

DEMONS AND MONKS IN GUIBERT OF NOGENT

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In Guibert of Nogent's *Confessions*, the Devil and demons are very real threats to the monks of Fly and Nogent, and can assail any, both holy and impious, as the desire takes them. Demons are not a metaphor, mere symbols, but continuing tempters of holy men.

Many of the visions or visitations of demons afflict monks who have sinned. In particular, avarice and theft seem to attract demons to revel in the sin and Guibert notes that the Devil uses stealing more than any other sin to trap monks (76). The subject of money and monastic avarice is clearly a worrisome one for Guibert: the Rule binds monks to vows of poverty, and yet opportunities to gain "filthy lucre" surround them. Too frequently, they give in. Sometimes, as in the case of the simoniac monk, the sinner repents, yet the money that they stole remains tainted as long as it remains in the hands of an individual. In this case, demons gleefully played on the money until the holder of the money returned it to the Church (75). When another monk received two sous from noble lady and kept it to himself, he came down with dysentery and, unconfessed and unanointed, the Devil killed him (77). Both examples would suggest that for the Church to possess wealth is not a sin; yet, once it comes into the hands of individual monks it becomes dangerous. Guibert is clearly concerned about the increasingly wealthy nature of monasteries and their involvement in secular affairs that required money and the possibilities of such wealth leading monks into temptation. In the first instance, the monk took money set aside for the restoration of public roads, a non-spiritual endeavor and one far removed from the original ideal of monks to set themselves apart from the world. As the monasteries struggled to come to terms with the new capital economy and their place in the secular world, such instances would occur far more regularly.

Demons take an interest in pious monks too and Guibert believes that the Devil pays particular attention to

the holy. When Guibert had first entered the monastery of Fly and found true devotion, he had a vision of the Devil, intent on terrifying him from his piety (52). Similarly, the Devil assailed another young monk while in the bedchamber of Guy of Beauvais, irritated by the young man's piety (53). In both cases, young men had found God and repented of their sins. They had thus become lost to the Devil. Guibert notes that just as Luke 15.7 makes clear that a repentant sinner is more valuable to God, so it must be that these lost sinners are more annoying to the Devil. Guibert sees so much sin pervading the life of the monks, including himself, that for a monk to repent is a victory. The Devil, however, merely works harder.

When a former priest became a monk, demons came to him demanding alms, although the monk had none to give (113). Once again, the minions of the Devil used money as a route to the temptation of a monk, although in this case, they call to his inherent charity not his avarice. Given his poverty, he would have to take from the monastery to give to the "Scots" and thus commit a sin. When he does not, they punish him by physically damaging his body not once but twice. With this story, Guibert reinforces the dangers of money, even to the pious.

Other sins, not only avarice and the dangers of money, attract demons. The former chaplain of Guibert's mother was guilty of "abominable vices" and became a magnet for demons (84). So great were his sins that no amount of prayer or penance could remove them and he died in torment. This would seem to indicate that Guibert believed that although a man can repent and achieve salvation for his sins, it is dangerous to wait too long, to rely upon a final, deathbed absolution. In some cases, the sins are too great, the demons too powerful, for the sinner to achieve salvation. In Guibert's world, surrounded as it was by sin and temptation, a wise man would do well to

acknowledge this and to repent and live a good life or risk the consequences.

Lust also draws down the attention of the Devil. In one story, the Devil tempts a “lascivious” monk into accepting diabolic power. This, the monk uses to consort with a nun and sate his lust (89). Here, the monk is greedy not for wealth but for flesh, for another aspect of the secular world that religious men are expected to set aside. Chastity must have been difficult for many monks, especially given the number who entered monastic orders as young men or without a powerful vocation. However, Guibert links lust with the Devil, attempting perhaps to deter fellow monks into such temptations.

Sin surrounded the monks described in Guibert’s Confessions and with sin came demons and the Devil,

waiting to reap the souls of those who did not repent.

Avarice appears to be the most common sin and must have been a deep concern for many, including Guibert, during the time. The situation of monasteries within the emerging cash economy left many open to temptation. However, greed for money was not the only draw to demons. Other sins attracted them, including lust, and Guibert makes clear the belief that too much sin was not only possible but left the sinner in danger of losing his eternal soul, that the weight of sin would overwhelm prayer. Even the most pious were not immune. They made a particularly delicious target to the Devil and he used all his wiles to corrupt the repentant. For Guibert, danger was everywhere, sin pervasive, demons terribly real.