

## Innocence Almost Entirely Departed: The Equality and Accessibility of Shame and Self-Control in Odo of Cluny's Masculinity

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In his *vita* of the ideal Christian aristocrat, the tenth-century monk Odo of Cluny was not shy about addressing the more intimate aspects of St Gerald of Aurillac's life. After Gerald's rejection of a politically advantageous marriage, Odo stated the religious significance of even the most involuntary admission of sexual impurity. It was Gerald's reaction to his 'nocturnal illusions' that captivated his hagiographer, who related how the king's vassal washed himself after this shameful happening 'not only with water but with tears.'<sup>1</sup> The 'staining of the [outer] body' through the pollution of sex horrified Gerald, the strict 'follower of interior purity.'<sup>2</sup> This over-riding sense of guilt over corporal temptation, in a world where spiritual integrity fought an unending battle against the easily corrupted, impure body, would become not only the story of Gerald's life, but of Odo's too.

In his work, the monastic author Odo of Cluny was preoccupied with shame. Guilt over his body and the sexuality it both represented and was capable of permeates his own work and that of his hagiography by John of Salerno.<sup>3</sup> That a monastic author would be uncomfortable with sex and would show his distaste for it through his work may seem not at all surprising, yet, as Diem suggests, the matter was

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<sup>1</sup> St Odo of Cluny, 'The Life of St Gerald of Aurillac', ed. and trans. Gerard Sitwell in *St Odo of Cluny* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> S. Airlie, 'The Anxiety of Sanctity: St Gerald of Aurillac and his Maker', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 43 (1992), p. 388.

far from simple. Diem argues that the ideal of celibacy, whilst sought and idealised by monks since antiquity as a way to ‘solidify a religious identity’ against the ‘pinnacle of vice’ indulged in by laymen, had ‘effectively disappeared from representations of Frankish monasticism during the sixth century.’<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Jones points out that sexual sin was not necessarily more abhorrent, or shame-inducing, to contemporary theologians than the seemingly lesser transgressions of gluttony or vanity.<sup>5</sup>

Why then, as Jestice asks in her exploration of the development of a new tenth-century morality, did celibacy come to represent the peak of spiritual excellence for Odo and his monastic contemporaries?<sup>6</sup> The answer is twofold, and begins with a change in the conception of sex itself. Nelson has persuasively argued that the ninth century marked a redefinition in gender identities, with monks like Alcuin stating that chastity is equivalent to the angelic life.<sup>7</sup> Second, as monasteries adopted Cluny’s reforms, developing themselves away from lay patronage and therefore completely separating themselves from the secular world, they asserted a new, centralised discipline that included their sexual propriety over the ‘allegedly corrupt houses they were replacing’ and over the immorality of the secular world.<sup>8</sup> The seminal historical treatment of Odo of Cluny’s life and work, Airlie’s ‘The Anxiety of Sanctity: St Gerald of Aurillac and his Maker’ addresses a major point of differentiation between Cluny religiosity and Odo’s morality; Gerald of Aurillac, a secular ruler, was a saint

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<sup>4</sup> J. Nelson, ‘Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c. 900’, in Dawn Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1999), p 131; P. G. Jestice, ‘Why Celibacy? Odo of Cluny and the Development of a New Sexual Morality’, in Michael Frassetto (ed.) *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (London: Garland, 1998), p. 105; Albrecht Diem, quoted in C. A. Jones, ‘Monastic Identity and Sodomite Danger in the *Occupatio* by Odo of Cluny’, *Speculum*, 82 (2007), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Jestice, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Jestice, p. 85; Nelson, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> J. A. McNamara, ‘Canossa and the Ungendering of the Public Man’, in Constance Hoffman Bergen (ed.) *Medieval Religion: New Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 99.

precisely because he lived within the world, not in spite of it.<sup>9</sup> His self control through celibacy and non-militarism were all the more remarkable because of his secular life.

Yet it can be convincingly argued that Odo's conception of sin, faith, and self went even further, revealing a belief even more contrary to Cluniac reforms: that *all* men, from whatever walk of life, were able, or at least should strive, to overcome the physicality that had been thrust upon them.<sup>10</sup> Their celibacy made them all into equal men, and attaining this true spiritual and earthly state was accessible to all. The fact that he and his subject experienced such strong guilt over their sexuality separated them, in his mind, from all other men, announcing that it was overcoming this human precondition to moral frailty with regards to sex and sin, rather than the traditionally masculine militaristic pursuits, which made true Christian manhood. The idea of this celibate spirituality making true masculinity through penance and shame was an idea that would define Odo both as a subject and as a writer, and studying his life and work allows the historian to distil a complex series of emotions amidst changing definitions of sin and gendered identities.

In investigating the responses to the body, adolescence and sexual temptation, this work will identify and seek to understand how, in the face of difficult conceptions of manhood and faith, shame over impurity would create and bind Odo's Christianity and masculinity. Shame over lustful actions, the self-control necessary to prevent sexual indiscretion and the penance undertaken through guilt would announce masculinity as not simply a human conception, but very much a divine one. For Odo, it would take a focused view of shame and the subsequent 'strength of will,' to create

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<sup>9</sup> Airlie, p. 373.

<sup>10</sup> J. Murray, 'Masculinising Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity', in P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (eds.) *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 27; Jones, p. 7.

the Christian man.<sup>11</sup> It was a title available to everyman, and, though it so often excluded those who felt anything less than crippling guilt over the smallest indiscretion, to Odo, it ought to have been aspired to by all.

As Gerald's dead body was being washed and prepared for burial, his hagiographer registered the astonishment of the aristocrat's servants as 'suddenly his right arm extended itself, and his hand was applied to his private parts so as to cover them.'<sup>12</sup> The shame over his nakedness and his wish to preserve bodily humility was so strong it seemingly transcended death, with Odo offering the explanation that 'perhaps it was being divinely shown that this flesh when alive was always anxious to preserve the modesty of chastity.'<sup>13</sup> Seen alongside Gerald's emotional reaction to his 'nocturnal emissions,' there can be no mistaking the discomfort and guilt with which Odo regards the body, as it displayed sin in the most visual and bodily of ways.

For Odo, shame over one's body and the sins it could commit were ever-present, entirely manifested in his Christian-masculine concept: the body needed to be taught self-control in accessing celibate masculinity, and self-control could only be achieved through shame over sin. The very nature of the bodily functions that so grieved Gerald affected all, regardless of rank, calling or occupation, rendering all men equally at risk. At his death, Gerald escaped the binding physicality of sexual temptation and sin that he had resisted and abhorred, dying on a Sunday, which, for Odo, signified his peaceful passing to heavenly rest.<sup>14</sup> Gerald's hagiographer described how, on entering paradise, his spirit 'exulted, trusting that it would now

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<sup>11</sup> Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 337.

<sup>12</sup> St Odo of Cluny, p. 170.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

receive... the hope so long desired.’<sup>15</sup> In life, and, in this instance, even after death, he would experience nothing less than a battle against his own flesh.

In the Life of Gerald of Aurillac, an almost dualistic understanding of, and response to self is revealed. Gerald could control his thoughts and, to an extent, his actions, bound by the mentality of purity and self-control; yet his body, with the sexuality it symbolised and was able to enact, seemed often beyond such restraint. In this sense, in Odo’s work Gerald becomes Everyman; the shame over the wet dreams that plague him and his sheer physicality are ‘indelible’ to his Christianity and his masculinity.<sup>16</sup> Whereas ‘the flesh might fear on account of its mortal state’, the pure, uncorrupted spirit is ‘confirmed in the sight of glory.’<sup>17</sup> For Gerald, and for Odo, the body and its capabilities posed a major threat to internal and personal chastity, alongside the manhood and spirituality that the concept represented. It was a threat all the more dangerous because of its inherency and often autonomy in all men, regardless of secular or religious calling.

Whilst shame over the involuntary actions of the body and the body’s nakedness could be invoked throughout (and indeed, after) one’s lifetime, the onset of adolescence is significantly referenced in both Odo’s life and work as the time in a man’s life when both his body and his mind are susceptible to the corruption of the world. For Odo himself, his chastity was promised from his birth, with his father swearing his newborn baby to St Martin (famously quoted in John of Salerno’s work as having said “nothing is to be compared with virginity”) from his cradle.<sup>18</sup> With the onset of puberty, however, his father took the ‘vigorous and good-looking young

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> St Odo of Cluny, p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> John of Salerno, ‘The Life of St. Odo of Cluny’, ed. and trans. Gerard Sitwell in *St Odo of Cluny* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), pp. 8-9. Also cited: St Odo of Cluny, p. 124.

man' away from the Church to begin his schooling in military exercises.<sup>19</sup> Yet from the ages of sixteen to nineteen, Odo experienced headaches and pains so great '[he] thought [he] should die.'<sup>20</sup> Only when he turned his devotion to his patron St Martin did his suffering stop, as he once again embraced a monastic and, most importantly, chaste, path.

With remarkable similarity, the subject of his most famous work suffered equally troubling growing pains. Though as a child Gerald was characterised by 'a certain sweetness and modesty of mind', his outdoors, militaristic adolescent pursuits favoured by the nobility were hindered by a pimply rash that 'so covered [his body] [...] that it was not thought that he could be cured.'<sup>21</sup> After turning his attentions to ecclesiastical study, his health improved, and despite the obligatory aristocratic militarism he undertook, 'nothing was able to hinder Gerald from hastening to the love of learning.'<sup>22</sup> After pious childhoods, in their respective shadowy stages of *iuventus*, both young men suffered God's correcting force, intended to steer them back to their moral spiritual path.<sup>23</sup>

It was with a deep, troubling sense of shame that these men would look back at their teenage years. Before Odo returned to his monastic education he believed God was showing him how prone to evil his life was, noting sagely that 'I have never acted well of my own accord.'<sup>24</sup> Odo's and Gerald's anxious and painful adolescent turmoil manifested itself through their pubescent bodies, as they experienced the pursuits and presumably, though the hagiographers barely allude to it, the temptations of the world,

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<sup>19</sup> John of Salerno, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> John of Salerno, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> St Odo of Cluny, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> K. G. Cushing, 'Pueri, Iuvenes and Viri: Age and Utility in the Gregorian Reform', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 94 (2008), p. 438.

<sup>24</sup> John of Salerno, pp. 10-11.

equal to each of their adolescent contemporaries. It is not too strong, Nelson asserts, to describe Odo and his subject's troubled teenage years as something of a crisis of both masculine and spiritual identity.<sup>25</sup> The traditional ascetic view of puberty, whether inside or outside monastic confines, as the weakest moment in a man's life for resisting sexual temptation, could not be more clearly reflected than in these works; their shame at almost succumbing, however briefly, to their adolescent mentalities would manifest itself in their redefinition as pious, controlled, chaste *men*.<sup>26</sup> The fact that they could resist, when so many succumbed, strengthened the feeling all the more. Through following their love of godly celibacy over indulging in pleasures of the flesh, Odo and his subject were not just older, but wiser too.

Yet for any man, adult or otherwise, the challenges of taming an unruly body and a corruptible mind were great; true chastity was not intended to come 'too easily or naturally', and undertaking grave penance was presented as key to future self-control.<sup>27</sup> For Gerald and Odo, the shame in the famous encounters in which they almost, or at least appear to almost experience and succumb to their flesh, would be invoked as examples of the utmost masculine practice for all. There is a difference, Odo asserts, 'between one who feels the delight in vice and gives way and one who fighting against it conquers [...] [driving] out the poison of evil delight.'<sup>28</sup> In explaining such temptation resisted, the authors reveal the strangest, paradoxical heart of this monastic-principled, masculine-Christian concept: whilst sexual arousal in itself was seen as an Augustinian punishment for earlier sins, the temptations faced alongside penance undertaken are almost a necessity.<sup>29</sup> The subsequent shameful

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<sup>25</sup> Nelson, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup> Cushing, p. 445.

<sup>27</sup> Murray, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> St Odo of Cluny, p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, pp. 17-18. Also cited: Jestice, p. 92.

response, therefore, remains almost a self-fulfilling prophecy. Needed but deeply unwanted, these shameful experiences, alongside their acceptance and genuine encouragement of punishments, defined their celibacy *as* their masculinity in a way that was both monastic and, in Gerald's case, a model to the layman seeking superior religious experience.

In a scene resonating with urgency and panic, Odo describes Gerald as nearly driven mad by unwelcome yet uncontrollable desire for a peasant girl. Linguistically, the connections between Gerald's experience of lust and the evocation of the agonies of Hell could not be clearer, as in his lust, he was 'tortured [...], allured and consumed by a blind fire.'<sup>30</sup> Just as during Gerald's adolescence, God's correcting punishment of blindness (suitably symbolic, given Odo's urging of the reader to look beyond the physical, and see the ugliness that lay 'beneath the skin') was not overwhelmingly shameful enough for the punished.<sup>31</sup> 'Humiliating himself under the chastising hand of the Lord', Gerald accepted his reprimand patiently without medicine, understanding soberly that 'every son is chastised.'<sup>32</sup> It took the 'cleansing of his mind' to remove the affliction, leaving a lasting and warning impression on the subject and, undoubtedly, on its readers.<sup>33</sup>

In one of the strangest passages in the *vita* of Odo of Cluny, John of Salerno describes an innocuous event where his hero, at this point the master of the monastic boys' school, accompanied a student to the bathroom in the middle of the night, without a candle.<sup>34</sup> The hagiographer asserts that the event was, from the outset, 'an opportunity of proving his patience', but Odo's response to questions the next

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<sup>30</sup> St Odo of Cluny, p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> John of Salerno, p. 34.

morning could equally be described as a display of both the guilt and the inherent need for penance he felt was necessary.<sup>35</sup> Jones, in his investigation into the monk's preoccupation with the dangers to the monastic life of hetero- and homosexuality, believes the event went further than causing Odo embarrassment; he appeared to be so deeply ashamed of raising suspicious ideas, being so acutely aware of the sensitivity of the improper sexual conduct implied, that he begged pardon and 'prostrated himself on the ground.'<sup>36</sup> The taint of sexual sin on his unblemished chastity, and, by extension, on his identity as a Christian, even though just mistaken, was enough to cause the deepest remorse which could only be alleviated by self-enforced penance.

In his own life and his work, Odo regarded self-control as essential, but as only obtainable after very nearly failing to resist worldly temptation.<sup>37</sup> Celibacy, he acknowledged, was hard to access for both religious and secular men (the constant references to such resistance as a battle, especially in Gerald's *vita*, attest to appeals to the military mentality of the latter) but it was the only way in which true Christian faith and manhood could be achieved. A celibate Christian man was the pinnacle of masculinity, simply because his internal faith controlled the desires of the body; he would not be 'unmanned' by a lust that threatened to reduce its numerous victims to 'womanly irrationality' (Gerald's tears when faced with his 'nocturnal emissions' for example) but would fight against it with internal shame, willingly-enacted penance, and hard-earned self-control.<sup>38</sup> To become a true Christian, Odo therefore asserted, was to take one's guilt and its outcomes very much like a man.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Also cited: Jones, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> R. Balzaretto, 'Man and Sex in Tenth-Century Italy', Dawn Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, p. 158.

<sup>38</sup> McNamara, p. 111.

In his most famous work, Odo would astutely acknowledge that ‘what a man may be by himself and what [he may be] by the grace of God’ were remarkably different things.<sup>39</sup> For this Cluniac monk, there could be no true masculinity without Christian faith, and truly embracing God meant a complete espousal of the celibate life. Swanson famously called this conception of maleness ‘emasculinity’ but Odo’s self-identification and notion of Christian maleness was far greater in its encompassment, meant for a far wider audience.<sup>40</sup> Despite his monasticism, and especially the influence of the reforming Cluny convent, Odo judged all men equally: all male bodies were expressions of deliberate or involuntary sexual behaviour; adolescence provoked in all men the same unsavoury reactions. All men were, at some point or another, susceptible to temptation. Yet what differentiated them was their subsequent reaction to the lure of sexuality. In Odo’s mind real men resisted, sought penance and developed a hardened sense of composed, controlled self. Celibacy was hard to access, but through shame and its consequences, all men were equal to the task.

Seen with regard to the subsequent Gregorian Reform of the late tenth century, Odo’s anxieties over his gender and its demonstration fit within the competing, conflicting models of masculinity presented to all men.<sup>41</sup> Yet Odo’s masculinity was not so much Swanson’s renowned ‘third gender’ as it was the *only* gender deemed worth aspiring to and attaining. As a model for emulation, Gerald did not fit with the traditional monastic advice given to Carolingian men, as he is ‘nearly always on his own, a

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<sup>39</sup> St Odo of Cluny, p. 103.

<sup>40</sup> R. N. Swanson, quoted in K. A. Smith, ‘Saints in Shining Armour: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, c. 1050-1250’, *Speculum*, 83 (2008), p. 591.

<sup>41</sup> Nelson, p. 142; R. N. Swanson, ‘Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation’, in Dawn Hadley (ed.) *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, p. 161.

brooding, praying, chaste and isolated figure.’<sup>42</sup> In this work, however, Odo not only furthered monastic conceptions of manhood: he embodied, starkened and embraced the feelings that make the truest form of masculinity. It is safe to say that, when he recorded Gerald as viewing his contemporaries and seeing ‘innocence almost entirely departed’, Odo was reflecting his exacting sentiments at the world.<sup>43</sup> A powerful sense of shame and wilful self-control both ensured the protection of celibate innocence and enabled it; for this monk and his lay subject, to be a true Christian was to be a real man, and *vice versa*.

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<sup>42</sup> Airlie, p. 395.

<sup>43</sup> St Odo of Cluny, pp. 138-139.