fails in this comparison, for Gilbert instructed that a lay monk, not the abbess, was to manage the convent after his death. See William Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum* (London: Sam Kebles, 1692), 220–221. Dugdale's monastic history is based on the institutes of the Gilbertine Order, which claim authorship by Gilbert.

23. For instance, at Tart both the nuns and the abbess were required to remain in the cloister; see Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1977), 351.

24. Giles Constable, ed., *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 428.

25. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Strict Active Enclosure," in *Medieval Religious Women: Distant Echoes* (n. 1 above), 65.

26. Robert of Arbrissel, "Regulae Sanctimonialium Fontis Ebraldi," *PL* 162.1080–1081, XXVI, XXIX.

27. Andrea, "Vita Altera B. Roberti de Arbrisello," *PL* 162.1068. The participation of the prioress or of a literate member of the community was often required because many of the lay monks were uneducated, illiterate, and therefore unable to execute some forms of business. See Duane J. Osheim, "Conversion, *Conversi*, and the Christian Life," *Speculum* 58 (1983): 371.

28. "Liceat Mariae coelestibus continuo inhiare, et eligatur Martha, quae sciat exteriora sollicite ministrare," *PL* 162.1060.

29. Osheim (n. 27 above), 371–373.

30. With emphasis—although twelfth-century women's houses had *conversi*, they were agents of male houses. Take, for example, Savigny, Cadouin, and Saint-Sulpice; see Gold, *Lady and Virgin* (n. 1 above), 109. In Cistercian and Cluniac houses the *conversi* system by the twelfth century was an established method, yet the lay monks in population records of the twelfth century appear exclusively in

male houses, which is understandable since the male houses—and their representatives—managed the women's houses under the abbot's dominion. It is not until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that *conversi* are recorded at abbeys and convents; see Knowles, "Tables showing the increase and decrease in the various orders," in Knowles and Hadcock (n. 18 above), 488–495, and for Cistercian figures, see Lekai (n. 23 above), 347–363.

31. Baldric, "Vita B. Roberti de Arbrissello," *PL* 162.1052.

32. Gold, *Lady and Virgin* (n. 1 above), 111–113. Robert did instruct that the lay monks were present to serve the women, not to supervise them. Gold's reliance on the *conversi* system in her thesis of women-centeredness overshadows the more practical intentions that Robert had. For the more practical approach to the *conversi* system, see Smith (n. 1 above), 175–184.

33. Abelard, *Historia* (n. 5 above), 101. Further in the passage, Abelard shows dismay at abbesses who have overthrown the "natural order" and administer not only their convents but the clergy as well. Radice (ibid., 101 n.) argues that Abelard could have only been referring to Fontevrault, since it was the only house of the period that adopted this practice.

34. Although original to the twelfth century, Fontevrault and the Paraclete revived the practice, found as early as the seventh century, of abbesses being in charge of the women and men. In seventh-century England, St. Ethelreda's Ely was governed by the abbess, who had authority over the men attached to the community; Lawrence (n. 10 above), 51–52.

35. For the story of Abelard and Heloise's misfortunes and a description of the early years of Heloise's Paraclete, see Abelard, *Historia* (n. 5 above).

36. During an assembly of ecclesiastics held at Saint Germain-des-Près in Paris, where Suger made his formal complaints against the nuns of Argenteuil, it was recorded that "there was a sudden outcry in the hearing of everyone against the irregularlity and evil repute called Argenteuil, in which a few nuns living in manifold infamy, to the dishonor of their order, had by their impure and disgraceful ways for long defiled the whole neighborhood of that place [Argenteuil]"; Enid McLeod, *Heloise* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), 93.

37. Innocent placed the Paraclete under papal control; see Lalore (n. 5 above), no. 1.1.

38. Although the Paraclete does not refer to itself specifically as an order, in the documents addressed to daughter houses, the peripheral houses are referred to as being part of the "order of the Paraclete"; see ibid., nos. 14, 15.

39. Lalore (n. 5 above), no. 12.22. The department names are from Lalore's introduction, x.

40. Ibid., no. 48.65–66.

41. The only rule Heloise professed to follow was that of St. Benedict; Heloise, Letter in the Radice ed. (n. 5 above), 159–160.

42. In writing to Heloise, Peter the Venerable laments that she did not join

the Cluniac order: "If only our Cluny possessed you, or you were confined to the delightful prison of Marcigny with the other handmaids of Christ who are there awaiting their freedom in heaven!" See "Peter the Venerable," Letter (115) to Heloise in the Radice ed. (n. 5 above), 280–281.

43. Bernard recalls the visit only briefly, but he recommends to the pope that a petition for the Paraclete be granted; see Bernard of Clairvaux, Letter 350, in *The Letters of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James (Chicago: Henry Regnry, 1953), 428. For the similarities and differences between the Cistercian and Paraclete hymnals, see Chrysogonus Waddell, introduction and commentary to *The Old French Paraclete Ordinary and the Paraclete Breviary*, vol. 1: *Cistercian Liturgical Series: Number Three* (Trappist, Kentucky: Gethsemani Abbey, 1985), 320–336; and for the hymnal, see idem, "Peter Abelard's *Letter 10* and Cistercian Liturgical Reform," *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History*, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 75–86; see also Lekai (n. 22 above), 348.

44. *Petri Abelardi Opera* (n. 5 above), 213 n.

45. "De convenientia consuetudinum.—Domino super nos prospiciente, et aliqua loco nobis largentia, missimus quasdam ex nostris ad religionem tenendam, numero sufficiente. Annotamus autem boni propositi nostri consuetudines; ut quod tenuit mater incommutabititer, teneant et filiae uniformiter," Heloise, "Excerpta," in *Petri Abelardi Opera* (n. 5 above), 213. Translation by MacLeod (n. 36 above), 220.

46. Abelard, Letter 7 in the Radice ed. (n. 5 above), 201–202.

47. Ibid., 199; 1 Timothy 5:9–11.

48. In Letters 5 and 7 there is a disagreement between Heloise and Abelard concerning the monastic diet. He advocated strict diet and fasting, while Heloise preferred a varied diet, deemphasizing the importance of fasting. Her rule supports the varied diet. See Heloise, "Excerpta," in *Petri Abelardi Opera* (n. 5 above), 214.

49. Abelard, Letter 7 in the Radice ed. (n. 5 above), 199.

50. Ibid, 209–210.

51. "Quando egredimur—Statum tenemus, quod nulla velata, causa cujuscunque necessitatis, egrediator ad forensia negotia, et ad custodiam rerum nostrarum, mittimus in domus nostras probatas tam aetate quam vita et moniales et conversas," Heloise, "Excerpta," in *Petri Abelardi Opera* (n. 5 above), 214.

52. Abelard, *Historia* (n. 5 above), 97.

53. Heloise, Letter 5, in the Radice ed. (n. 5 above), 163.

54. Abelard, Letter 7, ibid., 219.

55. "Unde necessaria proveniant.—Religionis erat de cultu terrarum et labore proprio vivere, si possemus. Sed quia ex debilitate non sufficimus, admittimus conversos et conversas, ut quae per nos administrare rigor permittit religionis, per eos adimpleantur," Heloise, "Excerpta," in *Petri Abelardi Opera* (n. 5 above), 214.

56. Abelard remembers that in the Paraclete's first years the nuns faced 'hardship and deprivation," which was relieved by the outside community; *Historia* (n. 5 above), 97.

57. With other historians that is not the case. For example, C. H. Lawrence (n. 10 above), 176–191, notes the autonomy given to the sisters of Fontevrault, but he finds Fontevrault's significance in simply being a large order established for women. Thus, in Lawrence's analogy, Fontevrault is no different from other houses, such as Sempringham or Prémontré.