

NAUGHTY NUNS AND PROMISCUOUS MONKS: MONASTIC SEXUAL
MISCONDUCT IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

by

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ABSTRACT

Naughty Nuns and Promiscuous Monks: Monastic Sexual Misconduct in Late Medieval England

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This dissertation examines monastic sexual misconduct in cloistered religious houses in the dioceses of Lincoln and Norwich between 1430 and 1530. Traditionally, any study of English monasticism during the late Middle Ages entailed the chronicling of a slow decline and decay. Indeed, for nearly 500 years, historiographical discourse surrounding the Dissolution of Monasteries (1536-40) has emphasized its inevitability and presented late medieval monasticism as a lacklustre institution characterized by worsening standards, corruption and even sexual promiscuity. As a result, since the Dissolution, English monks and nuns have been constructed into naughty characters. My study, centred on the sources that led to this claim, episcopal visitation records, will demonstrate that it is an exaggeration due to the distortion in perspective allowed by the same sources, and a disregard for contextualisation and comparison between nuns and monks.

In Chapter one, I discuss the development of the monastic ‘decline narrative’ in English historiography and how the theme of monastic lasciviousness came to be so strongly associated with it. Chapter two presents an overview of the historical background of late medieval English monasticism and my methodological approach to the sources.

In Chapter three, I survey some of the broad characteristics of monastic sexual misconduct. In particular, I discuss the overall rate of sexual misconduct, the sexual partners of monks and nuns, same-sex relationships, and conventual pregnancies. Chapter four examines the episcopal response to sexual scandal and their use of visitatorial inquisition, compurgation, penance and written injunctions. Finally, in Chapter five, I discuss the connection between the Dissolution and sexual misconduct, and in particular, the sodomy accusations made by Suppression agents in the infamous *Compendium Compertorum*.

The overarching conclusion is that monastic sexual misconduct in the medieval monasteries of Lincoln and Norwich (at the level of individuals) occurred at very low and predictable rates. Nearly half of the monasteries experienced a case of sexual misconduct over the 100 years examined for this study, and certainly a bishop could expect to encounter numerous instances of it during his career. However, although sexual misconduct was clearly considered a sin and corrected by bishops and monastic leaders, in general, it was very much de-emphasized compared to other disciplinary issues. Time and time again, the bishops examined for this study emphasized economic and leadership issues over problems with chastity.

*Meae uxori et filiae,
sine quibus
nihil sum.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library, London.
BR	<i>Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum</i> . 25 volumes. Turin and Naples: n.p., 1857-1885.
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford.
CIC	Emil Albert Friedberg, editor. <i>Corpus Iuris Canonici</i> . 2 volumes. Leipzig: n.p., 1879-81.
DEC	Norman P. Tanner, editor. <i>Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils</i> . London: Sheed and Ward, 1990.
HOL	House of Lords Record Office (The Parliamentary Archives).
Knowles and Hadcock	David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, editors. <i>Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales</i> . London: Longman, 1971.
LAO	Lincolnshire Archives Office, London.
LP	J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie, editors. <i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII</i> . London: Longmans and Co. et al., 1862 - 1932.
Lanfranc, <i>Constitutions</i>	David Knowles and Christopher Brooke, editors. <i>The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc</i> . Translated by David Knowles. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.
Linc. Visit.	A. Hamilton Thompson, editor. <i>Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln</i> . 3 volumes. Translated by A. Hamilton Thompson. London: Canterbury and York Society, 1915-1927.
Linc. Visit. 1517-1531	A. Hamilton Thompson, editor. <i>Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1517-1531</i> . 3 volumes. Hereford: Lincoln Record Society, 1940.
NNRO	Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, Norfolk.
PRO	Public Record Office, National Archives, London.
Statutes of the Realm	<i>The Statutes of the Realm</i> . 11 volumes. London: Great Britain Record Commission, 1810-28.
VCH	William Page, editor. <i>Victoria History of the Counties of England</i> . Oxford and London: Archibald Constable and Company Ltd., 1900-.
Wilkins, <i>Concilia</i>	David Wilkins, editor. <i>Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae</i> . 4 volumes. London: n.p., 1737.

- Councils and Synods* C. R. Cheney and F. M. Powicke, editors. *Councils and Synods with other Documents relating to the English Church*. 2 volumes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
- Visitations of Norwich* Augustus Jessopp, editor. *Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich, 1492-1532*. Westminster: Camden society, 1888.

INTRODUCTION

IN a particular fifteenth-century manuscript containing mostly copies of theological works, there is a curious collection of love poetry, written by some anonymous clerk, most likely a student doing practice exercises.¹ Within this collection, there is a short original creation, which one nineteenth-century scholar labelled “an absolutely obscene poem.”² The piece in question is posed as a dialogue between an amorous nun and a clerk:

Monacha: Deponam velum, deponam cetera quaeque,

ibit et ad lectum nuda puella tuum.

Clericus: Si uelo careas, tamen altera non potes esse.

*Vestibus ablati non mea culpa minor.*³

This little moralistic fifteenth-century clerical fantasy is actually part of a familiar literary topos – the wayward nun. From the fabliaux and *Chanson des Nonnes* to the courtly elegance of Chaucer’s Madame Eglentyne, the ‘naughty nun’ and, to a lesser extent, the ‘promiscuous monk’ were popular medieval stereotypes. The literary and

1. Bern, Burgerbibliothek 434, fol. 49b; Hermann Hagen, *Catalogus Codicum Bernensium* (Bern: B.F. Haller, 1875), 381. See also Philip Schuyler Allen, *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 61.
2. “Absolutamente oscena è un’altra poesia metrica...” Umberto Ronca, *Cultura medioevale e poesia latina d’Italia: nei secoli XI e XII* (Rome: Società Laziale Editrice, 1892), 159.
3. “Nun: I will take off my veil, I will take off everything else, and a naked girl will come to your bed. Clerk: Even if you take off your veil, you would not be any different and my sin would be no less with your clothes gone.” Hermann Hagen, *Carmina Medii Aevi maximam partem inedita: Ex bibliothecis Helveticis collecta* (Bern: G. Frobenium, 1877), 206. All English translations are mine unless specified.

cultural phenomenon of the ‘naughty nun’ is well known and documented, and still provides titillating interest to this day if the continued popularity of sexy nun costumes worn every Halloween at student parties is any indication. The body of medieval literature utilizing the topos has also been the subject of a few studies, the most ambitious being Graciela Daichman’s 1986 book.⁴ Although the literary ‘promiscuous monk’ (or at least the ‘promiscuous friar’) has also received some notice, in many respects, the ‘naughty nun’, perhaps unfairly, has eclipsed the ‘promiscuous monk’ in our imagination.⁵ Over the past century, scholars have debated the degree to which these medieval topoï were reflected in the reality of late medieval monastic institutions.⁶ While many earlier scholars delighted

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4. Graciela S. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986). Other studies which look at some aspects of the ‘naughty nun’ are Eileen Edna Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), 436-74, 499-562; Nancy Bradley Warren, “Pregnancy and productivity: the imagery of female monasticism within and beyond the cloister walls,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28, no. 3 (1998): 531-52, 531-52; Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2001)
 5. For instance, although they are not the subject of her study, Daichman, identifies many literary examples of ‘promiscuous monks, friars and clerics.’ Daichman, *Wayward Nuns*, 35, 48-9, 53, 86, 93-103, 111, 120-1, 131, 134. Likewise, Power also includes male examples in her discussion on the nun in literature. Power, 611, 625-6. On literary ‘promiscuous friars’, which have been studied much more thoroughly (although they are certainly not monks), see Penn R. Szittya, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton: University Press, 1986); Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973); or more recently, G. Geltner, “Brethren Behaving Badly: A Deviant Approach to Medieval Antifraternalism,” *Speculum* 85, no. 1 (2010): 47-64. One notable exception which treats late medieval popular ideas about ‘naughty nuns’ and ‘promiscuous monks’ together is Marjo Kaartinen, *Religious Life and English Culture in the Reformation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 97-118.
 6. See for example G. G. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), 2:ix; Power, 436-74; and more recently, see Daichman, *Wayward Nuns*, 3-30; Graciela S. Daichman, “Misconduct in the Medieval Nunnery: Fact, not Fiction,” in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, ed. by Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 97-117; John H. Tillotson, “Visitation and reform of the Yorkshire Nunneries in the Fourteenth Century,” *Northern History: A Review of the History of the North of England and the Borders* 30 (1994): 1, 1-19; Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 112-30; Lindsay Bryan, “*Vae Mundo a Scandalis*: The Sin of Scandal in Medieval England” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1998), 139-93; Lindsay Bryan, “*Periculum animarum*: Bishops, Gender, and Scandal,” *Florilegium* 19 (2002): 49-73; Claire Cross, “Yorkshire

in relating lewd anecdotes found in episcopal visitation records as evidence of a general monastic decline during the closing centuries of the Middle Ages, more recently some historians looking at English nuns have tended to eschew these anecdotal conclusions and instead present misconduct as a rare anomaly in an otherwise vibrant late medieval female monastic life.⁷

This study is about some of the real ‘naughty nuns’ of late medieval England (as opposed to their literary counterparts) in the last century prior to the Dissolution. However, by design in its comparative approach to the subject, it is also about ‘promiscuous monks’ too. More specifically, it is about the sixty-three male religious and nineteen female religious who between them were accused of 111 acts of sexual misconduct in episcopal visitation records from the dioceses of Lincoln and Norwich from 1430 to 1530. It is about men like Richard Bettys, the prior of the Benedictine house of Eye, whose mistress lived with him at the monastery and had her own set of keys;⁸ or Thomas Tewkesbury, an Augustinian canon who liked to drink beer and play chess, and is said to have cherished his lover Margaret;⁹ or women like Isabel Benet, a Cistercian nun who conceived a child with a local chaplain, and was fond of dancing with friars and playing the lute.¹⁰

I have specifically chosen to focus on traditionally cloistered orders (both male and female) such as the Benedictines and Augustinians. Partially, this is necessitated by

Nunneries in the Early Tudor Period,” in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 149; and for Premonstratensian canons, see Joseph A. Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 65-8, 245-7. I discuss these examples in detail in §1.3.

7. See for example Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England: Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1540* (Woodbridge, Suffolk ; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998), 211-12.

8. Augustus Jessopp, ed., *Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich, 1492-1532* (Westminster: Camden society, 1888) (henceforth cited as *Visitations of Norwich*), 184; Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fol.74b.

9. A. Hamilton Thompson, ed., *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln*, 3 vols., trans. by A. Hamilton Thompson (London: Canterbury and York Society, 1915-1927) (henceforth cited as *Linc. Visit.*), 2:72; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.112, sched.1.

10. *Linc. Visit.*, 2:50; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.93, sched.

my choice of sources, the records of bishops' visitations to monasteries, which almost never include any mendicant houses such as the Franciscans or Dominicans. Moreover, as Carolyn Bynum has pointed out, although there were differences in spiritual outlook, there was a broad similarity in life and practise between English monks and canons.¹¹ Likewise, nearly all English nuns, irrespective of order, followed a similar life.¹² For these same reasons, I have also chosen not to include other types of religious houses such as secular colleges or hospitals (although they are represented in visitation records). The rules and structure of life in secular colleges (or hospitals for that matter) were markedly different from that of monasteries, which consequently makes comparisons difficult. However, although the visitations of secular colleges do not form part of the main data set for this study, I use them to understand better the process of episcopal visitation itself, and in particular the role of episcopal *inquisitio*. By focusing on monastic houses which follow a relatively similar day to day life, I am able to draw more substantive conclusions. Consequently, as I will demonstrate in chapter three, among traditional monastic houses, differences in gender rather than order resulted in the most significant variations with respect to sexual misconduct.

Unfortunately, comparative approaches are relatively rare in monastic history and this has been particularly true for English studies which have tended to be written about one sex, usually male, even when they purport to be 'general' histories. One of the most glaring examples is David Knowles, who famously dedicated only six short paragraphs to nuns in over twelve hundred pages of his influential *The Religious Orders in England*.¹³

11. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 57.

12. Linda Rasmussen, "Order, Order! Determining Order in Medieval English Nunneries," in *Our Medieval Heritage: Essays in Honour of John Tillotson for his 60th Birthday*, ed. by Linda Rasmussen, Valerie Spear, and Dianne Tillotson (Cardiff: Merton Priory Press, 2002), 32-3.

13. David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), I: 108, II: 260-261, III: 75, 311, 413. Another example is C.H. Lawrence's well received survey

Although the medieval English nun has hardly been ignored over the past few decades the way she was in the first half of the twentieth century, the more recent studies have tended to suffer from a reverse focus. Indeed, Caroline Bynum recently lamented this deficit of comparative work arguing that one cannot say anything about nuns' "activities or institutions as characteristically 'female' without comparison to male institutions."¹⁴ To my mind, it seems all the more important to include comparison when discussing sexuality since an exclusive focus can lead to somewhat erroneous or misleading generalizations such as the 'wayward nun' depicted by Daichman whom she described as common and frequent in medieval society.¹⁵ This study of both monks and nuns in the dioceses of Lincoln and Norwich will challenge Daichman's conclusion. In its comparative approach, it will also represent a small step towards reversing the trend of studying English monks and nuns in exclusion of one another. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the 'naughty nun' and her place in medieval society without the 'promiscuous monk.'

Why study sexual misconduct at all? Certainly, the aim of this study is not simply to collect titillating stories, nor is it meant to lend support to the idea that late medieval monks and nuns were somehow less zealous or holy than their forebears. At the risk of uttering a cliché, the simple reason is that sex and sexuality are important. As Joyce Salisbury put it, sexuality is "intimately associated with what it means to be human," and thus cannot be disassociated from any study of the human condition.¹⁶ Human beings are sexual beings, even monks and nuns. Moreover, while the study of sexuality has been an important part of social history since the publication of Michel Foucault's seminal

of medieval monasticism, in which he dedicated only a single chapter to the story of nuns. C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 1984).

14. Caroline Walker Bynum, foreword to *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. by Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), xiv.

15. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns*, 5.

16. Joyce E. Salisbury, *Medieval Sexuality: A Research Guide* (New York: Garland, 1990), xvii.

History of Sexuality, the last twenty years have also seen an increasing number of monastic historians investigating issues of sexuality too - particularly the medieval conception of virginity.¹⁷ More recently there has been a movement by some scholars to challenge even the idea that chastity and sexual purity have always been the *sine qua non* of monastic identity.¹⁸

More importantly, although monks and nuns technically led cloistered lives, they were still part of the larger society. Religious men and women did leave their cloisters. They saw family, conducted business, taught children and involved themselves in politics. Consequently, understanding how sexuality was conceptualized by monks, nuns and

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17. Notable studies include Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1985); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jacqueline Murray, "Men's Bodies, Men's Minds: Seminal Emissions and Sexual Anxiety in the Middle Ages," *Annual Review of Sex Research* 8 (1997): 1–26; Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Salih, *Versions of Virginity*; Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). The editors of the recent collection *Medieval Virginities* have suggested there have been enough monographs, articles and collections on virgins and virginity published in the last few years to constitute a mini-discipline on the subject. See Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau, and Ruth Evans, "Introduction: Virginites and Virginity Studies," in *Medieval Virginities*, ed. by Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau, and Ruth Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).
 18. Recent studies have emphasized the fluidity of ideas such as chastity and virginity in monastic discourse. For instance, Albrecht Diem traced the development of the importance of sexual purity in monasticism from the fourth to the seventh centuries. His study convincingly argues that in the beginning sexual purity was a goal of monastics, but by the end of Diem's period it had become a presupposition. See Albrecht Diem, *Das monastische Experiment: Die Rolle der Keuschheit bei der Entstehung des westlichen Klosterwesens* (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2005). Likewise, Karen Cheatham argues that virginity, although remaining the highest virtue for religious women, lost some of its importance in the later Middle Ages for religious men and was replaced instead by an emphasis on physical chastity. See Karen Cheatham, "'Let Anyone Accept this Who Can': Medieval Christian Virginity, Chastity, and Celibacy in the Latin West," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. by Carl Olson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Karen Cheatham, "They Hasten toward Perfection: Virginal and Chaste Monks in the High Middle Ages" (Phd diss., University of Toronto, 2010). Although virginity remained a virtue for late medieval women, Sarah Salih has demonstrated that this ideal was continually reinterpreted by religious women themselves and was quite distinct from that espoused by male authorities. See Salih, *Versions of Virginity*.

bishops can help us better understand how all medieval English people conceptualized it. As Shannon McSheffrey has demonstrated, attitudes towards sexual activity could vary widely within late medieval English society. Medieval Londoners, for instance, variously saw sexual relationships as “irrelevant, as deeply damaging to society and to the body politic, as economically productive or as wasteful of resources.”¹⁹ Other studies have demonstrated that while certain types of sexual behaviour tended to be tolerated in lay society, specific crimes such as adultery could prompt more action. As Martin Ingram has pointed out, popular customs such as ‘rough music’, in which people gathered outside the homes of known adulterers, banging pots and pans and publicly relating the details of the offence to the community, are indicative of this.²⁰ In her well-received monograph examining efforts by local English courts to control undesirable behaviour, Marjorie McIntosh concluded that attitudes toward sexual misconduct amongst the population were centred around its ability to cause controversy and discord in the community. As such, although sexual crimes were normally under the purview of ecclesiastical courts, secular authorities did occasionally act upon fornication or adultery – particularly in cases involving prostitution. However, McIntosh concluded that there were no signs “either of an obsessive, prurient interest in sexuality among those responsible for controlling it nor of excessive valorization of sexual counter-ideals, expressed, for example in carnival-like activities.”²¹ In other words, lay attitudes toward sexual misconduct were complex and varied. As I will present in Chapter four, secular variations were mirrored within the cloister wall and in the attitudes of medieval bishops.

19. Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 4.

20. Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 163.

21. Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71-4.

Nevertheless, topics such as sexuality or gender, as categories useful to monastic history, continue to elicit concern from some historians, critical of the ‘new social history’ and its over-reliance on constructs to understand the past. Witness, for example, Roy Haines’ recent review of Valerie Spears’ book *Leadership in Medieval English Nunneries*, in which he argued that categories such as gender, do more to “obfuscate than to elucidate.”²² Yet, these same constructs have also allowed scholars to understand successfully relatively silent groups such as late medieval nuns in ways predominantly male-authored sources made less obvious. A good example is how different scholars have interpreted the failure of *Periculoso*, Boniface VIII’s 1298 decree which mandated strict enclosure for female religious. While there were certainly enthusiastic early attempts at enforcing it, over time its strictures were relaxed or ignored altogether by episcopal authorities.²³ Earlier twentieth-century scholars saw the relaxation of *Periculoso* as another indication of a decline of spiritual vibrancy and discipline in late medieval female monasticism.²⁴ More recently, however, other scholars have shown that medieval nuns actively resisted this decree, not due to a lack of vocation, but as a challenge to their economic survival and because it was inconsistent with their spiritual ideals.²⁵

22. Roy Martin Haines, review of *Leadership in Medieval English Nunneries*, by Valerie G. Spear, *The English Historical Review* 121, no. 494 (2006): 1527.

23. Tillotson, “Visitation and reform.” However, despite the fact that *Periculoso* was difficult for authorities to enforce, it continued to be a trumpeted ideal for female monasticism. Canon lawyers continued to discuss the topic and eventually it was re-enacted with the addition of more penalties at the Council of Trent (1545-63). See Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered women: Periculoso and its Commentators, 1298-1545*, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

24. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2: 337. Power, at points, seems to agree that the stipulations of *Periculoso* were severe and unrealistic. However, after relating a litany of anecdotal examples from visitation records of nuns getting into trouble while wandering outside the convent, she concludes that Henry VIII’s brief attempts to return nuns to this degree of enclosure was “in accordance with the best ecclesiastical tradition and amply justified by the condition of the monastic houses.” See Power, 382-3, 393.

25. Katherine Gill, “*Scandala*: Controversies concerning *clausura* and women’s religious communities in late medieval Italy,” in *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, ed. by Peter D. Diehl and Scott L. Waugh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Tillotson, “Visitation and reform,” 6-7, 14-19; Salih, 136-52; Oliva, 35-6.

Studying the medieval Church's reaction to sexual misconduct also has obvious interest considering the ongoing public debate surrounding the sexual scandals of the modern Catholic Church. On June 11th, 2010 when Pope Benedict XVI officially closed the celebratory 'Year of the Priest,' he publicly apologized for the abuse cases of the past and stated that the Church would do "everything possible to prevent priests from abusing children."²⁶ Indeed, the 'Year of the Priest' had actually marked some of the worst revelations of sexual abuse in recent years. Just a few months earlier, on March 22, 2010 the Pope had issued a papal letter to Irish victims of priestly sexual abuse in which he expressed his shame and remorse over the crimes.²⁷ The letter had come at a time of widening scandal that included new allegations of sexual abuse in several countries including Brazil, Austria, the Netherlands and Benedict's own native Germany.²⁸ Over the years, countless op-ed pieces in the major media have suggested, as Dyan Elliot noted in her inaugural lecture of the Peter B. Ritzma Chair in humanities, Northwestern University on March 10, 2009, that the Church's failure to come clean publicly about these sexual scandals somehow represented a shift from the Church's traditional pastoral role.²⁹ However, as Elliot pointed out, the precedents which informed the current Church's efforts to suppress scandal are rooted in centuries of canon law and practise concerning the 'sin' of scandal. Consequently, studying how the medieval Church reacted to sexual scandal in the past might be helpful to understand the dramas at play today.

26. Rachel Donadio, "Pope Pleads for Forgiveness Over Abuse," *New York Times*, June 11, 2010.

27. Benedict XVI, pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland, March 22, 2010. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20100319_church-ireland_en.html

28. See Rachel Donadio and Alan Cowell, "Pope Offers Apology, Not Penalty, for Sex Abuse Scandal," *New York Times*, March 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/21/world/europe/21pope.html>; Dan Gilgoff, "Catholic Church's sex abuse scandal goes global," *CNN*, March 19, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-19/world/catholic.church.abuse_1_abusive-priests-church-abuse-archdiocese.

29. *The Church Sex Scandal: Medieval Blueprint for Disaster* [Video]. (2009). Retrieved August 13, 2010, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GV0mAD3en8>.

Indeed, to medieval ecclesiastical authorities, scandal was itself a sin – although not part of the traditional seven deadly sins which were first articulated in their common form by Gregory the Great. By the twelfth century, the theology surrounding the sin of *scandalum* in the works of medieval scholars such as Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) had become complex and detailed.³⁰ Moreover, the term also carried legal force in Church courts, and was occasionally invoked by defendants to avoid public punishment, lest scandal arise.³¹ Although recently, there has been an increasing interest in *scandalum*,³² the most work to date on the subject has been done by Lindsay Bryan.³³ In her PhD dissertation, Bryan demonstrated that during the late Middle Ages the definition of scandal expanded from simply causing another to sin. By the fourteenth century, it encompassed the maintenance of reputation and a good name as itself important.³⁴ Thus, regardless of whether or not a particular scandal was grounded in truth, the shame and sin were nonetheless still real. Bryan also showed that a medieval strategy for dealing with sexual scandals is evident in the episcopal visitation records of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, records which also form the basis for this study. However, although

30. Bryan, “*Vae Mundo a Scandalis*,” 37-8.

31. Richard Helmholz suggests that this was more common for sexual offences involving members of the clergy such as fornication, adultery, or sodomy where public penance might “actually enlarge and aggravate the public scandal.” Richard Helmholz, “*Scandalum* in the Medieval Canon Law and in the English Ecclesiastical Courts,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung* 127 (2010): 258-74, 267. My own evidence suggests a similar pattern in monastic visitations and is discussed in detail in §4.3.

32. In addition to the recent article by Richard Helmholz, *op. cit.*, see Gerhard Jaritz, “Varieties of *Scandalum*,” in *Scandala*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz (Vienna: Krems, 2008), 44-54; Elena M. Lemeneva, “‘Do Not Scandalize thy Brother:’ Scandal as Preached on by Jacobus de Voragine and Other Thirteenth-Century Sermon-Writers,” in *Scandala*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz (Vienna: Krems, 2008), 18-32; Victoria Smirnova, “Saint Faith’s Scandalous Miracles: A Quest for Novelty,” in *Scandala*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz (Vienna: Krems, 2008), 33-43; Kathryn Ann Taglia, “‘On account of scandal ...’: Priests, their Children and the Ecclesiastical Demand for Celibacy,” *Florilegium* 14 (1995/6): 57-70. According to her C.V., Dyan Elliott is also currently working on a forthcoming study tentatively entitled, *Church Sex Scandal: Medieval Blueprint for Disaster*. See also n.29

33. In addition to those already cited, see Lindsay Bryan, “From Stumbling Block to Deadly Sin: The Theology of Scandal,” in *Scandala*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz (Vienna: Krems, 2008), 7-17; Lindsay Bryan, “Scandle is Heaued Sunne,” *Florilegium* 14 (1995/6): 71-86.

34. Bryan, “*Vae Mundo a Scandalis*,” 283.

sexual misconduct was certainly one way to create scandal, it was by no means the most important or common. Anything that was visible to the outward world was also a potential source of scandal. Thus, the disrepair or neglect of buildings, the dubious financial dealings of the monastery's leaders, or too much permeability of the cloister were also important sources of scandal. The last was particularly true for women, who from 1298 onward, officially at least, were strictly separated from the outside world by the cloister wall. In fact, although sexual scandal was certainly a cause of concern for medieval authorities, my study will demonstrate that financial mismanagement or misconduct was often treated far more seriously by the bishops of Lincoln and Norwich.

Another reason for studying monastic sexual misconduct is the importance that 'naughty nuns' and 'promiscuous monks' have for the historiography of English monasticism, and in particular, the sixteenth-century Dissolution of Monasteries. Common to popular discourse, and frequently scholarship as well, is the idea that late medieval monks and nuns somehow had it coming, that they were wanton, lazy and wealthy, and they had become a shallow imitation of their more illustrious and pious forbears. This monastic 'decline narrative' and the 'inevitability' of the Suppression have been some of the most abiding themes not only in English historiography, but also in popular nationalist discourse. In this view, the Dissolution is seen as one of the great triumphs of the English Reformation and a necessary step toward modern nationhood.³⁵ Moreover, sexuality, although often unspoken, has become an inseparable part of this narrative. Indeed, as Chapter one will demonstrate, sexual incontinence was one of the most frequent accusations levied against monasteries by sixteenth-century anti-monastic writers. The infamous *Compendium Compertorum*, for instance, compiled by Cromwell's agents on

35. This theme underlies much of the Protestant historiography of England prior to the twentieth century. I discuss several examples in §1.1

the eve of the Dissolution to support its cause was filled with such ‘accusations’.³⁶ Until quite recently, the general consensus among English historians has largely supported this interpretation. As a result, since the Dissolution, but even more in the last century, late medieval English monks and nuns, especially the latter, have been constructed into naughty characters. My study, centred on the sources that led to this claim, episcopal visitation records, will demonstrate that this claim is at best an exaggeration due to the distortion in perspective allowed by the same sources, and a disregard for contextualisation and comparison between nuns and monks.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter one, I discuss the development of the monastic ‘decline narrative’ in English historiography, and how confessionality has shaped it since the Dissolution. Moreover, I discuss how the theme of monastic lasciviousness came to be so strongly associated with this narrative. Although recently some scholars have argued for a more nuanced and balanced view of monasticism on the eve of the Dissolution, by and large, the image of the late medieval promiscuous, or at least undisciplined monk remains a staple of monastic historiography to this day. English nuns, however, have undergone a much more dramatic historiographic transformation over the past thirty years, and the traditional view of late medieval nuns as women oppressed by poverty and devoid of spiritual vocation, has been challenged on numerous fronts. I suggest that the recent historiography of English nuns may provide a model for this study on how familiar and well-read sources may be re-examined and re-evaluated with new analytical approaches. I will explain how my study both builds upon these works, but also attempts to expand some of that

36. PRO, SP 1/102, fol. 91-114. For a summary transcription, see also J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie, eds., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (London: Longmans and Co. et al., 1862 - 1932) (henceforth cited as LP), X:137-44 (364).

re-conceptualization to male houses too. Finally, in this chapter I also present the limited and largely anecdotal historiography of monastic sexual misconduct itself.

The first part of Chapter two presents the historical background for this study, as I conclude my analysis of the ‘decline narrative’ with respect to the principal developments of late medieval English monasticism. In the second part of this chapter, I outline the problematic nature of the main sources for this study, episcopal visitation records and my own methodological approach to them. I also examine the limitations of these sources in terms of gender and language, and how the data was collected for this study.

Chapter three surveys some of the broad characteristics of sexual misconduct in Lincoln and Norwich. In particular, it shows how frequency of misconduct and numbers of sexual partners divide on gender lines. It discusses possible motivations of sexually active religious men and women, and the varying power dynamics at play in sexual relationships both in and outside monasteries. In particular, it examines the role played by the holding of monastic offices in the likelihood of offending. It also discusses some of the particular concerns of female religious with regards to sexual misconduct, such as pregnancy. In addition, this chapter also investigates the characteristics of same sex sexual relationships as revealed in the sources, and how these relationships also differ on gender lines.

Chapter four examines the episcopal response to sexual misconduct and begins with an examination on how it fit into the overall hierarchy of monastic misconduct. Next I present an outline of the principal consequences of sexual misconduct - namely scandal. This chapter also surveys episcopal strategies toward misconduct, in particular the use of visitatorial inquisition, compurgation, allocation of penance and written injunctions.

Chapter five examines the connection between the Dissolution and sexual misconduct. In particular, this chapter looks at factors such as monastic house income and size, and how these compare to misconduct rates. The original premise of the Dissolution was that

smaller and poorer houses were more prone to immorality, as the prelude to the Act for the Dissolution of the Lessor Monasteries makes clear - “forasmoche as manifest synne, vicyous carnall and abhomynable lyvyng, is dayly used and com̄ytted comonly in such lytell and smalle Abbeyes Pryoryes and other Relygyous Houses of Monks, Chanons & Nonnes...”³⁷. Moreover, historians such as Penelope Johnson have suggested that economic conditions and perceptions of material poverty correlate directly to the likelihood of sexual misconduct.³⁸ More recently, Anthony Shaw argued that the crime rate in smaller monasteries was indeed much higher than larger houses at the time of the Dissolution.³⁹ My own research challenges these findings with a comparison of sexual misconduct rates to income, both prior to and at the Dissolution.

A few notes regarding sources, manuscript transcriptions and translations

My research for this study is based primarily upon five sets of episcopal visitation records of the dioceses of Lincoln and Norwich from the last century prior to the Dissolution. I looked specifically at the Lincoln visitation reports of Bishop William Alnwick (1436-1449),⁴⁰ William Atwater (1517-20),⁴¹ John Longland (1525-31),⁴² and the Norwich reports of James Goldwell (1492-94),⁴³ and Richard Nicke (1514-32) (sometimes spelled

37. HOL, 27 Henry VIII, Roll of Parliament, No. 18 (27 Henry VIII, c. 28); *The Statutes of the Realm*, 11 vols. (London: Great Britain Record Commission, 1810-28) (henceforth cited as *Statutes of the Realm*), 3:575.

38. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 121-2.

39. Anthony N. Shaw, “The *Compendium Compertorum* and the making of the Suppression Act of 1536” (Phd diss., University of Warwick, 2003), 344.

40. LAO, MS V/j/1. Printed: A. Hamilton Thompson, ed. *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln*. 3 vols. Trans. by A. Hamilton Thompson (London: Canterbury and York Society, 1915-1927).

41. LAO, MS V/j/7. Printed: A. Hamilton Thompson, ed. *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1517-1531*. 3 vols. (Hereford: Lincoln Record Society, 1940).

42. LAO, MS V/j/9. Printed: Linc. Visit. 1517-1531.

43. Bodl. Tanner MS 100. Printed: Augustus Jessopp, ed. *Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich, 1492-1532* (Westminster: Camden society, 1888).

Nix or Nykke).⁴⁴ Fortunately, each of these sources has been published in decent modern editions. Except where otherwise noted, all excerpts from these sources are taken from the editions by A. Hamilton Thompson and Augustus Jessopp. However, I have also provided the manuscript folio references alongside these citations and, when relevant to the discussion, I have noted any differences between the manuscript and the printed text. Thus, for these sources (and a few others), I have provided the citation of the edition first, followed by the manuscript folio reference. However, there are also some sources such as the *Compendium Compertorum* in which I have drawn excerpts exclusively from the manuscript, even though a printed edition exists. I did this in situations where the printed edition was flawed or incomplete in some significant way. For these sources I have cited the manuscript first, and followed it with a citation for the printed edition.

Thompson's three volume *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln*, which contains Alnwick's visitations, as well as numerous earlier injunctions of Richard Flemyng and William Gray, includes an excellent English translation from which I have drawn throughout this study. Except where otherwise noted, all other translations (and errors) are my own.

44. Bodl. Tanner MS 210; Bodl. Tanner MS 132. Printed: *Visitations of Norwich*.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ‘NAUGHTY NUNS’ AND ‘PROMISCUOUS MONKS’ IN ENGLISH MONASTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

O Lorde god what goode dayes
Thes monkes have in abbeyes
And do nether swett nor swyncke
Thei live in welthynes and ease
Havynge what foever they please
with delicate meate and dryncke.¹

Sixteenth-century evangelical satire,
Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe, 1528

1.1 THE MONASTIC ‘DECLINE NARRATIVE’

IN November 1519, Cardinal Wolsey, the most powerful religious leader in England, presented a series of proposed reforms to the Benedictine order of monks. Although Wolsey’s proposals have not survived, the Benedictines’ response to them has. In a letter to the Cardinal, the order pleaded that the reforms should not be adopted since they would lead to “flight and apostasy,” and that “in our age (with the world now drawing to its close) those who seek austerity of life and regular observance are very few and very rare.”² The Benedictine-Wolsey exchange certainly lends support to the abiding theme

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1. Jerome Barlow and William Roy, *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, ed. by Douglas H. Parker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 101.
 2. W. A. Pantin, ed., *Documents illustrating the activities of the general and provincial chapters of the English Black monks, 1215-1540* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1931), 3:123-4. Translation is from Martin Heale, ed., *Monasticism in Late Medieval England, c.1300-1535* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 126-7.

that in the years just prior to the Dissolution of the Monasteries, traditional cloistered monasticism in England was both in need of reformation, and in no mood for change.³ For both sixteenth-century protestant critics and modern historians alike, evidence such as this has long supported the belief that late medieval monasticism was an institution in decline. Indeed, for nearly 500 years, historiographical discourse surrounding the Dissolution of Monasteries has emphasized its inevitability and presented late medieval monasticism as a lacklustre institution characterized by worsening standards, corruption and even sexual promiscuity.

In fact, sexual incontinence was one of the most frequent accusations levied against monasteries by sixteenth-century critics. Evangelist Richard Morison, for example, accused monasteries of amassing great stolen wealth, sleeping with married women (“sowing seed in other men’s furrows”), and applauded the Dissolution as the “putting away of maintained lechery, buggery and hypocrisy.”⁴ Certainly, the agents of the Dissolution attempted to present a case for widespread monastic incontinence, as witnessed by the numerous ‘accusations’ found in the infamous 1535-6 visitations⁵ and the opening words of the first official suppression papers, which begins with “forasmuche as manifest synne, vicyous carnall and abhomynable lyvyng, is dayly used and com̄ytted comonly in such lytell and smalle Abbeyes Pryoryes and other Relygyous Houses of Monks, Chanons & Nonnes...”⁶

3. Benjamin Thompson recently argued that the Benedictine reaction to these reforms offers a “telling indication” that late medieval English monks did not want to be practitioners of traditional monasticism, but instead wished to live comfortable lifestyles as ecclesiastical administrators. Benjamin Thompson, “Monasteries, Society and Reform in Late Medieval England,” in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 188.
4. Richard Morison, *Humanist Scholarship and Public Order: Two Tracts Against the Pilgrimage of Grace*, ed. by David Sandler Berkowitz (Canbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1984), 94-5.
5. PRO, SP 1/102, fol. 91-114. Summarized in LP, X:137-44. This visitations are discussed at length in Chapter five.
6. HOL, 27 Henry VIII, Roll of Parliament, No. 18 (27 Henry VIII, c. 28). The printed edition in the *Statutes of the Realm* series contains a number of errors as Anthony Shaw has recently noted. For that reason, citations will be primarily taken from the manuscript and the page numbers from the edition will be provided as reference. Statutes of the Realm, 3:575. See also Shaw, 389.

In fact, one recent historian, argued that the idea that “the religious were incorrigibly corrupt was the first, and official, version of the state of the monasteries.”⁷ The assumption underlying these ‘hostile’ sources is that sixteenth-century English Monasticism was past its prime, the strict asceticism of the monastic past was over, and it had been replaced by a decadent, promiscuous and corrupt institution.

Until recently, most historians more or less accepted the view presented by these sources, and consequently, the ‘decline narrative’ has been one of the most abiding themes in monastic historiography - although the elements which are emphasized of this decline can vary greatly from scholar to scholar. To most, however, the evidence for some sort of decline seemed self-evident and this was particularly true for women’s institutions which were usually depicted as small, illiterate, dumping grounds for unwanted daughters, rife with scandal, devoid of religious vocation, and stricken with debilitating poverty.⁸ According to this view, by the time Henry VIII began dissolving the monasteries in England in 1536, many if not most female convents were desperately poor and in massive debt. Poor financial management, wasteful extravagance, and outright corruption within convents were often cited as reasons for this poverty.⁹ Conversely, late medieval male houses are frequently described as lascivious, decadent and/or slothful.¹⁰ Spiritually and

7. Thompson, “Monasteries, Society and Reform,” 165.

8. See for example Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 409; Power, 161, 436-74; Robert Hugh Snape, *English Monastic Finances in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), 149; William C Jordan, “The Cistercian Nunnery of La Cour Notre-Dame de Michery: A House That Failed,” *Revue bénédictine* 95 (1985): 311-320, 315; Daichman, “Misconduct,” 97; Cross, “Yorkshire Nunneries,” 149.

9. See for example Power, 203-36.

10. On this subject, see especially G. G. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies* (Cambridge: University Press, 1930), 89, 91-4. For recent examples of decadent late medieval monks, see James G. Clark, “Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England,” in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 17; Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100-1540* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 69-71; Philip Slavin, “Feeding the Brethren: Grain Provisioning of Norwich Cathedral Priory, c. 1280-1370” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2008), 333-4. Occasionally, even nuns are described as decadent. See Diana K. Coldicott, *Hampshire Nunneries* (Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1989), 77-8.

temporally removed from the vibrant monasticism of the early Middle Ages, it had been understood that late medieval monks and nuns were a far cry from the austere ascetics required by the sixth-century *Regula Sancti Benedicti*. Confessionalist historians, such as George Coulton, maintained that this decay was embarrassing in its mass and variety and that it would be impossible to fill just one book with all the evidence for it.¹¹ Although recently some scholars have argued for a more nuanced and balanced view of monasticism on the eve of the Dissolution,¹² by and large, the image of the 'promiscuous (or at least undisciplined) monk' and 'naughty nun' remains a staple of monastic historiography to this day.¹³ As James Clark recently remarked, most historians today would "agree with the substance - if not the tone" that "monastic life was failing in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England, and the traditional image of a community of men and women serving God and the wider Christian community was, to a very great extent, a thing of the past."¹⁴

11. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 88; Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 409.

12. See for example Marilyn Oliva who argues that late medieval nunneries were highly valued by the communities in which they resided and the majority of nuns "lived quiet lives of prayer and devotion to the monastic vows to which they were wed." However, Oliva does not extend this revisionism to late medieval English monks whom she describes as living a "compromised" religious life. She writes: "Scandals involving superiors who stole from their priories' treasures to outfit their mistresses, monks who squandered their houses resources on drinking and gambling, and canons who neglected the needs of the poor and of local parishioners were considerably more common among the male religious in the diocese than among the houses of nuns." Oliva, 72-4, 209-12.

13. See for example the recent monograph by Joseph Gribbin who laments that the "English Premonstratensians, as a particular group of late medieval religious, do not shine with the same brilliance as their illustrious forefathers in the early twelfth century, but perhaps they should not be judged against such a rigorous standard." Gribbin, 94. Similarly, Martin Heale while recognizing the methodological problems associated with negative sources such as visitation records, argues that they cannot be ignored and "display genuine faults, which make it difficult for the historian to declare all was entirely well with English monasticism in the later Middle Ages." Heale, *Monasticism in late medieval England*, 26. See also Joan G. Greatrex, "After Knowles: Recent Perspectives in Monastic History," in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 36; Cross, "Yorkshire Nunneries," 149; Thompson, "Monasteries, Society and Reform," 187-8.

14. Clark, 4.

"Respectable English folk," wrote historian, George Coulton in 1906, "have long been accustomed to serious accusations against monks and nuns at the time when Cromwell and his agents began to visit."¹⁵ Indeed, the closing centuries of the Middle Ages had witnessed a host of monastic criticism. From humanists such as Erasmus,¹⁶ to poets such as William Langland¹⁷ or Chaucer,¹⁸ late medieval monks and nuns were frequently the subject of derision, for among other things, their perceived wealth and lasciviousness. However, the

15. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 89.

16. See for example Erasmus' letter to Abbot Volz in the preface to the *Enchiridion* (1503) in which he laments the fall of monasticism from its earlier ideals. P.S. Allen, ed., *Opus epistolarum Des.*, vol. 3: *Erasmi Epistolae 1517-1519* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 87-90. For an overview of Erasmus' views on monasticism, see Erika Rummel, *Erasmus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 43-8. See also James D. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 90-4; Erika Rummel, "Monachatus non est Pietas: Interpretations and Misinterpretations of a Dictum," in *Erasmus' vision of the Church*, ed. by Hilmar M. Pabel (Kirkville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1995).

17. Langland is critical of monks and nuns in several instances in *Piers Plowman*. See for example where the personification of Wrath mocks his aunt, an abbess who would "rather faint or fall dead than feel any pain." (Hir were levere swowe or swelte than soeffre any peyne.) (*Passus* 5, lines 153-4) Similarly, after criticizing monks for not caring about the poor and acting like lords, the character Clergy prophesies that one day a king shall come who shall bring them back into their pristine state and "amend members of your orders, monks, nuns and canons, and put them to penance" (amende monyales, monkes, and chanouns, and putten hem to her penaunce, *ad pristinum statum ire*.) (*Passus* 10, lines 323-4). William Langland, *Piers Plowman: the Donaldson translation, Middle English text, sources and backgrounds, criticism*, ed. by Elizabeth Ann Robertson, Stephen H. A. Shepherd, and E. Talbot Donaldson (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 70-1, 154-5. Wendy Scase argues that Langland belongs to a new wave of fourteenth-century 'anti-clericalism' which proposed, among other things, that the monasteries should be disendowed. See Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. chp. 4. Langland's poem has also been accused of being anti-fraternal. See Szittyá, 247-87. However, the poet's anti-fraternal sentiments have more recently been challenged. Lawrence Clopper argues that Langland in fact sympathized with the Franciscan ideal of poverty. See Lawrence M. Clopper, "Langland's Franciscanism," *The Chaucer Review* 25, no. 1 (1990): 54-75; Lawrence M. Clopper, "Langland's Persona: An Anatomy of the Mendicant Orders," in *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship*, ed. by Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); and more recently, see Lawrence M. Clopper, "Langland and the Franciscans on *dominium*," in *Defenders and Critics of Franciscan Life: Essays in Honour of John V. Fleming*, ed. by Michael F. Cusato and Guy Geltner (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

18. See Mann, 189-201. Similarly, see also Marsha Dutton's article in which she argues that Chaucer's two nuns (the prioress and the second nun) in the Canterbury Tales contrast good and bad monastic behaviour. See Marsha L. Dutton, "Chaucer's Two Nuns," in *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 1994 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Benjamin Thompson (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1999).

negative perception of late medieval monasticism was also influenced by contemporary writings of English evangelists who were the Dissolution's strongest supporters. Simon Fish, for example, in his famous *A Supplicacyon for the Beggars* (1529), described monks as "disguised yprocrites, vnder the name of the contempt of this world, wallowed in the sea in the worldes wealth."¹⁹ Thus, not surprisingly, the historiography of the Dissolution of Monasteries, and its 'decline narrative,' have been inexorably linked to the larger historiography of the English Reformation itself and divided on confessional grounds.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the 'decline narrative' established itself as one of the prime historical justifications for the Dissolution, which was depicted as one of the greatest triumphs of the English Reformation. Gilbert Burnet's description of late medieval English monks as living in "houses abounding in wealth, and living at ease and in idleness" in his famous *History of the Reformation of the Church of England* epitomized this stance.²⁰ However, some eighteenth-century historians, such as David Hume, recognized that the actual process of the Dissolution incorporated other factors as well - particularly political ones. Although monasteries were, as he described them, "receptacles of sloth and ignorance," Hume argued that it was Henry's avarice rather than religious convictions that underscored the Dissolution itself.²¹

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a wave of revisionist Catholic historians such as John Milner and Charles Butler, similarly portrayed Henry VIII as greedy and calculating in his suppression of the monasteries, but also attempted to show the monasteries themselves in a more positive light.²² Milner, for instance, described how

19. Simon Fish, *A Supplicacyon for the Beggars*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall and J. Meadows Cowper (London: Early English Text Society, 1871), 62.

20. Gilbert Burnet, *History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (1679-1715), 7 vols., ed. by Nicholas Pocock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), 303.

21. David Hume, *The History of England: From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James II, 1688* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1850), 3:130, 217.

22. On the subject of Catholic interpretations of the English Reformation, see generally John Vidmar,

monasteries performed numerous popular social functions such as the giving of alms, the running of hospitals and seminaries for poor children, but were dissolved “to gratify the passions of one sensual king and to raise the families of a few wicked courtiers.”²³ Rosemary O'Day argues that the wave of Catholic revisionists during the early nineteenth century marked an important demarcation point in the historiography of the Reformation. According to O'Day, the impetus behind the new movement was the debate surrounding the Emancipation Act of 1829 which would reduce many of the restrictions under which English Catholics had endured since the sixteenth century.²⁴ Most importantly, however, the new wave of Catholic historians had also utilized (to a certain extent) documentary sources to support their arguments, which at the time, was less common. Thus, as O'Day argues, Protestant historians were forced to “face up to the charge that the Reformation had not been a spiritual cleansing at all, but a division of the spoils of a wealthy but pristine Catholic Church by money grubbing monarchs, courtiers and climbers.”²⁵ However, if the work by Catholic historians such as Milner represented the opening volley in the battle of sources, it was one that protestant historians eagerly took up over the next century.

The mid nineteenth century witnessed the publication of numerous editions of medieval records associated with English monasticism and the Dissolution such as visitation reports and state papers. This publication trend continued to grow in the early twentieth century led by groups such as the Canterbury and York, and Lincoln Record Societies. Armed with such ‘sources,’ protestant scholars continued to present the Dissolution as an inevitable, even positive consequence of late medieval monastic corruption, but now they could

English Catholic Historians and the English Reformation, 1585-1954 (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

23. John Milner, *The History and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester* (Winchester: D.E. Gilmour, 1812), 1:255-6.

24. Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London: Methuen, 1986), 54-5.

25. *Ibid.*, 68.

illustrate it with actual medieval examples. Thomas Wright, for example, argued in the preface to his 1843 edition of Dissolution sources, that “the worst crimes laid to the charge of the monks are but too fully verified by the long chain of historical evidence without interruption from the twelfth to the sixteenth [centuries].”²⁶ Similarly, evidence from episcopal visitation records led James Froude to conclude that “acts of incest between nuns and monks were too frequently exposed to allow us to regard the detected instances as exceptions.”²⁷

In the early twentieth century, expansive studies by George Coulton and Eileen Power continued this trend. Power’s study on English nuns was particularly impressive in its scope and range of primary sources, and remained the most important study on English female monasticism for the better part of a century. However, her analysis was largely anecdotal and focused primarily on the often negative depiction of nuns found in episcopal visitation records. Power’s late medieval nun was not only frequently ‘naughty,’ but also frivolous, poor and financially incompetent.²⁸ Nevertheless, Power conceded that not all nuns were bad and that although “the Dissolution of the monasteries amputated in England a limb of the Church which though diseased was yet far from putrid.”²⁹ Coulton, however, was less forgiving in his assessment. He described English monastic history as “a wearisome story of embezzlement and robbery from generation to generation,” which is almost impossible for a modern person to understand since: “three hundred years of clerical decency have taught even Protestants to stagger at the sordid facts of the Middle Ages.”³⁰

26. Thomas Wright, ed., *Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries* (London: Camden Society Publications, 1843), vi.

27. James Anthony Froude, *History of England from the Death of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth*, 12 vols. (London: Longman, Roberts and Green, 1856-70), 1:188.

28. See for example Power, 161-211, 436-74.

29. *Ibid.*, 473.

30. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 89.

However, not all Protestant historians interpreted the wealth of newly available evidence in the same way. Visitation records, the principal source used by these scholars are, in a sense, systemically biased toward negativity. A visitation record was the report made by a bishop or his emissary while visiting monasteries or religious institutions in the diocese. Their purpose was to reform and correct faults - not to praise good practice. Monks and nuns were encouraged to confess their sins and those of their brethren in private testimonies with the bishop. The bishop in turn would use these testimonies to recommend reforms. Consequently, they are frequently filled with reports of misconduct. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, some scholars noted that this negative emphasis could distort our image of monasticism. Mary Bateson, for example, noted that one should approach the often scandalous reports from visitations of late medieval English nuns with an eye of suspicion, since the witnesses who reported to visiting bishops and their emissaries often gave "rambling and gossiping answers" that "bear obvious traces of human nature."³¹ Likewise, Augustus Jessop expressed some reservations about the credibility of visitation records. With respect to reports of monastic corruption stemming from the visitations of monasteries by Henry VIII's officials in 1536, he concluded that:

The prejudices with which we were, most of us, brought up against the monastic orders, the extent to which dread and horror of them has been fostered by everything we were taught of which we heard and read in poetry, romance, or so-called history, from our childhood is so incalculable, and the difficulty of freeing ourselves from beliefs which have been handed down to us by generations of good haters is so very very great, that no man can be sanguine of convincing his fellow creatures that what has been accepted as truth for centuries can be open to doubt or question.³²

31. Mary Bateson, "Archbishop Warham's Visitation of Monasteries, 1511," *The English Historical Review* 6, no. 21 (1891): 18-35, 19.

32. Augustus Jessopp, "The Norfolk Monasteries at the Time of the Suppression by Henry VIII," in *Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany*, ed. by Walter Rye (Norwich: A. H. Goose and Co., 1883), 442.

Yet, in the same edition of the Norfolk Miscellany in which Jessop published his transcription and conclusion, his editor, Walter Rye, made it clear that he disagreed with him. After Jessop's essay, Rye included a postscript where he argued the opposite and concludes that "there was never smoke without fire!"³³

More commonly, however, the different camps with respect to late medieval monasticism were often betrayed by the confessional tendencies of the authors. In the late nineteenth century, the famous Catholic historian, Francis Gasquet, wrote more sympathetic descriptions of late medieval monasteries and described the evidence for their immorality as "wholly unreliable."³⁴ However, Gasquet, an English Benedictine monk, was roundly criticized for letting his own confessional sympathies influence his conclusions. Coulton, for example, fiercely attacked Gasquet's version, and even accused him of "modern Romanism," an ironic accusation considered Coulton's own confessionalist past as an Anglican deacon.³⁵ Indeed, the great divide between Coulton and Gasquet is somewhat typical of English Reformational history. As one scholar recently remarked, for four centuries it seemed that it was difficult to write about English monasticism without "confessional blinkers on."³⁶

Despite occasionally positive portrayals of late medieval English monasticism, the more traditional 'decline narrative' presented by George Coulton and Eileen Power has certainly been more prevalent over the past century. A.G. Dickens, one of the most influential modern historians of the Reformation, argued in the 1960s that the monastic

33. Jessopp, "Norfolk Monasteries."

34. Francis Aidan Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries: An Attempt to Illustrate the History of their Suppression* (London: J. Hodges, 1895), vii. Another example of a positive portrayal of late medieval monasticism may be found in Robert Hugh Benson, *The King's Achievement* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1905).

35. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 95; For context, see Henry Summerson, "Coulton, George Gordan (1858-1947)," and D. A. Bellenger, "Gasquet, Francis Neil (1846-1929)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13: 654-6 and 21: 614-16 respectively.

36. Thompson, "Monasteries, Society and Reform," 165.

faults recorded in late medieval primary sources have been grossly over-emphasized. Nevertheless, Dickens still maintained that late medieval monastic houses were 'uninspired and lukewarm establishment[s].' With respect to the Dissolution, he argued:

Had the average rural house displayed half its virtue, the attitude of Tudor Englishmen toward monasticism would have been vastly different from that which prevailed at the meeting of the Reformation Parliament.³⁷

Similarly, in 1966 George Woodward argued that the Dissolution could never have taken place, if a "general slackness and lack of enthusiasm among the orders [had] not bred in the lay public a widespread lack of sympathy with the religious ideal."³⁸ Another similar example is J.H. Bettey who, while cautioning that some monasteries continued to be respected, argues that there "is no doubt that there had been a great decline both in the fervour and in the popularity of monasteries."³⁹

The direction of scholarship over the past thirty years on late medieval English monasticism has been framed by two separate historiographic influences. The first is the hugely influential work of David Knowles from a half century earlier. Knowles did temper the 'decline narrative' somewhat, and he argued quite strongly that English monastic history should not be seen as a preamble to the Dissolution.⁴⁰ However, at the same time, Knowles, a Benedictine monk like Gasquet a generation earlier, maintained most of the

37. A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1964), 56-7. See also Dickens' later assessment of monasticism in which he argues that, with few exceptions, "English monasticism was too old, too enfeebled, too forgotten to die violently amid dramatic passions." A. G. Dickens, ed., *Late Monasticism and the Reformation* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), 23.

38. George William Otway Woodward, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: Blandford Press, 1966), 41.

39. J. H. Bettey, *The Suppression of the Monasteries in the West Country* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1989), 1-2.

40. Knowles, 3:456.

'decline narrative' in his series and is often only barely able to conceal his disappointment with the monastic failings he had discovered.⁴¹ As Martin Heale recently described him,

his standards were exacting, and many prominent medieval monks were deemed spiritually undeveloped by his measure, with his appraisal of individual epochs of monastic history tied closely to the number of saintly regulars he could identify.⁴²

Nevertheless, as Frances Andrews points out, Knowles' enthusiasms and omissions set an unwitting agenda, as scholars "working on monasticism in late medieval England have often found themselves either building on the foundations set by Knowles or explicitly filling in the gaps left by his work."⁴³ And in many respects, Knowles' four volumes which cover the history of English monasticism from the early Middle Ages up to the Dissolution have not yet been superseded.

The second principal influence on the recent scholarship of late medieval monasticism has been the wave of revisionist scholars such as Eamon Duffy, J. Scarisbrick, Christopher Haigh and later, Robert Whitting, who began to question many of the established tenets of the history of the English Reformation, and in particular, the idea that Protestant sympathies began early in England.⁴⁴ In general, these studies argue that change came

41. See, for example, his summary of the visitation evidence of the sixteenth century: "In the majority of these there were no serious scandals apparent, and still less evidence of fervour; the picture they present is not exhilarating, and the complaints show a state of slovenly and sometimes sordid disorder; they are not frequently naive in their want of any spiritual aims or ideals. At only a few is the impression given of a harmless and contented group of men or women living a regular and devout, if neither zealous nor austere, life." Knowles, 3:75.

42. Heale, *Monasticism in late medieval England*, 5.

43. Frances Andrews, "Monastic Historiography in England: The Late Middle Ages," in *Dove va la storiografia monastica in Europa? Temi e metodi di ricerca per lo studio della vita monastica e regolare in età medievale alle soglie del terzo millennio*, ed. by Giancarlo Andenna (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2001), 88.

44. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: University Press, 1993); Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989).

only very slowly and England remained predominantly Catholic in belief and practice on the eve of the Reformation. In the years immediately following these studies, Reformation historians split into two camps - the revisionists and those espousing the more traditional view, sometimes dubbed the Whig-Protestant group, represented by historians such as A.G. Dickens.⁴⁵ Until recently, the camps seemed somewhat intractable. In 1989 upon the publication of the second edition of *The English Reformation*, Dickens justified his original argument (albeit now somewhat tempered) that there was widespread support for the Reformation in England, explaining "I find myself unable to follow far the revisionist generalizations of Dr. Christopher Haigh," which he suggests have been unduly influenced by Haigh's focus on a particularly conservative region of England.⁴⁶ Since then, however, other scholars such as Marjo Kaartinen have observed that there has recently been a general movement to "the 'third generation', who stress a middle way, seek a compromise, and admit that there were differences, both local and individual in the acceptance of evangelicalism."⁴⁷

45. For a good overview of the development and principal arguments of both sides, see O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation*.

46. A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation: Second Edition* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 10. Dickens is not the only historian to have questioned the revisionists' conclusions. See for example Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

47. Kaartinen, 5. For example, Christopher Marsh argues that while there is evidence of popular 'anti-clericalism' prior to the Reformation, there is also evidence of popular respect and positive feelings toward the clergy too. Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England: Holding their Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 92-3. Peter Marshall argues that while revisionists have given a fatal blow to "earlier 'Whiggish' and progressivist narratives," new studies must not undermine the role of agency in the formation of religious change. Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), vii. See also Alec Ryrie who stresses that although early modern evangelicals have received attention disproportionate to their numbers, as a minority they still exerted a political and social dominance that makes them hugely important. Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5-6. Similarly, see Virginia R. Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside: Social and Religious Change in Cambridgeshire, c. 1350-1558* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1996), 51-78. Other examples include Caroline Litzenberger, *The English Reformation and the Laity: Gloucestershire 1540-1580* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Caroline Litzenberger, "The Coming of Protestantism to Elizabethan Tewkesbury," in *The Reformation in*

However, the new revisionist histories of the Reformation have not, to a great extent, challenged the monastic 'decline narrative' and most revisionist scholars have avoided much discussion of monasteries.⁴⁸ As Benjamin Thompson recently remarked, the "fate of the monasteries fits the revisionist view of the Reformation(s) less well than do other aspects of the ecclesiastical and religious history on which the new interpretation has been built."⁴⁹ Thus, while the English Reformation has undergone significant revision over the past thirty years, the monastic 'decline narrative' remains at least partially intact - albeit softened somewhat of its confessionalist ideology.

Certainly, a survey of recent studies on late medieval English monasticism would suggest that most scholars have moved beyond the Catholic-Protestant stances which so divided Coulton and Gasquet. Today, most historians acknowledge the limitations of using negative sources such as episcopal visitation records to understand the quality of religious life. Most scholars also tend to acknowledge that there was great variation in the quality of monastic life throughout late medieval England. Nevertheless, while acknowledging these limitations and variations, most, if not all historians, would still argue that the preponderance of negative evidence ultimately gives the 'decline narrative' a certain amount of credibility. For example, Benjamin Thompson agrees that using these negative sources presents certain problems and limitations, but cautions that this should not exonerate "the religious from all charges," and then proceeds to argue that regular religious observance was failing in late medieval monasteries. Similarly, another contributor to the same volume as Thompson, Claire Cross, used visitation reports to show that "instances of sexual immorality occurred in Yorkshire nunneries with depressing

English towns, 1500-1640, ed. by Patrick Collinson and John Craig (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); John Craig, *Reformation, Politics, and Polemics: The Growth of Protestantism in East Anglian Market Towns, 1500-1610* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

48. A notable exception is Scarisbrick who argues that monasteries were fulfilling a valuable social role and remained popular. See Scarisbrick, 6, 51-4, 74.

49. Thompson, "Monasteries, Society and Reform," 167.

regularity in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.” Implicit in both Thompson’s and Cross’ argument is the idea that monasteries from earlier periods were better.

Nevertheless, few historians today would argue that declining standards of monastic religious observance led directly to the Dissolution, as Protestant scholars did a generation before. Today, historians such as R.W. Hoyle tend to emphasize the secular and political motivations behind the Dissolution as the most important factors.⁵⁰ Of course, some scholars suggest that reform still played some part in the state’s decision to dissolve the monasteries - even if political motivations were more important.⁵¹ However, recent studies have largely resisted making sweeping generalizations of any sort - good or bad - on the state of late medieval English monasticism.⁵² As Nicholas Orme recently concluded in his study of late medieval monasteries in Cornwall: “Mediocrity or merit? No absolute judgement can be made on either side.”⁵³

Consequently, the “decline narrative” as it stands today in monastic historiography has been greatly modified. Benjamin Thompson, for instance, writes somewhat sympathetically about monasteries as institutions doomed to be out of step with the changing religious practices of Tudor England - a sort of fatalistic, “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” view of late medieval monasticism.

Their belated attempts to make themselves useful were problematic because they conflicted with the monastic ideal of withdrawal, just as the comfortable practice of late medieval monasticism was out of step with the ascetic ideal.⁵⁴

Taking a similar stance to George Woodward’s argument a generation before, Thompson concludes that the speed and lack of resistance with which the Dissolution was accom-

50. R. W. Hoyle, “The Origins of the Dissolution of the Monasteries,” *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 2 (1995): 275–305.

51. Shaw, 416–22.

52. See for example Clark, 9–10.

53. Nicholas Orme, “Monasteries in Medieval Cornwall: Mediocrity or Merit?” In *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by Janet E. Burton and Karen Stöber (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 227.

54. Thompson, “Monasteries, Society and Reform,” 195.

plished demonstrates that late medieval monasteries had lost much of their spiritual currency with the laity since “even powerful states find it hard to make major social changes without some element of consent, or at least apathy.”⁵⁵ Articles such as this demonstrate that despite the adoption of a ‘post-confessionalist’ history of the English Reformation by most scholars, a largely negative perception of late medieval English monasticism remains standard.

However, recently another group of scholars has challenged some of the assumptions of the ‘decline theory’ more directly - at least as it applies to religious women. Consequently, in contrast to the enduring image of corrupt late medieval English monks, our understanding of English nuns has undergone a more dramatic transformation. Although originally depicted as women oppressed by poverty and devoid of religious vocation, beginning in the 1980s, a number of scholars began not only to challenge the picture that late medieval nuns were devoid of vocation, but also to claim that the poverty within their convents was, in fact, the very expression of that vocation. It was the beginning of a complete re-conceptualization of our understanding of late medieval English nuns. This recent scholarship on nuns also provides an historiographical case study on how familiar and well-read sources may be re-examined and re-evaluated with new analytical approaches.

1.2 CASE STUDY: THE POVERTY, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND SPIRITUAL VIBRANCY OF LATE MEDIEVAL NUNS

Until recently, it had been standard in the introductions of studies on late medieval English nuns to begin by lamenting the lack of scholarship and academic interest on the subject since the publication of Eileen Power’s great monograph, *Medieval English*

55. Thompson, “Monasteries, Society and Reform,” 167.

Nunneries nearly ninety years ago.⁵⁶ One recent characterization of this dearth of interest was that, since 1922, “the nuns of late medieval England have rested, if not in peace, at least substantially undisturbed.”⁵⁷ Certainly, interest from the academic community toward female monasticism was slow in developing. In fact, both before and after Eileen Power, medieval English nuns, when studied at all, were usually relegated to only brief mentions in larger works about male monastic houses. According to David Knowles, this absence of scholarship about nuns was the consequence of a relative paucity of sources concerning their lives. Responding to criticism about their omission from the first volume of his *Religious Orders of England*, Knowles wrote in his introduction to the second volume that “the intimate and detailed records of the nunneries are almost entirely wanting over the period between c. 1200 and the Dissolution.”⁵⁸ Knowles was also not alone in his belief about this ‘apparent’ lack of sources on religious women. Twenty years earlier, R. H. Snape had also remarked that it was only barely possible “to pierce the obscurity which hangs far more deeply about the history of these houses than over that of the monasteries.”⁵⁹

There is a certain truth, at least relatively speaking, to Knowles’ and Snape’s statement. In terms of sheer quantity, there is no question that, in comparison to male monastic houses of later medieval England, the documentary evidence surviving for female houses is slim. Even quite recently, historians such as Sally Thompson have remarked on the

56. Examples of this standard introduction include: Oliva, 1-10; Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society: The Dominican Priory of Dartford* (Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press, 2001), 1-9; Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1-4; John H. Tillotson, *Marrick Priory: A Nunnery in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (York: St. Anthony’s Press, 1989), 1; James Bond, “Medieval Nunneries in England and Wales: Buildings, Precincts, and Estates,” in *Women and religion in medieval England*, ed. by Diana Wood (Oxford: Oxbow, 2003), 46-7.

57. C. Paxton, “The Nunneries of London and its Environs in the Later Middle Ages” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1993), 1; as quoted in Lee, 1.

58. Knowles, 2:viii.

59. Snape, 149.

difficulty this presents in studying English nuns, particularly for the foundations of their houses after the Norman Conquest, for which only a minute number of charters survive. Comparatively, however, the origins of male houses are much better documented. For Thompson, this disparity in surviving documents is attributable to a number of factors including differences in accounting procedures between male and female abbeys, and the greater poverty of female houses. Consequently, as Thompson puts it, a scarcity of sources is a “fundamental aspect of a study of women’s convents founded in the twelfth and first half of the thirteenth centuries.”⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the relative paucity of primary sources does not mean that there are no sources at all - something which Eileen Power clearly demonstrates throughout her book. As Marilyn Oliva has remarked ironically, “had Knowles picked up a copy of Eileen Power’s book - written some thirty years earlier - he would have realized that sources do exist which illuminate the status and condition of the female houses during the Middle Ages.”⁶¹ And, like the sources for male monasticism, they are often inherently ‘negative’ by nature, and tend to be written by male outsiders such as visiting bishops. Thus, until recently, what little work had been done on late medieval English nuns had conformed to the overall traditional ‘decline narrative.’ However, the feminine version of this narrative included one important attribute which was generally absent from the male version - poverty.

The alleged extreme poverty of late medieval nuns is by far the dominant theme of

60. Thompson, *Women Religious*, 15. See also Sally Thompson, “Why English Nunneries Had No History: A Study of Problems of the English Nunneries Founded after the Norman Conquest,” in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, ed. by John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Oxford: Cistercian Publications, 1984). As recently as 1989, R.N. Swanson concluded that there is “scant material” to conclude definitively about female religious life, and “the possibility that nunneries were ‘dumping-grounds’ for unwanted daughters prevents assessment of religious commitment from the scant evidence of numbers.” R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 270.

61. Oliva, 2.

their limited historiography. In 1926, R.H. Snape wrote that the “general poverty of the nunneries seems incontestable.”⁶² His opinion was shared by most other historians at the time, including Eileen Power, who declared “in the history of the medieval nunneries of England there is nothing more striking than the constant financial straits to which they were reduced.”⁶³ Power in fact dedicated a whole chapter in her book to the subject of the financial difficulties of English nuns and demonstrated that, based on the numbers from *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the precursory inventory of the Dissolution composed in 1535, English nunneries were on average only half as rich as men’s houses and generally had more inmates relative to income. According to Power there was hardly a nunnery in England that did not at one time complain of poverty and that these difficulties increased from the end of the thirteenth century to the eve of the Dissolution.⁶⁴

However, with the exception of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Power primarily illustrates her argument by using episcopal visitation records from which she concludes that poverty was common in female houses. Central to her argument are the frequent descriptions of debt and dilapidated conventual buildings which are noted in these records. From these descriptions, Power demonstrates that approximately 50% of the female Lincoln houses visited by William Alnwick were in debt.

Time after time visitations revealed houses badly in need of repair and roofs letting in rain or even tumbling about the ears of the nuns; time after time indulgences were granted to Christians who would help the poor nuns to rebuild church, frater or infirmary. The thatched roofs especially were continually needing repairs.⁶⁵

62. Snape, 149.

63. Power, 161.

64. *ibid.*, 161. To come up with her statistics at the time of the Dissolution, Power reviewed the evidence presented in A. Savine, “English Monasteries on the Eve of the Dissolution,” in *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*, ed. by P. Vinogradoff (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909).

65. Power, 168-9.

According to Power, one of the chief reasons for this ‘poverty’ was the financial mismanagement by female monastic leaders, whom she described as “not very good businesswomen.”⁶⁶ This sentiment was shared by other historians as well. Coulton, for example, made a similar argument based on a series of visitation reports of the nunnery of Easebourne which showed the priory’s finances in a steady decline during the last two and a half centuries before the Dissolution. In 1441 the visitation record found that the “prioress’ extravagance had run the house into debt to the amount of about £400. She was constantly out of her convent, feasted sumptuously wherever she went and wore a mantle of which the fur trimmings were worth £50.”⁶⁷

In addition to managerial incompetence, Power also concluded that inadequate initial endowments contributed to the widespread poverty of English nunneries. Two more recent studies on the subject agree with this assessment. W.C. Jordan suggests that small endowments created a “wider precariousness for female religious houses that made them more susceptible to even minor fluctuations in the economy.” According to Jordan, this connection was also not lost on medieval Cistercian writers who worried that nunneries might be so poor that the women would be forced to beg.⁶⁸ Likewise, Sally Thompson’s survey of the initial endowments of numerous English nunneries founded after the Norman Conquest shows that most of the grants were indeed very small relative to male houses. According to Thompson, this may have been the result of nunnery endowments coming from a slightly lower and less important level of nobility than male houses. While kings and the baronial class might favour larger traditional male houses, the gentry class could only afford to found small houses for women.⁶⁹

66. Power, 228, see also 203-4.

67. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 91-2.

68. Jordan, “Review,” 315.

69. Thompson, “Why English Nunneries Had No History: A Study of Problems of the English Nunneries Founded after the Norman Conquest,” 138; Thompson, *Women Religious*, 165-6.

In addition to portraying nunneries as very poor, Power's monograph also argued for many other traditional aspects of the 'decline narrative.' In particular, Power maintained that there was indeed a general decline in the spiritual enthusiasm of late medieval English nuns and cites the frequency of complaints made during bishops' visitations regarding lax discipline as evidence of it. According to Power, even nuns who entered religious life as children would have been devoid of vocation:

To such, even though they might experience no longing for the forbidden pleasures of the world, the monotony of the cloister would often be hard to bear. Their young limbs would kick against its restrictions and the changing moods of adolescence would turn and twist in vain within the iron bars of its inadaptably routine.⁷⁰

Not just limiting her argument for lax spiritual vocation to the youth of the cloister, Power argues that carelessness in the performance of the monastic hours and the breaking of rules were common complaints against nuns of all ages. She points to reports which describe worldly pursuits being enjoyed by late medieval nuns such as owning pets and wearing gay clothes.⁷¹ In this negative assessment of the state of spiritual conviction among the nuns, Power was not alone, and most of her contemporary historians subscribed to a similar hypothesis. G.G. Coulton of course, strongly argued that monastic houses in general, both male and female, were so morally bankrupt that the Dissolution of them in the sixteenth century was "a clearance for which even orthodox Catholics had long since clamoured."⁷² Other contemporary historians, such as Geoffrey Baskerville and C.R. Cuncer, also argued that there was a female monastic spiritual decline in the later Middle Ages in England, pointing to the same episcopal records as evidence, as well as

70. Power, 290.

71. Ibid., 293-303.

72. Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 88.

the declining numbers of nuns and their declining literacy in Latin.⁷³ Consequently, the vision of the late medieval English nun as a woman oppressed by poverty and devoid of spiritual vocation remained the standard in histories written for the next fifty years following Power's book. However, over the past thirty years a new generation of scholars has begun to question the 'decline narrative' as it applies to religious women, and to re-examine the principal evidence upon which it was built.

Probably the most influential and important of this new wave of scholarship was Caroline Walker Bynum's landmark book *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* published in 1987.⁷⁴ In her study, Bynum explored the different form of religious asceticism of women of the late medieval period. Basing her argument primarily on the *vitae* of late medieval female saints and the writing of female mystics in North West Europe, Bynum challenged the traditional view of medieval feminine spirituality which was bound up with chastity. Instead, she demonstrated that food, the Eucharist and a devotion to Christ's suffering characterized late medieval feminine piety. The reviews for the book at the time were nothing short of glowing. One reviewer described her book as a masterpiece, praising her creative use of sources and subtle argument.⁷⁵ Others remarked on the importance of her book as a corrective against the "dominant trends in feminist criticism and histories, tendencies to focus on the obviously sexual component of gender roles: the body, sexual politics, and by extension the social body."⁷⁶ However, most of Bynum's important sources were *vitae* of female mystics operating

73. Geoffrey Baskerville, *English Monks and the Suppression of the Monasteries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 205-15; C. R. Cuncer, "The Dissolution of the Kentish Monasteries," *Archaeologia Cantiana* 47 (1935): 126-143, 128-43.

74. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

75. Judith Brown, review of *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, by Caroline Walker Bynum, *The American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 735-737.

76. Rita Copeland, review of *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, by Caroline Walker Bynum, *Speculum* 64 (1989): 303-305.

outside the cloister like Marie d'Oignies. Consequently, it was not immediately clear to what extent her hypothesis could describe the spirituality of traditional conventual women, and more specifically, English cloistered women.

The social history of medieval religious women done after Bynum's work (at least in English) generally fell into two different groups, split largely by geography. With a few notable exceptions, scholarship on continental religious women of the late Middle Ages began to focus on non-cloistered incarnations, such as recluses and hermits, or members of new orders such as the Poor Clares. Those scholars looking at medieval English religious women, on the other hand, came to focus far more on traditional cloistered nuns. Some of the explanation for this no doubt rests with the substantial surviving English episcopal registers for the later Middle Ages, sources dealing for the most part exclusively with traditional conventual nuns - but this cannot explain entirely the different focus of the continent. To be sure, there have been some important studies done on continental cloistered nuns - Penelope Johnson's excellent study on cloistered women in France comes to mind - but they are in the minority.⁷⁷ Of the studies on continental nuns, the Cistercian order has certainly received the most notice. Since the 1980s, the relationship between the fledgling female branch of the Cistercian order to their reluctant male brothers, has been a popular topic of discussion. For the most part, these studies have focused on the institutional structures of the order and spoken little about their social environment or living conditions. Another notable exception to this different focus, is Jeffrey Hamburger's work, whose studies of German convents have demonstrated the difficulty in reading both artistic and literary output of cloistered nuns due to their dual nature of both upholding patriarchal enforcement and propagating an individualist feminine expression.⁷⁸ However,

77. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*.

78. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

Hamburger and Johnson are exceptions to an otherwise different focus of scholarship on continental female religious. French scholar Alexis Grelois recently lamented this lack of interest in cloistered nuns in the introduction to his doctoral thesis on Cistercian women, saying that much of their history remains to be written, “alors que les béguines et les religieuses des ordres mendiants ont attiré depuis longtemps l’attention des historiens.”⁷⁹

However, in contrast to continental studies, the period following the publication of Bynum’s work proved to be very productive for scholars working on late medieval English cloistered women. In 1993, influenced partially by Bynum’s work on feminine piety, Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva challenged historians to re-visit some of the common assumptions concerning the poverty, physical denigration and isolation from society of late medieval English nuns. They argued that “instead of being identified as negative attributes of female religious life, these choices should be considered in the wider context of female piety in the Middle Ages.”⁸⁰ In Oliva’s book published four years later, *The Convent and Community in Late Medieval England*, she would again address this issue. Since Bynum had shown that poverty is part of late medieval piety, according to Oliva, the state of poverty which exists within female religious houses in late medieval England should be “understood as integral parts of a gender-specific female monasticism.”⁸¹ Essentially, according to Oliva, relative poverty compared to male monasteries was not only intended but also desired.

The next year, Roberta Gilchrist argued in her book, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (1994), that evidence for this intentional poverty may be seen in the choice of location for women’s monastic houses. She states that late

79. Alexis Grelois, “Homme et Femme il les créa: l’ordre cistercien et ses religieuses des origines au milieu du XIV^e siècle” (PhD diss., Université Paris, 2003), 5.

80. Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia: History and Archaeology c1100-1540* (Norwich, England: Centre of East Anglian Studies, 1993), 81.

81. Oliva, 9.

medieval English nunneries were “liminal places - located at the physical and psychological margins of society.”⁸² The majority of nunneries, according to Gilchrist, were in desolate locations. In fact, certain orders provided explicit statutes requiring the isolated location of nunneries. Criticizing Sally Thompson’s assertion that the nuns were simply less fortunate in their choice of sites than their brothers, Gilchrist maintained that sites were likely chosen by their patrons according to an established social and spiritual norm. Monasteries for men were also sometimes founded on marshy, inhospitable land, but when this happened, male houses were more likely to initiate programmes of land reclamation. As an example she cited archaeological excavations at the male monastic house, Osney Abbey, which revealed that the outer court area had been reclaimed from marsh in the twelfth century.⁸³ Nunneries, according to Gilchrist, rarely initiated such projects. Thus, these sites reinforced an existing feminine monastic spirituality.

In her book, Marilyn Oliva argued that there needs to be a “more positive and nuanced view of English nuns and their communities in the later Middle Ages.”⁸⁴ This new view was needed, in her view, because of the predominantly negative stereotype of the late medieval nun perpetuated by earlier historians. Oliva reserves the brunt of her criticism for Eileen Power’s book which she describes as suffering from a “lack of critical analysis.”⁸⁵ For Oliva, Power’s book from 1922 is a largely anecdotal generalization of monastic life in which the exceptions become the rule. Perhaps the most fundamental variance between the books of Oliva and Power is in their different approaches to the sources. Whereas Power interpreted the frequency of complaints in the episcopal visitation reports as an indication of widespread monastic decline, Oliva sees them as exceptions to an otherwise

82. Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 66.

83. J. Sharpe, “Osney Abbey, Oxford: Archaeological Investigations, 1975-1983,” *Oxoniensia* L (1985): 95-130; As referenced in Gilchrist, 66.

84. Oliva, 10.

85. *Ibid.*, 2.

vibrant spirituality. One qualitative difference between the two books should be noted which is that, while Power's study is meant to encompass the whole feminine monastic history in England, Oliva limits herself to Norwich between the years 1350 - 1540 which happens to be relatively well represented in surviving sources.

In her book, Oliva also disagrees with Power's portrayal of female monastic poverty as an unintentional result of poor money management. In contrast to Power, who suggested that financial mismanagement within female houses was common, Oliva argues that based on extant household and manorial accounts, cartularies, scattered charters, Exchequer and Court Augmentation records and Suppression papers, most nuns were able to manage their meager resources skilfully and survive fluctuations in the economy.⁸⁶ In support of her assertion, Oliva looked at account books for Bungay and Marham abbeys which are the only abbeys in the diocese for which substantial account records remain. In these records, Oliva traced the income and expenses for the two abbeys over the three-hundred-year period before the Dissolution. According to Oliva, the surviving collector and bailiff accounts for Bungay Priory show fairly consistent income during the last three centuries of the Middle Ages. This was despite the general depression of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries which hit all landlords hard in England, but particularly the smaller landholders such as women's religious houses. According to Oliva, starting in 1399, Bungay Priory adjusted to these changes by leasing out most of the land which they had previously held in their own hands. This according to Oliva helps to explain the consistency of the priory's income, even during the rough times.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the surviving household accounts for Bungay, show that the prioress from 1490 to around 1526, Elizabeth Stephenson, was able to successfully balance the rising costs within the abbey with the house's income. According to Oliva, "she kept a narrow but positive margin

86. Oliva, 7.

87. Ibid., 90-5.

between her income and expenses, and never began her accounts with the hefty arrears which often kept houses in a perpetual state of financial insecurity.”⁸⁸ Oliva, however, does not explain how it was that the income was able to rise each year to meet the revised expenses of the abbey.

At Marham abbey in contrast, Oliva concedes that there were financial difficulties. Nine extant abbesses’ accounts over a four-year period show the abbey operating within the limits of their revenues. However, two other surviving account books show over spending of £42 in 1446-7 and £23 in 1492-3 and another £4 pounds the following year. According to Oliva, the problem of these deficits was increased by a large number of the abbey’s tenants being in default of rent. For this argument, Oliva relies heavily on John Nichols’ Ph.D. dissertation which analysed closely the income and expenses of the abbey in the fifteenth century. According to Nichols, each account record showed that the abbess was steadily paying down the debts of the abbey. Despite the troubles at the abbey, its manors maintained themselves in the black and often ran a surplus. By the time of the dissolution, the abbey was no longer in debt.⁸⁹ Similarly, Oliva chronicles the evidence for financial problems at several other houses as well, but argues that on the whole, most houses in the diocese of Norwich were in good financial shape.⁹⁰

Although much of Oliva’s analysis is excellent, some of her conclusions seem a little broad. For example, much of Oliva’s argument rests on the absence of information. Thus, if no complaints about financial matters are made during an episcopal visitation, Oliva concludes that there were no problems to report. She may very well be correct, but one can also imagine that there might have been reasons for nuns to hide financial difficulties from visiting bishops. Thus, extending her conclusion that most houses managed their

88. Oliva, 95.

89. John Nichols, “The House and Cartulary of the Cistercian Nuns of Marham Abbey” (Phd diss., Kent State University, 1974), 130-78, 168-78; as referenced in Oliva, 96-7.

90. Oliva, 99.

finances well may be a bit of a stretch. To support her conclusion further, Oliva references studies from other parts of England which showed financial stability within convents. For example, she cites Gasquet's book, *English Monastic Life* which had so enraged George Coulton nearly a century earlier, in which he examined one abbey, Grace Dieu, for an unspecified length of time, during which Gasquet claimed that the nuns lived within their means.⁹¹ In this respect, Oliva's book suffers a bit from the same anecdotalism that she criticized in Power's work. Nevertheless, Oliva convincingly demonstrates that many nunneries managed their finances well and other recent studies have similar findings. For example, John Tillotson, in his study of Marrick Priory, found that, based on the account books and expenditures for food, the nuns in the abbey ate about as well as the better off peasants, and certainly more than enough to dispel any concern about starvation.⁹² Diana K. Coldicott in her analysis of a number of Hampshire nunneries' accounts found that nuns ate a variety of foods including meat, poultry, eggs, fish and butter. The quantities of these substances which were consumed by the abbeys prompted Coldicott to state that "earlier nuns would (or should) have been shocked by the amount of meat eaten in the nunneries by the later Middle Ages."⁹³ However, it should be noted that the abbeys of Hampshire were some of the richest in England, so the lifestyle represented there is far from the average.⁹⁴ However, Tillotson's study of Marrick Priory, which had an income

91. Francis Aidan Gasquet, *English Monastic Life* (London: Methuen and Co., 1905), 175.

92. Tillotson, *Marrick Priory*, 15. Tillotson based his calculation on Christopher Dyer's influential study on the diet of the upper and lower classes based on manorial account books and maintenance contracts. See Christopher Dyer, "English Diet in the Later Middle Ages," in *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honour of R.H. Hilton*, ed. by T. H. Aston and Paul Levinson (Cambridge: University Press, 1983), 191-216.

93. Coldicott, 77-8.

94. In the appendix to her book, Coldicott lists the values assessed by the VE for the houses in question as Wintney Priory £43, St. Mary's Abbey, Winchester £179, Wherwell Abbey, £352. With the exception of Wintney, all of these houses are well above average. On the 106 houses for which there is information on income at the time of the Dissolution, 73 had incomes of less than £100. *ibid.*, 192-193. See also Power, 2-3.

much more representative of the norm, does show that nuns could eat well.⁹⁵

In addition to questioning the nature of poverty within late medieval female monastic houses, historians have recently questioned the idea of decline in spiritual viability of nunneries during the late medieval period. Some have argued that nunneries continued to be vibrant religious centres throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Paul Lee, for instance, proposed in his recent book, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society*, that the involvement of nuns in the education of children, a widespread phenomenon in the late medieval period (a phenomenon which both Power, Coulton and others remarked upon but did not reach the same conclusion as Lee) was a facet of a continuing feminine spiritual viability. In addition, Lee also questioned the widespread historiographic claims for the illiteracy of late medieval nuns. For evidence, Lee examined the monastic inventories from the Dominican priory of Dartford which recorded numerous books containing vernacular spiritual writings. Lee concludes that although late medieval nuns may have lacked the Latin proficiency of their monastic brothers, they were certainly prolific consumers of vernacular writings. Thus, according to Lee, the nuns of Dartford priory, who were actively involved in the local lay community and intellectually engaged, should be classified as spiritually vibrant and healthy - not lacklustre and irrelevant in institutions apt for Dissolution.⁹⁶ Similarly, Marilyn Oliva also argues that late medieval convents were essential parts of the lay communities in which they were situated. Oliva proposes that the various services which the abbeys offered such as the probating of wills, education of children and temporary room and board for lodgers, did not “undermine their spiritual viability, but rather increased their prestige among secular neighbours as holy women devoted to both the active and passive

95. At the time of the Dissolution, Marrick Priory had an annual income of £64. Tillotson, *Marrick Priory*, 3.

96. Lee, 164.

aspects of monastic life.”⁹⁷ These conclusions presuppose that active involvement in the community be considered spiritual vibrancy, but whether medieval nuns understood their spirituality on these terms is not quite as clear. Certainly, Church authorities disliked a strong involvement of nuns with their surrounding world and thus, would not have considered involvement in the community as a proof of a rich spiritual life. Consequently, interpreting the behaviour of late medieval nuns based only on the stricter models implied by monastic *regula*, visiting bishops, or theologians could lead to erroneous conclusions regarding their spiritual identity. Does community viability equate to spiritual viability? The studies by Oliva and Lee have made strong arguments that (at least in part) it did.

Thus, in the twenty-five years since Carolyn Bynum published her book, the historiography of late medieval English nuns has been transformed. Historian James Bond, aptly summed up this transformation in his paper published just a few years ago concerning the archaeology of late medieval nunneries, in which he begins by apologizing that until recently, he was among those “male chauvinist pigs” who believed that nunneries were “merely frivolous imitations of monasteries, serving only as dumping grounds for unmarried daughters and comfortable places of retirement for wealthy ladies.”⁹⁸ However, as his paper admirably demonstrates, nunneries are distinct, interesting and worthy of study in themselves - something which Eileen Power already knew ninety years ago. Consequently, the study of late medieval English nuns certainly no longer suffers from a chronic lack of interest or devaluation. If anything, the pace of scholarship recently seems to have eclipsed that of the male houses.

The recent work by Bynum, Oliva, Lee, and Gilchrist has shown that poverty and spirituality were intertwined for medieval religious women, and that an active involvement with the larger community was also important to them. The effort made by these

97. Oliva, 8.

98. Bond, 47.

historians to test existing models of medieval nuns against the surviving evidence offers a valuable example of how historiographic models can sometimes be based upon cultural assumptions rather than empirical data. The assumptions are not always modern either. In the case of English nuns, a narrow corpus of primary sources written almost entirely by Church authorities has made it difficult to hear the feminine voice amidst the din of the patriarchal establishment. This forces historians to confront the question: by what measure does one evaluate the spirituality of religious women? Is it more important to understand the expectations of the Church, lay society as a whole, or the women themselves? Each group would likely give us different answers. These same questions are important to consider when approaching monasticism as a whole. As recent studies of religious women have demonstrated, appearances can be deceiving. Nuns could be poor and spiritual, or poor and miserable - just as 'promiscuous monks' and 'naughty nuns' might co-exist with chaste brethren, and might or might not be condemned by them.

1.3 THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MONASTIC SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Curiously, despite the traditional assumption in English monastic historiography that there were plenty of *real* "naughty nuns" and "promiscuous monks," there have been remarkably few studies which have approached the subject in any great detail, and even fewer which have attempted to provide any statistical basis for the phenomenon. This is not only the case for English historiography. The continental 'naughty nun' and 'promiscuous monk' have also been only touched lightly. To date, there have been no book length studies on the subject for either sex. Certainly, some have dealt with the phenomenon peripherally, such as Peter Linehan's well received book, *Ladies of Zamora* (1997), a micro-history of a scandal that plagued a Spanish Dominican convent in the

thirteenth century;⁹⁹ or Lindsay Bryan's Ph.D. thesis, and subsequent article, which discussed monastic sexual misconduct in terms of its relationship to the medieval sin of scandal.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the subject has been more commonly approached by individual articles or chapters, and often bundled up with discussions about the 'quality' of late medieval religious life in general.¹⁰¹

The literary topos has certainly had more attention. Jill Mann discussed Chaucer's frequent use of the topos in her book, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (1973). In it she argues that although Chaucer never directly related sexual misconduct to the religious, his puns nonetheless quite clearly sexualized and transferred them "from a factual status to a linguistic one."¹⁰² Likewise, Penn Szittya examined the literary tradition of the lecherous and amoral friar in England, paying particular attention to his negative literary portrayal during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁰³ For female religious, the most notable study was done by Graciela Daichman. She devoted a whole book to the literary examples of nuns' sexual misconduct. In her first chapter, she attempted to reconcile the historical 'naughty nun' to the literary one.¹⁰⁴ Daichman's study, however, was heavily criticized for her clumsy approach to primary sources, and lack of comparative analysis

99. Peter Linehan, *The Ladies of Zamora* (Manchester: University Press, 1997).

100. Bryan, "Vae Mundo a Scandalis"; Bryan, "Periculum animarum."

101. See for example Power, 436-74; Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 105-65; Gribbin, 65-8; Knowles, 1:85-113, 2:204-18, 3:62-86. Shannon McSheffrey recently examined cases of priests accused of sexual misconduct in late medieval London. She concluded that, while the actual incidence rate of clerical misconduct is impossible to know, civic authorities were certainly concerned about it, and (in conjunction with ecclesiastical authorities) went to great lengths to ensure that incontinent priests were prosecuted. Shannon McSheffrey, "Whoring Priests and Godly Citizens: Law, Morality, and Clerical Sexual Misconduct in Late Medieval London," in *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. by Norman L. Jones and Daniel Woolf (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 50-70.

102. Mann, 25.

103. Szittya, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature*.

104. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns*, 3-30. Daichman also published a version of this chapter as a separate article, see Daichman, "Misconduct." Eileen Power also dedicates a chapter to the literary nun and her association with promiscuity. Power, 499-562.

with male religious.¹⁰⁵ More recently, Marjo Kaartinen dedicated a chapter in her 2002 book, *Religious Life and English Culture in the Reformation*, to the laity's perception of sexual misconduct in monasteries on the eve of the Reformation. In this chapter, Kaartinen discusses popular ridicule of monastic ideals in contemporary literature such as referring to nunneries as brothels or monks as adulterers. According to Kaartinen, the dichotomy might be explained in part by the literature and symbolic separation between the lay and monastic worlds. She writes:

Groups of men or women living in communities, in secluded conditions, unchecked and uncontrolled, gave ample possibilities for imaginative minds to create images, gossip and tales of the wildest kind, whether based in facts or not. As a result, the religious could be presented as the greatest of all adulterers or seen as so strict in their religion that they could not even read or discuss matters such as carnal love.¹⁰⁶

According to Kaartinen, early modern evangelists capitalized on these lay perceptions for their own ends, exploiting real examples of 'naughty nuns' or 'promiscuous monks' whenever cases came to light. The evangelists understood that the consequences for sexual activity were higher for monastics than regular people since the "sexual nature of human beings caused constant and serious embarrassments in the religious life even more than elsewhere."¹⁰⁷

There is significant variance in quality among studies that directly discuss historical 'naughty nuns' and 'promiscuous monks.' Moreover, as I shall illustrate there has been far more scholarly interest in the sexual misconduct of nuns than of male religious, leading to a somewhat unbalanced view of the subject. The earliest scholar to approach monastic

105. See for example Penelope D. Johnson, review of *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature*, by Graciela S. Daichman, *Speculum* 63, no. 2 (1988): 388–90; Janet Summers, review of *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature*, by Graciela S. Daichman, *The Journal of Religion* 68, no. 2 (1988): 331–2; Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 113.

106. Kaartinen, 114.

107. *Ibid.*, 118.

sexual misconduct in any systematic way was Eileen Power, who included a chapter on the subject in her pioneering book *Medieval English Nunneries* (1922). However, she excluded comparison with male monastics and has been criticized by some scholars, perhaps a little unfairly, for an overly anecdotal portrayal of the subject, and a “lack of critical analysis.”¹⁰⁸ Certainly, her work was largely supportive of the ‘decline theory’ and in many respects has been superseded by more recent works, such as those by Oliva and Gilchrist. Nevertheless, Power remains one of the few scholars to have dealt with the subject of sexual misconduct directly. Citing that the “celibate ideal was a hard one,” she presented a colourful collection of lewd stories drawn from episcopal visitation reports depicting what she termed “the olde daunce.”¹⁰⁹ In fairness, Power’s examples are real, many of which are drawn from the same visitation reports upon which this study relies. In addition, she did provide some rough statistics for sexual misconduct and apostasy. She presented for instance, that twelve nuns were guilty of amoral behaviour in the Lincoln visitation records of William Alnwick (1436-1449).¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, Power only elaborates on a few examples from these cases and does not give the names or houses for the rest. In addition, problematically my numbers for the same records do not match hers.¹¹¹ Since she does not give specific criteria about what constituted in her view ‘amoral behaviour’, our discrepancy in numbers cannot be resolved. Similarly, Power gives numbers for other sets of visitation records, including the Norwich visitations of Richard Nicke (1514).¹¹²

108. Oliva, 2.

109. Power, 436-74.

110. *Ibid.*, 461.

111. Power states that her number omits the six cases of apostasy in the visitation of Ankerwyke in 1441. Omitting the same, my own count is ten nuns accused of either sexual misconduct or apostasy. They are Isabel Benet (Catesby, 1442), Margaret Wavere (Catesby, 1442), Alice Longspey (Godstow, 1445), Joan Maynard (Littlemore, 1445), Elizabeth Wylugby (Stamford, 1442), Margaret Mortymere (Stamford, 1445), Agnes Butylere (Stamford, St. Michael’s, 1440), unnamed nun (Godstow, 1445). For a complete list of all cases of sexual misconduct or apostasy I found, see Appendix below. See *Linc. Visit.*, 2:47-48, 91, 114, 217, 348, 350, 352, 355.

112. In this case, her single case of sexual misconduct matches mine. The single case is Agnes Smyth, an

However, Power does not provide any numbers for male monastics, and the closest thing there is to comparison is her unsubstantiated claim that, in Alnwick's visitations, the "men were more lax in behaviour than the women."¹¹³ Without any methodology or raw data, Power's numbers are not particularly useful.

In his seminal, *Religious Orders in England*, David Knowles also tackled the question of monastic misconduct, including a chapter in each of his three volumes on the state of religious life at different times based on visitation reports. In each of these chapters, a sample of extant records is surveyed and certain visitation reports are singled out for further analysis. Like Power, many of Knowles' conclusions are also anecdotal. For example, in his discussion concerning the visitation records of William Alnwick, Knowles casually states that the "most common cause of trouble was the incompetence or self-will of the superior."¹¹⁴ Nowhere does Knowles give any numerical evidence to support his argument. On the whole, Knowles gives numbers only sparingly, preferring broad generalizations such as his claim that the fifteenth-century "religious houses, for their part, were undoubtedly several degrees more distant in fervour than they had been in 1300."¹¹⁵ A notable exception is in volume three in which he shows that there was no serious decline in monastic population in Lincoln in the years preceding the Dissolution.¹¹⁶ On the whole, Knowles does not discuss sexual misconduct separately from other types of monastic misconduct. Moreover, Knowles' conclusions and examples are limited almost exclusively to male religious, further limiting their usefulness.

There have been few significant studies on the subject for England since Eileen Power. However, two exceptions are John Tilloton's article from 1994 and Joseph Gribbin's

Austin canonness at Crabhouse nunnery who bore a child with one Simon Prentes. See *Visitations of Norwich*, 109; Power, 461.

113. Ibid., 461.

114. Knowles, 2:210.

115. Ibid., 2:218.

116. Ibid., 3:70.

book from 2001. Although Tillotson's article was primarily about the early enforcement of Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* in the diocese of York, he examined sexual incontinence numbers in several nunneries and compiled some statistics on the subject. Interestingly, Tillotson found a dramatic increase in sexual misconduct and apostasy cases in the years following the implementation of *Periculoso* which had mandated a much stricter life. However, he proposes that these numbers do not represent a real increase, but rather are the result of bishops performing their duties of visitation more diligently under papal pressure to implement the bull. Thus, as Tillotson put it, "the appearance of a sudden rise in serious disciplinary problems is likely to have been created by the changing practices of the clerical bureaucracy in recording an archbishop's activities in his diocese."¹¹⁷ Gribbin dedicated a short portion of one of his chapters in his well-received study, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England*, to a discussion about sexual misconduct rates amongst English Premonstatensian canons between 1478-1500. In his examination, Gribbin confirmed and amended a list of fornication accusations originally compiled by George Coulton in 1930. Gribben also included an appendix of accused individuals found in the fifteenth-century visitation reports of Bishop Redman. However, Gribbin's analysis of the accusations themselves was somewhat cursory. In addition to compiling his overall numbers of sexual misconduct, Gribbin also briefly discussed the seriousness of scandal, and how even the "merest suspicion" of fornication could result in an accusation. However, he did not push his analysis much further.¹¹⁸ In the late 1980s, Penelope Johnson dedicated a large portion of her book to examining instances of sexual misconduct in France in the thirteenth century.¹¹⁹ As opposed to almost every other scholar who has written on the subject, Johnson looked at both male

¹¹⁷. Tillotson, "Visitation and reform," 9-10.

¹¹⁸. Gribbin, 65-8, 245-7; See also Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 262-4.

¹¹⁹. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 112-30.

and female monastic sexual misconduct. Her detailed and careful study, which was based on the extensive visitation records made by Archbishop Eudes (Odo) Rigaud in Normandy over a twenty-year period, is the only statistical comparative approach on the subject to date. Although her study is based on a different place and time period, it can provide a useful reference point for comparison and context with late medieval English monks and nuns.

To conclude, while the monastic ‘decline narrative’ has been a dominant force in English historiography for nearly 500 years, recent scholarship has challenged its assumptions on numerous fronts. A post-confessionalist wave of scholars has moved to present a more nuanced view of pre-Dissolution England which recognizes that monasteries could still be valued in lay society. In particular, scholars such as Marilyn Oliva and Paul Lee have made strong cases that many English nunneries were spiritually vibrant and attracting new recruits right up until the Dissolution. Nevertheless, while historians over the past thirty years have downplayed the ‘decline narrative,’ they have not dropped it entirely either. More importantly, no one has yet dealt directly with one of the ‘decline narrative’s most enduring images: the ‘promiscuous monk’ and ‘naughty nun.’

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND, SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

*Se tu fas la mounjo
D'aquel counbent tant grand,
leu me farèi le mounje,
T'aurè 'n te counfessant.*

If you become a nun
in that big convent,
I will become a monk,
I will hear your confession.¹

Traditional Pyrénées folk song.

2.1 BACKGROUND: EVALUATING LATE MEDIEVAL MONASTICISM

THE yardstick by which late medieval monasticism should be measured has always been problematic. Should late medieval monks and nuns be compared to earlier ages, or should they be judged by their own standards? Although the former in general more common than the latter in English historiography, methodologically, it is obviously problematic. Supporters of the ‘decline theory’ have long argued that the numerous documented instances of monastic misconduct from the fourteenth century onward are *prima facie* evidence of its validity. Compared to earlier periods, there is

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1. Jean Poueigh, *Chansons populaires des Pyrénées françaises: traditions, moeurs, usages* (Paris: Champion, 1926), I:364. Graciela Daichman identifies this piece as a variation on the *jeux de transformation* genre, a sub-type of the *chanson de nonne*. These *jeux* traditionally depict a young woman trying to evade a persistent lover by becoming a nun. Daichman identifies a number of other French, Spanish and English variations of the same theme. The translation is hers. See Daichman, *Wayward Nuns*, 95-99.

without a doubt an abundance of late medieval records depicting ‘promiscuous monks’ and ‘naughty nuns’. Indeed, George Coulton famously challenged any historian to refute his damning depiction of late medieval monasteries with an appeal to actual evidence.

Not that I have not failed to weigh their objections carefully, or that I depreciate their scholarship; but in the last resort, I must prefer the evidence of actual contemporary documents. For this, in effect, is the invidious choice forced upon me. None of my critics has produced medieval testimony against my main facts.²

There is no question that Coulton’s challenge is difficult to meet. Largely because of one type of source in particular, episcopal visitation records, we know far more about the interior world of sixteenth-century monasteries than we do about twelfth-century ones. Moreover, the monastic world which is depicted in these sources is one far removed from the austere asceticism and ideals required in the monastic rules which supposedly formed the basis for this way of life.

Visitation records document the bishop’s official inspection of monasteries, colleges, hospitals and other religious institutions in his diocese and are unparalleled in what they can show us about private lives of monks and nuns. In England, they first appear toward the end of the thirteenth century, and become increasingly common thereafter. During visitations, monks and nuns were encouraged to confess their sins and report on their brethren. Consequently, visitations are usually filled with a litany of complaints and accusations - everything from minor or petty grumblings about food, to gross misconduct or larceny on the part of the abbot or prior. Not surprisingly, there are also frequent accusations of sexual misconduct detailed in them as well. The negative nature of these sources has led to an emphasis on the failings of late medieval monks and nuns which is absent for earlier periods.

2. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2:ix.

However, prior to the fourteenth century when episcopal visitations were still uncommon, sources documenting real 'naughty nuns' and 'promiscuous monks,' were exceedingly rare. Thus, whenever actual monastic sexual activity (as opposed to literary *topoi* or debatable case-figures found in penitentials or canon law) is discussed by historians, they almost invariably draw their examples from the later Middle Ages. The same often follows with discussions of other types of monastic misconduct as well. As a result, there tends to be a huge difference in how late medieval monks and nuns are depicted by historians compared to those of earlier times. As Martin Heale recently remarked, when one compares the sources from which early monastic history has been written with those of the later Middle Ages, the disparity in the two histories should come as no surprise. The monasticism of the early and high Middle Ages has largely been constructed based on monastic chronicles, saints' *vitae*, and other sources naturally positive toward monasticism.³ So, were late medieval monks and nuns all that much more 'naughty' after all? Perhaps earlier periods had their own share of sexual scandals of which we are unaware. Acceptance of the premise of the 'decline narrative' presupposes there was a 'golden age,' and then after this moment in time, monastic standards of observance declined. Turning Coulton's challenge on its head, what evidence is there that the monks and nuns of earlier ages were any better? If it is impossible to prove conclusively that earlier monastic men and women held a higher standard of observance, then it follows that it is impossible to conclude that their later medieval brethren were any worse.

Nevertheless, in other ways which are more easily documented, late medieval monasticism was somewhat different from that of the early and high Middle Ages - although whether these differences amounted to a less vigorous spiritual life for monastic men and women is debatable. By the mid fourteenth century, English monasteries were forced to

3. Heale, *Monasticism in late medieval England*, 3.

make a number of adaptations which eventually came to redefine their overall place in medieval society. However, not all of these changes were obvious either to contemporaries or historians. Moreover, as David Knowles points out, although many of the details had changed, overall the monastic “life lived in 1500 was essentially that of 1200 and 1300.”⁴ Despite this essential continuity, late medieval monasticism was different. These changes in monastic practice principally fall into two categories: economic and administrative.

Economically, by the end of the fourteenth century, monasteries were struggling under the same massive financial pressures affecting the rest of England stemming from the Black Death. These economic changes in turn forced monasteries to adopt new strategies to survive and fundamentally changed their relationship with the secular world. Administratively, there was renewed pressure to regularize episcopal oversight and monastic observance. Under such pressures, episcopal visitations and record keeping became standardized and common by the end of the thirteenth century - creating whole new sets of sources for historians. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, autonomous monasteries also moved to formalize their relationships between houses following the same rule as the rule of Saint Benedict for monks or the Rule of Saint Augustine for canons. In so doing, they organized themselves into orders (the Benedictines, the Augustinians, etc.), and established in each case an overall hierarchy of control and oversight, similar to that employed by the Cistercians.⁵ Moreover, in the interest of practicality and standardization, all cloistered orders including the Cistercians felt the pressure to relax officially certain aspects of monastic asceticism.⁶ On the other hand, restrictive legislation mandated that

4. Knowles, 3:6.

5. On the Cistercian (as well as Cluniac and Premonstratensian) system of administration and oversight, see generally Jörg Oberste, *Visitation und Ordensorganisation: Formen sozialer Normierung, Kontrolle und Kommunikation bei Zisterziensern, Prämonstratensern und Cluniazensern, 12. - frühes 14. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1996).

6. On the subject of the fourteenth-century Avignon Papacy's attempts at monastic reform in England, see generally Peter McDonald, “The Papacy and Monastic Observance in the Later Middle Ages: The

female orders retreat to a much more cloistered existence, thus threatening their ability to provide the services the lay community expected of them.⁷ In order to contextualize properly late medieval sexual misconduct, these changes must be understood.

Economic Changes

David Knowles noted, with what seems some wry amusement, the dichotomy of sixteenth-century monastic critics pointing to both the great poverty of monastic houses as reason for the Dissolution, while at the time complaining about the wealth and wasteful habits of other houses.⁸ Such is the difficulty of discussing the monastic economy on the eve of the Dissolution that houses could and did exist on both extremes of the economic spectrum. However, despite the fact that some monasteries such as Westminster or Syon Abbey remained wealthy to the end, it is safe to say all monasteries were challenged by the economic changes of the fifteenth century. Indeed, the time period of this study is contained in what economic historian Christopher Dyer recently termed the “long fifteenth century (1350-1520).”⁹ During this time the medieval economy in England was completely transformed. What started as an economy which was dominated by a powerful aristocracy whose wealth was built upon the rents and services of a large subordinate peasantry, and a Church which controlled vast tracts of land and likewise enjoyed a sizable income from rent and services, was transformed into a market-dominated economy. Traditional customs and services declined, wages rose and consumption patterns changed. All of this resulted

Benedictina in England,” *Journal of Religious History* 14, no. 2 (1986): 117–32; Anthony Margett-Crosby, “The Monastic Response to Papal Reform: *Summi Magistri* and its Reception,” *English Benedictine History* 27 (2001): 1–9; Jean-Berthold Mahn, *Le Pape Benoît XII et les Cisterciens* (Paris: H. Champion, 1949); Philibert Schmitz, *Histoire de l’Ordre de Saint-Benoît*, 7 vols. (Liège: Éditions de Mardsous, 1948), 3:63–74; Knowles, 2:3–13.

7. On this subject, see generally Tillotson, “Visitation and reform”; Makowski, esp. 112–121.

8. Knowles, 3:241.

9. Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–6.

in an economy which in many ways was very different. The overall population decrease across England caused the price of grain and other staples to fall dramatically during the second half of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth century.¹⁰ Like the rest of the population, monasteries were hit hard during the Black Death. From an estimated 13,000 monks and nuns at the start of the fourteenth century, the monastic population contracted to perhaps only 7,000 by the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹¹ The fact that fewer monks were available to manage the estates combined with the rise of wages meant that large scale direct cultivation of monastic estates became unprofitable. Large landholders like monasteries and the aristocracy were forced to switch to leasing out their lands, but since room needs to be made for lessees to make a profit after the cost of rent, the overall revenues fell for landlords. Moreover, income derived from church tithes also began to fall after the Black Death. Fewer parishioners meant less tithes. Martin Heale has suggested that this effect was felt most strongly by monasteries which derived the majority of their income from this type of source, such as the Augustinian canons who drew a third of their income from such spiritualities.¹²

Naturally, these economic challenges precipitated a number of monastic adaptations. However, some of these adaptations put monks and nuns in direct conflict with authorities and the traditional monastic life, and may have contributed to an environment in which

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10. Dyer, *An Age of Transition?*, 96; John Hatcher, *Plague, Population, and the English Economy 1348-1530* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1977), 49-51; Edward Miller and John Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change, 1086-1348*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, 1978), 61.
 11. David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, eds., *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London: Longman, 1971) (henceforth cited as Knowles and Hadcock), 488-95; Heale, *Monasticism in late medieval England*, 7-8.
 12. Heale, *Monasticism in late medieval England*, 12; Martin Heale, *The Dependent Priories of Medieval English Monasteries* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), 237-49. See also David Robinson who argues that the proportion of Augustinian Canons' income derived from spiritualities was much higher in the century prior to the Black Death, accounting for approximately forty percent of their income in 1291. David Robinson, *The Geography of Augustinian Settlement in Medieval England and Wales*, 2 vols. (Oxford: B.A.R., 1980), 128, 172, 373-80.

sexual misconduct rates were affected. The first and most obvious reaction to the difficult economic conditions coming out of the Black Death was the increase in monastic debt. Credit seems to have been reasonably available to most monasteries. Over half the monasteries visited by Bishop Alnwick between 1436-49 reported debt of some amount, and some were very high relative to income. Nevertheless, debt seems to have been a reasonable strategy for many monasteries who did manage to pay back these amounts during the better times. For example, in 1442 the prior of Daventry Priory, reported that he had managed to reduce the debt of the priory from 600 marks to approximately 120 in approximately thirteen years.¹³ Similarly, Marilyn Oliva found in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Norwich that although there are plenty of examples of monasteries which were burdened excessively with debt, there are also examples of houses which used credit successfully to get through lean times.¹⁴

Another strategy frequently employed by houses to increase revenue was the practice of selling *corrodies* (an allowance of food, clothing and shelter in a monastery in return for a lump sum gift). Barbara Harvey has argued that this practice peaked in the mid fourteenth century and declined somewhat in the years prior to the Dissolution.¹⁵ However, this practice also brought increased tensions into the monastic environment because it represented the inclusion of secular people within the monastery. Moreover, *corrodies* could become excessive financial burdens on a house if too many were sold, or if the

13. "Frater Robertus Man, prior, dicit quod stetit prior xiiij annis, et dicit quod domus indebitabatur in ingressu suo in dc marcis, de quibus soluit, vt dicit, d. marcas; et dicit quod isto die indebitatur et oneratur in cxx marcis et modicum vltra." Linc. Visit., 2:60; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.88d. There is no record of Daventry's income during the period of Alnwick's visitations, however, the income of the house at the time of the Dissolution was recorded as £236 per annum. Knowles and Hadcock, 96. Despite the prior's success at paying down debt, many of the canons complained that the prior had been careless with the house's finances by signing bad contracts without the chapter's consent and letting several of the rectory houses go to ruin. Moreover, during the same visitation he was accused of having an affair with Agnus, the wife of Robert Mason. Alnwick convicted him after he failed to produce six canons to swear to his innocence. Linc. Visit., 2:63-4; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.89-89d.

14. Oliva, 98-9.

15. Harvey, 188.

money received from a corrody sale was treated as income rather than capital reserve (i.e. the income was spent on immediate expenses rather than invested or saved). For all these reasons, the practice was certainly frowned upon by bishops who routinely forbade it without their express permission.¹⁶

The second major economic challenge affecting late medieval monasteries were changes in monastic patronage. By 1300, lay patronage of English monasteries reached its height and began to decline. According to Karen Stöber in her recent book, traditional monasteries increasingly had to compete for potential patrons with newer more fashionable foundations such as the mendicant orders, hospitals and colleges. These foundations “simultaneously provided lay patrons with more flexibility and a greater degree of personal manipulation of the liturgy.”¹⁷ However, Marilyn Oliva’s study demonstrated that the lower gentry and merchant classes made donations to monasteries in their wills right up until the Dissolution.¹⁸ Recruitment also does not seem to have been a problem. Calculations by a number of scholars have shown that numbers were actually on the rise in the early half of the sixteenth century.¹⁹

16. Bishop William Alnwick, for instance, included a warning about awarding corrodies without consent, “under pain of excommunication and deprivation of office” (*sub penis excomunicacionis et priuacionis*), in nearly every injunction he issued. See, for example, his injunction to Daventry in 1442. Linc. Visit., 2:66-7; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.90. See generally on the subject Harvey, 179-209; Richard I. Harper, “A Note on Corrodies in the Fourteenth Century,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 15, no. 2 (1983): 95-101; John H. Tillotson, “Pensions, Corrodies and Religious Houses: An Aspect of the Relations of Crown and Church in Early Fourteenth-Century England,” *Journal of Religious History* 8, no. 2 (1974): 127-43.

17. Stöber argues that late medieval patrons increasingly favoured foundations in which they could exert some influence over the “shape of their piety and hence, more control over the prayers of the community.” Chantry chapels, for instance, offered patrons the chance to designate specific prayers and services through their statutes. Karen Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c.1300-1540* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2007), 117, 207.

18. Oliva, 156.

19. See for example Knowles, 3:69-70; Claire Cross, “The Religious Life of Women in Sixteenth-Century Yorkshire,” in *Studies in Church History: Women in the Church*, ed. by W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Cambridge: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1990), 310.

Notwithstanding the numerous economic challenges which faced late medieval monasticism, monasteries on the whole were surviving, and in some cases, thriving. Monasteries had adapted to provide a larger range of services for the laity - although as Benjamin Thompson has argued, these adaptations directly conflicted with the monastic ideal.²⁰ This was particularly the case for female convents despite *Periculoso* as Oliva's exceptional study published a decade ago demonstrates.²¹ Nevertheless, these late medieval patronage changes had made it more difficult for monasteries to survive. Abbots and abbesses now potentially had to expend much more effort into providing services to the community. They had to employ more people in the collection of rents which now formed a much more substantial portion of their income. Under conditions such as this, fiscal savvy and prudence may have become much more important in the quality of monastic leadership.

Certainly, the importance of financial well-being is evident in many late medieval episcopal visitations - although whether this concern increased during the later Middle Ages is not clear. Bishop William Alnwick, for example, customarily enquired into the financial state of any house he visited at the start of the visitation. Moreover, his concern over financial matters often seemed to trump other issues including sexual incontinence, such as when he appointed an admitted incontinent nun at Catesby Priory to manage the house's finances after the prioress had proved herself to be incompetent.²² In Archbishop Robert Winchelsey's thirteenth-century 'articles of visitation,' a set of procedures for bishops to follow when visiting monasteries, he instructs his prelates that they should make

20. Thompson, "Monasteries, Society and Reform," 195.

21. Oliva, 8.

22. I discuss this particular case in much more detail in §4.2. The prioress in question, Margaret Wavere, was accused of selling or giving away numerous items in the monastery (particularly some silver spoons which were said to be in the possession of her mother). She was also accused of neglecting the upkeep of the buildings and in failing to manage the tenants. On the other hand, Isabel Bennet, the nun later appointed to investigate the finances of the abbey and report back to the bishop, admitted to having a child with one man and spending her nights dancing with travelling Austin friars. No penance or punishment for Isabel is recorded in the injunction. Linc. Visit., 2:46-53; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.93 sched., 94-95d.

a detailed enquiry into the economic state of the monastery (*Circa Temporalia*), whether the buildings are kept in good repair, whether any goods of the house have been alienated, woods destroyed or servants released.²³

2.1.1 Administrative Changes

The twelfth century marked a period of massive enthusiasm for cloistered life, and witnessed an explosion of new orders such as the Cistercians, Augustinians and Premonstratensians.²⁴ However, this era of expansion came to a close at the beginning of the thirteenth century. With the exception of the Bridgettine order of nuns, no other new cloistered orders were created after the year 1200.²⁵ There also seems to have been a significant decrease in new monastic foundations after 1200. This dearth of new houses, along with the end of new orders, has led some historians to describe the later Middle Ages as a period of retraction and retreat for traditional cloistered monasticism. David Knowles, for example, argued that their “early fertility had gone” and pointed to the fact that from 1216 onwards no new plantation of any significance was made by any of the male monastic orders in England.²⁶ Knowles, of course, does not mention Syon Abbey here - the only offshoot of the female Bridgettine Order in England which certainly qualified as a significant foundation. However, one royal foundation, as exceptional as Syon might be, does not really change the overall trend of fewer English monastic houses - both male and female -

23. These financial requirements, however, were just a small subset in a much larger overview of visitation procedure. I discuss these articles in much more detail in §4.2 Rose Graham, ed., *Registrum Roberti Winchelsey Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi A.D. 1294-1313* (Oxford: Canterbury and York, 1952), 1302-3; BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.64v-65.

24. This was also true for female monasteries as demonstrated by Bruce Venarde’s important study. Bruce L. Venarde, *Women’s Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

25. The Bridgettine order of nuns was founded in the mid fourteenth century, but consisted of just a single monastery in England, Syon Abbey, which was founded in 1414 and went on to become one of the wealthiest nunneries in England.

26. Knowles, 1:5.

being founded in the later Middle Ages. The founding of the Cistercian monastery of Hayles in the mid thirteenth century, according to Knowles, “was in a sense the end of a chapter. It was the furthest wash of the tide from Cîteaux.” The expansion of cloistered monasticism was further hindered in the thirteenth century, due to the breakdown in the previously close relationship between the king and the monasteries. According to Knowles, the breakdown of this relationship is demonstrated most clearly in the Statute of Mortmain (1279) which limited the ability of the Church to acquire new lands in England, making it much more difficult to found new houses of any significance.²⁷ To Knowles, these changes were symptomatic of an overall change in English cloistered monasticism, in which “monks were no longer the animating or invigorating principle of the nation’s higher life.”²⁸

In fact, all religious orders, even mendicant orders, were facing increasing restrictions in the thirteenth century. The thirteenth canon of the Fourth Lateran Council, *Ne nimia religionum diversitas*, had already forbidden the creation of further new orders.²⁹ Moreover, the Council of Lyons of 1274 decreed that all religious and mendicant orders

27. Knowles, 1:6-7; Interestingly, Ernest Jones demonstrates that although the overall effect of Mortmain on monastic houses was negative, a number of monasteries managed to circumvent surreptitiously the law and acquire significant new lands. Ernest D. Jones, “The Crown, Three Benedictine Houses, and the Statute of Mortmain, 1279-1348,” *Journal of British Studies* 14, no. 2 (1975): 1-28.
28. Knowles, 1:6-7; More recently, Benjamin Thompson said essentially the same thing, arguing that monasteries became increasingly irrelevant in English society toward the end of the Middle Ages. Thompson, “Monasteries, Society and Reform,” 165-95.
29. *Concilium Lateranense* IV, c.13: “Ne nimia religionum diversitas gravem in ecclesia Dei confusionem inducat, firmiter prohibemus, ne quis de caetero novam religionem inveniat, sed quicumque voluerit ad religionem converti, unam de approbatis assumat. Similiter, qui voluerit religiosam domum fundare de novo regulam et institutionem accipiat de religionibus approbatis” Josepho Alberigo et al., eds., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* (Rome: Herder, 1962), 218. Herbert Grundmann argues that the inclusion of this canon may be partially a conservative reaction to the rapid success and support of new mendicant orders such as the Franciscans. Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Hildesheim G. Olms, 1961), 136-54. Similarly, see Jane E. Sayers, *Innocent III: leader of Europe, 1198-1216* (New York: Longman, 1994), 99-100. Marian Michèle Mulchahey suggests that the real aim behind this canon was to “outlaw the new preaching movements, whose activities most nearly touched the Church’s doctrinal concerns.” Marian Michèle Mulchahey, *“First the bow is bent in study-”: Dominican education before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 11.

established after the Lateran Council of 1215 without papal approval were banned in perpetuity.³⁰ Consequently, it seems likely that the period after 1200 did mark some sort of watershed for cloistered monasticism.

However, if outward monastic expansion slowed, internal reform continued to be frequent and substantial until 1400. Beginning in the thirteenth century, traditional male monasteries were caught up in a wave of reform and re-organization which resulted in a much more standardized form of monastic life. Formerly autonomous houses which followed the same rule were organized into orders such as the Benedictine monks and Augustinian canons, which would eventually include complex hierarchies of chapters and jurisdictions. Influenced by the Cistercian monastic structure, the Fourth Lateran Council's (1215) stipulation *in singulis regnis* required the Black Monk abbots (abbots of traditional Benedictine houses) in each province to meet in a general chapter once every three years.³¹ In the century following Lateran Four, the Black monks continued to struggle with calls for further reform from two opposing camps within the order: those who wished for some sort of official relaxation of some aspects of the rule (particularly the stipulations against eating meat), and a more conservative camp which wished to

30. *Concilium Lugdenense* II, c.23: "Cunctae affatim religiones et ordines mendicantes post dictum concilium adinventos, qui nulla confirmatione sedis apostolicae meruerunt, perpetuae prohibitioni subicimus et, quatenus processerant, revocamus" J.D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio*, 31 vols. (Florence and Venice: n.p., 1692-1769), 24: 96-7. On this canon and its implications for monastic expansion, see generally Richard W. Emery, "The Second Council of Lyons and the Mendicant Orders," *The Catholic Historical Review* 39, no. 3 (1953): 257-71; Frances Andrews, *The Other Friars: The Carmelite, Augustinian, Sack and Pied Friars in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 173-222. For a good discussion concerning thirteenth-century conciliar prohibitions against monastic expansion with respect to the later sixteenth-century Jesuits, see also Joseph F. Conwell, *Impelling spirit: Revisiting a Founding Experience, 1539, Ignatius of Loyola and his Companions* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997), 322-30. On the council itself, see the well-received monograph by Burkhard Roberg, *Das zweite Konzil von Lyon (1274)* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1990).

31. Innocent III actually recommended that Cistercian abbots help the Benedictines in their transition to the chapter system. Alain Boureau, "Prout moris est iure: Les moines et la question de la coutume (XIIe -XIIIe siècle)," *Revue Historique* 303, no. 2 (2001): 363-402, 374; Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990) (henceforth cited as DEC), 1:240-1.

“return” to a more strict, literal interpretation of the Rule of Saint Benedict. By the end of the thirteenth century, it seems the former camp prevailed (at least in terms of officially loosening dietary restrictions).³² However, while rules were officially relaxed, the overall organization of the Black Monks continued to become increasingly streamlined following the initial guidelines of the Fourth Lateran Council. In 1336, Benedict XII promulgated *Summi Magistri* which organized the Benedictines into one single provincial chapter for all of England.³³ In 1339, the Augustinian canons joined the monastic reform movement with a similar system of chapters as laid out in the papal bull, *Ad decorem*.³⁴

It is not clear whether these relaxations of monastic rules in male houses during the thirteenth century represented a retreat from strict observance, or simply an acknowledgement of a dichotomy between ideals and practice which was always present. Alain Boureau has demonstrated that there was frequently a re-interpretation of both monastic rules and papal edicts in the customaries of English monasteries (particularly wealthy and important ones such as Bury St. Edmunds) - indicating that ultimately, monastic practice remained somewhat locally determined, even after the reforms of the thirteenth century.³⁵ Although there is little evidence to suggest that earlier religious observance was particularly stricter, traditional scholarship has interpreted these changes as evidence of monastic decline. Visitation reports, for instance, are frequently cited as evidence that further aspects of monastic life were relaxed as time went on - particularly concerning private property and dress.³⁶

32. McDonald, 119-20; Knowles, 1:18.

33. *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum*, 25 vols. (Turin and Naples: n.p., 1857-1885) (henceforth cited as BR), 4:347-87. On this subject, see generally Maret-Crosby, 1-9.

34. David Wilkins, ed., *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, 4 vols. (London: n.p., 1737) (henceforth cited as Wilkins, *Concilia*), 2:629-51. On this subject, see generally H. E. Salter, ed., *Chapters of the Augustinian Canons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), xxiii; McDonald, 117-32.

35. Boureau, 363-402.

36. See for example Knowles, 2:214.

Certainly the Lincoln and Norwich visitation records examined for this study appear on the surface to support this conclusion and illustrate a number of practices and customs which would seem to contradict a literal interpretation of the *Regula Benedicti*. For instance, customs permitting private allowances of money seem to have been relatively common place during visitations. Sometimes these allowances seem to have been for the purpose of purchasing necessary personal items such as clothing, while in other cases, they seem to have represented some sort of discretionary spending on the part of the monk or nun. In 1445, the canons of Bicester Priory complained that they had not received their raiment, and Alnwick ordered the prior to supply it at “the accustomed terms.”³⁷ Similarly, during his visitation of Dorchester Abbey in 1441, Alnwick found the abbey’s finances in such disarray that he entrusted the temporal affairs of the monastery to a layman steward named William Marmyone. Accordingly, Alnwick stated that

the said administrator should pay the abbot twenty pence a week year by year for his commons and forty shillings a year for his raiment, and every canon fourteen pence each week and twenty shillings a year for his commons and raiment.³⁸

In these instructions, Alnwick clearly differentiates between “commons” (*pro communiis*) and “raiment” (*vestitu*). It seems logical that the former represented some form of additional spending allowance above and beyond what was needed for necessities. As these examples demonstrate, Alnwick not only clearly accepted the practice of private monastic allowances, but might even intervene to ensure they were distributed equitably. Indeed, failure to pay the customary allowance could put a monastic leader in debt to the monks or nuns. The prioress of Catesby was said to be “in the nuns’ debt for three

37. “in terminis consuetis.” Linc. Visit., 2:35; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.27.

38. “quod dictus administrat < sic > soluat abbati annuatim xxd. in septimana pro communiis et xls. in anno ad vestitum, et cuilibet canonico singulis septimanis xiiijd. et xxs. in anno pro communiis et vestitu suis.” Linc. Visit., 2:72; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.112.

quarters of a year” because she had not paid the agreed upon raiment.³⁹ Just a few years after these visitations, the Benedictine Chapter of 1444 acknowledged that, although it was contrary to the Rule, the practice of monks and nuns receiving private allowances for both necessities and recreation had become so customary in most monasteries that it was no longer officially forbidden. However, the expenses still had to be approved and a faithful account of them given.⁴⁰ This official sanction seems to indicate that private allowances were a feature unique to the end of the Middle Ages. But did it mean a decline in monastic fervour?

Common sense would suggest that few monasteries at any time during the Middle Ages followed the Rule of Saint Benedict to the letter. Indeed, the earlier debate about diet in the thirteenth century would seem to be evidence that the disconnect between official interpretation and practice existed long before the later Middle Ages. Which part of the rule was not followed simply changed with time.⁴¹ Nevertheless, historians such as David Knowles have suggested that, by the sixteenth century, old failings “have become so common and so habitual that they are regarded as customs rather than as breaches of the law.”⁴² Does the later Middle Ages represent a real quantifiable relaxation of the severity of monastic life, or simply better documentation of breaches of the rule which were always symptomatic of the religious life? I believe it is impossible to know.

Female cloistered religious were also affected by the great sweeping reforms of the thirteenth century, although with a different emphasis. The Council of Oxford in 1222 had

39. “quod priorissa est indebitata monialibus de premissis per tria quarteria anni.” Linc. Visit., 2:47; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.94.

40. Pantin, 2:203; Snape, 164. See also Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 5, 186-7.

41. For example, in her examination of abbot’s *vitae* and customaries, Isabelle Cochelin found that the stipulation for the one year novitiate was not followed until the beginning of the twelfth century. Isabelle Cochelin, “Peut-on parler de noviciat à Cluny pour les Xe-XIe siècles?” *Revue Mabillon: Revue internationale d’histoire et de littérature religieuses* 70 (1998): 17-52, 17-52.

42. Knowles, 3:69.

passed a number of decrees aimed at female houses. Clothing rules and strict requirements regarding the specifics of their veils were passed, along with recommendations that nuns should not sleep together in the same bed. There was also a strong emphasis on the relationship the cloister had with the outside world. Nuns were enjoined not to allow any secular women into their houses except for necessary servants, and both monks and nuns should not leave the cloister except with good reason and permission of their superior and they must have a strict day of return.⁴³ It is difficult to determine whether these rules were actually implemented on a wide spread scale. Certainly, by the end of the thirteenth century, further reforms were deemed necessary and women's claustration entered into its most restrictive era with the publication of Boniface VIII's infamous *Periculoso* in 1298.⁴⁴ This papal mandate required all professed women (those who had taken solemn vows) to be part of an approved order and be completely enclosed - technically never to leave the monastery. This strict forced enclosure threatened both the nuns' economic and spiritual life.

Although it was common for bishops to censure both men and women for travelling outside their monastery without permission, or for allowing secular people entry to the interior of the monastery, it took on an additional meaning in female houses. On one hand, there is the frequency with which medieval jurists argued for female enclosure⁴⁵ and the repetitive complaints in visitation reports regarding lapses in nuns' houses; on the other hand, the frequency of these same complaints raises the question: did the nuns really accept and integrate in their daily life these strict limitations to their movements? There is some evidence that early attempts by bishops to implement *Periculoso* in female houses

43. C. R. Cheney and F. M. Powicke, eds., *Councils and Synods with other Documents relating to the English Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) (henceforth cited as *Councils and Synods*), II, i: 118-123.

44. *Sexti Decretal. Lib. II, Tit. XVI*, Emil Albert Friedberg, ed., *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: n.p., 1879-81) (henceforth cited as CIC), II: 1054.

45. On this subject, see generally Makowski, esp. 101-121.

were met by resistance. For instance, according to his report, when Bishop John Dalderby visited Markyate priory in 1300 to enforce the new rules, the nuns “hurled the said statute at his back and over his head.”⁴⁶ In another example, the nuns of Meaux Abbey refused to accept the new strict rules of enclosure mandated by *Periculoso*, arguing that they were not bound by law or reason to a stricter observance than had been contained in their original profession.⁴⁷ At the minimum, there appears to be a bit of a disconnect between the regularity of medieval sermons which preach the importance of female enclosure, and the commonplace manner in which lapses of it are recorded in visitation reports.

This is all the more important, because scholars since Eileen Power have pointed to regular lapses of enclosure by women as evidence of the waning spirituality of women in the later Middle Ages.⁴⁸ More recently, however, scholars have suggested that a more nuanced interpretation of these so called lapses is required. For instance, John Tillotson studied the early efforts of enforcement of *Periculoso* in the diocese of York as represented in episcopal injunctions in the century following its publication. Interestingly, he found that after an initial period of strict interpretation, very quickly a more flexible approach to the rule developed.⁴⁹ One example of this flexibility, as shown by Tillotson, was in the changing injunctions of Archbishop Melton: he found it necessary to relax enclosure rules during harvest time in poor convents in which nuns needed to work. Tillotson also points out that *Periculoso* was to a certain extent, incompatible with many of the demands which society and patrons imposed upon religious houses such as hospitality. Thus,

46. LAO, Episcopal Register III, f. 10v. Translation is from Power, 351-2. See also Tillotson, “Visitation and reform,” 2; and *VCH, Bedford*, 1:359.

47. Thomas de Burton, *Chronica monasterii de Melsa.*, 3 vols., ed. by Edward A. Bond (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866), II:243.

48. Indeed, Power warns the reader that “sympathy for the nuns must not blind us to the fact that hardly a moralist of the Middle Ages but inveighs against the wandering of nuns in the world and adds his testimony to the fact that all the graver abuses which discredited monasticism rose in the first instance from the too great ease with which monks and nuns could leave their convents.” Power, 391-2.

49. Tillotson, “Visitation and reform,” 10.

episcopal visitors, rather than forbidding visitors altogether, instead limited the duration of their stay and contact with the nuns.⁵⁰ Other scholars, such as Penelope Johnson, have echoed this conclusion arguing that in reality strict cloistering was rarely put entirely into effect since it was completely impractical. Nuns, particularly convent superiors, had to leave occasionally the monastery in order to conduct business. According to Johnson, the numerous accounts found in the thirteenth-century French episcopal records of nuns breaking cloister is evidence that the nuns themselves had a different standard in mind, and that enforcement was usually quite lax.⁵¹ Similarly, Marilyn Oliva's study also showed that enclosure was also not very well enforced by English bishops in the fifteenth century, and that economic necessity often required women to be outside their convent.⁵²

Most recently, in one of the most interesting studies to come out in the past decade, Sarah Salih argued that although *Periculoso* was made to be taken seriously, it was continually reinterpreted by the women themselves. Central to Salih's thesis, is a revised conception of late medieval feminine piety which re-includes sexuality, more specifically, virginity. In this sense, Salih's work builds upon that of Carolyn Bynum, whose book, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* (1988) (as I discussed in chapter one), had first proposed that late medieval spirituality was very different for men and women, and that conceptions of food and fasting were particularly important for the feminine expression of piety. Bynum's study had largely de-emphasized chastity, but Salih argues that this conception of "food asceticism" cannot adequately apply to all examples of medieval feminine spiritual expression. Salih is careful not to denigrate Bynum's significant accomplishment in her book, but argues that virginity, and particularly the symbolic representations of it could be central to female conventual spirituality. For instance, in a careful analysis of the

50. Tillotson, "Visitation and reform," 10-11.

51. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 161.

52. Oliva, 35-36.

profession ceremony for medieval nuns, Salih demonstrates that a woman's donning of the habit bound her symbolically to the collective virginity of the cloister, and in particular, that "veiling could be said to confirm the nun's virginity and confer it, a useful ambiguity which allows virginity to be perceived simultaneously as both natural to the body and discursively formed."⁵³ This symbolic virginity according to Salih allowed for a more flexible conception of claustration from the point of view of medieval religious women. Elsewhere she argues:

Interpreting enclosure as a symbolic practice, however, enables the nuns to perform their virginity in front of an audience of lay people, edified by the presence of holy women, their virginity marked by the signs of their communal identity, in their midst.⁵⁴

Salih's analysis, to my mind at least, offers a plausible explanation how late medieval religious could re-interpret claustration to their advantage, creating a type of "mobile claustration." This different conception allowed nuns the ability to travel and operate outside the convent walls because they carried their cloister with them in the form of their veils wherever they went. So, although some might argue that the active circumvention of *Periculoso* made late medieval nuns more 'naughty,' the nuns themselves might not have agreed.

How does one, therefore, define monastic misconduct? There is certainly no shortage of barometers to use. To name just a few: there are the sources produced normally by monks and nuns themselves such as monastic chronicles and *vitae* of saints, classic monastic rules, or customaries, and the ones produced by the Church prelates such as Church councils, papal decrees, and episcopal injunctions. Each of these sources carries slightly different standards and expectations of proper conduct expressed by different

⁵³. Salih, 128.

⁵⁴. Ibid., 152.

groups. When these standards conflict, as we saw for instance regarding nuns' enclosure, it is not always easy to classify something as misconduct. There is often a difference in interpretation between monastic and non-monastic - particularly, in the often antagonistic relationship between the episcopal visitor and the religious house.

One example will illustrate this point vividly. Willian Alnwick, bishop of Lincoln, visited the Augustinian house, Dorchester Abbey, at least twice during his episcopate. During his first visit, in the spring of 1441, he found that many of the religious spent their idle time drinking and gambling, many of the buildings and tenements were in disrepair, two canons had fled in apostasy and at least five others stood accused of sexual misconduct. Among those accused was the abbot himself who was said to maintain sexual relationships with at least five different married women.⁵⁵ Four years later, on Alnwick's second visit, little seems to have changed. Many canons were reported to be drinking and gambling at taverns in town. There were also two more accusations of sexual misconduct, and one canon was particularly unruly - Ralph Carnelle was said to be in open rebellion with the abbot after having beaten the prior and threatened others with knives.⁵⁶ Nearly a century later, Dorchester still seemed to be suffering from issues considered worthy of reform by visiting bishops. A short notation of a visit in 1517 by William Atwater noted that the canons were still regularly eating and drinking at taverns in town and that building maintenance continued to be neglected.⁵⁷ In 1530, John Longland's visit recorded two more instances of sexual misconduct, including the prior who was said to be infamous in the surrounding region for his open affair.⁵⁸ The history of Dorchester Abbey seems to have been frequently marked by scandal and misconduct. Indeed, one of the earliest references to the house is when they sued their former abbot for embezzling

55. Linc. Visit., 2:68-78; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.111-13.

56. Linc. Visit., 2:78-83; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.25d-26 sched.

57. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2:115; LAO, MS V/j/7, fol.96.

58. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2:115-22; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.153-155d.

forty-eight marks in 1225.⁵⁹ Incidents such as this, led David Knowles to conclude that “the virus was in the soil of Dorchester.”⁶⁰

Was Dorchester really a ‘bad’ house, populated by ‘bad’ canons? Yes, despite injunctions and attempts at reform, the house continued to be at odds with episcopal visitors for the better part of a century, and potentially longer. What, however, does this mean for our understanding of misconduct? Underlying these considerations is the problematic concept of ‘misconduct’ in general. Did the canons of Dorchester consider themselves ‘bad’? In the visitation of 1441, no less than four out of the eleven canons stated that all was well (*omnia bene*) at the house.⁶¹ Putting aside for a moment that the designation *omnia bene* can mean many things and cannot always be taken at face value - clearly not all the canons at Dorchester felt that episcopal reform was needed. Others, however, went out of their way to point out the failings of their fellow monastics and entreated the bishop to intervene. One canon begged the bishop to make changes, stating “let us feel your fatherly kindness in all its bounty, especially with respect to the house.”⁶² Did the canons engaged in the inappropriate behaviour see themselves as bad? Or, did they simply have different standards? Clearly, the answer is not black and white.

Nevertheless, it is easy to understand why some historians have perceived increasing levels of documentation of misconduct as an indication of increasing misconduct. However, obviously these two elements do not necessarily coincide. Indeed, rather than a “golden age,” one could characterize the beginning of the monastic reforms of the thirteenth century as an attempt by ecclesiastical authorities to standardize observance and to

59. *VCH, Oxford*, 2:87.

60. Knowles, 3:66.

61. The canons in question were Thomas Tewkesbury, Walter Dorchestre, John Shrewesbury, and Henry Yorke. Thomas Tewkesbury and John Shrewesbury were both later accused of sexual misconduct by other canons. *Linc. Visit.*, 2:69,72; *LAO*, MS V/j/1, fols.111-111d, 112 sched.1.

62. “Quo circa senciamus iam vestram paternalem largifluam benignitatem precipue circa domum.” *Linc. Visit.*, 2:73; *LAO*, MS V/j/1, Fol. 112 sched. I.

curtail “undesirable” customs present in many houses from the point of view of the secular clergy. The fact that many of these customs continued unabated after the reforms, such as the eating of meat or travelling outside the cloister, may be a reflection of the disconnect between Church authorities and practising monastic men and women. Could it have been the same with sexual misconduct?

Further examples of the monks’, nuns’, and regular canons’ resistance to outside interference may be found in the reaction to Benedict XII’s reforms *Summi Magistri* (1336) and *Ad decorem* (1339). One anonymous English monastic chronicler described the reforms as being published *against* the religious orders (*Aliaque statuta edidit contra statum omnium religiosorum*).⁶³ Another chronicler from Westminster is even more straight forward in his complaint:

[Benedict] in the third year of his pontificate, published very oppressive constitutions for the state of monks, and inundated those transgressing them with penalties and censures, which Pope Clement VI mercifully suspended.⁶⁴

Clearly, the terms misconduct and reform are subjective - both to historians and to monastic men and women. If we are to generalize about the state of monastic observance in late medieval England, for which we have plenty of sources, we must be careful not to compare late medieval monks and nuns to earlier ones for whom we do not have equivalent records, nor be too quick to characterize their behaviour with adjectives such as ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ There are indeed more recorded ‘promiscuous monks’ and ‘naughty nuns’ after the thirteenth century; we just can not say whether this is representative of a trend of increasing naughtiness or just better records. Nevertheless, the spiritual and

63. Burton, 391.

64. “Qui anno pontificatus tertio pro statu monachorum constitutiones edidit gravissimas, et contravenientes poenis ac censuris innodavit, quibus papa Clemens sextus misericors indulgit, poenas ac censuras suspendendo.” James Tait, ed., *Chronica Johannis de Reading et Anonymi Cantuariensis, 1346-1367* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1914), 81. See also McDonald, 123.

administrative changes in English monasticism provided a framework in which misconduct was more easily detected, more likely to be recorded, and thus can be better studied.

2.2 SOURCES: THE VISITATION RECORDS OF LINCOLN AND NORWICH

As presented in the introduction, this study is primarily based upon the Lincoln episcopal visitation records of Bishop William Alnwick (1436-1449), William Atwater (1517-20), and John Longland (1525-31), and the Norwich reports of James Goldwell (1492-94), and Richard Nicke (1514-32). These records encompass 391 separate visitations, injunctions or letters to monasteries, convents, colleges, hospitals and cathedrals in Norwich and Lincoln, and represent some of the most detailed sources available for late medieval monastic life in England. These particular visitation records of Norwich and Lincoln are certainly not unknown to historians. Due to their remarkable detail, they have been used extensively in other studies. In fact, Alnwick's visitations are often cited as one of the most valuable sources of monastic social history for all of Europe, along with the thirteenth-century register of Archbishop Eudes Rigaud of Normandy, which Penelope Johnson used in her study, and the fifteenth-century German visitations of Johann Busch.⁶⁵ This of course,

65. Power, 670. On the visitations of Rigaud, see generally Adam J. Davis, *The Holy Bureaucrat: Eudes Rigaud and Religious Reform in Thirteenth-Century Normandy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), esp. 65-103; Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*. Rigaud's register itself exists as Paris BN, MS. lat. 1245. Printed: Odo Rigaldus, *Regestrum Visitationum Archiepiscopi Rothomagensis* (Rouen: A. Le Brument, 1852). The "visitations" of Johann Busch are not strictly speaking administrative records such as those of Alnwick and Rigaud, but rather represent his recollections of his interaction with female religious during visitations over the course of his career. They are contained in book II of his *Liber de reformatione monasteriorum* which he composed toward the end of his life. Although many scholars have focused on the usefulness of Busch's visitations for what they can reveal about the social and religious practices at work in fifteenth-century German nunneries, as Julie Hotchin has recently pointed out, Busch himself seems to have considered the work to be largely didactic. Julie Hotchin, "Guidance for Men who Minister to Women in the *Liber de Reformatione Monasteriorum* of Johannes Buch," in *What Nature does not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, ed. by Juanita Feros Ruys (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 237-8. The *Liber de Reformatione* exists in several manuscripts and the only critical edition to date is Karl Grube's 1886 version, rpt. 1968. See Karl Grube, ed., *Des Augustinerpropstes Ioannes*

raises the question: what ‘new’ can possibly be gleaned from records which so many have already perused? I believe much.

Given the mass of surviving episcopal registers for late medieval England, it is astonishing that no more visitation reports survive. Visitation records are created when a bishop tours the monasteries, parishes, colleges, hospitals and other religious institutions in his diocese. A typical English episcopal register is usually filled with somewhat more mundane activity of a diocesan see, such as the awarding of benefices, form letters, and records of prebends. Injunctions, without the visitation details from which they arose, are far more common. However, as will be explained below, they are problematic sources by themselves. Thus, for this study I have focused on records in which there is as much detail from the ‘full visitation’ as possible, which means the ones from Lincoln and Norwich.

Each visit report of a bishop for a monastery generally follows the standard procedure for episcopal visitations. The record normally assumed a narrative and chronological format, listing first the bishop’s arrival. In the usual form, the bishop would begin with a sermon in front of the monks or nuns. After which time, the abbot or abbess, as it may be, would present documentation of their election, confirmation by the diocesan see, and the financial account records of the convent - all of which the record would note. Sometimes the record would also contain a notation about whether the convent was in debt and by how much. After these preliminaries, the bishop would conduct a general chapter meeting with everyone. He would then proceed to meet with each of the monks or nuns individually. The evidence recorded from these separate testimonies is called the *detecta* in the visitation record. The *detecta* are recorded without any comment or analysis from the scribe or bishop. Thus, often they will present conflicting testimonies. Following

Busch Chronicon Windeshemense, und Liber de Reformatione Monasteriorum (Farnborough: Gregg International, 1968), 379-799. For an analysis of the manuscript tradition of Busch’s work, as well as further analysis concerning its reception, see Bertram Lesser, *Johannes Busch: Chronist der Devotio Moderna: Werkstruktur, Überlieferung, Rezeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2005).

these testimonies, the record generally contains the *comperta*, which was a summary of the evidence discovered by the bishop over the course of his investigation, along with his opinions on it. Finally, the record often details the injunctions and mandates which the bishop issued to the monastery to correct whatever abuses he deemed in the end were present. It is from the records of the *detecta* and occasionally the *comperta* that the majority of cases of sexual misconduct and apostasy may be found. The entire process of visitation from *detecta* and *comperta* to injunction, strictly follows the procedures for episcopal inquisition (*inquisitio*), the specifics of which are discussed in much more detail in Chapter four.

The rarity of ‘full visitation’ records makes the detailed visitation reports of late medieval Lincoln and Norwich all the more special and explains the interest they have received from historians over the years. The visitation records of all five bishops examined for this study contain a wealth of information regarding the visitorial process and life within the monasteries visited. However, the visitation records of William Alnwick stand apart from the others in terms of the depth of their detail.

Alnwick’s records are preserved in a separate manuscript from his formal register. In fact, Alnwick’s official register is a somewhat unremarkable document, containing only a few injunctions, and apparently assembled without much care toward the end of his episcopate.⁶⁶ The visitation dossier, on the other hand, is without equal in the level of detail it offers the historian about the visitation process. Its purpose was essentially as a rough draft for the official, formal injunctions which were to be issued to the monasteries in question. In Alnwick’s visitation dossier, we have the full *detecta* and *comperta*. In addition, we have early copies of the injunctions created on the basis of this information, complete with emendations and interlinear notes. If Alnwick’s scribes had followed the

66. Thompson, Linc. Visit., 2:xxxi.

usual procedure, after the formal injunctions had been copied into the main register, the visitation dossier would have been destroyed.⁶⁷ It is fortunate from our point of view that they did not. The importance of these documents cannot be understated as numerous historians have observed. David Knowles, for instance, argues that they allow us to “see the relationship of the bishop’s formal commands to the evidence previously put before him, and to form an idea of the method of the whole.”⁶⁸

A few words should be said about the five bishops examined in this study. Obviously, in order to analyse properly the findings of these bishops during their visitations, it is important to take into account their individual characteristics. However, a few limitations present themselves immediately. First, since these bishops were chosen specifically because their records survive, it follows that there are few equivalent records to compare theirs too. Consequently, conclusions regarding the relative severity or laxity of any one particular bishop are limited primarily to comparisons within this group. This situation leads us to the second limitation: each of these record sets differs in its level of detail provided. As already mentioned, Alnwick’s records are exceptionally detailed. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this was because Alnwick was particularly detail oriented compared to his peers. Rather, the level of detail reflects the stage of the work which was preserved. The Norwich visitations in comparison read much more as summaries of the visitations and leave many details unsaid. Thus, one must be careful not to assign too much weight to these differences. None of the bishops examined seem to be very different in their overall visitatorial approach and each of them seemed concerned with enquiring into the same issues with a similar vigour. When there are noticeable differences - such as slightly different rates of sexual misconduct accusations (see §3.10) – the underlying reasons may or may not have anything to do with the bishops themselves. Often, the

67. Thompson, *Linc. Visit.*, 2:l-li.

68. Knowles, 2:208.

differences may be reflective of the differences in the sources. Thus, Alnwick's records frequently give details about a process about which the others are silent. For instance, Alnwick often records the full proceedings of special inquisitions which could be employed in instances of suspected serious misconduct (see §4.4). Conversely, the others tend to report simply the results of these inquisitions and omit the rest - their silence does not necessarily mean that a different process was employed.

Beyond the records of their visitations, it is difficult to ascertain the attitudes of these bishops toward monastic life. Given the importance of the dioceses of Lincoln and Norwich, it should not be surprising that most of the bishops examined in this study were involved to some extent in the politics of their day - although none perhaps to the same degree as William Alnwick. He worked in the service of both Henry V and later his son, Henry VI. Indeed, Alnwick spent his early career accompanying Henry V on trips abroad and acting as one of his ambassadors. After Henry V's death, he served on the council ruling England during Henry VI's minority, and even acted as the young king's confessor.⁶⁹ Similarly, prior to his episcopate in Norwich, James Goldwell acted as Henry VI's secretary and was also involved in foreign relations.⁷⁰ Two of the sixteenth-century bishops examined, William Atwater and Richard Nicke, found themselves in opposing political camps. Atwater was one of Cardinal Wolsey's protégés and likely owed much of his success to him.⁷¹ Nicke, on the other hand, often sparred with the Cardinal and

69. Rosemary Hayes has recently done extensive work on William Alnwick. See generally Rosemary Hayes, "The 'Private Life' of a late Medieval Bishop: William Alnwick, Bishop of Norwich and Lincoln," in *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1992 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nicholas Rogers (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1994), 1-18; Rosemary Hayes, "The Pre-episcopal Career of William Alnwick, Bishop of Norwich and Lincoln," in *People, Politics, and Community in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 90-107; Rosemary Hayes, "William Alnwick, Bishop of Norwich (1426-1437) and Lincoln (1437-1449)" (PhD diss., Bristol University, 1989); See also Thompson Linc. Visit., 2:xiv-xxx.

70. J. Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary and the Signet Office in the XV Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), 155, 175-6.

71. Margaret Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1495-1520* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), 15.

publicly opposed the appointment of Wolsey's son to the archdeaconate.⁷²

Among the bishops, only John Longland had a background which could be construed as somewhat anti-monastic or even proto-protestant. Longland was the confessor of Henry VIII and oversaw the diocese of Lincoln both before and after the Dissolution which in and of itself makes his monastic visitations deserving of particular notice. Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that Longland was a humanist or at least had humanist sympathies. Erasmus himself praised Longland and dedicated several sermons to him, and Longland was known to support him with occasional financial donations.⁷³ Margaret Bowker has argued that Longland, who had never been a monk or canon himself, was likely "shocked by some of the houses he visited and genuinely at a loss to know how to discharge his duty of correction."⁷⁴ According to Bowker, the text of Longland's visitations and injunctions shows that he strictly interpreted monastic abuses through a solid understanding of the Rule of Saint Benedict. However, a similar reliance on monastic *regula* can be found in the injunctions and visitations of each of the bishops examined for this study - so in that sense, Longland is not particularly different. In a sermon to the monks of Westminster, Longland reveals himself to be a keen proponent of monastic reform. Indeed, while Longland spends a great deal of his sermon musing on the ideals of monastic life, he also harshly denounces those that fail to achieve it:

How can you display the sign of perfection, how can you cloth yourself in the habit of perfect religion in order to present yourself as perfect, you who do not even observe the smallest part of perfection? How can you wish to be

72. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County, 1500-1600* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 150-2.

73. P.S. Allen, H.M. Allen, and H.W. Garrod, eds., *Opus epistolarum Desiderati Erasmi Roterdami*, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 6:1-21,332; Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland 1521-1547* (Cambridge: University Press, 1981), 9.

74. Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation*, 26.

called religious, you who do not live fully religiously, and scarcely know what true religion is?⁷⁵

Longland was particularly critical of monks who maintained any contact with women:

Avoid everywhere the company of women, lest a silent wound enter your breast if their faces adhere to your heart. Among women, the most splendid flower of chastity withers, and the lily of modesty perishes. Why therefore, oh monk, servant of omnipotent God, most elect of the servants of Christ, why would you seek conversations with women, why in the cloister, why at home, why in sacred and profane places, why in any place would you allow yourself to stay with them?⁷⁶

Given the zeal toward monastic reform demonstrated in Longland's sermon, one might suppose that this would translate into his being more zealous during his visitations. However, as I discuss more thoroughly in chapter three, Longland's rate of recorded sexual misconduct puts him in the lower end of the scale amongst the bishops examined for this study. (See §3.10)

2.3 THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF EPISCOPAL VISITATION RECORDS

There are numerous difficulties with using visitation reports as historical sources, as many scholars have already noted and as I discussed briefly in the above sections. By their very nature, these sources tend to overemphasize the negative, and only rarely give us details about the positive. David Knowles, who was himself a Benedictine monk, famously

75. "Quomodo signa perfectionis ostendis, quomodo perfecte religionis habitum ut te perfectum ostendas induis, qui non minimam perfectionis partem obseruas? Quomodo religiosus appellari uis qui nec ad plenum religiose uiuis, uixque quid sit uera religio cognocis?" John Longland and Thomas Caius, *Ioannis Longlondi Dei gratia Lincolnien[sis] Episcopi, tres conciones reuerendissimo Domino. do. vvaramo Cantuariensi Archiepiscopo totius Angliae primati merito nuncupatae* (London: Richard Pynson, 1527), fol.7r.

76. "Foeminarum ubique societas euitanda : ne si uultus earum cordi tuo haereant, tacitum ueniat sub pectore uulnus. Inter has facillime candidissimus flos castitatis emarcescit inter has pudoris lilium excidit[ur]. Quid igitur o monache serve dei omnipotentis, in Christi famulicium electissime: quid foeminarum queris alloquia : quid in clauastro, quid in sede, quid in profanis sacrisque, quid ullis in locis cum illis stare sustines." *ibid.*, fols.10r-v.

expressed some regret that these ‘intimate’ sources are available at all. Arguing that the records were given in private and in confidence to the bishop, he laments:

The dead as well as the living have a right to their good name, and the accidents of time which have made public property of the visitation dossiers do not of themselves entitle the historian to bruit abroad the failings and weaknesses, the vagaries, the quarrels and the recriminations of those long since gone to their reckoning, and to present them as a fit subject for the strictures and flippancies of another age.⁷⁷

Of course, as Knowles remarks, it is no longer possible to ignore these records. And indeed, the records which form the basis of this study have already been mined for lurid details by the likes of George Coulton and Eileen Power. Nevertheless, since the purpose of these documents was to record items in need of reform, interpretation of this evidence becomes critical. As numerous scholars have noted, the exclusive focus on the bad has potentially been one of the reasons why the ‘decline narrative’ has been so resilient in monastic historiography.⁷⁸ Indeed, at times it is difficult to read these sources without occasionally feeling as though all monastics of the later Middle Ages were suspect. As Joan Greatrex recently commented, “anyone who immerses himself or herself in Hamilton Thompson’s *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln* for more than an hour at a stretch will become sorely depressed in being subjected to human beings revealing themselves as all too human for our comfort.”⁷⁹

2.3.1 Visitation records and gender

In many ways, visitation records are not representative of the whole monastic population. First, it should be noted that not all monasteries of Lincoln or Norwich were subject

⁷⁷. Knowles, 1:84.

⁷⁸. Heale, *Monasticism in late medieval England*, 2-3.

⁷⁹. Greatrex, 37.

to visitation. Many, particularly all the male Cistercian houses, had exemption from episcopal oversight. Consequently, there is a great deal more evidence for misconduct and scandal in male Benedictine houses compared to Cistercian houses. Even more problematic, however, is that female houses had no exceptional privileges, regardless of order. Thus, the nunneries belonging to orders, in whose male houses the bishop would not dream of interfering, still receive attention. Considering that not just male Cistercian houses were exempt, but also some of the wealthier and more powerful Benedictine abbeys such as Bury St. Edmunds, this of course creates a relative over representation of women in these records, something which has led some historians to suggest that the process of episcopal visitation is gender biased.⁸⁰ Despite these exemptions, however, the sheer number of male houses in England compared to female houses, means that male houses outnumber female houses in these visitation records by two to one. For example, over the years of his episcopate, William Alnwick visited fifty different male houses comprising over five hundred monks and canons, more than twice the number of nuns.

Nevertheless, the over-representation of women in these records is very problematic for analysis. As Nancy Bradley Warren recently observed, the gendered effects of visitation may be seen in many ways. For example, as Warren demonstrates, the expense of visitation could be a burden for both male and female houses, yet due to the relative increased visitation for women, and the greater propensity for poverty in their houses, it could be far greater for women. When a bishop arrived at a religious house with his retinue for an official visitation, the monks or nuns had to pay for his expenses, and as Warren shows, this expense could be substantial for a small nunnery.⁸¹ If the bishop found serious faults with a religious house, the costs could be even more. Depending on the circumstances, extra expenses could include deputies returning with injunctions or further summons, additional

80. Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, 14.

81. *Ibid.*, 15.

subsequent hearings or investigations. Consequently, it would be in the economic self-interest of a female house to avoid as much follow-up to a visitation as possible. This reality renders a unanimous *omnia bene* from a convent more suspect. Furthermore, as Warren also points out, misconduct was interpreted very differently in female houses than in male houses. Thus, she argues visitation reinforces “very specific, differing identities for monks and nuns as men and women in religion.”⁸² Warren’s observations are apt warning for a study such as this, since the differing misconduct along gendered lines represents not just the different sexual choices of men and women, but also the very different focus and interest of the bishop himself. This is particularly true as it concerns claustration and enforcement of *Periculoso* since, as we have seen, bishops and nuns could interpret these rules very differently.

2.3.2 Visitation records and language

The language of visitation records is often extremely formulaic, particularly the opening phrases of injunctions and visitations. As Thompson justly remarked, the “earnest piety which distinguishes the preambles of injunctions was the common property of every bishop’s chancery in England.”⁸³ As a result, it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain the individual characteristics of misconduct at different houses, and certainly the relative seriousness of any one accusation. Injunctions, as a matter of course, threatened excommunication for even minor offences. Nevertheless, formulaic language does not in and of itself mean that instances of recorded misconduct or the bishop’s reaction to it, was not genuine. Thus, deciding whether misconduct is real or part of a formulaic warning is difficult. An interesting example of this problem may be found in a series of early fifteenth-century injunctions of William Gray. In the preamble to his injunction to

82. Warren, *Spiritual Economies*, 16.

83. Thompson, *Linc. Visit.*, 2:xlili.

Huntingdon Priory in 1432, Gray admonished the prior, stating that “there is nothing else here but drunkenness and surfeit, disobedience and contempt, private aggrandisement and apostasy, drowsiness—we do not say incontinence—but sloth and every other thing which is on the downward path to evil and drags man to hell.”⁸⁴ This same accusation, in fact the entire preamble, is used verbatim in at least two other of Gray’s surviving injunctions – namely, Daventry (1432-3) and an undated injunction to Caldwell priory.⁸⁵ In both cases, the preamble is referred to at the beginning of the injunction, as *ut in prohemio prioratus Huntynghdon*. Hamilton Thompson argues that, despite the reoccurrence of set phrases such as the Huntingdon preamble, such words would not have been used unless they “had been thoroughly justified by the *comperta* of the visitation.”⁸⁶ Although, I am not as convinced as Thompson by the fact that such damning sentence was “thoroughly” justified in the three above houses, there are enough other details in these specific injunctions to suggest that it was based upon some true facts in these instances. Nevertheless, there may still have been differences in degree of misconduct in Huntingdon, Daventry and Caldwell, since in each of these injunctions the bishop chose to emphasize different faults. Thus, in Daventry, a Benedictine house, the bishop noted that there were a number of apostate monks, and problems of financial mismanagement.⁸⁷ At Caldwell, an Augustinian house, there were accusations of embezzlement against one of the canons.⁸⁸ The Huntingdon injunction, however, highlighted accusations of gambling and drunkenness.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the fact that there are no surviving *comperta* to which to compare these preambles, makes

84. “Non est hie aliud nisi ebrietas et crapula, inobediencia et contemptus, proprietates et apostasia, sompnolencia, non dicimus incontinencia, sed torpor et omne aliud quod in malum declinat et hominem trahit ad gehennam.” Linc. Visit., 1:76; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.197.

85. Linc. Visit., 1:27, 43; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fols. 199, 200d.

86. Thompson, Linc. Visit., 1:76.

87. Linc. Visit., 1:43; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 199.

88. Linc. Visit., 1:28; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 200d.

89. Linc. Visit., 1:77-8; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.197d.

it impossible to determine with absolute certainty to what degree these three houses shared, or not, the same types of misconduct.

2.3.3 The importance of *omnia bene*

While records containing *detecta* and *comperta* are relatively rare, injunctions (detached from the original visitation which prompted them) survive in much greater numbers throughout England from the late thirteenth century onward. Indeed, due to their relative abundance, injunctions have formed the backbone of almost every study which has dealt with monastic misconduct. However, injunctions tend to exacerbate the problems already present in the utilization of visitation records as evidence, in that they have an exclusive focus on the bad. When full visitation reports survive, they usually include some notice of houses visited in which there were little or no problems. These visitations, in which the inmates of the house reported “*omnia bene*” to the bishop’s inquiries, are essential for any comparative or statistical analysis of monastic misconduct. Although it seems obvious, it is important to recognize that in order to study the ‘bad,’ we must also look at the ‘good.’ Houses in which the bishop did not find any misconduct did not consequently receive an injunction. Unfortunately, however, survival of records which contain instances of *omnia bene* is exceedingly rare. This is because it was not normally thought worthy to record the visitations of houses in which there was no need for reformation. Thus, as discussed above, the accidental survival of Alnwick’s visitation dossier provides a window on visitations of good houses since it contains both the troubled and *omnia bene* reports. In contrast, houses for which injunctions were written were considered much more important to preserve. Bishops often referred to previous injunctions on subsequent visits in order to track compliance with their mandates.

Although the Lincoln visitation records of William Atwater (1517-20), John Longland (1525-31), and the Norwich reports of James Goldwell (1492-94), and Richard Nicke (1514-32) are not nearly as detailed as Alnwick's, they still preserve much of the visitation process, and most importantly, they still preserve records of houses which were *omnia bene*. Still, other historians have argued that a notation of *omnia bene* does not mean that the house was truly misconduct free. Ben Thompson suggests that "*omnia bene* might suggest not so much a lack of anything wrong as low standards and expectations, or even positive conspiracy."⁹⁰ True enough, all the monks or nuns of a given place might have been tight enough as a group to present a uniform front to the visiting bishop, brushing him off with a consensual *omnia bene*. But the same could be said for the opposite, that faults can equally be fictitious. For obvious reasons, a bishop's visitation and the subsequent private audience with an outside power figure provided many monastic men and women with the means to play out their own private vendettas and to spread gossip. The *detecta* are fascinating for this reason. They reveal internal power struggles at monasteries, and petty disputes, monks or nuns dissatisfied with the religious life or the performance of their abbot or abbess; and they can detail many lurid things that may or may not be based in fact. Lies could easily have been made to destroy the reputation of another, or to remove a rival from a position of power, or simply to sow discord. And this, indeed, is one of the problems that not nearly enough historians have taken into account when concluding that late medieval nunneries were rife with scandal. One can focus on lurid accounts, containing accusations of conventual prostitution, pregnancies, and sex-crazed nuns and conclude as did confessionalist historians such as George Coulton, that late medieval nuns were distinctly in the naughty category. Other historians, however, have not been so quick to accept these reports as strongly reliable. Even as early as 1895, Mary Bateson

90. Thompson, "Monasteries, Society and Reform," 185.

noted that one should approach the often scandalous reports of late medieval English nuns with an eye of suspicion, since the witnesses who reported to visiting bishops and their emissaries often gave “rambling and gossiping answers” that “bear obvious traces of human nature.”⁹¹

2.4 METHODOLOGY: COUNTING ‘NAUGHTY NUNS’ AND ‘PROMISCUOUS MONKS’

Despite the numerous difficulties in using visitation records, they are really all we have for this type of study. I am also sensitive to David Knowles’ concern that it is unfortunate that historians find need to make use of documents which are so very personal in nature. However, it is precisely because these documents have been used so extensively in the past to suggest somehow that the monks and nuns of the later Middle Ages were less pious or holy than those of an earlier time, that they must again be used now. In order to avoid the mistakes made by past historians in this regard, careful attention must be paid not to exaggerate the usefulness of the visitation records in either condemning or redeeming the late medieval monk or nun. This study is based on the aforementioned visitation records of Lincoln and Norwich, despite the fact that they represent a comparatively small sample size, at least in comparison to injunctions alone, which are available for wider expanses of time and place in England. Nevertheless, the disadvantage in scope is offset to a certain degree by the advantages afforded by their level of detail. I am not using these visitations because they offer more colourful stories, but because the inclusion of *omnia bene* minimizes as much as possible the nature of these records to overemphasize the ‘bad’ over the ‘good.’

In this study I will be tracking numbers of alleged sexual relationships reported during episcopal visitations per individual monk or nun – regardless of whether or not they were

91. Bateson, 19.

well-founded. It must have been difficult enough for the bishop at the time to tell the difference between fact and fiction, between jealousy and legitimate complaints, but for the historian, these problems are compounded exponentially. It seems to me that it would be an exercise in futility to attempt to develop a set of criteria to sort these accusations based on the credibility of their claims. This does not mean that issues of credibility will not be factored into my analysis of individual cases of misconduct; however, my overall numbers are predicated on the assumption that more often than not, the accusations were valid. And indeed, even if a certain percentage of these accusations can be assumed to be false, meaningful patterns can still arise from the overall numbers. Thus, in these numbers I have included any illicit relationship which can be reasonably assumed to have been sexual in nature or at least to have had the potential to become so.

My standard for determining whether or not to include a particular accusation as a potential sexual relationship was, first, its illicit nature and, second, whether or not it included some element of privacy, physicality or scandal. For instance, if a monk or nun were said to be “defamed with someone,” even if there were no other details about the relationship, the element of scandal would classify it as a sexual relationship (or potential one) under my criteria and would be counted. As I discuss more thoroughly in chapter four, the seriousness with which both bishops and monastics alike treated scandalous relationships underscores their implied sexual nature for medieval people. Similarly, I also counted relationships portrayed as illicit in which privacy or physicality were present. For instance, Agnes Croke, the prioress of Flamstead Priory, was accused in 1530 of sharing her bed each night with another nun, purportedly so they could wake each other up for matins. However, their fellow nuns and the bishop both clearly saw the behaviour as inappropriate since a point was made to mention it during the visitation, and Longland subsequently forbade it.⁹² In this instance, since the relationship was considered illicit and included

92. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2:144-5; LAO, MS V/j/7, fols.44d-45.

elements of physicality and privacy, I counted it in my numbers. It is also important to note that my methodology was to count individual sexual relationships per visitation, not gross accusations – since in a particular record there might be multiple accusations against a single nun or monk which all refer to the same relationship. For instance, Richard Ashtone, the abbot of Peterborough Abbey, was accused by no less than thirteen monks of sexual relationships with three different married women during Alnwick’s visitation in 1446.⁹³ However, all of these accusations refer to just three relationships, thus I have counted it as three accusations of sexual misconduct. In cases of homosexual relationships, where both parties are adult monks or nuns of the same monastery, I have counted them twice since each party is technically a ‘naughty nun’ or ‘promiscuous monk’ and each is technically involved in an illicit relationship. Thus, the case from Flamstead Priory of the prioress and nun sleeping together, counts as two sexual relationships. However, in instances where one of them was a youth, non-professed, or with unclear attachment to the monastery, I have only counted it as one alleged relationship. For example, John Barbour, a canon of Westacre Priory, was accused in 1526 of sodomy with a *puer masculus*, probably a youth of the monastery.⁹⁴ However, since the unnamed boy is clearly not a fully professed monastic, I have only counted it as a single sexual relationship.

93. Linc. Visit., 285-302; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.123-127, 96 sched.

94. *Visitations of Norwich*, 250; Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fol.45.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

*Hae caput abscondunt omnes sub tegmine nigro,
Sub tunicis nigris candida membra latent.*
Beneath black veils they all conceal their heads,
beneath black skirts they hide their lovely legs.¹

Nigel de Longchamps, *Speculum Stultorum*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

ON July 14th, 1440 Bishop William Alnwick visited Elsham Priory and what he found was troubling. Afterwards, in his injunction to the priory, he lamented that religious discipline was almost dead in the place (*quasi perit*). Out of the five Augustinian canons which made up the entire complement of Elsham, only two besides the prior seemed to know even the rudiments of faith or the rules of the order. According to the prior himself, the canons were not very religious. Two of the canons were quite old and did not seem to want to live under the rule any longer. Much of their time was spent drinking and in leisure. Moreover, some of the canons grumbled that the resources of the priory were too meagre. Alnwick, however, upbraided them and reminded them that:

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1. Nigel Wireker, *Speculum Stultorum*, ed. by John Henry Mozley and Robert R. Raymo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 84. Translation is from Nigel Wireker, *The Book of Dawn Burnel the Ass: Nigellus Wireker's Speculum Stultorum*, trans. by Graydon Wendell Regenos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959), 115.

As ye have food and raiment, be content with them, not hankering after dainties, seeing that ye have made public profession of voluntary poverty, obedience and chastity therein.²

These of course, are the three familiar vows which all monastic men and women had to make upon their profession and which bound them for life: poverty, obedience and chastity. The vows in this form had become common by the central Middle Ages, although the fifth-century *Regula Sancti Augustini* made no mention of them.³ Poverty, obedience and chastity represented the willingness of a monk, canon or nun to submit completely to the religious life. The first two, and particularly ‘poverty’, seem to have been the most trying for the canons of Elsham, who for all their faults were not accused of breaking the last. However, for many other monastic men and women in late medieval England, chastity did prove to be more difficult to maintain.

I would like to begin this chapter with two case studies from the early sixteenth century, both of which we know about because of the records left from episcopal visitations. Missenden abbey, a male Augustinian house and Littlemore Priory, a female Benedictine house, both endured a number of serious scandals in the last decades prior to the Dissolution, which included pregnancies, internal rebellions, mass apostasy and

2. “Item habentes alimenta et vestimenta, his contenti sitis, non querentes delicias, cum paupertatem voluntariam, obedienciam et continenciam inibi sitis publice professi.” Linc. Visit., 2:88; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.75.
3. It is not clear exactly when these vows became associated with monastic houses. The original wording in the sixth-century *Regula Sancti Benedicti* (RB 58,17) had asked instead for “stability, conversion of life, and obedience to the superior” (“*promittat de stabilitate sua et conversatione morum suorum et oboedientia*”). Anthony Maret-Crosby argues that the “virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience” were essentially mendicant in origin, and the later insertion of them into Benedictine spirituality represented a subtle movement of the “model from the Mendicant to the monastic world.” Maret-Crosby, 6. A similar process may have influenced their adoption by Augustinian canons. Certainly, there is evidence that vows of ‘poverty, chastity and obedience’ were associated with traditional monastic houses from at least the thirteenth century onward. Penelope Johnson, for example, notes that Eudes Rigaud (ca. 1210-75) referenced them frequently in his injunctions to monastic houses in Normandy. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 106.

paedophilia. The scandals tested both the reforming ability of the visiting bishops and the monastics themselves. For my purposes, these cases are also a useful starting place in my discussion since they illustrate many of the common characteristics of monastic sexual misconduct. They represent not only two particularly sensational examples, the types which have so intrigued both historians and early modern critics of monasticism, but also demonstrate the danger in taking similar evidence out of context. They are at once, exemplars of both the seductiveness and the pitfalls of the episcopal visitation records.

3.1.1 Missenden Abbey: Sodomy, Adultery and Nepotism

The Augustinian Abbey of Missenden in the diocese of Lincoln was in trouble on the eve of the Dissolution. Between 1530-1, the house was beset by accusations of sodomy, adultery and gross nepotism, with a full third of the house of nine canons implicated in the scandal including the abbot. However, it should be pointed out that these troubles of 1530-1 at Missenden were not entirely isolated instances. From a certain perspective, the abbey had a somewhat checkered history. The earliest sign of troubles was in 1236 when Bishop Robert Grosseteste (1235-1253) deposed the abbot of Missenden for unknown reasons.⁴ The register of Bishop Oliver Sutton records that there was a certain amount of trouble with apostasy in the late thirteenth century.⁵ During the fourteenth century, the abbey seems to have had serious financial troubles. In 1347, there was suit against the abbot John of Abingdon over a debt of £1000.⁶ In 1361, the abbot of Missenden, Ralf

4. The same entry in the *Dunstable Annales* lists that Grosseteste deposed the abbots of seven other houses over the course of his visitations. See Henry Richards Luard, ed., *Annales Monastici*, 5 vols. (London: Rolls Series, 1864-9), 3:143-4.

5. There are two cases of apostasy recorded in the *memoranda* section of Sutton's register: Richard of Rutland (1294) and Richard of Chalfont (1295). However, in both cases, the apostate canons changed their minds and wished to reconcile. See Rosalind M. T. Hill, ed., *The Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton, 1280-1299*, 8 vols. (Hereford: Lincoln Record Society, 1948-75), 5:30-1, 99.

6. PRO C131/7/13.

Marshall, was condemned to death for counterfeiting coinage, but his sentence was later lessened to imprisonment.⁷ In 1433, an injunction from Bishop William Gray revealed only minor problems involving buildings in disrepair and the abbot continuing to conduct business without chapter consent.⁸ However, in 1462 the abbot Robert Risborough was removed from office for the crime of simony by a vote of chapter. He later appealed this decision to the bishop and had the subsequent abbot, Henry Honour, imprisoned for three years. Henry and Richard would switch places again, and the legal battles continued for years.⁹ In fact, a subsequent abbot had to use the valuables of the monastery as collateral to secure a loan to fight off Risborough's claims.¹⁰

The scandals of 1530-1 came to light after a routine visitation by an episcopal official named Thomas Jackman on October 10th, 1531. For the most part, the visit revealed problems common to many late medieval English monasteries. The house was having financial problems and many of the buildings were falling into disrepair. The canons complained that they did not know the state of the accounts, because for all intents and purposes, the temporal affairs of the monastery had been entrusted to a secular bailiff, John Compton, who was acting without any oversight.¹¹ This arrangement was causing

7. *VCH, Buckingham*, 2:371. According to Pollock and Maitland, by the thirteenth century, in practice, high treason had become an exception to the traditional 'Benefit of Clergy,' which could allow a criminal clerk to escape secular justice. Frederick Pollock and F.W. Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1905), 1:446. Moreover, in 1351, a statute of Edward III (24 Edward III, stat.5, cap. 2) had made counterfeiting a treasonable offence, equating it to making war on the king. Consequently, Ralf Marshall's status as an abbot would not have saved him from the King's justice. See Statutes of the Realm, 1:319-20. As Reginald Robinson Sharpe points out, the abbots of some monasteries such as Bury St. Edmunds had the right to coin money, although there is no evidence that Missenden was one of them. Sharpe also discusses a similar case from circa 1350, in which Richard Maury, the abbot of Middleton, only narrowly escaped a similar fate for coining money because of his connections at court. Reginald Robinson Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letters from the Mayor and Corporation of the City of London: circa A.D. 1350-1370* (London: J.C. Francis, 1885), xxi.

8. Linc. Visit., 1:86-7; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.201d.

9. *VCH, Buckingham*, 2:371.

10. PRO C1/148/1.

11. Monastic bailiffs are frequently referenced in the Lincoln and Norwich visitation records – although

a great deal of discord between the abbot, John Fox, and the former sacrist, Richard Gynger, who claimed that Compton was “useless to the monastery” (*inutilis monasterio*), and cut down the abbey’s trees without any supervision. Although obviously troubling to the canons themselves, the abbey’s financial situation, minor infighting and trouble with servants were hardly unusual. Many abbeys struggled with debt and, as landowners, dealt with their fair share of management issues too.

However, Jackman’s visit also revealed far more serious problems. He discovered that one of the canons, John Slyhurst, was accused of committing sodomy with a local boy, the son of John Compton, the very bailiff that was the source of discord between the abbot and the former sacrist.¹² The sodomy accusations had come to light after the boy had told his mother what had happened. Moreover, it was revealed that this was not the first time Slyhurst had been accused of sodomy. According to some of the canons, he had been chastised under the previous abbot and had even done penance for it (although obviously to little effect!). Slyhurst also did not seem to have been particularly liked by his fellow canons since he was described by them as “quarrelsome and talkative” (*rixosus et verbosus*) and “crazy” (*elate mentis*).

After the visitation was completed, Jackman issued his injunctions. Interestingly, he hardly mentioned anything about the financial situation of the abbey or the management problems with John Compton. To the question of suspected sodomy, however, Jackman

the circumstances at Missenden seem to be somewhat exceptional in that the bailiff was acting without any oversight. Nunneries in particular relied upon bailiffs to conduct much of the convent’s outside business, a relationship which could be the cause of some concern of visiting bishops. For instance, in 1427, the prioress of Redlingfield Nunnery was accused of spending time alone with the bailiff in “private and suspicious places such as a small hall with the windows closed and *sub heggerowes*.” *VCH, Suffolk*, 2:83-4; *Linc. Visit.*, 2:415; NNRO, Reg/5/9, fols.104-6. Likewise, William Gray expressed some concern about the closeness of this relationship at Godstow nunnery in 1434, and specifically ordered that the bailiff should hold no private conversations with any nuns. *Linc. Visit.*, 1:67; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.167.

12. The age of the boy was not noted. However, in any respect, medieval authorities did not recognize paedophilia as a crime distinct from sodomy when considering the adult’s crime. This issue is discussed further in §3.5.

took decisive action. Slyhurst was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment and the abbot was enjoined not to release him without special licence from the bishop. Furthermore, Jackman ordered that no boys should be permitted to enter the dormitory or private cells of the canons.¹³ The troubles at Missenden, however, were far from over.

Less than a year later, Bishop Longland visited the abbey himself, and convened a special tribunal to investigate further rumours (*publica vox et fama*) that had been spreading throughout the parish of Missenden. Another canon named Robert Palmer was accused of carnal relations with a married woman, Margaret Bishop. Robert admitted that he knew her and had spent time with her, but insisted that the moment he learnt about her true carnal intentions for him, he ran away. He further argued that it was the abbot, John Fox, who had a carnal relationship with her, not him. Naturally, the abbot denied this counter-accusation. However, the investigation revealed that the abbot also faced serious accusations himself including nepotism and financial misconduct. Moreover, Fox was said to have turned a blind eye to Palmer's affair with Margaret. The canons also stated that the abbot made his sister the abbey's brewstress, even though he knew that her daughter was of bad character (*male conuersacionis*). Not surprisingly, the canons reported that shortly after the daughter arrived at the monastery, she became pregnant, ostensibly as a result of her relationship with one of the canons. Abbot Fox defended himself stating that after he learnt of his niece's pregnancy, he banished her from the monastery. Moreover, he admitted that he sold some of the abbey's lands without the chapter's consent, but he argued that his predecessor had done the same thing. Moreover, he pleaded to Longland that he had attempted to end Palmer's illicit affair with Margaret Bishop on numerous occasions. Needless to say, neither Palmer nor Fox fared very well by the end of the tribunal. A series of witnesses contradicted much of their testimonies.

13. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:18-21; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.74-6.

In the end, Longland ordered Palmer imprisoned indefinitely and suspended Abbot Fox from his office.¹⁴

3.1.2 Littlemore Priory: Rebellion, Apostasy, and Pregnancy

Littlemore, like Missenden was a monastic house which seemed to confirm the worst accusations against the religious both by contemporaries and historians. Littlemore was a small female Benedictine priory with a population of about seven nuns. For most of its history, we know very little about the priory. The house seems to have been quite poor throughout its existence. In 1245, the Pope offered an indulgence to anyone who would contribute to the rebuilding of the church since the nuns lacked the resources to do it themselves.¹⁵ Unfortunately, there are almost no records pertaining to the house from the thirteenth century to mid fifteenth century, a veritable black hole in the history of the priory. However, a series of three visitations under William Alnwick and John Longland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought the priory back into the limelight and showed it was facing some serious problems. On June 1st, 1445, an emissary of Alnwick visited the priory. The visitation revealed that the dorter was in near ruin and that the nuns were afraid to sleep in it as a result. One of the nuns, Joan Maynard, was suspected of having an illicit relationship with a chaplain named John Somerset, who was said to converse with her alone in a suspect manner(*cum eadem Johanna sola suspecto modo*). It was also noted that a certain Cistercian monk from Rievaulx regularly stayed overnight with the prioress, eating and drinking with her for up to four days. The nuns reported as well that another scholar from Oxford, a kinsman of the prioress, also regularly stayed in the priory. Also, troubling to the emissary, was the fact that one of the nuns, Isabel Sydnale,

14. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:23-7; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.77-80.

15. VCH, Oxford, 2:76.

slept every night in the same bed as the subprioress, Agnes Pidyngtone.¹⁶ Another nun, who had been in the priory for thirteen years but had not yet taken vows, stated that she did not wish to make express profession in the place “because of the ill-fame which is current thereabout concerning that place and also because of the barrenness and poverty which in likelihood will betake the place on account of the slenderness of the place’s revenues.”¹⁷ In Alnwick’s injunction to Littlemore, the bishop warned the nuns that they must sleep in individual beds, and specifically to the prioress that she must cease to have any discourse with secular men - and especially scholars from Oxford. Moreover, Alnwick was also concerned that the nuns were not wearing their veils properly, and enjoined that “euery sustere of yowres and ye also vse your vayles hangyng your browes.”¹⁸

Three quarters of a century later, in 1517 one of the emissaries of Bishop Atwater had the occasion to visit the abbey again. This time the matters were more complicated. The current prioress, Katherine Wellys, had previously borne a daughter with a local chaplain, whom she supported from the proceeds of the priory. The chaplain in question still visited her regularly and stayed overnight two to three times per year. According to the nuns, when the prioress’ daughter had come of age and married, she provided a dowry for her out of the goods of the convent. Moreover, the nuns seem to have been terrified of her. They told Atwater’s emissary that the prioress had threatened them with repercussions if they spoke out against her to the bishop. They said that the prioress was redirecting the priory’s money to her relatives, while the nuns themselves were not getting their allowance. Atwater’s emissary also noted that the convent buildings were still in great disrepair and in danger of falling down.

16. The potential homosexual aspect of this relationship is discussed in §3.5.

17. “Item dicit quod non intendit expresse profiteri dum steterit in loco illo occasione infamie que laborat de loco illo in partibus et eciam occasione sterilitatis et penurie que de verisimili eueniet ioco propter tenuitatem prouentuum loci.” Linc. Visit., 2:217; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.31.

18. Linc. Visit., 2:218; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.31.

A few months later, Bishop Atwater visited the priory himself – probably as a result of his emissary’s findings – and found that little had changed since the last visit, except that there now seemed to be a rebellion against the prioress brewing in the priory. The nuns were openly quarrelling. According to the nuns, the prioress had put one woman, Elisabeth Wynter, in the stocks on account of her alleged incorrigibility. Three other nuns, Anna Willye, Juliana Wynter and Johanna Wynter, immediately helped her escape. In the process of the “jail break” they broke a window and disappeared for almost three weeks in apostasy, leaving the priory with a population of just three nuns including the prioress. Shortly after the apostate nuns returned, one of them, Joanna Wynter gave birth to a child. According to their testimony, the prioress put another of the ex-apostates, Anna Willye, in the stocks for a month for no reason (*absque causa*). Furthermore, the prioress was said to have beaten Elisabeth Wynter in chapter, punching and kicking her, due to her incorrigibility. Richard Hewes, the prioress’ lover, had continued to visit the priory since the last visit. Finally, one nun, Juliana Bechamp (the only nun it seems who was not directly involved in the dispute with the prioress), pleaded to the bishop in desperation that “I am ashamed to [be] here off the evil ruele off my ladye.”¹⁹

3.1.3 Putting Missenden and Littlemore into context

What are we to make of the state of these two religious houses? While the frequency of scandals such as these in medieval society is impossible to determine from individual examples, these cases do help illustrate how misconduct was approached by both the bishop and the monastic men and women themselves. In both Missenden and Littlemore, the bishop or his emissary moved quickly with injunctions and punishments to effect reform. In both of these examples, the injunctions also had serious consequences for the

19. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3: 8-12; LAO, MS V/j/7, fols. 83-83d, 87-87d.

offenders, such as the perpetual imprisonment of Slyhurst. These facts suggest that there certainly was an expectation on the part of the bishops for better conduct within the monasteries even if their reform attempts were not always successful.

Likewise, there also were canons and nuns in both houses who seemed to disapprove strongly of the misconduct in their houses, evidenced by their testimony and their candid complaints. It is also important to note that, although the sexual scandals in both houses were salacious, neither house had a history of these types of problems. For both houses, the sexual scandals of the sixteenth century were somewhat of an anomaly. Missenden, certainly had a longer history of scandal in general, but it was of a non-sexual nature. It is true we only have a limited understanding of Missenden's earlier problems. For instance, we have no idea why Bishop Grosseteste removed the abbot in 1236. However, it should be remembered most removals from office were not a result of sexual misconduct. Incompetence and the disability of age were much more frequent reasons as evidenced by the visitation records of Lincoln and Norwich.²⁰ The fact that the abbot, Robert Risborough in 1462 was removed from office on the crime of simony by a vote of chapter could speak to the desire of the canons themselves to live to a higher standard, rather than a laxity in the house on the whole, supposing the accusation was real and not made for another purpose. Likewise there is evidence at Littlemore that some of the nuns desired reform, but were hindered in their attempts by one individual, the prioress, who punished with imprisonment anyone who spoke out against her.

20. Monastic leaders were often removed from office due to a combination of old age and incompetence. Alnwick, for instance, removed John Depyng from the office of abbot at Peterborough abbey in 1437 due to his age and infirmity and his inability to manage the abbey's finances. See Linc. Visit., 2:271-2; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.1. Likewise, James Goldwell forced the abbot of Wymondham Abbey to resign and accept a pension due to his age and incompetence in 1514. See *Visitations of Norwich*, 20-3; Bodl. Tanner MS 100, fol.33b-34. Similar examples may be found in the records of Nicke and Longland. For Nicke, see *Visitations of Norwich*, 72; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol.7b; and for Longland see Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2:129; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.50-55d. See also §4.7.

To look at it another way, if we examine the misconduct at Missenden in terms of the office of abbot, then we have evidence that four abbots were deposed or otherwise removed from their office over a four hundred year period between 1133-1538: Martin (1219), Ralf Marshall (1374), Robert Risborough (1462) and John Fox (1531).²¹ Although it is certainly possible that other abbots had problems for which there are simply no records, it is also quite possible that the rest never had any problems as serious as these four. The overall episcopal register coverage in Lincoln is quite good. Even if full visitation reports like Alnwick's or Longland's are rare, we do have surviving registers for every bishop from Hugh of Wells (1209-1235) to the Dissolution. In none of these registers is there any evidence that other abbots of Missenden lost their offices due to misconduct.²² If, for argument sake, we accept that these instances represent the limit of Missenden's abbatial problems then we are left with four out of a total of twenty-seven abbots or a 14% leadership misconduct rate. It is not negligible, but it is certainly not dramatic.

Neither house, however, would survive long enough to experience any significant reform. Littlemore only lasted a few more years after the scandal of 1517-8. Cardinal Wolsey recommended that the house be dissolved in 1524 and the following year the prioress is recorded to have received a pension of £6 13s. 4d.²³ Missenden's infamous abbot, John Fox, died before the Dissolution, but the remaining canons are recorded to have received pensions. The new abbot married and the paedophile John Slyhurst was given a benefice before they both disappeared into history.²⁴

21. John Fox was removed from temporal power after Longland's visitation of 1531. However, he retained the title of abbot until his death in 1538. *VCH, Buckingham*, 2:374-5.

22. During an abbatial vacancy in 1240, Bishop Robert Grosseteste wrote to the monks of Missenden, urging them to take at least as much care in choosing a new abbot as they do when employing someone to look after their pigs. He asked them to consider "how unworthy of your monastic calling it is to prefer even your pigs to your own souls and to be more concerned about them than about yourselves." Joseph Goering and Frank Anthony Carl Mantello, eds., *The Letters of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 289.

23. *VCH, Oxford*, 2:77.

24. *VCH, Buckingham*, 2:374-5; Gerald Augustus John Hodgett, ed., *The State of the Ex-religious*

3.2 THE RARITY OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Table 3.1: Accusations of Sexual Misconduct in Lincoln and Norwich Episcopal Visitations of Cloistered Houses 1430-1530

Bishop	Visits	Houses	Accusations	% of visits with at least one accusation	% of houses with at least one accusation
Alnwick	68	60	56	32.35	31.67
Atwater	55	48	8	9.09	8.33
Longland	51	48	15	13.73	12.5
Goldwell	26	26	1	3.85	3.85
Nicke	115	35	31	14.78	37.14
Overall	315	108†	111	16.51	39.81†

† This number reflects the total number of *individual* houses. Since many of the houses were visited more than once by different bishops at different times, the total of houses is less than the combined total of visits. Likewise, the percentage of houses with sexual misconduct is correspondingly higher, since a house that was visited by three different bishops would obviously have a greater chance of having sexual misconduct discovered.

How common were abbeys like Missenden and Littlemore? How common were the Robert Palmers and Joan Maynards? The simple answer is not very common. However, calculating actual monastic misconduct levels is difficult and depending on how you count sexual misconduct, different patterns emerge. In the surviving records from Lincoln and Norwich, there are a total of 315 separate visitations of 108 cloistered male and female monastic houses between 1430 and 1530. In these records there are a total of 111 accusations of sexual misconduct, and approximately 17% of the visitations contained at least one of these accusations. Obviously, houses which were visited on more than one occasion had a greater likelihood of having sexual misconduct discovered, partially because they were visited more than once in order to eradicate the problems they had. Thus, the overall percentage of houses which had sexual misconduct accusations at one time

and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln: 1547-1574 from returns in the Exchequer (Hereford: Lincoln Record Society, 1959), 99, 139.

or another over a period of approximately 100 years (39.81%) is correspondingly higher than the percentage of visitation reports which recorded it (see Table 3.1). This large percentage might be said to support the claim that “promiscuous monks” and “naughty nuns” were a relatively common phenomenon: slightly more than one house in three. However, when one examines individual monks and nuns accused of sexual misconduct, a different picture arises.

Table 3.2: Individuals Accused of Sexual Misconduct in Lincoln and Norwich Episcopal Visitations of Cloistered Houses 1430-1530

Bishop	Total Individuals	Individuals Accused	% of the whole
Alnwick	748	36	4.81
Atwater	—	Not enough data to calculate	—
Longland	555	15	2.70
Goldwell	300	1	0.33
Nicke	386	24	6.22
Overall	1989	76	3.82

The approximate combined monastic population of Norwich and Lincoln during the visitations of Alnwick, Longland, Goldwell and Nicke is 1,989 people.²⁵ Seventy-six of these monastic men and women were accused of sexual misconduct, which equates to a misconduct rate of less than 4%. Or, perhaps phrased better, the vast majority of monastic men and women (96%) were not accused of any sexual misconduct (see Table

25. The total population of monks and nuns in Lincoln and Norwich, of course, fluctuated over time. For instance, over multiple visitations, a house’s population might rise or fall somewhat. This number of 1989 monks and nuns represents an estimate of the highest total monastic population recorded during episcopal visitations between 1430-1530. Unfortunately, there is not enough data in the records of William Atwater to estimate monastic population during his visitations. Although some of his visitation reports list inmates, a sizeable percentage do not. As a consequence, this 1989 number reflects only a reasonable approximation based on available data. Nevertheless, I am cognisant of its imprecise nature – since as F. Donald Logan once remarked, “it is always perilous to estimate the population of religious houses.” F. Donald Logan, “The Departure from the Religious Life During the Royal Visitation of the Monasteries, 1535-1536,” in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), 220.

3.2). Although more than one-third of the houses would at one time or another experience a case of a ‘promiscuous monk’ or ‘naughty nun,’ on an individual level they remained a rare phenomenon.

3.3 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Another interesting characteristic arising from counting accusations of sexual misconduct in Lincoln and Norwich is the gender disparity in the numbers of the accused (see Table 3.3). To begin with, the overall percentage of houses which had accusations of sexual misconduct was not the same for men and women. A significant 43% of the male houses had such accusations compared to only 25% of female houses. However, men and women appear more similar when one looks at the numbers of accused individuals. Excluding the records of Atwater, which do not contain enough data to estimate monastic populations, only sixteen nuns out of a total of 556 were accused of sexual misconduct, or 2.88%, which is not that far off from the monks and canons where approximately 4.19% of their estimated number of 1433 were accused of being sexually active. However, these small percentages tend to mask the much larger difference in scale (including Atwater’s numbers): sixty-three sexually active monks or canons to just nineteen sexually active nuns. Another striking difference between male and female monastics was the number of accusations per house. There was an average of 1.2 accusations per male house, but only 0.6 per female house.²⁶ Clearly, at a societal level the ‘promiscuous monk’ was a far more common figure than the ‘naughty nun.’

These numbers fly in the face of the prominence of the literary ‘naughty nun,’ whom historians such as Graciela Daichman argued was based on a common figure in medieval

26. These numbers (which include Atwater’s) are calculated by dividing the total number of accusations by the number of houses visited. Thus, 22 female accusations divided by 36 female houses equals 0.6 accusations per house. In comparison, there were a total of 89 male accusations of sexual misconduct over 72 houses visited. This equates to roughly 1.2 accusations per house.

Table 3.3: Gender Comparison of Sexual Misconduct Accusations in Cloistered Monastic Houses 1430-1530

	Houses Accused	%	Individuals Accused†	%
Men	31	43.06	60	4.19
Women	9	25	16	2.88
Overall	40	37.04	76	3.82

† Excludes Bishop Atwater for which there is not enough data to estimate monastic population. For my methodology of counting individuals, see §2.4

society.²⁷ Penelope Johnson did not find the same numerical gender disparity in her study of sexual misconduct accusations in thirteenth-century Normandy. She found that forty-nine monks out of 1,486 were accused of sexual misconduct (3%), while twenty-six nuns out of a total of 587 were likewise accused (4%).²⁸ Possibly, (Norman) thirteenth-century nuns were more sexually active than (English) fifteenth- and sixteenth-century ones, which would contradict a claim of decline of moral in English monasteries before the Dissolution. In any case, as Johnson herself underlines, the difference between monks and nuns is “statistically insignificant.” One must wonder then on which basis George Coulton concluded that the “proportion of peccancy in nuns is more than double that of the monks.”²⁹ As Johnson rightfully points out, Coulton’s numbers to support this claim are unreliable and “more anecdotally striking than historically accurate.”³⁰ Nevertheless, Coulton justifiably points out that it may have been more difficult for women to conceal the consequences of a sexual relationship (i.e. pregnancy), something which Johnson agrees with as well.³¹ Although neither Johnson nor Coulton provide numbers for the pregnancy rate among the misconduct accusations, it is reasonable to assume that women

27. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns*, 5.

28. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 128.

29. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2:224-225.

30. As an example of just one of Coulton’s numerous statistical errors, Johnson points out that Coulton states that Archbishop Eudes Rigaud visited five nunneries outside his diocese, when in fact he visited six. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 114.

31. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 225; Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 114-5.

had a greater chance of being caught in sexual misconduct because of pregnancy. If proven, as I will, based on my own pregnancy numbers from Lincoln and Norwich, then the disparity between monks and nuns committing sexual acts might have been even greater (see Table 3.4 below).

So why might the rates of sexually active nuns be lower in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Lincoln and Norwich compared to thirteenth-century Normandy? Part of the answer may be the promulgation of *Periculoso* in 1298, which strictly controlled and regulated access to female convents. Nuns after *Periculoso* faced much greater restrictions of movement and these restrictions obviously decreased opportunities for religious women to engage in sexual relationships. Thus, there is the possibility that nuns of the thirteenth century were slightly more ‘promiscuous’ than their later medieval counterparts, not because of any greater predilection to sexual activity, but simply due to opportunity. Nevertheless, in both thirteenth-century France and sixteenth-century England, the unsurprising reality is that the ‘promiscuous monk’ was numerically superior to the ‘naughty nun.’ Thus, in medieval society, one was far more likely to encounter examples of the former than the latter. Even more important, overall, both were a relatively rare occurrence.

3.4 MONASTIC SEXUAL PARTNERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

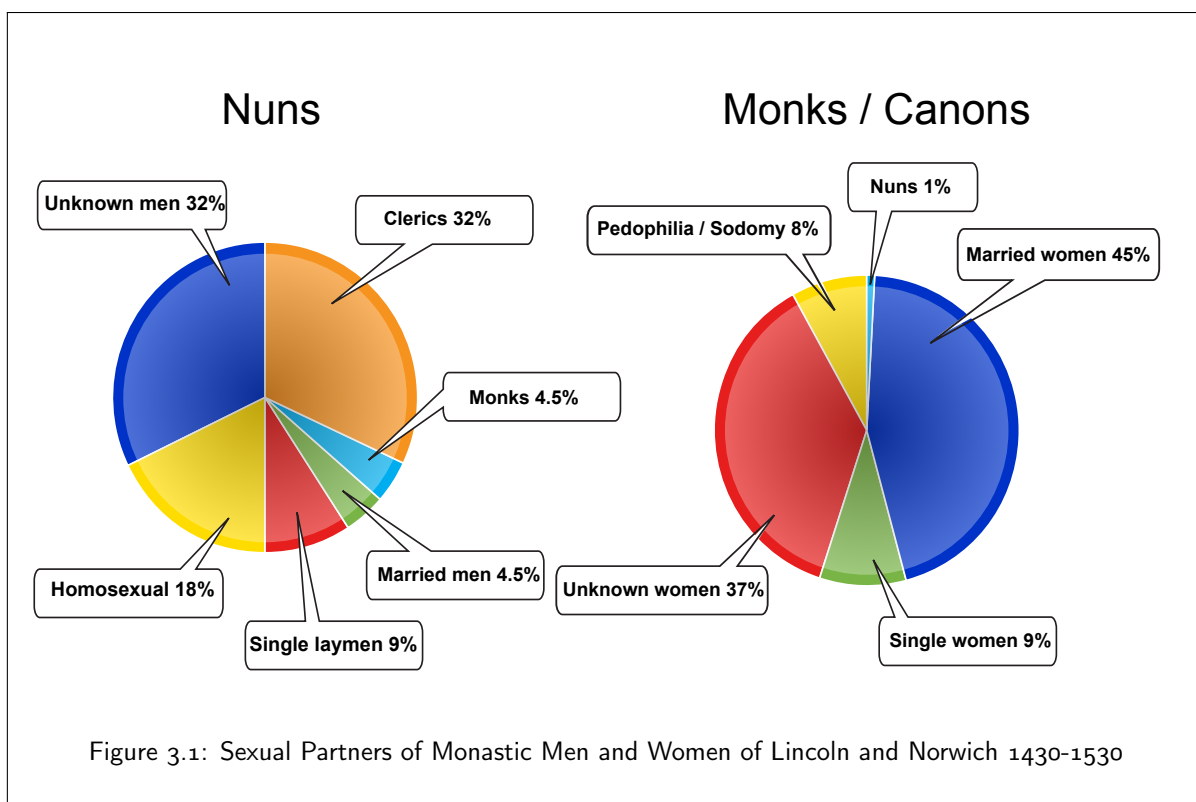
Male and female religious also distinguished themselves in their choice of sexual partners. Not surprisingly, given the freedom of movement which monks enjoyed compared to nuns, and the (extremely limited) type of men which nuns had regular contact with, nuns were far more likely to have a relationship with a member of the clergy than male monastics were with female religious. In particular, chaplains seem to be a preferred choice (if there was a choice) for the ‘naughty nun’ and 32% of their partners fall into this category (see

Figure 3.1). Chaplains often had easy access to convents where they performed the duties of mass and hearing confession for the nuns. It seems inevitable, that occasionally, this resulted in an illicit affair. Married men and single laymen, on the other hand, accounted for only 14%. We do not know the status of another 32% of the partners, but likely many of them were clerics too. If we eliminate the unknown men, the rate of clerics is even higher, at 50% of the recorded sexual partners. Another 14% were accused of same-sex relationships with other nuns; none with a lay woman. This would mean that an extremely significant percent of nuns' sexual partners were clergy. Monks and canons, on the other hand, seem to have had relationships mostly with married women and this accounted for 45% of their accusations. Although the records do not often tell us much about these women, most of them seem to have been attached to the monastery in some way – either as servants or as wives of servants. The latter seems to have been particularly common.

It is difficult to determine where religious men and women met their lovers. Some monastics went into apostasy with their lovers, such as Agnes Butylere at Stamford, St. Michaels, who ran off with her lover Robert Abbot, a harp player; and the Benedictine monk John Bengeworthe who ran off with a nun from Godstow.³² For those that maintained their relationships closer to home, the records are often more silent. It would seem likely that nuns more often engaged in sexual activity within the monastery's grounds, but, unfortunately, there are not enough instances in the visitation records where locations of lovers' trysts are mentioned in order to form any meaningful statistics. Some, like Joan Maynard and Katerina Wellys, were accused of misconduct because they were seen by the other nuns spending private time with their lovers on the convent grounds.³³ However,

32. Linc. Visit., 2:91, 348; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.83,122.

33. Linc. Visit., 2:218; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.31; Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3: 9; LAO, MS V/j/7, fol. 87.



not all nuns exclusively met their lovers within the convent. For example, Ellen Cotton of the Cistercian Heynings Priory had an affair with an unnamed man in his “dwelling house.”³⁴

Male monastics obviously had slightly more flexibility in this regard. Some certainly conducted their relationships off-site such as Roger Palmer of Missenden who only got caught because he was seen leaving the house of his lover.³⁵ Monks and canons in practice had a much greater freedom of movement compared to women. Although technically they also were supposed to remain within the monastery at all times except when given specific leave by the abbot or prior to conduct monastic business or visit relatives. However, this rule seems to have been frequently ignored, giving male religious far more opportunities

34. Linc. Visit., 1:71; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.117d.

35. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:24; LAO, MS V/j/9, fol.77d.

to engage in relationships with outside women. Eighty-six out of the total of 220, or 39% of the visitations of male houses had some citation of monks either spending too much time in town, frequenting taverns or leaving the monastery without permission. Ralph Carnelle, for instance, of Dorchester Abbey was cited in 1445 for regularly going into taverns in town and carousing with women.³⁶ Similarly, Richard Asshtone, the abbot of Peterborough Abbey, was accused in 1446 of sneaking out of the monastery at night, putting on secular dress and secretly visiting the wife of the mercer William Clerk.³⁷ Whereas, for the nuns, only 17 out of a total of 95 visitations, or 18%, had citations for enclosure lapses – and, not surprisingly, none of them for frequenting taverns.

Monks and canons, however, seemed just as likely to engage in sexual relationships within the cloister walls, which might be quite understandable given the high proportion of married women among their lovers. For instance, John Clyftone, the abbot of Dorchester, was accused of regularly sneaking women into his chamber at night.³⁸ Thomas Tewkesbury, also of Dorchester, was said to have appropriated a room for himself within the monastery for the sole purpose of meeting lovers.³⁹ Simply the inviting of a woman to a private location within the monastery was often a cause for suspicion, as was the case with William Coleworth, the prior of Canons Ashby Priory, who was accused of having improper relationships with Jane Berdynh, the wife of John Beg, and Karerine Pieris in 1432.⁴⁰ Likewise, John Tacolston, the prior of St. Benet at Holme Abbey, was accused of incontinence because he was seen taking a married woman into his chamber.⁴¹ For monastic leaders of both sexes, bringing lovers into the monastery and having them stay in private chambers was a particularly attractive option.

36. Linc. Visit., 79; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.25d.

37. Linc. Visit., 2:290; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.124.

38. Linc. Visit., 2:80; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.25d.

39. Linc. Visit., 2:72; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.112 sched.1.

40. Linc. Visit., 1:31; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.198.

41. *Visitations of Norwich*, 127; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol.41.

Also rare in the visitation records of Lincoln and Norwich is any indication of sexual assault or rape, as opposed to consensual relationships. Certainly, many of the sodomy cases were likely non-consensual, such as John Slyhurst's assault of the son of one of Missenden's servants. However, the issue of consent is almost never explicitly mentioned in the visitation records – although Allan Frantzen has shown that consent or lack of it, may have been a factor in determining the penance for a child in paedophilic sodomy cases (see §3.5).⁴² Thus, Slyhurst was disciplined for sodomy, not for an assault on a child.⁴³ There are also no clear cut examples of male religious raping women. One possible case is a monk from Dorchester Abbey who was said to have abducted a woman in 1441 and smuggled her into the monastery in a trunk, where he had carnal relations with her. According to the visitation report,

John Shrewesbury is of very evil report, because he was caught in the bell-tower with a woman, whom, being led thereto by fear and fright, he put into a chest of the house.⁴⁴

As a consequence, the abbot had imprisoned Shrewesbury and ordered him to fast on bread and water. However, during Alnwick's visitation he pleaded his innocence and was released from his imprisonment after clearing his name with the help of three compurgators.⁴⁵

In general, we know very little about the lovers of religious men and women – and this is particularly the case when they were laymen or laywomen. Indeed, for more than one third of the accusations against both sexes, nothing is said about the sexual partner whatsoever. In the majority of the rest of the accusations, a bare minimum tends to

42. Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 160.

43. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:20-21; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.75d-76.

44. "Johannes Scherousbery pessime fame est quia erat deprehensus cum quadam muliere in campanili, quam metu et timore ductus posuit in quendam cistam domus." Linc. Visit., 2:73; LAO, MS V/j/1, 112 sched.1.

45. Linc. Visit., 2:69; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.111.

be recorded. For men, this usually means the woman's status - either as a servant or someone's wife. The latter can often be inferred from the inclusion of the charge of adultery. For women, often all that is noted is the man's name, and occasionally his profession. We learn a little more about ecclesiastical partners, such as chaplains, the preferred choice of 'naughty nuns.' These men almost always seem to have been secular priests. However, details about these men are usually limited to some notation about the parish to which they were attached. Homosexual relationships, which are discussed in more detail below, tended to be in-house affairs when they occurred. In most cases we seldom learn more than the barest of details about the sexual partners of monks and nuns.

One notable exception to this rule is Richard Gray, the lover of the Benedictine nun Elizabeth Wylugby of Stamford, St. Michael's Priory, who had the unfortunate experience in 1442 of being called to account for his relationship before an episcopal tribunal recorded in Alnwick's visitations. According to the record, Richard had been staying in the convent for a period of time as a lodger with his wife. He was accused of having an illicit relationship and impregnating the nun Elizabeth Wylugby. The notice of this infraction was sufficiently alarming to Alnwick that he arranged to have Richard called before him to answer charges of "sacrilege and spiritual incest." Richard confessed his guilt to the charges and, in a rare inclusion for a monastic visitation record, his penance was listed in some detail.⁴⁶

On one level, Alnwick's concern about the affair should not strike us as surprising, but this case is singular because of the unusual light made on the 'other' partner in the sexual misconduct. As I discuss in much more detail in chapter four, fornication with nuns was consistently rated in English ecclesiastical legal parlance as one of the most

46. Linc. Visit., 2:352; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.39d.

serious offences to commit (see §4.1). Nevertheless, despite such strong condemnations, the visitation records rarely make any mention of the fate of the lovers of nuns (or monks for that matter). Richard Gray is an exception since he was brought to public trial – potentially because of the pregnancy and the notoriousness of the crime.⁴⁷ Gray’s penance was reasonably harsh. He was required to endure being flogged while walking around the Stamford Church on four Sundays carrying a candle while dressed only in linen garments, and then to make a barefoot pilgrimage to the cathedral at Lincoln on the final Sunday. Gray, however, did not seem to have performed this penance. A short time later he was called again before Alnwick’s official to account for his failure to obey. He sent instead a proctor, who explained that Gray was sick with fever in bed. The official gave him another date to appear and when he did not, promptly excommunicated him. From that point on, Richard Gray, lover of a nun, disappears into history.

3.5 HOMOSEXUALITY

When I began this study, I expected to find more instances of sexual misconduct within monasteries, i.e., monks with other monks, or nuns with other nuns, but records of these types of relationships have not been often recorded in my sources for either sex. I did not find even one instance of a same-sex sexual relationship between adult men in cloistered houses in Lincoln and Norwich. There were, however, a number of sodomy accusations which involved older monks and young boys in several houses. Medieval authorities did not normally distinguish cases of sodomy between adults and other adults, or adults and children, in that there was no special crime of paedophilia. Both of these types of offences were classified as sodomy. Interestingly, Allan Frantzen’s examination of old English penitentials, specifically those dealing with monastic life, demonstrated that both

47. I discuss in detail how sexual scandals could prompt episcopal inquisitions in §4.3 and 4.4.

adult men and children could be held culpable in acts of sodomy and the key issue in determining the extent of that culpability was consent. If a child was deemed to have consented to the sodomy, English penitentials dictated that he should receive a harsher penalty. Thus, according to one Anglo-Saxon penitential, a boy who was forced into sexual relations might receive a week's penance, but he would receive twenty days if he consented.⁴⁸ However, the culpability of the child was never suggested in any of the records that I looked at. For instance, in the aforementioned case from Missenden, the guilt of the canon Slyhurst is emphasized numerous times, while the child is only referred to in terms of his being a witness and/or victim. The guilt and required penance belongs to Slyhurst.

Certainly the very search for homosexual relationships is fraught with pitfalls and anachronisms. Scholars since the early eighties and the publication of John Boswell and Michael Goodich's seminal studies have argued about the value of using modern terms such as 'gay' or 'homosexual', which carry distinctions of membership in some sort of social group, in the context of ancient and medieval history.⁴⁹ However, for our purposes this debate is somewhat moot, since I am not concerned with establishing any social identity or group. My study is simply interested in asking whether monks or nuns were accused of being engaged in same-sex sexual relationships. To that end, it is curious that there were no true cases of monks with other monks. Indeed, such cases existed. For

48. Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 158; See also Allen J. Frantzen, "Where the Boys are: Children and Sex in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1997).

49. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Michael Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1979). Boswell's thesis has attracted significant debate since its publication, with some of its fiercest criticism coming from scholars in the Gay Academic Union (GAU). Some of this historiography surrounding this debate may be found in the recent volume of essays: Mathew Kuefler, ed., *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

instance, B.P. McGuire has noted that there was some concern among the Cistercians that sexual relationships between monks could occur. McGuire noted that they developed specific punishments for those found to be exchanging presents for instance, including whipping in chapter and fasting on bread and water.⁵⁰ However, for whatever reason, there are no such relationships recorded for Lincoln and Norwich in male houses. This said, there was a series of possible male homosexual relationships recorded for one of the secular colleges of Lincoln. John Dey, a canon at Leicester New College, was convicted in 1440 of committing sodomy with a number of different men, two were described as canons like himself, and two were described as “choristers / choirboys” (*chorista*) and said to be fifteen years of age.⁵¹ The allegations resulted in a full blown inquisition in which numerous witnesses were called to testify. I discuss this case in much more detail in chapter four (see §4.5).

Conversely, homosexual relationships account for 14% of the female accusations based on two separate recorded relationships. On the surface this is puzzling for a number of reasons. First of all, it should be noted that these are suspected homosexual relationships. The records in no way make explicit mention of any sexual activity. For example, the prioress of Littlemore priory was chided in 1445 for having one of the nuns sleep with her privately in bed.⁵² The possibility exists that it does not represent a sexual relationship at all since the dormitory of the convent in which it took place was also described to have been quite cold. Indeed, Sarah Salih suggests that this instance likely did not represent sexual misconduct since the “Littlemore visitation contains none of the references to modesty or shamefastness which usually appear when sexual transgression is at issue.”⁵³

50. Brian Patrick McGuire, “The Cistercians and the Transformation of Monastic Friendships,” *Analecta Cisterciensia* 37 (1994): 1–63, 9–10.

51. Linc. Visit., 2:188; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.100.

52. Linc. Visit., 2: 217–8; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.31.

53. Salih, 150.

However, Alnwick's injunction to the house after the visit of his official made specific mention that the practice of sleeping together must stop. Certainly, a number of medieval writers on female monasticism have shown the same concern as Alnwick. Both Augustine, and Donatus of Besançon felt that close female friendships could develop into sexual relationships.⁵⁴ Donatus prescribed that nuns should if at all possible, sleep by themselves and be fully clothed.⁵⁵ A similar case to Littlemore was found by John Longland at Flamstead in 1530, where two nuns were said to sleep together. One of the nuns in question, Johanna Mason, explained to the bishop that they did it so that they could wake each other up for matins. Longland clearly disapproved and stated as much in his injunction. Like Littlemore, it is left up to the reader whether either of these two cases constitutes a real sexual relationship.⁵⁶ However, given that lesbianism is usually invisible in all but a few texts due to the phallogentric medieval understanding of sexuality, these cases may be as close as we get to seeing real examples.

3.6 MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS

Another interesting difference between male and female accusations is the ratio of numbers of accusations to individuals. Indeed, there seems to have been a greater tendency for male monastics to have multiple accusations levied against them, whereas women were usually only accused once. For the women, with only two exceptions, the ratio was one accusation per nun, but for the men it was entirely different.⁵⁷ The entire eighty-nine

54. Jacqueline Murray, "Twice Marginal and Twice Invisible: Lesbians in the Middle Ages," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996), 196.

55. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, trans., *The Rule of Donatus of Besançon* (Saskatoon: Peregrina, 1985), 40.

56. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2: 144-5; LAO, MS V/j/9, 44d-45.

57. The first in question was Isabel Benet, a Cistercian nun of Catsby Priory. She was accused of having a child with a chaplain named William Smythe in 1442. She did not deny the illicit relationship with

accusations of sexual misconduct in this study were levied against just sixty-three men, which means an average of 1.4 partners per male religious. Thus, male religious were more likely than nuns to have more than one sexual relationship. The abbot of Dorchester abbey, John Clyftone, for example, was accused of maintaining multiple relationships with a number of married women. During one visitation, he was described by an older canon of the monastery as being

[...] of most unclean life. He is not diligent in quire by either day or night: he makes no corrections of the transgressions of the canons. He keeps several women whose names I don't know, but these I do know: Joan Baroun, with whom he was taken in the steward's chamber; he keeps John Forde's wife, he keeps John Roche's wife, John Prest's wife and Thomas Fisher's wife; and all these he pays by means of the goods of the house.⁵⁸

One wonders if these accusations had been true, how the abbot managed to pull off this rather 'three's company-ish' love triangle (or perhaps hexagon). However, the case actually represents a trend among the male accusations. When a man is accused, he is often accused of having more than one sexual transgression. Nevertheless, despite the greater likelihood of multiples, the majority of monks and canons were accused of just one sexual relationship. In fact, only fifteen out of the sixty-five sexually active monks and canons engaged in multiple or successive affairs. However, these fifteen monks averaged 2.73 partners each and engaged in forty-one separate relationships, supposing

Smythe, but insisted the father of her child was another man. She was also accused of sneaking out of the convent regularly to go dancing with Augustinian Friars. I discuss this case in more detail in §4.2. The other example is Alice Longspey, a Benedictine nun of Godstow Abbey, who went into apostasy with John Bengeworthe, a monk of Eynsham in 1445. She later returned to Godstow only to be accused of having illicit relations with another man whom she met under the guise of him being a relative. Linc. Visit., 2:46-53, 113-116; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.28-9, 93 sched., 94-95d; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.59.

58. "Abbas immundissimus est. Chorum non diligit nec die nec nocte: correcciones non facit super transgressiones canonicorum. Tenet plures mulieres quarum nomina ignoro, set istas noui: Johannam Baroune, cum qua erat captus in camera senescalli ; tenet vxorem Johannis Forde; tenet vxorem Johannis Roche; tenet vxorem Johannis Prest; tenet vxorem Thome Piscatoris; quas omnes exhibet per bona domus." Linc. Visit., 2:73; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol. 112 sched.1.

the accusations were true! Some like the abbot of Dorchester were particularly prolific, but none came close to the record of John Madyngley, the prior of Huntingdon Priory. In 1439, he was accused of having relationships with eight separate women including the wife of one of the priory's servants, two of her daughters and five other women from the local town.⁵⁹

Women, on the other hand, seem to have more commonly engaged in long term relationships. Katerina Wellys, for example, the prioress of Littlemore, whom we have already encountered, maintained a relationship with a chaplain named Richard Hewes for a number of years. She even bore a child with him, whom she supported from the goods of the monastery, and married off, while her relationship with Richard went on. This would mean a relationship lasting over at least thirteen years. Moreover, Richard continued to visit the priory two or three times per year to stay overnight with the prioress.⁶⁰ Another example is Denise Lowelyche, the prioress of Markyate Priory, who maintained a relationship for five years with a chaplain, which only ended when he died.⁶¹ Indeed, over half of the accusations against women suggested some sort of ongoing relationship.

Some religious men also had long term relationships. Thomas Dryby, a canon of Markby Priory was accused in 1438 of having two children with a certain Margaret Portere.⁶² The abbot of Missenden, John Fox was also accused of maintaining a long term relationship with Margaret Bishop, to whom he was said to give the goods of the monastery.⁶³ Accusations of misdirection of convent funds to lovers were a particular trouble for long term relationships, since it implied an economic loss to the house. In both the cases of Littlemore and Missenden, this aspect formed an important part of the

59. Linc. Visit., 2:148-153; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.

60. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3: 11-12; LAO, MS V/j/7, fols.83-83d.

61. Linc. Visit., 1:84; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.149d.

62. Linc. Visit., 2:221; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol. 84d.

63. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:26; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.79-79d.

accusation. In general, however, it is difficult to know how many religious men engaged in long term relationships. The visitation records are more apt to simply state that a man was *defamatus* with a certain woman, leaving few details as to the nature of the relationship. Occasionally, the records will imply short term relationships or even individual acts. However, this seems to be more common with sodomy accusations or relations with prostitutes.⁶⁴

3.7 PREGNANCY

Pregnancy as a consequence of an illicit relationship was obviously more problematic for the ‘naughty nun’ than the ‘promiscuous monk,’ a fact which a number of scholars have noted.⁶⁵ Indeed, pregnancy made concealment of an illicit relationship impossible for women. In fact, pregnancy is often the only notice we have that an illicit relationship had taken place at all. For example, Margaret Mortymere, a nun of the Benedictine house, Stamford, St. Michael’s priory, was described as being pregnant and giving birth just before Easter in 1442. She had been away for just two weeks to have the child and then returned shortly after the birth. The other nuns testified to the bishop’s emissary that they did not know who the father was, nor whether Margaret had given birth to a boy or a girl.⁶⁶ All we know of a particular pregnancy at Godstow Abbey in 1432 is that Bishop William Gray of Lincoln was concerned that the nun in question, Mary Browne, would keep herself out of sight and not be performing in any official offices.⁶⁷

64. See for example, John Dey, a canon at Leicester New College, who was caught in the act of sodomy. Or John Atkynsone, also from Leicester New College who was accused of sleeping with prostitutes. See Linc. Visit., 2:191, 197; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.100d, 102d.

65. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 225; Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 114-5; F. Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England, c. 1240-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 84.

66. Linc. Visit., 2:355; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.96.

67. Linc. Visit., 65; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.167.

Due to difficulties in concealment, we would expect that more of the nuns' illicit relationships would be associated with pregnancy in visitation records than monks or canons. Initial statistics give some compelling support for this - 40% of female accusations involved instances of pregnancy, while only 6.74% of male accusations (see Table 3.4). That percentage is even higher for women, closer to 50%, if we omit the cases of suspected homosexuality. On the surface, the different percentages between male and female monastics for pregnancies resulting from illicit relationships are a bit problematic. Obviously the risk of impregnation was 'relatively' as great for a 'promiscuous monk' as a 'naughty nun.'⁶⁸ However, pregnancies resulting from the illicit relationships of male monastics were probably less easy to detect, given that a majority of their lovers were married women. Moreover these pregnancies were less likely to be considered relevant from the point of view of episcopal authorities because taking place normally outside the Church and therefore, a lower rate of them would have been recorded. However, on the other hand, the pregnancy of a female religious posed additional and practical problems for authorities which obviously did not end necessarily when the relationship did. First, the visibility of a pregnancy prolonged the duration of the scandal. The very image of a pregnant nun was the antithesis of the medieval ideal of virginity expected of religious women. Consequently, bishops such as William Gray in 1432 seemed concerned that the pregnancy should stay out of sight.

Another problem facing the pregnant nun was what was to become of the child. Unfortunately, the fate of these illegitimate children is usually a mystery. After a pregnancy was recorded, very rarely is anything further said in visitation reports or injunctions. For instance, the pregnancy of Mergareta Newcome of Greenfield Priory

68. A monk could theoretically choose to practise *coitus interruptus*. A nun could hope that her partner will practise it, but has limited power to impose it on him.

Table 3.4: Monastic Pregnancy rates in Lincoln and Norwich, 1430-1530

	Number of pregnancies	% of accusations
Monks and canons	6	6.74
Nuns	8	36.36
Overall	14	12.6

in 1535 received only slight notice in Longland's visitation notes and can be considered typical of these cases:

That same nun [Mergareta Newcome] was impregnated by William Wharton, who it is said, now resides in the diocese of London. She was corrected by the prioress.⁶⁹

In each case from the visitation records, the nuns who had given birth seem to have remained in the monastery as monastics. Presumably, this meant that most monastic mothers had to cut off ties with their children. In only a few cases is there any mention of what became of the babies conceived from illicit relationships and then frequently the concern seems to have been that these children would become some sort of financial drain on the abbey. For instance, the nuns of Littlemore made a point to mention that the prioress Katerina Wellys was raising her daughter in the monastery and more importantly, that she had provided a dowry for her daughter out of the goods of the monastery which they listed in some detail.⁷⁰ Likewise, one of the cases in which a pregnancy resulting from an illicit relationship with a male religious was recorded, the financial burden also seems to have been an important cause for concern. For instance, Nicke's visitation of Coxford Priory in 1532 noted that a canon named "Robert Porter supports his child with

69. "Ista fuit impregnata per dominum Willehnum Wharton qui iam moratur Londoniensi diocesi vt dicitur . Ista fuit correcta per priorissam." Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2:162; LAO, MS V/j/7, fol.2.

70. "Eciam dicunt quod priorissa antedicta subtrahit ab huiusmodi monasterio ad maritandum suam filiam antedictam / multa vtensilia , videlicet pannes pottes candilstikes basynes schettes pellous fedderbeddes etc." Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:9; LAO, MS V/j/9, fol.87.

whom the house is burdened.”⁷¹ However, occasionally we do hear about the fates of the children for other reasons. The daughter of the prioress of Littlemore got married and one can hope an happy ending for her.⁷² Quite different is the sad case of Agnes Smyth of Crabhouse nunnery. Smyth had become pregnant in 1514 by a certain Simon Prentis of the parish Wighenhall St Mary Magdalen, whom the nineteenth-century editor of the printed volume, A. Jessopp, suggests was a “wealthy landowner.” Moreover, Jessopp infers that Prentis seduced Smyth whom he describes as a “wretched woman.”⁷³ Although there is no evidence within the record itself to support Jessopp’s characterizations, the ending of the story was not a happy one. By the time Richard Nicke visited the abbey in the summer of 1514, the relationship seemed to have been over for some time and Agnes told Bishop Nicke that her baby had died shortly after birth.⁷⁴

3.8 POWER DYNAMICS IN MONASTIC SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

In the strict hierarchy of the monastery, power dynamics often played an important role in the likelihood, frequency and nature of monastic sexual relationships. This becomes apparent when one examines the proportions of sexual relationships maintained by those in leadership positions and those who were not. Interestingly, abbots / abbesses and priors / prioress seem to have been accused of illicit affairs at much greater rates than their small numbers would otherwise suggest, and certainly proportionally had them more often than regular monks and nuns did. For instance, male monastic leaders represented approximately 6% of the total number of monks and canons, yet they accounted for 19% of the sexual misconduct accusations. Similarly, female abbesses and prioresses represented

71. “dicit quod dominus Robertus Porter suscitavit prolem cum qua domus oneratur.” *Visitations of Norwich*, 313; Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fol.91b.

72. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:9; LAO, MS V/j/7, fol.87.

73. Jessopp, *Visitations of Norwich*, xlii.

74. *Visitations of Norwich*, 109-10; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.31-31b.

approximately 7% of the total number of nuns, yet were said to be involved in 27% of the sexual relationships.

Table 3.5: Monastic Leadership and Sexual Misconduct Accusations in Lincoln and Norwich, 1430-1530†

	Number*	% of pop.	Accused	% of accus.
Abbots / Priors	88	6	17	19
Abbesses / Prioresses	39	7	6	27
Overall	127	6	23	21

† Excludes Bishop Atwater for which there is not enough data to estimate monastic population.

* Estimated population.

So why would this be the case? Certainly, the discrepancy in numbers could be explained by political motives. If one wants to get rid of a person in power in a monastery, one accuses him or her of sexual misconduct. Another possibility is that being in a leadership position allowed religious men and women far more opportunities to engage in sexual relationships than those who were not. This was particularly true for female leaders since they often had much more freedom to connect with the outside world due to their position. They also were much more likely to have private accommodations of some sort. As a number of examples have already shown, monastic leaders' use of these rooms to meet privately with members of the opposite sex was both a blessing and a curse - since the very meeting with people often raised the suspicions of the other monks or nuns. For example, this was the case in 1442 with Margaret Wavere, the prioress of the Cistercian house Catesby Priory, who was accused of having a relationship with a cleric after they had been seen to spend private time together.⁷⁵

Monastic leaders also had the ability to coerce the monks or nuns under them to either accept their relationship or even lie to episcopal visitors about it. The case of

75. Linc. Visit., 47; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.94.

the Littlemore prioress, Katerina Wellys, already mentioned, is a good example of this, even though she was obviously unable to convince the sisters to lie for her. According to the nuns she threatened them with repercussions if any spoke out against her and even put some nuns in the stocks to make her point.⁷⁶ Another example may be found in the prior of St. Mary's Priory, Walsingham who in 1514 was said to have openly been keeping a mistress. He was described by the other canons as cruel and they claimed that he threatened them with punishments if they should tell the bishop anything about him. According to the canons, he boasted in chapter that "when my lorde of Norwiche is goon I shall turne every thing as I woll."⁷⁷ Needless to say, Bishop Nicke was not impressed. Not only had the prior been conducting himself poorly, he had been embezzling money from the priory and was letting it go to ruin. Still, Nicke did not remove him entirely. Instead, he appointed the prior of Westacre as a coadjutor of the priory (*in coadjutorem prioris*) and ordered that nothing could be done without his consent.⁷⁸ These examples of Littlemore and St. Mary's may be extreme, but obviously the position of authority afforded heads of houses a certain amount of power to control the outcome of their sexual relationships. If leaders like these two individuals could get away with so much, subtler hands may have been able to maintain their lovers much longer.

Monastic leaders did not only have the ability to wield power and influence events inside the monastery, they also could affect things on the outside to their advantage. Richard Asshtone, for instance, the abbot of Peterborough abbey, was accused of awarding the husband of one of the married women he was in a relationship with, office of park warden for some of the abbey's lands for the term of his life. The reason for this is not given, but it seems a reasonable possibility it was either to silence the husband, appease

76. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3: 11-12; LAO, MS V/j/7, fols. 83-83d.

77. *Visitations of Norwich*, 117; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol.35.

78. *Visitations of Norwich*, 123; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol.38.

him or both.⁷⁹ Other monastic positions of power could also afford the holder a greater ability to maintain or engage in illicit relationships. In several of the adult/youth sodomy cases, the positions of the offenders offered them a greater opportunity to commit their crimes - such as John Buxum of Leicester abbey, who held the position of submaster of the novices and was accused of sodomy with a youth named Hugo Massy in 1528.⁸⁰

3.9 DIFFERENCES IN ORDER

The monastic orders found in the visitation reports in Lincoln and Norwich are contingent on the rules of exemption for episcopal visitations. Many of the important male orders and houses were exempt from visitation, in particular, the Cistercians. The famous abbey of Bury St. Edmunds was exempt from the authority of the bishop of Norwich. Female houses on the other hand were rarely awarded exemption status, and as a consequence their visitations are more evenly distributed across different orders. The male visitations are largely focused on only two orders - Augustinian Canons and Benedictine Monks. The largest group was the former – Austin canons made up 76% of the male houses visited. The next largest male order was the Benedictines, at 21%. Female orders were the reverse: Benedictine houses made up the largest at 47% followed by Austin houses at approximately 24%. Cistercian houses made up 20% of the female visitations and there was one female Cluniac house visited.

English monastic historiography has frequently been divided between orders, i.e. studies focused on one order to the exclusion of others.⁸¹ However, actual differences in religious life between the orders are much less certain and this is particularly true with

79. Linc. Visit., 2: 287; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.123d.

80. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2: 190; LAO, MS V/j/9, fol.23d.

81. See for example the recent study by Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England* (2001).

Table 3.6: Distribution of Monastic Orders and Sexual Misconduct in Lincoln and Norwich, 1430-1530

	monastic houses	portion of all monastic houses (%)	no. with sexual misconduct	misconduct rate (%)
Men				
Austin	55	75	22	40
Benedictine	15	20	9	60
Bonshommes	1	2	0	0
Trinitarian	1	2	0	0
Women				
Austin	9	25	2	22
Benedictine	18	50	5	28
Cistercian	8	22	2	25
Cluniac	1	3	0	0

the Benedictine monks and Augustinian canons. In 1984, Carolyn Bynum summarized much of the scholarship of historians who had analyzed the theological and practical experiences of these two orders, and concluded that “none of this evidence, as currently presented and analyzed, proves that there was a general difference between twelfth-century monks and regular canons either in practice or in ideas.”⁸² Bynum goes on to argue that there were some differences between monks and canons, but that these differences were largely due to spirituality rather than practice.⁸³ Certainly, by the sixteenth century, little had changed in this regard. For women, the differences between the orders were even more irrelevant to their daily lives and it seems that even medieval people were unsure about them. Recently, Linda Rasmussen examined how the nuns of St. Michael’s outside Stamford were variously described as Cistercian, Benedictine, and even Augustinian by medieval ecclesiastical authorities. She argued that this “suggests that the authorities were perhaps somewhat unclear about the manner in which religion was carried out in

82. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 35.

83. *Ibid.*, 57.

nunneries and perhaps also that there was little difference between the way that nunneries of different orders functioned.”⁸⁴ After *Periculoso* in 1298, any differences in the emphasis on an active or passive life were essentially eliminated, and even mendicant orders of nuns lived much the same cloistered lives as their traditional Benedictine and Cistercian counterparts.

For the women, these similarities in religious life carried over into sexual misconduct rates which are almost identical between orders (see table 3.6). For the men, however, at first glance there does seem to be a significant difference. Benedictine houses had a much larger rate of sexual misconduct compared to Augustinian houses, despite having significantly fewer numbers. 60% of male Benedictine houses experienced sexual misconduct, while only 40% of Austin houses did. However, if one examines individual rates of sexual misconduct, the two orders are identical. In fact, Augustinian canons had a slightly higher individual misconduct rate (4.45%) compared to the Benedictine monks (3.86%). (See table 3.7) The lower rate of Austin houses with sexual misconduct thus seems to be the result of their smaller average size of 11.5 inmates. On the other hand, the average size of male Benedictine houses in Lincoln and Norwich was 19.1 inmates. Thus, the Benedictine houses were larger, but they had fewer houses overall compared to Austin canons. Therefore, they were more likely on an individual house basis to have sexual misconduct.

One explanation for the slightly higher individual rate of sexual misconduct recorded for canons compared to monks may be found in the former’s role as parish priests which could have allowed them greater opportunity to engage in sexual relationships. However, the difference is still quite negligible – less than one percent. Considering the enormous numerical disparity – in total there were 1012 individual canons recorded to just 389 monks – the difference may just be a statistical anomaly and not meaningful.

84. Rasmussen, 32-3.

Table 3.7: Comparison of Individual Sexual Misconduct Levels in Male Augustinian and Benedictine Houses in Lincoln and Norwich, 1430-1530

Bishop	Austin canons	Accusations	Benedictine monks	Accusations
Alnwick	331	19	200	8
Longland	270	10	80	0
Goldwell	181	1	52	0
Nicke	230	15	57	7
Overall	1012	45 (4.45%)	389	15 (3.86%)

3.10 EPISCOPAL VARIATION IN MISCONDUCT LEVELS

The individual misconduct rate also varies a great deal between bishops. (See table 3.2) The highest rate of individual sexual misconduct (6.22%) is found in Richard Nicke's Norwich visitations, followed by William Alnwick's visitations (4.81%). Likewise, the number of houses with sexual misconduct was also high in both sets of visitations, 37.14% and 31.6% respectively. In comparison, the percentages of houses with sexual misconduct visited by Longland and Goldwell were considerably lower - 12.5% and 3.85%. (See Table 3.1) Likewise, the number of individuals charged with sexual misconduct was also quite lower; just 2.7 % of the monastic population visited by Longland was accused, and a miniscule 0.33% of those visited by Goldwell. Indeed, out of an estimated monastic population of 300, Bishop Goldwell encountered only one case of sexual misconduct – a canon named Thomas Bevyrley at Bokenham Priory who was suspected of having a relationship in 1492 with a certain lay woman, Isabella Warner.⁸⁵ So, why the higher rates of misconduct found by Nicke and Alnwick? Nicke certainly conducted far more visitations than anyone else, nearly twice as many as Alnwick and almost five times as many as Goldwell. Each of these visitations was another opportunity for a sexual scandal to come to light. In fact, given that Goldwell conducted a mere twenty-six visitations, his

85. *Visitations of Norwich*, 25; Bodl. Tanner MS 100, fol.34b.

numbers may be low purely by chance. Likewise, Longland conducted the second fewest visitations, so his sample size also may be too low for full comparison. In some respects, it is Atwater's numbers which are the most difficult to explain since he visited nearly as many houses as Alnwick. Although it is impossible to determine with accuracy the monastic population during the visitations of William Atwater, the 8.33% of monastic houses he visited with accusations of sexual misconduct is significantly lower than Alnwick's 31.6%, and Alnwick conducted just eight more visitations than Atwater. Interestingly, although all the bishops conducted some of their visitations through officials, Atwater did this for most of his visitations. Indeed, he rarely visited religious houses in person and almost always preferred to send officials instead. However, whether this is a factor in his lower numbers of sexual misconduct is unclear since there is no indication that officials were less diligent in this regard than the bishops themselves. Another possibility is that the higher level of misconduct in Alnwick's records compared to Atwater's is attributable to the greater detail found in the former. As discussed briefly in chapter one, Alnwick's visitation notes are exceptional sources for monastic social history and not just for England. Moreover, Alnwick seems to have been particularly thorough in his investigations as bishops go (even if he was more lenient in his punishments as David Knowles has suggested).⁸⁶ Had Alnwick's *memoranda* of visitations not survived, all we would have as evidence of his work would be one set of injunctions in his register, and then one might have concluded that it is Alnwick rather than Atwater who seems to have overlooked sexual misconduct.⁸⁷ Thus, not only are historians lucky enough to have these early "rough copies" of future injunctions, but they are also lucky that these drafts belonged to a bishop who kept exceptionally detailed records. As Sarah Salih remarked, Alnwick seemed interested even in minute details such as the various ways that

86. Knowles, 2:212-3. See also §4.7.

87. Thompson, *Linc. Visit.*, xvii. See also C. R. Cheney, *Episcopal Visitation of Monasteries in the Thirteenth Century* (Manchester: University Press, 1931), 6.

nuns wore their veils.⁸⁸ Such attention to detail could well explain his higher misconduct levels. It seems a plausible explanation that the discrepancy in numbers between Atwater, Longland and Alnwick represents more a difference in the degree and diligence of the visitation, rather than a quantifiable difference in misconduct levels among monastics. There is of course, another distinct possibility. Perhaps, there really was less sexual misconduct during the visitations of Atwater and Longland. Perhaps sexual misconduct levels dropped in the last half century before the Dissolution. If this is true, then it would indeed be an ironic twist considering the charges made against the monasteries by early modern supporters of the Dissolution as being filled with “abominable sodomites” and monks who “were lecherous and unashamedly used other men’s women for their lustful purposes.”⁸⁹ An exploration of this possibility forms a basis of chapter five (see §5.2).

88. Salih, 136.

89. Kaartinen, 105-6.

CHAPTER 4

THE EPISCOPAL RESPONSE TO MONASTIC SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

For sum bene devowte, holy, and towarde,
And holden the ryght way to blysse;
And sum bene feble, lewde, and frowarde,
Now God amend that ys amys!¹

Why I can't be a nun (316-19),
Early fifteenth century.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

SOMETIME in the early autumn of 1433, news of a sexual scandal involving a nun reached the ears of the Bishop of Lincoln, William Gray, at his castle in Sleaford. Evidence that the bishop took the report seriously is demonstrated

1. The poem tells the story of a young woman who decides to become a nun against her father's wishes. However, after witnessing the extent of monastic corruption, she declares:

For nun wold I nevere be none,
For suche defawtes that I have see. (330-1)

A number of scholars have discussed this poem with reference to its anti-monastic sentiment, including Power, 545-49, and V. J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford Press, 1971), 235-6. More recently, C. Annette Grise has also discussed the poem's relationship to the *Chanson de Nonne* tradition and the anti-clericalism of the Lollards. Grise also points out the remarkable similarity of the poem to Erasmus' *Colloquies* (1526). See C. Annette Grise, "In the Blessid Vyneyerd of Our Holy Saueour': Female Religious Readers and Textual Reception in the *Myroure of Oure Ladye* and the *Orcherd of Syon*," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition : England, Ireland, and Wales : Exeter Symposium VI : Papers read at Charney Manor, July 1999*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 193-4. The poem exists in a single manuscript, BL Cotton Vespasian D.ix, fols. 177a-182b, 190a-190b, wherein as James M. Dean describes, it is "tucked in amongst treatises concerned with issues of reform - verses of the Lollards against clerical abuses." See James M. Dean, ed., *Middle English texts, Six Ecclesiastical Satires* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), p.227-46. Dean's recent edition is based partially on the earlier edition of the poem by F.J. Furnivall. See F. J. Furnivall, ed., *Transactions of the Philological Society of London*, 1858, *Early English Poems and Lives of Saints* (Berlin: Asher, 1862), 138-48.

by the tenor of his letter on October 17th to John Macworthe, his dean at the Cathedral Church of Blessed Mary:

By the report of common rumour and by loud whispering it has come to our hearing that one sister, Ellen Cotone, nun of the priory of Heynings, of the order of Citeaux, of our diocese, disregarding the good repute of shamefastness, having set at naught the purity of religion and utterly quitted its path, has abandoned chastity, has committed incest,² and of such incestuous embraces has conceived and brought forth a child to the grievous peril of her soul, the scandal of religion, and the ruinous example of others.³

Gray urged Macworthe to travel immediately to Heynings and conduct an investigation into the affair. The bishop did not mention specific penance, just that the nun should face some form of punishment as a deterrent to others if the investigation proved the rumours to be true. When he did not immediately receive a reply from his dean, Gray sent another follow-up letter in August 1434 and chastised Macworthe, stating that, although he had conducted an investigation at Heynings, “nevertheless you have taken no care to certify us of your proceeding in the same business, but have despitefully neglected to make such certificate, whereat we marvel.”⁴ Bishop Gray clearly considered the matter very serious; he arranged an investigation, insisted that the nun face penance, worried about the effect of the scandal on others and sent two letters enquiring about it. Why would the escapades of a single ‘naughty nun’ garner such interest from a bishop?

2. *Incestus* is not used in the familial (or biological) sense here, but refers instead to ‘spiritual incest’ which is frequently employed in medieval ecclesiastical sources to describe any type of any illicit relationship with a professed religious person. In Alnwick’s records, for instance, the charge of incest is appended to nearly every accusation of sexual misconduct. I discuss the terminology of sexual misconduct accusations further below.
3. “Fama publica referente et clamosa insinuacione, ad nostrum peruenit auditum quod quedam soror Elena Cotone, monialis prioratus de Henynges, ordinis Cisterciensis, nostre diocesis, famam pudoris negligens, honestate religionis abiecta et eius tramite penitus derelicto, castimoniam deseruit, incestum commisit, ex huiusmodique incestuosis amplexibus concepit et peperit in sue anime graue periculum, religionis scandalum et aliorum perniciosum exemplum.” Linc. Visit., 1:69; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 117d.
4. “vos tamen de facto vestro in eodem negocio nos certificare non curastis, sed sic certificare contemptibiliter omisistis, de quo miramur” Linc. Visit., 1:70; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 117d.

While fornication of any sort was condemned by the medieval Church, fornication with a nun was classified as one of the *maiore crimina* which incurred the highest ecclesiastical condemnation in English legal parlance. The Synodal Statutes of Salisbury (1219-28), for example, listed it under the greater sins (*de maioribus peccatis*), alongside homicide, parricide and crimes against nature.⁵ In 1281, the Council of Lambeth considered the crime so serious that absolution for the offence was reserved for the bishop himself. Likewise, the statutes of Archbishop John Pecham also established the fornication with nuns to be a crime worthy of a greater excommunication which could only be lifted by the bishop himself.⁶

However, while ecclesiastical legislative sources emphasize the culpability of sexual partners of nuns, they tell us very little about the degree of guilt attributed to the nuns themselves, and the punishment assigned to them. What was the attitude of Church authorities toward ‘naughty nuns’? Similarly, although the physical chastity of monks was de-emphasized in comparison to nuns in monastic writings of the later Middle Ages, it was still expected of them.⁷ At the very least, a ‘naughty nun’ or ‘promiscuous monk’ was guilty of fornication, just like any other sexually active medieval person outside marriage. If the sexual relationship was between two members of the same sex, it could be classified under the crime of sodomy.⁸ If their sexual partner was married, they might also be guilty

5. *Councils and Synods*, 2:73. The same wording is repeated in another series of statutes by an unknown bishop (1225-30), *Constitutiones cuiusdam episcopi*, which is only found in one manuscript, see *op. cit.* 2:181, 189, and also BL Cotton Vespasian E.iii, fol.150va.

6. *Councils and Synods*, 2:911, 1124.

7. Salih, 17; Coyne Kelly, 102; Eleanor McLaughlin, “Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Christ in Medieval Theology,” in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. by Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 234-35; Newman, 28-34; Cheatham, “They Hasten toward Perfection: Virginal and Chaste Monks in the High Middle Ages,” 23. Also, see generally on this subject (esp. the conclusion) Cheatham, “‘Let Anyone Accept this Who Can’.” However, as Bruce Venarde has posited, the different emphasis on chastity for monks and nuns is not surprising, since “in an atmosphere of suspicion of female sexuality, nuns were more likely to be accused and reprimanded for misbehaviour than monks.” Venarde, 168.

8. For more discussion on this subject, see above §3.5.

of adultery. Finally, a ‘naughty nun’ or ‘promiscuous monk’ was also often described as guilty of “spiritual incest” since any relations with a professed religious person could be considered incestuous.⁹ Thus, in Gray’s letter, Ellen Cotone is described as having succumbed to “incestuous embraces.”

In Chapter three, I demonstrated that monastic sexual misconduct occurred at relatively predictable low rates and followed distinctive patterns. Nevertheless, despite its overall rarity, bishops could certainly be expected to encounter it occasionally during their visitations. In this chapter, I will explore how bishops reacted to monastic sexual crimes compared to other types of misconduct. I will also discuss how the medieval concepts of *scandalum* and *inquisitio* framed the episcopal response to sexual misconduct, and the strategies bishops employed to resolve it, namely compurgation and the allocation of penance. The overarching conclusion I will present is that, in every step of the visitatorial process, sexual misconduct occupied a secondary position to other issues which bishops considered of greater importance - in particular, monastic finances and leadership.

4.2 THE HIERARCHY OF MONASTIC MISCONDUCT: SEXUAL CRIMES CONTEXTUALIZED

In 1442, Bishop Alnwick visited the female Cistercian priory of Catesby. According to the record, once the preliminaries of the visit were over, the accusations began to fly. A number of nuns told the bishop that, the prioress, Margaret Wavere, was letting the house go to ruin, several of the conventual buildings were falling down, and the house was in massive debt. In addition, she was accused of pawning the jewels and other valuables of the house for her own gain and for that of her mother, who was being maintained in

9. As Thompson points out, the frequent charge of “adultery and incest” for monks points to the fact that “the crime was committed in its first aspect as an ordinary offence: the second aspect was spiritual and was an offence against the monk’s sacred calling.” Thompson, *Linc. Visit.*, 2:11 n.6.

the house at the expense of the priory. Worse, there seemed to be a growing disagreement brewing between the prioress and one nun in particular, Isabel Benet, whom the prioress accused of having an illicit relationship with one William Smyth, a chaplain. According to the prioress, Isabel had even conceived a child from this man. Other nuns described the tyrannical nature of the prioress and her mother, who they say rules the convent in all but name. After a previous visitation conducted by Alnwick's predecessor had resulted in a number of injunctions against the prioress, she subsequently had threatened prison to any nun who spoke ill of her to any ecclesiastical official again. The nun accused of having the illicit relationship, Isabel Benet, was in open rebellion against her. Isabel, for her part, stated that the prioress was evil and when she was enraged, pulled the nuns' hair and called them whores. She admitted that she got pregnant but insisted it was with another man, not William Smyth. Moreover, she counter-accused that the prioress was, in fact, having a relationship of her own with another man, William Taylour.

The account gets even more confusing. The prioress denied wholesale any illicit activity with William Taylour and the other nuns suggested that Isabel was starting this rumour because she hated the prioress. Another nun gave more damning testimony against Isabel and stated "that the said dame Isabel on Monday last past did pass the night with the Austin Friars at Northampton and did dance and play the lute with them in the same place until midnight, and on the following night, she passed the night with the friar preachers at Northampton, luting and dancing in like manner."¹⁰ Yet despite Isabel's startling admissions, Alnwick seemed far more concerned about the *prima facie* case of embezzlement on the part of the prioress and the fact that the convent was in financial ruin, than on any of the various illicit relationships of Isabel Benet (or even

10. "Item dicta domina Isabella die Lune vltimo preterito pernoctauit apud fratres Augustinianos Northamptonie et ibidem cum ipsis saltauit et citherauit vsque mediam noctem, et nocte sequenti pernoctauit cum fratribus predicatoribus Northamptonie consimiliter citherisando et saltando, etc." Linc. Visit., 2:58; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.93 sched.

the prioress for that matter). In an odd twist of events, he removed the prioress from control of all temporal affairs of the convent, and appointed Isabel Benet, along with another nun, to perform an audit of the priory's finances and report back. Moreover, in his commission to Isabel to conduct the audit of the priory, he wrote that he had every confidence in her abilities.¹¹ It would seem that it was more important to the bishop that Catesby Priory be solvent, than continent.

It goes without saying that monastic sexual misconduct was not the only concern of visiting bishops. From the thirteenth century onward, it was the expectation that the general monastic discipline and financial well-being of non-exempt houses were under the purview of bishops.¹² And indeed, examples such as Alnwick's visitation of Catesby Priory suggest that incontinence may not even have been the most serious type of monastic misconduct from the point of view of visiting bishops. Actually, it is a recurring theme in episcopal visitation records that leadership and financial matters were taken extremely seriously by bishops and quite often trumped sexual misconduct in importance to them.

Certainly, bishops had a wide range of interests during visitations and an indication of this range may be found in Archbishop Robert Winchelsey's thirteenth-century 'articles of visitation' which are preserved in a single manuscript.¹³ Winchelsey's articles are part of a corpus of similar visitation-articles surviving from late medieval England which

11. Linc. Visit., 2:46-53; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.93 sched., 94-95d; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.59.

12. The male houses of certain orders such as the Cistercians and Cluniacs claimed exemption from episcopal visitation. In addition, several major English Benedictine houses also claimed exemption such as Bury St. Edmunds. *VCH, Suffolk*, 2:64, 71. The exemption of houses such as Bury St. Edmunds only applied to normal episcopal visitation - exceptions could be made. For instance, in 1232 Gregory IX ordered a general visitation of all monastic houses, including exempt ones. The Bury monks, however, were able to appeal successfully Gregory's original choice of visitors, and replace them with ones chosen by them. See Rose Graham, "A Papal Visitation of Bury St. Edmunds and Westminster in 1234," *The English Historical Review* 27, no. 108 (1912): 728-39, 728. On the subject of the development of regular episcopal visitation during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Cheney. See also Knowles, 1:78-84.

13. BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.61-65; Printed: Graham, *Reg. of Roberti Winchelsey*, 1289-1303.

are essentially templates or models for bishops to follow during monastic visitations.¹⁴ These visitation ‘templates’ provided not only specific questions to be asked by visiting prelates at religious houses, but also a framework under which visitations could take place. Moreover, the types of questions contained in such articles can also indicate what Church authorities were most concerned about during visitations. However, as with other extant visitation-articles, Winchelsey’s instructions are partially derivative and seem to have been based upon a variety of sources, notably the constitutions of the prominent thirteenth-century papal legates to England, Otho and Ottoboni (ca. 1237 and 1268 respectively), and the *Liber extra* of Gregory IX.¹⁵ Nevertheless, his articles in other respects are also reflective of Winchelsey’s particular interests. As Knowles describes him, Winchelsey was “a man of zeal and entirely fearless in asserting what he deemed to be in his rights.”¹⁶ Indeed, nearly a third of the articles pertain to his oversight of bishops under him rather than monastic visitations.¹⁷ According to Cheney, Winchelsey’s injunctions made after the composition of these articles seem to follow their format closely. Consequently, at the very least, Winchelsey’s articles are illustrative of his own visitations, but as other similar extant visitation-articles suggest, they are also a reflection of the concerns shared by all medieval English bishops toward monastic visitation.

Winchelsey’s articles concerning monastic visitation are divided by type of religious institution and include questions for cathedral chapters, secular canons, regular canons,

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14. Several similar visitation-articles have survived from late medieval England, and as George Coulton argues, all of them are remarkably similar to one another in terms of general content and questions. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2:232-7, 468-70. See, for example, the earliest extant English visitation-articles contained in the Burton Annals (ca. 1259) which were likely derived from the now lost articles of Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1237 or 8). Luard, 1:484. The significance of these articles and their relationship to the wider corpus of visitation-articles is discussed in A. L. Smith, *Church and State in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 24.
 15. Cheney, 74; Rose Graham, “The Metropolitan Visitation of the Diocese of Worcester by Archbishop Winchesley in 1301,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 2 (1919): 59-93, 63.
 16. Knowles, 1:108.
 17. Jeffrey H. Denton, *Robert Winchelsey and the Crown 1294-1313: A Study in the Defence of Ecclesiastical Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45.

monks and female religious.¹⁸ This is somewhat unusual, since most surviving examples of visitation-articles tend to be order specific.¹⁹ In terms of general content, the three sections pertaining to the visitations of cloistered religious (regular canons, female religious and monks) are quite similar to one another, and several articles are nearly identical.²⁰ The section for monks is the longest with fifty-four articles, while the regular canons and nuns have nineteen and eighteen articles each respectively. Each section of questions shares a similar concern for basic discipline in monastic life and the performance of divine services. However, compared to the sections for regular canons and nuns, the section for monks contains more detailed and specific questions about the quality of monastic life practised. For example, the articles suggest visiting bishops enquire whether the monks stay up late drinking, whether any monks are feigning illness to get out of divine service, and about the general physical appearance of monks when travelling outside the monastery. There are also detailed questions about the administration of the abbey and the leadership of the abbot. For instance, the articles suggest an enquiry about whether goods were sold without consent of chapter, whether monastic woods were felled, whether the abbot eats with the monks and whether the monastic responsibilities of hospitality are maintained.

The sections for canons and nuns also have questions (although not as many) about

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18. It is interesting to note that Winchelsey did not create separate articles of enquiry for the different orders of female religious. He did, however, create different articles for male regular canons and Benedictine monks. This seems to lend further support to Linda Rasmussen's conclusion that differences between orders of female religious meant very little to Church authorities. Rasmussen, 32-3.
 19. See, for example, the fifteenth-century articles contained in the customal of Syon Abbey. George James Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery: The Parish of Isleworth, and the Chapelry of Hounslow* (London: J. B. Nichols and son, 1840), 276-80. A fifteenth-century set of questions for Cluniac visitations is printed in G. F. Duckett, ed., *Visitations and Chapters-General of the Order of Cluni* (London: n.p., 1893), 129. Several other examples are given by Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2:236 n.1.
 20. The three sections are: Graham, *Reg. of Roberti Winchelsey*, 1298-1303; BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.63v-65.

leadership and administration of the monastery, and, in some instances, these are identical to those asked of monks. It is not immediately clear why there are such differences in the number of articles for each section. As Caroline Bynum has demonstrated, although there were differences in how monks and canons understood and conceptualized their vocations, there is little evidence that late medieval regular canons differed much in day-to-day practice from traditional orders of monks.²¹ Consequently, one might expect that there would be nearly identical questions for both types of visitations. Indeed, the fact that the section for regular canons does not contain any completely unique questions would seem to support Bynum's conclusion. However, the additional questions for monks are still hard to explain. One possibility is that the questions for monks were understood to be applicable to the regular canons too. However, the fact that the sections for canons and nuns precede the section on monks seems to make that idea less credible.

Nevertheless, despite the mystery surrounding the different lengths of each section of questions, and why some questions were repeated but not others, much may still be gleaned from them about the general episcopal visitatorial strategy. Certainly, the questions in each section seem to follow a certain pattern. First, each began with an enquiry into whether previous injunctions were being kept, followed by general questions about the performance of divine services. Following this, each contained several questions which pertained directly to the financial management and leadership of the abbey – and, in particular, the performance of the leader. Finally, each visitation also included questions about day-to-day monastic discipline and here one finds instructions for the bishop to enquire into the personal behaviour of individual monks, canons or nuns including issues of sexual incontinence. The order of these questions (liturgical, financial, general misconduct) may underline the relative importance of each from the point of view of the bishop. In

21. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 35.

this analysis, sexual misconduct as well as other types of general misconduct, clearly rank below the performance of divine services and financial management.

Moreover, even when general misconduct is addressed, questions about sexual incontinence occupy relatively little space compared to other matters. For the canons, only two questions (out of a total of nineteen) could be said to pertain to potential sexual misconduct, and one of these questions is really just about access to the cloister by women. In the section on monks, three questions pertain to sexual misconduct – four if you include a prohibition against sleeping naked – out of a total of fifty-four questions. As in the section for canons, however, all the questions but one are really just prohibitions against general contact with women and not specifically incontinence. The nuns have just one question relating to sexual misconduct, which happens to be the last of their articles, and it is quite specific: “It ought to be enquired whether there are any nuns who are defamed over incontinence or some other crime.”²² In contrast, the two specific questions relating to sexual misconduct of monks and canons combine incontinence with many other crimes. For example, the fifteenth article for regular canons reads:

Likewise, [one should enquire] about incest, perjury, quarrelsomeness, drunkenness, gluttony, eating or drinking outside the refectory or other lawful places, uproars, or those conducting themselves dissolutely or dishonestly, and frequenting suspect places.²³

The sixth article for monks similarly asks about those who are heretics, disobedient, quarrelsome, propertied, incontinent, incorrigible or vagabonds.²⁴

22. “Item de quibuscumque defamatis super incontinencia vel aliquo crimine.” Graham, *Reg. of Roberti Winchelsey*, 1300; BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.64.

23. “Item de incestis, perjuriis, contenciosis, ebriosis, gulosis seu extra refectarium aut alia loca licita edentibus vel bibentibus de tumultuosis vel se dissolute aut inhoneste gerentibus quoquomodo et frequentantibus loca suspecta.” Graham, *Reg. of Roberti Winchelsey*, 1296; BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.63.

24. “Item an sint aliqui scismatici, inobedientes, rixosi, proprietarii, incontinentes, incorrigibiles vel vagabundi, et qui sint et qualiter sit contra eos processum.” Graham, *Reg. of Roberti Winchelsey*, 1300; BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.64.

The relative paucity of questions relating to sexual misconduct is even clearer when contrasted with the numbers of questions pertaining to other topics. Just 10% of the visitation articles for canons – two out of nineteen questions – deal in any way with sexual incontinence, and only 6% of those for monks and nuns – three out of fifty-four and one out of eighteen questions, respectively. And indeed, this number could be even lower if one took into account that sexual misconduct really only forms part of some of the questions. On the other hand, questions about the financial management of the monastery receive much more space. For the monks, fourteen questions deal with financial matters or 26%. For the nuns this percentage is even higher at 33% of their articles, and for the canons it is 37% – well over a third of their articles.

Certainly, based on these numbers, it would seem that Archbishop Winchelsey intended for his bishops to spend more time investigating the financial management of religious houses than seeking out incontinent religious living within them. This conclusion is also borne out by the records examined for this study, such as Alnwick's visitation of Catesby Priory – far more ink tended to be used describing problems of financial management, than the illicit relationships of 'naughty nuns' and 'promiscuous monks.' Nevertheless, just because sexual misconduct was not the primary concern of visiting bishops, does not mean that it was unimportant – only that other things could be more important. It is also worth noting that the visitation of Catesby Priory is somewhat exceptional in the way that the bishop seemed to de-emphasize completely the sexual misconduct in comparison to other issues. The consequences of sexual misconduct rarely included a promotion as it did for Isabel Benet. Indeed, Benet's actions did not seem to have negatively affected her subsequent career at all. Approximately twenty years later, in 1461, a man named John Boston was recorded to have leased a cottage and some land from the priory. On the lease agreement, the prioress of Catesby was noted to be one Isabel Benet.²⁵ Not bad

25. PRO, E 326/1028; see also David M. Smith, ed., *The Heads of Religious Houses England and Wales*,

for a nun who once admitted to spending her nights dancing with Austin Friars.

4.3 *Scandalum* AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

As the visitation of Catesby Priory and Bishop Winchelsey's articles suggest, sexual misconduct was just one among many faults that a bishop would be looking for in a community during a visitation. Moreover, it was usually not the first thing he was looking for, nor the most problematic. However, in certain situations, it could represent the worst crisis possible, particularly in cases of scandal, and the unfortunate pregnancy of Ellen Cotone described at the outset of this chapter underscores this point well. Indeed, the fact that her situation elicited not one, but two letters from the bishop and a final reply from his dean, is a good example of the lengths to which bishops would go to contain and control sexual scandal in their dioceses. Both of Bishop Gray's letters show a very strong concern about the public rumour (*publica fama*) surrounding the incident, and in fact, it is the *fama* which provided the reason for the correspondence in the first place. In the first letter, Gray informs his dean that it was the "common rumour and loud whisperings" which had alerted him to the situation at Heynings. In his second letter, he states that news had reached him "a second time publicly and notoriously concerning the ill-fame of the said sister Ellen."²⁶

That 'promiscuous monks' or 'naughty nuns' could be considered scandalous to medieval people comes as no surprise. However, for medieval ecclesiastical authorities, scandal (*scandalum*) was itself a sin. Indeed, from the twelfth century onwards, discussion of this complex theology could be found in canon law, papal decretals, diocesan statutes

III. 1377-1540 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 636.

26. "verum quia ad nos iam iterate de infamia dicte sororis Elene publice et notorie peruenit." Linc. Visit., 1:70; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 117d.

and even writings concerning preaching and pastoral care.²⁷ As Lindsay Bryan has pointed out, the language of late medieval episcopal visitation records often reflects this broader theological development of *scandalum*.²⁸ Certainly, the bishops included in this study frequently described sexual misconduct in terms of scandal. The importance of the concept for practical application is that, regardless of whether or not a particular scandal was grounded in truth, the scandal itself could still be considered a sin.²⁹ Thus, a nun or a monk was said to be *defamatus cum [...]*, defamed with someone, when they were suspected of having a sexual relationship. However, sexual misconduct was not the only way to create scandal. Anything that was visible to the outward world was a potential source of it. In this respect, the disrepair or neglect of conventual buildings, the erroneous financial dealings of the monastery's leaders, or too much permeability in the cloister were all important sources of scandal too.³⁰

However, while just about anything theoretically could create scandal, by the twelfth century, sexual crimes were more frequently associated with it.³¹ Naturally, this association between *scandalum* and sexual crimes makes it an important subject for this study. However, *scandalum* was also a legal concept and its existence allowed the bishop, if he wished, to call either a formal inquisition (*inquisitio*) or order the accused to undergo canonical purgation or compurgation. These three legal and theological concepts, *scandalum*, *inquisitio* and compurgation, are at the heart of the overall episcopal response

27. See generally on the subject: Bryan, "Vae Mundo a Scandalis"; Bryan, "Periculum animarum"; Bryan, "Scandle is Heaued Sunne"; Bryan, "From Stumbling Block to Deadly Sin: The Theology of Scandal"; Helmholz, "Scandalum in the Medieval Canon Law and in the English Ecclesiastical Courts."

28. Bryan, "Vae Mundo a Scandalis," ii-iii.

29. Although, variation on this subject abounds amongst medieval theologians, broadly speaking scandal was an inducement for others to sin, thus the inducement exists if the *publica fama* exists. Consequently, the sin need not be grounded in fact. See for example: Peter the Chanter, *Summa de Sacramentis et Animae Consiliis*, 3 vols., ed. by Jean A. Dugauquier (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1954), 372.

30. For example, the poor money management of the cellarer of Ramsey Abbey was said to be "in scandalum monasterii" in 1518. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 88; LAO, MS V/j/7, fol.140.

31. Bryan, "From Stumbling Block to Deadly Sin: The Theology of Scandal," 11.

to sexual misconduct. If suspicions of sexual crime produced *scandalum*, than visitatorial *inquisitio* and compurgation provided the means to determine veracity and provide resolution. Thus, in order to contextualize the attitude of bishops toward sexual crimes – an attitude that sometimes appears to modern eyes, as contradictory or indifferent to sexual activity (such as in the case of the Cistercian nun Isabel Benet) – then one must first understand the theological framework under which they worked. Although these three concepts are clearly intertwined, they were also understood by medieval bishops to be distinct from one another. In this section I will explore first how *scandalum* was understood and acted upon by bishops (as well as monks and nuns), and in the following sections, I will explore the related concepts of visitatorial inquisition and compurgation.

As in the case of the Heynings' pregnancy, a mid fifteenth-century visitation of Peterborough Abbey by Bishop William Alnwick, also demonstrates how seriously bishops took the danger of sexual scandal. During the visitation in the winter of 1447, the abbot, Richard Ashtone, was accused of committing incest and adultery with three different women, by which the monastery had been "grievously defamed among all."³² The abbot denied the charges, despite having been accused by several of the monks. Bishop Alnwick warned the abbot that, if he was canonically convicted, he would 'proceed against him vigorously according to the sanctions of canon law.'³³ On a separate day, two of the women were called to account at the bishop's residence and both denied the accusations.³⁴ After speaking with one of the women, Margaret Clerke, the bishop summoned her husband to the enquiry. The record reports:

32. "monasterium fore grauiter apud omnes diffamatum." I have adjusted slightly Thompson's translation here for readability. Linc. Visit., 2:294; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.125d.

33. "quod contra eum secundum canonicas sanctiones et cum rigore procedet." Linc. Visit., 2:301; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.127.

34. The *inquisitio* of the women is recorded on a separate folio in Alnwick's visitation manuscript. LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.96 sched.

The same reverend father told the said William Clerke that his wife Margaret had denied the article with which she was charged. Therefore, the same reverend father, considering that the abbot has been and continues to be a distinguished prelate of the Church, as has been presented, and as a result, his honour should be preserved from hurt, said that he would deal more favourably with the same Margaret, if the same William and Margaret should be willing or should arrange effectually to remove themselves from the place of their dwelling adjoining to the monastery for the avoidance of scandal.³⁵

Although several witnesses had accused the abbot of having illicit relationships, Alnwick's main priority seems to have been to contain the scandal. Although the threat of canonical conviction is made, Alnwick does not press the women beyond their simple denial. Moreover, he suggests that he would 'act favourably' toward Margaret if she agreed to his wishes. Alnwick clearly notes that Margaret had denied the charges, and as a result he is able to allow the overall good reputation of the abbot to overrule the original allegations. In this example, as in the preceding one, concern about the spread of scandal rather than the underlying sexual sins themselves, seems to have been guiding the actions of the bishop.³⁶

Bishops were not alone in their concern about scandal. Religious men and women themselves were also frequently concerned about the possibility of scandal in their cloisters. For instance, in the previous example of the allegedly adulterous abbot at Peterborough

35. "Tandem euocato dicto Willelmo Clerke predicto ad presenciam dicti reuerendi patris, idem reuerendus pater retulit dicto Willelmo Clerke quod dicta Margareta vxor sua articulum predictum sibi obiectum negauit. Propterea idem reuerendus pater, pensato quod dictus abbas fuit et est prelatus egregius ecclesie, vt asseruit, et propterea eius honor debeat in quantum possit illesus obseruari, dixit se velle ipsam Margaretam fauorabilius pertractare, in casu quo ipsi Willelmus et Margareta a loco habitacionis sue, qui locus est contiguus monasterio, et ad scandalum euitandum se amouere vellent seu disponerent cum effectum." (Note that I have slightly modified Thompson's translation here to improve readability.) Linc. Visit., 2:302; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.96 sched.

36. The concerns shown by late medieval bishops to monastic scandal are also similar to instances from ecclesiastical court cases with lay individuals examined by Richard Helmholz. According to Helmholz, sexual cases such as fornication, adultery or sodomy brought to court as a result of *publica fama* or *scandalum* were frequently dismissed without punishment in order to prevent the further spread of scandal, i.e. the punishment itself would cause further scandal. Helmholz, "*Scandalum* in the Medieval Canon Law and in the English Ecclesiastical Courts," 264-5.

Abbey, one of the monks, William Walmesforde, suggested during his initial audience with the bishop that “if the two women with whom the abbot is defamed were sent far away from the monastery, it would turn out to the great fame of the monastery and the abbot.”³⁷ Likewise, in 1514 an Augustinian canon named Edward of the priory of Bromehill complained to Bishop Richard Nicke that, although his prior had lived chastely for three or four years,

they have a house called Dayry, in which a woman stays who came from Mildenhale, and from which a scandal is created. However, he does not believe that the prior has actually sinned with her.³⁸

Similarly, a canon of the Cathedral of Norwich, Robert Worstead, asked that the bishop order a certain woman, the wife of one of the servants, Richard Scissor, to be removed from the priory, not because she had done anything wrong, but for the avoidance of the appearance of scandal (*propter scandalum et malum exemplum*).³⁹ In all of these cases, like the bishops in the preceding examples, the monks and canons were clearly concerned about the scandals themselves. Indeed, in both the examples from Bromehill and Norwich Cathedral, the accusers even doubted that the sexual activity had taken place at all. However, even if they did believe that sexual misconduct had occurred, as was the case with the abbot of Peterborough Abbey, containment of scandal often trumped other concerns.

However, if all cases of monastic sexual activity were considered scandalous, why did some cases receive more attention by the bishop (as well as by monks and nuns) than others? For instance, while references were frequently made to scandal in Alnwick’s

37. Linc. Visit., 296; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.126.

38. “habent tamen domum dayry vocatum in qua moratur mulier quae venit a Mildenhale, et ex hoc generatur scandalum, non tamen credit quod prior peccavit actualiter cum ea.” *Visitations of Norwich*, 86; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol. 17b.

39. *Visitations of Norwich*, 201; Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fol.9b.

visitation of Catesby Priory in 1442, in the end financial issues were taken more seriously. The nun, Agnes Allesley, for instance, described the relationship of the prioress with the chaplain, William Taylour, as a scandal (*scandalo priorisse et domini Willelmi Taylour*). Likewise, Isabel Benet was said to be defamed with William Symth (*notatur cum domino Willelmo*).⁴⁰ However, the sexual accusations against both Isabel Benet and the prioress were resolved rather quickly. Benet confessed one relationship and successfully managed to use compurgation to clear herself on the other. The prioress, however, failed to find the requisite number of compurgators and Alnwick declared her canonically convicted. According to the record, the next day was appointed for the prioress to receive penance for the conviction.⁴¹ However, the details were obviously not considered important enough to record since nothing more was written on the subject. Follow-up concerning the issue of financial mismanagement, on the other hand, was recorded in great detail and included a separate letter of commission for a financial audit.⁴² In the end, when Alnwick removed the prioress from temporal power, it was not because she was convicted of fornicating with a chaplain, but rather, because she had proved incompetent at running the priory.

Similarly, Alnwick's visitation of Dorchester Abbey in 1441⁴³ uncovered numerous sexual scandals – including accusations that the abbot, John Clyftone, was simultaneously carrying on relationships with five different married women. In addition, four other canons were also accused of sexual misconduct – including one accusation of rape. Not surprisingly, several testimonies made references to the *scandalum* arising from these sexual crimes during the visitation. The accused rapist, for instance, a canon named John Scherousbery, was said to be “of very evil report” (*pessime fame*).⁴⁴ The other

40. Linc. Visit., 2:47-8; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.94-94d.

41. Linc. Visit., 2:49-50; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.95.

42. Linc. Visit., 52-3; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.59.

43. I have already described this visitation briefly in §2.1.1 and §3.6.

44. Linc. Visit., 2:73; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.112.

sexual relationships were also described with respect to *infamia*; most accused canons were said to be defamed with someone (*defamatus cum*) or something similar. Likewise, several canons were said to be spending their time hunting and hawking after breakfast, as well as “drinking and eating in public taverns with suspect persons, even with low women, to the great scandal of the house.”⁴⁵ However, as at Catesby, most of these sexual accusations were resolved quickly. Each of the accused canons, save one, successfully cleared themselves of the charges using compurgation. The one who was unsuccessful, Nicholas Plymouth, a canon accused of committing adultery with the tanner’s wife, was ordered to remain silent for one week as penance. However, before the visitation was finished he fled the monastery in apostasy along with another canon.⁴⁶ The abbot’s responses to his sexual charges, on the other hand, are not recorded at all.

Other problems, however, received much more notice. Indeed, despite all of the accusations of sexual misconduct, Alwnick’s most pressing concern, at least with respect to the abbot, seems to have been on the state of the abbey’s finances which numerous canons testified as being in a ruinous state. The prior, John Hakeburne, for instance, said that the abbot had never reported to chapter as to the state of the house. Another testified that the tenements of the monastery were in disrepair.⁴⁷ In his *comperta*, Alwnick surmised that Clyftone supported his lavish lifestyle and various relationships “by pawning,

45. “Canonici non seruant claustrum post prandium aliquo die, sed quidam intendunt aucupacionibus, quidam venacionibus, quidam publicis tabernis, ibidem bibendo et comedendo cum suspectis personis, eciam mulieribus miseris, in magnum domus scandalum.” Linc. Visit., 2:71; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.112.

46. The apostasy is reported at the end of the visitation, where Alwnick’s publication of his *comperta* to the monastery is recorded: “ac fratribus Thoma Henrethe et Waltero Plymmouthe, qui duo a domo citra inchoacionem visitacionis huiusmodi in apostasia recesserant, absentibus.” As Thompson has noted, the scribe must have written ‘Walter Plymmouthe’ for Nicholas. Walter Dorcester, who was the only canon with that first name, was noted in the sentence earlier to have been present for Alwnick’s presentation of *comperta*. Moreover, Nicholas was the only canon with the last name Plymouth and was not recorded among those present at the *comperta* reading. Linc. Visit., 2:70-1; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.111d-112.

47. Linc. Visit., 2:68-9; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.111.

may more truly, as it is feared, by selling the jewels of the house he dilapidates and wastes all the goods of the house.”⁴⁸ Moreover, while the abbot testified that the debt of the house was approximately £60, Alnwick concluded that it was actually more than £200. At the end of the visitation when the abbot failed to produce any records concerning the current state of the monastery, Alnwick had clearly had enough. He suspended the abbot on the spot.

At length the same reverend father spake these or like words: ‘Because by your confessions uttered before us at another time and now, and by the ruinous state, which is visibly evident, of the houses and buildings of the monastery both inside and out, and also as you are in default as regards the presentation of the state of the house, we hold you suspect of dilapidation of the goods of the monastery: therefore we do suspend you from the administration of such goods.’⁴⁹

The only ‘confessions’ recorded of the abbot were about the pawning of jewels, not his various relationships with married women. Here, like at Catesby, when Alnwick took the serious step of actually removing a leader from power, it was clearly not because he was sexually active but because he was financially incompetent.

One possibility as to why some sexual scandals were treated more seriously by bishops than others may be the extent to which a scandal had spread outside the monastery. A scandal which extended to the larger community in which a monastery resided endangered more than just the religious life of the monks and nuns – the reputation and respect of the Church was potentially at stake. However, if a bishop believed a sexual scandal was

48. “quas omnes sustentat communibus bonis domus, sicque et impignorando, quin verius vt timetur vendendo iocaha domus dilapidat et consumit omnia bona domus.” Linc. Visit., 2:71; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.112.

49. “Tandem idem reuerendus pater dixit hec vel similia: Quia per confessata vestra coram nobis alias et nunc emissa ruinamque domorum et edificiorum monasterij tam interius quam exterius que ad oculus patet, et eciam in exhibicione status domus deficientem, vos super dilapidacione bonorum monasterij habemus suspectum: idcirco vos ab administracione huiusmodi bonorum suspendimus.” Linc. Visit., 2:72; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.112.

confined to the cloister, then he could focus on other matters normally considered more important. For instance, in the sexual scandals of Heynings Priory and Peterborough Abbey, both instances in which the bishops seemed to take a keener interest in the sexual crimes, several references were made which could be construed as evidence of a wider public knowledge of the scandals. With Heynings Priory, for example, Bishop Gray noted that news of the scandal had come to him “by the report of common rumour and by loud whispering” at his castle at Sleaford. The implication by extension, is that the scandal of the pregnant nun had moved well beyond the confines of the cloister. Similarly, when Gray ordered an inquisition to be held into the activities of the prioress at Markyate Priory in 1431, a clear reference was made to a wider public knowledge of the scandal. Gray explains in his commission of enquiry that he had heard that

certain things forbidden, hateful, guilty, and contrary to and at variance with holy religion and regular discipline are daily done and brought to pass in damnable wise by the prioresses, nuns and others, serving-men and agents of the same places; by reason whereof the good report of the same places is set in jeopardy, the brightness and comeliness of religion in the same persons are grievously spotted, inasmuch as the whole neighbourhood is in commotion.⁵⁰

Similarly, Alnwick’s relatively greater concern about the abbot’s sexual crimes at Peterborough Abbey in 1447 may have also been because the scandal had become known in the wider community. One monk, William Burghe, told Alnwick that as a result of the

50. “nonnulla vetita, detestabilia, criminoso et sancte religioni regularibusque disciplinis contraria et inimica per ipsorum locorum priorissas, moniales et alios seruitores et ministros indies dampnabiliter committuntur et perpetrantur ; per que fama eorundem locorum periclitatur, decor et honestas religionis in personis ipsis grauiter maculantur, cum ex hoc tota vicinia commouetur.” Linc. Visit., 1:81; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 89; The specific nature of the scandal which prompted the commission is not noted. However, a subsequent inquisition held two years later found evidence that the prioress, Denise Lewelche, was involved in an affair with Richard, the priory’s steward. The charge against her read: “Item quod tu cum dicto Ricardo senescallo in huiusmodi criminibus incestus, adulterij et sacrilegij per quinque annos et vltra impudice vsque ad tempus mortis dicti Ricardi continuasti in grauem offensam Dei, cui tuam integritatem deuouisti, religionis obprobrium ac tam commonialium tuarum quam aliorum quamplurimorum exemplum perniciosum” Linc. Visit., 1:84; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 149.

abbot's illicit affairs, the monastery was grievously defamed "among all" (*apud omnes*). Another, John Pyghtesley, reported that the abbot's adulterous relationship with the wife of William Est (which included expensive gifts from the goods of the monastery) was a source of constant "public rumour."⁵¹ And another monk, William Markham, went so far as to say that "by reason of the defamation which the abbot has incurred, he has not dared to defend the rights of the monastery nor speak out against those that infringe upon them."⁵²

However, in most examples of sexual scandals recorded in visitation records, it is difficult to infer how much knowledge of it had spread outside a monastery. In fact, it is quite common for sexual crimes to be described as being "to the great scandal of the house" (*in magnum domus scandalum*) – even when the record otherwise contains no indications of any wider public awareness of the crime. Consequently, another possibility as to why some sexual crimes, while still described in scandalous terms, were treated relatively lightly by bishops, is that the very terminology of scandal was largely formulaic. Thus, perhaps in practice the idea of *scandalum* was so general or so differently understood by individuals, that it was essentially void of any greater theological meaning. For example, monks and nuns frequently constructed their testimony to bishops with appeals to scandal, but without any of the theological overtones such as an inducement to sin. Thus, the dismissal of a group of stone masons from a monastic building project at Spalding Priory in 1439 by an incompetent monk was said to be scandalous.⁵³ Thus, any and every monastic complaint which involves public notice becomes theoretically scandalous, and

51. "Item dicit quod abbas dedit vnam murrain ornatam argento aureato de bonis communibus domus vxori Willelmi Est absque consensu conuentus, cum qua notatur super adulterio, vt fama publica laborat." Linc. Visit., 2:293; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.125.

52. "Item propter infamiam quam abbas incurrit non est ausus defendere iura monasterii nec contradicere ea infringentibus." (Note that I have slightly modified Thompson's translation here to improve readability.) Linc. Visit., 2:293; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.125.

53. Linc. Visit., 2:336; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol. 62d.

ends with the phrase “*in magnum eorum et monasterii scandalum*.” Indeed, as Richard Helmholz has cautioned, there is a danger in pushing the concept of scandal too far, and certainly in many cases its usage in ecclesiastical legal proceedings was largely formulaic. As Helmholz demonstrates, over time the term *scandalum* in Church court proceedings came to be synonymous with slander, and used as a matter of routine – although exactly when this process occurred is difficult to determine.⁵⁴ Certainly, the term was also a subjective one and although it carried some theological distinction, it could be interpreted and understood very differently in practice. As Lindsay Bryan remarks, “some bishops considered few things scandalous, while others saw scandal everywhere.”⁵⁵

Nevertheless, even if the terminology of *scandalum* could be formulaic, it clearly retained its importance in certain situations and this was particularly true with respect to inquisitorial procedures. In this sense, the importance of *scandalum* was not its status as a sin itself, but rather its status as an investigatorial trigger. Theological discourse about *scandalum* frequently emphasized that the primary responsibility of a bishop was to establish the underlying veracity of a scandal. For example, the twelfth-century theologian, Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) stated that the pursuit of truth should not be overshadowed by scandal.⁵⁶ Lydsay Bryan argues that Peter’s distinction was not only an important addition to earlier work done on the subject by Gregory the Great and others, but also became widely adopted by later theologians, such as Thomas of Chobham (ca.1160-1236) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), whose work would form the basis of the theology of sin for the Catholic Church up to today.⁵⁷

This distinction was certainly evident in Bishop Gray’s instructions to his dean, Macworthe, about the pregnant nun, Ellen Cotone. In his letter, Gray made clear that

54. Helmholz, “*Scandalum* in the Medieval Canon Law and in the English Ecclesiastical Courts,” 273.

55. Bryan, “*Vae Mundo a Scandalis*,” 139.

56. Chanter, 375 and 376; Bryan, “From Stumbling Block to Deadly Sin: The Theology of Scandal,” 13.

57. Bryan, “From Stumbling Block to Deadly Sin: The Theology of Scandal,” 14-5.

any punishment for the scandal was conditional on confirmation of the underlying sins. Although Gray was also concerned about the scandal creating the occasion for others to sin and that the nun's punishment should be used as a deterrent against this, he ordered that further action should be taken only after Macworthe's investigation reveals the truth. In the letter, Gray orders a full enquiry into the matter, and counsels the dean to call trustworthy witnesses as part of the process. He continues,

...if you shall find that the premises hold truth, the prioress of the said priory should correct and duly punish the said Ellen according to the regular observances of her order, so that her penalty rather than her impunity, may remain as an example for others.⁵⁸

In this case, although *scandalum* prompted an inquisition, it was not a cause for punishment in and of itself. Thus, if Macworthe's investigation had shown Ellen Cotone to be innocent, it follows that Gray would not want there to be any further action. If she was found guilty, then her penance would send a clear message to prevent the scandal from inducing others to sin. Similarly, Gray explained in a letter dated a year after the events at Heynings Priory, that an inquisition was needed at Enysham Abbey concerning accusations of incest, rape, fornication and adultery so that "we might see if such rumour be fulfilled in deed."⁵⁹ Again, the emphasis on *scandalum* was used as an investigatorial trigger, not as a sin in and of itself. Here, as in Heynings, *scandalum* was not more important than the truth.

Nevertheless, one should not conclude from these examples that scandal was completely overshadowed by a quest for the truth. In each of the different cases preceding, *scandalum* was clearly understood by both bishops and monastics to be something dangerous by

58. "si premissa veritate continere inueneritis, priorisse dicti prioratus vt dictam Elenam secundum regulares ordinis sui obseruancias, ne ipsius impunitas sed pena ceteris maneat in exemplum, corrigat et debite puniat" Linc. Visit., 1:69-70; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 117d.

59. "vt videremus igitur si clamor huiusmodi opere compleatur." Linc. Visit., 1:62; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 168.

itself. Moreover, their understanding of *scandalum* seems to have been at least partially rooted in a larger theological conception of it. Thus, *scandalum* could be understood simultaneously in different ways. It could be a sin all on its own as well as an inducement for others to sin. It could also be secondary to the establishment of truth. However, an emphasis on truth did not make scandals less worrisome. Indeed, from the bishop's point of view, often the best way to oppose a scandal (whether or not a crime had really been committed or not) would be to launch a (seemingly) thorough investigation, or rather, inquisition (*inquisitio*), into the matter.

4.4 VISITATORIAL INQUISITION AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

As Archbishop Winchelsey's articles attest, medieval English bishops were expected to make detailed and specific enquiries during their regular visitations. Indeed, Winchelsey even recognized that some prelates might feel uncomfortable with such personal questions. Nevertheless, he urged them to put aside such feelings:

Brothers, you should not fear to uncover the truth concerning the things which ought to be inquired by you on account of restraints made or opinions received, or on account of oaths or promises extorted, or penalties threatened, because these things in no way confine, obligate or bind you.⁶⁰

Winchelsey uses the verb "to inquire" (*inquirendum*) here, and indeed, an episcopal visitation was a type of inquisition (*inquisitio*) with the bishop acting as chief inquisitor. In visitation records, monks and nuns under questioning are frequently described as being *inquisitus* or *inquisita*. Moreover, the entire process of the *detecta* and *comperta* are

60. "Fratres, non timeatis veritatem detegere super inquirendum a vobis propter inhibiciones factas vel sentencias latas vel propter juramenta aut promissiones extortas vel penas adjectas, quia premissa in nullo artant obligant vel astringunt." Graham, *Reg. of Roberti Winchelsey*, 1290; BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.61.

also commonly referred to as a preparatory inquisition (*inquisicione preparatoria*) by the bishops themselves.⁶¹

The medieval inquisition was, of course, never a unified bureaucratic institution, but rather a formula for trying cases in which the procedures against the defendant had been initiated by the court (*ex officio*) without a complaining witness.⁶² However, although inquisition is more commonly associated with the persecution of heresy (*inquisitio hereticae*), this was not its original focus. Indeed, as a number of scholars have demonstrated, the *inquisitio* actually arose as a means of maintaining clerical discipline rather than prosecuting heretics.⁶³ More recently, Lotte Kéry has argued that the use of inquisitorial procedures by bishops to investigate and prosecute clerical crimes had already been

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61. See, for example, Bishop Alnwick's visitation of Markyate Priory in 1442. At the end of the *detecta* with no major problems reported, the record states that the bishop concluded his *inquisicione praeparatoria*, delivered a warning to the nuns not to rebuke each other for what was said, and dissolved the visitation. The subsequent written injunction follows in which the bishop enjoins the prioress to change the chaplain at least once a year. Linc. Visit., 2:228-31; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.6-7. Among the numerous other examples of Alnwick using the phrase *inquisitiones praeparatorias*, see his visitations of Ankerwyke Priory (1441), Bardney Abbey (1437), Canons Ashby Priory (1442), Catesby Priory (1442), Dorchester Abbey (1441 and 1445), Dunstable Abbey (1442), Elstow Abbey (1442), Eynesham (1442), Godstow Abbey (1445) and Leicester Abbey (1440). Linc. Visit., 2:5, 13, 43, 46, 71, 79, 83, 89, 90, 115, 213; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols. 25d, 28d, 32d, 55, 58d, 94, 105d, 112, 118, 119d, 122.
62. Edward Peters, "The Prosecution of Heresy and Theories of Criminal Justice in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Vorträge zur Justizforschung: Geschichte und Theorie*, ed. by Heinz Mohnhaupt and Dieter Simon (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1993); Richard Kieckhefer, *The Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979); Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Inquisition and the Prosecution of Heresy: Misconceptions and Abuses," *Church History* 58 (1989): 439-51.
63. Richard M. Fraher, "The Theoretical Justification for the New Criminal Law in the High Middle Ages: *Rei Publicae Interest, Ne Crimina Remaneant Impunita*," *Illinois Law Review*, no. 3 (1984): 577-95; Winfried Trusen, "Der Inquisitionsprozess: Seine historischen Grundlagen und frühen Formen," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung* 74 (1988): 168-220. See also Richard M. Fraher, "Conviction According to Conscience: The Medieval Jurists' Debate Concerning Judicial Discretion and the Law of Proof," *Law and History Review* 7, no. 1 (1989): 23-88; James A. Brundage, "Proof in Canonical Criminal Law," *Continuity and Change* 11, no. 3 (1996): 329-39, 331-2. Edward Peters has cautioned, however, that the later links between secular criminal justice and inquisitorial procedure need more work to be firmly established. Edward Peters, "Destruction of the Flesh - Salvation of the Spirit: The Paradoxes of Torture in Medieval Christian Society," in *The Devil, Heresy, and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell*, ed. by Alberto Ferreiro and Jeffrey Burton Russell (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 144, n.28.

firmly established as standard procedure by the end of the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216).⁶⁴ The implication of these studies is that episcopal visitations of clergy influenced the later development of the more familiar judicial inquisition, not the other way around. In other words, the episcopal visitation was the original inquisition. However, while there is a wide range of scholarship concerning the use of *inquisitio* in criminal proceedings and the persecution of heresy, its association with episcopal visitation has attracted much less interest.⁶⁵

Consequently, the exact process of *inquisitio* employed during episcopal visitations of monasteries is less well understood. However, the connection between inquisitorial procedures and visitations has two important implications for the study of monastic sexual misconduct. First, if bishop, as well as monks and nuns, recognized visitations as inquisitions, then it follows that sexual accusations must be interpreted (at least partially) within this legal framework. Second, since inquisitorial procedures within visitations have differing levels of formality and seriousness depending on legal conditions such as

64. Lotte Kéry, "Inquisitio - Denunciatio - Exceptio: Möglichkeiten der Verfahrenseinleitung im Dekretalenrecht," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung* 87 (2001): 226-68.

65. While the connection is well known, few historians have specifically discussed inquisitorial procedure during monastic visitation. The two main studies on the use and development of *inquisitio* during monastic visitation are Cheney, 78-83, and Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2:237-8, 480-5. As Marie A. Kelleher remarks, while there has recently been a resurgence of interest on the subject of *inquisitio*, particularly since the decision by the Vatican to open its files on the inquisition in 1998, almost all of this scholarship has focused on the relationship between inquisition, heresy and Judaism. See Marie A. Kelleher, "Law and the Maiden: Inquisitio, Fama, and the Testimony of Children in Medieval Catalonia," *Viator* 37 (2006): 351-67, 359. Recent examples of this focus include Mark Gregory Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Christine Caldwell Ames, "Does Inquisition Belong to Religious History?" *American Historical Review* 110 (2005): 11-45. Another good example is James Given's earlier and well-received study on *inquisitio* and heresy. See James Buchanan Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society: Power, Discipline, and Resistance in Languedoc* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997). For an overview of the development of *inquisitio* in general in addition to what has been already cited above, see Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

pre-existing *publica fama*, the relative degree to which sexual accusations are the subject of the full power of inquisition compared to other types of misconduct may be revealing.

The term *inquisitio* normally implies a very formal affair, a complex legal proceeding which required pre-existing infamy (called *fama*, *publica fama*, *mala fama*, *infamia* or *scandalum*) in order to be initiated.⁶⁶ Certainly, most medieval writers on canon law emphasized the importance of this requirement. Hostiensis (ca. 1200 - 1271), for instance, one of the most influential thirteenth-century canonists, stated that an inquisition could only be made against a defamed person⁶⁷ and should not be undertaken unless the scandal is great.⁶⁸ William Durandus (ca. 1230 - 1296) went a step further in his *Speculum iudiciale* (which became the most popular textbook on inquisitorial procedure until the end of the Middle Ages)⁶⁹ and suggested that, if the accused was of good character, then only multiple trustworthy witnesses of the *mala fama* could trigger a formal inquisition.⁷⁰

However, medieval authorities frequently also utilized the term *inquisitio* to include less formal proceedings, often without a requirement for pre-existing *fama*. This was particularly true with respect to inquisition during episcopal visitation during which monks or nuns under questioning would not normally have to swear oaths. Innocent IV

66. Richard Helmholz, "Crime, Compurgation and the Courts of the Medieval Church," *Law and History Review* 1, no. 1 (1983): 1-26, 13; Cheney, 77-8; Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2:470-1.

67. Hostiensis, *Henrici de Segusio cardinalis Hostiensis In primum [...etc] Decretalium librum commentaria*, 6 vols. (Venetiis: n.p., 1581), Comment. V., fol.5v.

68. "Si inquisitio fiat contra ipsum: sive sit regularis, sive secularis, nunquam proceditur, nisi quando fama tanta est, quod non potest amplius sine scandalo fama sive sine periculo dilapidationis." Hostiensis, *Henrici cardinalis Hostiensis summa aurea interiectae recens fuere eruditae ex summa F. Martini Abbatis* (Venice: n.p., 1570), de inq. §4, fol.383v; Cheney, 77-8. However, as Gianna Burret points out, Hostiensis' exact definition of *fama* was a little ambiguous. Gianna Burret, *Der Inquisitionsprozess im Laienspiegel des Ulrich Tengler: Rezeption des gelehrten Rechts in der städtischen Rechtspraxis* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010), 112.

69. Fraher, "Theoretical Justification for the New Criminal Law," 584.

70. "Arbitratur autem superior ex hoc: nam tanta potest esse nequitia, seu iniquitas, et infamia subiecti et tot simul et semel denunciant, quod ad unicum auditum fiet, sue concedetur inquisitio. Si vero sit bonae famae, tunc non sufficit semel audire, imo requiritur, quod bis, vel ter, vel pluries a fide dignis audiatur." William Durandus, *Speculum Iuris* (Frankfurt: n.p., 1612), lib. III, Part. 1, *De Inquisitione* §1: *Impugnatur*, n. 3, p.26.

(1243 - 1254), for instance, wrote that it was the duty of archbishops to hold inquisitions during their visitations, but “without the forcing or exacting of an oath.”⁷¹ In the *Speculum iudiciale*, we find a description of episcopal visitation using the inquisitorial terminology. According to Durandus, the initial business of a bishop’s visitation was an *inquisitio praeparatoria*, and it is distinguished from the more formal process called *inquisitio sollemnis* which required oaths of the participants.⁷² Thus, by this definition, an episcopal visitation was an *inquisitio* of a sort. This same two-step inquisitorial process was also described with respect to criminal proceedings and heresy by a contemporary of Durandus, Albert Gandinus, in his *Tractatus de Maleficis* (1301). According to Gandinus, the first part of an inquisition was a general enquiry about malfeasance, whereas the second type

71. “Sane huiusmodi impensurus officium proposito verbo Dei quaerat de vita et conversatione ministrantium in ecclesiis et locis aliis divino cultui deputatis, ac ceteris, quae ad officium ipsum spectant, absque coactione et exactione qualibet iuramenti, ad ipsorum emendationem per salubria monita, nunc levia, nunc aspera, iuxta datam sibi a Deo prudentiam.” J. Friedrich von Schulte, ed., *Liber Sextus Decretalium d. Bonifacii Papae VIII suae integritati restitutus*, vol. 2 (Rome: Catholic Church, 1881), lib. III, tit. XX, cap.1, §4, col. 1057. This distinction is certainly evident in the records examined for this study where monks and nuns do not seem to have been put under oath as a matter of routine during visitation. Although at the outset of a visitation, an abbot or abbess of a monastery was usually described as having sworn (*iuravit*) canonical obedience, the use of the word elsewhere is not common. Thus, an abbot or abbess’ responses to questions were usually recorded as “he or she says...” (*dicit*) not “he or she swears” (*iurat*). Likewise, while monks or nuns are often described as *inquisitus/a* when questioned, they are usually said to respond as *dicit* and not *iurat*. Based on his broad survey of late medieval visitations, George Coulton also concluded oaths were rarely required. Coulton points to the Norwich visitations of Goldwell and Nicke where oaths are rarely mentioned and argues that, if the bishops had actually required them, there would be some notation of it. Furthermore, he states: “Nor, again, so far as I have noted, is there any record of oaths as a normal formality in the Lincoln visitations, nor in any of the *Formae Visitandi* that I have seen.” Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 2:483. However, while oaths were not normally required, records occasionally note their use. See, for example, Alnwick’s visitation of St. Michael’s Priory in Stamford where each of the nuns is described as “*iurata et examinata*.” Linc. Visit., 355-6; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol. 96. However, as Cheney argues, although these enquiries did not require oaths, monks or nuns could still be “bound simply by the obligation of canonical obedience to answer truly to his superior.” Cheney, 79. In 1254, Archbishop Rigaud, for instance, ordered canons in Rouen to confess “though obedience.” (“*Iniunximus, per obedienciam, ut quicumque super hoc culpabilis est, antequam recedamus a domo, super hoc nobiscum loquatur.*”) Rigaldus, 204.

72. “Differunt tamen haec praeparatoria, et illa sollemnis nam haec sit sine exactione qualibet iuramenti.” Durandus, lib. III, Part. 1, *De Inquisitione* §2: *Quando*, n.14, p.30.

investigated a single, specific and named person.⁷³ Interestingly, J. M. M. H. Thijssen noted the application of a similar two-step process in the trials of ten heretics in Paris in 1210. First, the *mala fama* was established by the testimony of trustworthy witnesses. Only after the truth of the report had been established (*inquisitio famae*), the judge was able to proceed to the full trial or *inquisitio specialis*.⁷⁴ In each of these examples, medieval authorities understood *inquisitio* to be more than a formalized *ex officio* proceeding against a defendant. Rather, the term was somewhat more encompassing and composed of at least two parts, one with the requirement for *fama* and/or oaths, and the other without.

According to Cheney, this process of *inquisitio* allowed bishops “to hold a preparatory enquiry without a complicated legal process” and was increasingly adopted as standard practice for episcopal visitations over the course of the thirteenth century.⁷⁵ This distinction meant that bishops could actively seek out faults in monasteries without the requirement for pre-existing infamy. The bishop’s canonical right to visitation allowed him to bypass the normal requirements of notoriety. Thus, as Winchelsey’s articles of visitation suggest, a bishop was supposed to *inquire* whether there were any monks who were “heretics, disobedient, quarrelsome, propertied, incontinent, incorrigible or vagabonds,” regardless of whether any *mala fama* exists.⁷⁶ The results of these enquiries are recorded as the *detecta* and *comperta* portion of a visitation record. However, if a bishop discovered evidence of serious faults, either from credible rumours (*publica fama*) or through the course of a

73. “Hoc est bene notandum ... utrum iudex de maleficio inquit contra aliquam singularem et specialem et nominatam personam, an inquirat generaliter de maleficio, quis illud maleficio fecerit.” Albertus Gandinus, *Albertus Gandinus und das Strafrecht der Scholastik*, 2 vols., ed. by Hermann Kantorowicz (Berlin: J. Guttentag, 1907), 2:39. For a more detailed discussion of Gandinus’ approach to *inquisitio*, see Burret, 117-8 and also, see Thomas Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht: das Kanonisationsverfahren im europäischen Spätmittelalter* (Köln: Böhlau, 2004), 169.

74. J. M. M. H. Thijssen, “Master Amalric and the Amalricians: Inquisitorial Procedure and the Suppression of Heresy at the University of Paris,” *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 43-65.

75. Cheney, 78.

76. “Item an sint aliqui scismatici, inobedientes, rixosi, proprietarii, incontinentes, incorrigibiles vel vagabundi.” Graham, *Reg. of Roberti Winchelsey*, 1300; BL Cotton Galba F.iv, fols.64.

visitation - he had the option of initiating a more formal proceeding sometimes referred to as a special inquisition (*inquisitio specialis*) or a special visitation (*visitatio specialis*).

Consequently, while all monastic visitations were theoretically inquisitions, some were clearly more formal than others. For instance, there are eight surviving mandates of enquiry ordered by William Gray for monasteries during his tenure as Bishop of Lincoln.⁷⁷ Although each case would have involved the visitation of a monastery by the bishop or one of his officials, none of them should be considered ‘regular’ visitations. In fact, Gray frequently made a careful distinction between regular visitations and special visitations or inquisitions. For example, in April 1433, Gray wrote to his commissioner, Robert Thorton:

When we some time ago made actual visitation by our right as ordinary of the priory of the Holy Trinity of the Wood by Markyate, of the order of St. Benedict, of our diocese; we, making anxious enquiry touching the state of the same priory and the concerns of religion in the same, found that in such our visitation, certain crimes, transgressions and offences worthy of reformation were discovered to us.⁷⁸

Note that Gray specifies that he visited the priory “by right as ordinary.” In other words, his visit was not compelled by *mala fama*. He explains that after this visitation, he made several injunctions to correct the problems he found. Nevertheless, afterwards Gray reported that

from loud whispering and the notoriousness of the deed in public, it has come to our hearing that more grievous offences than what had been discovered by

77. The mandates are for Eynsham Abbey (1433), Eynsham Abbey (1434), Godstow abbey (1434), Heynings Priory (1433), Markyate Priory (1431), Markyate Priory (1433), Newstead Priory by Stamford (1435), and Swardsley Priory (1434). Linc. Visit., 1:56-8, 60-1, 64-6, 69-71, 81-6, 92-4, 111-2; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 89, 111, 117d, 149-50, 158, 167, 177, 173d.

78. “Cum nos iam dudum iure nostro ordinario prioratum sancte Trinitatis de Bosco iuxta Markyate, ordinis sancti Benedicti, nostre diocesis, actualiter visitauimus, et super statu ipsius prioratus et religionem in in [sic] eodem concernentibus sollicite inquirentes, nonnulla crimina, excessus et delicta reformatione digna nobis in huiusmodi nostra visitacione reperimus fore detecta.” Linc. Visit., 1:82; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 149.

us in our same visitation, had been unhappily perpetrated and committed in the same priory before the beginning of the same [visitation].⁷⁹

The loud whisperings referred to rumours that the prioress, Denise Lowelyche, was flaunting Gray's injunctions and openly having an affair with the priory's steward, Richard. Also, one of the nuns, Katherine Tyttesbury, had committed spiritual incest and gone into apostasy. As a consequence, Gray ordered his commissioner to travel to Markyate immediately and make

diligent enquiry concerning and touching all and each of the aforementioned issues, and their whole circumstances, and also to depose, remove and suspend the said prioress from her dignity, and the other nuns who hold offices or administrations in the same from their administrations and offices, if their faults or crimes shall require it.⁸⁰

Thus, this second visitation was occasioned by *scandalum* and was not a general visitation into the "state of the priory" (*super statu ipsius prioratus*) under Gray's "right as ordinary" (*iure nostro ordinario*). This was clearly something different.

A similar pattern can be found in each of the eight mandates of inquiry issued by Gray. Most important, there were always exigent circumstances (i.e. scandals) which prompted them – they were not part of the bishop's normal round of visitations. In each mandate, Gray specifically outlined his reasons for ordering the inquisitions which always included some reference to scandal, usually phrased as "common rumour and loud

79. "Verum quia ad nostrum, clamosa insinuacione frequenti factique notorietate in publicum prodeunte, nuper peruenit auditum quod grauiora delicta quam in ipsa visitacione nostra nobis fuerint detecta ante eiusdem inchoacionem in eodem prioratu miserabiliter perpetrata fuerunt et commissa." (Note that I have slightly modified Thompson's translation here to improve readability.) Linc. Visit., 1:82; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 149.

80. "[...] ac de et super omnibus et singulis premissis et eorum circumstanciis vniuersis dictas priorissam et moniales examinandum, et diligenter inquirendum, necnon dictam priorissam a sua dignitate aliasque moniales officia seu administraciones in eodem obtinentes a suis administracionibus et officiis, si earum culpe aut crimina id exigerint deponendum, amouendum et suspendendum [...]" (Note that I have slightly modified Thompson's translation here to improve readability.) Linc. Visit., 1:83; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 149.

whispering.” In the example of Heynings Priory, for instance, there were rumours of a pregnant nun. In several others, there were references to “rumours and whisperings” about some unnamed bad behaviour. For example, Gray’s mandate of enquiry for Swardsley Priory in 1434 referred to rumours that the prioress and nuns had given “their minds to debauchery” and had committed “acts of adultery, incest, sacrilege and fornication” in public.⁸¹ Also, in four of these enquiries, Gray specifically noted that the monks or nuns in question should also be put under oath – although the wording on this subject is somewhat non-committal.⁸² In three of the mandates, Gray orders his official to examine the individuals in question “having admitted their oath thereupon, if it be expedient ” (*super hoc si expediat iuramento*).⁸³ The phrase “*si expediat*” would seem to suggest that the oaths were not an absolute requirement. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the formality of oaths was almost never required or requested in regular episcopal visitations of monasteries – another indication that these processes were different.

Unfortunately, Gray’s mandates of enquiry do not reveal much about the process of these special inquisitions. However, an indication of their format may be found in the record of Bishop Longland’s enquiry into fornication and adultery allegations against the abbot and another monk held at Missenden Abbey in 1531 – a record which has been briefly described in §3.1.1. Less than a year before, Longland’s commissary Thomas Jackman had visited Missenden and uncovered numerous sodomy accusations against one of the monks, John Slythurste. However, the record for Longland’s inquisition of 1531 makes it clear that it was not a follow-up to this visitation.

81. “carnis illecebras sectantes et religionis tramite derelicto, ac omnis pudicie et castimonie freno abiecto, stupro intendunt, adulteria, incestus, sacrilegia et fornicaciones publice et quasi in conspectu totius populi dampnabiliter committendo, in suarum interitum animarum, religionis opprobrium ac aliorum perniciosum exemplum.” Linc. Visit., 1:82; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 173d.

82. The mandates are for Eynsham Abbey (1434), Godstow abbey (1434), Newstead Priory by Stamford (1435), and Swardsley Priory (1434). Linc. Visit., 1:61,65,93,112; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 158, 167,177,173d.

83. Eynsham Abbey (1434), Godstow abbey (1434), and Newstead Priory by Stamford (1435).

On the ninth day of July, in the year of the Lord 1530, the reverend father, bishop of Lincoln, descended to the monastery of Missenden for a special visitation and sitting judicially for a tribunal, he ordered the abbot of the monastery, John Fox, having been brought before him personally, to swear an oath for responding truthfully about certain articles concerning the health of his soul and the utility of the said monastery.⁸⁴

While a normal visitation record would usually begin with a report on the various pleasantries of the bishop's arrival, the celebration of mass, and the showing of the abbey's financial records, the visitation of 1531 begins with a specific reference to the mandate or reason for Longland's presence – "certain articles concerning the health" of the abbot's soul. As the record makes clear, articles themselves are in fact accusations against the abbot and another canon, Robert Palmer, based upon *mala fama* of fornication and adultery.

Most of the body of the visitation record is devoted to the abbot's and Palmer's responses to these accusations. The articles themselves are actually listed at the end of the record. However, each response from the two men in the manuscript is carefully numbered to correspond to the related article, so the line of questioning can be readily re-constructed. The first three articles *contra abbatem* read:

First, we present and articulate that you were gravely defamed of incontinence among good and serious men, with a certain woman, Mergareta Bishop, the wife of Thomas Bishop of the aforementioned parish of Missenden for some years and that you continue to be defamed at present.

84. "Decimo nono die mensis Junij anno domini millesimo quingentesimo xxxjo reuerendus pater Lincolniensis episcopus ad specialem visitacionem monasterij de Messyndyn descendit et idem monasterium in refectorio eiusdem specialiter visitans et [iudicialiter pro] tribunali sedens oneravit iureiurando dominum Johannem Fox abba[tem eiusdem] monasterij coram se personaliter constitutum de [vere respon]dendo certis [articulis] anime sue salutem et vtilitatem dicti monasterij [concernentibus]." The record of this entire visitation is unfortunately quite damaged in the manuscript and certain sections, indicated here by brackets, are unreadable. Thompson has made some reasonable extrapolations. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:23; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.77.

Next, that you knew the same Mergareta carnally before she was married, and that you knew her carnally after she was married, and that you were very familiar with her for several years.⁸⁵

The abbot confessed to the first two articles with respect to his defamation, but denied that he ever knew her carnally either before or after her marriage.⁸⁶ The rest of the abbot's testimony continues in this fashion, followed by that of Robert Palmer who, like the abbot, was also compelled to go under oath (*iuramento oneravit*).⁸⁷ Following their responses, there is testimony from other canons of the monastery concerning the behaviour of the two men. As it turned out, these witnesses contradicted much of what the Abbot and Palmer said. The end of the record contains Longland's *detecta* and details his subsequent decisions. The entire process of visitation remained remarkably focused. The only apparent subjects of the enquiry were the abbot and Palmer and there is no evidence that Longland conducted any of the normal business of monastic visitation while at Missenden.

Overall, however, 'special visitations / inquisitions' occasioned by scandal, such as Longland's 1531 inquisition at Missenden, are rare among visitation records. However, when they did happen, sexual scandal was not infrequently the cause. Out of the eight cases in which Bishop Gray ordered a special inquisition, five were for sexual scandals.⁸⁸ Alnwick ordered a similar inquisition to take place at Charly Priory in 1433, although

85. "Inprimis tibi objicimus et articulamus quod tu de incontinentia cum [quadam] Mergareta Bushope vxore Thome Bishope parrochie de Mes[syndyn] predicta per nonnullos annos apud bonos at graues diffamatus [fuisti] et es in presenti. Item quod eandem Mergaretam antequam f[u]erat nu]pta carnaliter cognouisti postea carnaliter cognouisti ac per nonnullos annos multum fa[m]iliaris cum eadem fuisti." Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:26; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.79.

86. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:23; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.77.

87. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:24; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.77d.

88. The inquisitions occasioned by sexual scandal were for Eynsham Abbey (1434), Godstow abbey (1434), Heynings Priory (1433), Markyate Priory (1433), and Swardsley Priory (1434). Linc. Visit., 1:60-1, 64-6, 69-71, 82-6, 111-2; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol. 117d, 149-50, 158, 167, 173d.

the source of the *fama* which prompted it was a bit more vague.⁸⁹ There are also records of special inquisitions taking place at four other monastic houses, as well as two secular colleges during Alnwick's tenure.⁹⁰ However, in only one of these cases, Leicester New College, was sexual misconduct the clear underlying reason. It should be noted, however, that the Leicester case, which involved sodomy accusations against a canon named John Dey, was the most detailed and lengthy record by far in Alnwick's visitation dossier. There are no examples of formal inquisitions in the records of Goldwell, Nicke or Atwater and the example of Missenden was the sole case from Longland's records.

Nevertheless, although special inquisitions were rare, the overall process of *inquisitio* still framed the episcopal response to sexual misconduct. As has already been noted, all visitations were essentially preparatory inquisitions, that is, informal inquisitions without the requirement for *infamia* or oaths, and nearly all cases of monastic sexual misconduct were discovered via this process. Armed with testimony from monks or nuns about sexual misconduct, which by definition, could be considered *fama* of good repute, the bishop could normally proceed directly to formally charging the individual – without the need for the more formal process. Moreover, if an accused individual denied the charges, then the bishop was more likely to force them to undergo compurgation than proceed to a second, more formalized inquisition.

89. According to Alnwick, the prior of Charley, in addition to letting the priory buildings go to ruin, was “spending his all of his time drinking and frequenting taverns, and living otherwise in an unseemly fashion” (ad nichil aliud vacat nisi potacionibus, ingurgitacionibus et publicis tabernis, in aliis aliter viuens quam deceret). Linc. Visit., 2:390; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.53d.

90. The special inquisitions initiated in cloistered houses were Ankerwyke (1441), Bardney (1437), Bardney (1440) and Spalding (1438). The college inquisitions were Fortheringhay College (1438) and Leicester New College (1440). A further two visitations, Gracedieu (1440) and Kirby Bellars Priory (1440), had enquiries into the legitimacy of the elections of their respective prioress and prior, but they were not initiated as a result of *mala fama*. Alnwick also held a special enquiry for two lay women accused of sleeping with the abbot of Peterborough Abbey in 1446. However, the enquiry did not directly involve the monks and took place at the bishop's residence. Linc. Visit., 2:1-25, 28-31, 92-107, 126-7, 166-7, 187-206, 301-2, 334-5; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols. 10-15, 17-17 sched., 57d-59, 32-39, 62, 96 sched., 99d, 100-103 sched., 109 sched.

4.5 COMPURGATION

The roles of compurgation and *inquisitio* are complementary during visitation. While an *inquisitio praeparatoria* brought accusations of sexual misconduct to light, compurgation provided an easy means of resolution. Compurgation, also referred to as canonical purgation, required that an accused individual to clear their name by swearing their innocence publicly under oath backed by the oaths of several other witnesses. The episcopal right to assign canonical purgation was articulated in a decretal of Alexander III (1159-81), *Nos inter alios*, which stipulated that, if *publica fama* of a crime existed, a bishop could compel a person to undergo purgation.⁹¹ Some indication of the underlying rules governing the allotment of purgation may be found in a letter of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) to the Bishop of Ely regarding a group of openly incontinent and rebellious clerics:

If their crime is so public that it could justly be called notorious, then neither witnesses nor accusers are necessary, since nothing is able to disguise such a crime. But if the crime is public, not because of evidence, but rumour, then rumour alone is not sufficient for condemnation, since they ought to be judged by witnesses not hearsay. But if there is so much suspicion concerning these clerics that scandal has been generated in the populace as a result, then, although they have no accuser, canonical purgation is required of them. If they do not wish to purge themselves, or fail in the purgation, then you ought to assign canonical punishment.⁹²

91. “publica fama eum accusante, ad purgationem cogere possit.” Alexander III, *Nos inter alios*, *Decretals*, Lib. v, Tit. xxxiv, Cap. vi. Printed: CIC, II: col 871. For a thorough discussion of the implications of this decretal to the application of late medieval canon law and criminal proceedings, see Helmholz, “Crime, Compurgation and the Courts of the Medieval Church.”

92. “si crimen eorum ita publicum est, ut merito debeat appellari notorium, in eo casu nec testis nee accusator est necessarius, quum huiusmodi crimen nulla possit tergiversatione celari. Si vero publicum est, non ex evidentia, sed ex fama: in eo casu ad condemnationem eorum sola testimonia non sufficiunt, quum non sit testimoniis, sed testibus iudicandum. Sed si de clericis ipsis talis habeatur suspicio, ut ex ea scandalum generetur in populo, licet contra ipsos non apparuerit accusator, eis tamen est canonica purgatio indicenda. Quam si praestare noluerint, vel defecerit in praetestanda, eos canonica debetis animadversione punire.” Innocent III, *Tua nos duxit*, *Decretals*, Lib. IV, Tit. 1, Cap. XXVI. Printed: CIC, II: col 670. On the development of compurgation as a part of inquisitorial procedure, and on the importance of *Tua nos Duxit*, see Brundage, 331-2.

According to Innocent, a bishop should work on a sliding scale of notoriety with respect to *inquisitio* and compurgation. Although the line between “notoriety” and “rumour” is somewhat ambiguous in Innocent’s description, clearly there was an attempt to distinguish between a public awareness of evidence versus a public awareness of rumour.

Thus, in a case where a crime had been committed so openly and publicly that it met the threshold for notoriety, a bishop could proceed directly to punishment. On the other hand, if someone had been impugned by rumour alone, and their guilt was in question (a frequent occurrence in episcopal visitations), compurgation could be used to resolve the situation. Interestingly, Richard Helmholz has also shown that the criteria for what constituted ‘enough rumour’ to force a compurgation in the first place was interpreted fairly narrowly by canonists and English courts. Panormitanus (ca. 1386-1445) for example, specified that an accused could not be put to compurgation “if his fame was impugned only by enemies, or by untrustworthy men and habitual perjurers.”⁹³ By default, however, most accusations of sexual misconduct arising during an episcopal visitation would seem to meet the minimum threshold required to force a canonical purgation since they were made by ‘trustworthy’ individuals (i.e. fellow monks or nuns).

An example of this process in action can be found in Alnwick’s visitation of Markby Priory in 1438. During the *detecta* phase of the visitation, a series of monks testified about the alleged sexual misconduct of one of the monks, Thomas Dryby. The prior, John Fentone, gave the first piece of evidence and told the bishop that Dryby was “suspect with a woman that dwells in the town of Markby.”⁹⁴ Thereafter, each monk interviewed by Alnwick added a little bit more to the story. The subprior, Richard Leeke, testified

93. Helmholz, “Crime, Compurgation and the Courts of the Medieval Church,” 14.

94. “Frater Thomas Dryby est suspectus cum quadam muliere manente in villa de Markeby.” Linc. Visit., 2:220; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.84.

that the alleged woman lived in a tenement called Hanney Thyng.⁹⁵ The cellarer, John Yorke, finally gave the woman a name, Margareta Potere, and informed the bishop that Dryby had “suspect recourse to her house almost daily.”⁹⁶ The most damning testimony came from the monk, John Alforde, who told Alnwick that not only was Dryby publicly defamed with her, but it was also suspected he had “begotten two children of her,” and that “certain folk, such as sir Thomas Cumberworthe, do withhold their alms” as a result.⁹⁷ Out of the entire complement of the monastery, ten monks and one novice, only two men (not including Dryby himself) did not mention the affair. Naturally, Dryby was brought to account for the accusations.

After nones of the same day, Thomas Dryby appeared, and, the article [of incest] with Margaret Portere having been put to him, he denies his guilt; wherefore he has a term and place, to wit forthwith and in the same house, to clear himself with five of his brethren, and to do what else is in course of law. At length, because he said that he made no purgation of his guilt, and confesses that he had had common resort to the said woman’s house, therefore my lord held him to be convicted.⁹⁸

It is important to note in this example, that none of the monks claimed to have actually witnessed Dryby having the affair. The monks’ allegations were all described in terms of rumour or *fama*, as in “Thomas Dryby is defamed with Margareta Potere” (*Thomas Dryby notatur cum Margareta Portere*). Consequently, this would constitute an awareness

95. “Thomas Dryby notatur super incontinencia cum quadam muliere manente in villa de Markeby in quodam tenemento vocato Hanney Thyng.” Linc. Visit., 2:220; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.84.

96. “Thomas Dryby notatur super incestu cum Margareta Portere de Markeby, ad cuius domum nimium habet et suspectum et quasi quotidianum accessum.” Linc. Visit., 2:221; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.84d.

97. “Thomas Dryby notatur cum Margareta Portere de Markeby, de qua suscitauit duas proles; nam propter infamiam laborantem super similibus quidam, vt dominus Thomas Cumberworthe, subtrahunt elemosinas suas” Linc. Visit., 2:222; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.85.

98. “Post nonas eiusdem diei Thomas Dryby comparuit; et obiecto sibi articulo cum Margareta Portere, negat crimen; vnde habet terminum et locum, videlicet incontinenti et in eadem domo, ad purgandum se cum v de confratribus suis et cetera facienda que iuris sunt. Tandem, quia dixit se nullam facere purgacionem de crimine, et fatetur se habuisse communem accessum ad domum dicte mulieris, ideo dominus habuit pro conuicto.” Linc. Visit., 2:224; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.85d.

of rumour rather than an awareness of fact. Thus, under Innocent III's stipulations, the allegations would meet the requirement for compelling Dryby to undergo canonical purgation, but not enough to convict him outright.

Another example of how compurgation worked in practice with respect to sexual misconduct allegations, is Alnwick's visitation and special inquisition held at Leicester New College in December 1440. Although, Leicester was a secular college and not a cloistered house, there is no reason to believe that process of canonical purgation would have been any different. The record of the visitation of the college begins in an unremarkable way with the dean, William Walesby, presenting his certificate of receipt, a list of all benefices held within the college, and a dispensation for plurality (i.e. the right for him to hold multiple benefices) – all of which the bishop held to be satisfactory. However, from the *detecta* which follow, it is clear that the college had some serious problems. In addition to minor discipline issues, such as not rising for matins in the morning, several canons were accused of sexual misconduct: John Shiryngham was said to commit adultery with the wife of one Ryggesmaydene; John Atkynsone was accused of admitting suspect women into the college, particularly the wife of one Broghtone; John Bramburgehe was defamed with two married women, Cicely Trebys and Agnes, the wife of William Capmakere; Richard Kempsake was defamed with the sister of John Broghtone; and Ralph Welles was accused of maintaining three separate relationships with married women and impregnating all three. However, the accusation which would attract the most attention from the bishop was made first by the dean himself, immediately following his oath of canonical obedience:

Thereafter he says upon examination that master John Dey, canon of the place, is defamed of the vice of sodomy with Thomas Craven, chorister in the same, who has confessed, and with someone with the surname of White, a canon of Repton, and with Henry Cravene, and with John Burley, chorister. He gave long boots to some of them so that they should conceal such offences;

and he is a common haunter of the public taverns, even to drunkenness and vomiting.⁹⁹

John Dey's case was clearly treated differently from the outset. In the Leicester *detecta*, the other accusations of sexual misconduct were immediately followed by a response from the accused canon – either confessing or denying the charge. With the exception of John Dey's charges, each of the sexual accusations in the Leicester *detecta* was accompanied by a notation of their canonical purgation. Thus, after the charge of impregnating three women, Ralph Welles is noted to have denied the accusations, and afterwards cleared himself of them by his own “unsupported oath” (*de quibus purgavit se sola manu*).¹⁰⁰ Likewise, nearly identical notations follow the accusations of Shiryngham, Kempsake and Bramburgh – although for some reason there does not seem to have been any follow up on the accusations against Atkynsone. Interestingly, in this instance, Alnwick did not require any of the canons to support their oaths with witnesses. This is all the more striking when contrasted with the fact that John Dey was never offered the choice of canonical purgation at all.

On the following day in the presence of the bishop, another canon, Robert Matfene was also accused of sexual misconduct with three women. This brought the count to seven canons in total accused of sexual misconduct during the visitation. Like the other men, the bishop allowed him to clear himself on all counts through canonical purgation, although in this instance, required compurgators to support Matfene's oath.

Wherefore he cleared himself with Bedale, Welles and Gaddesby, and was warned, under pain of excommunication and six shillings and eightpence to the

99. “Postea examinatus dicit quod magister Johannes Dey, canonicus loci, notatur super vicio sodomitico cum Thoma Craven, chorista ibidem, qui confessus est, et cum quodam cognominato White, canonico de Repyngdone, et cum Henrico Crauene, et cum Johanne Burley, chorista, quorum aliquibus dedit longas caligas vt celarent huiusmodi peccata ; et est communis sectator tabernarum publicarum vsque ad ebrietatem et vomitum.” (I have slightly modified Thompson's translation here for readability.) Linc. Visit., 2:188; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.100.

100. Linc. Visit., 2:189; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.100.

fabric fund of the Church, to have no famliar intercourse with these women, etc.¹⁰¹

Finally, at this point in the record, John Dey's response to all the earlier accusations are recorded – all of which he expressly denies. Dey goes on to state that “if these two youths will bear this witness against him, he will make renunciation of all his benefices in the world.”¹⁰² However, responding differently than in every other accusation of sexual misconduct recorded during this visitation, Alnwick did not allow him to clear his name by compurgation. Instead, he initiated a formal inquisition to investigate the matter further.

During the *inquisitio*, the bishop heard testimony from the choir boys in question who confirmed the accusations, and from another canon, William Bentley, who saw the acts being committed through a hole in the door (*per ly snekhole in hostio*).¹⁰³ After hearing the testimony of the choir boys, the bishop enquired whether the defendant had anything to say for himself. Dey, however, remained silent. The bishop enquired again asking if John would say anything whereby he should not immediately declare him convicted. When Dey continued to remain silent, the bishop pronounced him convicted of the crime on the spot.

On the surface, there is no clear answer as to why Dey's case went to inquisition, whereas the other cases of sexual misconduct were resolved by purgation. One possibility is that the case did not meet the requirements for canonical purgation in that there were

101. “Vnde purgavit se cum Bedale, Welles et Gaddesby, et monitus est sub pena excommunicacionis et vjs. viijd. fabrice ecclesie quod non habeat familiaritatem cum hiis, etc.” Linc. Visit., 2:194; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.100.

102. “si isti duo iuuenes volunt hoc testificari contra eum, se renunciaturum omnibus beneiciis suis in mundo.” Linc. Visit., 2:194; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.101.

103. LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.103. Amusingly, Thompson does not provide a transcription or translation of the testimony of the choir boys. Instead, he includes a note in Latin explaining his discomfort with the material: “quo vero aut qualia planius indicare nolumus, non nisi mentionem de rebus huiusmodi hic facientes.” Thompson, Linc. Visit., 2:197.

direct witnesses to the crimes. As Richard Helmholz has argued, although canon law allowed for compurgation, many canonists considered it a subordinate form of proof, “one to be used in default of the affirmative evidence provided by witnesses or documents.” As Helmholz’s evidence from several late medieval Act Books show, English courts frequently allowed petitions to suspend compurgations in situations where someone had evidence which could ‘prove’ the accused person had committed the crime.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, this may be the reason why the sodomy case of John Dey was not resolved by compurgation since several canons and choir boys were direct witnesses of the act. John Dey had confidently responded to the accusations with the statement, “if these two youths will bear this witness against him, he will make renunciation of all his benefices in the world.”¹⁰⁵ Clearly, as the later inquisition transcripts show, at least one boy did indeed bear witness against him. If the bishop knew that the witnesses would testify, then it would have consequently invalidated a compurgation. Thus, while the promiscuous canon that impregnated three women, Ralph Welles, clears himself with an oath, the sodomist John Dey goes to inquisition. In the end, the language Alnwick used to describe the crime may be the most telling reason why Dey’s denials were met with *inquisitio* and not compurgation: “*illo dampnato et detestabili vicio sodomitico, cuius solo verbo aer corrumpitur.*”¹⁰⁶

Compurgation rates and Sexual Misconduct Accusations

One might expect that records of compurgations, whether successful or not, would closely match numbers of sexual misconduct accusations in visitation reports. However, with the exception of William Alnwick, compurgations were rarely recorded by the bishops

104. The petition, commonly referred to as a *causa reclamationis contra purgationem*, represented a case to make affirmative proof of the crime. Helmholz, “Crime, Compurgation and the Courts of the Medieval Church,” 16.

105. “si isti duo iuuenes volunt hoc testificari contra eum, se renunciaturum omnibus beneiiciis suis in mundo.” Linc. Visit., 2:194; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.101.

106. Linc. Visit., 2:197; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.102d.

Table 4.1: Compurgation of Sexual Misconduct Accusations in Cloistered Monastic Houses, 1430-1530

Bishop	Accusations	Compurgations Attempted	Compurgations Successful	Compurgations Failed
Alnwick	56	22 (39%)	18	4
Atwater	9	0	na	na
Longland	15	1 (7%)	1	0
Goldwell	1	0	na	na
Nicke	32	0	na	na
Overall	113	23(20%)	20	4

examined for this study. Indeed, there are no records of compurgations for Atwater, Goldwell or Nicke, and only one example from John Longland. However, as table 4.1 indicates, Alnwick allowed compurgations in twenty-three instances of sexual misconduct which represents nearly half of all accusations. This does not necessarily mean that the other bishops did not use compurgations during their visitation. Undoubtedly, due to the greater detail within Alnwick's visitation dossier, one might expect a certain disparity in this regard. Another possible reason for this disparity is that compurgations could be largely formulaic and may have been granted as a matter of course. As a result, their outcomes were largely predictable and their inclusion in the written record may have been superfluous. For example, nearly every one of Alnwick's compurgations was made successfully (81%). While, three or 14% of Alnwick's successful purgations were done with the unsupported oath of the accused individual, the rest of them required multiple witnesses (usually three or four) to swear on the accused's behalf. Clearly, for the 'naughty nun' or 'promiscuous monk,' finding fellow monastics to support your innocence was not too hard. Indeed, among some of the four cases which failed, there are indications that interpersonal disagreements within the monastery prevented the accused individuals from gaining enough support to purge themselves successfully. For instance, is it any surprise that Margaret Wavere, the prioress of Catesby who was accused of beating

her nuns and calling them whores, was unable to find enough supporters to clear her name of the charge of adultery?¹⁰⁷ There is also some indication that Alnwick himself viewed the process as largely a formality, and not a real indication of an accused individual’s guilt or innocence. In cases where a sexual misconduct accusation was made, it was customary for Alnwick (and frequently the other bishops as well) to ask the accused monk or nun to forswear all contact with their reputed sexual partner (see table 4.2). Thus, about half of Alnwick’s accusations included a notation about this custom. Interestingly, however, Alnwick also asked two thirds of those who successfully purged themselves of their crime to abjure also contact with the partner. Obviously, to a certain extent Alnwick is concerned about scandal. However, he also may recognize that in practice, a successful compurgation may not represent an innocent individual. Thus, although John Kempstone of Newham Priory sucessfully cleared himself of the charge of adultery with a married woman named Margaret Buchere, Alnwick still ordered him to forswear any further contact with her under the threat of being confined to cloister and keeping silent for three months.¹⁰⁸ It sounds as if Alnwick was hedging his bets.

Table 4.2: Abjurement Rates in Monastic Sexual Misconduct Accusations, 1430-1530

Bishop	Accusations	Abjures contact	Purged and abjures
Alnwick	56	20	12
Atwater	9	1	0
Longland	15	5	0
Goldwell	1	0	0
Nicke	32	4	0
Overall	113	30	12

107. Linc. Visit., 2:47, 49-50; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols. 94d-95.
108. Linc. Visit., 2:232; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol. 115.

4.6 WRITTEN INJUNCTIONS

While the records of preparatory inquisitions (*detecta* and *comperta*), represent the immediate reactions and reform attempts by bishops, written injunctions are much more reflective and formal documents. Composed afterwards, sometimes long after the visitation itself, an injunction represented a bishop's overall judgement of a troubled monastery and his strategy for reform within it. Bishops intended for these documents to be taken very seriously by their recipients. Injunctions were supposed to be read aloud to all the monks or nuns in chapter, and then posted for all to see. Indeed, bishops frequently chided abbots or abbesses who failed to follow this requirement, or who failed in any respect to follow the mandates included within them. Bishop Richard Flemyng, for example, specified in great detail in his injunctions to Bourne Abbey in 1422 how his injunctions should be read aloud publicly in chapter eight times a year in the venacular, so that neither the "abbot, nor any canon of the said monastery may be able for the future to plead ignorance."¹⁰⁹ In 1434, Bishop William Gray wrote in outrage to one of his officials, that the abbot and monks of the Benedictine abbey of Eynsham, were completely ignoring his earlier injunctions. The preamble to his mandate for inquisition reads:

It has very lately come to our ears, which we relate with sorrow, that the said abbot and convent, having slackened the bridle of obedience and the reins of chastity, [are] returning as dogs untamed to the lust and vomit of their former life and plunging back into the mischievous state of disobedience

109. "Et ne vos, abbas, ne quisquam dicti monasterij canonicus huiusmodi nostrorum mandatorum, iniunccionum et ordinacionum ignoranciam pretendere valeatis in futurum, volumus, ordinamus et sub supra et infra scriptis penis firmiter iniungimus, ac vobis omnibus et singulis precipimus et mandamus quod omnia et singula hiis litteris nostris contenta octies in omni anno, videlicet bis in qualibet quarta parte anni, in capitulo coram toto conuentu ibidem congregate distincte et voce intelligibili legantur et in lingua materna publice exponantur." Linc. Visit., 1:10; LAO, Episcopal Register XVI, fol.234d.

and contempt, holding up as it were to ridicule and sport our injunctions, ordinances and commands [...]¹¹⁰

Written injunctions are also the most common surviving documentation of episcopal oversight of monasteries. Indeed, while the visitation notes of Alnwick and the other bishops in this study are quite rare relatively speaking, injunctions by themselves are frequently found in episcopal registers. Indeed, they are often the only evidence of the monastic visitations made by any particular bishop, and in this respect, by themselves they offer an incomplete picture. For instance, only about half of the summaries of Alnwick's visitations include an accompanying written injunction. Moreover, if Alnwick's visitation dossier had not survived, all that would exist to document his extensive visitations would be an even smaller handful of miscellaneous injunctions inserted without much care toward the end of his proper register.¹¹¹

Although written injunctions were an important tool for bishops to regulate monastic discipline, these documents rarely contain specific references to sexual misconduct (or, for that matter, any type of misconduct committed by a specific monk or nun) even when the preparatory enquiry revealed numerous cases of it. For instance, only one of Alnwick's written injunctions could be said to contain a reference to a specific accusation of sexual misconduct.¹¹² More commonly, written injunctions regulate sexual misconduct by way of brief, general pronouncements without any reference to a specific accusation. These

110. "ad aures nostras, quod dolenter referimus, nuperime peruenit quod dicti abbas et conuentus, freno obediencie et pudicie habenis laxatis, ad prioris vite sue luxum et vomitum vt canes indomiti reuertentes ac in inobediencie et contemptus perniciem resilientes, huiusmodi iniunctiones, ordinaciones et mandata nostra, quin eciam ordinaciones, prouisiones et appunctuamenta sua per nos auctorizata, ratificata et stabilita quasi pro ridiculo et ludibrio tenentes [...]" Linc. Visit., 1:61; LAO, Episcopal Register XVII, fol.158.

111. Thompson, Linc. Visit., 2:xxxi.

112. The accusation itself was somewhat ambiguous. In his injunction to Littlemore Priory, Alnwick refers to two nuns accused of sleeping together in the same bed. He specifies that each of the sisters must henceforth have a separate bed. As I discussed in §3.5, this accusation may or may not represent a homosexual relationship. Linc. Visit., 2:217-8; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.31.

pronouncements, such as keeping women out of the cloister and avoiding contact with the opposite sex or suspect places, are made so commonly as to be formulaic. Consequently, while accusations of sexual misconduct may occupy a great deal of the actual visitatorial notes, the accusations generally morph into broad warnings in the subsequent injunctions. For instance, although accusations of incontinence concerning three nuns (one of whom was the prioress) occupied a significant part of the preparatory enquiry at Greenfield Priory in the summer of 1525, none of these instances made it into the subsequent injunction by the bishop. Instead, it is recorded in the visitation notes that the prioress was able to purge herself and the other two nuns were convicted and assigned penance.¹¹³ In general, individual monks and nuns are almost never mentioned in written injunctions. Thus, accusations of any sort against individuals become at most generalized admonitions in written injunctions.

However, sometimes written injunctions can be specific about the misconduct of an abbey's leader, and in those instances, mention actual instances of misbehaviour. This is not too surprising, since although injunctions were meant to be public and read to all the monks and nuns, they were addressed more specifically to the abbot or abbess. The reformation of an abbot or abbess was in many respects the more important function of a written injunction. Not only were they expected to conduct themselves appropriately, they were charged with the task of ensuring the general compliance of the monastery with the injunctions. However, here too, the specific injunctions against a leader usually contained no mention of sexual misconduct, even when the leader in question had been charged with it. For example, in December 1440, Bishop Alnwick visited Leicester Abbey and heard numerous accusations against its abbot, William Sadyngtone, ranging from financial dealings to adultery and even witchcraft. The accusations were detailed and

¹¹³ Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2:161-3; LAO, MS V/j/9, fols. 2-2d.

came from several monks. The prior, John Hickley, for instance, accused the abbot of allowing dogs to be kept in the monastery and frequently sleeping through matins. Several canons also told the bishop that the abbot never rendered accounts in chapter and that he was enriching himself from the proceeds of the monastery. One canon reported that the abbot had committed incest with a woman named Euphemia Fox. Other canons said the abbot practised magical incantations. According to the canon Thomas Asty, one day the abbot had accused the brethren generally in chapter of stealing money. When this did not elicit a confession, he

took a boy, after an incantation had been made by him, and, having smeared with oil the boy's thumb-nail, made his incantations, gazing upon the nail, and came thereafter to chapter, and, having called the brethren together, accused a certain canon, this Asty, of having stolen such monies and so defamed him of theft.¹¹⁴

Asty's story was confirmed by two other canons in separate private testimonies. At the conclusion of his visitation, the bishop called the abbot to account for the accusations of witchcraft (but not of incest). After he denied the accusations, the bishop declared him purged on the spot on his own unsupported oath. Neither the witchcraft nor the incest received any notice in the subsequent written injunction. However, the injunction did mention the hounds inside the monastery, not rendering accounts, and sleeping through matins. Thus, although written injunctions were important tools of reform for certain issues of monastic discipline, they did not in general function to control or regulate sexual misconduct.

114. "facta incantacione per eum sumpsit vnum puerum et vncta vngue pollicis pueri fecit incantaciones suas, respiciens in vngue, et postea venit ad capitulum, et conuocatis fratribus improperabat cuidam isti Asty canonico, quod ipse surripuit pecunias huiusmodi et sic diffamauit eum super furto." I have adjusted slightly Thompson's translation here for readability. *Linc. Visit.*, 2:211; *LAO*, MS V/j/1, fol.105.

4.7 PENANCE

Ultimately, penance was the final consequence for a confessed or convicted ‘naughty nun’ or ‘promiscuous monk’ – the last step in a course of events which might have begun with *scandalum*, and proceeded through an *inquisitio* and a failed compurgation. Penance represented both a chance for a ‘naughty nun’ or ‘promiscuous monk’ to atone for their crimes, and also the re-establishment of normality for a defamed monastery. Unfortunately, however, penances for sexual misconduct were rarely recorded in episcopal visitation records, and the few notations which do exist are typically vague. However, the cases which were recorded suggest that the severity of penance for sexual misconduct could vary widely. For example, a Benedictine nun of Gostow abbey, Alice Longspey, was sentenced to a year of strict confinement for her affair with a priest named Hugo Sadylere.¹¹⁵ Agnes Smyth of Crabhouse Nunnery, on the other hand, having confessed to giving birth, lost her rank within the cloister hierarchy for a month and had to perform the psalms of David seven times.¹¹⁶ The Dorchester monk, John Shrewesbury, who allegedly raped a woman in the bell tower of the abbey church, was required to fast on bread and water and stay confined to the cloister for an undetermined time.¹¹⁷ However, the relatively small sample size of penance notations within visitation records makes these variations in penance difficult to interpret by themselves. If we look at the overall numbers for the allocation of penance, this becomes evident (see table 4.3). We notice out of 111 accusations of sexual misconduct, only thirteen recorded allocations of penance were made by the bishop – representing just 11.7%. We have a further nine recorded examples of penance being assigned by an abbot or abbess. On one level, this is not very surprising. While penance was certainly important at the level of the individual, from the point of view

115. Linc. Visit., 2:114; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.28.

116. *Visitations of Norwich*, 110; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol.31b.

117. Linc. Visit., 2:69; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.111.

of episcopal record-keeping it seems to have been less so. As discussed earlier, detailed visitation notes such as Alnwick's dossier, were not meant to be preserved. Ultimately, the most important record keeping item arising out of a visitation for bishops was the injunction, which allowed them to track compliance on specific formal instructions on a monastery-wide scale. Sexual misconduct accusations are typically resolved quickly within the record and follow a distinct pattern – accusation, response and resolution. Thus, if the *detecta* state that Brother John accuses the sacrist of adultery with the washing lady, then the *comperta* might read Brother John is a defamed adulterer and required to purge himself with five brethren. The record would then note whether or not John was successful in his compurgation. After these notations in the *detecta* and the *comperta*, there is usually nothing else written about a case of sexual misconduct. It may be that individual penance was assigned orally on the spot by the bishop, or more likely, left to the individual abbot or abbess to assign later. Thus, in such cases, the role of the bishop is as an investigator rather than a punisher.

Table 4.3: Episcopal Allocation of Penance to Sexual Misconduct Accusations in Cloistered Monastic Houses, 1430-1530

Bishop	Accusations	No. of times penance given by bishop	% of accusations
Alnwick	56	4	7.14
Atwater	8	0	0
Longland	15	8	53.33
Goldwell	1	0	0
Nicke	31	1	3.22
Overall	111	13	11.7

Did the allocation of penance differ in terms of gender? Did bishops treat 'naughty nuns' differently from the way they treated 'promiscuous monks'? Based on the seriousness

with which Church authorities viewed the crime of fornication with nuns, it might be expected that female religious would receive harsher penalties for their sexual relationships than male religious. However, based on the visitation records examined for this study, there is no indication that the types of penance given to nuns was any different from that given to monks or canons. Both sexes might receive punishments ranging from prison terms, enforced silence to ritual humiliation. However, there is some evidence to suggest that there was a difference in how frequently bishops allocated penance or at least how frequently they recorded it (see table 4.4). Approximately 23% of the female accusations of sexual misconduct resulted in a recorded allocation of penance, which is significantly higher than the 9% of the male accusations. The discrepancy may be a result of a greater difficulty for women to clear themselves by compurgation, which as discussed earlier, could be negated by affirmative evidence. This seems to have been the case with the female allocations of penance since four out of the six cases involved pregnant women and this *prima facie* evidence probably overruled the possibility of compurgation.

Table 4.4: Gender Comparison of Penance Allocation in Sexual Misconduct Accusations

	Accusations	No. of times penance allocated by bishop	% of accusations
Men	91	8	9
Women	22	5	23
Overall	113	13	11.5

Nevertheless, when a visitation record contains some notation about penance (for either sex), the details are often vague or omitted altogether. For example, during a visitation to St. Michael's Priory in Stamford in 1445, Alnwick heard testimony that one of the nuns, Margaret Mortymere, had become pregnant after being apostate for two weeks and later gave birth to a child. According to the report, she was punished

“according to the rule” and no further details are given.¹¹⁸ The most common type of recorded penance was some form of imprisonment accompanied by a period of enforced silence. For example, in 1530, John Longland sentenced Thomas Wytney, a canon at Dorchester charged with incontinence to be confined to the priory for a year with no seynies privileges (recreational time devoted to bloodletting), and to take a lower place in the choir for fourteen days.¹¹⁹ Other possible types of punishment included forms of ritual humiliation, such as being forced to lie prostrate before chapter, or a transfer to another monastery to perform penance. In the two instances where there is a record of the latter, it was an abbot who assigned the penance rather than a bishop, which suggests that monastic leaders might prefer to remove troublemakers altogether than deal with them *in situ*.¹²⁰

Monastic customaries are another source which can provide further insight into what types of penances were applied in cases of monastic sexual misconduct. Customaries were supplementary to monastic rules, and provided individual monasteries (or orders) further instructions for day-to-day life and religious observance. A good example is the first post-conquest customary, Lanfranc’s *Constitutions* (c.1077), which provided the template for several other monastic customaries including the Lincoln Abbey of Eynsham visited by Gray, Alnwick and Atwater. In it, Lanfranc categorizes monastic misconduct into different levels of severity – although which crimes would be assigned to each level is not

118. “et quod punita est secundum regulam.” Linc. Visit., 2:335; LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.96.

119. “ut per annum continuum a die date presentium non exiret limites monasterij sub pena excommunicationis et deputavit eundem in inferiorem chori locum ad minus per quatuordecem dies immediate sequentes inhibendo eum a le zenis quousque secum fuerit dispensatum per dominum visitatorem” Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 2:121; LAO, MS V/j/9, fol.155d.

120. Knowles argues that the practice of exiling a problem monk or nun became less common by the fifteenth century – although he does not provide any numbers to back up his claim. According to Knowles, the penances recorded in the Lincoln visitations of Alnwick are “remarkably light,” while “in the visitations of c.1300 the monk or canon convicted of, or confessing, notorious incontinence was upon an extremely severe penance, which he was usually required to undergo in exile.” Knowles, 2:214.

clear. The most serious crimes (*culpae graves*) were reserved for the abbot alone to assign penance. A monk who was found guilty of one of these crimes

shall suffer severe corporal punishment, and be ordered to do penance as for a grave fault. When he has been scourged and has put on his clothing and girdle, he shall lay aside his knife, cover his head with his hood and go in absolute silence to the place appointed, led by the brother who keeps the key of the place. Then the abbot shall appoint one of the seniors, to whom he may safely entrust the task of guarding him; he shall lead him to the hours, and after the hours shall take him back again to his own place. After chapter this senior shall ask the abbot in private what shall be the condition of the brother's confinement, and what he shall have to eat, and when.¹²¹

Although Lanfranc did not specify exactly what types of crimes would fall under the category of *culpae graves*, certainly, imprisonment as a punishment for sexual misconduct corresponds well with the limited examples found in the visitation records examined for this study. Out of the twenty-one examples of penance given to incontinent monastics recorded, which includes those assigned by bishops as well as abbots and priors, nine (43 %) involved terms of imprisonment.

Later consuetudinary examples, such as the thirteenth-century customary of Bury St. Edmunds, similarly contain different penitential instructions depending on the seriousness of the misconduct.¹²² In some cases, these sources also noted specific sentences for sexual misconduct. A chapter of the Augustinian Canons in 1288, specified that all monasteries should have a secret, strong and safe prison for holding “rebels, disturbers of the peace, the

121. “et communi frater ille corporalem disciplinam acriter patiatur, et in grauis culpe satisfactione esse iubeatur. Qui accepta disciplina uestitus atque cinctus, cultellum suum ibi deponent, caput suum capitio cooperiat, et cum summo silentio ad locum huic negotio ordinatum pergat, precedente fratre illo, qui clauem ipsius loci seruat. Tunc abbas provideat unum de senioribus, cui eum custodiendum secure possit committere, qui eum ad horas ducere, et post horas ad locum suum debeat eum reducere. Qui senior post capitulum secreto ab abbate inquirat quo ordine frater ille uiuat, et quid, aut qua hora comedere debeat.” David Knowles and Christopher Brooke, eds., *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc*, trans. by David Knowles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) (henceforth cited as *Lanfranc, Constitutions*), 148-9.

122. Antonia Gransden, ed., *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1973), 17.

propertied, incontinent, or or those convicted of theft or conspiracy.”¹²³ The customary of Eynsham, on the other hand, stipulated that, while serious faults should be punished with imprisonment, certain crimes, notably sodomy or heresy, could even warrant expulsion from the monastery.¹²⁴ Similarly, Westminster Abbey’s customary specified that, if a monk had slipped into fornication and the crime was publicly known, then he should be beaten with sticks and expelled from the monastery.¹²⁵ And likewise, the customary of the great female Brigittine monastery, Syon Abbey, considered sexual misconduct, called the “fleschly syn,” among the the “most greuous faults” which also included apostasy, murder and sacrilege. Under conviction of one of these crimes, the customary ordered that the nun be “led to the pryson in the whiche sche shal abyde tyl sche be very repentaunte.”¹²⁶

In other examples, penance for sexual misconduct involved some sort of public shaming, but stopped short of expulsion or imprisonment. The customary of St. Augustine’s abbey, for example, which actually provides a definition for incontinence as a “voluntary lapse of the flesh” (*lapsu carnis voluntario*), suggests

if any monk of our congregation, with the bridle of modesty broken, God forbid, is convicted of incontinence, he loses the stall which he held in the convent in posterity. Let him never celebrate the major mass in choir, nor from that point should external administration be entrusted to him.¹²⁷

123. “Item statuimus, ut de cetero maliolis et fugitiuis via nocendi artius precludatur, quod in singulis monasteriis locus secretus, firmus et tutus celerius provideatur in quo rebelles, pacis perturbatores et incorrigibiles, proprietarii, incontinentes vel de furto seu de conspiracione conuicti firmiter et districte ad arbitrium prioris de consilio trium uel quatuor seniorum et saniorum de conuentu sub certa custodia teneantur.” Salter, 44.

124. Antonia Gransden, ed., *The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Eynsham in Oxfordshire* (Siegburg: F. Schmitt, 1963), 90-1.

125. Edward Maunde Thompson, ed., *Customary of the Benedictine Monasteries of Saint Augustine, Canterbury and Saint Peter, Westminster*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1904), 2:231-2.

126. Aungier, 261-2.

127. “si quis nostrae congragacionis monachus, pudiciciae rupto freno, quod absit, de cetero super incontinencia convincatur, stallum perdat in posterum quod habuit in conventu. Numquam celebret missam maiorem in choro, nec administracio extrinseca sibi ex tunc aliquatenus committatur.” Thompson, *Customary of the Benedictine Monasteries of Saint Augustine, Canterbury and Saint Peter, Westminster*, 1:41-2, 151.

Although this penance was noted as “in posterum,” the customary allowed for the abbot to intercede and remove the sanctions if he judged that the monk in question was now contrite of heart and humble in his work (*cordis contritio et humilitas operis*).

Of course, it is difficult to know definitively whether any of these consuetudinary stipulations was carried out in practice. Certainly, there are no examples from the visitation records examined for this study which would correspond to some of the more extreme punishments suggested by the customaries, such as expulsion. Nevertheless, this does not mean that customaries were not actively employed as a guide in penance allocation. As Julie Kerr has noted, while many passages in monastic customaries were formulaic, there is “evidence nonetheless that these were living texts that were modified and updated to suit the community’s needs” on a regular basis.”¹²⁸ Overall, the evidence from monastic customaries, as well as visitation records, suggests that there was a certain amount of leeway given to monastic leaders (as well as to bishops) for determining penance for sexual misconduct. This latitude would allow leaders the flexibility to take into account the individual circumstances of each case, and may help explain the great variation in the severity of sexual misconduct penance documented during visitations.

What about monastic leaders who got involved in sexual misconduct? What type of repercussions might they face? Theoretically, a bishop certainly had the power to remove a naughty abbot or abbess from power. And as David Knowles has argued, “an inflexible resolve to get rid of a scandalous superior must always be the acid test of a visitor’s sincerity.”¹²⁹ Alnwick did routinely include the threat of dismissal from office in his injunctions to abbots and abbesses.¹³⁰ However, in practice the threat seems to

128. Julie Kerr, *Monastic Hospitality: The Benedictines in England, c.1070-c.1250* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2007), 14-5.

129. Knowles, 2:213.

130. See for example Alnwick’s injunction to the abbot of Leicester Abbey in 1440, in which he warns the abbot not to sell any corrodies without his consent, “sub pena finalis priuacionis et perpetue amocionis vestri a vestra dignitate abbaciali.” Linc. Visit., 2:214-5; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols. 105d-106.

have been rarely acted upon. In total there are eleven examples in the visitation records examined for this study in which a bishop removed a leader of an abbey from power, and in no instance was this directly the result of sexual misconduct. Moreover, in every example, the bishop only removed the leader from temporal power (i.e. the ability to make financial decisions) and not from their actual status as abbot or abbess. Although in several instances, the leaders were also under suspicion of sexual misconduct, it was clearly other factors which led to their actual deposition. For example, John Longland suspended the abbot of Missenden, John Fox in 1530 from his office after the *inquisitio specialis* (briefly described above: §3.1.1 and 4.4) in which the abbot was accused of multiple crimes including fornication. Fox denied the charges of sexual misconduct, but he confessed to conducting business without the chapter's consent, mismanaging the abbey's finances and allowing his sister's daughter, a woman of known ill-repute, into the monastery in which she subsequently became pregnant. After listening to the abbot's confession and denials, Longland suspended him from office, "on account of the guilt and crime confessed by him and his own negligence."¹³¹ Thus, although the abbot's reputed fornication was clearly an issue during the *inquisitio*, Longland made it clear that it was his failure as a leader which was the real problem. A similar concern about an abbey's solvency led to Alnwick's partial dismissal of the leaders of Dorchester Abbey in 1441, and Catesby Priory and Daventry Priory in 1442.¹³² Thus, a sexually active but good leader, whether an abbot or abbess, might risk some form of censure or condemnation from the bishop, but was very unlikely to lose their office as a result.

Ultimately, the consequences of sexual misconduct were not particularly severe for a 'naughty nun' or 'promiscuous monk.' Although the ecclesiastical discourse treated

131. "propter culpam et delictum alias per eum apud acta confessatum ac negligentiam suam." I have adjusted slightly Thompson's translation here for readability. Linc. Visit. 1517-1531, 3:25; LAO, MS V/j/9, fol.78.

132. Linc. Visit., 2: 50, 64, 72; LAO, MS V/j/1, fols. 89d-89, 95, 112.

fornication seriously – particularly fornication with a nun – bishops were confronted with a number of competing interests when deciding what to do with a case of sexual misconduct. First, a bishop was concerned about scandal and making too much of an individual case risked spreading scandal. As Richard Helmholz has demonstrated, a similar concern in episcopal courts allowed some fornication cases to remain unpunished lest the punishment itself augment the scandal. Second, a bishop was strictly bound by canon law procedure in terms of *inquisitio* and punishment. Without affirmative evidence, which would always be a rarity in sexual cases, a popular or powerful monk or nun could certainly expect to clear their name as a matter of course via compurgation. This is not to suggest that there were not other (less easily measured) social consequences for ‘naughty nuns’ and ‘promiscuous monks.’ Certainly, the readiness with which many monks and nuns would inform on their brethren to bishop during visitations, suggests that sexually active monks or nuns could hardly expect widespread acceptance of their activities.

CHAPTER 5

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND THE DISSOLUTION

How long have you cried: “monks, priests, have too much”? How long have we all prayed: “God send the King such counsel that one day he may see goods that were evil spent turned into a better use”?¹

Richard Morison, *A Lamentation in which is showed what Ruin and Destruction cometh of Seditious Rebellion*, 1536

5.1 INTRODUCTION

ON January 15th 1538, the Augustinian priory of Westacre and all its possessions were surrendered to the crown as part of the English Dissolution of Monasteries. The canons themselves were given small pensions and told to leave. It was the final chapter for a priory which had once been a significant monastic success story. Founded in the late twelfth century, Westacre had grown quickly to become the richest house of regular canons in East Anglia and attracted the patronage of some of the leading merchant families of nearby Lynn and Norwich.² However, in the early

1. Morison, 93; G.R. Elton described Richard Morison as “the man who wielded far and away the best propagandist pen in Henrician England.” G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 199. A close associate of Cromwell, Morison wrote numerous works in support of Henry VIII’s policies toward the Church throughout the 1530s. This piece was produced in reaction to the Lincolnshire uprising of October 1536, a brief popular revolt against the Dissolution and prelude to the larger Pilgrimage of Grace uprising in the North. On Morison, see generally Berkowitz (ed.), *op. cit.*, 19-84; C. R. Bonini, “Lutheran influences in the early English Reformation: Richard Morison re-examined,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 64 (1973): 206–24.
2. Jessopp, *Visitations of Norwich*, xxxi; *VCH, Norfolk*, 2:402-4.

sixteenth century, several visitations by Richard Niche, the bishop of Norwich, revealed that the priory was beginning to struggle with debt and financial mismanagement. During the visitations, there were also whisperings of two separate scandals. The first one may have been nothing – in 1514 there were suspicions that the prior was spending too much time with the wife of one of the priory’s servants.³ The bishop ordered that the servant and his wife move away from the priory for the sake of appearances. The second scandal was more serious and came to light during a subsequent visitation by the bishop in 1526. According to the summary of Niche’s visitation, one of the canons, John Barbour, was accused of committing sodomy with a boy (*puer masculus*).⁴ Unfortunately, there is no record of what happened as a result of the accusation and the bishop’s subsequent injunction did not mention it at all.

However, even with these financial problems and scandals, the overall state of the priory seemed to be improving in the years just prior to the Dissolution. By 1532, the date of the last episcopal visitation, the priory was out of debt and in good repair. The canons reported *omnia bene* – all is well.⁵ However, the priory’s final suppression six years later was somewhat more ignoble. Prior to its surrender, a visitation by Dissolution agents in November 1535 had uncovered shocking accusations. The prior, William Wyngfeld, was accused of being incontinent and was said to have confessed to partaking in ‘voluntary pollutions,’ that is, masturbation. Another canon, Richard Cobbes was said to have been incontinent with as many unmarried women as married ones (*cum diversis feminis tam conjugata quam solute [sic]*). Richard Halle admitted to fornicating with two women and confessed himself to be a committed sodomite. Nine other canons also confessed to

3. “Item quod fama laborat publica priorem suspectum frequentare consortium uxoris Johannis Smyth.” *Visitations of Norwich*, 102; Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol.27.

4. “D. J. Barbour, commissit crimen sod. cum puero masculo et deprehensus erat in delicto per seculares et sepius fuit detectus super hujusmodi crimine.” *Visitations of Norwich*, 250; Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fol.45.

5. *Visitations of Norwich*, 250; Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fol.45.

voluntary pollutions. In total, thirteen canons were labelled incontinent in the report, representing 76% of the priory.⁶ A few days after the surrender of Westacre in 1538, one of Cromwell's agents wrote:

As for Westacre, what falsehood in the prior and convent, what bribery, spoil, and ruin contrived by the inhabitants it were long to write; but their wrenches, wiles, and guiles shall nothing [of] them prevail.⁷

Supporters of the 'decline narrative' could find no better example than the story of Westacre – a formerly proud and respected religious institution which slowly decayed into a shadow of its former self. In the fall of 1535, problematic monasteries just like Westacre showed up again and again in the reports of the state visitors. Their conclusions were clear. The 'naughty nuns' and 'promiscuous monks' had taken over. Only a Dissolution could resolve the problems.

Certainly, a segment of Tudor society thought this to be true. During the early sixteenth century, vocal critics of the monastic *status quo* began to grow louder. Some, such as Cardinal Wolsey advocated reform of the institution.⁸ Others, particularly members of the growing evangelical groups, such as Richard Morison, called for more

6. PRO, SP 1/102, fol. 111v.

7. LP, XIII, pt.1:35 (102).

8. Wolsey made several attempts at monastic reform including his ill-fated proposals to the Benedictine order in 1519, discussed at the outset of chapter one. A 1528 papal bull had even given Cardinal Wolsey the power to suppress smaller houses with less than six inmates, or consolidate those of less than twelve inmates with larger houses. However, even without this mandate, Wolsey had already been dissolving some small houses on his own accord. Littlemore Priory, for instance, which had experienced a number of scandals in the early sixteenth century (see §3.1.2) was dissolved by Wolsey in 1524. *VCH, Oxford*, 2:77. Although Wolsey was clearly invested in reforming the English Church, recent scholarship has emphasized that his commitment was to the 'royal prerogative' above all else. Peter Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of Cardinal Wolsey* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1990), 49. Nevertheless, as Benjamin Thompson has pointed out, his motivation was complex and even though his will 'half-hearted', had he survived, the events of the 1530s might have taken a different course. Thompson, "Monasteries, Society and Reform," 168.

radical reformation or even whole-scale Dissolution.⁹ Over the summer and fall of 1535, and winter of 1536, agents of the crown made an unprecedented state visitation of the monasteries of England – visiting at least 85% of the houses.¹⁰ The reports from these visitations, some of which survive in the infamous *Compendium Compertorum*, made a damning indictment of sixteenth-century monasticism.¹¹

In the *Compendium*, the pattern found at Westacre is repeated *ad nauseam*. House after house was found to be filled with confessed sodomites and incontinent monks or nuns. Indeed, the ‘evidence’ from these visitations laid the foundation for one of the most enduring myths of the Dissolution – that the religious were sexually promiscuous. In all, approximately 31% of the monastic population of Norwich were labelled as guilty of a crime (mostly sexual ones) and only one house did not report any sexual crimes at all.¹² Although the exact connection between the *Compendium* and the Suppression Act of 1536 has been the subject of some debate, most historians acknowledge its usefulness

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9. In addition to the previously cited critiques of Morison and Thomas Fish (see above n.1 and §1.1), see also, for example, Sir Francis Bigod who argued that monasteries should be stripped entirely of their wealth so that “within a while peradventure they may be good men.” A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558* (Oxford: University Press, 1982), 73. A number of other examples of anti-monastic evangelical writing are also discussed in Kaartinen, 8, 55, 80, and 95; and Hoyle, 281. While not numerically great, many of these evangelicals held positions of power and influence in Henry VIII’s government. Ryrie, 5-6.
 10. Until recently, many historians were sceptical that the state commissioners actually visited this many monasteries. See for example R. W. Dixon, *History of the Church of England from the Abolition of the Roman Jurisdiction* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1878), 325; Woodward, 32. More recently, however, Anthony Shaw has demonstrated convincingly that the visitations were actually quite widespread. Using newly discovered evidence from an overlooked manuscript, Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 111, Shaw has been able to re-construct much of the itinerary of the state visitors. Shaw, 32, 427-51.
 11. The *Compendium Compertorum* survives as a single manuscript housed at the National Archives: PRO, SP 1/102. An imperfect summary and partial transcription may be found in LP, X:137-44 (364); and also, in Jessopp, “Norfolk Monasteries,” 444-9. Shaw has constructed a corrected summary of the crimes contained in the *Compendium*. See Shaw, 446-51. The manuscript consists of two parts – one concerning visitations in the diocese of Norwich, the other in the archdiocese of York. These two sections are commonly referred to as the Norwich and Northern *Compendium*, respectively.
 12. *ibid.*, 344. The only house which reported no sexual crimes was Langley, a Premonstratensian abbey. See PRO, SP 1/102, fol. 112v.

as propaganda in support of the Dissolution.¹³ By April of that year, Parliament had approved the first wave of the suppressions: houses with incomes of less than £200 a year were to be forfeited to the crown. Two years later, the Dissolution was also expanded to the larger wealthier houses. By the end of 1540, it was all over.

While accusations of sexual misconduct were only one aspect of the Dissolution narrative, they formed an important part and have subsequently entered into collective mythology surrounding the event. This chapter will explore the connection between sex and the Dissolution in more detail. In particular, it will examine two principal questions: First, was sexual misconduct actually on the rise at the time of the Dissolution? Certainly, the state visitations presented this case. On the face of it, Westacre, for example, experienced a massive increase in cases of sodomy between 1532 and 1536. For centuries, the ‘decline narrative’ has posited that monastic discipline of all kinds was on a downward spiral in the years just prior to the Dissolution. But was it true? The second question to be addressed here is whether smaller and poorer houses were more susceptible to sexual misconduct. The prelude to the 1536 “Act for the Dissolution of the Lessor Monasteries” certainly makes this case, stating that “manifest synne, vicyous

13. A number of historians have questioned whether Parliament was made aware of the contents of the *Compendium*. Gasquet felt that the connection could not be ascertained. Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*, 101. Dixon argued that since the *Compendium* was written in Latin it would have been inaccessible to many members of Parliament – although he provides no evidence to support this. Dixon, 352. Knowles, on the other hand, thinks that “very probably selections of the *comperta* were read out” in Parliament. Knowles, 3:291. More recently, Shaw has presented a strong case that evidence from the *Compendium* was used in the production of the act. In his analysis, Shaw suggests that there is evidence that the northern portion of the *Compendium* originally existed as a booklet. Shaw also compared the watermark of the *Compendium* to that of a contemporary draft of a Parliamentary bill (SP SP 6/ 1, fos. 123-128) which suggests a connection. Moreover, a comparison between the Northern and Norwich portions of the *Compendium* suggests the latter was a working draft, while the former was a clean version meant to circulate. Both the northern portion of the *Compendium* and the Parliamentary bill seem to have been written by the same scribe – Robert Warmington, likely in March, 1536. Shaw concludes “although historians call both the Norwich diocese and northern documents *Compendium Compertorum*, using the same name is confusing. They are not the same type of document at all: the Norwich diocese *Compendium* is essentially an enclosure accompanying a personal letter to Cromwell, the northern *Compendium* is an official exhibit.” Shaw, 386-406, 455-57.

carnall and abhomynable lyvyng, is dayly used and com̄ytted comonly in such lytell and smalle Abbeyes Pryoryes.”¹⁴. To answer these questions, this chapter will examine evidence for monastic sexual misconduct found by state visitors during the 1535/6 visitations contained in the *Compendium Compertorum*. In particular, I will compare the format and language of the *Compendium* to episcopal visitation records, and how sexual accusations were recorded in each. Next, I will compare the sexual misconduct rates found in the *Compendium* to the rates found during episcopal visitations in the half century prior to the Dissolution. Finally, I will discuss the effect of poverty and monastery size on sexual misconduct accusations.

5.2 SEXUAL MISCONDUCT FREQUENCY OVER TIME

While the monastic decline narrative presupposes increased sexual misconduct toward the end of the Middle Ages, actual evidence to support this claim is slight. As presented in chapter one, prior to the widespread adoption of episcopal record keeping and visitation reports beginning in the thirteenth century, there were very few recorded ‘promiscuous monks’ or ‘naughty nuns’. Consequently, if one compares the corpus of earlier monastic sources (consisting primarily of naturally positive ones such as saints’ *vitae*) to the copious documentary sources available for the later periods – the answer is clear – ‘naughty nuns’ and ‘promiscuous monks’ were on the rise toward the end of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, there is not a broad corpus of visitation reports to test this hypothesis over a wide range of time. However, the diocese of Lincoln provides a useful basis of comparison in this regard since the records used for this study stretch over a century and encompass many of the same houses. Alnwick, Atwater or Longland recorded accusations of sexual misconduct in a total of twenty-six different monastic houses (see table 5.1).

14. HOL, 27 Henry VIII, Roll of Parliament, No. 18 (27 Henry VIII, c. 28); Statutes of the Realm, 3:575.

Table 5.1: Lincoln Monastic Houses with Sexual Misconduct, 1430-1530

	# of sexual misconduct accusations		
	Alnwick (1436-1449)	Atwater (1517-20)	Longland (1525-31)
Bold = common visitations			
Ankerwyke Priory (FB)	0	1	na
Bardney Abbey (MB)	3	0	0
Caldwell Priory (MA)	na	1	0
Canons Ashby (MA)	1	0	0
Catesby Priory (FC)	3	0	0
Daventry Priory (MB)	1	0	na
Dorchester Abbey (MA)	12	0	3
Eynsham Abbey (MB)	1	0	na
Flamstead Priory (FB)	na	na	2
Godstow Abbey (FB)	2	0	na
Greenfield Priory (FC)	na	0	3
Humberstone abbey (MT)	2	0	0
Huntingdon Priory (MA)	9	0	0
Kirby Bellars Priory (MA)	0	2	0
Kyme Priory (MA)	1	na	0
Leicester abbey (MA)	1	0	1
Littlemore Priory (FB)	3	3	na
Markby Priory (MA)	3	0	0
Missenden Abbey (MA)	na	0	4
Newnham Priory (MA)	3	na	0
Nocton Park Priory (MA)	1	na	0
Northampton, St.James abbey (MA)	na	na	2
Nutley Abbey	2	0	na
Peterborough Abbey	3	2	na
St. Neot's Priory	2	0	0
Stamford, St. Michael's priory	3	na	na
Total	56	9	15
<i>Common Visitations</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>

Key: na = not applicable / visited, MB = Male Benedictine, MA = Male Augustinian,
BT = Male Tiron, FC = Female Cistercian, FB = Female Benedictine

Direct comparison between the three Lincoln bishops shows that the rate of sexual misconduct accusations declined approximately 84% from Alnwick's high of fifty-six accusations in the early fifteenth century, to Atwater's nine accusations nearly a century later. Then the rate increased again slightly under Bishop Longland in the 1530s to fifteen accusations. However, Longland's rate still represents a decrease of approximately 73% from the time of Alnwick. The possibility of an overall decrease becomes more persuasive when one compares the rates of sexual misconduct in the houses which the bishops visited in common. There are only ten abbeys in which this can be done and in most there was a significant decrease from the time of Alnwick to Longland. Indeed, many of Longland's visitations were at abbeys which had much higher rates of misconduct under Alnwick. For instance, when Alnwick visited Dorchester Abbey in March of 1441 and then again in 1445, he encountered a total of twelve accusations of sexual misconduct. However, Atwater's visitation of the abbey in 1517 turned up no sexual misconduct, while Longland's visitation of 1530 found just three accusations. The rate of change within common abbeys was an 89% drop between Alnwick and Longland. Thus, it is indeed possible that "promiscuous monks" and "naughty nuns" were in decline on the eve of the Dissolution.

Let's imagine instead that the visitations of Atwater and Longland represent a momentary drop in an otherwise upward trend of sexual misconduct in monasteries which had begun centuries earlier. However, there are too few visitation records which include houses reporting *omnia bene* before the fifteenth century to make direct comparison possible (see §2.3.3) Nevertheless, there are a few examples which might, on the surface, suggest that sexual misconduct was less common in earlier periods. One such comparison is with the English Cluniac visitations of 1262-79.¹⁵ These records are interesting in a

15. Printed: G. F. Duckett, ed. *Visitations and Chapters-General of the Order of Cluni* (London: n.p., 1893)

number of ways. Male Cluniac houses, like the Cistericans, had exemption from episcopal oversight and visitation. They were subject to visitations conducted by members of their own order nominated at the annual General Chapter held in Cluny. The Cistercians had a similar system of internal visitation, although there are few surviving records from them. For England there are only two extant Cisterican examples, a visitation of Warden Abbey in 1492 which included two cases of sexual misconduct and one apostate, and a visitation of Thame Abbey, in which the abbot was accused of “excessive familiarity” with certain boys boarding at the monastery.¹⁶ Likewise, the English Cluniac houses also have few surviving examples of this type of internal reform and management. Naturally, therefore, the Cluniac visitations between 1262-79 are extremely valuable.

The actual visitation records themselves do not survive, however, the resolutions of the chapter which were based upon them do and these resolutions give summary states of most of the houses visited, including many of those which did not record any problems (*omnia bene*).¹⁷ Out of twenty-two different houses, there were only four recorded cases of sexual misconduct at a total of three monasteries.¹⁸ This gives a sexual misconduct rate of approximately 14% in thirteenth-century English Cluniac monasteries which is considerably lower than the rate of 39% found in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century monasteries of Lincoln and Norwich. These numbers seem even lower when one considers that only four Cluniac monks out of an approximate monastic population of 414 were accused, which equates to an individual sexual misconduct rate of less than 1%.¹⁹ This

16. Knowles, 3:33-4, 70.

17. Duckett, 5.

18. The houses in question are Thetford (1276), St. Clare (1279) and Farley (1279). See *ibid.*, 18, 27.

19. The Cluniac visitations summaries, as a matter of course, normally include the numerical population of each house which did fluctuate somewhat between visitations. The highest possible population based on these numbers would be 391 monks. There were also four houses which did not have any population numbers recorded during the visitations and for these I used the numbers compiled from other sources by Knowles and Hadcock to get a rough estimate. The houses and population estimates in question are Monk-Bretton (13), Kerswell (6) and St. Clears (2), and St. James of Exeter (2). Knowles and Hadcock, 96-98, 100.

rate is much less than the sexual rates found two centuries later by Alnwick (4.95%), Atwater (2.48%) or Nicke (6.48%).

However, given the very sparse details provided by the Cluniac records, it is difficult to read too much into them. It is possible that suspected cases which were later purged by oaths or investigations did not make it into the final chapter resolutions. George Duckett argued that the records suggest that the primary concern of the Cluniac record-keepers was actually the overall financial condition of the English foundations and not the “domestic concerns” of convents. This is not to say that Cluniac visitations were any less thorough than episcopal visitations. As a statute of Abbot Yves II makes clear, their overall purpose was not very different:

Holy canons were established for the business of visitation, so that, among other things, the sanctity of religion, the unity of the brotherhood, honesty of character, and honour in spiritual and temporal matters may be preserved.²⁰

Nevertheless, the actual records which have survived are not equivalent to the later episcopal examples. Consequently, since the surviving chapter summaries of these visitations do not provide much detail with respect to monastic discipline, it is impossible to conclude that English Cluniac monks did actually have a lower sexual misconduct rate.

A study by John Tillotson on thirteenth-century Yorkshire nunneries provides another point of comparison to the later Lincoln and Norwich misconduct rates. In his examination of episcopal injunctions between 1286 and 1300 in the diocese of York, Tillotson found that five houses out of a total of twenty-five Yorkshire nunneries had problems with either sexual misconduct or apostasy (20%). However, Tillotson also found there to have

20. “Sacri canones ad id visitationis officium inter cetera statuerunt ut religionis sanctitas, fraternitatis unitas, morum honestas, et locorum tam in spiritualibus quam temporalibus honor, prout ad Dei honorem et laudem expedit, conserventur.” G. Charvin, ed., *Statuts, Chapitres Généraux et visites de l’Ordre de Cluny* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1965), 1:61. On the subject of Cluniac visitations, see generally Oberste, *Visitation und Ordensorganisation*.

been a sharp increase in accusations of sexual misconduct and apostasy after the turn of the century. Between 1300-1315, thirteen nuns at nine different nunneries were accused of sexual misconduct. At the same time, there were also seventeen cases of apostasy at eight houses. Combined, there were thirteen houses out of a total of twenty-five nunneries that had problems with either sexual misconduct or apostasy – an incident rate of 52% percent. Why the sudden increase? Tillotson suggests that the Scottish Wars of Independence may have had a destabilizing influence on the nunneries which could have been a contributing factor. However, he contends that the 1298 publication of *Periculoso* was far more significant in this regard. He argues that pressure from the central ecclesiastical authorities pushed bishops to fulfil their mandate of visitation more “assiduously” in the wake of the new legislation. Indeed, Tillotson shows that attempts were made to implement the papal mandate within English convents as early as 1299 and that, for a period, bishops attempted to enforce it literally. Thus, he concludes that the “appearance of a sudden rise in serious disciplinary problems is likely to have been created by the changing practices of the clerical bureaucracy in recording an archbishop’s activities in his diocese.”²¹ To further support this argument, Tillotson demonstrates that after the reforming spirit prompted by *Periculoso* had died down, there was a corresponding decrease in sexual misconduct. Indeed, between 1347 and 1540 there were only fifteen cases of sexual misconduct recorded amongst the female religious houses of Yorkshire - which is absolutely remarkable considering the rate recorded during a mere fifteen years after *Periculoso*.²² Tillotson’s study provides strong evidence that the rate of ‘recorded’ sexual misconduct depends largely on the individuals recording it. Different bureaucratic practices, personality differences and changing external pressures may account for the varying rates of sexual misconduct found between the records

21. Tillotson, “Visitation and reform,” 9-10.

22. Ibid., 19.

of different bishops, time periods and diverse orders. Still, like the Cluniac records, Tillotson's sources, which consisted of injunctions only, are problematic in comparison to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century visitations of Lincoln and Norwich since they do not record cases of "*omnia bene*."²³

Table 5.2: Comparison of Monastic Sexual Misconduct: Thirteenth-Century Normandy vs. Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Lincoln and Norwich

	Normandy (1248-1275) [†]	Lincoln and Norwich (1430-1530)*
Total monastics	2073	1959
Individuals accused of sexual misconduct	75	76
Percentage of whole	3.6	3.8

[†] Data is from Penelope D. Johnson. *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 123.

* See §3.2 n.25

Another interesting study in this regard was conducted by Penelope Johnson, who catalogued monastic sexual misconduct found in the register of Archbishop Eudes Rigaud in Normandy in the thirteenth century. Despite the fact that her study is based 200 years earlier than mine and in another country (which had not been under English rule for more than half a century when Eudes' visitations took place), the numbers she found for sexual misconduct were remarkably similar to mine. Out of an estimated monastic population of 2073 nuns and monks in thirteenth-century Normandy, Johnson found 75 individuals cited for sexual misconduct (3.6%).²⁴ This is almost identical to my own findings which were 76 individuals accused of sexual misconduct in Lincoln and Norwich between 1430-1530 out of a total of 1959 monastics (3.8%).²⁵ These numbers suggest

23. On the importance of *omnia bene*, see above §2.3.3

24. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 123.

25. These do not include Atwater's visitations since his records do not include enough data to estimate population. See §3.2 n.25.

that given a large enough sample size and a bishop interested in uncovering it, sexual misconduct is found at a predictable and consistent rate in monastic houses even when comparing the situation right before the Dissolution with the one during the so-called “Golden Age” of the medieval period, the splendid thirteenth century.

5.3 THE *Compendium Compertorum* AND CONFESSIONS OF SODOMY AND VOLUNTARY POLLUTIONS

One source, of course, which would seem to demonstrate clearly an upward momentum of sexual misconduct cases in English monasteries are the *comperta* from state visitations conducted from the summer of 1535 to February 1536 in the lead up to the Dissolution. Naturally, these records contained in the *Compendium* are quite suspect. Indeed, most historians, even many of those who fully espouse the decline narrative, have tended to dismiss these royal visitations as unreliable and have labelled them as propaganda orchestrated by Cromwell to justify the first suppression of monasteries.²⁶ To say that

26. George Coulton, for instance, described the evidence of Henry’s commissioners as “unsupported” and conceded that “the brutality of those agents is in many cases indefensible.” Coulton, *Ten Medieval Studies*, 89. However, in another work Coulton made it clear that the crimes contained in the *Compendium* were not entirely inconsistent with what one would expect from episcopal visitation records. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 4:690-702. Not surprisingly, Gasquet described the *comperta* as the “baseless judgements of men who came to report evil.” Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*, 352. Eileen Power called the *Compendium* “tainted” evidence and chose not to examine it for her hugely influential work, *Medieval English Nunneries*. Power, vii. Knowles considered all the visitors untrustworthy, but in particular, the commissioner, Richard Layton: “The present writer, after very prolonged reflection, bearing in mind Layton’s evident impurity of mind and confessed desire to please, would hesitate to give full credence to any accusation of his, however plausible or amusing it might be.” Knowles, 3:272. More recently, R.W. Hoyle called their methods “corrupt” and their *comperta* “worthless.” Hoyle, 295. In somewhat of a revisionist stance, Anthony Shaw has argued that although the political aims of the *Compendium* are clear, this does not mean that all the information it contains is invalidated. Shaw concedes that the inclusion of sexual crimes existed to “blacken the name of the religious.” However, other information it contains such as those desiring release from vows, debt and income was there for a purpose. According to Shaw, by focusing exclusively on the sexual crimes, historians have “damned the Visitors more than they deserve.” Shaw, 429-32.

these visitations were unprecedented is an understatement. Conducted by lay individuals appointed by Cromwell, the visitations were ambitious and widespread. In 1534, Parliament had authorized Thomas Cromwell to visit all of the monasteries of England – including formally exempt orders such as the Cistercians. Unfortunately, most of the findings from these visitations have not survived. For the first half of the visitations, there are sporadic letters written by the visitors, particularly Richard Layton and Thomas Legh, to Cromwell and others – many of which have been calendered in the *Letters and Papers* series. However, relatively speaking, the letters reveal little detail about the conditions the state visitors encountered in the monasteries. Consequently, little can be ascertained concerning many large and important dioceses such as Lincoln. The only actual *comperta* which survive from these visitations date from the late fall of 1535 and early winter of 1536 contained in the *Compendium Compertorum*. These *comperta* encompass monasteries in the archdiocese of York (known as the northern *Compendium*) and the diocese of Norwich (known as the Norwich *Compendium*). Obviously, it is the latter which is most useful for this study since we have the Norwich visitation records of Goldwell and Nicke for the decades preceding the Dissolution to which we can compare it.

However, a straight comparison of the *Compendium* with the Norwich episcopal visitations would be a mistake. First, only monasteries with problems are listed in the *Compendium*. This makes it impossible to get an overall misconduct rate since good houses were omitted from the record. Moreover, the *Compendium* is really just a summary of findings. Unlike episcopal visitation reports we cannot read any testimony, compare stories or understand the context of individual cases. Also, the *Compendium* is almost exclusively interested in recording sexual offences to the exclusion of anything else. There are a few notations of other crimes such as theft or financial misdealing, but these aspects are largely minimized. The sexual misconduct findings, on the other hand, are quite

shocking. If we compare these numbers to the earlier findings of sexual misconduct at the same monasteries by the Norwich bishops Nicke and Goldwell, the difference is significant.

Table 5.3: Comparison of Incontinent Rates found in houses visited by Goldwell, Nicke and Dissolution Agents - 1492-1536

Monastery	Goldwell	Nicke	<i>Compendium</i>
Blackborough nunnery (FB)	na	0	3
Beeston Priory (MA)	0	1	1
Bokenham Priory (MA)	1	0	3
Bromehill Priory (MA)	na	1	4
Coxford Priory (MA)	0	1	1
Crabhouse nunnery (FA)	na	1	4
Hickling Priory (MA)	0	1	6
Ingham Priory (MT)	0	0	2
Ixworth Priory (MA)	0	0	1
Norwich Priory - Cathedral	0	11	5
Pentney Priory (MA)	0	0	6
St. Benet at Holme Abbey (MB)	0	4	4
St. Faith's Priory (MB)	0	0	2
St. Olave's Priory (MA)	0	0	3
Thetford nunnery (FB)	0	0	1
Thetford Priory (MA)	0	1	4
Westacre Priory (MA)	0	1	13
Wymondham Abbey (MB)	0	4	4
Totals	1	26	67

As can be noted in table 5.3, there was a total of eighteen Norwich monasteries which were visited in common by at least one of the bishops (Goldwell or Nicke) as well as Cromwell's agents, and fifteen were visited by all three. Bishop Goldwell found only one case of sexual misconduct during his visitations. Nicke, on the other hand, uncovered twenty-six accusations of sexual incontinence.²⁷ However, as I discussed briefly in chapter three, Goldwell's numbers should be taken with a grain of salt since he did not make

27. The sole case was found at Bokenham Priory in 1492. *Visitations of Norwich*, 25; Bodl. Tanner MS 100, fol.34b.

nearly as many visitations as Nicke – only twenty-six visitations to Nicke’s 115. (see §3.10.) They did, however, roughly go to the same number of monasteries. But Nicke visited the same houses again and again – averaging 2.8 visits per monastery – making it much more likely he would turn up a case of sexual misconduct. Consequently, Goldwell’s low number may just be a result of the small sample size. Cromwell’s agents, on the other hand, reported a staggering sixty-seven cases of sexual incontinence and they also visited each monastery only once.

It is dramatic numbers such as these, coupled with the sparse details about the cases found in the *Compendium Compertorum*, which led many historians to dismiss the reports altogether. David Knowles also pointed out that the visitors expanded the use of the term sodomy and incontinence to apply to all sorts of crimes not formally covered by them. In particular, the state visitors began to record confessions of masturbation under the heading of incontinence or sodomy which they termed “voluntary pollutions.” This decision greatly bolstered the overall numbers of sexual misconduct in the *Compendium*. The ‘solitary vice’, as Knowles put it, was never recorded in normal episcopal visitations and it would have been uncanonical to do so.²⁸ Certainly, it was unprecedented with respect to monastic visitations. In the 315 visitations I examined for this study, along with numerous injunctions and mandates of inquisition, I could not find one example in which an accusation of masturbation was recorded by a bishop. The *Compendium*, however, is filled with notations about masturbation. Anthony Shaw has shown that the decision to expand the definition of incontinence to include masturbation was likely made at a meeting held in Winchester in September, 1535 which all the state visitors attended. While the state visitations had already been going on for a couple of months when the meeting took place, those contained in the *Compendium* date entirely from after this

28. Knowles does not explain why these questions would have been considered uncanonical. Knowles, 3:297.

meeting. If one compares the few *comperta* found in letters written by the visitors in the summer of 1535 to the *Compendium* visitations made in the fall – there is a remarkable contrast. While some cases of incontinence are noted in the visitors’ letters, there are no notations about “voluntary pollutions.” Moreover, as Shaw demonstrates, the tone of the letters prior to the Winchester meeting indicate an interest in broader issues of misconduct and reform. The visitations after September 1535 seem to be interested in one thing – finding as many incontinent and sodomitic monks and nuns as possible.²⁹

The format and layout of the *Compendium* is designed to emphasize these sexual crimes. For example, note how sexual crimes are recorded in the entry for Hickling Priory on fol. 112 of the *Compendium* which was visited by Thomas Legh sometime between November and December 1535.³⁰ Under the name of the monastery, “Ikelyng”, there is a list of the six canons resident at the Priory at the time of the visitation. Beside each name, there is a notation of a crime of which they are accused and all of these are captured under the general heading – “incontinence” on the left. Thus, Robert Walsam, Richard Leke and Robert Bestwyke are noted “with married women” (*cum conjugata*). On the other hand, the next three names, Robert Allen, John Michell and Matthew Wood, are labelled as “through voluntary pollutions” (*per pollutiones voluntarias*). Yet, all six canons (both the adulterers and the masturbators) are captured under the same heading of incontinence on the left. There are numerous other examples which do exactly the same thing. In fact, in a number of cases, the incontinence heading was applied when there were only masturbation confessions and nothing more serious. For instance, four monks at Wymondham confessed to voluntary pollutions which were the only crimes

29. Shaw, 335-41.

30. Shaw dates this visitation sometime after November 11, 1535. *ibid.*, 432. See figure 5.1. The entry for Hickling is three quarters down the page. See also figure 5.2 which is my partial transcription of the entry.

noted at the priory. All four were labelled incontinent.³¹

The Norwich portion of the *Compendium* was completed in the late fall of 1535. Anthony Shaw has shown that by the time the Northern *Compendium* was made several months later, the term sodomy was being used broadly in the same way that incontinence had been during the Norwich visitations.³² Thus, a monastery with several confessed masturbators would all be captured under the heading of sodomy. There seems to be no question, as Shaw points out, that by the fall of 1535, the visitors were going out of their way to collect evidence of sexual scandal.³³ Thus, when the results of the *Compendium* were likely circulated to Parliament during the debate about the suppression of monasteries in the spring of 1536 – one could say with confidence, that the monasteries of England were filled with confessed sodomites.

Were any of the accusations true? On this point historians have traditionally been divided. Although historians such as George Coulton have conceded that the *Compendium* was manipulated for propaganda purposes, they pointed out that the crimes themselves were not inconsistent with the types which might be found in earlier visitation records.³⁴ Knowles, on the other hand, allowed the possibility that some of the accusations were true, but suggested that the state visitors likely considered any sexual misconduct – even

31. PRO, SP 1/102, fol.112v.

32. Anthony Shaw points out that, in fairness, the inclusion of masturbation under the term sodomy is not entirely inconsistent with the Church's usage of the term. As evidence, Shaw shows that some confessional manuals contemporaneous to the state visitations did loosely associate masturbation with sodomy. Shaw, 338-41. Certainly, medieval canonists used the word *sodomia* in a multitude of ways. Mark Jordan describes *sodomia* as a "medieval artefact" and argues that the term only began to be used during the eleventh century. However, Jordan is resistant to the idea that any one definition of *sodomia* could encompass the varied medieval usage of the word. Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1-9. At the very least, as Jacqueline Murray presents, for medieval canonists the category of sodomy came to include all manner of 'unnatural' sexual activity. Murray, "Twice Marginal and Twice Invisible," 199-200. However, to a certain extent, whether or not masturbation could 'technically' be included under the heading sodomy is a moot point. Medieval bishops did not record it during their visitations. This was an innovation of the state visitations.

33. Shaw, 345-8.

34. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, 4:690-702.

Figure 5.2: Partial Transcription of SP 1/102, fol.112

Ikelyng	
Incōtinen̄	Robtus Walsh ^m cū cōjugata
	Ricardus Leke cum cōjugata
	Robertus Bestwyke cū cōjugata
	Robertus Allē per polluc' voluntar'
	Johanes Mychell p polluc'
	Mateus p polluc' Wood p polluc'

something which had taken place far in the past which had previously been confessed and/or dealt with in terms of penance – as a count against the present. Consequently, “to add all ancient, recent and present delinquencies into a single consolidated total is to give a wholly misleading impression.”³⁵ More recently, however, the underlying validity of the *Compendium* has received new support from Shaw. According to Shaw, although sexual misconduct crimes had clearly been massaged in the *Compendium*, “there is every likelihood that, in their Act Book of Visitation, compertes were recorded in some relation to what they found.”³⁶ Thus, the propagandising of the *Compendium* was limited to the re-framing of accusations of masturbation to bolster the overall incontinence and sodomy numbers – but the original accusations were grounded in truth. Shaw suggests that the corpus of letters written by the state visitors to Cromwell and others, demonstrates they had been very detailed in every other respect with the visitations. Moreover, as Shaw argues “why should the Visitors lie in their *comperta*, knowing that the only people to

35. Knowles, 3:298.

36. Shaw, 352.

see their reports would be Cromwell and the king, and well aware that any adjustments could be made in London to a pattern determined by the policy makers?”³⁷

Obviously, given the lack of specific details in the *Compendium*, it is impossible to determine definitively either way. However, other contemporary sources complicate our understanding of the troubled monasteries depicted in the *Compendium* by offering contradictory evidence about their moral state. A good example is Crabhouse nunnery, a small Augustinian priory on the banks of the Ouse River near the village of Wiggshall for which we have two damning statements and two positive ones over twenty-two years. In the early sixteenth century, Nicke had visited the abbey twice, in 1514 and 1520. During his first visit, he had discovered that one of the nuns, Agnes Smith, had given birth to a child. The prioress complained that the nuns were disobedient, and several nuns testified to the mismanagement of resources and buildings in need of repair. A total of eight nuns were living in the priory. When Nicke visited the priory again six years later, the situation was apparently much improved with just a single notation recorded about the house: “all is well, according to their means” (*omnia bene, juxta facultates*). However, when Henry VIII’s commissioner, Thomas Legh, visited the priory sixteen years later, he described a very different place. According to the *Compendium*, Legh found four nuns living in the priory and all four were labelled as incontinent. All four women were said to have children, including the prioress, Margeria Studefeld. One of the nuns, Cecilia Barnesley, was said to have given birth to two children – one from a priest, the other from a layman (*unam ex presbytero alteram ex uno laico*).³⁸ Writing to Cromwell in November 1535, Legh described Crabhouse as a “lewd nunnery” and worried that the nuns were attempting to alienate all their property.³⁹ Indeed, the nuns of Crabhouse,

37. Shaw, 16.

38. PRO, SP 1/102, fol. 114v.

39. PRO, SP 1/99, fol.37r; LP, IX:271 (808).

along with other monasteries, seemed to suspect some sort of Dissolution was coming. In March 1536, just prior to the passage of the Act of Suppression, commissioners Richard Southwell and Robert Hogen wrote to Cromwell: “The nunneries also of Blackeboroughe, Sholdham, and Crabhowse make away with all they can, and make such pennyworths, as they are not able to pay any part of their debts, so that all the goods will be dispersed.”⁴⁰

After the Act suppressing the smaller houses came into effect in the Spring of 1536, the government sent a second wave of Suppression commissioners to visit each house in question again. Their mandate was to make a final valuation of the monasteries’ assets and to note the pension requirements for the former inmates. They were also instructed to enquire into various other particulars of the house including its moral state. On Crabhouse, they reported that the house was in good repair with total goods valued at £15, and the lead and bells of the church valued at a further £40. On the nuns themselves, they wrote “ther name ys goode.”⁴¹ Moreover, in their rough notes, under the names of all four nuns, they wrote the note: “good name and manner of life” (*bona fama et conversatio*).⁴² Shaw argues that the reports of the Suppression commissioners on the moral repute of the houses should not be taken seriously since their purpose was “to concentrate on the technical implementation of the Suppression Act, to which the ‘conversation’ of the religious was irrelevant.”⁴³ However, although their comments on the moral climate of each house are short, as the editor of the *VCH* points out, they “did not hesitate to give credence to scandal in three out of all the many religious houses of the diocese”⁴⁴ Obviously, the actual state of Crabhouse Priory will never be known

40. LP, X:220 (563).

41. PRO SP12/33/29; The commissioners’ reports are also transcribed in Jessopp, “Norfolk Monasteries,” 450-63; and Francis Aidan Gasquet, “Overlooked Testimonies to the Character of the English Monasteries,” *Dublin Review* 114 (1894): 245-77, 260-8.

42. PRO SP 5/3, fol.29, no.35. The report is part of a bundle of miscellaneous suppression documents relating to Crabhouse nunnery. The contents are described in LP, XII:116 (243)

43. Shaw, 344.

44. *VCH, Norfolk*, 2:410.

definitively – but it seems a little disingenuous to discount one set of state documents for another just because the former’s mandated purpose was different. Given the obvious hostile political climate which produced the *Compendium*, which no historian seriously disputes, it seems all the more important to consider all available primary sources when passing judgement on whether the nuns of Crabhouse (or any other house for that matter) were “lewd” or “goode.”

Table 5.4: Comparison of Incontinent Rates *without* Voluntary Pollutions

Monastery	Goldwell	Nicke	<i>Compendium</i>	<i>Compendium</i> without <i>v.p.</i>
Blackborough nunnery (FB)	na	0	3	3
Beeston Priory (MA)	0	1	1	1
Bokenham Priory (MA)	1	0	3	2
Bromehill Priory (MA)	na	1	4	4
Coxford Priory (MA)	0	1	1	1
Crabhouse nunnery (FA)	na	1	4	4
Hickling Priory (MA)	0	1	6	3
Ingham Priory (MT)	0	0	2	2
Ixworth Priory (MA)	0	0	1	0
Norwich Priory - Cathedral	0	11	5	2
Pentney Priory (MA)	0	0	6	3
St. Benet at Holme Abbey (MB)	0	4	4	1
St. Faith’s Priory (MB)	0	0	2	1
St. Olave’s Priory (MA)	0	0	3	0
Thetford nunnery (FB)	0	0	1	1
Thetford Priory (MA)	0	1	4	2
Westacre Priory (MA)	0	1	13	3
Wymondham Abbey (MB)	0	4	4	0
Totals	1	26	67	33

v.p. = Voluntary Pollutions.

However, despite the obvious manipulation of the sexual misconduct recorded in the *Compendium*, Shaw is correct that the source has been discounted too readily by historians of the past. Indeed, one final piece of analysis lends some overall credibility to

the accusations contained in the *Compendium*. If one removes the cases of masturbation from the overall numbers of sexual misconduct, and only count the cases of sexual activity in which a partner was involved – which were the types of cases bishops had recorded during their visitations – then a very different pattern emerges (see table 5.4). In this analysis, the Norwich *Compendium* lists a total of thirty-three cases of actual sexual incontinence (i.e. incontinence with a partner). Interestingly, these numbers, on the whole, are not that far off from Nicke’s number of twenty-seven. If Nicke’s numbers are compared to the overall population of monks and nuns recorded during his visitations – something which is impossible for us to do with the *Compendium* since it only lists those who are accused – then only 6.48% of monastics were potentially sexually active and the vast majority (93%) were continent.⁴⁵ Now, it stands to reason that, if we could do the same comparison with the *Compendium* numbers, we would get a similar result. Thus, to a certain extent – although the data in the *Compendium* has clearly been subject to some manipulation – the overall numbers are not inconsistent with what we found for the episcopal visitations. This point leads us back to one of the central questions of this chapter – was sexual misconduct actually increasing during the later Middle Ages? While the results are far from conclusive, they do suggest that rather than increasing, sexual misconduct levels were relatively consistent during the last century prior to the Dissolution.

5.4 THE EFFECT OF MONASTERY INCOME AND SIZE ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ACCUSATIONS

As demonstrated in chapter one, the relationship between wealth or poverty to the supposed late medieval decline of English monasteries is complex and frequently contradictory.

45. The approximate population of monks and nuns in the monasteries visited by Richard Nicke was 348. For my methodology in calculating this number, see §3.2 n.25.

On one side, generations of English historians, epitomized by Gilbert Burnet, commonly derided late medieval monasteries as “houses abounding in wealth, and living at ease and in idleness.”⁴⁶ On the other, poverty and/or financial mismanagement are said to be the hallmarks of late medieval monastics – particularly female religious. As Knowles has remarked:

It has often been asserted in the past that financial distress, or inefficient administration, would alone have made some great readjustment necessary. It has no less often [been] held that the wealth of the monasteries, and their wasteful and luxurious habits, invited and justified confiscation.⁴⁷

This dichotomy was no less true for Tudor contemporaries. Thus, while some sixteenth-century critics such as Richard Morison railed against the supposed wealth of the monks, the first Suppression of Religious Houses Act in 1536 specifically cited that the “manifest synne, vicyous carnall and abhomynable lyvyng” were most common in smaller and poorer monasteries with incomes of less than £200.⁴⁸ Is either true? Was there any connection between the size and wealth of a monastery with its propensity for sexual misconduct?

At least with respect to the argument made in the preamble to the Act to Suppress Smaller Houses, most modern historians have been reluctant to agree. Geoffrey Elton, for instance, argued that the whole pretence of the Act that smaller houses were worse than larger ones was “hypocritical.”⁴⁹ G.W.O. Woodward insisted that the *Compendium* actually presented larger abbeys “in a worse light.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Joyce Youings argued that the evidence of the *Compendium* did “not bear out the creed which Henry and his advisers chose to adopt, namely that only the wealthier houses were worthy to continue.”⁵¹ S.E.

46. Burnet, 303.

47. Knowles, 3:241.

48. HOL, 27 Henry VIII, Roll of Parliament, No. 18 (27 Henry VIII, c. 28); Statutes of the Realm, 3:575.

49. G. R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (London: Methuen, 1974), 144.

50. Woodward, 31, 65.

51. Joyce A. Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), 43.

Lehmberg believed the *Compendium* showed that both sizes of houses were equally bad.⁵² Knowles, in his usual fashion, took middle ground and conceded that “some of the worst and most unjustifiable cases of decadence had in the past been found among the smaller houses.” However, he added that there is nothing in the state visitors’ letters or their *comperta* which could “justify the sharp division made in the preamble of the Act of Suppression.” Moreover, in Knowles’ judgement, the whole debate is ‘surreal’, since clearly “Cromwell had strong practical reasons for wishing to ruin one class of monastery while sparing the other.”⁵³ None of these scholars, however, provided any numerical or statistical evidence from the *Compendium* to back up their judgement. More recently Anthony Shaw did perform a detailed analysis on the findings in the *Compendium Compertorum* and calculated that the ‘crime rate’ in smaller and poorer houses was indeed much higher than in larger houses.⁵⁴ If Shaw is right, then the *Compendium* supported the premise of the first Act of Suppression – poorer houses were more sexually incontinent.

Although it is difficult to conclude that the conditions in small or poor houses cause sexual misconduct, some studies have suggested that the factors may be co-relational. For instance, Penelope Johnson compared the existence of ‘poverty’ to instances of sexual misconduct in her analysis of French monasteries during the thirteenth century, and concluded that there was a strong connection between them and that this was particularly true for female houses. According to Johnson’s criteria, a monastery was poor when its “total assets were less than the mean assets of all the houses of the same sex.” In her analysis, Johnson calculated that the mean debt for nunneries with sexual offences was £6 pounds, whereas in those houses without offences there were mean assets of £119. She concluded that the wealthier a convent was, the less likely it was to have instances

52. Stanford E. Lehmberg, *The Reformation Parliament 1529-1536* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 226.

53. Knowles, 3:295.

54. Shaw.

of sexual misconduct. In a footnote, she further states that she ran “two-, three-, and fourway multivariable statistical analysis” on her numbers and found a 13% correlation between involvement in sexual activity and living in a poor female house, compared to only a 6% correlation in male houses.⁵⁵ As explanation of these numbers, Johnson suggested “that poverty and its attendant daily miseries constituted the most potent force that drove monastics to substitute emotional and sexual satisfaction for the ordered monastic life.”⁵⁶

Unfortunately, however, Johnson does not show us the numbers or underlying data from which she calculated these conclusions. And although Johnson’s analysis on poverty and sexual misconduct is persuasive, her categorization criteria for rich and poor houses is problematic. The main sources for Johnson’s study are the impressive thirteenth-century visitation records of the archbishop of Rouen, Eudes Rigaud. In her economic analysis of the monasteries he visited, Johnson notes that the bishop commonly recorded the debt and income of each house. She further explains that

by subtracting money owed to a house from its assets and then finding the mean sum for all convents and all male monasteries visited by the archbishop, we can derive figures for the mean net worth of all the houses of women and of men.⁵⁷

The problem is how Johnson defines assets and income. Although Eudes Rigaud did frequently record debts and income for houses (the former more regularly than the latter), he very rarely made any mention of capital assets or cash reserves for houses. However, Johnson seems to equate income alone (after debt) as the “net worth” of a monastery which can sometimes lead to a skewed impression of the house’s relative wealth or penury.

55. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 122.

56. *Ibid.*, 129.

57. *Ibid.*, 219.

This is particularly true in situations when capital assets, such as woods, are sold resulting in a temporary (and one time) increase in a monastery's income.

For example, Johnson states that the Priory of Saint-Saens, a house which had significant problems with sexual misconduct over the years, had a “meager £26 pounds” as its mean assets.⁵⁸ However, Johnson does not give any of the underlying numbers for this calculation, and my own analysis of Eudes Rigaud's records does not support this number. The Priory of Saint-Saens was visited fifteen times by the archbishop between 1250 and 1269 (See table 5.5).⁵⁹ In nearly every visitation, the debt of the convent was noted which ranged from a low of £60 in 1250 to a high of £360 in 1260. Income was only recorded in four of the visitations, and another five visitations noted debts owed to the nuns from the sale of capital assets. The visitation of 1257 is particularly troublesome in this respect since two contradictory sets of numbers are given by Rigaud. Using Johnson's stated criteria, if we take the mean debt (£154) and subtract it from the mean income (£400), we are left with mean “assets” of £246. If we also include the debts owed to the nuns as assets, then the average increases to £346. The only way I can see how Johnson calculated her number of £26, is to have considered the instances in which no income was recorded, as meaning the nuns had literally no income to report at that time. The average income in that case would be £80 (plus £100 owed to the nuns). This number subtracted from the average debt of £154 would give an average for assets of £26. However, absence of income information should not be taken as evidence of no income.

This is not to suggest that the Priory of Saint-Saens was not poor – or that the high incomes reported certain years continued in the years for which no income was reported. Indeed, the visitation records provide other indications that the nunnery was indeed

58. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 120.

59. Rigaldus, *Regestrum Visitationum Archiepiscopi Rothomagensis*, 100, 140, 170, 273-4, 310, 338, 380, 418-9, 451, 481, 491, 522, 566, 598, 634.

Table 5.5: Visitations of Saint-Saens Priory by Archbishop Eudes Rigaud 1250-69

Year	inmates	debt	owed	income
1250	26	60	na	140
1252	24	na	na	na
1253	17	na	na	na
1257†	16	212	na	270
		234	26	140
1258	14	68	na	na
1259	15	na	na	na
1260	16	350	na	450
1261	16	240	na	350
1262	17	160	160	na
1263	na	na	na	na
1264	17	80	95	na
1265	na	100	40	na
1266	18	100	na	na
1267	18	140	na	na
1269	17	100	180	na
Averages	18	£154	£100	£267 (£80)*

na = no information recorded.

† There are two different sets of numbers for the 1257 visitation. They are listed one after another in the record. It may represent a revision by the bishop's scribe as the second notation includes greater explanatory detail with respect to the breakdown of the income and debt.

* The second number represents the average income if one assumes that the years for which there is no information had no income.

suffering from poverty. In 1265, for instance, Rigaud noted that the nuns did not have enough food to last until harvest.⁶⁰ In several other visitations, the bishop was concerned that the nunnery's revenue was insufficient for them to accept any more novices.⁶¹ In 1260, Rigaud ordered that the nuns shut down one of Saint-Saens' cells, the priory of Saint Austreberte, and recall the two nuns living there due to their slim revenue.⁶²

60. Rigaldus, 522.

61. See for example, Rigaud's visitation of 1259 in which the nuns presented an agreement they had made with the local community to accept and veil the nieces of some of the nuns. The bishop was enraged, and tore up the agreement in front of the nuns, declaring that the prioress was inefficient in business. *ibid.*, 338.

62. *Ibid.*, 380.

However, Johnson's overall analysis and conclusion that poverty and sexual misconduct were co-relational for monks and nuns was predicated on her numerical determination of what constituted a poor house in terms of debt and income – not on an accounting of other poverty indicators. The monastery of Saint-Saens is the only instance in which Johnson demonstrates her methodology for determining poverty, and unfortunately, this methodology is problematic in this case. The existence of other poverty indicators, such as insufficient food or the dilapidation of buildings, are irrelevant in this instance since these were not part of her stated criteria. In my estimation, there is on the whole, insufficient information to determine with any accuracy the actual assets of Saint-Saens or any other monastery visited by Rigaud. Unfortunately, although Johnson's hypothesis is reasonable, these limitations weaken her conclusion that poverty and sexual misconduct were co-relational.

In an earlier published study, I also found a possible connection between monastic poverty and sexual misconduct in the records of William Alnwick.⁶³ Moreover, like Johnson, I noted a stronger co-relationship of these factors in female houses. However, unlike the thirteenth-century records of Eudes Rigaud which formed the base of Johnson's study, Alnwick's records do not contain any notice of conventual income, only the presence of debt, and this alone is an unsatisfactory indication of the social conditions of monasteries. Indeed, debt can be good or bad. Indeed, indications suggest that many houses managed their debt well, using it to survive lean harvests and repair conventual buildings, something that Oliva also found in her work on the diocese of Norwich.⁶⁴ Similarly, a lack of debt does not mean that a nunnery is not poor or that the nuns did not begrudge their conditions. Thus, to compensate for the ambiguity of debt, I tracked when monks or

63. Christian Knudsen, "Promiscuous Monks and Naughty Nuns: Poverty, Sex and Apostasy in Later Medieval England," in *Poverty and Prosperity: The Rich and the Poor in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Anne Scott and Cindy Kosso (Belgium: Brepols, 2012).

64. Oliva, 96-7.

nuns actually complained about their ‘poverty’ to the bishop. This approach provides a better indication of the environment than debt alone, since it speaks to the perception of their financial condition held by the nuns themselves. Even if a nunnery were rich in comparison to its neighbours, if the nuns themselves felt they were living in intolerable conditions, then for all intents and purposes, they were ‘poor’. Thus, by using these complaints as an indicator, I attempted to determine which houses considered themselves poor and compared this list of ‘poor’ houses to those with and without documented instances of sexual misconduct or apostasy.

Although the female houses visited by Alnwick were only slightly more often in debt than the male houses (55% of the female monasteries compared to 46% of the male ones), when one compares debt along with recorded complaints about poverty, dilapidated buildings, and/or financial mismanagement, a more significant difference emerges. In this analysis, 75% of the female monasteries had some sort of ‘undesired’ financial problems, whereas only 54% of the male ones did. These financial problems also seem to have had a strong connection to the numbers of accusations of sexual misconduct and apostasy, and this was particularly true for the women. While the percentage of male accusations occurring in these houses is high, 71%, 100% of the female accusations occurred in ‘poor’ houses. Female houses visited by Alnwick with none of these financial factors, that is, no debt or complaints concerning poverty, also had absolutely no sexual misconduct or apostasy accusations. This evidence would seem to suggest that poverty was co-related to sexual misconduct in monastic houses. However, my analysis does not quantify poverty numerically. A monastery could be relatively wealthy in terms of income or assets and still feel ‘poor’. The 1536 Act of Suppression associated specific income levels with moral failings, and not perceptions of it. My earlier analysis, on the other hand, more aptly connected sexual misconduct to dissatisfaction with the religious life, not income levels.

Monks or nuns who complained about their conditions were, by definition, dissatisfied with their level of wealth – but not necessarily ‘poor’ in terms of actual income.

Anthony Shaw, however, argues that a quantitative analysis of the *Compendium* does support the premise of the Act of Suppression that poorer houses (i.e. houses with incomes of less than £200) were more sexually incontinent. To demonstrate this, Shaw tabulated the crimes recorded for each monastery in the *Compendium* along with an estimate of their population. In this analysis, Shaw concluded that the crime rate in smaller houses was much higher. As an example, Shaw points out that the wealthy Bury St. Edmunds had fourteen cases of sexual crimes which amounted to only 23% of their complement. The small Benedictine priory of Aldeby, on the other hand, had a population of only four monks and two of them confessed to ‘volluntary pollutions,’ which results in a crime rate of 50%. As Shaw demonstrates, although there are exceptions, this is the predominant pattern in the *Compendium*. Based on these findings, Shaw concludes that the historical position that denies that the “compertes of the *Compendium Compertorum* had any relationship to the eventual Suppression Act [...] is totally false.”⁶⁵

Although Shaw is absolutely correct in his analysis that smaller houses had higher crime rates in the *Compendium*, his conclusion that this validates the premise of the first Suppression Act is problematic. First of all, the vast majority of houses had incomes of less than £200 and this complicates any analysis of overall trends. In the Norwich *Compendium*, for instance, there were twenty-two houses with incomes of less than £200 and only nine houses with more than this amount. Naturally, the more houses visited, the greater the chance of finding sexual crimes. Indeed, it is for this same reason that I suggested in chapter three that Augustinian canons had higher rates of sexual misconduct. (See §3.9) It does not necessarily mean that canons were more lascivious than monks, only

65. Shaw, 391.

that they were more numerous as were the houses with low incomes. Second, as already noted, the *Compendium* was designed to showcase sexual crimes. Indeed, every single house visited in Norwich with the exception of Langley, had sexual crimes noted. If the state commissioners were intent on digging up sexual accusations everywhere they went, then smaller houses would fare worse in this regard. In a tiny house, even one or two monks or canons accused of sexual misconduct could impact the crime rate dramatically. For instance, as Shaw noted, the wealthy Bury St. Edmunds had a crime rate of 23% with fourteen monks accused. Beeston Priory, on the other hand, had only one sexual crime listed, but because the house contained just four canons, it amounted to a crime rate higher than that of Bury: 25%.

Table 5.6: Average Dissolution Income and Size Distribution in Lincoln and Norwich Monastic Houses, 1430-1530

	All	Male	Female
Average Income (£)†	195.63	261.1	68.33
Houses with sexual accusations	253.64	306.97	75.89
Houses without accusations	161.87	226.70	65.81
Average income per inmate (£)	11.91	15.22	5.68
Average income per inmate (houses with accus.)	13.98	16.06	6.81
Average income per inmate (houses without accus.)	10.62	14.51	5.30
Average House size (no. of inmates)*	12.7	13.6	10.8
Average House size (houses with accus.)	13.9	15.2	9.7
Average House size (houses without accus.)	11.9	12.4	11.1

† *Valor Ecclesiasticus* income as compiled by David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, eds. *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales*. London: Longman, 1971 (henceforth cited as Knowles and Hadcock).

* See §3.2 n.25

However, while the *Compendium* does not demonstrate a definitive connection between income and misconduct, the data derived from the episcopal visitations of the five main bishops examined for this study allows us to examine this question on a wider scale. Although the income of monasteries was not normally recorded during these visitations,

we do have detailed income reports for each monastery recorded at the time of the Dissolution in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. This is clearly an imperfect source for comparison, since the *Valor* is a snapshot in time and income levels fluctuate. However, it does provide a reasonable approximation of the relative distribution of wealth between different houses. If we compare the rates of sexual misconduct accusations found in each house during the visitations between 1430 and 1530 to the income reported in the *Valor*, a distinctly different pattern arises than that predicted by the work of Johnson or Shaw (see table 5.6). The average income of the monasteries in Norwich and Lincoln visited by the bishops between 1430 and 1531 and recorded in the *Valor* is £261.1 per annum for male houses, and £68.33 for female houses. However, houses which recorded sexual misconduct accusations had a significantly higher income – £306.97 for men and £75.89 for women. However, houses without sexual misconduct reported much lower income levels and the difference is significant for both men and women. For instance, the average income for male houses without sexual misconduct accusations was just £226.70 which is £80 less than houses with recorded sexual accusations. Similarly, the difference between female houses with sexual misconduct accusations and those without was £10. The conclusion from these numbers is undeniable. Houses with higher incomes were more likely to record sexual misconduct accusations. It is also interesting to examine the average income divided by the number of monastic inmates and compare it with sexual misconduct accusations. In this calculation, the average income per monastic in male houses with sexual accusations was £16.06 per monk or canon, while the average in houses without sexual accusations was only £14.51. The same ratio also appears in female houses, £6.81 to £5.30 respectively. This calculation suggests that the important factor was not the overall gross income of the monastery, but rather the number of monks, canons or nuns relative to income. Nevertheless, the overall conclusion is the same – wealth is co-related

to sexual misconduct – not poverty.

My data shows that there was also a correlation between the size of a monastery and the likelihood of sexual misconduct accusations. However, in this case, the relationship seems to have differed along gender lines. The average male monastery visited between 1430 and 1531 contained 13.6 monks or canons. In contrast, the average population of male houses with sexual misconduct accusations was 15.2 – a difference of nearly two monks or canons. Female houses exhibited the opposite relationship. English Nunneries had an average of population of 10.8 nuns, but houses which had sexual misconduct accusations averaged only 9.7 inmates. Indeed, female houses without sexual accusations had higher than average populations. So in male houses, more monastics increased the likelihood of sexual misconduct accusations – whereas in nunneries, the opposite effect occurred. Interestingly, in this case, my data does correspond to Johnson's analysis on size and sexual misconduct. Johnson found that smaller female houses (in terms of the number of nuns) were 19% more likely to experience sexual misconduct than larger houses.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, although the Suppression Act of 1536 did target smaller houses, it did so on the basis of income not size. Houses less than £200 were suppressed, not houses less than a certain size. And the overall conclusion in this respect, was that for both sexes, more money equated to a greater likelihood of sexual misconduct.

Accusations of sexual misconduct played an important role in the Dissolution of Monasteries and have certainly become part of the mythology surrounding the event. While it is not clear if the multitude of sodomitic monks and incontinent nuns depicted in the *Compendium* were very instrumental in the passing of the Dissolution Act, there can be little doubt that sexual misconduct numbers were manipulated to present the moral state of English monasteries in as poor a light as possible. In this respect, it would seem that

66. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 122.

the *Compendium* was successful. Indeed, there are hardly any monks or nuns not guilty of sodomy or incontinence listed in it. However, although “sodomy” and “incontinence” were more broadly defined by the state visitors, the overall sexual misconduct numbers were not that different from that recorded during episcopal visitations. The *Compendium* data (stripped of its masturbation accusations) presents a nearly identical rate of sexual misconduct as Nicke’s episcopal visitations. This suggests that beyond the inclusion of masturbation as an offence, the state visitors were recording real accusations and not inventing them. In fact, rather than presenting a case for increasing sexual misconduct, one could argue that the *Compendium* data actually provides evidence that monastic sexual misconduct did not fluctuate but was stable over time. Moreover, as my analysis of income and sexual misconduct demonstrates, the central premise of the initial suppression of monasteries, that poorer monasteries contained more “abominable living,” is completely false and, in fact, the opposite was true.

CONCLUSION

It is a lamentable thing to see a legion of monks and nuns who have been chased from their monasteries wandering miserably hither and thither seeking means to live.⁶⁷

Eustace Chapuys, July 1536

WHILE the last monasteries in England may have closed in 1540 (if we ignore the brief and limited revival under Queen Mary in 1555-58), the vow of chastity for monks, canons and nuns remained in force for many years. Eventually, in 1549, an act of Edward VI removed the stipulation and, in Lincoln at least, some ex-religious seem to have finally taken advantage of this freedom.⁶⁸ According to surviving Exchequer returns, within a few years following the Act, nearly 17% of the monks and canons, and 19% of the nuns were married.⁶⁹ However, the majority of monastic pensioners in Lincoln did not marry.⁷⁰ Isabel Lynley, for instance, a former

67. LP, XI:26 (42). Chapuys, whom Eric Ives describes as a “shrewd, brilliant, cynical cosmopolitan,” was Charles V’s long-term ambassador to England and a frequent critic of Henry VIII and, in particular, his marriage to Anne Boleyn. Eric William Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: ‘the most happy’* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004). The most comprehensive study on Chapuys to date is Richard Lundell, “The Mask of Dissimulation: Eustace Chapuys and Early Modern Diplomatic Technique: 1536-1545” (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 2001).

68. Statutes of the Realm, 4:67.

69. Hodgett, xx. The Lincoln Exchequer returns of 1556 (PRO E 101/76/26), which Gerald Hodgett edited for the Lincoln Record Society, are a particularly valuable source for the ex-religious in England since unlike other records of pension assignments, a notation of the marital status of the pensioners is included.

70. Age may have been a factor, as we can safely assume that, by 1549, the majority was well over thirty years old and, therefore, past the usual age of first marriage. However, as Shannon McSheffrey has pointed out in her study on late medieval marriage in London: “in an age of high mortality, marriages were often of short duration, perhaps as short as a decade on average, and both widows and widowers could chose to, or needed to, remarry. Thus, those seeking marriage could be fifteen – or they could be seventy.” McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture*, 17.

nun of Heynings Priory, the monastery which had erupted in scandal a century earlier with the pregnancy of Ellen Cottone, survived on a meagre pension of £1 10s and never married.⁷¹ Interestingly, none of the confirmed ‘naughty nuns’ or ‘promiscuous monks’ we can trace in the pension records were listed as married either. Roger Palmer, for example, whose sexual relationship with Margaret Bishop had prompted John Longland to conduct a full inquisition at Missenden in 1531, was still receiving a pension as late as 1554 and had reportedly “never married.”⁷² Similarly, John Buxum of Leicester Abbey, who was accused of committing sodomy with a local boy in 1528, had a pension of £6 in 1554 and was described as “never married.”⁷³

Thus, for most monastic men and women, the end of cloistered religious life did not mean the beginning of a completely ‘lay’ existence. As Peter Cunich has demonstrated, there is “a large body of evidence that suggests that many religious found it difficult or impossible to readjust to the loss of identity which expulsion from their cloisters entailed.”⁷⁴ Many former nuns, for instance, continued to live together in small groups – pooling their pensions and living out their lives in a continuance of a semi-monastic life.⁷⁵ A number of former monks and canons managed to transition into cathedral chapters or other secular ecclesiastical positions.⁷⁶ At any rate, their pensions were on average higher

71. Hodgett, 79.

72. *ibid.*, 97

73. *Ibid.*, 86.

74. Peter Cunich, “The Ex-Religious in Post-Dissolution Society: Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?” In *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. by James G. Clark (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 235.

75. Marilyn Oliva tracked several likely communities of ex-nuns in the diocese of Norwich. Oliva, 202-3. Likewise, the former nuns of Syon Abbey developed a sophisticated post-Dissolution organization and split into seven groups, maintaining a communal life. See Cunich, 235 Other possible examples are discussed by Coldicott, 143-4; Cross, “Yorkshire Nunneries,” 153; and Knowles, 3:412.

76. Knowles, 3:409-10; Geoffrey Baskerville, “The Dispossessed Religious of Gloucestershire,” *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 49 (1927): 63-122, 67-8; Geoffrey Baskerville, “Married Clergy and Pensioned Religious in Norwich Diocese,” *English Historical Review* XLVIII (1933): 43-64, 49-63.

than their female counter parts, which afforded them an easier existence.⁷⁷ Others, both men and women, found places in monasteries on the continent and continued their lives there.⁷⁸ As the Lincoln returns of 1556 attest, while ex-religious could now finally enjoy sanctioned sexual activity within the confines of marriage, less than a fifth of them did.

The overarching conclusion after examining 315 visitation records spread over more than a century is that monastic sexual misconduct in the medieval monasteries of Lincoln and Norwich (at the level of individuals) occurred at very low rates. My analysis suggests they represented just over 4% (see §3.2). Obviously, these are only the cases that had caused problems in one way or another and it is probable that a larger proportion of the monastic population ‘sinned’ exceptionally or regularly. Nevertheless, we cannot but be struck by the low percentage of sexual misconduct. Moreover, it seems that it was also a predictable constant. Nearly half of the monasteries of Lincoln and Norwich experienced a case of sexual misconduct over the 100 years examined for this study, and

77. Hodgett, xvi. The pensions awarded to ex-religious varied quite a bit. Male religious, in general, had substantially larger pensions and monastic leaders (both male and female) could also count on more support. As Isabel Lynley’s case suggests, female religious tended to have the smallest pensions and, consequently, struggled the most in the post-Dissolution world. Indeed, the Lincoln pension returns specifically note that Lynley had “no other income” beside her allowance of £1 10s. In comparison, Thomas Kent, a former monk of St. Robert’s by Knaresborough, had a pension of £13 6s. 8d. *op. cit.*, 78. There has been some debate about the relative poverty of ex-religious pensioners and what exactly constituted an adequate (or liveable) income in sixteenth century England. Baskerville argued that a pension of £5, which was the average for male pensions, was an “adequate sum on which to live.” Baskerville, *English Monks*, 256. However, these were fixed pensions and, as A.G. Dickens has pointed out, in early 1540s, £5 scarcely equalled the average earnings of an unskilled labourer. By the end of the decade, rampant inflation erased this parity. A. G. Dickens, “The Edwardian Arrears in Augmentations Payments and the Problem of the Ex-Religious,” *The English Historical Review* 55, no. 219 (1940): 384–418, 417. Hodgett has suggested that pensioners trying to live on £5 annually after 1549 “must have suffered considerable hardship if they had nothing but their pensions.” *op. cit.*, xvii. On the subject of monastic pensions, see also Oliva, 195–201; Cunich, 237–8; and Knowles, 3:406–12.

78. Claire Walker argues that, while waves of dispossessed nuns flowed into Continental convents after the Dissolution, “membership of ‘foreign’ houses had posed many logistical and cultural problems.” Consequently, beginning in 1598, exiled English Catholics facilitated the foundation of numerous new English convents abroad which flourished during the seventeenth century. Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English convents in France and the Low Countries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.

certainly a bishop could expect to encounter numerous instances of it during his career. Moreover, these low rates are nearly identical to what Penelope Johnson found for French monasteries nearly 200 years earlier. This would suggest that monastic sexual misconduct always occurs at the same predictable low levels. Even in comparison to the hostile reports of the *Compendium Compertorum*, produced on the eve of the Dissolution, the number of sexual misconduct cases remains nearly identical (if one omits masturbation from the tally). (See §5.3.)

Another interesting finding made by this thesis is that, although sexual misconduct was clearly considered a sin and corrected by bishops and monastic leaders, in general, it was very much de-emphasized compared to other disciplinary issues. As demonstrated in chapter four, time and time again, the bishops examined for this study emphasized economic and leadership issues over problems with chastity. Indeed, when serious action was taken by the bishop – such as removing a monastic leader from power – it was almost always as a result of mismanagement of the monastery (wilful or not) rather than sexual crimes. (See §4.7.)

Contrary to the assumption inherent in the monastic ‘decline narrative’, there is no evidence that sexual misconduct was ever less prior to the late Middle Ages. Rosy and idyllic depictions of monastic life found in earlier sources such as *vitae* are not equivalent in any way to the detailed and searching *inquisitiones* which later medieval episcopal visitations represent. Absence of evidence does not mean absence of misconduct. The factors which influence monastic sexual misconduct, such as contact with the outside world and the strength of individual vocation, are problems which are universal to monasticism and not confined solely to the later Middle Ages. The thirteenth-century visitations of Eudes Rigaud are not really very different from the visitations made three hundred years later just prior to the Dissolution. The issues the bishops confronted, such as sexual

misconduct, financial mismanagement or bad leadership, were the same. In Rigaud's records, just as in Longland's, there were always variations in how successful or pious individual monasteries were.

As I demonstrated in chapter one (§1.1), over the past fifty years English monastic historiography has moved beyond the traditional confessional divisions which used to define it. This new historiography seeks a middle ground and recognizes that variation existed in the speed and success of the English Reformation. The Dissolution is no longer presented as a direct and predictable consequence of monastic failings which, in any respect, most historians would now agree were over-stated by confessionalist scholars of the past. More recently, a new wave of scholars, such as Marilyn Oliva and Roberta Gilchrist, have challenged the 'decline narrative' more directly as it relates to female monasticism. English Nunneries are now understood to have played important roles in local communities and continued to attract new recruits right until the Dissolution. (See §1.2)

The direction of scholarship over the past decades has resoundingly demonstrated that the 'decline narrative', as a model to understand the past, is deeply flawed. I would go a step further and suggest that it should be thrown out all together and with it the study of monasticism in its accustomed 'boom-to-bust' or 'golden-age-to-decline' form. This traditional model of monastic historiography grossly distorts a very human institution and unfairly presents later periods, for which there are more detailed documentary sources, as worse than the earlier ones. It seems likely to me, that every age had its saints and every age had its 'naughty nuns' and 'promiscuous monks.' This is, of course, my own judgement and cannot be proven definitively. However, the opposite view, which 500 years of English historiography has presented, can no more definitively be proven than mine. Consequently, it would be prudent for us as historians to keep an open mind on

the subject.

This is not to say that late medieval monasticism was not different. Difference is not the same as decline. As historians such as Benjamin Thompson have pointed out, late medieval monasteries did struggle, in some respects, to adapt to changing times.⁷⁹ As discussed in chapter two (§2.1), from the thirteenth century onward, English monasteries had made a number of fundamental changes. Formerly autonomous houses were grouped together into orders, and there was an increasing emphasis on widespread uniformity in ascetic practice. For generations, historians characterized the internal debates which accompanied these changes as a movement from an earlier strict observance to a more relaxed monastic life. However, the move towards greater uniformity brought these variations to the forefront, and the consequence was that the overall severity of monastic life was officially relaxed in England. The question is, why should we as historians characterize these changes negatively? Traditionally, monastic historians have tended to treat these changes as symptoms of decay, rather than as James Clark characterized it, “a bold attempt at modernization.”⁸⁰ The movement for uniformity and official relaxation of rules could just as easily be seen as an acknowledgement that certain ideals were rarely achieved rather than a retreat from earlier perfection.

This issue of characterization is particularly problematic when studying sexuality and monasticism. Even recent historians regularly pepper their prose with negative adjectives to describe it. Claire Cross, for instance, described the “*depressing* regularity” of sexual misconduct in the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century monasteries.⁸¹ Similarly, Joan Greatrex suggested that anyone reading the visitation reports of William Alnwick “will become *sorely depressed* in being subjected to human beings revealing themselves as

79. Thompson, “Monasteries, Society and Reform,” 155-95.

80. Clark, 12.

81. Cross, “Yorkshire Nunneries,” 149.

all too human for our comfort.”⁸² Graciela Daichman discusses how late medieval monastic life “took an *uglier* turn with reports of incontinence and childbearing in the convent becoming increasingly frequent.”⁸³ We, as historians, should strive to avoid negative (and subjective) terminology with respect to sexual misconduct since it adds nothing of substance to our understanding of it. It would be highly unusual to find modern historians today describing the sexual practises of medieval lay people with terms such as ‘depressing’ or ‘ugly.’ However, just a few generations ago, historians presented any medieval sexual activity in much the same way.

In this respect, Church history which has traditionally been dominated by an institutional or spiritual focus, could use a bit more social history in it. Monks, canons and nuns, even the naughty and promiscuous ones, were part of the medieval social landscape. It is beholden upon us as historians to understand their place in society as individuals and human beings, not just as spiritual or institutional actors. If we are going to understand the nature of the boundaries of medieval sexuality and of religious vocation for men and women in the later Middle Ages, we must strive to keep monastic sexual misconduct in context. We must understand ‘naughty nuns’ and ‘promiscuous monks’ neither as standards nor anomalies, but as tiny yet predictable human elements within medieval monastic life.

82. Greatrex, 37.

83. Daichman, “Misconduct,” 97.

INDIVIDUAL ACCUSATIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT (1430-1530)

This is a list of individuals accused or suspected of sexual misconduct in the Lincoln visitation reports of Bishop Alnwick (1437-1447), William Atwater (1517-21), John Longland (1525-32), and the Norwich reports of James Goldwell (1492-94), and Richard Nicke (1514-32). My methodology for compiling this list may be found in §2.4. The spelling of names has not been regularized.⁸⁴

Table A.1: Individual Accusations of Sexual Misconduct, 1430-1530

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
5/25/1519 Ankerwyke Priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/7, fol.42.	Alice Hubbart, nun (tacit expressed)	Apostasy and adultery with a relative of Richard Sutton, seneschal.
1/26/1437 Bardney Abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.32-39.	John Hole, monk	Adultery with wife of the washerman.
1/26/1437 Bardney Abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.32-39.	John Hole, monk	Adultery and incest with Jane Raven, a married woman of Bardney.
Continued on next page		

Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

84. Frequently the spelling of names is inconsistent within the records themselves. See for example the nun of Stamford, St. Michael's priory who was accused of running off with a harp player and is variously described as Agnes Butylere or Pery or Northampton. LAO, MS V/j/1, fols. 81d, 83-83d; fols. Linc. Visit., 2:347-351.

Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
1/26/1437 Bardney Abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.32-39.	John Bracy, monk	Adultery with Ellen Cok, married woman late of Bardney, now of Tumby.
7/18/1514 Beeston Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fol.39.	prior-beeston, prior / canon	Impregnated Elena Ev- erard.
10/16/1492 Bokenham Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 100, fol.34b.	Thomas Bevyrley, canon	Held in suspect with Is- abella Warner.
6/20/1514 Bromehill Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.17-17b.	Thomas Martyn, prior	Causing scandal with Christiana de Weting, a servant.
7/13/1442 Canons Ashby Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.55-55d.	Thomas Everdone, monk	Defamed of adultery with Isabel Brewes of Thorpe, a married woman.
7/17/1442 Catesby Priory (C) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.93 sched., 94-95d; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.59.	Isabel Benet, nun	Impregnated by William Smythe, a chaplain.
7/17/1442 Catesby Priory (C) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.93 sched., 94-95d; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.59.	Margaret Wavere, Prioress	Defamed with William Taylour, a chaplain.
7/17/1442 Catesby Priory (C) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.93 sched., 94-95d; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, fol.59.	Isabel Benet, nun	Impregnated by an un- known man.
1532 Coxford Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.91b-92.	Robert Porter, canon	Previously impregnated a woman. Now supports his daughter with pro- ceeds from the priory.
Continued on next page		

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Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
7/10/1514 Crabhouse nunnery (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.31-31b.	Agnes Smyth, canoness	Impregnated by Simon Prentes, of Wigonhale.
7/15/1442 Daventry Priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.88d-90.	Robert Man, prior	Adultery with Agnus Masone, the wife of Robert Masone of Dav- entry.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	John Shrewesbury, canon	Carnal knowledge of a certain woman in the bell tower of the church.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	Walter Dorchestre, monk	Defamed with and im- pregnated Joan Bar- bour, a married woman.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	Walter Dorchestre, monk	Defamed with the wife of Thomas Deye, a serv- ing man.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	Nicholas Plymmouth, e, monk	Adultery with the tan- ner's wife.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	Thomas Tewkesbury, canon	Keeps and maintains Margaret Heny.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	John Clyftone, abbot	Had relations with Joan Baroun in the steward's chamber.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	John Clyftone, abbot	Keeps John Forde's wife.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	John Clyftone, abbot	Keeps John Roche's wife.
Continued on next page		

Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	John Clyftone, abbot	Keeps John Prest's wife.
3/27/1441 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.111-113.	John Clyftone, abbot	Keeps Thomas Fisher's wife.
5/22/1445 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.25d-26 sched.	Ralph Carnelle, monk	Defamed of incontinence with the daughter of Thomas Robyne of Stadhampton.
5/22/1445 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.25d-26 sched.	John Clyftone, former abbot, now just monk	Defamed with Margaret Tylere, a suspect woman from town.
9/19/1530 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.153-155d.	William Goldyngton, Prior	Defamed with a certain woman (<i>quadam muliere</i>).
9/19/1530 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.153-155d.	Thomas Pyuer, canon	Incontinence with Johanna Martyn de Warborowe.
9/19/1530 Dorchester Abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.153-155d.	Thomas Wytney, canon	Incontinence with unnamed woman.
8/8/1514 Eye Priory, Suffolk (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.48b-49b.	unnamed, prior	Suspect with Margeria, the wife of John Bery.
8/8/1520 Eye Priory, Suffolk (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.74-75.	Richard Bettys, prior	suspected with with Margareta Veer, servant
6/5/1445 Eynsham Abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.122.	John Bengeworthe, monk	Apostasy with a nun of Godstow.
Continued on next page		

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Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
5/21/1530 Flamstead (B) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.44d-45.	Agnes Croke, prioress	Shares her bed with with Johanna Mason, a nun.
5/21/1530 Flamstead (B) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.44d-45.	Johanna Mason, nun	Shares her bed with with Agnes Croke, the prioress.
8/20/1520 Flixton nunnery (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fol.78.	Elizabeth Wright, prioress	Held in suspect with Richard Carr, a servant.
5/29/1445 Godstow Abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.28-29.	Alice Longspey, nun	Used to spend time suspiciously with Hugo Sadylere, a priest.
5/29/1445 Godstow Abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.28-29.	Alice Longspey, nun	Apostasy with John Bengeworthe, a monk of Eynsham.
7/3/1525 Greenfield Priory (C) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.2-2d.	Mergareta Newcome, nun	Impregnated by William Wharton, a chaplain.
7/3/1525 Greenfield Priory (C) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.2-2d.	Agnes Graunde, nun	Defamed with Jacob Smith.
7/3/1525 Greenfield Priory (C) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.2-2d.	Isabella Smyth, Prioress	Bore a child from an un- known man.
6/19/1526 Hickling Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.16-18.	Robert Walsham, canon	Defamed with Mar- gareta Curtes.
7/6/1440 Humberstone abbey (TB) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.69-70.	John Gedney, monk	Held in suspicion with Alice Layceby.
7/6/1440 Humberstone abbey (TB) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.69-70.	John Gedney, monk	Held in suspicion with Joan Walteham.
Continued on next page		

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Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with Maud Plummer / Clerke / Derham, wife of John Plumber / Clerke / Der- ham.
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with Joan Plummer / Clerke / Der- ham, elder daughter of John Plumber / Clerke / Derham.
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with Ellen Plummer / Clerke / Der- ham, other daughter of John Plumber / Clerke / Derham.
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with Mar- garet Masone.
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with Joan Dey.
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with Alice Butylere.
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with Alice Freeman.
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Madyngley, Prior	Incontinence with the daughter of Thomas Charweltone.
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Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
10/15/1439 Huntingdon Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.19-20.	John Overtone, monk	Adultery with Maud Plummer / Clerke / Derham, wife of John Plumber / Clerke / Der- ham.
7/14/1518 Kirby Bellars Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/7, fol.142.	John Kyrkby, canon	Incontinence with a certain washing lady (<i>lotrix</i>).
7/14/1518 Kirby Bellars Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/7, fol.142.	William Borow, canon	Incontinence with a certain washing lady (<i>lotrix</i>).
10/14/1440 Kyme Priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.79, 80-80d	William Spaldyng, monk	Defamed with Margery Watnesse.
12/3/1440 Leicester abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.104-105d.	William Sadyngtone, abbot	Defamed of incest with Euphemia Fox.
9/24/1528 Leicester abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.22-27.	John Buxum, submaster of the novices	Took Hugo Massy, a youth, into his bedroom.
6/1/1445 Littlemore priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.31.	Joan Maynard, nun	Suspected with John Somerset, a chaplain.
6/1/1445 Littlemore priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.31.	Isabel Sydnale, nun	Lies in the same bed with Agnes Pidyngtone, the subprioress.
6/1/1445 Littlemore priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.31.	Agnes Pidyngtone, subprioress	Lies in the same bed with Isabel Sydnale, a nun.
6/17/1517 Littlemore priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/7, fols.87-87d.	Katerina Wellys, Prioress	Bore a child with Richard Hewes, a chaplain.
Continued on next page		

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Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
9/2/1518 Littlemore priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/7, fols.83-83d.	Katerina Wellys, Prioress	Continues to see Richard Hewes, a chaplain.
9/2/1518 Littlemore priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/7, fols.83-83d.	Julianna Wynter, nun	Impregnated by John Wixeley.
8/19/1438 Markby priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.84-85d, god.	Thomas Dryby, canon	Defamed of incest and impregnated Margaret Portere of Markby.
8/19/1438 Markby priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.84-85d, god.	John Alforde, monk	Lies in the same bed with youths of the pri- ory.
8/19/1438 Markby priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.84-85d, god.	John Alforde, monk	Lies in the same bed with the son of John Kyrkeby.
10/10/1530 Missenden (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.74-77.	John Slythurste, canon	Sodomy with John Compton, a youth.
7/9/1531 Missenden (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.77-80.	John Fox, abbot	Incontinence with Mar- garet Bishop, the wife of Thomas Bishop.
7/9/1531 Missenden (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.77-80.	Roger Palmer, canon	Incontinence with Mar- garet Bishop, the wife of Thomas Bishop.
7/9/1531 Missenden (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.77-80.	unknown canon, canon	Impregnated the daugh- ter of the abbot's sister.
1/18/1442 Newnham priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.115-117d.	William Thornham, monk	Lives incontinently with Maud Iryshhe.
Continued on next page		

Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
1/18/1442 Newnham priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.115-117d.	John Rothewelle, monk	Adultery with Alice, the wife of John Mountagu of Goldington.
1/18/1442 Newnham priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.115-117d.	John Kempstone, canon	Adultery with Margaret Buchere, a married woman of the parish of St. Peter's in Bedford.
10/12/1440 Nocton park priory (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.79, 81.	Robert Hidelstone, canon of Thorton	Held suspect with Katherine Pymme, of Bardney.
9/7/1530 Northampton, St.James abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.119-119d.	Henry Cokes, abbot	Consorting with Jo- hanna Bodyngton, the washing lady (<i>lotrix</i>) of the monastery.
9/7/1530 Northampton, St.James abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/9, fols.119-119d.	unnamed canon	Sleeps in the same bed with a boy.
4/27/1514 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.1-15.	Robert Worstead, canon	Had a child with a certain loose woman (<i>quadam soluta</i>) of Nor- wich.
4/27/1514 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.1-15.	William Boxwell, subprior	Incontinence with the wife of William Bevy.
4/27/1514 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.1-15.	Nicholas Bedingham, canon	Incontinence with the wife of Pigeon.
4/27/1514 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.1-15.	William Boxwell, subprior	Incontinence with the wife of his servant Robert.
Continued on next page		

Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
4/27/1514 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.1-15.	William Boxwell, subprior	Incontinence with the wife of Pigeon.
4/27/1514 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.1-15.	Nicholas Bedingham, canon	Incontinence with the wife of subprior's servant Robert.
4/27/1514 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.1-15.	Nicholas Bedingham, canon	Incontinence with the wife of William Bevy.
7/27/1526 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.8-12b.	William Reppis, subprior	Suspected with the wife of the wardroper.
7/27/1526 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.8-12b.	Thomas Sall, Third prior	Kissed and touched the privates of Richard Lopham, a junior of the priory.
7/27/1526 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.8-12b.	John Sall, canon	Took an unnamed women to his bed.
7/3/1532 Norwich Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.51-56b.	John Kirby, canon	Suspect with many women.)
8/15/1447 Nutley abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.130-132; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, 73-73d.	William Walyngford, monk	Acted in a manner sus- pect with a woman of Chilton.
8/15/1447 Nutley abbey (A) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.130-132; LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII, 73-73d.	Thomas Ewelme, monk	Adultery with a married woman of Dorton.
9/10/1446 Peterborough abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.123-127, 96 sched.	Richard Asshtone, abbot	Defamed with the wife of William Clerk, a mer- cer.
Continued on next page		

Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
9/10/1446 Peterborough abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.123-127, 96 sched.	Richard Asshtone, abbot	Defamed with the wife of William Parkere.
9/10/1446 Peterborough abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.123-127, 96 sched.	Richard Asshtone, abbot	Defamed with the wife of William Est.
6/19/1518 Peterborough abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/7, fols.143-145d.	Sacrist, sacrist	Defamed of incontinence with Johanna Turnour.
6/19/1518 Peterborough abbey (B) LAO, MS V/j/7, fols.143-145d.	Sacrist, sacrist	Defamed of incontinence with many other women.
7/24/1514 St. Benet at Holme Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.41-42.	John Tacolston, prior	Had the wife of Latami in his chamber.
7/24/1514 St. Benet at Holme Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.41-42.	John Tacolston, prior	Suspected with the wife of Chippesby.
7/24/1514 St. Benet at Holme Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.41-42.	John Tacolston, prior	Allowed suspect women in his chamber.
7/24/1514 St. Benet at Holme Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.41-42.	Andree Walsham, monk	Allowed suspect women in his chamber.
7/14/1514 St. Mary's Priory, Walsingham (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.33-38	Unnamed Prior	Brings the wife of Smyth into his chamber at night.
9/28/1439 St. Neot's Priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.52 (50) - 53 (51).	Robert Etone, prior	Maintains a suspect rela- tionship with Agnes Ac- tone, a married woman of Hardwick.
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Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
9/28/1439 St. Neot's Priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.52 (50) - 53 (51).	John Caxtone, monk	Adultery with Joan Coke, a married woman of St. Neots.
10/21/1440 Stamford, St. Michael's priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.81d, 83-83d.	Agnes Butylere or Pery or Northampton, nun	Went into apostacy with Robert Abbot, a harp player.
6/19/1442 Stamford, St. Michael's priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fols.39d, 129d.	Elizabeth Wylugby, nun	Committed sacrilege, spiritual incest, and adultery with Richard Gray, a married man who was lodging in the priory with his wife and was impregnated by him.
8/6/1445 Stamford, St. Michael's priory (B) LAO, MS V/j/1, fol.96.	Margaret Mortymere, nun	Conceived and gave birth to a child.
6/21/1514 Thetford Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.18-19.	Thomas Vicar, prior	Held suspect with the wife of Stephen (a rela- tive of the prior) who is a servant.
1514 Westacre Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.26b-29b.	Richard Clarke, prior	Held in suspect with the wife of John Smith.
8/1/1526 Westacre Priory (A) Bodl. Tanner MS 132, fols.44b-45b	John Barbour, canon	Committed sodomy with a boy.
6/28/1514 Wymondham Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.23b-26.	Jacob Bloom, cellerar	Held in suspect with wife of Edward Colyns.
Continued on next page		

Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

Table A.1 – continued from previous page

Date, House and MS ref.	Name	Accusation
6/28/1514 Wymondham Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.23b-26.	Jacob Bloom, cellerar	Incontinence with sus- pect women.
6/28/1514 Wymondham Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.23b-26.	John Hengham, monk	Invited the wife of a certain Angelus into his chamber.
6/28/1514 Wymondham Abbey (B) Bodl. Tanner MS 210, fols.23b-26.	Richard Caumbridge, monk	Held suspect with the wife of Poynter.

Key: B = Benedictine, A = Augustinian, C= Cistercian, TB= Tiron Benedictine.

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BL Cotton Vespasian E.iii.

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HOL, 27 Henry VIII, Roll of Parliament, No. 18 (27 Henry VIII, c. 28).

Lincolnshire Archives Office

LAO, Episcopal Register III.

LAO, Episcopal Register XVI.

LAO, Episcopal Register XVII.

LAO, Episcopal Register XVIII.

LAO, MS V/j/1.

LAO, MS V/j/7.

LAO, MS V/j/9.

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