

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-TWO

*The Lives of Monastic Reformers, 1:  
Robert of La Chaise-Dieu  
and Stephen of Obazine*



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Robert of La Chaise-Dieu  
and Stephen of Obazine*

*Introduced and translated by*

Hugh Feiss, OSB  
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## Foreword

The ferment that brought diversity and vitality to the monastic life in the eleventh and twelfth centuries included not just Cluniacs, Cistercians and Carthusians, but a host of other movements and experiments following both the *Rule of Saint Benedict* and the *Rules* of Saint Augustine. This volume includes English translations of the lives of two of the initiators of new monastic families, Robert of La Chaise-Dieu (d. 1067) and Stephen of Obazine/Coyroux (d. 1159). Both of them are among the surprising number of monastic innovators who were active during the reformation and renaissance of the eleventh and twelfth century in what is today south-central France.

There were similarities in the lives of these two men and connections between their respective monastic families and with other movements of the time. Robert of La Chaise-Dieu was a canon who thought to become a monk at Cluny, but then became a hermit and finally the founder of a new Benedictine congregation. His biographer, Marbod of Rennes, wrote letters to Robert of Arbrissel (c. 1045–1116), the founder of Fontevrault, to one of his followers at Grandmont, and to Vitalis (c. 1050/60–1122), the founder in 1112/13 of Savigny, a reform center on the borders of Normandy, Brittany and Maine. Marbod also composed a life of Walter, who in 1032 introduced the *Rule of St. Augustine* into the community of canons regular at Lesterps in the diocese of Limoges. In 1114, Bishop Gerard of Sales (d. 1120) founded an abbey at Dalon, twenty miles northwest of Tulle; Dalon figures in Stephen of Obazine's life and death. At the time it was affiliated to the Cistercians in 1167,

Dalon had at least five daughter houses. Seguin (1078–1094), the third successor of Robert as abbot of La Chaise-Dieu, was instrumental in founding the Carthusians.

Stephen of Obazine probably received his elementary education at the Benedictine priory of Pleaux. Pleaux belonged to the abbey of Charroux, which was established near Poitiers in Carolingian times. In 989, Charroux was the site of the first 'Peace Council,' which tried to put an end to the pervasive violence of the time by inaugurating 'The Peace of God.' It was reformed in 1014 at the instigation of the duke of Aquitaine. Pleaux, which also was established in Carolingian times, was about fifty miles southwest of Clermont. Stephen then served as a parish priest, before becoming a hermit with his friend and fellow priest, Peter. Others joined them to form a community of hermits. Women joined them at nearby Coyroux. The twin communities of Obazine and Coyroux adopted the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

The author of the *Life of Stephen of Obazine* had passed his youth in a monastery connected with La Chaise-Dieu, perhaps the priory of La Port-Dieu. After a brief sojourn in the world, this anonymous author, on the advice of Stephen, became a religious at Cîteaux. From there he went to Obazine, where he spent the rest of his life. The monastic congregations of Savigny and Obazine were incorporated into the Cistercian *ordo* at the General Chapter of 1147, the same chapter that refused to incorporate the monastic family of Gilbert of Sempringham.<sup>1</sup>

The *Lives* of these two reformer monks are revealing windows into the monastic ferment of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They show us how even austere monasteries were deeply intertwined with the world around them. In Robert and Stephen we meet two men who were searching for a way of life that would bring them to God. Neither found what he was looking for in the existing forms of monastic life, and each of them pioneered a new, austere way of life which suited him and attracted many followers,

1. Gilbert (ca. 1083–1189) founded the only new medieval religious order to originate in England. While he was parish priest in Sempringham a group of women who wished to live for Christ in detachment from the world gathered around him. For them he created a monastery that became the motherhouse of a congregation of double monasteries.

so that, somewhat ironically, they became founders of monastic congregations which had much in common with existing monastic institutions.

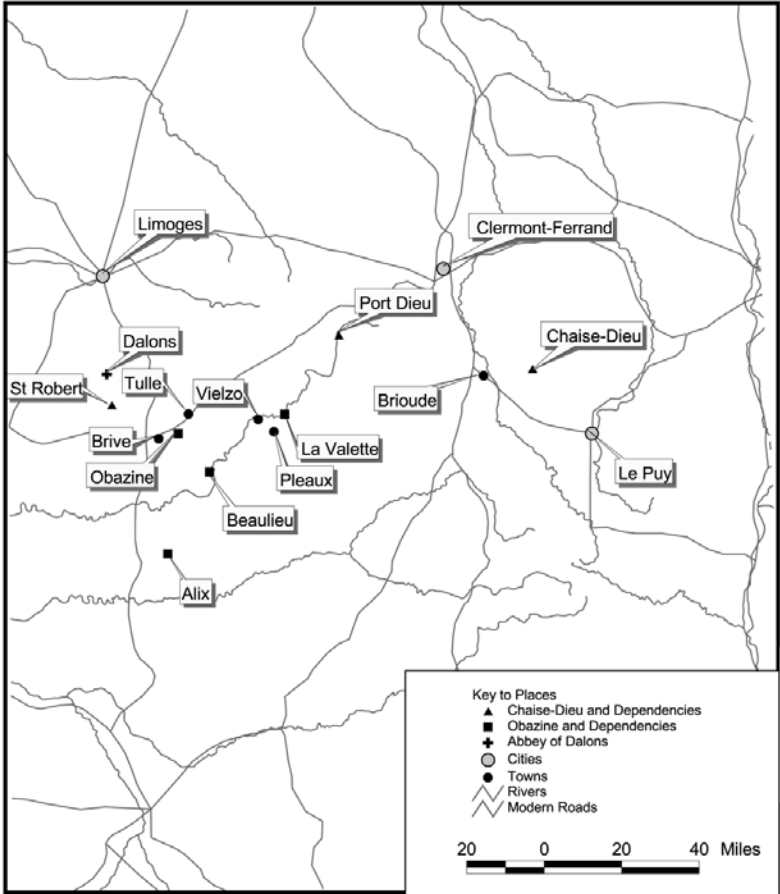
The geographic and historical overlapping of La Chaise-Dieu and Obazine is mirrored in the overlapping efforts of the authors of these translations of their lives. Ronald Pepin translated the *Life of Stephen of Obazine*, and Hugh Feiss translated the *Life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu* and the *Tripartite Life*. Hugh Feiss wrote the introduction to the *Life of Stephen of Obazine*; Hugh Feiss and Maureen O'Brien wrote the introductions to the *Life of Robert of Chaise-Dieu* and the *Tripartite Life*. All three have read the entire work and made suggestions that have been incorporated into the translations and introductions. Maureen O'Brien was instrumental in securing some of the sources. She did the final authorial editing before the manuscript was submitted to Fr. Mark Scott, OCSO, the editorial director of Cistercian Publications, who kindly guided us during the final stages of our work. Dr. E. Rozanne Elder originally commissioned the translations, and she also did some editorial work on the manuscript. Our thanks to both Dr. Elder and Fr. Mark.



## Abbreviations

- AA SS            *Acta sanctorum*, ed. Ioannes Bollandus, et. al. Antwerp, Bruxelles, Paris, 1643–1894.
- AA SS OSB        *Acta Sanctorum Ordinis S. Benedicti*, ed. Lucas d’Achery et Iohannes Mabillon, 9 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Venice, 1733–1740.
- Abbaye*            Bernadette Barrière, *L’abbaye cistercienne d’Obazine en bas-limousin: Les origins–le patrimoine*. Tulle, 1977.
- Berman            Constance H. Berman, *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe: Sisters and Patrons of the Cistercian Reform*. TEAMS. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002.
- Cartulaire        *Le cartulaire de l’abbaye cistercienne d’Obazine (xii<sup>e</sup>–xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, ed. Bernadette Barrière, Publications de l’Institut d’Études du Massif Central, 33. Clermont-Ferrand: Université de Clermont-Ferrand II, 1989.
- CS                Cistercian Studies Series
- CSEL             Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
- Degl’Innocenti    Marbodo di Rennes, *Vita beati Roberti*, ed. Antonella Degl’Innocenti. Florence: Giuti, 1995.
- Dial.*             Gregoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, 3 vols., ed. A. de Vogüé, SCh 251, 260, 265. Paris: Cerf, 1978–1980.
- Gaussin          Pierre-Roger Gaussin, *L’abbaye de la Chaise-Dieu (1043–1518)*. Paris: Editions Cujas, 1962.

- Genoux Simon Genoux, *Histoire de l'abbaye de la Chaise-Dieu*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS latin 12818.
- Jaffé *Registra pontificum romanorum*, ed. Philipp Jaffé. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1956.
- Liber* Bernard of La Chaise-Dieu, *Liber Tripartitus de miraculis sancti Roberti*, in AA SS OSB, tom. IX, 213–231.
- Kardong Terrence G. Kardong, translator. *Benedict's Rule*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996.
- PG J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, 162 volumes, Paris, 1857–1866.
- PL J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, 221 volumes, Paris, 1844–1864.
- O'Brien Maureen M. O'Brien, *Far From the Heart: The Social, Political, and Ecclesiastical Milieu of the Early Abbots of La Chaise-Dieu, 1052–1184*. Ph.D. diss., Western Michigan University, 2006.
- RB *Rule of Saint Benedict*.
- SCh Sources chrétiennes series. Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- Vie* *Vie de Saint Étienne d'Obazine*, ed. Michel Aubrun, Publications de l'Institut d'Études du Massif Central, 6. Clermont-Ferrand: Institut d'Études du Massif Central, 1970.







*The Life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu*

by

Marbod of Rennes



## Introduction to *The Life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu*

**F**OUNDED IN 1043 by the Auvergnate noble Robert of Turlande, La Chaise-Dieu was declared ‘the mirror of monastic perfection in our own times and an example,’<sup>1</sup> by Pope Lucius II in 1144. Pope Lucius was not the first pontiff to recognize this abbey’s preeminence. Robert and his successors had all cultivated a close rapport with the bishops of Rome. During the abbacy of Seguin of Escotay (1078–1094), fourth abbot of La Chaise-Dieu, it became one of the foremost monastic centers of its time. This position was bolstered on 27 March, 1080, when Gregory VII issued a bull<sup>2</sup> that confirmed, among other privileges, the free possession of all the monastery’s lawful goods and wealth and, in case of disputes, the right of appeal directly to the Holy See. In short, La Chaise-Dieu enjoyed privileges equal to those of the Burgundian abbey of Cluny. From that time onwards, the popes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries considered the Casadéen abbey a center of reform and so entrusted to its control other monasteries and priories. Little by little, with the increase of donations and with the general expansion of La Chaise-Dieu, the original standards of austerity and poverty declined and a powerful organization emerged.

Abbot Seguin, arguably the real founder of the Casadéen congregation, recognized what had happened and realized that he had to act to protect his community’s interests. He was torn, however, because he also realized that his community was moving away from

1. Bull of Lucius II, dated 22 May 1144; *Gallia Christiana*, 2:334.

2. *Monumenta pontificia Arvernicae*, ed. Chaix de Lavarene (Clermont-Ferrand, 1880) doc. XXVIII, 50–53.

its founder's ideals. Two possible courses of action were open to him: retreat or expansion. Abbot Seguin chose expansion. Despite the decline of the ideal of poverty, the monks strove to maintain a rigorous standard of asceticism and contemplation while at the same time expanding their congregation.

With the rapid success of Seguin's strategy and the expansion of La Chaise-Dieu, it was perhaps inevitable that the monks should start to draw some criticism of Robert's aim to combine contemplation with active service to those outside the monastery. Seguin was resolute in his desire to protect Robert's memory and to reaffirm the authentic monastic spirit of Robert's synthesis of contemplation with the practice of active charity. He evidently decided that the formulation of his monastery's defense required the assistance of a professional. Seguin sought out Marbod of Rennes, a professor of rhetoric, and commissioned a new *Life* of Robert. Behind his request was the desire not only to reassert the sanctity of the abbot-founder, but also to defend his memory. Marbod accepted the task and wrote Robert's *Life* in two books; over half of the second book was devoted to defending the saint.

### **The Author and His Book**

#### *Marbod of Rennes*<sup>3</sup>

Marbod of Rennes (c. 1035–1123) was an important writer in his time. Born at Angers, he studied at the cathedral school there under Rainald (d. 1075), who was a student of Fulbert of Chartres (ca. 960–1028), an outstanding teacher and bishop. Around 1069, Marbod became master and chancellor, and later archdeacon, of Angers. In 1096 he was named bishop of Rennes. By then he was already a well-known author who had written a book on rhetoric, a lapidary, sacred and secular poetry, and some hagiographical works. He was thus a prolific and versatile writer. After his appointment as bishop, he continued to write, penning *The Book of Ten Chap-*

3. Much of what follows about Marbod is from Marbodo di Rennes, *Vita beati Roberti*, Antonella Degl'Innocenti, ed. (Florence: Giunti, 1995) vii–xxiii.

ters, letters, hagiography, and poetry.<sup>4</sup> His poetic themes include female beauty, love, and nature. In *The Book of Ten Chapters*, he is a moralist, inculcating serene and measured contempt of the world. Somewhat ashamed of some of his youthful writings, he now opts for more dignified meters and content. His reflections make use of pagan moralists who, while congruent with Christianity, are not Christian.

Marbod had been a bishop for almost thirty years when, in his late eighties, he retired to the monastery of Saint-Aubin where he died on 11 September 1123. A few of the letters that Marbod wrote while he was a bishop have survived. These include a letter of counsel to a monk named Agenorid, one to Vitalis of Savigny<sup>5</sup> recommending to him a young woman who wished to consecrate herself to God, and three letters to hermits, of which one is addressed to Robert of Arbrissel, the founder of the monastery and order of Fontevrault, and the other two to Ingilgerius, a disciple of Robert of Arbrissel.<sup>6</sup>

4. Most of the works of Marbod are found in PL 171: 1465–1780. Modern editions include Marbodi, *Liber decem capitulorum*, ed. R. Leotta (Rome, 1984); Marbode of Rennes, *De lapidibus*, ed. J. M. Riddle, tr. C. W. King (Wiesbaden, 1977); A. Degl'Innocenti, *L'opera agiografica di Maboda di Rennes* (Spoleto: Biblioteca di Medioevo Latino, 1990); Marbodi Redonensis Episcopi *Libellus de Ornamentis Verborum*, ed. William Carey (<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/marbodus.html>).

5. Vitalis of Savigny was born in Tierceville (Normandy) about 1050/1060. He came from a family of modest means but was well educated. After his ordination to the priesthood, he became chaplain to Count Robert of Mortain. He abandoned his ecclesiastical career in 1095 and became a hermit in the border region between Normandy, Maine, and Brittany, where Robert of Arbrissel, Raoul of la Futaie, and Bernard of Tiron had also gone. Vitalis became the leader of a group of disciples and also travelled about preaching. After seventeen years of this life of solitude and preaching, in 1112/13 he founded the monastery of Savigny, which lay in the same region, adjoining the dioceses of Avranches, Le Mans, and Rennes. He served as abbot of Savigny for the last years of his life. Under his successor, Geoffrey (1122–1138), the congregation expanded. When, in 1147, it was incorporated into the Cistercians, the order had thirty-one abbeys, including more than a dozen in the British Isles, where King Stephen (who had been count of Mortain) was an important patron.

6. Robert of Arbrissel (c. 1045–1116) was born in the diocese of Rennes and educated in Paris. He became an advisor to Bishop Sylvester of Rennes. After Sylvester's death, Robert went to Angers for more schooling. Shortly after that, a conversion led him to the forest of Craon, where he founded a community of

In these last three letters Marbod criticizes three aspects of Robert's community: they accept women into their company (by so doing, Robert has forfeited his status as canon, his stability of place, and his pastoral authority over the brothers); although he is a canon and a priest, he dresses in rough clothes; and, finally, his sermons not only criticize the faults of the laity but also condemn those of the clergy, and so encourage clergy to abandon their posts to follow him. Marbod sees in Robert of Arbrissel a threat to the existing order of the Church. He calls on him to return to a more moderate, less idiosyncratic way of life. In his letters to Ingilgerius, Marbod criticizes the latter's community because it questions the validity of sacraments administered by unworthy priests and because they do not have a proper understanding of the Church's hierarchy. Marbod may not have been adverse to church reform, but his enthusiasm for it was certainly restrained.

While he was still at Angers, Marbod had written a *Life* of a local saint, the bishop Licinius, a contemporary of St. Gregory the Great (d. 604). He was, likewise, probably still in Angers when he wrote his five hagiographical poems. They praise Maurice and his companions in the Theban legion, who were martyred at Martigny near the Lake Geneva about 287; Lawrence, the deacon of Rome, who was martyred about 258; Felix and Adauctus, who were martyred under Diocletian; Thais, a Christian who became a prostitute and then converted at the urging of St. Paphnutius; and Maurilius, an early bishop of Angers. The subjects of his other prose lives are Magnobod, another bishop of Angers, the canon Walter of

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regular canons. He left there to become a travelling preacher of conversion. His extreme asceticism and spirited preaching won many men and women over to him as followers. At Angers in 1096, he received a preaching mandate from Pope Urban II, who asked him, however, to moderate the tone of his preaching. In 1098 he settled his followers in Fontevrault in a forested area on the borders of the dioceses of Poitiers, Angers, and Tour. He established there two enclosures, one for men and one for women. He considered himself *magister*, not abbot. He turned over the leadership of the community to two noble widows, Hersende de Montsoreau, who was prioress, and Petronilla de Chemille, who was her assistant and successor. He continued his wandering life and founded more communities, also led by women. For the sources for the study of his life and work see, J. Dalarun, et. al., *The Two Lives of Robert of Arbrissel, Founder of Fontevrault. Legends, Writings, and Testimonies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

Lesterps,<sup>7</sup> and the subject of our study, Robert of La Chaise-Dieu. The last two lives were requested by the communities that each of them founded.

Marbod was not a particularly original hagiographer. He used and elaborated the hagiographical tradition and existing sources about the saints he wrote about. His five hagiographical poems were all based on pre-existing prose works. He seldom abbreviated; instead, he amplified his sources by adding introductions and dialogues. In his introductions, he said that in reworking the existing sources, he wished to eliminate prolixity and obscurity in favor of brevity and simplicity. The clergy of his area seem to have preferred to refurbish the cult of early saints rather than to promote the holiness of near-contemporaries.<sup>8</sup> Walter of Lesterps and Robert of La Chaise-Dieu were the only two recent saints Marbod wrote about.

### *The Life of Blessed Robert, Abbot*<sup>9</sup>

Marbod's most important hagiographical work is his *Life of Blessed Robert, Abbot*. The first of its two books contains a prologue and an account of the life of the saint, which concludes with some miracles worked by Robert when he was still alive. The second book, written some time after the first, includes a prologue, a spirited defense of Robert's interweaving of action and contemplation, and then stories of the miracles he worked after his death. In writing his life of Robert, Marbod made use of a life of the saint no longer extant, whose author is identified in Bernard of La Chaise-Dieu's *The Tripartite Life of Robert, Abbot of La Chaise-Dieu* (1160) as Gerald of Laveine.<sup>10</sup>

7. Walter of Lesterps died in 1070. Marbod's life of Walter can be found in PL 171.1565–1576 and *Acta Sanctorum*, May 11, 2:701–06 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 699–704).

8. As will be seen below, similar sentiments created resistance to *The Life of Saint Stephen of Obazine*. The anonymous author of that life lamented that either because there were fewer saints or fewer authors not many saints' lives were being written at his time. He thought that people tended to prefer older lives of saints because they did not like the style of contemporary works or were suspicious about their purposes and veracity.

9. Degl'Innocenti, xxiii–lxiv.

10. Bernard of La Chaise-Dieu, *Liber tripartitus de miraculis sancti Roberti* in AA SS OSB, vol. 9:213–31.

When Robert died in 1067, Marbod was thirty-two years old and about to become master of the school of Angers. It seems unlikely that he would have had an opportunity to meet the subject of his later biography. It should not be surprising, however, that by 1096 he found Robert's life appealing; he would have appreciated Robert of La Chaise-Dieu's discretion and stability compared to Robert of Arbrissel's unruliness and rootlessness. There was a charisma about Robert of Turlande—better known as Robert of La Chaise-Dieu—that resonated with Marbod. In Book One of his *Vita Roberti*, Marbod excelled at giving meaning to Robert's raw experiences: he was educated by the canons of Saint-Julien of Brioude and served as a zealous and beloved priest; he then retired with two companions to a solitary place. There he dedicated himself to prayer, the poor, and teaching. Disciples flocked to the small community and Robert gathered them into a monastery under the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. This monastery, where he died in 1067, became the center of a network of monastic communities. Marbod's endeavor in the first book was one of inspiration, not scrutiny.

The second book of Marbod's *Vita Roberti* is dedicated to *Seguinus*, Seguin of Escotay, who was abbot of La Chaise-Dieu from 1078–1094. His abbacy ended two years before Marbod became a bishop. In Book Two Marbod defends Robert at length against detractors who criticized Robert for forsaking the higher, contemplative life of a hermit to devote himself to the active life of ministry to others outside the cloister, thereby—in their opinion—returning from a higher state to a lower state and so reversing the proper order. We are not told the identity of Robert's detractors. Sometimes Marbod refers to them in the plural; at other times he argues against a singular adversary. Marbod seems to enjoy the controversy; it offers him an occasion to use his rhetorical gifts. His passionate language surrounds the controversy with an aura of importance that it may not in fact have had. Nevertheless, Marbod had some reason to abandon his use of earlier sources and to devote some pages to writing this defense. What was at stake?<sup>11</sup>

Evagrius of Pontus (345–399), followed by John Cassian (c. 360–c. 435) who carried his ideas to the West, distinguished between two

11. In what follows, we somewhat modify Degl'Innocenti, xxvi–xxxviii.



successive stages in the life of the monk.<sup>12</sup> In the first stage, that of the practical or active life (*bios praktikos*; *vita activa*), the monk worked to achieve *apatheia* or purity of heart by quieting his mind and emotions. Crucial to the active life was the discernment of spirits or discretion, by which one identified good and bad impulses and developed tools to resist and tame the bad ones. Having once achieved inner peace, the monk could then devote himself to the contemplation of God. By the time of Saint Benedict (c. 480–550), who was heir to the traditions of eastern monasticism and recommended the works of Cassian,<sup>13</sup> discretion meant not just the capacity to discriminate wisely, but also the result of that capacity, moderation.<sup>14</sup> The *Rule of Saint Benedict* may, however, manifest the impress of the early distinction between the practical and contemplative lives when it provides for those who wish and are ready for a more advanced form of life to pass from the community governed by his ‘little rule for beginners’ to the single combat of the eremitical life.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, according to the *Life* of Saint Benedict in Book Two of the *Dialogues* attributed to Gregory the Great, Benedict began as a hermit, and then after several unsuccessful attempts, interspersed with times of solitude, founded a community. Over the next few centuries, the active and contemplative ‘lives’ became more specifically associated in western monasticism with the two-fold command of love of God and love of neighbor. The active life came to mean service of neighbor in activities like preaching, pastoring, and the corporal works of mercy. The contemplative life was the life of prayer, including not just solitary contemplation but also, and principally, liturgical prayer. Both distinctions—the earlier one between an ascetical life aimed at self-mastery and a

12. See, for example, Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters On Prayers*, translated by John Eudes Bamberger, CS 4 (Spencer-Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981); and Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 149–152; John Cassian, *Conferences*, 1.1–10, translated by Boniface Ramsey, *Ancient Christian Writers 57* (New York: Paulist, 1997) 41–48; McGinn, *Foundations*, 219–221.

13. RB 73: 5; Kardong, 603, 608, 612–614.

14. RB 64: 18–19, Kardong, 526–527, 536. See also RB 25: 5; 31: 12; 41: 5, 9; 48: 9; Kardong, 263–264, 333, 335, 389.

15. RB 1: 3–5.

contemplative concentration on God, and the later one between works of service and ministry to others on the one hand and praise and contemplation of God on the other—were and are somewhat artificial. The desert monks who went to uninhabited places to pray were famous for their hospitality.<sup>16</sup> They were sought out as spiritual guides, just as Cassian had sought Evagrius.<sup>17</sup> Gregory the Great, a very major exponent of the second distinction, which interprets the active life as service to others, taught that the life of every Christian necessarily combines action and contemplation. His *Pastoral Rule*<sup>18</sup> influenced Marbod's defense of Robert.<sup>19</sup>

Carolingian monasteries were centers of culture and administration as well as of prayer. Nevertheless, there was a tendency then, as there is still today, to harden the distinction between the 'active life' of service and the call to contemplative prayer. Religious groups used the distinction to identify themselves and distinguish their way of life from other ways. It was widely assumed that contemplation was a higher form of endeavor than the works of the active life, so various groups identified themselves as 'contemplative' in contrast to other groups whom they regarded as more 'active'. There were practical consequences. For one thing, there was prestige attached to being more contemplative. Secondly, there arose a principle that a person could transfer from a lower (more active) state of life to a higher (more contemplative) state. In the burgeoning diversity of forms of monastic life in eleventh and twelfth centuries, this principle had frequent applications, as Christians seeking, as Benedict had, for a setting suited to their aspirations attempted to move from one form of religious life to another.

Many of the founders of new religious communities during the reformation and renaissance of the eleventh and twelfth centuries began their quest for God as hermits. Like Robert and his compan-

16. Lucien Regnault, *The Day-to-Day Life of the Desert Fathers in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's, 1999) 139–149; William Harmless, *Desert Christians* (New York: Oxford, 2004) 176–177, 204–205, 280–281; Kardong, 431–432.

17. Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford, 1998) 11–12.

18. St. Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*, tr. Henry Davis (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1950); see especially 1. 5, 29–31.

19. Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism* (New York: Dutton, 1924) 213–241.

ions, and like Stephen of Obazine, they frequently combined their lives of solitude with service to the poor and religious instruction for their neighbors. Some, like Robert of Arbrissel, were not so much dwellers in solitude as wandering preachers with no place to lay their heads. These solitaries, like the desert monks of old and like Saint Benedict of the *Dialogues*, often attracted disciples who wished to live with them. Marbod tells us that, after being prevented from going to Cluny (1.6.2–6), Robert of La Chaise-Dieu deliberately sought two companions to withdraw with him into solitude so that there, committed to God alone, they could follow the canonical hours of the Divine Office (1.6.7–8). When others subsequently joined them, Robert of La Chaise-Dieu, like other charismatic hermits, needed to organize his disciples into a community. He elected to adopt the *Rule of Saint Benedict* and took all the steps necessary to become a community recognized by the local bishop and later by the pope.

Marbod does not tell us who Robert's critics were. Antontella degl'Innocenti, who skilfully edited Marbod's *Life of Robert*, thinks the critics may have been monks of the Cluniac observance. Cluny, founded in 910, was a dominant force in eleventh-century monasticism, and there were Cluniac monasteries in the Auvergne, the area of La Chaise-Dieu. The Cluniac observance gave pride of place to liturgical prayer, which, by their reckoning, was an essential part of the contemplative life. In fact, their monasteries were often centers of charitable activities, and many Cluniacs lived as hermits or in small cells.<sup>20</sup> Some of Robert's Cluniac neighbors may, however, have resented his new version of monastic life which was different from their own and was drawing off both recruits and donations. By the time of Seguin's abbacy, as we have seen, La Chaise-Dieu was an important monastic center with the same papal privileges as Cluny itself and a growing congregation of affiliated monasteries. Perhaps, too, the austere living of Robert's community was

20. Ivan Gobry, *L'Europa di Cluny*, tr. Annamaria Sanfelice di Monteforte (Roma: Città Nuova, 1999) 148, 171, 436; Edwin Mullins, *Cluny: In Search of God's Lost Empire* (New York: Blue Bridge, 2006) 140–141; Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (New York: Oxford, 1989) 68–69; Irven M. Resnick, "Peter Damian on Cluny, Liturgy and Penance," *Journal of Religious History* 15 (1988): 61–75.

seen as a reproach to the power and affluence of the Cluniacs. Another possibility is that the critics were canons who resented Robert's going over to the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Their complaint would be that Robert had been a canon, then he became a hermit because he wanted to live for God alone, but now he was a monk doing many of the pastoral and charitable activities he had done as a canon, while claiming to be leading the contemplative life. The opponents' actual criticisms may have been fairly muted without the rhetorical fireworks that Marbod puts in their mouths. Nevertheless, Seguin and the monks of La Chaise-Dieu—who found themselves in the difficult position of administering an order after the initial passion of its founder had worn off—may have felt they needed answering.

That Marbod was no champion of radical innovation in monasticism is evident from his letters to Robert of Arbrissel and Ingilgerius. Nevertheless, by the time Marbod wrote his *Life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu*, Robert's foundation was an established, recognized, and stable community that Marbod could approve. Marbod's answer to those who criticized Robert for having embraced a contemplative life only to return to an active ministry moves the argument from the level of rigid, abstract distinctions. He argued that the love of neighbor that takes the form of active service when the opportunity that presents itself is not incompatible with the love of God. In fact, one cannot love God without loving one's neighbor. He cites many biblical examples (2.6.2). Jesus and the apostles alternated prayer and acts of service to others. Robert's choices did not therefore represent a new rule of holiness. He was following in the footsteps of the saints of old. Marbod thought that Robert of Arbrissel lacked discretion, the mother of the virtues.<sup>21</sup> Robert of La Chaise-Dieu, by contrast, manifested the discretion that the *Rule of Saint Benedict* required of the abbot and adapted himself to the needs of each of his monks (1.5.4–5). In his discretion, he was like the saints of old (2.6.2). His discretion charted a course embracing both action and contemplation (2.5.9).

21. *Ep* 6; PL 171.1486.

*Marbod as Author*

Marbod was a former teacher and the author of a book on rhetoric. In the *Life of Robert* he employs many literary commonplaces, especially in the dedications at the beginning of both books. The *Life* has a good many biblical allusions, though Marbod does not quote the Scriptures often. There are a few allusions to classical authors, but they are not frequent or emphasized. He cites the *Mathesis* of Firmicius Maternus,<sup>22</sup> and most of Chapter Six of Book Two parallels Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Rule*, II.5. Marbod does not emphasize the miraculous in Book One; it contains only seven miracles. He recognizes that the faith of the simple (1.20.1) needs to be bolstered by exterior signs (1.19.2). Even wicked people can perform miracles, but only saints achieve constancy or perseverance (1.20.2). He has Robert deliver to his first followers a lengthy exhortation on perseverance, and in subsequent chapters shows how Robert helped them grow in constancy.

The apologetic nature of Book 2 requires Marbod to devote more space to miracles. In their telling, he shows his skills as a storyteller. In a series of short sketches he indicates where the petitioners were from, what the nature of their disease was, the pain it caused the sufferers and their families and friends, and why their recourse to Robert's tomb. Then Marbod tells of their climactic cure and their joy at the favor granted. In each miracle the faith of the petitioners and the merits of Robert combine to bring exorcism and healing.

Marbod, a churchman, emphasized Robert's insertion into the life and structure of the Church. Robert was educated by a community of canons in Brioude and grew up to be a canon and priest there (1.3.1). He was, in fact, a model priest. He went to Rome to seek divine help in discerning God's will for him (1.6.9). He sought an abandoned parochial church as his new home precisely in order to avoid conflicts with existing churches (1.7.5). Robert and his companions obtained the site lawfully from two brothers, both of them men of the church, one an abbot, the other a canon (1.11.2).

22. About 335, Julius Firmicius Maternus wrote a handbook on astrology called the *Mathesis*. He converted to Christianity a decade later and wrote *De errore profanarum religionum*.

Before building a monastery he obtained the permission of Bishop Rencon of Clermont (1.17.5) and then obtained the approval of Henry I of France and Pope Leo IX (1.17.1–3). He became the first abbot of La Chaise-Dieu with the blessing of the bishop (2.18.4). At the end of Book Two, the archbishop of the province of Embrun<sup>23</sup> endorses the miracles worked at Robert's tomb (2.17).

If Robert is shown as being on good terms with the hierarchy of the Church on earth, he is also devoted to the saints in heaven. Robert's veneration of Mary is referred to several times (1.7.6; 1.19.8; 2.9.2–7; 2.17.8). Devotion to the saints (of whom Robert now is one), their power, their protection, and their example are also recurrent themes (1.4.7; 1.10.8; 1.15.2, 6).

### *Robert of Turlande and La Chaise-Dieu in Context*

Since neither cartulary nor customary survives from La Chaise-Dieu, Marbod's *Life* is the primary source of information about Robert and the founding of La Chaise-Dieu. Here we will try to situate Marbod's story in a wider context of Robert's time, the eleventh-century, and his place, the Auvergne.

Robert lived at a time when Europe was expanding economically and demographically. However, the Auvergne where he was born and lived was remote from the control of any king or great lord. Political control there was in the hands of a powerful and fractious local aristocracy. To protect themselves and their flocks, bishops there convoked councils that promoted the 'Peace of God,' which sought to limit the frequency and damage of wars.<sup>24</sup> This was the setting for Marbod's story.

Marbod says that Robert was born into a noble family in the Upper Auvergne at the beginning of the eleventh-century. When he was about seven or eight years of age, his parents placed him in the care of the canons at Saint-Julien of Brioude. There, according to Marbod, Robert grew in devotion both to God and to the poor.

23. Lantelmus, who was archbishop in 1080.

24. *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000*, ed. Thomas Head and Richard Landes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

When he decided to go to Cluny to dedicate himself completely to God, the people at Brioude were devastated, so Robert returned there for a time. He then went on a pilgrimage to Rome to pray to the saints for guidance.

Robert subsequently decided to find a solitary place where he could live a regular, canonical life with several like-minded people. He was joined by Stephen, one of his father's former soldiers. Later, Stephen invited a former companion named Dalmatius to join them. Looking for a place where they might settle, Stephen set out to the shrine of Notre-Dame of Le Puy-en-Velay. On the way he found an abandoned church that suited their needs. There the three men settled in a small hut, where they divided up the chores. They ate moderately, and what they did not eat they gave to the poor. Robert preached to the local inhabitants. He drew additional followers from among soldiers and clergy. Then, around 1050, with the consent of Rencon, bishop of Clermont, they built a monastery which they called *Casa Dei* (House of God). They adopted the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, and their undertaking was confirmed by King Henry I of France and Pope Leo IX. According to Marbod, the community grew to three hundred members, and Robert restored almost fifty abandoned churches.

### *Robert's Family*

Marbod suggests that Robert was descended from the house of Aurillac. Gerald of Aurillac (855–909) was the premier saint of the region.<sup>25</sup> However, Marcellin Boudet, through detailed study of regional cartularies from Conches, Saint-Flour, Brioude, and Sauxillanges, determined that on his father's side Robert descended from the Turlande, who were lesser nobility in the Auvergne. The Turlande were benefactors of Conques and Saint-Flour. Robert's uncle was Odilo of Mercoeur (962–1049), who had been a canon at Brioude, and later became abbot of Cluny (994–1049). After Robert entered the canonical community at Brioude, Gerald II of

25. *St. Odo of Cluny. Being the Life of Odo of Cluny by John of Salerno and the Life of St. Gerald of Aurillac by St. Odo*, ed. Gerard Sitwell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958).

Turlande gave the community of Saint-Julien a farmhouse to help support his 'brother Robert'.<sup>26</sup>

That Robert initially chose to go to distant Cluny, rather than to Conches or Saint-Flour, with both of which his family had connections, may be explained by his uncle's position as abbot of the great Burgundian abbey. Whether Robert reached Cluny is not known. If he did, he may have found that the demanding liturgical life conflicted with his concern for the poor. In any case, neither Marbod nor Robert criticizes Cluny. Shortly afterward, Robert went on pilgrimage to Italy and may there have come into contact with hermits. In any case, it was to the eremitical life that Robert turned.

Stephen of Chaliers, and probably Dalmatius, Robert's other initial companion, had been in the service of Robert's father and brother. The land the three of them decided to settle on probably belonged to the castle of Beaumont; it was held by two brothers, Rostaing and Albert: the former was a canon of Notre-Dame of Le-Puy-en-Velay, and the latter, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Pierre-La-Tour.

At their hermitage, Robert and his companions followed a strict regimen of prayer, fasting, and work. However, Robert never forgot the needs of the poor. He was pulled simultaneously toward solitary prayer and toward helping those in need. Living among people in a backwoods of Christendom, Robert had to forego the strictly contemplative life for a state that was more natural for him, that of the monk-apostle.

In 1046, within six years of his pilgrimage to Rome, Robert began building a monastery. Between 1050 and his death on 17 April 1067, Robert worked tirelessly within the Massif Central, most notably in the diocese of Clermont, to restore old churches and to establish new ones. Many of these churches became small priories, usually with only a couple of monks who took care of one of more churches. Most of these new foundations, including a monastery for women,<sup>27</sup> were located in the high Livradois.

26. Marcellin Boudet, 'Saint Robert de Turland, fondateur de La Chaise-Dieu,' *Bulletin Historique et Scientifique de L'Auvergne* (1906) 68; *Cartulaire de Brioude*, ed. H. Doniol (1863) charter 67.

27. Raoul of Lugeac donated the church of Saint-Andrew of Comps to La Chaise-Dieu around 1050. There, sometime between 1052 and 1058, the wife and



Geoffroy, prior of Vigeois in the Limousin, wrote: 'In this century three men made themselves famous by their holiness: the first was Odilo, abbot of Cluny [Robert's uncle], the other Gautier of Lesterps [in the Limousin], and finally, Robert, who built La Chaise-Dieu.'<sup>28</sup> Robert may have had occasion to meet Geoffroy, because Robert visited the Limousin while establishing La Chaise-Dieu's most significant dependent house, Le Port-Dieu. This foundation was made possible by the donation of Raoul 'Passereau' whose benefactions also underlay the later priories of Chapelle-Saint-Robert in the diocese of Limoges and Saint-Christophe-Cambres in the diocese of Agen.<sup>29</sup> Other magnates supported Robert's foundations in and beyond the Massif Central. At the time of his death, the Casadéen network included seven major priories, six cells, and the monastery for women at Comps. As for smaller priories, there were twenty-seven in the Livradois, five in the remainder of the Auvergne, one in the Limousin, one in Agenais, one in Lyon, and one in Vivaris.<sup>30</sup>

The concentration of the abbey's expansion in the Livradois is not surprising. This was a marginalized area untouched by the economic and political growth, and the stability taking root in the north. There were no great lords in the area. With the help of his uncle, Bishop Rencon, Robert networked well with the secular and ecclesiastical aristocracy of the area. To this area Robert and his monks brought a spiritual renewal through their devotion to the life of prayer, and they devoted themselves not just to prayer, but also to the service of the poor.

## Conclusion

Robert of La Chaise-Dieu remains a significant figure in the history of the monastic and ecclesiastical renewal of the eleventh

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daughter of Gausbert of Breuil entered the community, and Robert established a monastery for women. *Gallia Christiana*, II, Instr. col. 107.

28. Geoffroy de Vigeois, *Chronicon Lemovicense*, in P. Labbe, *Nova bibliotheca manuscriptorum librorum*, vol. 2 (1657) 284.

29. *AA SS* April 3:330. Raoul wrote the life of Adelelmus, after the former abbot of La Chaise-Dieu's death in 1097 (*AA SS* January 3:671).

30. Gaussin, *L'Abbaye*, 115.

century, foremost as the founder of La Chaise-Dieu, but also as a reformer who attempted to integrate the active life (love of neighbor) and the contemplative life (love of God). For the monks of La Chaise-Dieu, some thirty years had passed since their founder's death, and his memory and spiritual legacy were coming under attack just as the abbey was beginning to experience remarkable success. The monks of La Chaise-Dieu were resolute in their desire to protect their founder's memory and to reaffirm the viability of their monastery's spiritual reforms, namely the reconciliation of the active life with the contemplative through the practice of charity. To do this, the monks commissioned Marbod of Rennes to write a new *Vita* for the abbey's founder. The criticisms leveled against Robert's spiritual ideals and choices struck at the core of issues already on Marbod's mind. For Marbod, monastic reform had to be tempered by discretion and stability, both of which he deemed lacking in Robert of Arbrissel, while Robert of La Chaise-Dieu's foundation had become a renowned and stable community on behalf of which the master rhetorician could mount an enthusiastic defense.

## *The Life of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu*

### **Prologue to the Life of the Blessed Abbot Robert**

(1) With the help of God, we are going to try to narrate simply and briefly the life of Blessed Robert which, we think, one of his disciples told truthfully but in a difficult and wordy style.<sup>1</sup> A brief telling will ward off fatigue and a simple style will allow for easy understanding. We do this not because we disdain that author's skill, but because we hold in highest esteem the religion and authority of those who had good reason to enjoin this undertaking.<sup>2</sup>

(2) Because the deeds of the saints are put in written form in order to move all readers or hearers to imitate them, the writer must be especially careful that, in so far as possible, what aims at the utility of all exceeds the capacity of none. (3) Otherwise, the whole undertaking will fall short of its proper aim, if those to whom the beauty of the material is inviting are excluded by the useless difficulty of the text, and those who do have access to the text are tired out by excess wordiness. (4) For this reason there is no point to using unusual or foreign language or to extending the discourse with various applications. (5) Nor should one be afraid that the poverty of the style will swallow the richness of the subject matter. Rather, it is to be hoped that in such a noble cause, after every

1. Marbod is referring to a now-lost life of Robert by Gerald of Laveine, who was Robert's disciple and assistant. Bernard of La Chaise-Dieu, who in 1160 wrote *The Tripartite Life of Robert, Abbot of La Chaise-Dieu* (*Liber tripartitus de miraculis s. Roberti*), says there that after writing his life of Robert, Gerald went to Rome and informed the pope of Robert's deeds and holiness. Bernard also reports that the pope then granted the monasteries of the order of La Chaise-Dieu the right to celebrate the day of Robert's death as a solemn feast.

2. Marbod is evidently referring to the monks of La Chaise-Dieu. The reference to 'those who enjoin this undertaking,' like the preceding references to *brevitas* and *simplicitas* and other elements in the rest of this prologue and in the prologue to Book 2 (2.1), are literary devices common in medieval Latin literature.

veil has been removed, the dignity of the subject will be its own safeguard, and the limitations of the poor language will be enriched by the greatness of the material. (6) So, we solicit both the good will and the attention of the reader, so that our reward will be all the greater, when with God's help our efforts please so many more. (7) It will benefit those whom it pleases, but it will also please us very much that it benefits them. Thus, our effort becomes the cause of another's progress, and the progress of another the cause of our reward. (8) We will try in every way with all our strength to please, taking care, as we said, to be brief, not in order to remove anything necessary, but to avoid what is unnecessary; taking care to be accessible, not to diminish the dignity of the material, but to promote ease in understanding. (9) If the careful style displeases readers a little, let them at least be pleased by the eager devotion of the writer, the truth of the account, the fresh recollection of the saint's holiness. (10) For while in any circumstance the recollection of deeds done well is pleasing to the faithful, the hearer is deeply moved when contemporary evidence, placed before his eyes, removes suspicion of falsity. Now, because enough has been said about this, let us come to the story.

### **The Life of Blessed Robert, Confessor of Christ and Abbot**

2. (1) Robert was born a free person of Christian parents in the Auvergne. His mother was Ringarde, and his father, Gerald, who, it is thought, was descended from the line of Blessed Gerald of Aurillac.<sup>3</sup> (2) From his earliest days, certain signs showed that he would be a servant of God. It seems right to insert them in this story. (3) When his mother was pregnant with him, she went toward a certain town<sup>4</sup> because she felt his birth was imminent. By God's providence she had to give birth in a solitary place. (4) The child was going to be a lover of solitude. He was going to think that this life, into which he was then born, is a road, not a homeland. (5) He

3. Marbod seems to be mistaken in thinking that Robert was a descendant of Gerald of Aurillac.

4. An eighteenth-century historian of La Chaise-Dieu identified the town as Reilhac, which was about 30 kilometers south of Brioude.

was taken from there with his mother to the town. As was customary, he was given to a certain woman to be nursed. But when she offered him her breast, he refused to taste, not because he did not like the smell of the milk, but because he felt distaste for the sin of the nurse. (6) This was clear immediately when he happily sucked the breasts of his mother, but when the other woman's breast was offered again to tempt him, he rejected it. (7) That woman was a prostitute, and so when he refused her milk he condemned her sin. He did not know what he was condemning, but the power of God works even in those who are unaware.

3. (1) Divine mercy grew with the infant.<sup>5</sup> When he had grown to be a boy he was sent for instruction to the village of Brioude to the church of the martyr Julian. There he became a cleric and found admittance among the canons. Then as time went on, he proceeded through the ecclesiastical orders to the priesthood. (2) Thus, he spent his youth in such a way that he safely evaded the evils with which that tender age is generally affected through a person's own wickedness or someone else's. From the beginning he meditated on innocence and filled the pure vessel<sup>6</sup> of his heart with the fresh perfume of virtues. Forestalled by God's sweet blessings,<sup>7</sup> he could admit no bitter vices. (3) Already full of faith<sup>8</sup> in eternal realities and despising all temporal things, he put all his hope in the Lord.<sup>9</sup> Although he was still small, he loved the Lord with no small affection. He often spent whole nights weeping and keeping vigil in church. Those who found him were surprised that the watchmen were unaware of him. (4) He prayed and read very often, so that alternately he commended God to himself and himself to God.<sup>10</sup> (5) He pursued humility and obedience, so that he dealt with men in such a way that he incurred no offense against God. (6) He attended the poor and afflicted with heartfelt mercy. He

5. This phrase is an adaptation of Jb 31:18: 'for from my infancy, mercy grew with me. . . .'

6. Prv 25:4.

7. Ps 20:4. (Psalms are cited according to the Vulgate numbering.)

8. Acts 6:5; 11:24.

9. Ps 72:28; 77:7.

10. On this theme see Jean Leclercq, "Etudes sur le vocabulaire monastique du moyen âge," *Studia Anselmiana* 48 (Rome: 1961): 131–32.

helped those whom he could and showed compassion to all. (7) More than once he touched and washed with his own hands<sup>11</sup> the bodies of the sick that were full of sores that filled others with repugnance. He calmly accepted exterior uncleanness while he kept his mind on interior gain. As a result, it was believed that by the loving touch of his hands illness could be banished.

4. (1) This boyhood was followed by a young adulthood, when he used his increased means and strength in the service of God. During that passionate time of life many people's chastity suffers enticing shipwrecks, as their minds are buffeted by the wind of new impulses. He wisely had anticipated this and imbibed such a love of chastity that no unclean thought could trouble his heart nurtured with virtue. (3) He added virtue to virtue and indefatigably constructed a tower<sup>12</sup> whose foundations he had established in his boyhood. (4) The trees that he had planted in his heart grew and bore fruit unto eternal life.<sup>13</sup> From day to day divine grace shone more clearly in him, and now many were moved by his word and example<sup>14</sup> to live better lives. (5) He fasted willingly and prayed, and as much as he could he distributed open-handedly to the poor. He built an almshouse in the village so that by ministering to the sick there he could exercise vigorously as if in a training gym for sanctity. (6) It is certain that after he had given everything to the poor, he often added his cape and cloak for them to use. He clearly saw Christ in the poor, and thinking little of his own nakedness, he strove to cover theirs. (7) In the same way, Martin once divided his cloak with a poor person and so deserved to see Christ covered with the same garment. Although I dare not compare Robert with Martin, I do not hesitate to compare the one event to the other.<sup>15</sup>

11. 1 Jn 1:1.

12. Is 5:2; Mk 12:1.

13. Mk 4:20.

14. 'Word' and 'example' are found conjoined at 1.10(3) and 1.18(7) also. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Docere verbo et exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*, Harvard Theological Studies 31 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979).

15. Supicius Severus, *Life of Saint Martin*, in *The Western Fathers*, F. R. Hoare, tr. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954) 14–15.

5. (1) Meanwhile, he exercised his priesthood vigorously. He attended the regular hours in the church and offered sacrifices to God frequently for the salvation of the Christian people. He embraced that whole people in magnanimous love as though they were a single individual. (2) He invited sinners to penitence, sometimes striking them with fear of punishments, and at other times presenting them with joyful rewards. He taught that no one, if he were contrite and genuinely converted, should despair of pardon. (3) Above all he promised the support of his prayers and in this way he kept winning over many. When his voice was silent, his life spoke, although when he spoke, he was silent about his life. For although he displayed the form of right living in himself, he did not in any way put himself on display. (4) His moral integrity was evident on his countenance, and his bearing and clothing bespoke the modesty of his mind. He was friendly to everyone, even though he offered to each the feeling proper to his or her state in life, age and manner of life. (5) With this discretion,<sup>16</sup> he prudently provided for the salvation of all, so that, as if nearer and more familiar to all, he might persuade them, since he had transformed the personalities of each individual into his own. Although he was ahead of all in the worthiness of his life, he wanted himself thought of as inferior to all. (6) In the midst of all this he was on fire with love of contemplation. He always wished to add better to good, and best to better. He had had a passing taste of how sweet the Lord is<sup>17</sup> and with every fiber of his heart he wished to occupy himself with God alone,<sup>18</sup> so that he might drink deeply from a sweetness he had only just tasted.

6. (1) Therefore, he decided to move to a new place and, having left everything, follow Christ. (2) Moved by its fame for holiness and discipline, he chose the monastery of Cluny. (3) He undertook the journey accompanied by only one companion, who shared his

16. Discretion was a very important idea in the monastic tradition. It was used with reference to 'discernment of spirits,' discernment between good and evil, and moderation, the outcome of such discernment. See A. Cabassut, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: 1937–1995) 3:1311–1330. Marbod uses the term again in 2.6(2).

17. Ps 33:9.

18. *Vacare soli Dei* was used to describe a life devoted to prayer, and hence the calling of a hermit.

journey, but not his plans. He did so because he feared that, as in fact happened, he would be restrained from what he was undertaking if he departed openly. (4) For who would want to lose one who had been a protector of all and had often supplied the needs of so many: (5) sight for the blind, a healthy foot for the lame, clothes for the naked, food for the hungry, a man and father for orphans and widows, an open door for the confined, a roof for pilgrims, medicine for the sick, burial for the dead?<sup>19</sup> (6) When it was learned that he was leaving secretly (his family, surprised that their lord was leaving alone and silently, had quickly disclosed the fact), everybody, concerned about the public well-being, immediately went after the fugitive, took hold of him, and led him back. (7) The holy man was embarrassed. He was not more sorry that his plan had been impeded than that it had been revealed. His mental distress made him sick. (8) When he had begun to get better, he understood that he had been recalled from the place he intended to go by the will of God, because he might be able to do more good elsewhere. So he experimented to see if he could achieve what he wanted among his own people. (9) But when no one of his acquaintances acceded to his salutary admonitions, he set out for Rome, irrevocably committed to his purpose. He wanted the intercession of the apostles asking God to grant him the counsel he desired. (10) What he wanted was this, that, removed from the company of people, he might be able to build a monastery in a solitary place, where professed to God alone, he could live the canonical life in the religious habit with two or three others. (11) Having returned from Rome, he awaited steadfast in faith for what he had asked.<sup>20</sup> He was delayed for a while, and I think that the delay increased his desire.

7. (1) Meanwhile, a soldier, who had been moved to compunction by God's inspiration, came to the man of God to seek his counsel about how, by worthy satisfaction, he could eliminate the burden of his sins, which was tormenting his conscience. There was nothing so arduous that he would not undergo it in order to recover the grace of God. (2) He received from the saint the advice to leave everything and transfer to the army of Christ. He told the saint that he would

19. This list of good works draws on Tb 1:20, Is 61:1 and Mt 25:35-36.

20. Jas 1:6.



do that most willingly, if he could do it with him. At that the man full of God<sup>21</sup> understood that this was the man destined by God to be his companion and the servant of his will.<sup>22</sup> (3) He was very happy and opened to him the whole of his secret desire. He promised to be his companion and made a pact with him. Then he sent the man away happy, giving him the task of seeking a place suitable for their enterprise and if possible admitting a third companion. (4) He indicated a suitable place would be a small, parochial church in an isolated place, even if deserted and abandoned, where they could acquire food by the labor of their hands or from the roots of plants. I think he wanted a parochial church, because if they built a new oratory in an unfamiliar place, they might seem to do injury to existing establishments. (5) It would not be right that what they aimed to acquire solely for the sake of heavenly reward be shadowed by any hint of earthly greed. (6) The soldier was now full of faith and perseverance. So that God's mercy might prosper his undertaking, he decided to go to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin at Le Puy.<sup>23</sup> He knew that nothing would be more helpful to him in attaining his petition than the intercession of Mary with her Son. (7) While he was still hurrying on his way there, God saw to it that he found what he sought, an old church surrounded by a vast solitude which fulfilled all his requirements.<sup>24</sup> (8) His holy desire had been heard before his prayers, and through the merits of the saint the desired effect preceded the servant's petition. (9) He continued on toward his destination, so that he could offer thanks instead of petitions. However, he also added petitions that by divine mercy God might complete what God had begun in them. He returned to his teacher and reported what he had done. He described the solitude of the

21. The expression 'man (full) of God' derives from the biblical books of Kings and was used of Saint Martin and Saint Benedict in the influential biographies of the two saints by Sulpicius Serverus and Gregory the Great respectively. Marbod uses it often of Robert in book 1.7(1), 8(4), 15(11), 16(1).

22. Later [1.11(4)] Marbod will identify this first disciple as Stephen.

23. Le Puy-en-Velay is located in the Auvergne about one hundred km from Clermont-Ferrand. There the cathedral of Notre-Dame possessed some relics of the Blessed Virgin and was a pilgrimage site.

24. This church, the site of the future monastery of La Chaise-Dieu, was located in the forest of Livradois near the headwaters of two streams, the Dore and the Senouire. It is about forty km from Brioude and Le Puy.

place and other inconveniences convenient for living austerely. The man of God was pleased. He gave thanks and urged the brother to accomplish his remaining tasks diligently and vigorously.

8. (1) One of their aims was still unfulfilled. They wished to find a third companion for their great undertaking. For a third person serves as a link of charity between two, and it seemed that united in this number they would more fittingly serve God, triune and one. (2) In a short time what was missing presented itself, as divine grace furthered the effort of the soldier. When he returned to his people and, it is said, thought about acquiring a companion, he made no effort to keep from his countenance the changed disposition of his mind. He was asked by a certain soldier who was an acquaintance of his why he seemed unusually preoccupied. He said: 'I would tell you if I knew you would faithfully keep the secret.' (3) The man quickly gave the assurance that was asked of him, and then listened to what he had asked to hear. While he was listening, he conceived a great love of virtue. Moved by the example of his comrade, he felt a great desire to be included in a project of such great perfection. (4) Then he asked with humble entreaties that he, a sinner, be introduced to the man of God and that he not be considered unworthy of sharing in their laudable undertaking. (5) He offered himself not as a colleague, but as a servant. He promised on his faith never to depart from the course that he had professed. Thus the first soldier, having gained a second, returned rejoicing with his companion to his teacher.

9. (1) Robert rejoiced over the spiritual success and commended to God in prayer the fruits of the seeds that he had sown.<sup>25</sup> He addressed the recruits to the divine army:<sup>26</sup> 'My sons, I am very happy with your eager devotion. Conscious of my own weakness, I wish to have you as comrades and supporters on the way of God, which He tells us is very narrow and difficult.'<sup>27</sup> (2) However, I know we should be very fearful lest we rashly enlist in this most demanding army, thinking only of the rewards. (3) What is praiseworthy is not

25. Mk 4:1–20.

26. Marbod favors the traditional metaphor which sees the monastic calling as service in the army of Christ: 1.9(2), 10(2), 11(8-14).

27. Mt 7:14.

to make a good beginning, but to finish. The former sometimes happens by impulse; the latter always happens because of virtue. For this reason, not to propose the highest summits is allowed because of human frailty, but to fail at what one has promised is condemnable and a diabolical transgression. (4) Keep a diligent watch, therefore, and again and again ponder interiorly, lest, while you strive for the summit of perfection, you become for yourselves the cause of greater damnation, which God forbid. As far as possible, think about all the good things you aim to do without, and their opposites, the many and great injuries to which you expose yourselves by taking leave of the world. Hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, sleepless watches, work, contempt, slander—whatever people flee, you seek. Be careful lest when these things come along you flee yourselves.’ (7) He said such things not to deter them from their salutary undertaking, but to forearm them against whatever was to come and so to make them strong enough to bear those things because they would be prepared for any kind of temptation.

10. (1) For their part, they were not budged from their proposal; rather they were all the more stirred by the words of the holy man. They promised, with the help of Christ, not to be broken by any adversities, nor to be moved by the recollection of any pleasures. (2) It sufficed for them that they had had enough experience of the difficult paths of sin, and they realized that they had worn themselves out to no purpose. Now, they wished to fight for Christ. One cannot serve him without a reward, since not to serve sin is itself a great reward. (3) Moreover, God had fully provided for their weakness and ignorance by giving them a teacher whose word could instruct them and whose example could strengthen them. (4) He knew how to suggest what should be done and to do the things suggested. So they were going to stay with him and serve him devoutly in all things. (5) In response, the holy man, attributing everything to God and nothing to himself, said: ‘God is able to make firm the wavering and instruct the ignorant. (6) In no way should those whom the supreme power protects fear the assaults of an opposing force. Without doubt God protects you who serve God, for God is accustomed to protect those who do not serve so that they may come to serve him. (7) So, if you have decided to cling firmly to God, you will have me as comrade and servant, who will,

I hope, be both useful and devoted. (8) Beware of the inconstancy of the human mind. Now, if it is not a burden, go to the church to beg God with the intercession of the martyr Julian<sup>28</sup> that he may provide whatever will be most useful.' They went into the church; they prostrated in prayer; and they returned more steadfast.

11. (1) He had examined their faith sufficiently, and the time had come to depart. Only this remained: that the place granted them by God would also be handed over by the earthly lords. (2) Robert took one of the two and went to Le Puy. There stayed two noble brothers. Both of them were canons, and one was an abbot. One's name was Albert; the other's was Rostagnus.<sup>29</sup> The abbot Albert was later a monk and disciple of the blessed man himself. (3) From them he easily obtained what he asked, for they necessarily knew of his reputation for sanctity because the places were close together. (4) When everything had been prepared in the way decided, on the appointed day he sought the hermitage with two disciples, of whom the first was called Stephen, the other Dalmatius.<sup>30</sup> (5) They found thorns and brambles, horror and solitude,<sup>31</sup> in short, a place lacking in all good things, except that it was good for them to lack all good things. (6) They believed that the further they were from men, the closer they were to God, and the more temporal goods they lacked, the more eternal goods they would receive. (7) The coarseness of their neighbors increased the difficulties of the place; the savagery of their behavior resembled that of wild beasts. They abused and threatened God's servants, whom they should have supported. They thought them mad to have begun, without resources, to live in a sterile place that they could not bear even if they had brought supplies with them. (8) It is no wonder that they who had undertaken

28. The church of Brioude was dedicated to St. Julian and contained his tomb. According to tradition, he was the tribune of a Roman legion that converted to the faith and took refuge at Brioude, where they were martyred in 304.

29. Rostagnus was a canon of Le Puy and Albert was abbot of Saint-Pierre-la-Tour.

30. According to the tradition at La Chaise-Dieu they arrived at the site on December 28, 1043.

31. See John Cassian, *Conferences* 24.2, E. Pichery, ed., *SCh* 64 (Paris: Cerf, 1959) 3:173; trans. Boniface Ramsey, *Conferences*, *Ancient Christian Writers* 57 (New York: Newman, 1997) 827.

a struggle against the devil were now attacked by his members. (9) I think that how many troubles they suffered and bore may be told better by silence than speaking. For silence can indicate much or all, when words express only a part. (10) However, they resisted by suffering adversities, and they conquered those attacking them by not fighting back. (11) The third fortified the minds of the other two, as a veteran in an army strengthens new recruits, teaching them that if they overcame the first attacks of the enemy, they would conquer later ones more easily. For, as fear grows in the conquered, so the confidence of the victor is increased. (12) Thus he not only made them victors in the present, but also made them more ready for future combat. (13) He told them that if later a more vehement temptation oppressed them, it would be all the more base if those who conquered in the first engagement fell in the second, for the battles they had experienced had made them more astute and their victories had made them stronger. (14) In this way the man expert in the arms of the spirit strengthened the less astute and weaker spirits of his comrades-in-arms. Like an artisan, he developed in them patience in toil by using the hope of later victories to win earlier battles and the memory of battles won to gain subsequent victories. (15) But he also instructed them from sacred authorities that ‘they should choose rather to be afflicted’ a little ‘with the people of God than to have the pleasure of temporal sin,’<sup>32</sup> for eternal damnation follows the latter, and eternal happiness the former. (16) So they kept their eyes on the reward, gazing on Jesus, the author and perfecter of the faith, who for the sake of the joy that lay ahead bore the cross, despising its shame.<sup>33</sup> (17) With these and similar measures he restored the sometimes flagging spirits of his companions, while he was not worn down by the common work nor his proper task of brotherly solicitude. After a short time, he had rendered them so constant and perfect, that they not only suffered all sorts of vexations happily, but also prayed for their persecutors.

12. (1) They made a little hut next to the church; it was of branches and leaves, I believe. They divided the household tasks among them, so that they worked with their hands to provide food, while he spent

32. Heb 11:25.

33. Heb 12:2.

his time in reading and prayers. (2) They labored by using their hands; he worked by genuflecting often. Their physical exertion produced sweat; his compunction of heart bathed him in tears. Their breaks from work restored them from fatigue; his reading refreshed him from languor. (3) What each did profited all, but what the third worked profited more than the other two. He brought God to them through teaching based on reading; he brought them to God through insistent prayer. Thus, since he sowed his spiritual seeds in them, it was not so great a matter whether he reaped their physical sowing.<sup>34</sup> (4) Meanwhile, in the oratory that they had restored, they offered common prayers at specified hours of the day and night. (5) They took the sparse and dry food together with thanksgiving; the greater part of it was kept for the poor and pilgrims,<sup>35</sup> in case any should turn aside to the place. (6) It was their custom that if they had anything, they gave it to anyone who asked.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the blessed man instructed his comrades to give increasingly and completely, without thinking about the morrow.<sup>37</sup>

13. (1) One day, when the brothers had gone out to work while he stayed alone in the church, where it was his custom to offer daily and unceasing tears and prayers, he heard the voice of someone asking alms. (2) He rose quickly, went to the hut, and gave all that he found. All that was there was a piece of bread that was left over from yesterday's supper. However, it would have sufficed for another meal for all three of them, because their eating was not much different from fasting. (3) When they came back from work, there was no food. Dalmatius bore this with ill grace. The holy man quickly checked his complaining by citing the words of Christ: 'do not be concerned about yourselves, saying what will we eat or what will we drink. For your Father knows that you need these things'.<sup>38</sup> (4) What happened immediately confirmed this saying, and a miracle revealed the doubting brother's lack of perfection. (5) Abbot Albert, who, as was noted above, had let them have the place, knew that the infertility of their

34. 1 Cor 9:11.

35. Lv 19:10; 23:22.

36. Lk 6:30.

37. Mt 6:34.

38. Lk 12:22 and Mt 6:31.

solitary place was an added burden upon the voluntary poverty of the holy men. He sent to them with his blessing three pack animals loaded with bread and wine. (6) The messengers presented two of them to the blessed man, but said that the third had died during the journey in a very peculiar way. It was no less strong than the other two, and previously it had not given any signs of weakness. (7) At this, the holy man gave thanks. Because his way of speaking was always plain and edifying, he turned to the brothers with a cheerful countenance and said: 'Let our beloved brother, Dalmatius, learn never again to hesitate in his faith in Christ. Our faith is recompensed by this present reward, while he finds that for his murmuring he has been inflicted with a small but clear punishment that is sufficient for his correction. (8) Let him know that his part has remained behind. It has not been taken away, but delayed. So that he will not waver in his faith, what is lacking will be restored. What a great thing is faith that even beasts of burden sense its absence!'

14. (1) Making frequent use of these and similar talks, he not only instructed his comrades, but also softened the earlier ferocity of the inhabitants, so that gradually eliminating their brutish habits, he was making men out of wild beasts. This was a greater miracle than if, as fables tell, human bodies were transformed into wild animals. (2) He raised up the eyes of their minds to recognize the creator of all. Enumerating the labors and dangers of earthly life, he easily convinced them that apart from the creator there is no peace for souls. (3) Thus, it happened that some soldiers abandoned their military life to become members in his holy band and dedicated themselves to serve Christ there in perpetuity. Moreover, some of the clerical order, instructed by his teaching, preferred the solitary and poor life to the comforts of their home. (4) As the number of his disciples grew so did their religious observance, which was elicited not only by the strict discipline, but also by the perfection of charity. (5) To what was required of all communally, each added something on his own.<sup>39</sup> There occurred in that poor little flock of Christ a marvelous exchange of holiness, since each added to his own virtues whatever he saw was imitable in another. (6) Since

39. RB 49.5-6; Kardong, 402.

poverty sufficed for those who for the sake of Christ had nothing, only lack of holiness bothered them. Crass love of money usually causes the greedy to place little value on whatever they have acquired, since they long only for the things they wish to acquire. Here, however, there was at work a most noble love of justice and, if one may speak that way, a religious avarice. (7) The flag-bearer and teacher of great perfection guided them in this quest, for he forgot the things that were left behind and stretched toward the things ahead, and so followed the way to his destination as the Apostle had done,<sup>40</sup> until he reached his goal. His disciples' pursuit was sustained by his example.

15. (1) The fame of their holy way of life moved their neighbors near and far to praise God. (2) To the merit of their lives was joined such a power of miracles that no one in those places doubted that the holy man had clearly merited from God the grace of healing.<sup>41</sup> To safeguard his humility, he so exercised his healing ministry for those who asked in faith that he attributed God's benefits not to his own merits but to those of the holy martyrs, Agricola and Vitalis, in whose church he was serving.<sup>42</sup> (3) However, the demons were not silent about his merits when they were driven from the bodies of possessed people at his command. (4) Through the faith of her friends, a demoniac woman, the wife of a peasant, was brought to him for healing. (5) She had barely entered the church where the saint was praying, when the enemy who possessed her rebelled and began to hurl threats and insults at him from his horrible sounding mouth: 'Robert, Robert of La Chaise-Dieu, why do you, a stranger, try to force us from our residence? (6) Instead we will shortly disturb you and yours, adding a fire to the unbearable torments that they suffer here. Nor will your colleagues, Agricola of Bologna, Symphorian of Autun, Marcel of Die, Privatus of Mende, and Julian of Brioude, whom you are preparing to enlist to fight against us, be of any use to you.' (7) The devil foresaw that a place called by the new name of La Chaise-Dieu would be founded there and that

40. Phil 3:13-14.

41. 1 Cor 12:28.

42. The church that Robert and his companions restored was dedicated to the Bolognese martyrs, Agricola and Vitalis.



the relics of the saints whose names he recited would be brought there. While he unwillingly prophesied future good things, he lied about the harmful things that he wanted to happen. (8) The only thing he predicted willingly about the future was that the site was going to be burned up in a fire. Even in this the good he did by his prediction outweighed the harm he later did by causing it. By his prediction, he fortified the patience of the saints; by afflicting them, he tested their patience.<sup>43</sup> (9) Meanwhile, the woman, wildly running and jumping through the church, suddenly turned toward the altar as though she were going to put her hand on the sacred objects. (10) The holy man, saddened by the unhappy woman's madness, prayed for a while, then proceeded toward her, struck her lightly with the rod he was holding, and reproved her severely. Then he turned to the demon and said: 'In the name of the Lord, I command you, get out, give glory to God, and once you are expelled never again come back'. (11) The woman fell down when he said this, and exhausted at the enemy's departure she immediately fell asleep. She woke up after a little while with her mind healthy but her body still fatigued. She asked that some bread be brought to her. She eagerly took the bread blessed by the man of God, and thus healed she returned home. She lived for a long time afterward and was a model of lively virtue.

16. (1) On another occasion, a peasant named Constantius, who dwelt near St. Victor,<sup>44</sup> was so filled with a demon that, sparing no one, he attacked himself with his teeth. He proclaimed openly that the only thing he feared was the presence of the man of God. His relations wrapped his whole body with chains and transported him like a dead man on a bier. They presented him, terrified and unwilling, to the saint. (2) He prayed over him, raised his eyes and mind to heaven, and adjured the enemy in God's name, ordering him to depart. (3) The adversarial spirits knew the power of his words and that it was impossible to disobey what he had ordered. (4) So, at the first sound of his commanding voice, the frightened adversary

43. Rv 13:10.

44. Marbod may be referring to St-Victor-sur-Arlanc, which lay a few kilometers from La Chaise-Dieu.

was compelled to leave the captive vessel,<sup>45</sup> and so he did the only thing he could and left him tired and disturbed. (5) The man was restored after a little while. When he had taken the blessed bread that the saint brought him, he went home healthy and happy.

17. (1) The spreading fame of these events brought forth many from their homes. A mixed crowd of noble and ordinary people came together to see the new example of ancient virtue. (2) He received them very courteously and kindly. Although in that solitary place he did not have enough bodily food for such crowds, he put before all of them the word of God. In this way it was as if he nourished the souls of believers with bread and fishes and various delicious dishes. (3) All were amazed at the modesty of his countenance and the spiritual eloquence of his speech that was accommodated to each person. With them he changed the minds of some, so that they immediately spurned the pleasures of the present life and burned with love for nothing except future happiness. (4) When many pledged to serve Christ only under his leadership, and the multitude of those asking to do so was large, both the desolation of the place and the variety of interests seemed to make it impossible for so many to dwell there together. Out of necessity, a new plan was formulated, for even difficulties serve divine providence. A monastery was built there, in which, as in the Lord's sheepfold, those whom God had gathered could dwell with one mind under the discipline of a monastic rule.<sup>46</sup> The devotion of many faithful paved the way for building it; they eagerly and voluntarily provided estates and money for this purpose. (5) The servant of God saw this divinely prepared opportunity for so much good; he rightly knew that it would be at the peril of his soul if out of concern for his own quiet he turned his back on the salvation of so many. Taking counsel on the matter with his brothers, and with the advice and consent of Rencon, of happy memory, the Bishop of Auvergne,<sup>47</sup> he set himself to this laborious effort and, to everyone's great joy and with the support of all, began to build

45. 1 Mc 2:9.

46. According to *The Tripartite Life*, the community now accepted the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

47. Again according to *The Tripartite Life*, Rencon, bishop of Clermont (1028–1052), was Robert's uncle.

a monastery near the place where he had first dwelt. (6) Previously he had desired a solitary life with few companions and commanded that no money or possessions be accepted from anyone. However, when he had received these things, and ever more extensive gifts from God's abounding generosity followed, he did not want to seem ungrateful for the heavenly benefactions. With the offerings that the faithful brought either spontaneously or at his exhortation, he successfully completed the work he had begun.<sup>48</sup>

18. (1) At that time, Henry was the ruler of France, and Leo IX occupied the Apostolic See.<sup>49</sup> (2) The bishop mentioned above went to the pope, and the holy man to the king of France. Each sought to enhance the stability of the new foundation with the sanction of higher authority and fitting privileges. (3) Each obtained what he sought. The king not only confirmed the grant of whatever had been given to the monastery or would be conferred in the future, but also honored La Chaise-Dieu and the holy man with royal gifts. The pope, who had heard of the man of God's reputation for holiness, confirmed his project with apostolic decrees and commanded him, despite his unwillingness and resistance, to preside over his brothers.<sup>50</sup> (4) So it happened, when the monastery had been dedicated with great rejoicing by all, the blessed man, compelled by the requests of his brothers and the authority of his bishop, accepted with a blessing the monastic habit and the role of superior. (5) Otherwise, he thought it was safer to be ruled than to rule, and to give an account of his own life only, rather than of the lives of many.<sup>51</sup> By the grace of God, he was capable of either, since in neither would he have presumed on his own strength. (6) After he accepted the task of ruling, the spiritual results of his labor testified to the extent of the ready vigilance he showed toward those subject to him, while frequent signs manifested how the simplicity of his mind shown before God. (7) He gained the souls of a large multitude of secular people by the

48. The monastery's construction probably was completed about 1050.

49. Henry I (1031–1060) and Leo IX (1049–1054).

50. On September 20, 1052, at Vitry-aux-Loges, Henry issued a charter of protection for La Chaise-Dieu. Pope Leo IX issued a charter on May 2, 1052, assuring La Chaise-Dieu of his protection.

51. See Rom 14:12 and RB 2.34; 64.7.

word of his preaching, the example of his life, and the intercession of his prayers. From among them he gained about three hundred monks. He restored about fifty churches to the service of God after they had long lain desolate. Most of all, he transmitted his own form of simplicity and charity to his disciples, and he left to the place that he had founded a most precious gift, the legacy of his holiness.

19. (1) We will tell about a few of his miracles, with that faith with which those who said they saw them handed them on to us. For the rest, his whole life on earth was a kind of great miracle. (2) If some people are more easily taken with exterior signs, not because such signs are great, but because such people are less endowed and usually more moved to wonder through the physical senses, there is no dearth of the kind of material which will serve usefully for such people. (3) A soldier named Bernard from Montgacon<sup>52</sup> had been suffering continually for three years from a kidney ailment which doctors call nephritis. Robert cured him of his bodily ailment by sprinkling holy water on him and praying over him. Later, when the soldier had become a monk, Robert also dedicated him to the army of Christ. (4) There was another man who suffered from dropsy (a disease that involves internal accumulation of water because of unhealthy blood); because the natural sources of his bodily heat were flooded, he was liable to be suddenly overwhelmed by the quantity of superfluous liquid. Robert restored him to health by the laying on of his sacred hands. (5) He cured by the same power, through the imposition of his hand combined with prayer, a demoniac boy, who was unable to walk or speak. He was the son of a certain farmer who is said to have lived below Chaumont.<sup>53</sup> In doing so he worked a threefold miracle in the same person, restoring speech to one who was mute, the capacity to walk to a cripple, freedom to a captive. (6) Another time a demoniac was brought to him, to whom he offered blessed bread at the door of the church; the devil, unable to bear such power of faith, departed from the man with a horrible shriek and unbearable odor and left him healthy. (7) A woman, who had lost all use of her limbs, attended the sacred mysteries while he

52. Montgacon was near the river Allier, about 20 kilometers north of Clermont-Ferrand.

53. Probably Chaumont-le-Bourg, 20 kilometers north of La Chaise-Dieu.

celebrated mass. She was carried there not by her own feet, but by the hands of others. She was quickly restored to health when with faith she listened to his voice proclaiming to the people the praises of [Mary], the ever virgin on her feast of the Annunciation. (8) The effect of such power was not hidden from those in attendance, for the noise emitted by the shaking of her nerves, like the crashing down of a roof, filled those present with instant panic.

20. (1) It is enough to have remembered briefly these few examples from among the miracles of this holy man, so that the steadfastness of the more advanced is not taxed and the faith of the simple is strengthened. (2) For quite apart from the mention of those deeds of power which in legal processes are called common places because they do not always happen to the good and sometimes even happen to the wicked, just the very constancy of the life of the saints serves the wise for faith and example, for only a good person could achieve it. (3) What could ever be more noteworthy than a miracle, if not to keep the mind's intention firmly focused amid the variety of worldly things? (4) By God's gift, this blessed man kept his mind so fixed that no change of season, place, time or fortune could budge him from his sacred commitment. (5) One thing he had asked from the Lord, this he sought, to dwell eternally in the house of the Lord.<sup>54</sup> In the light of this intention, he judged as nothing the pleasure and hardship of the present life. (6) It came to pass that after a brief period of labor (everything which passes away is short) he gained the prize of eternal life<sup>55</sup> and happily exchanged earthly things for heavenly ones. (7) It is believed that he foresaw the day of his death. He called the brothers together, spoke to exhort them with divine warnings, kissed each one, and said goodbye. Then he turned to God and commended himself and them in prayer, and full of days died in Christ. He was buried on April 24<sup>th</sup> in the new La Chaise-Dieu, which he had built, in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>56</sup>

54. Ps 26:4.

55. Phil 3:14.

56. According to the tradition handed on by Bernard in *The Tripartite Life*, Robert died on April 17, 1067 and was buried on April 24. Liturgical manuscripts and printed martyrologies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries assign his feast to April 24. Later martyrologies assign it to April 17.

**Book II**

1. (1) From Marbod, a sinner, to the lord abbot, Seguinus,<sup>1</sup> a man truly holy and most esteemed among the members of Christ.

I composed an earlier book in a simple style about the life of Blessed Robert. I hope I was as effective as I was willing. You, venerable sir, frequently ask or rather, under the guise of making a request, very strongly order and compel that I add to the earlier book the following work about his miracles according to the titles used by the first writer.<sup>2</sup> (2) The command of this new distinction honors my insignificance, but the assumption of the heavy labor burdens my weakness. (3) You would not have required the second work from me so insistently, if the first had displeased you, but on the other hand, what was pleasing could not be accomplished without effort and industry. But I am not so foolish that, if I do something good, I attribute it to my strength instead of to Him from whom all good things come. Nor am I so unfaithful that I have no hope of divine help in honorable and devout labors. (4) So, rather, I am pleased that that little work pleased you and the holy brothers, and I give thanks for the divine grace that made it pleasing. (5) I now approach what remains to be done, confident in the same divine aid, which is assured to me not by the presumption of my own merits, which are evil or non-existent, but by the intercession of the blessed patron, about whom I am speaking, and of your holiness. (6) If there is anything amiss, let it be attributed to me, and whatever is right let it be attributed to heavenly grace. I beg you, do not let the unworthiness of the writer be held against the dignity of the cause undertaken, since out of regard for their masters worth is often attributed to insignificant slaves. (7) The faithful reader should pay attention to what is said rather than to how it is said, since depending on the skill of the speaker, frequently true things are discussed briefly, and false things are treated at length.

1. Seguin of Escotay, *Seguinus*, was abbot of La Chaise-Dieu from 1078–1094.

2. Marbod did not compose the second book immediately after the first book but after an interval and at the urging of the abbot of La Chaise-Dieu. In fact, over a dozen manuscripts contain only Book I, whereas four manuscripts contain both books. The second book is meant to narrate Robert's miracles, his works of power (*virtutes*).

For healthy foods are served in earthen vessels, and lethal poison is sometimes mixed in gold cups.

2. (1) Before I tell of the miracles of the saint, it does not seem irrelevant to me to counter the blasphemies of some people on whose foreheads and in whose sacrilegious mouths one sees without any doubt the sign of the dragon and the beast.<sup>3</sup> (2) For it is written of him that ‘he will open his mouth in blasphemies toward God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven.’<sup>4</sup> Thus, those who vainly try to slander this holy man surely show themselves to be of the number of that beast. (4) They say (I am not reluctant to explain, as before judges, their crafty and evil intent that must be refuted): ‘This new holy man overturns for us the ancient order of holiness. (5) For while all the others, who with love faithfully maintain hope for higher things, arrange in their hearts ways of going higher and always undertake to go from the lower to the higher, only this man, although he had first put his foot on the summit, afterwards gradually slipped down to lower things. (6) Far from earthly and burdensome tumults, above the clouds on a high mountain, he undertook to gaze upon only divine and heavenly things with the peaceful gaze of his mind. Then, behold, little by little he turned away to active labor and human affairs, and finally to taking care of the dead. “He had begun a wine-jar, but he finished a water-pot.”<sup>5</sup> (7) He altered the marriage customs and contrary to the ways of the fathers and the trustworthy report of the Old Testament, he merited the embraces of Rachel before the bedchamber of Leah. (8) Having experienced both, he preferred the beautiful face to the bleary-eyed one; then he repudiated the former to be united permanently with the latter. Or better, having experience of neither, he tried in vain for both and was repulsed as an unworthy suitor.’<sup>6</sup> (9) In preferring Martha to Mary, he went

3. Rv 16:2; 20:4.

4. Rv 13:6.

5. This is an echo of Horace, *Ars Poetica* 21–22. It is cited by Jerome, *Epistle* 27.3 and by Hildebert of Lavardin, *Vita Hugonis Cluniacensis* (PL 171:859).

6. Gn 29:26–17. For Leah and Rachel, Martha and Mary, and the whole question of the relationship between action and contemplation, see Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995)

contrary to the judgment of Christ who declared that Mary chose the better part.<sup>7</sup> Thus, he blasphemed, if not by voice, then in deed, which is worse. (10) He stands convicted by his own words, for he affirmed that what he did afterward is reprehensible. For when he was going to seek a solitary place, he said to his disciples: "It is tolerable not to aspire to the highest because of human weakness, but to fall from one's promise because of diabolical sin is worthy of condemnation."<sup>8</sup> (11) Therefore, either one ought not to put faith in the writer or this man who is accused of transgression by his own words is regarded as holy not through his own merit but through another's error.' What slander, full of envious cunning and proud quarreling!

3. (1) Our saint does not depart from the way of the blessed even in this: he is the object of the curses and hatreds of the wicked for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ, indeed, for the name of Christ even if his detractors are assigned the same name. (2) If Robert had not served Christ in a singular way and his great reputation for sanctity had not spread through different regions, these sons of pride<sup>9</sup> certainly would not have considered him worthy of their slander. (3) Now, however, because they are not afraid to claim hypocritically for themselves praise for their religion, they think that whatever praise is accorded others damages their glory. (4) So it happens that they bring to bear all the force of their learning to destroy Robert's name, misusing spiritual weapons, that is, the divine authorities, against the spiritual servant of God. Christ has nurtured them as internal enemies in his very encampment. (5) So, the greatest of these, whom their mother pride begot from their father, the devil,<sup>10</sup> dared to reprove Martin because, when he had been scorched with flames and threatened with death, he had hesitatingly prayed for the protection of flight. (6) At Christ's command, Sulpicius then presented Martin's case, and in the judgment of the reader forced

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1–141; and Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (New York: Cambridge U P, 1996) 189–191.

7. Lk 10:42.

8. Above, 1.9(3).

9. 1 Mc 2:47.

10. Jn 8:44.



his adversaries into confused silence.<sup>11</sup> (7) Now Christ, making use of our lowliness, is also mighty enough to confound or instruct ignorant pride that vainly congratulates itself on its knowledge. (8) Come now, whoever you are, who are the bitter assailant of the new holiness and really hostile to the new man, you still sound the image of the old man with your voice and bear it in your mind. (9) Come now, I say, you noble of foggy diligence, indeed, you notable show-off, you claim you have sharp eyesight, but really you see like a mole. (10) You think that the ancient rule of holiness is that one first engage in active labor through which charity, out of solicitous compassion, supplies neighbors with what they need. Then, moving to higher things by ever new advances in virtue, one victoriously obtains the summit of contemplative sweetness, in which one enjoys the insatiable love of God alone. (11) When one has arrived there, it is judged wrong to be concerned about lesser things. What has been said in jest about someone can fittingly be said of this person also: he looks at the doors of heaven, caring no more about men. (12) Thus, like a new authority and expert you divide the two lives of the church, assigning each limits, and so, confused by a mental error, you claim they are not mixed, so that whoever once attains the higher is to be condemned if he returns to the lesser. So, one who has loved God fully cannot love his brother also.

4. (1) You introduce a new rule of cruelty in place of religion. Wordy Greece tells a more humane story. When Orestes and Pylades were fleeing from their homeland, a violent storm cast them on a foreign shore. They were captured and taken before the altar of Diana of Scythia, so that a solemn offering could be made with foreign blood to the cruel goddess. However, since there was a law that only one ought to die, they offered the barbarians a protracted and thoroughly pious spectacle of friendly rivalry, as each tried to save the other by dying for him.<sup>12</sup> (2) Now you, a devout worshipper of Christ, urge an act more savage than those idolatries. (3) Suppose a gentle

11. The reference is to Sulpicius Severus, *Epistula prima. Ad Eusebium*, ed. C. Halm, CSEL 1 (Vienna, 1867) 138–141, tr. Hoare, 48–51, which is the source of the phrases ‘scorched by fire’ (*adustus incendio*) and ‘the protection of flight’ (*fuge presidium*).

12. Cicero, *On Friendship* 7.24; Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.6.11, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford, 1991) 59.

father, standing on the edge of a pit, called with gentle voice to his children long held captive in a deep and dark prison, and, having sent down a ladder, urged them to climb up the well-worn steps. Then, while the rest remained anxious and too disturbed to pay heed to their father, one who was more ready to take risks and had wider experience attempted the difficult climb. When he happily emerged at the top, he turned his back on his siblings who vainly begged for his brotherly help. He refused the easy task of leading them up the steps that he now knew well. He lied and said that he did so out of love for their father. Meanwhile, the father, having pity on their distress, did not cease to urge him with fatherly love to undertake the task. Does this son seem perfect to you? (4) Suppose someone saw his brother fighting to the death in an amphitheater with a very fierce gladiator whom he himself had already conquered and whose strategy he knew well. He was able to coach him, but he did not. Rather, undisturbed about his brother's danger and retired from the fray, he sat and watched with his father whose untimely kisses he wished to enjoy. Would such a person not be judged shameless and cruel by everyone including his own father, and, because of his neglect of his brother, a vile parricide? (5) 'But,' you will respond, 'the fiery love of God devours and consumes any care for mortal things.' If that is so, then a new and monstrous division has arisen in the realm of charity, and the two commandments on which the whole law and the prophet depends<sup>13</sup> have been rent by an internal sedition even worse than a civil war. As a result, the sacraments of the whole Christian faith collapse. (6) For, to sum up briefly, if the all-consuming love of God, in which the summit of contemplative life consists, devours and extinguishes brotherly love, which is the principal concern of the active life, then the former is itself extinguished and no trace of love remains. (7) 'For how can someone who does not love his brother whom he sees, love God whom he does not see.'<sup>14</sup> Similarly, 'If someone sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how can the love of God remain in him?'<sup>15</sup> Therefore, either loving God one will love one's neighbor also, or

13. Mt 22:40.

14. 1 Jn 4:20.

15. 1 Jn 3:17.

despising one's neighbor, one will have contempt for God as well. (8) Furthermore, those who love their brother with God will, according to their means, provide necessities to whoever is in need. They will certainly be devoting themselves to the active life, whether they do so by deed, or if they do not have anything, by volition only. (9) On the other hand, fraternal love will be useless or null, if the intention of the mind is not directed toward God. (10) We are forced by irrefutable reasoning to admit that, although the two lives are distinct from each other in their merits, they can be possessed by the same person and exercised alternately.<sup>16</sup> (11) When out of necessity they turn toward what is lesser, this is not a fall, but a descent; not transgression, but compassion. (12) So, it is apparent that to censure the holy man for transgression in this matter is an offense that deserves to be censured with more than words.

5. (1) Unless you were dreaming, it is amazing that you say he subverted the traditional order by trying unsuccessfully for the beauty of Rachel before the bed of Leah, as though he was an impudent suitor. (2) I think that the clear and orderly story of his deeds is not lost even on someone as blind as you, for it was not silent about his earlier acts of almsgiving. (3) Furthermore, your accusation that contrary to Christ's teaching he preferred Martha to Mary proves to be a frivolous and empty objection. (4) For if this is said with reference to the time sequence, which the stupidity of such a reckless slanderer would not hesitate to do, the calumny of that wagging tongue is self-condemned, for now you are accusing him of doing what a little before you accused him of not doing. (5) For above your charge was that he did not marry Leah before Rachel; now it is that he preferred Martha to Mary. (6) However, according to the mystic meaning, Leah and Martha are identical, as are Rachel and Mary.<sup>17</sup> One cannot put Martha ahead of Mary, if one has not put Leah ahead of Rachel. (7) If it is primacy in dignity that is at issue, then your accusation is patently groundless, because you

16. This seems to be the meaning of Marbod's *ab eodem tamen communiter lege queunt vicaria possideri*.

17. For the traditional identification of Leah and Martha with the active life, and Rachel and Mary with the contemplative life, see Giles Constable, *Three Studies* (1995) 1–141.

are making assertions about a judgment passed on someone else's mind of which you have no knowledge. (8) From the words and deeds of the holy man it can be seen that he truly put Mary before Martha in dignity when he ministered to the brothers because of love of God. In this compassion he was no backsliding violator of a demanding promise, but rather a most devout imitator of all the elect and of their head himself. This is the rule of holiness, whether ancient, modern or future: until the end of time the ready devotion of the servants of Christ does not cease to run with ready step on well-marked stages of virtue within the boundaries of both the active and contemplative lives.

6. (1) We think that we have said enough against the things which are said by those who judge that it is wrong to mix the active life with the contemplative life, in order to heap calumnies on blessed Robert, whose sanctity they envy. (2) However, we wish to illustrate our position from a different angle using sacred witnesses, so that no one may scorn us for preferring human reason to the authority of the Scriptures. We do not think it is irrelevant to the intent of this work if for the current edification of readers we show that the servant of God was conformed to the ancient saints in this act of virtuous discernment. (3) When Jacob, the patriarch, rested his tired head on a mystic rock while he slept, he saw the Lord resting on a ladder. Not only were angels ascending the ladder through divine contemplation; they were also descending out of compassion for humanity.<sup>18</sup> (4) This very patriarch experienced this same mystery in his marriage, for, after the embraces of his more beautiful wife, he often had intercourse with his more fertile spouse. (5) If those who in their temerity are envious had paid attention to this, they would have realized that the divine narrative gives no support to their foolish calumny. For what else does the most holy page of the Older Scripture and of the New Testament teach? (6) Let us say a few words about each. Did not Abraham, the father of faith, Isaac

18. Gn 28:12–13. This passage and those which follow show points of contact with Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Rule 2.5, Regula pastoralis*, ed. F. Rommel, SCH 381 (Paris: Cerf, 1992) 196–203.

the son of the promise,<sup>19</sup> Jacob the one chosen by spiritual grace,<sup>20</sup> who especially manifest the mystery of the blessed Trinity in themselves, often speak with God but nevertheless managed their family affairs. (7) This alteration is especially obvious in Jacob, who when he had seen God face to face—for which reason he called the place Phaniel—immediately, because of the demands of the journey, returned to organize his family, dividing his servants and wives with his children and flocks into groups.<sup>21</sup> (8) So, too, Moses the lawgiver, after staying alone with the Lord on the mount, went back repeatedly to the people entrusted to him. He did not always dwell in the hidden place of the divine tent, but went outside to decide the contentious cases of litigants,<sup>22</sup> which generally was no easy task. (9) Another example that seems not irrelevant to our understanding of the matter is that of Axa. Seated upon an ass, he asked from his father both the upper and the lower water sources, neither without the other.<sup>23</sup> (10) In the same way, the apostles of Christ, Peter and John, ‘ascended to the temple for the ninth hour of prayer’.<sup>24</sup> This number stands for the summit of angelic contemplation. Then, as soon as they went out, they bestowed benefits on those who asked in Christ’s name. (11) Next, there is Paul, pre-eminent among the teachers. He was rapt into paradise,<sup>25</sup> and more than once with the heightened vision of his mind investigated the secrets of the third heaven.<sup>26</sup> Afterwards, he adapted himself to human measure, even the measure of carnal men, in his benevolent compassion allowing some pleasure even to the incontinent. (12) He said, ‘Because of fornication, let each man have his wife, and let each woman have her own husband. And let a husband render his debt to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.’<sup>27</sup> (13) Notice what perfect

19. Gal 4:28.

20. Rom 11:5.

21. Gn 32:30; 33:1-2.

22. Lv 24:10-11.

23. Jos 15:18-19; cf. Jgs 1:14-15. This story is not found in Gregory’s *Pastoral Rule*.

24. Acts 3:1, followed by their cures of the sick in Acts 3.2-10.

25. 1 Cor 12:4.

26. 1 Cor 3:1.

27. 1 Cor 7:2-3.

charity does and imitate it! The one who was just privy to heaven's secrets becomes master of the private bedchamber. (14) Moreover, concerned about the collections that were made for the saints,<sup>28</sup> he diligently exhorts the Corinthians to prepare the promised gift. (15) Thus, through the fullness of twofold charity, he was at the top and the bottom, in heaven and on earth, in mental ecstasy for God, prudent for us.<sup>29</sup> None of Christ's other disciples deviated from this rule of holiness. (16) But to give the details proper to every example pertaining to this subject is both very long and not very necessary. Of himself, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is sufficient example for us, for of his fullness all have received,<sup>30</sup> and his whole life on earth stands as a lesson on how to live. (17) Jesus now 'ascends the mountain to pray alone',<sup>31</sup> now comes to the disciples, whom he sees working on the water.<sup>32</sup> Now he speaks the word of God to the crowds; now he grants gifts of health. (18) When he was transfigured on the mountain, Jesus showed his glory to a few.<sup>33</sup> After he returned to the crowds, in the presence of many he paid heed to the misery of a father asking on behalf of his son.<sup>34</sup> (19) Sometimes he exulted in the Holy Spirit and gave praise to the Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>35</sup> At another time he was deeply moved and wept at the death of his friend.<sup>36</sup> (20) He taught by word what he showed by example when he urged us not only to pray to the Father behind closed doors,<sup>37</sup> but also to give visible aid to the brother who asks it.<sup>38</sup> (21) The contemplative church recommends the same in Song of Songs, when she voices her regret at being compelled to leave her bed of internal quiet for the external care and office of preaching that she had formerly exercised and to which her spouse calls her back. (22) She says: 'I am sleeping, but my heart keeps

28. 1 Cor 16:1.

29. 2 Cor 5:13.

30. Jo 1:16.

31. Mt 14:23.

32. Mt 14:24-25.

33. Mt 17:1-13.

34. Mt 17:14-17.

35. Lk 10:21.

36. Jo 11:33-35.

37. Mt 6:6.

38. Lk 11:15ff.

vigil. The voice of my beloved knocking on the door: My sister, my friend, my dove, my immaculate one, for my head is covered with frost and the locks of my hair with drops of dew. (23) I have taken off my tunic; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how will I make them dirty? (24) My beloved puts his hand through the opening, and my stomach trembles at his touch. I have risen to open to my beloved.<sup>39</sup> (25) I think from all this it is sufficiently established and evident that it is not only licit but necessary for contemplatives to move toward action often, nor does their previous merit suffer any detriment because, if they are deprived within of sterile beauty, they are compensated exteriorly by bleary-eyed fecundity. (26) Because the demonstration of this fact is so obvious that I have run out of time rather than examples, the things I have said are all the more sufficient, and the things omitted are missed all the less. (27) So, because truth has rebutted falsity and charity has instructed envy, silenced are 'the deceitful lips which speak ill against the just in pride and disdain'.<sup>40</sup> (28) In fact, since I intend to edify rather than to vanquish, let envy yield to charity, and let the impiety of wicked blasphemy make amends to the esteemed herald of truthful confession, so that we may together proclaim the merits of the blessed man in a spirit of love and peace.

7. (1) The miracles for which, through God's grace, the tomb of his sacred body is renowned, are for doubters certain proofs of his merits. (2) Therefore, in the continuation of this book let these be our answer to those who are unbelieving or ill-disposed, if any such remain from among those whom we opposed above in the measure that the Lord gave us. Thus, as the Apostle testifies 'tongues are a sign not for believers, but for unbelievers,'<sup>41</sup> so on the contrary, let signs be a tongue not for believers, but for unbelievers.

8. (1) On the very day that the body of the blessed man lay ready for burial,<sup>42</sup> while the others were occupied with the holy funeral

39. Sg 5:2-4.

40. Ps 30:19.

41. 1 Cor 14:22.

42. April 24, 1067. Bernard, *The Tripartite Life*, says this disciple's name was Radulf.

rites, one of his earliest disciples went apart by himself, since he suffered his sudden loss more deeply because of his long association with him. (2) Worn out and upset by his prolonged mourning, he had sat down, since as happens drowsiness followed upon sadness. (3) And behold, the light of his mind was divinely opened and he beheld a fiery ball come down from heaven and stop over the place where the saint's body lay; everything near it was brightly illumined by its radiant splendor. (4) When he was astonished and struck with dread at this terrible vision, there appeared a woman of incalculable beauty surrounded by the heavenly hosts and matching by her own splendor the brightness of the earlier light. By her majestic face and bearing she was clearly a queen. (5) She stood on the fiery ball above the bier. She stretched out her hand and took the right hand of the dead man, and urged him with her gentle voice to get up and ascend with her. (6) With their hands joined, they traveled straight to heaven with the light accompanying them. At the moment they seemed to reach the borders of the heavens, an immense right arm reached down and they were received into the open heaven. (7) There is no doubt that this was the mother of the Lord who led the soul devoted to her into the joys of heaven, after he had rightly discharged the tasks of the present life. There Christ received him.

9. (1) After Christ, it was to her allegiance that the holy man especially bound himself. While he was living in the flesh he loved her spiritually with such an intense affection that even when he was busy with something else, he could not restrain himself from her praises, and even when he was asleep he was awake to her memory.<sup>43</sup> (2) He bore the image of Christ and Mary deep within his heart. He cherished this as a unique and sweet treasure lodged in his joyful mind. (3) He had bound on his heart this pair of pearls that were of unequal but inestimable value. At every hour he recalled them before the eyes of his secret love with an insatiable desire. (4) Christ and Mary, chastity and mercy, remained ever on his lips. With delight he varied her titles, calling Mary the gate of heaven, the star of the sea, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the refuge of the miser-

43. The Latin text, '*ad eius memoriam, etiam dormiens, animo vigilaret.*' might also mean 'even while he slept his mind kept vigil at her altar.'



able, the rose of modesty, the lily of chastity, the jewel of virginity. (5) It was his opinion that anyone who wished to receive the grace of Christ should first approach Mary, as a second mediatrix between God and human beings, for her Son had delegated to her a bountiful share in the work of reconciliation, so that he might commend to the Father those whom his own mother had commended to him.<sup>44</sup> (6) The devotion of his disciples demonstrates and expresses the fervor of their master still today. According to the tradition they received from him, in the monastery of La Chaise-Dieu they still joyfully celebrate together for the glorious Virgin the praises of the daily office. (7) Hence, there can be no doubt that his blessed soul in particular has been led into heavenly joy by her whom, save God, he strove to serve before all others. (8) The vision just mentioned is not lacking the authority of the whole Trinity: the fire signified the ardor of the Holy spirit; the right hand, the strength of the Son; and the beauty of heaven, the majesty of the Father.

10. Likewise, a certain man who lived in the region of Velay<sup>45</sup> was afflicted for two straight years with a quartan fever. (2) He had spent a long time going around to the sanctuaries and gravesites of the saints because he wished to beg for health. But all his effort was in vain as he added the trouble of this unseasonable effort to his dangerous illness. (3) He was unsuccessful not through some failure in his faith or a want of power in the saints, but so that he might be saved by God through the merits of blessed Robert, as the sequel made clear. (4) For, drawn by the news of Robert's holy death that had spread everywhere, he was led in haste amid large crowds to the site of the saint's body on the very day of his burial. He prostrated himself on the ground and pleaded for a cure for a long time with unwavering confidence that he would be granted health. While he was praying, a heavenly sleep came upon him and he slept peacefully. In the meantime, by the mysterious working of divine love, through the merits of the blessed man the passages of his veins were warmed, the baneful power of the sluggish cold began to dissolve, his pores opened, and all at once feverish sweats

44. Marbod here adopts the language of I Ti 2:5: '*unus et mediator Dei et hominum.*'

45. Velay was a region of the Massif Central whose capital was Le Puy.

poured from his whole body. (5) The sleeping man's nature, now freed from its burden, sensed the cure. When he awoke, suddenly freed from every malady without the discomfort of a medical cure, the man saw that he was changed and thought he had risen. (6) The thanks he offered to God for the health he had received and the shouts he addressed to Robert reflected his great joy, which can only be calculated by comparing that joy with his earlier misery. (7) As someone who has evaded a greater danger rejoices more, so the one who rejoices more offers greater thanks.

11. (1) News of this great act of power was quickly spread throughout the neighboring territories by the voices of those who had seen it and by those who believed their reports. Led by this news, crowds of the sick and infirm followed various paths to the sacred tomb of the blessed man, as if to a copious and only recently reported free clinic for dispensing cures to all those who were sick. (2) Among these was a poor old man. It was his misfortune that to his double burden of old age and poverty had been added the worst and most difficult burden of blindness. His worried wife brought him to the tomb of the confessor. (3) There that blind man spent three days. Having fixed the eyes of his mind on Christ with indefatigable zeal, he frequently repeated the name of Robert, whose patronage he trusted. Never for a moment did he cease from his praying. His wife who was, it seemed, offended by the insistent loquacity of the man, said: (4) 'At least stop bothering the people who are present here, even if you do not fear offending the one who rests here. (5) You do not think that the saint will hear you unless you shout excessively. While you ask for your lost sight, you are distressing the hearing of the one whom you are assaulting. You do not deserve to receive what you are praying for, when you who are blind importune him as though he were deaf. Instead, wait a while in silence, and pour forth prayers in the secret chamber of your heart.' (6) He was indignant and horrified to hear what she said, so he thought that this was not the simple talk of a woman, but the deceptive hissing of the devil. (7) He said: 'Woman, stop! Stop your stupid talking, and cover your wicked blasphemy with a semblance of faith. (8) Do you think that the ears of the saints are sensitive, and so they are worn out with excessive shouting? (9) In fact, the saints, instructed by Christ's divine teaching, ultimately

give to the one who keeps knocking doggedly what they do not give to the one who asks many times in a friendly way.<sup>46</sup> (10) He immediately turned back to the saint and began to shout out his holy name ever more insistently. In this he imitated the blind man in the gospel who was aroused to even greater intensity in his prayers by the crowd that scolded him to be quiet.<sup>47</sup> (11) The loving-kindness of the priest<sup>48</sup> was moved immediately to ask from God the power of restoring sight to the blind man, but when He deferred giving what he asked, he tested the faith of the petitioner and also made the favor more cherished because it was more desired. (12) When the man persisted in his prayers, a hidden power produced a visible effect. The dense cloud of darkness began to be drawn away, and his blindness began to appear to the eyes of the onlookers as already far away, although they did not yet see the light, as when someone stretches a curtain in front of those looking at the light.<sup>49</sup> (13) The man immediately put his hands on his fluttering eyes and, surprisingly touching nothing, he wiped away whatever was causing the obstruction. (14) A wonderful light lit up his long dead eyes and immediately rendered brighter the whole substance of his illuminated body. (15) A joy beyond bounds burst the silence, and he, the most fitting person to preach about the new miracle that had occurred in him, instantly began to shout thanks mixed with praises throughout the whole basilica.

12. (1) Who of those present at that time and place could silence the praises of God? Who did not sing the merits of blessed Robert? (2) The power of the saint was indubitable in the face of public proof, since the blind man could give specific names to the various things brought to him as tests of his vision without being led into error by differences of color or form. (3) Here, if it can, let vicious envy find grounds for slander, and let him in his leisure try to concoct

46. Lk 11:8.

47. Mk 10:46–49.

48. The word 'priest' here evidently refers to Robert. This is the only place in Marbod's *Life of Robert* where this title is used of him. Robert was a priest; cf. 1.3(1).

49. The passage, 'and his blindness . . . looking at the light' is obscure. It has been the subject of several emendations, but the meaning remains elusive.

something to distort what in the end he cannot deny. (4) When he finds out that all his efforts fail in spite of exhausting effort, then, refuted, let him finally come to his senses with greater shame. Since he disdains to believe us, let him believe for himself, and following the example of that crazy prophet dismount from his jackass,<sup>50</sup> that is, from his own stupidity. (5) Perhaps he contends that the whole of this event of miraculous power is to be ascribed not to the merits of the holy man, but to the faith of the petitioner. (6) However, the faith of the petitioner was this: that he could obtain his lost sight through the prayers of Robert; that is why he frequently called out Robert's name. (7) Therefore, either he received what he asked through the merits of the same saint, or the faith with which he asked contributed nothing to his gaining his request. (8) Often before this, with Christian faith he had prayed for his lost sight at the tombs of other saints, but nevertheless he had never merited to be heard. (9) Finally, if the granting of favors were to be imputed completely to the faith of the petitioners, no graces would be attributed to Christ, who often granted various favors and cures to those who were burdened. He was not silent regarding the merit of faith, saying: 'your faith has made you well'.<sup>51</sup> That is, your faith has obtained the healing for which it asked, not by giving me the power, but by meriting from me the grace. (10) Hence, the faith of the one asking cancels out neither the power of the one granting nor the merit of the patron.

13. (1) Here is another evident proof of extraordinary holiness. A certain wretched woman from the Limousin<sup>52</sup> had been devastated for about twenty years by frequent incursions of an evil spirit. Finally, some faithful people brought her to the tomb of the blessed man. (2) The wicked force did not trouble her continuously as usually happens, but tormented her in a worse way intermittently, like chronic disease. (3) When she had been placed before the site of his holy body, with everyone else who was there, she

50. Nm 22:22ff.

51. Mk 10:52; Lk 18:42. In 2.10(2) Marbod presented another miracle in which other saints had failed to answer the petitioner's prayers.

52. The Limousin is the area around Limoges on the west side of the Massif Central.

waited in suspense, like a criminal waiting for a merciful judge to pronounce a sentence of absolution. Suddenly, she began to be convulsed throughout her whole body as if now her tormented countenance were gazing upon a dreaded death. (4) The wicked spirit trembled violently, unable to stand the presence of some invisible majesty. As if terrified by some unforeseen attack, it was hurrying to escape from her body which it had wickedly invaded. Since every exit was blocked, it ran around frantically banging into the walls of its prison. (5) The assailant was retained for a while, so that a penalty could be exacted from him, and also so that the public manifestation of the magnitude of the horrible affliction might commend the miracle of purification which was soon to take place. (6) So, when in that wretched state she had for some time presented the heart-rending spectacle of her affliction to the onlookers, the woman suddenly cried out and with often repeated shouts began to invoke the help of St. Robert. (7) Meanwhile, the custodian of the church took some holy water and sprinkled it into the mouth of the shouting woman. As though a shower had been sent down from heaven, this instantly restrained all the fire of her raging passion. (8) How wonderful are the merits of the devout confessor, who could rout the power of the enemy even through the offices of a humble minister. (9) This is certainly an indication of outstanding power, which could not come forth from just any saint at any time. (10) Christ empowered his apostles that they might command evil spirits in his name.<sup>53</sup> The apostles did so very often themselves, but seldom through others under their command.<sup>54</sup> (11) It is believed that the great and wondrous Elisha did this long ago, when the corpse of a man rose to life at the touch of his sacred bones.<sup>55</sup> (12) However, the servant sent ahead with his staff was not able to raise the dead son of the great woman at his command, not because he lacked confidence in the merits of such a great prophet, but because such an overflowing of grace is not always conferred even on the perfect. On the other hand, there is no room for doubt that those to whom it is sometimes conferred are indeed perfect.

53. Mt 10:1; Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1-2.

54. Cf. Acts 8:7.

55. 4 Kgs 13:21.

(13) The woman collapsed on the pavement and lay senseless for some time, so that it seemed clear to all that she was dead. (14) It was no great matter for the saint to raise the dead woman by his lively merits, if the situation were as it seemed. (15) When after a while her senses or her soul, whichever it was, returned, she opened her eyes and sat up quietly as Tabitha had done long ago.<sup>56</sup> She gave all the thanks she could to the servant of God, Robert, for having received back health of mind and body. (16) Then those who had been present and were struck with awe, when they experienced the outcome and saw so great and obvious a miracle, sounded together the praises of God with devout cries. (17) But the woman, having returned cured to her native place, carried with her the evidence of the wondrous power that she had experienced.

14. (1) Likewise a certain man who lived in the region of Forez,<sup>57</sup> pouring out devout prayers, carried his son to the tomb of the holy man in hopes of obtaining a cure for him. The son had suffered a long time from a contraction of his nerves, so that he seemed not so much to walk as to crawl. He stayed there a week, beseeching with tears and prayers in faithful anticipation of an act of divine mercy. (2) Then one day, while the brothers were celebrating mass, the boy began to be both agitated by sudden nervous movements and prompted by impulses of his nature coming back to life, as he tried to stretch out his limbs which had been so long inert. (3) He hesitatingly tried to move, and behold with a kind of rush the nerves of the skin were stretched noisily, so that now, even if he had tried, he could not have stopped. (4) Without doubt a heavenly force broke the confining chains of his nature too long held captive, and what took place was beyond human power. (5) The crippled man immediately stood up on feet long unused and was forced to take some first, unsteady steps. (6) Those who were watching ran to him weeping for joy, and supporting him on all sides with their hands, with praises they led him upright to the altar. (7) Everybody felt the joy that such an obvious manifestation of the divine presence deserved. (8) But above all their clamor the voice of the father resounded with the most festive rejoicing, for, since he had

56. Acts 9:40.

57. The Forez is in the extreme eastern part of the Auvergne.

greater cause to rejoice, he had more reason to shout. (9) When he returned to his own people with his son who now had steady feet and was no longer crippled, he spread the news of the great miracle in his own region.

15. (1) A noble knight from the town called Céreix<sup>58</sup> had a daughter who labored under the heavy burden of a double disgrace: her face was horribly disfigured with swelling, and she had been afflicted in both eyes for a long time. (2) After a while the father, who was deeply saddened by his daughter's afflictions, decided to direct her to the tomb of the holy man, where it was widely reported that many received health. (3) The blind woman, her face deformed with hideous tumors, was led to the saint. After a little while, she returned with her sight again and her face restored to its original beauty. (4) What happened was this. While she besought God with incessant prayers, to which the pain of her contrite heart urged her, and while she repeatedly called on the name and merits of blessed Robert, one of the brothers who served as guardian of the sanctuary, gathering from the face of the passionately gesturing girl the sentiments inspiring her supplication, paid attention to her cries. Moved with love he groaned and with the speed of love quickly took some wine which had washed the body of the saint and with it sprinkled the whole face of the trembling girl. (5) When she felt the beneficial drops of the sacred liquid, she entreated that this procedure be repeated for her often. When this had been done for several days, the woman became completely healthy. (6) She returned home with her face beaming; she was no longer ashamed to be seen nor did she need to envy those who looked at her. (7) Her father rejoiced when he saw his daughter healed, as did her family and neighbors. The entire town rejoiced together praising God in shared prayers. There was no dearth of praise for blessed Robert, who in his usual way took up the cause of the poor girl as her strong champion.

16. (1) There is a well-known town that its inhabitants called Monistrol.<sup>59</sup> There dwelt there a knight who had a daughter. She was

58. Céreix is about 15 kilometers from Le Puy.

59. Monistrol-sur-Loire is about 45 kilometers from Le Puy. See the reference to the Loire in 2.6(11).

troubled in wretched ways by a savage spirit. (2) She not only gave evidence of insanity by terrible shouting and horrible gestures and filthy language, but she also lunged to bite whomever she could. She did not even spare herself, if there was no opportunity for attacking others. (3) She did not even recognize her father, except when, at the urging of the hidden enemy, she attacked him with greater insults than she did other people. (4) But the more she inflicted insults on him, the more deeply he was moved with fatherly love for his poor girl. (5) The unhappy man saw himself being punished in the body of his daughter, and so in some way was tormented with even greater anguish. (6) Since he was of sound mind, he felt what he lamented, whereas in her case madness absorbed the feeling of grief. (7) She remained secure behind her fierce glances and the cruel stare of her crazed eyes. The sorrow of her grieving father made his pale cheeks and eyes overflowing with tears a sight worthy of compassion. (8) Her terrible gaping, her slobbering mouth, the tortured contortions of her twisted neck, and the frightful tangle of her uncombed hair, and whatever else was visible in the pitiable body of the senseless woman, the loving compassion of her father transferred it all to himself. (9) Moreover, since there was no apparent way for a cure, despair for her health further increased his desperate sorrow. While he was tossed on such waves of sorrow, suddenly a fresh wind of salutary advice blew up from his friends. It directed him to take the girl to the tomb of the holy man, who never disappointed the faith of those who invoked him with a just request. (10) He was immediately lifted up in the certain hope that this was the only way of reaching the shore, that is, the health of his daughter. He prepared his servants and a maid servant and whatever else seemed needed, and ordered that the girl be placed on a cart and led quickly to the saint, but with her limbs secured, so she could not leap out and wound those she met, as was her wont. (11) The Loire River crossed the middle of the route they were taking. Even sane heads feared its swift currents. (12) There the bound girl began to improve and to call to her companions with a calm look and gentle words. (13) This cure, which was the result of virtue rather than of nature, occurred at a place where her fragile nature easily could have been utterly terrified. 'Why,' she asked, 'have you wrapped me in a shroud like a dead woman.'



Let me loose, for I am tired; you wouldn't want to coerce a harmless woman any longer.' (14) Having been let loose right away, she remained at peace during the rest of the journey. When she was led to the holy tomb, as to a place of judgment, the one who had lain hidden could not be quiet. (15) A violent convulsion passed through the limbs which were to be healed of their missing sinews. The malignant pestilence began to shake her teeth and to convulse her and then to torment in every way the body it was about to lose. (16) Three days later, the expelled deceiver took all the causes of her misfortune with him. Gradually her restored nature returned to a state of perfect health. After a little while she returned hail and hearty to her father's house, amazed at her own strength. We leave to the reader to imagine what joy and what prayers she caused. I would think that not even strangers, moved by simple affection for the misery of this poor woman who shared their nature, could refrain from praising God. (18) How much more did her father's love exult, urged on by personal as well as shared affection. Fittingly, all extolled with many praises the holy confessor of the Lord by whose glorious merits such great miracles were granted by God. (19) So no one will have any doubts, it seems desirable to recite at this point a final episode.

17. (1) The fame of such works of power spread through the Maritime Alps and aroused the hearts and tongues of peoples in praise of Saint Robert. The archbishop of that province, a man whose way of life accorded with the dignity of his office,<sup>60</sup> judged it unsuitable for the weighty pontifical office to put faith right away in the vain outcries of the fickle crowd. He decreed that there be an examination to determine what was collective error and what was public merit. (2) While the blessed man lived, he had been long acquainted with him and closely united with him in the love of the same endeavors. (3) When all the arrangements required for the journey had been made, he set out, not with the skeptical aim of a tempter, but with a zeal for showing the truth. (4) So, like the queen of the South, he came with his retinue to the place in order to

60. Bernard's *Tripartite Life* identifies him as the archbishop of Embrun. It was probably Lantelmus, who held that office from 1080.

investigate. She had probed the wisdom of Solomon; he was probing his power.<sup>61</sup> (5) He was received hospitably, as was fitting; and so, when the time seemed right he asked leave to enter the monastery. (6) What he asked was quickly granted, and when the doors of the sanctuary had been closed, he remained inside alone. (7) There he poured himself out completely in prayers as he lay prostrate at the tomb of St. Robert. He dissolved in tears because of the fiery intensity of his love. From the bottom of his heart he called on the true light,<sup>62</sup> that He deign to reveal to him clearly whether truly and without any shadow of doubt the divine power had granted to the blessed man a grace of miracles so great that it was unusual in recent centuries. (8) Turning to the saint, he said many things, as his soul suggested to him, bringing forth one prayer after the other. He did not cease calling on the Virgin Mother, nor did he omit the angelic spirits. (9) While he added prayers to prayers, the divine response was speedily apparent. It came not in the elementary sounds of words, but in the clear evidence of deeds. (10) A crowd, which by God's will had gathered from all over, accompanied with their communal prayers the body of a girl, long completely crippled, who was brought to the tomb of the saint as she had asked. (11) The gates were opened to those who knocked<sup>63</sup> and the accompanying crowd followed inside. Scarcely had the girl been let down onto the pavement when her knotted muscles loosed, the skin of her knees split, and she rose to her feet and walked around the whole basilica, glad to take the first steps made possible by this new gift. (12) The people raised their voices to heaven, and everywhere there sounded a tumultuous clamor. (13) The astonished bishop stood on one side, freed of his earlier doubts not only by the joint testimony of many but also by the credence he gave to his own eyes. (13) He acknowledged silently the grace for which he had asked and was amazed that he had been heard so quickly. (14) However, lest any occasion for base suspicion remain, there soon came the confirmation of a second miracle, so that the legal number of witnesses would not be lacking. (15) For the joyous uproar of the previous miracles had

61. Mt 12:14; Lk 11:31.

62. 1 Jo 2:8.

63. Lk 11:10.

barely subsided when a boy blind from birth, accompanied by a large crowd, was brought in, and turned the minds and voices of all who were present toward him. (16) He was quickly placed at the tomb, and all the people prayed for him. Immediately the darkness was expelled, and an unfamiliar light penetrated his awe-struck eyes. (17). Once more there arose joyous and thankful shouts. The bishop was amazed at the repeated miracle, whose specific nature seemed to allude to his own earlier blindness of mind. (18) The blindness corresponded to the doubter, and the illumination reflected faith. There was no place left for doubt and in the face of such evidence no Thomas could hesitate any longer.<sup>64</sup> (19) Faith, now advanced and strengthened, took voice and sounded in the ears of all, and profession of the truth resounded. (20) He said, 'I see here more than I have heard, and what is reported is less than the truth'. So the happy prelate returned home, taking back with him the riches of a precious testimony and giving glory to the God of heaven, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

64. Jo 20:24ff.