

## Accounts of the Raid on Lindisfarne

*In the year 793 CE, Viking ships attacked the monastery at Lindisfarne on the east coast of England. Below are excerpts from some accounts of the raid:*

"Here Beorhtric [AD 786-802] took King Offa's daughter Eadburh. And in his days there came for the first time 3 ships; and then the reeve rode there and wanted to compel them to go to the king's town, because he did not know what they were; and they killed him. Those were the first ships of the Danish men which sought out the land of the English race."

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*  
(Winchester MS)

Such is the entry for AD 789, written by the chronicler a hundred years later. The king's reeve is said to have ridden to the harbor at Portland on the southwest coast of England, thinking the strangers to be traders whom he then would escort to the royal manor at Dorchester. (Even though the chronicler identifies the raiders as Danes, the term, like Northmen, was used generically to signify all Scandinavian invaders. The early Vikings tended to be Norwegian, although it was the Danes, who began their pillaging in AD 835, from whom the English suffered the most.)

A few years later, there is another entry, even more ominous, this time for AD 793.

"Here terrible portents came about over the land of Northumbria, and miserably frightened the people: these were immense flashes of lightening, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air. A great famine immediately followed these signs; and a little after that in the same year on 8 June the raiding of heathen men miserably devastated God's church in Lindisfarne island by looting and slaughter."

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*  
(Petersborough MS)

The Vikings attack on the holy island of Lindisfarne off the northern coast of Northumbria is the earliest recorded and the best known of the Viking raids in the west. There was situated the monastery of St. Cuthbert, one of the most sacred places of pilgrimage in Britain, and it was there that the Lindisfarne gospels had been copied and illuminated. For more than one hundred and fifty years, Lindisfarne had been a sanctuary of learning and a repository for riches bequeathed by both the pious and the wicked for the repose of their souls. In its chapels and on its altars were golden crucifixes and crosiers, silver pyxes and ciboria, ivory reliquaries, tapestries, and illuminated manuscripts.

All were plundered.

The attack on Lindisfarne was unprecedented and horrified those who wrote of it. For Alcuin, who was at the court of Charlemagne and a leader of the Carolingian Renaissance, it was inconceivable that ships could suddenly appear from over the horizon.

"Lo, it is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made. Behold, the church of St. Cuthbert spattered with the blood of the priests of God, despoiled of all its ornaments; a place more venerable than all in Britain is given as a prey to pagan peoples."

Alcuin, Letter to Ethelred, King of Northumbria

So terrible was the attack on God's house that Alcuin sought to justify its occurrence (just as, over two hundred years later, Wulfstan, archbishop of York, would admonish his English brethren for their sins when renewed raids by the Danes had forced Æthelred to flee to Normandy the year before). How else to explain these depredations except that an omnipotent God was deservedly chastising an unworthy people.

"...the calamity of your tribulation saddens me greatly every day, though I am absent; when the pagans desecrated the sanctuaries of God, and poured out the blood of saints around the altar, laid waste the house of our hope, trampled on the bodies of saints in the temple of God, like dung in the street....

What assurance is there for the churches of Britain, if St Cuthbert, with so great a number of saints, defends not its own? Either this is the beginning of greater tribulation, or else the sins of the inhabitants have called it upon them. Truly it has not happened by chance, but is a sign that it was well merited by someone. But now, you who are left, stand manfully, fight bravely, defend the camp of God."

Alcuin, Letter to the Bishop of Lindisfarne

Another chronicler, working from a lost version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, writes of that fateful year.

"In the same year the pagans from the northern regions came with a naval force to Britain like stinging hornets and spread on all sides like fearful wolves, robbed, tore and slaughtered not only beasts of burden, sheep and oxen, but even priests and deacons, and companies of monks and nuns. And they came to the church of Lindisfarne, laid everything waste with grievous plundering, trampled the holy places with polluted steps, dug up the altars and seized all the treasures of the holy church. They killed some of the brothers, took some away with them in fetters, many they drove out, naked and loaded with insults, some they drowned in the sea..."

Simeon of Durham, *Historia Regum*

In AD 794, there was an attack on the Northumbrian monastery at Jarrow, where Bede once had resided, and the year after that, on St. Columba's monastery on the island of Iona. There also were attacks on the coast of Wales and Scotland. In AD 802 and 806, Iona again was devastated.

It was as a later entry recorded: the Vikings "burned and demolished, killed abbot and monks and all that they found there, brought it about so that what was earlier very rich was as it were nothing."

**References:** *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (1996) translated and edited by Michael Swanton; *English Historical Documents c.500-1042* (1979) edited by Dorothy Whitelock; *The Vikings* (1979) by Rober Wernick (Time-Life Books); *Vikings: Raiders from the North* (1993) by the Editors of Time-Life Books; *Early Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History* (1988) edited by Boris Ford; *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England* (1997) edited by Nigel Saul; *The Illustrated Bede* (1989) by John Marsden; *Early Britain: The Cambridge Cultural History* (1992) edited by Boris Ford; *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, AD 600-900* (1991) edited by Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse; *The Fury of the Northmen: Saint, Shrines and Sea-Raiders in the Viking Age, AD 793-878* (1995) by John Marsden; *Lindisfarne Priory and Holy Island* (1988) by Eric Cambridge (English Heritage).

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# The Medieval Reader

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## ST. BENEDICT OF NURSIA

### Rules for Monks

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St. Benedict (d. 543) was a Roman aristocrat and monastic leader who tried to make religious communities effective and durable institutions. He blended idealism and devotion with Roman common sense and keen psychological insight. The result was one of the most successful examples of all time in constitution-drafting. The Benedictine rule represents the effective pragmatic side of the hierarchic tradition. The life of the monks lived under the *Rule* at St. Benedict's abbey at Monte Cassino near Naples was so stable, happy, and productive that in the following three centuries the *Rule* became the documentary basis for nearly all Western monastic life. The *Rule* has remained influential with Catholic orders to the present day. Until as late as 1100, the Benedictine monastery was so neatly tied to its social context that the monks undertook social responsibilities far beyond their original spiritual calling: as missionaries, secretaries to kings, episcopal office, as librarians, publishers, artists, musicians, and estate managers and improvers. St. Benedict was firmly committed to the hierarchic view of the Church and society, but he made hierarchical systems work smoothly and harmoniously. The abbot has absolute authority over the community, but he is to exercise his authority in a caring and generous fashion within the context of both spiritual idealism and human nature. What is important is that monks be devout, sincere, and happy. St. Benedict is closer to Augustine's moderate functional thinking than to the militant papal rules.

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## INTRODUCTION

Listen, my son, to the precepts of your Master, and incline the ear of your heart unto them. Freely accept and faithfully fulfil the advice of a loving father, so that you may, by the labor of obedience, return to Him, Whom you abandoned through the sloth of disobedience. To you, therefore, whoever you are, my words are directed, who, renouncing your own will, takes up the strong and excellent arms of obedience to fight for the true King, our Lord Christ.

In the first place, beg with most earnest prayer that He may perfect whatever good work you begin, so that He Who has seen fit to count us among the number of His sons may never be grieved by our evil deeds. For we must always so serve Him with the gifts He has given us, that He will not, as an angry father, disinherit His sons, nor, as a dread lord, be provoked by our sins to consign to perpetual punishment His most wicked servants, who did not wish to follow Him to glory.

Let us, therefore, arise at last, for the Scripture arouses us, saying: "It is now the hour to arise from sleep." And with our eyes opened to the divine light, let us hear with awe-filled ears the warning which the divine voice daily calls out to us: "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your ears"; and again: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the

Churches." And what does He say? "Come My sons, harken unto Me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness of death overtake you."

And our Lord, seeking His workman among the multitude of people to whom He thus calls, says again: "Who is the man who longs for life and desires to see good days?" And if you hear this and answer: "I am he"; God says to you: "If you wish to have true and everlasting life, restrain your tongue from evil, and let not your lips speak guile. Turn away from evil and do good, inquire after peace and pursue it." And when you have done these things My eyes shall be upon you and My ears shall be open to your prayers; and before you call Me, I will say unto you; "Behold, I am here." What can be sweeter to us, dearest brothers, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness, the Lord shows us the way of life.

Let us, therefore, with our loins girt up by faith and performance of good works, follow the guidance of His Gospel and walk in His path, so that we may deserve to see Him, Who has called us into His Kingdom. If we wish to dwell in the tabernacle of His Kingdom, we shall not reach it unless we run thither with good works.

But let us, with the Prophet, question the Lord, saying to Him: "Lord, who shall dwell in Your tabernacle, and who shall rest on Your holy hill?" After this question, my brothers, let us hear the Lord answer and show us the way to His tabernacle, saying: "he who walks without blemish and works justice; he who speaks truth in his heart; he who has used no guile on his tongue; he who has done no evil to his neighbor, and has believed no evil of his neighbor." He who takes the evil demon who tempts him and casts him and his temptation from the sight of his heart and brings them to naught. He who takes his evil thoughts as they arise and dashes them against the rock which is Christ. They who, fearing the Lord, do not exalt themselves because of their good works, but know that what is good in them is not performed by them but by the Lord, and magnify the Lord working in them, saying with the Prophet: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your Name give glory." Thus the apostle Paul imputed nothing of his preaching to himself, saying: "By the grace of God I am what I am." And he says again: "He who glorifies, let him glory in the Lord."

Wherefore the Lord also says in the Gospel: "He who hears these My words and does them, I will make him like unto a wise man who has built his house upon a rock; the floods came and the winds blew, they beat upon that house and it did not fall, because it was founded upon a rock."

Having answered us in full, the Lord daily expects us to make our deeds correspond with these His holy instructions. Therefore the days of this life are lengthened to give us respite in which to mend our evil ways. For the Apostle says: "Do you not know that the patience of the Lord leads you to repentance?" And our merciful Lord says: "I do not desire the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live."

So, my brothers, we have asked the Lord about the dwellers in His tabernacle, and have heard the duties of him who would dwell therein; but we can only attain our goal if we fulfil these duties.

Therefore must our hearts and bodies be prepared to fight under the holy obedience of His commands. Let us beg the Lord to grant us the aid of His grace where our own natures are powerless. And if, fleeing the pains of hell, we wish to attain to perpetual life, then we must—while there is still time, while we are in this body and can fulfil all these precepts by the light of this life—hasten to do now what will profit us in eternity.

Therefore must we establish a school for the service of the Lord, in which we hope to ordain nothing harsh or burdensome. But if, for some sound reason, for the amendment of vices or the preservation of charity, we proceed somewhat severely at times, do not immediately become

frightened and flee the path of salvation, whose entrance is always narrow. But as we progress in our life and faith, our hearts shall be enlarged and we shall follow the path of God's commandments with the unspeakable sweetness of love: so that, never departing from His rule, and persevering in His teaching in the monastery until our deaths, we may participate in the sufferings of Christ by our patience, and thus deserve to be partakers of His Kingdom. Amen.

## ON THE TYPES OF MONKS

It is evident that there are four types of monks. The first are the Cenobites: that is, those who live in monasteries, serving under a rule and an abbot.

The second type is that of the Anchorites, or Hermits: that is, those who, not in the first fervor of conversion, but after long probation in a monastery, having been taught by the example of many brothers, have learned to fight against the devil and are well prepared to go forth from the ranks of their brothers to solitary combat in the desert. They are now able, with God's assistance, to fight against the vices of the flesh and evil thoughts without the encouragement of a companion, using only their own strength.

The third and worst type of monks is that of the Sarabites who have not been tested by any rule or the lessons of experience, as gold is in the furnace, but are as soft as lead. They still follow the standards of the world in their works and are known to lie to God by their tonsure. They live in twos or threes, or even singly, without a shepherd, not in the Lord's sheepfold, but in their own. Their desires are their law: whatever they think of or choose to do, they call holy, and they consider what they do not like as unlawful.

The fourth type of monks are called the Gyrovagues. These spend their whole lives moving from one province to the next, staying as guests for three or four days in different monasteries, always wandering and never stable. They obey their own wills and the enticements of gluttony, and are in all ways inferior to the Sarabites.

It is better to pass over the wretched observances of all these men in silence than to speak of them. Let us omit these, therefore, and proceed, with God's help, to provide for the Cenobites, the strongest type of monks.

## WHAT KIND OF MAN THE ABBOT OUGHT TO BE

The abbot who is worthy to rule over a monastery should always remember what he is called and suit his actions to his high calling. For he is believed to take the place of Christ in the monastery, and therefore is he called by His title, in accordance with the words of the Apostle: "Ye received the spirit of the adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba, Father."

Therefore the abbot ought not to teach, ordain, or command anything which is against the law of the Lord; but he should infuse the leaven of divine justice into the minds of his disciples through his commands and teaching. Let the abbot always remember that there will be an inquiry both as to his teachings and as to the obedience of his disciples at the dread Judgment of God. Let the abbot know that whatever lack of profit the Father of the family may find in His sheep will be accounted the fault of the shepherd. However, if the Shepherd has used all his diligence on an unruly and disobedient flock, and has devoted all his care to amending their corrupt ways, he shall be acquitted at the Judgment of the Lord and may say to Him with the Prophet: "I have not hidden Your justice in my heart, I have declared Your truth and Your salvation; but they

have scorned and despised me." And then at last, death itself shall be the penalty for the sheep who have not responded to his care.

When, therefore, any one receives the name of abbot, he ought to rule his disciples with a two-fold doctrine — that is, he should display all that is good and holy by his deeds rather than by his words. To his intelligent disciples, let him expound the commands of the Lord in words, but to harder hearts and simpler minds, let him demonstrate the divine precepts by his example. All things which he teaches his disciples to be contrary to God's law, let him show in his deeds that they are not to be done, lest while preaching to others he himself should become a castaway and God should some day say to him as he sins: "Why do you declare My justice and take My testament in your mouth? For you have hated My discipline and cast My words behind you"; and: "You saw the mote in your brother's eye and did not see the beam in your own."

Let him make no distinction of persons in the monastery. Let no one be loved more than another, unless it be him who is found better in good works or obedience. Let not the free-born monk be put before the man who was born in slavery unless there is some good reason for it. But if the abbot, for some reason, shall see fit to do so, he may fix anyone's rank as he will; otherwise let all keep their own places, because whether slave or freeman, we are all one in Christ and we must all alike bear the burden of service under the same Lord. "There is no respect of persons with God." In this regard alone are we distinguished in His sight, if we are found better than others in good works and humility. Therefore let him show equal love for all; and let one discipline be imposed on all in accordance with their deserts.

In his teaching, the abbot should always observe the apostolic rule which says: "Reprove, entreat, rebuke." That is, he ought to adapt himself to the circumstances and mingle encouragements with his reproofs. Let him show the sternness of a master and the devoted affection of a father. He ought to reprove the undisciplined and unruly severely, but should exhort the obedient, meek, and patient to advance in virtue. We warn him to rebuke and punish the negligent and scornful.

Let him not blind himself to the sins of offenders, but let him cut them out by the roots as soon as they begin to appear...He should use words of warning to punish, for the first and second time, those who are of gentle disposition and good understanding; but he ought to use the lash and corporal punishment to check the bold, hard, proud, and disobedient even at the very beginning of their wrongdoing, in accordance with the text: "The fool is not corrected by words"; and again: "Beat your son with a rod, and you will free his soul from death."

The abbot should always remember what he is and what he is called, and he should know that from him, to whom more is entrusted, more is also required. Let him know how difficult and arduous a task he has taken upon himself, to govern the souls and cater to the different dispositions of many men. One must be encouraged, the second rebuked, the third one persuaded; in accordance with the disposition and understanding of each. He must so adapt and accommodate himself to all that not only will he endure no loss in the flock entrusted to his care, but even rejoice in the increase of his good sheep.

Above all else, let him not slight or undervalue the salvation of the souls entrusted to him by giving more attention to transitory, earthly, and perishable matters. Let him always remember the souls he has undertaken to govern, for which he will also have to render an account. Let him not complain of lack of means, but let him remember that it is written: "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His justice, and all things shall be given unto you"; and again: "Nothing is lacking to those who fear Him."

Let him know that they who undertake to govern souls must prepare themselves to give answer for them. Let him understand that, however great the number of brothers he has under his care, on the Day of Judgment he will have to answer to God for the souls of all of them, as well as for his own. And so, fearing always the inquiry which the shepherd must face for the sheep entrusted to him, and anxious about the answers which he must give for the others, he becomes solicitous for his own sake also. Thus, while his admonitions help others to amend, he himself is freed of all his faults.

#### WHETHER THE MONKS OUGHT TO HAVE ANYTHING OF THEIR OWN

This vice especially ought to be cut out of the monastery by its roots. Let no one presume to give or receive anything without the permission of the abbot or to keep anything whatever for his own, neither book, nor tablets, nor pen, nor anything else, because monks should not even have their own bodies and wills at their own disposal. Let them look to the father of the monastery for whatever is necessary and let it be forbidden for them to have anything he has not given them or allowed them to possess.

Let all things be common to all, as it is written, lest anyone should say that anything is his own or arrogate it to himself. If anyone shall be found to indulge in this most wicked vice, let him be admonished for the first and second time. If he does not amend let him undergo punishment.

#### WHETHER ALL SHOULD RECEIVE EQUAL MEASURE OF NECESSARY THINGS

It is written: "Distribution was made to each according to his need." By this, we do not mean that there should be—which God forbid—respect of persons, but rather consideration of infirmities. Therefore, he who needs less should give thanks to God and not be discontented; but he that needs more should be humble because of his infirmity, not exalted by the pity shown him. In this way will all members be in peace.

Before all things, let not the sin of murmuring for any reason show itself in any word or sign. If anyone shall be found guilty of this let him undergo severe punishment.

#### OF OLD MEN AND CHILDREN

Although human nature is drawn towards pity for these two ages, that is, for old men and children, nevertheless let them also be cared for by the authority of the Rule. Their weakness should always be taken into account, and in no way should the severity of the Rule in regard to food be applied to them. Let them receive, on the contrary, loving consideration, and let them eat before the regularly established hours.

#### THE AMOUNT OF FOOD

We believe it to be sufficient for the daily meal, whether it be at the sixth or ninth hour, that every table have two cooked dishes, on account of the individual weaknesses of the brothers, so that he who, by chance, cannot eat out of the one, may eat from the other. Therefore, let two

cooked dishes suffice for all the brothers, and if there are fruits or young vegetables available, let a third dish be added.

#### THE AMOUNT OF DRINK

“Every man has his proper gift from God, one after this manner, another after that?” And therefore it is with some misgiving that we determine the amount of food for someone else. Still, having regard for the weakness of some brothers, we believe that a hemina of wine per day will suffice for all. Let those, however, to whom God gives the gift of abstinence know that they shall have their proper reward.

But if either the circumstances of the place, the work, or the heat of summer necessitates more, let it lie in the discretion of the abbot to grant it. But let him take care in all things lest satiety or drunkenness supervene. We do read' that wine is not a proper drink for monks; but ace in our days monks cannot at all be persuaded of this, let us at least agree to drink sparingly and not unto satiety: for "wine makes even the wise to fall away."

#### OF THE DAILY MANUAL LABOR

Idleness is the enemy of the soul. The brothers, therefore, ought to be engaged at certain times in manual labor, and at other hours in divine reading. Therefore do we think this arrangement should be ordained for both times: that is, from Easter until the Kalends of October [October 1] they shall begin early in the morning, from the first until about the fourth hours, to do the necessary tasks. Let the time from the fourth until about the sixth hour be spent on reading.

After the sixth hour, let them rise from the table and rest on their beds in perfect silence. If anyone may wish to read to himself, let him do so in such a way as not to disturb the others. Let None be said early, about the middle of the eighth hour, and then let them do the work which has to be done until Vespers. If the circumstances of the place or poverty forces them to gather the harvest by themselves, let them not be saddened on this account: because then they are truly monks, if they live by the labor of their own hands like our Fathers or the Apostles. Let all things, however, be done in moderation because of the fainthearted...

#### THE MANNER OF THE RECEPTION OF BROTHERS

Let not anyone, newly coming to the religious life, be granted an easy entrance; but, as the Apostle says: "Test the spirits to see whether they are of God." If, therefore, anyone perseveres in his knocking at the door, and if he is seen, after four or five days, to bear patiently the harsh treatment inflicted on him and the difficulty of admission and to persist in his petition, let admittance be granted to him, and let him stay in the guesthouse for a few days. Afterwards let him stay in the novitiate, where the novices study, eat, and sleep.

And let a senior, who is skilled at the winning of souls, be appointed to watch over them with the utmost care. Let him be diligent to learn whether the novice is truly seeking God, whether he is eager for the Work of God, for obedience, and for humiliations. Let the novices be told of all the hardships and difficulties through which we journey to God.

If he promises to persevere in his purpose, at the end of two months let this Rule be read to him from beginning to end, and let him be told: "Behold the law under which you wish to serve;

if you can observe it enter; but if you cannot, depart freely." If he remains there still, then let him be led back into the above-mentioned room and let him again be tested in all patience.

After the lapse of six months let the Rule be read to him so that he may know upon what he is entering. If he still abides, let this same Rule be read to him again after four months. And if, after having deliberated with himself, he promises to observe all its provisions and to obey all commands given him, then let him be received into the congregation. But let him know that from that day forth he shall not be allowed to leave the monastery nor to withdraw his neck from under the yoke of the Rule, which it was open to him, during that long period of deliberation, either to reject or accept.

When the novice is ready to be received, let him, in the oratory, in the presence of all, and in the sight of God and His Saints; promise stability, the conversion of his life, and obedience. Let him know that, if he behaves otherwise, he shall be condemned by Him, Whom he mocks...

If he has any property, let him either give it beforehand to the poor, or offer it to the monastery in a formal donation. Let him keep back nothing for himself, since he knows that from that day forth he will not even have power over his own body.

In the oratory, therefore, let him be immediately stripped of his own clothes, which he is wearing and be attired in the clothes of the monastery. The garments which he had worn, however, should be stored and preserved in the clothes-room. Then, if he ever consents to any persuasion of the devil -which God forbid — and determines to leave the monastery, he may be stripped of the clothing of the monastery before being dismissed. Let him not receive, however, his petition, which the abbot placed above the altar, but let it be preserved in the monastery.

#### OF PRIESTS WHO MAY WISH TO DWELL IN THE MONASTERY

If anyone of the priestly order requests to be received into the monastery let him not obtain this permission too quickly. If, nevertheless, he still perseveres in this petition, give him to understand that he will have to observe the entire discipline of the Rule and that none of it will be lightened for him. For Scripture says: "Friend, for what purpose have you come?"

Let him be allowed, however, to stand behind the abbot in rank, to say the blessing, and to celebrate masses, if the abbot permits him to do so. If not, let him not presume to do anything, knowing that he is subject to the discipline of the Rule, and that he, especially, ought to set an example for others by his humility.

If he entered the monastery in hopes of obtaining special station or privilege, let him know that he shall achieve his rank in accordance with the length of time which he has spent in the monastery and not because of the respect for his priesthood.

Likewise, if any clerics should wish to be admitted into the monastery, let them be placed in a middle rank; but only if they promise to observe the Rule and to be stable in this observance.

#### THE ORDER OF THE COMMUNITY

Let all keep their order in the community according to the date of their conversion, the merit of their lives, or as the abbot shall determine. Yet let not the abbot disturb the flock entrusted to him, nor ordain any thing unjustly by making arbitrary use of his power; but let him always consider that he will have to answer to God for all his decisions and deeds

In accordance, therefore, with the order which the abbot has determined, or the one which the brothers themselves hold, let them receive the kiss of peace, go to Communion, intone the

psalms, and stand in the choir. And in no place whatsoever should age distinguish or predetermine their order, since Samuel and Daniel, although boys, judged the priests.

Except for those, therefore, whom, as we have said, the abbot has promoted by a special decision, or degraded for a definite reason, let all the rest take their rank from the date of their conversion. Thus, for example, he who came at the second hour of the day should know that he is younger than he who came at the first hour—no matter what his age or dignity may be. Boys, however, are to be kept under discipline in all things and by every one.

Let the juniors, therefore, honor their seniors; let the seniors love their juniors. In addressing each other, let no one be permitted to use the bare name: let the seniors call the juniors "Brother," and let the juniors call the seniors "Nonnus," which means "Reverend Father."

The abbot, however, because he is believed to hold the place of Christ, should be called "Lord" and "Abbot," not because of his own pretensions, but out of honor and love for Christ. Let the abbot himself remember this and so deports himself that he may be worth of such honor.

Whenever brothers meet each other let the younger ask the older for his blessing. When a senior passes by, let the junior rise and give him his seat; and let not the junior presume to sit unless his senior so instructs him, in order to fulfill what is written: "Outdo one another in showing honor."

Small boys and youths shall keep strictly to their order in the oratory and at the table. Outside however, or anywhere else, let them be supervised and disciplined, until they come to the age of discretion.

#### THE APPOINTMENT OF THE ABBOT

In the appointment of the abbot, let this rule always be observed: he should be made abbot whom the whole community, unanimously, and in the fear of God, or even a minority, however small, acting more wisely, has chosen. Let him who is to be appointed be chosen for the merit of his life and for his wisdom, even if he is the last in order of the community.

But if the whole congregation—which God forbid—should agree to choose a person who supports them in their vices, and this depravity somehow comes to the knowledge of the bishop, to whose diocese the monastery pertains, or to the knowledge of the neighboring abbots and Christians, let them annul the choice of the wicked, and set up a worthy steward for the house of God.

After he has been appointed, let the abbot always consider how weighty a burden he has undertaken, and to Whom he will have to answer for his stewardship. Let him understand that he ought to profit his brothers rather than to preside over them. He ought, therefore, to be learned in Divine Law, so that he may know whence to bring forth things both new and old; and to be chaste, sober, and merciful. Let him always exalt mercy above justice, so that he himself may obtain mercy. Let him hate vice and love the brothers.

Let him proceed prudently in the administration of correction, lest, being too anxious to remove the rust, he break the vessel. Let him always distrust his own frailty, and remember that the bruised reed must not be broken. By this we do not mean to imply that he should allow vice to thrive; but, as we have already said, that he should remove it prudently and with charity, in the way which seems best for each case. Let him study more to be loved than to be feared. Let him not be turbulent, or anxious, or too exacting, or obstinate, or jealous, or oversuspicious, for then he will never be at rest.

He should be prudent and considerate in all his commands; and whether the task he enjoins concerns God or the world, let him be discreet and temperate, remembering the discretion of holy Jacob, who said: "If I cause my flocks to be over-driven, they shall all die in one day."

Imitating, therefore, these and other examples of discretion, the mother of virtues let him so arrange all things that the strong shall have something to strive for, and the weak shall not be put to flight.

And, especially, let him keep the present Rule in all things, so that having administered it well, he may hear from the Lord what was heard by the good servant, who gave wheat to his fellow-servants in due season: "Amen, I say unto you, he will set him over all his goods."

# Medieval University Readings

## Peter Abelard: Prologue to *Sic et Non* (excerpts)

Translated by W. J. Lewis (aided by the helpful comments and suggestions of S. Barney)  
from the Internet History Sourcebooks Project

*Peter Abelard (1079-1142) was one of the great intellectuals of the 12th century, with especial importance in the field of logic. His tendency to disputation is perhaps best demonstrated by his book Sic et Non, a list of 158 philosophical and theological questions about which there were divided opinions. This dialectical method of intellectual reflection - also seen in Gratian's approach to canon law - was to become an important feature of western education and distinguishes it sharply from other world cultures such as Islam and the Confucian world. Abelard's mistake was to leave the questions open for discussion and so he was repeatedly charged with heresy. For a long period all his works were included in the later Index of Forbidden Books.*

### Prologue to *Sic et Non*

When, in such a quantity of words, some of the writings of the saints seem not only to differ from, but even to contradict, each other, one should not rashly pass judgment concerning those by whom the world itself is to be judged, as it is written: "*The saints shall judge nations*" (cf. Wisdom 3: 7-8), and again "*You also shall sit as judging*" (cf. Matthew 19:28). Let us not presume to declare them liars or condemn them as mistaken – those people of whom the Lord said "*He who hears you, hears me; and he who rejects you, rejects me*" (Luke 10:16). Thus with our weakness in mind, let us believe that we lack felicity in understanding rather than that they lack felicity in writing — those of whom the Truth Himself said: "*For it is not you who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you*" (Matthew 10:20). So, since the Spirit through which these things were written and spoken and revealed to the writers is itself absent from us, why should it be surprising if we should also lack an understanding of these same things?

(11-18) The unfamiliar manner of speech gets very much in the way of our achieving understanding, as well as the different meanings these words very often have when a given word is used with a particular meaning only in that particular manner of speech. Indeed, each man is as well-stocked with words as he is with sense. And since according to Cicero (De Invent. I, 41, 76), "A sameness in all things is the mother of weariness" (that is, it gives rise to distaste), it is fitting to vary these words used on the same topic and not to strip everything bare with casual and common words. Such topics, as blessed Augustine said, are veiled for this reason, lest they become cheap, and the greater the effort it takes to discover them and the more difficult it is to master them, the more precious they are.

(18-43) Likewise, it is often appropriate to change the wording to suit the differences among those with whom we speak, since it frequently happens that the proper

meaning of a word is unknown or less familiar to some people. Certainly if we wish, as is fitting, to speak to these people, to teach them, we should strive after their usage, rather than after proper speech, as that leader in the grammatical arts and instructor of speaking, Priscian himself, taught. Even that most painstaking doctor of the Church, St. Augustine, took this into account when he instructed the ecclesiastical teacher in the fourth book of *On Christian Doctrine* and warned him to leave out everything that might hinder the understanding of those with whom he spoke and to scorn elaboration and pickiness in speech, if he could make himself understood more easily without them. He said (De Doct. Christ. IV, ix-x), "As for the one who is teaching, he should not be anxious as to how much eloquence he uses as he teaches, but rather as to how clearly he teaches. A person who is eager to be careful sometimes avoids the more elegant terms. For this reason someone said, when discussing this kind of speaking, that there is in it a certain careful casualness." [...]

(54-85) We also ought to pay close attention so that, when some of the writings of the saints are presented to us as if they were contradictory or other than the truth, we are not misled by false attributions of authorship or corruptions in the text itself. For many apocryphal works are inscribed with the names of saints in order that they might obtain authority, and even some places in the text of the Holy Testament itself have been corrupted by scribal error. Whence that most trustworthy author and truest translator, Jerome, warned us in his letter to Laeta concerning the education of her daughter, when he said (Epist. 107, 12), "Let her be wary of all apocrypha; and if she ever wishes to read such works not for the truth of dogma, but for the miracles contained in them, let her know that they do not belong to those men whose names are indicated in the inscription and that it

requires great wisdom to seek gold amid the mud.” The same man has this to say about the 77<sup>th</sup> Psalm (Tractatus sive Homil. in Ps. LXXVII), concerning the attribution in its title (which is like this: ‘recognized as Asaph’s’), “It is written according to Matthew (cf. 13:34-35), “when the Lord had spoken in parables and they did not understand, etc...”. he said these things happened so that what had been written by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled (Psalm 77:2): “I will open my mouth in parables”. The Gospel has this wording even up to today. However, Isaiah does not say this, but Asaph.” And further: “Therefore let us say plainly that, as it is written in Matthew and John that the Lord was crucified at the sixth hour, and in Mark that it was the third hour — this was a scribal error and ‘the sixth hour’ had been written in Mark, but many scribes thought it was a gamma instead of the Greek episeimon [i.e. a symbol for ‘six’; it resembles gamma, which can be used as a symbol for ‘three’], just as the error was scribal when they wrote ‘Isaiah’ instead of ‘Asaph’. For we know that many churches were made up of uneducated Gentiles. [...] And if in the Gospels some things were corrupted due to scribal ignorance, what is so surprising if it should also happen sometimes in the writings of the Church Fathers who came later, and possessed far less authority? So if something in the writings of the saints should seem perhaps to be deviating from the truth, it is honest and in accordance with humility and appropriate to charity (which ‘believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’ (1 Corinthians 13:7) and does not readily suspect errors from those whom she embraces) that either we believe that this place in the text may have been corrupted or not translated faithfully, or that we acknowledge that we do not understand it.

(86-148) Nor is it any less a matter for consideration whether such statements are ones taken from the writings of the saints that either were retracted elsewhere by these same saints and corrected when the truth was afterwards recognized -- as St. Augustine often did — or whether they spoke reflecting the opinion of others rather than according to their own judgment, just as Ecclesiastes often brings in conflicting ideas from different people, whence ‘Ecclesiastes’ is translated as ‘provoker’, (as St. Gregory asserts in his fourth Dialogue, or whether they left such statements under investigation as they were examining them rather than concluding with a confident solution [...]. By the evidence of St. Jerome, as well, we know that this was the custom of the Catholic teachers — that in their commentaries they would insert among their own thoughts even some of the worst opinions of heretics, while, in their pursuit of perfection, they rejoiced in omitting nothing of the ancient authors. [...]

Even in the Gospel, some things appear to be said according to human opinion rather than according to the

truth, as when, following common opinion and custom, Joseph is referred to as the father of Christ by the mother of the Lord, when she says (Luke 2:48), “*In sorrow thy father and I have been seeking for you.*” [...]

(176-187) What is so amazing, then, if some things are proposed or even written by the Holy Fathers sometimes based on opinion rather than on the truth? When conflicting things are said about the same topic, one must carefully distinguish that which is offered with the stricture of a command, that which is offered with the lenience of indulgence and that which is offered with exhortation to perfection, so that we might seek a remedy for the apparent conflict in accordance with this variety of intents. If indeed it is a command, we must distinguish whether it is general or specific, that is, directed toward everyone in general or toward certain people in particular. The times and causes of dispensation ought also to be distinguished, because what is permitted at one time is found to be prohibited at another, and what is often commanded with rigor may sometimes be tempered with dispensation. It is very necessary to distinguish these things in the statutes of the Church decrees or canons. Moreover, an easy solution for many controversies may be found as long as we are able to be on our guard for the same words being used with conflicting meanings by different authors.

(188-194) The reader who is eager to resolve conflicts in the writings of the holy ones will be attentive to all the methods described above. If the conflict is obviously such that it cannot be resolved by logic, then the authorities must be compared together, and whatever has stronger witnesses and greater confirmation should be retained above all. [...]

(195-208) Indeed it is established that the prophets themselves at one time or another have lacked the gift of prophecy and offered from their habit of prophecy some false statements, derived from their own spirit, while believing that they were in possession of the Spirit of prophecy; and this was permitted to happen to them so as to preserve their humility, so that in this way they might recognize more truly what sorts of things come from the Spirit of God and what sorts from their own spirit, and recognize that when they possessed the Spirit of prophecy they had it as a gift from the Spirit Who cannot lie or be mistaken. For when this Spirit is possessed, just as it does not confer all its gifts on one person, so does it not illuminate the mind of the inspired one concerning all things, but reveals now this and now that, and when it

makes one thing apparent it conceals another. Indeed, St. Gregory declares this with clear examples in his first homily on Ezekiel. And it did not shame even the very chief of the apostles, who shone so greatly with miracles and with the gifts of divine grace after that special effusion of the Holy Spirit promised by God, who taught his students the entire truth — it did not shame him to abandon a harmful untruth, when up to that point he had fallen into a not insignificant error concerning circumcision and the observance of certain ancient rites, and when he had been earnestly, wholesomely and publicly corrected by his fellow apostle Paul.

(209-304) When it is clear that even the prophets and apostles themselves were not complete strangers to error, what is so surprising, then, if among such manifold writings of the Holy Fathers some things seem to be handed down or written erroneously, for the reason given above? But just as these holy ‘defendants’ should not be charged with lying if at one time or another, not from duplicity but from ignorance, they make some statements other than what the real truth would have them think; so in the same way something that is said for love while giving some instruction should not be imputed to presumption or sin, since it is well known that all things are distinguished by God according to intention [...]

However, so that the room for this freedom is not excluded, and that very healthy task of treating difficult questions and translating their language and style is not denied to later authors, the excellence of the canonical authority of the Old and New Testaments has been distinguished from that of the works of later authors. If there should be something in the Old or New Testament that seems as if it were absurd, you may not say that the author of this work did not possess the truth, but that the manuscript is corrupt, or the translator has made a mistake, or that you do not understand. But in works of later witness, contained in innumerable volumes, if perhaps some things are thought to deviate from the truth because they are not understood as they have been expressed, in these works the reader or listener has the freedom of judgment to approve what seems good or disapprove of what offends, and therefore when it comes to things of this type, unless they are supported either by sure reasoning or canonical authority, so that what is either argued or narrated there may be shown either to be entirely so or to be potentially so, if it does not seem good to someone or they do not wish to believe it, they are not reproached.”

And thus [Augustine] calls the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments documents about which it is heretical to say that something in them contradicts the truth. [...]

(330-350) With these prefatory words, it seems right, as we have undertaken to collect the diverse sayings of the Holy Fathers, which stand out in our memory to some extent due to their apparent disagreement as they focus on an issue; this may lure the weaker readers to the greatest exercise of seeking the truth, and may render them sharper readers because of the investigation. Indeed this first key of wisdom is defined, of course, as assiduous or frequent questioning. Aristotle, the most clear-sighted philosopher of all, advised his students, in his preface ‘Ad Aliquid’, to embrace this questioning with complete willingness, saying (cited by Boethius, In *Categorias Aristotelis*, ii): “Perhaps it is difficult to clarify things of this type with confidence unless they are dealt with often and in detail. However, it would not be useless to have some doubts concerning individual points.” And indeed, through doubting we come to questioning and through questions we perceive the truth. In consequence of this, Truth herself says (Matthew 7:7), “*Ask and it shall be given you; knock and it shall be opened to you.*” Teaching us this spiritual lesson with Himself as an example, He let Himself be found, at about twelve years of age, sitting and questioning in the midst of the teachers, showing Himself to us in the model of a student with His questioning, before that of a schoolmaster in his pronouncements, although His knowledge of God was full and complete. And when some passages of Scripture are brought before us, the more the authority of the Scripture itself is commended, the more fully they excite the reader and tempt him to seek the truth. Hence it seemed good to me to prefix to my work here (this work of mine which we have compiled out of passages from holy authors, gathered into one volume), the decree of Pope Gelasius concerning authentic books, so that it can be understood that we have included no passages from apocryphal writings here. We also append excerpts from the *Retractions* of blessed Augustine, from which it may be clear that nothing set forth here is taken from passages that he later emended when he made his retraction.

## Statutes of Gregory IX for the University of Paris 1231

Dana C. Munro, trans., *University of Pennsylvania Translations and Reprints*, (Philadelphia, 1897)  
from the Internet History Sourcebooks Project

*Universities grew up in a number of regions in the early 13th century, and came to provide the institutional framework for the intellectual life of the period. There were two main patterns of organization: the Italian version in which the students employed the teachers; and the Northern European model in which the teachers dominated. The University of Paris was the focus much intellectual activity from its initial evolution from loosely organized collections of teachers and students. The statutes of Gregory IX marked a significant stage in the University's rise.*

*Gregory, the bishop, servant of the servants of God, to his beloved sons, all the masters and students of Paris—greeting and apostolic benediction.*

**P**aris, the mother of the sciences, like another Cariath Sepher, a city of letters, shines forth illustrious, great indeed, but concerning herself she causes greater things to be desired, full of favor for teaching and students...

...Wherefore, since we have diligently investigated the questions referred to us concerning a dissension which, through the instigation of the devil, has arisen there and greatly disturbed the university, we have decided, by the advice of our brethren, that these should be set at rest rather by precautionary measures, than by a judicial sentence.

Therefore, concerning the condition of the students and schools we have decided that the following should be observed: each chancellor, appointed hereafter at Paris, at the time of his installation, in the presence of the bishop, or at the command of the latter in the chapter at Paris—two masters of the students having been summoned for this purpose, and present on behalf of the university—shall swear that, in good faith, according to his conscience he will not receive as professors of theology and canon law any but suitable men, at a suitable place and time, according to the condition of the city and the honor and glory of those branches of learning; and he will reject all who are unworthy without respect to persons or nations. Before licensing anyone, during three months, dating from the time when the license is requested, the chancellor shall make diligent inquiries of all the masters of theology present in the city, and of all other honest and learned men through whom the truth can be ascertained, concerning the life, knowledge, capacity, purpose, purpose, prospects and other qualities needful in such persons; and after the inquiries in good faith and according to his conscience, he shall grant or deny the license to the candidate as seems fitting and expedient. The masters of theology and canon law will give true testimony on the above points. The chancellor shall

swear, that, he will in no way reveal the advice of the masters, to their injury; the liberty and privileges being maintained in their full vigor for the canons of at Paris, as they were in the beginning. Moreover, the chancellor shall promise to examine in good faith the masters in medicine and arts and in the other branches, to admit only the worthy and to reject the unworthy.

In other matters, because confusion easily creeps in where there is no order, we grant to you the right of making constitutions and ordinances regulating the manner and time of lectures and disputations, the costume to be worn, the burial of the dead; and also concerning the bachelors, who are to lecture and at what hours and on what they are to lecture; and concerning the prices of the lodging or the interdiction of the same; and concerning a fit punishment for those who violate your constitutions or ordinances, by exclusion from your society. And if, perchance, the assessment of the lodgings is taken from you, or anything else is lacking, or an injury or outrageous damage, such as death or the mutilation of a limb, is inflicted on one of you; unless through a suitable admonition satisfaction is rendered within fifteen days, you may suspend your lectures until you have received full satisfaction. And if it happens that any one of you is unlawfully imprisoned, unless the injury ceases on remonstrance from you, you may, if you judge it expedient, suspend your lectures immediately.

We command, moreover, that the bishop of Paris shall so chastise the excesses of the guilty, that the honor of the students shall be preserved and evil deeds shall not remain unpunished. But in no way shall the innocent be seized on account of the guilty; nay, rather if a probable suspicion arises against anyone, he shall be detained honorably and, on giving suitable bail he shall be freed, without any exactions from the jailers. But if, perchance, such a crime has been committed that imprisonment is necessary, the bishop shall detain the criminal in his prison. The chancellor is forbidden to keep him in his prison. We also forbid holding a student for a debt

contracted by another, since this is interdicted by canonical and legitimate sanctions. Neither the bishop nor his official, nor the chancellor shall exact a pecuniary penalty for removing penalty for removing an excommunication or any other censures of any kind. Nor shall the chancellor demand from the masters who are licensed an oath, or obedience, or any pledge nor shall he receive any emolument or promise for granting a license, but be content with the above mentioned oath.

Also the vacation in summer is not to exceed one month, and the bachelors, if they wish, can continue their lectures in vacation time. Moreover, we prohibit more expressly the students from carrying weapons in the city, and the university from protecting those who disturb peace and study, And those who call themselves students but do not frequent the schools, or acknowledge any master, are in no way to enjoy the liberties of the students.

Moreover, we order that the masters in arts shall always read one lecture on Priscian, and one book after the other in regular courses. Those books on natural philosophy which for a certain reason were prohibited in a provincial council, are not to be used at Paris until they have been examined and purged of all suspicion of error. The masters and students in theology shall strive to exercise themselves laudably in the branch which they profess; they shall not show themselves philosophers but strive to become God's learned. And they shall not speak in the language of the people, confounding the sacred language with the profane. In the schools they shall dispute only on such questions as can be determined by the theological books and the writings of the holy fathers.

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It is not lawful for any whatever to infringe this deed of our provision, constitution, concession, prohibition and inhibition or to act contrary to it, from rash presumption. If anyone, however, should dare attempt this, let him know that he incurs the wrath of almighty God and of the blessed Peter and Paul, his apostles.

Given at the Lateran, on the Ides of April [April 13], in the fifth year of our pontificate.

## Jacques de Vitry: Life of the Students at Paris

From the Internet History Sourcebooks Project and  
*Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, (Philadelphia, [1897?-1907?]).

*The testimony is unanimous as to the evil life of a large proportion of the students. It was inevitable that young men, in many cases, mere boys living under practically no restraint and not subject to the full penalties of the law, should have been boisterous and obstreperous. Many of the so-called students resorted to the universities simply for enjoyment and with no idea of study. Conflicts between the different nations were every day occurrences. Town and gown rows were frequent. But the citizens as a whole seem to have been favorably disposed toward the students.*

*In the Chartularium of Paris there are many proofs of the evil lives led a part of students, but Jacques de Vitry is preferred here because of his account of the jealousies among the different nations. The first part of his description is very characteristic, but cannot be quoted.*

Almost all the students at Paris, foreigners and natives, did absolutely nothing except learn or hear something new. Some studied merely to acquire knowledge, which is curiosity; others to quire fame, which is vanity; others still for the sake of gain, which is cupidity and the vice of simony. Very few studied for their own edification, or that of others. They wrangled and disputed not merely about the various sects or about some discussions; but the differences between the countries also caused dissensions, hatreds and virulent animosities among them and they impudently uttered all kinds of affronts and insults against one another.

They affirmed that the English were drunkards and had tails; the sons of France proud, effeminate and carefully adorned like women. They said that the Germans were furious and obscene at their feasts; the Normans, vain and boastful; the Poitevins, traitors and always adventurers. The Burgundians they considered vulgar and stupid. The Bretons were reputed to be fickle and changeable, and were often reproached for the death of Arthur. The Lombards were called avaricious, vicious and cowardly; the Romans, seditious, turbulent and slanderous; the Sicilians, tyrannical and cruel; the inhabitants of Brabant, men of blood, incendiaries, brigands and ravishers; the Flemish, fickle, prodigal, gluttonous, yielding as butter, and slothful. After such insults from words they often came to blows.

I will not speak of those logicians before whose eyes flitted constantly "the lice of Egypt," that is to say, all the sophistical subtleties, so that no one could comprehend their eloquent discourses in which, as says Isaiah, "there is no wisdom." As to the doctors of theology, "seated, in Moses' seat," they were swollen with learning, but their charity was not edifying. Teaching and not practicing, they have "become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," or like a canal of stone, always dry, which ought to

carry water to "the bed of spices." They not only hated one another, but by their flatteries they enticed away the students of others; each one seeking his own glory, but caring not a whit about the welfare of souls.

Having listened intently to these words of the Apostle, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," they kept multiplying the prebends, and seeking after the offices; and yet they sought the work decidedly less than the preeminence, and they desired above all to have "the uppermost rooms at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogue, and greetings in the market." Although the Apostle James said, "My brethren, be not many masters," they on the contrary were in such haste to become masters that most of them were not able to have any students except by entreaties and payments. Now it is safer to listen than to teach, and a humble listener is better than an ignorant and presumptuous doctor. In short, the Lord had reserved for Himself among them all only a few honorable and timorous men who had not stood "in the way of sinners," nor had sat down with the others in the envenomed seat.

