Constructing Sanctity in the Long Twelfth Century: The Miracles of St. Anselm, St. Bernard and St. Francis

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Introduction

Miracles were a key feature of the religious life of the High Middle Ages. As such they played an important role in constructing, creating and enacting medieval notions of sanctity. This thesis analyzes the ways in which three different saints – St. Anselm, St. Bernard and St. Francis – performed miracles. It aims to show how their miracles differed, what claims the saints made about their own sanctity through their miracles, and more broadly what the miracles show concerning the religious movements of which the three saints were emblematic figures. The key question is: How did the miraculous contribute to the sanctity of St. Anselm, St. Bernard and St. Francis?

This thesis intersects with a number of different areas of scholarship. Primarily it is a study of sanctity but viewed through the lens of the miraculous. To analyze the miracles, the idea of performativity will be drawn on, and finally, because each of the saints this thesis deals with are significant enough to warrant their own fields of study, it intersects with the biographical work on Anselm, Bernard and Francis. The novelty of this study primarily derives from the fact that no historians have applied the ideas developed by Judith Butler to the study of traditional – Great-Men – figures of history.

Judith Butler developed performance theory within the context of gender studies. In her 1988 essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” Butler argued that ‘the body as a mode of dramatizing or enacting possibilities offers a way to understand how cultural conception is embodied and enacted.’ Butler was writing specifically about gender. Her argument, with its

1 For the most comprehensive and thorough study of all aspects of the miraculous in the Middle Ages see Benedicta Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215, (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1987). For a more recent, and entirely thematic, account of miracles in Middle Ages see Robert Bartlett, Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), 333–409. For an example of the ways in which records of saints’ lives and their miracles can be used to explore a variety of topics see Michael Goodich, Lives and Miracles of the Saints: Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography (Burlington: Variorum, 2004).
references to transgender rights and critique of essentialist third-wave feminism, appears, at first sight, a world away from the Middle Ages. Whilst Butler was writing with a certain political objective there is no reason that her theoretical stance on performance should be only thought applicable to the study of gender. The same analytical tools she uses to grapple with gender could equally be applied to the study of the “holy” or the “sacred.” This is particularly true of the Middle Ages when, as Constable has noted, “to have truly said “No” to Christ in the Middle Ages would have been a sign not of heresy but of madness.” 3 For the Europeans of the Middle Ages faith was not a discrete part of their lives: Faith was a fundamental part of their entire existence.

Indeed, scholars have used Butler’s model as a way of thinking about gender in the Middle Ages. For example, in her recent book *Divine Possession*, Nancy Caciola has outlined a tripartite system for analyzing medieval accounts of divine possession that draws heavily on performance theory. She begins with the “roles” that the possessed play, then she deals with the self-representation of the individual as she “performs” the roles before finally assessing the audiences’ collective evaluation of those performances. 4 Caciola’s book is based around a gendered account of divine possession; her focus is on the extent to which female mystics were performing distinctly gendered roles and whether the evaluations from their audiences were also gendered.

Caciola’s book is a good example of the kinds of subjects that analysis centered on performance has been applied to. Caciola’s book deals with women mystics, a typically underrepresented subject of study in medieval history. What has not happened in the decades since Butler’s article appeared is for her new ways of thinking to be applied back to traditional subjects.

This thesis takes a type of analysis developed to further an understanding of subjects beyond the politically significant men and applies that form of analysis back onto those men.\(^5\)

The miracle is a feasible subject on which to utilize Butler’s ideas about performance. In one sense God, via his saints, is literally performing miracles on the profane world but in another deeper sense the recipients of the divine (the subjects of the miracles) are performing the divine through their bodies. The performance is therefore twofold, God creating miracles and men enacting the divine according to ‘interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.’\(^6\) Secondly, the miraculous exists in a liminal space. Whatever boundary is erected between religious and lay worlds is shattered by the occurrence of a miracle. Thus over the course of a century where the role of the divine was profoundly questioned we would expect to see a significant transformation in the role of miracles, the mediators of the line between secular and divine.

Because this thesis is principally concerned with aspects of the history of sanctity it also deals with the large body of scholarship on the changing nature of religious ideals during the long twelfth century. The twelfth century was a time of rapid social and religious change. This has broadly come to be labelled the “Twelfth Century Renaissance,” and scholars have followed in the wake of Charles Haskins’ seminal 1927 book *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* in analyzing the kind of transformations that were taking place.\(^7\) For example in worship the twelfth

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\(^5\) There are a number reasons this kind of analysis has not been applied to the great men of the age. Partly the current, and laudable, historiographical trend of attempting to bring into the historical narrative many of those historical figures who were left out of much history writing during the 20th century might be responsible. Partly also this kind of analysis requires a willingness to engage with parts of medieval spirituality that appear to be at odds with our more rational notions of religion, namely the use of miracles, and the major trends in the historiography of these saints were established by historians who tended to look at the saints as spiritual guides as well as historical subjects. These historians were often unwilling to devote serious scholarly attention to a part of the saint that they thought, if not extraneous, at least of minimal importance. This argument is made at the beginning of the relevant chapters and more detail can be found below on pages 14-17, 34-36.


century saw a focus on a private relationship with God rather than on corporate worship for social needs. It would not do to overstate this shift; the highly corporate liturgical worship of much Benedictine monasticism remained a significant factor in the twelfth century, but many of the new forms of religious life that were appearing did emphasize a personal connection with God. As Constable puts it “the balance of spiritual responsibility in society, as it were, shifted from the community to the individual, so that the process of salvation, even in purgatory, was seen as a lonely affair, in which the sinner could look for only limited help from other people.” Examples of this are numerous. One oft-noted instance is that the Cistercian order refused to take child oblates. Throughout the early Middle Ages Benedictine houses had accepted many child oblates but the Cistercians chose to emphasize the importance of personal choice and thus only accepted those who were able to choose monasticism for themselves. The emphasis on personal choice showed the increased importance of personal relationships with God.

Artistically this change is seen in a new type of depiction of Christ that focused on his suffering and human nature. The formalized depiction of Christ in glory untouched by pain and death faded, and, according to R.W. Southern, the new art was a realization of “the extreme limits of human suffering” where the dying figure of Christ was “stripped of its garments, the arms sagged with the weight of the body, the head hung on one side, their eyes were closed, blood ran down the Cross.” By making Christ progressively more vulnerable the artists stressed his humanness and accessibility.

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11 Scholarly works that deal with the twelfth century renaissance are numerous. For an elegant and sweeping summary of the kinds of changes that were underway see Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, 219-259. For a longer and thorough analysis of the main ideas and debates in the scholarship of the twelfth century renaissance see R. Swanson,
Miracles too were subject to these broad changes in religious sensibility. Perhaps most obviously this is seen in a shift away from the violent vengeance miracles of the early Middle Ages and towards an emphasis on thaumaturgy and forgiveness. Benedicta Ward outlines this transition in *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*. A general comparison of two miracle collections almost a century apart, but originating in similar parts of southern France, serves to demonstrate the shift.

In the miracles of St. Foy, an early eleventh century collection, the focus is on vengeance and the actualized power of St. Foy. The examples are numerous; in one particularly gruesome story a baron attempted to steal some wine from the monks of Foy whereupon “his muscles lost their ability to move and stiffened completely. . . so the wretch tortured with wretched torture, squarely extended his wretched life, wretchedly, for more than two days.” According to Ward these types of miracle collections were concerned with the application of a saint’s power to local needs: “the miracles of St. Faith assert her consequence as a protector, and also the consequence of those associated with her.”

By the latter twelfth century when the Miracles of Our Lady of Rocamadour were collected the change in emphasis is marked. Roughly 70% of the stories collected in this account

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*The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999). The turn towards an inward spirituality also manifested itself in institutional reformation of religious life. Throughout the early Middle Ages Benedictine monasticism enjoyed a largely unchallenged primacy in religious life. But during the twelfth century this spiritual hegemony was rapidly broken down. Most famously the Cistercians burst onto the spiritual scene but along with them came the Carthusians, the Augustinian Canons, the Grandmontines and an increase in the popularity of the hermitical life. By the end of the twelfth century the religious scene had changed radically enough that it was ready for the entrance of St Francis of Assisi and the friars, whose absolute mendicant poverty marked a sharp departure from the Benedictine wealthy and corporate lifestyle. For a account of the transformation of these religious institutions during the twelfth century see Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*. For an excellent series of essays that concentrate on the emotional and affective elements of piety as well as questioning the validity of the idea that the twelfth century can be said to have discovered the individual see Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

12 Foy was third century child martyr whose cult waned until the early Middle Ages when it enjoyed a resurgence. For the miracles of saint Foy see *The Book of Sainte Foy*, ed. and trans. Robert Clark and Pamela Sheingorn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).


were thaumaturgical (cases of miraculous healing).\textsuperscript{15} Not only did the type of miracle most commonly performed change but so did the reasons for miraculous happenings. There are relatively few instances where Our Lady of Rocamadour acts to protect local interests; rather she responds to repentant pleas for salvation. She seems further and further removed from the supernatural equivalent of a secular baron. In the words of Ward: “The saint is invoked to increase the glory of his own shrine and to defend his veneration, not to terrify temporal enemies of the shrine or reinforce the claims of his guardians.”\textsuperscript{16}

It is possible to establish how miracles participated in creating Anselm, Bernard and Francis’ sanctity because each of these three saints have biographies that feature a significant number of miracles. The miracles are both formulaic, in the sense in that they conform to hagiographical typology, but also in a number of notable cases break from that typology. The unique personality of these saints and the way in which their biographers marry standardized descriptions of miracles with exceptional descriptions render each of them productive subjects for historical study. Also there is a significant amount known about each of their biographers, which means that the records of miracles can be contextualized both with reference to the biographer and the subject.

On top of this, each of the saints has a significant corpus of their own writings, although this is much smaller in the case of Francis. In Bernard’s case we have a number of writings in which he outlines his own view on the miraculous, whether it be through a biography of a saint or his own letters and other writings. Whilst neither Anselm nor Francis set down, at any length, their

\textsuperscript{16} Ward, \textit{Miracles and the Medieval Mind}, 69.
own views on miracles, we do have other writings of theirs which can tangentially throw light on how they perceived miracles.

These three saints are well suited to this exercise because each of them stood at the forefront of the religious sensibility of their time and advanced that religious sensibility. In the case of St. Anselm, he was representative not only of traditional Benedictine religiosity but the ways in which that religiosity was reshaping itself to deal with the changes that occurred during the twelfth century. Bernard was both the propagandist and, for a time, the principle theologian of Cistercian monasticism, which reached its flowering in the twelfth century and was in many ways the most coherent and advanced expression of the spiritual tastes of the later twelfth century. St. Francis was the founder and model for the Franciscan order, which along with the Dominican order, formed the largest and most significant new development in religious institutions towards the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. Taken together, then, these three figures represent both high points of individual sanctity – after all all three were canonized relatively quickly after their deaths – and the institutions of which they can be taken to be, at least to some degree, representative.

The principle sources used for this study will be the biographies of the three saints. For St. Anselm the main source on his life is Eadmer’s biography. Eadmer knew Anselm personally and for the last decade of Anselm’s life was almost constantly in his company. The biography contains a number of miracles stories but is also deeply personal in nature. The biography was written to advance the argument for Anselm’s canonization. Therefore, we can assume that Eadmer’s record of Anselm’s miracles would conform to the types of miracles that were expected of twelfth-century

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saints. But, because of his intimate knowledge of St. Anselm, his record went beyond the formulaic platitudes of some hagiographies.

For St. Bernard the main source that will be analyzed is the biography that Bernard wrote about the Irish saint Malachy. Bernard wrote the biography of Malachy in order to express, by providing an example, a certain view of saintliness. There are a large number of miracles in Malachy’s biography and they are noticeably different from the types of miracles that St. Anselm was recorded as performing. Part of this is due to the fact that Malachy was an Irish saint, and the Irish saintly tradition has certain distinctive features, but equally significantly it was because Bernard was engaged in a different spiritual project to Anselm and thus his use of the miraculous was different. For Bernard miracles were a way of accruing personal, charismatic power which could be wielded in the secular world, but remaining religiously orientated. Bernard’s Life of Malachy allows the reader to look into Bernard’s idealized view of how a saint should use and harness miracles.

Biographies of St. Francis are numerous. This thesis principally uses the earliest of the biographies, Thomas of Celano’s First Life, and the collection of stories about Francis known as the Legend of Perugia. After Francis’ death the Franciscan order became split between a group of people who advocated for a return to the type of extreme poverty that Francis himself was believed to have practiced and another faction that favored a relaxation of certain rules to facilitate

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institutional viability. Both of these texts came out of the school of thought that attempted to access Francis at his most severe and penitential; they both looked to Francis as the charismatic pursuer of poverty and not as a model for institutional development. Thus both texts offer us a personal insight into Francis’ miracles and neither of them attempted to make the miracles simply formulaic expressions of saintliness to appease the papacy.

Therefore, all of the principal sources share a concern with the saint as an individual model of a certain form of saintliness. Because the sources are formally related – they are all hagiographical texts – they share certain tropes. These commonalities provide for a degree of comparison and thematic unity in their analysis. However, because the texts are also distinctly personal, they often depart from standardized depictions of sainthood and offer arresting moments of unique insight into the way these saints used miracles in their performance of their unique brands of sanctity.

Establishing whether or not these miracles actually occurred is outside the bounds of this thesis. Not only is it beyond the bounds of this thesis, but the question is not really relevant to the thesis’s conclusion. What matters is not whether they happened but rather how the performers, recorders and audience construed them as happening. Or put another way, the chroniclers and witnesses built up their own impression of the miracle and it is that impression that we have access to now. The miracles in this thesis are treated as products of an attempt by society to understand the divine not as discrete events that may or may not have happened.

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The predominant understanding of the miraculous during the Middle Ages was provided by St. Augustine. In four works, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, *De Trinitate*, *De Utilitate Credenda* and *De Civitate Dei*, he argued that there was only really one miracle, namely creation and re-creation through Christ. But because men became indifferent to daily miracles, such as rain, unusual manifestations of God’s power were necessary to remind men of the wonder of God. However, these manifestations were not contrary to the laws of nature; rather they were part of a united whole, a grand miracle. This is the understanding of miracles that this thesis will use, the manifestation of God’s power outside of ordinary natural progress but still a part of a coherent whole.

In order to explore the different ways in which the miraculous contributed to different constructions of sanctity across the High Middle Ages, this thesis will be divided into three different chapters, the first of which deals with St. Anselm, the second St. Bernard and the third St. Francis. This chronological approach allows the changes that were occurring in religious culture to be addressed coherently through the lives of three different men. Taken together they broadly represent the major changes in religious sensibilities from the eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries.

This thesis argues that across the twelfth century there was a noticeable increase in the showmanship involved in miracle performance. St. Anselm is the epitome of understated performance – despite the fact that he was beginning to find a demonstrative emotional strain in his writing – while Bernard used the miraculous as a way to synthesize his religious vocation with...
worldly power and St. Francis, the showiest of all the saints, used miracles as a way to address issues that arose because of his very public preaching and penance. All three of these saints used miracles in slightly different ways, but all three of them were responding to the major problems of their times and the institutions of which they were a part. In this way, the miraculous was a vital way for the saints to express and make sense of their own religious inclinations.
Introduction: Avoiding Miracles

In his *Vita Anselmi* the monk Eadmer describes a scene which took place in 1100, during Anselm’s first exile from England. Anselm was on his way to Cluny when, according to Eadmer, he was stopped by a man standing in the middle of the road and crying. Through his tears, the man begged Anselm to cure his mad sister. While the man stood pleading with Anselm his sister was being restrained by a crowd of townspeople who had gathered to see Anselm work a miraculous cure. However, in spite of the pleading man, the sick sister and the expectant crowd, Anselm ignored the request and passed along “as if he were deaf.”

Seeing Anselm’s reaction, the man prayed to him even more fervently. But yet again, according to Eadmer’s account, he was repulsed and Anselm walked on, “firmly protesting that on no account would he attempt anything so extraordinary.” Anselm’s retreat took him through the crowd of people holding the mad girl and for a third time he was stopped and they begged him to perform a miracle. This time the crowd would not take his refusal quietly and they grabbed his horse’s reins and began to “convince him by insults if nothing else.” Eventually Anselm relented and made the sign of the cross over the suffering woman. Eadmer was careful to point out, though, that Anselm did this because “he would not escape on any other terms.”

Eadmer explicitly stated that Anselm did not perform the miracle out of altruism or holy duty. He had to be physically accosted by an angry crowd before he acquiesced to the crying man’s demand.

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1 Eadmer, *The Life of St. Anselm*, 120.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
After blessing the mad girl Anselm retreated with his cowl drawn over his head. The mad girl, her brother, and the crowd then returned home while Anselm and his group proceeded on their way to Cluny. Eadmer reports that while neither he, nor any members of Anselm’s party, saw the miraculous healing take place, he did receive a reliable report of its occurrence. According to the report, when the mad woman arrived home and stepped across her doorway she was miraculously cured and restored to perfect health.

This is one of the most vivid examples in Eadmer’s *Vita Anselmi* of St Anselm’s striking reluctance to perform miracles. For Anselm, a man more used to reflection in his cloister than the rough and tumble of the secular world, this mobbing must have been a particularly unnerving experience, and yet he resisted the crowd multiple times. This chapter’s essential question is: why was Anselm so reluctant to engage in the miraculous and why, when he did engage in miracle working, was his performance so understated? The argument starts with an explanation of the tendency to neglect scholarly study of Anselm’s miracles. This is followed by an assessment of Anselm and Eadmer’s views on miracles, which leads into a close reading of several of Anselm’s miracles. Finally, the context in which Anselm lived is drawn in to explain his style of miracle working.

**Historiography: The Neglect of the Miraculous**

As noted in the Introduction, there is a notable gap in the scholarly literature around certain major saints and their miracles. In the case of Anselm this gap is particularly pronounced. This is in large part due to the influence of the greatest English speaking Anselm scholar of the last century: R.W. Southern. Southern viewed Anselm as an intellectual titan. Reading his magisterial biography of
Anselm gives the impression that Southern felt the twelfth-century saint’s spiritual and intellectual impact keenly. In his preface Southern describes living with Anselm in his thoughts for fifty years and concludes that Anselm’s best ideas were “above fashion. And they can be taken up at any time and be as fresh as ever.” Southern was never quite as explicit in his veneration of Anselm as was Sister Benedicta Ward. In her introduction to a translated edition of Anselm’s prayers Ward wrote that “Today they [the prayers] do not yield their riches at a casual reading. . . yet there is here a unique combination of theological veracity and personal ardour that has value at any time.”

Because Ward and Southern viewed Anselm as both an historical figure and a source of theological truth, their analyses tended to focus on aspects of his life that could inform their own relationship with God. Southern’s biography of Anselm was, in the words of Mark Phillipott, “a history of the soul.” Their central concern, which has been taken on by more recent historians, was with his prayers and his intellect.

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10 Southern established a certain paradigm for historical writing about Anselm. A brief look at historical studies of Anselm published recently suggests the contours of this paradigm. A. Smith published *Saint Anselm’s Other Argument* which is an intellectual treatise based around a close reading of Anselm’s writing that suggests he had a second argument, along side his well known ontological argument, for the existence of God. For and explanation and assessment of this ‘other’ argument see A. Smith, *Anselm’s Other Argument* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 125-75. For the the ontological argument for the existence of God see Prosologion in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 75-99. For an elegant explanation of both the history and philosophy of the Prosologion, see R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*, 127-134. For another recent example of the kind of scholarship that Southern serves as a model for see Eileen Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 1. Whose book is about Anselm’s “development of rational arguments, expressed in long chains of logical inferences and elaborate linguistic analysis.”
In his biography Southern rarely mentions miracles and when he does it is riddled with condescension. Southern’s view was that while during the life of the seventh-century Saint Wilfrid miracles saturated the everyday, by the twelfth century this was not the case and they had become rare occurrences. Southern’s view is that for early saints, life “was bathed in supernatural events. In these Lives, the miraculous was not merely an addition to ordinary life; it was their ordinary life.” Southern posits that popular mentality shifted towards skepticism of the miraculous across the early middle ages. However, there is little evidence to support the idea that the general cultural expectation was that miracles were reducing in number during the twelfth century. In her study of miracles across the Middle Ages Benedicta Ward argues that from Augustine to Aquinas “Events called miracula permeated life at every level, but they were so closely woven into the texture of Christian experience that there was no incentive to examine or explain the presuppositions that lay behind them.” If Southern’s view was correct and miracles were expected with less regularity throughout the Middle Ages, one would expect to see an increasingly skeptical attitude towards the miraculous by the latter Middle Ages. However, as Ronald Finucane notes by the end of the thirteenth century some nuns in England had felt the need to establish a specific litany to chant whenever a miracle appeared in their midst, suggesting that miracles were seen as common enough events that they warranted a standardized liturgical response. The idea that miracles were somehow less a part of twelfth-century religious life than they had been part of seventh-century religiosity is incorrect.

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Southern’s disapproving view of miracles is not solely due to his belief that by the twelfth century they had ceased to be a normal cultural expectation; it was also because he considered them to be banal. He states this explicitly when discussing Eadmer’s relationship to St. Anselm. He wrote that “Eadmer would no doubt have liked to write a work bristling with conventional miracles, and he filled most of the few pages not occupied by official letters from 1100 to 1109 with miraculous banalities.”\(^{15}\) Southern had in mind the cures of cancer or paralysis or deafness that crop up in most hagiographies and at almost every miracle working shrine. Part of his view is based on the assumption that miracles were only included to try to secure papal approval for Anselm’s sainthood and therefore were the product of unhelpful conventions artificial imposed. This is wrong on three accounts. Firstly, it is unlikely that Eadmer was recording the miracles with a clear blueprint in mind for winning Anselm canonization. During the twelfth-century papal centralization of the canonization procedure was an ongoing, and ad-hoc process. During the early parts of the twelfth century the papacy’s actual control over sainthood was at best imperfect and mostly nominal. It was only by the end of that century that “the papacy began to take control of this process, removing recognition of individuals as saints from the periphery to the center.”\(^{16}\) Secondly, even if the miracles can be regarded as the products of an attempt to fit Anselm into a set of papal criteria for sainthood, that does not in itself render them banal. Conventions are important because they dictate what is commonly viewed as significant. Thirdly, Anselm’s miracles have a degree of individuality that suggest they were more than just reflections of papal ideology. Even when placed amongst the miracles of his fellow saints Anselm’s stand out for a number of reasons, not least of which was his overwhelming reluctance to perform them.

\(^{15}\) Southern, *Saint Anselm*, 427.

\(^{16}\) Finucane, *Contested Canonizations*, 13.
Eadmer & St. Anselm: Their Views on Miracles

Southern’s dismissal of Anselm’s miracles is unwarranted and it is a stance that does not reflect the religious sensibilities of his historical subject. St. Anselm’s writings on the miraculous are not extensive. Part of this may be due to the fact that, as Ward points out, they were such an accepted part of life from Augustine to Aquinas that he simply did not feel the need to challenge them or think about them in a critical way.17 Secondly, although he was an intellectual who wrote widely on a great deal of theological subjects, we should not expect that list to be exhaustive. But despite the fact that the miraculous is not the subject of an extensive study of his, he does mention it. In his treatise on *Virgin Conception and Original Sin* he wrote:

> that there are three ranks of events: the miraculous, the natural and the voluntary. And the miraculous is not at all governed by the other or their laws, but freely governs; nor does it harm them, when it seems to come up against them, because they have nothing but what they have received from it, nor has it given to them anything except what is under it.18

Not only does Anselm accord the miraculous a real and dignified place in his hierarchy of events, he actually places it above all other types of events. The other orders of events “have nothing but what they have received”19 from miracles. Anselm here states, and does not even feel the need to argue particularly to make his point, that everything flows from, and is ultimately subordinate to, the miraculous.

Given that Anselm’s own writing on the miraculous is relatively sparse the most profitable source for discussing how he viewed miracles is Eadmer’s biography. Any attempt to fully separate the historical Anselm from the portrait that Eadmer has given us is a fool’s errand. The two are inextricably linked: we cannot go beyond Eadmer’s text to an objective, historical Anselm. But, a

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19 Ibid.
brief comparison of the kinds of miracles that Eadmer records in his Vita Anselmi with the miracles that he chose to take note of in his other hagiographical work demonstrates that the according his subjects a disinclination to perform miracles was not a general feature of Eadmer’s work.

For example, in his biography of Saint Oda Eadmer describes a scene in which the king of England broke his sword during a battle. Oda saw this and in front of the whole army asked the king “What is the problem? What is worrying you? Your blade hangs intact at your side and yet you complain that it is broken. . . be not afraid since the sun will not set until either flight or destruction envelops the enemies of your Lord who have risen up against you.” According to Eadmer the king’s sword did reappear and the day was won by the English. After this Oda was “regarded by all men with great admiration and was acknowledged to be truly an illustrious son of the house of Israel.” This miracle, recorded by Eadmer, carries all the opposite features to the miracle that was described in the opening of this chapter. Oda volunteered to perform the miracle, he offered help freely without any sort of coercion, he chose a very public place to perform the miracle, and the whole act was steeped in violence. The effectiveness of the miracle was then witnessed by an entire army and Oda used this reputation as proof of his sanctity and power. The public, voluntary, violent and highly performative nature of Oda’s miracle is all described by Eadmer but seems to oppose the type of sanctity that Anselm was trying to construct.

During his hagiography of St. Dunstan, Eadmer recounts a different but similarly performance-based miracle. Dunstan was perturbed because he heard that several minters of counterfeit coins were having their punishment delayed because it was a feast day. Dunstan discovered this just as he was about to begin celebrating mass. So, with the congregation in front

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21 Ibid.
of him, he called a halt to the service until the wrongdoers had received their punishment. While he waited he contemplated the coiners’ fate, and standing in front of the congregation he was “drenched with tears.” Eventually word came that the punishment had taken place and Dunstan began to celebrate mass. While he was doing this a “snow-white dove descended from the heavens as many looked on and remained silently above his head with its wings spread and almost motionless until the sacrifice had been consumed.” Much like Oda’s miracle Dunstan’s performance took place in a very public place – a full church – and at a highly theatrical moment – the celebration of mass. Admittedly, Dunstan does not specifically request this miracle, but he does welcome its arrival. Indeed, as the congregation left Dunstan remained “still dripping with an immense flood of tears on account of the presence of the grace of God.” The holy man standing in front of a crowd of worshippers, weeping profusely, while a white dove hovers over him, is a deeply public and self consciously outward facing representation of the miraculous.

Given the fact that his other hagiographies present miracles as public and deliberately theatrical events, it is clear that the view of the miraculous presented in the *Vita Anselmi* was a joint project between Eadmer and Anselm. All of Eadmer’s hagiographies share similar stylistic elements that suggests they were written for the same purpose: to be read aloud to groups of monks. Therefore, we cannot simply ascribe differences in representations of the miraculous to Eadmer having different purposes in mind for each book. Eadmer’s life of Anselm was not just a projection of Eadmer’s own views of the miraculous onto St. Anselm. It was a shared attempt to create an idea of holiness that reflected Anselm’s own beliefs and the way he lived out those beliefs.

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23 Ibid., 123.
24 Ibid.
25 B. Muir & A. Turner, introduction to *Eadmer of Canterbury*, XXXIV.
**St. Anselm’s Performance: Miraculously Inward Facing**

There are a number of features that make Anselm’s miracles distinct, but the three principal ones for this chapter are the lack of regard for political consequences, his minimal use of showmanship and his consistent desire to perform without an audience. These three features when taken together demonstrate a religious sensibility that was profoundly inward facing.

In the other works of Eadmer, and indeed in earlier texts, one can see miracles used in public settings to accrue political power or demonstrate sanctity. The already cited example of St. Oda summoning a sword on a battlefield, or the moment in the *Song of Roland* when Charlemagne bends his head and prays “Don’t let the sun go down! / Hold back the dark, O Lord. Let the light abound” in order to secure enough time to avenge Roland’s death, are classic incidences of this.

Using miracles to influence politics was not a tactic seen only in literary work. It is also evident in many shrine records from the Middle Ages. For example, as mentioned in the introduction, in the miracles of St Foy, an early to mid eleventh century collection, the focus is on vengeance and the actualized power of St Foy.

The miracles of St. Anselm are clearly unlike the miracles of St. Foy. In the *Vita Anselmi* there is not a single example of miracles operating as an assertion of temporal power. This is particularly noticeable because there were a number of conflicts throughout Anselm’s political life that would have leant themselves to expression, and guarded resolution, through an invocation of

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27 For more on St. Foy see above, 5. Occasions when Foy is recorded as having used her miracles to emphasize her own worldly power are numerous. For example, at one point Foy foils an attempt to kill a pilgrim and the result is the death of the ambushers, *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 69-70. In a different miracle the miraculous collapse of a roof destroys a man who was slandering her: *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 70-73. In yet another tale Foy repeatedly visited a man who had stolen her gold demanding its return. He denied her until she threatened him three times and he was so scared he returned the gold, *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 92-3. For other shrines where the miracle collections actualize political power in a similar fashion see Ward’s chapter on Benedict of Nursia and St. Cuthbert: Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, 67-89.
the miraculous. For many shrines throughout the Middle Ages an ability to effectively grant miraculous cures was a way for the shrine to assert primacy over other local centers of pilgrimage. Ward illustrates this point with St. Cuthbert’s shrine, when she says that “Cuthbert is described in three stories as a better patron for sailors than St. Nicholas and in one as more useful at sea than St. Brendan;” favorable comparisons are also made to St. Martin, St. Peter and St. Lawrence.28 Thus by asserting Cuthbert’s greater efficacy as a miracle worker the monks could establish the importance of their foundation.

St. Anselm’s biography is completely free of any of this kind of competitive miracle working. This is especially noticeable given that throughout Anselm’s lifetime he was involved in a political dispute over whether Canterbury should hold sole primacy over the British Isles.29 Though by the twelfth century it was relatively unusual for jurisdictional disputes like primacy to turn into competitive assertions of miraculous potency, the close bond between jurisdictional prestige and spiritual prestige is found in a slightly later work also about Canterbury. In William of Canterbury’s biography of St. Thomas Becket a cure is only given to an employee of the archbishop of York after the employee acknowledge Canterbury’s rights.30 Given that the dispute Thomas was engaged in with York was very similar to the conflict Anselm was trying to resolve, and the fact that in earlier shrine miracles attempts to assert spiritual importance were often made through miracles, it is not fanciful to suppose that the lack of political connotations in Anselm’s miracles is significant. His miracles were non-political in two ways: firstly they did not lead to acclaim and personal power for him and secondly they were never pressed into use to assert Canterbury’s primacy.

28 Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind, 63.
29 For brief explanation of the meaning of primacy and the terms of the dispute that mainly focusses on the impact on Anselm: see R.W. Southern, Saint Anselm, 330-359.
30 Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind, 37.
Anselm also tended to perform his miracles without a great deal of showmanship. This point can be highlighted through a comparison of two similar incidences in Eadmer’s life of St. Wilfrid and his life of St. Anselm. Both of the anecdotes deal with a problem encountered by their respective saints while at sea, but they played out in very different ways. On a trip to Rome the wind was blowing in the wrong direction for Anselm’s ship. When he found out that their trip would be delayed Anselm groaned and said “if it be the judgment of Almighty God that I should return to my former miseries, rather than get free of them and pursue that purpose on which he knows I have set my mind, let him see to it and so dispose. I am ready to obey his will. For I am not mine, but his.”31 As soon as he had finished speaking, according to Eadmer, the wind immediately changed course and began to blow Anselm in the correct direction. As Anselm’s miracles go this is actually relatively full of showmanship: he says the prayer in public, although presumably on a ship the opportunities for privacy are minimal, and even lets out an audible groan. But he makes no large sign to signal God that he requires a miracle, he does not use any devices to aid his pursuit of the miraculous, and perhaps most strikingly he does not even ask for a miracle. As Eadmer tells the story he was not seeking a miracle; he was expressing his acceptance of God’s will. On the other hand, when Wilfrid was on board a boat and contrary winds came up they were accompanied by a “ferocious storm.”32 The storm blew Wilfrid’s ship towards a pagan country. Upon landing Wilfrid and his crew were attacked by a group of bloodthirsty barbarians. One of the pagans was chanting magic and so a young attendant of Wilfrid’s threw a stone, killing the magician, which Eadmer explicitly compares to David and Goliath. Then Wilfrid, in the midst of the battle, prostrated himself in prayer and the enemy was defeated because of “the Lord fighting

32 Eadmer, The Life of Saint Wilfrid, 39.
on behalf of his own people."\textsuperscript{33} The Christians held off the pagans long enough for the tide to rise, miraculously quickly on account of Wilfrid’s sanctity, and for them to make their escape.

The styles of performance in these two accounts could not be more contrasting. Anselm does not even ask for a miracle; when the miracle happens he is almost doing non-performance. He does not fight against the wind or even request God’s help; he simply accepts God’s judgment. Wilfrid on the other hand prostrates himself in the middle of a battlefield after one of his boys has recreated the David and Goliath miracle. The showmanship on display is of an entirely different tenor to that exhibited in Anselm’s story. Prostrating oneself in prayer, in the middle of a battlefield, and begging God for help shows an awareness of the audience and a desire to perform. Anselm quietly acquiescing simply to God’s miracle has none of these features.

The lack of showmanship is constantly evident in the \textit{Vita Anselmi}. When stopping a fire Anselm merely made the sign of a cross; occasionally he sprinkled a drop of water to facilitate a cure; he was generally known to be so reluctant to perform that people had to steal food from his plate and receive their cure through the stolen food; indeed at one point “the mere fact that Anselm, inspired by a fatherly pity and reflecting that to the pure all things are pure, had looked on him [a boy] freed him from so great a distress.”\textsuperscript{34} The lack of showmanship suggests that Anselm was focused on inward change rather than outwardly demonstrating his sanctity. This distinction is best exemplified in the example of the boy who was cured simply because Anselm looked on him with pity. No signal of miraculous intent was needed. In these incidences demonstrative acts like

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{34} For Anselm reluctantly making the sign of the cross to stop a fire from burning down a house see Eadmer, \textit{The Life of St. Anselm}, 66, 125. For Anselm curing blindness by sprinkling water see Ibid., 131-2. For people stealing food from his table in search of miraculous cure see Ibid., 117. For the quote wherein Anselm cures the boy merely by looking at him with pity see Ibid., 24.
prostration are exceedingly rare, he almost never used ceremonial props, and he very rarely raised his voice to a wail.

The desire to perform without an audience is closely related to his decision to eschew showmanship. After all showmanship is only showmanship if there are people there to see it. While he was abbot of Bec a man with leprosy came to see him and asked Anselm to give him water that he, Anselm, had washed his hands in while celebrating mass. Anselm balked at the idea but he eventually gave way and, Eadmer is explicit on this point, held a private mass for the man, gave him the water, and bid him leave in secrecy.\textsuperscript{35} In this one anecdote Anselm avoided any public recognition twice. Initially he moved the mass, usually done in front of people as a moment of high theatricality, to a private setting. Secondly he did not allow the cured man to tell anyone about his cure. Even in the story that was given at the opening of this chapter, in which Anselm was forced to perform to a crowd, he quickly left and the miracle itself actually occurred away from the crowd when the woman was crossing the threshold of her house and returning to a private space.\textsuperscript{36}

The fact that Anselm disdained using miracles for practical purposes, avoided crowds and eschewed showmanship points towards a striking contradiction within the way he used miracles. The miraculous is inherently outward facing. For example John describes Jesus turning the water into wine in Galilee as “the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory.”\textsuperscript{37} The sign was only meaningful because it revealed something, and revelation can only occur with an audience. Things need to be revealed to witnesses. Indeed, even the way we talk about miracles suggests that in our minds they are inextricably linked to showmanship; like actors performing to an audience

\textsuperscript{35} For the entire story of Anselm’s private mass for the man with leprosy see Ibid., 58-9.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{37} Jn. 2: 11-12 NIV.
the miracle worker ‘performs’ his miracle for the unenlightened. But, while deliberately choosing non-performance when doing miracles seems contradictory, it makes sense as a spiritual choice when set in spiritual context of the twelfth-century.

One commonly-held idea is that the twelfth century “discovered the individual.” Anselm’s prayers and meditations are an excellent example of the new kind of religious expression that focused attention on the individual soul and its relationship with God. His prayers are full of strident self-abasement. In the opening verses of his prayer to the Virgin Mary he wrote: “I long to come before you in my misery / sick with the sickness of vice, / in pain from the wounds of crimes, / putrid with the ulcers of sin.” Much of the first prayer continues like this, an eloquent exposition of Anselm’s unworthiness. The focus is directed inward at himself and the privacy of his relationship with the Virgin Mary. Anselm saw himself before the virgin and he saw his own inadequacy. His prayer was a moving plea for forgiveness on the basis of his own inward self analysis.

In his miracles Anselm was wrestling with the same problem that his prayers were addressing. How to adapt to the newly developing religious consciousness. As we can see in his prayers Anselm built sanctity inwardly; indeed, even his argument for the existence of God is deeply personal and inward facing – it is an argument from reason alone, arrived at through faith, and in that sense it is really no different from his prayers. Partly because he was a product of his times and partly due to his own religious sensibility, through his miracles Anselm was struggling to express a part of his religion in a way that was coherent. He had to do the miraculous in a way

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38 This idea was first expressed in Colin Morris’ book (originally published in 1972) *The Discovery of the Individual*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). His ideas have since been modified and amended, significantly by Caroline Walker Bynum who argued that while the twelfth century did see the individual emerge as a significant entity, it also saw a renewed focus on outward conformity to certain types of behavior. For Bynum the individual emerged within the concept of *imitatio* specifically and most importantly the imitation of Christ: Caroline Walker Bynum, “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?” in *Jesus as Mother*, 82-106.

that made sense given the newly developing sense of interiority. This forced him into some seemingly contradictory positions, how to do miracles without showmanship and perhaps most tellingly how to give a sign without an audience. He resolved this by performing non-performance. He made the act of avoiding performing miracles into a public statement about the type of religion he valued, and then in private, he continued to do the miraculous, but in a way that subverted many of the traditional tropes surrounding miracle performance. There were, however, certain instances in which Anselm engaged in miracles deliberately in front of and for the benefit of others. This can be understood when his miracles are considered as partly a product of new found inwardness and partly a lingering and deep sense of corporate responsibility.

**St. Anselm: A Traditionalist at Heart**

The other most obvious feature of Anselm’s miracles, besides the extent to which they were so devoid of showmanship, is the number of them that have to do with maintaining corporate harmony within the monastery. In the set up for one of the first post-monastic conversion miracles in the *Vita*, a young monk who Anselm had taken under his wing died. Shortly after he had died Anselm had a vision where the spirit of the dead monk was approached by a serpent three times and was asked three different questions; each time the young man answered and the serpent was forced away. In the vision, the final question the young, newly-dead monk was asked concerned the monk’s sins “between his profession and his death.”\(^{40}\) The monk was found to be innocent because he had confessed to Anselm prior to his death, and the snake was forced to let Osbern, the newly

\(^{40}\) Eadmer, *The Life of St. Anselm*, 19. For another example of Anselm resolving institutional conflict through miraculous work, in this case a dying monk who hated Anselm is preserved from several devils and absolved by Anselm, see Ibid., 25. For a miraculous vision concerning the virtues of corporate worship and the way a monastic community should function which Anselm devoted himself to living and “expounding it to others” (the only example of Anselm publicizing one of his own visions) see Ibid., 36.
dead monk, go “free.””

Then “each day throughout an entire year he [Anselm] celebrated a mass for his soul . . . and sent letters in all directions asking, and procuring, that prayers should be made for the sake of his Osbern.”

Whereas, in the previously cited example of the man who wished to be cured with water Anselm celebrated the mass in private, in this story Anselm deliberately organized and administered repeated public masses. These masses were a consequence of his miraculous vision. Therefore, in a sense he was invoking the vision each time he held a mass, in a public and performative way.

While this seems to run contrary to the previous argument that his miracle working was attempting to push sanctity inwards, it is an understandable contradiction given the audience of the masses he organized and the setting in which he performed the mass. The audience of these services were the Benedictine monks he was in charge of and the setting was inside the monastery. These masses were not performed in front of a lay public and the rhetorical point of the vision would not have served a lay public at all. The miraculous vision of Osbern served to validate the corporate ties that bound the monastery together. Through confession to his superior Osbern was shown to be saved; by obeying the hierarchical structure of the Benedictine order and existing within the community Osbern had been freed from the snake, in this instance representative of the devil. By repeatedly conducting a mass that commemorated Osbern, Anselm reiterated the importance of the Benedictine community in two ways. Firstly, he commemorated Osbern escaping from the serpent, an escape that was due to Osbern’s obedience to Anselm. Secondly, by holding services Anselm made it more likely that Osbern would reach heaven, thus showing the other monks that due to corporate obedience they would be taken to heaven via the worship of their brothers.

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42 Ibid., 20.
Anselm engaged in performance when in the context of the monastery and the performance served to re-enforce aspects of corporate identity or restore harmony to the community. In another somewhat similar incident, a monk who hates Anselm was being attacked by demons and Anselm voluntarily went, freed the man from the demons and heard his confession. There is a greater degree of privacy here than in the case of Osbern but nevertheless after the miracle was performed and Anselm had confessed him, the monk died peacefully and was then buried by the rest of the monks. While the miracle itself was done in private, the consequence was viewed publicly by all the monks. The result was the return of the monastic community to harmony. No longer did the brother hate Anselm; he had been honestly confessed.

To understand why the miraculous was used in two such different ways it is helpful to bear in mind R.W. Southern’s assessment of Anselm’s spiritual and academic work: that “he stood alone. Yet there was nothing he sought less than originality or individuality. If he removed authority from his arguments . . . it was to install authority so deep in the foundations that it was out of sight and beyond dispute.” Anselm was at the cusp of a newly developing spirituality but in his trust in the Benedictine approach to monasticism he was committed to a style of worship that emphasized community and corporate social responsibility. Benedictine worship was focused on communal chanting of the liturgy and discipline. It was not the spirituality best suited for exercises in rigorous introspection. This is why Anselm used the miraculous with some level of showmanship when dealing with his monastic community; he was attempting to preserve the features of Benedictine corporate responsibility, through miracles.

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45 For a thorough and up to date history of the Benedictine order throughout this period see James Clark, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2011). Clark explains at some length the types of social ties that bound the monks internally within the monastery and the community itself to the outside world.
Conclusion: The Two Spheres

What emerges from the study of Anselm’s miracles is a picture of his spirituality that aligns broadly with current scholarly understandings of his intellectual positions. He used miracles to re-enforce the sense of community that he found so important, but he simultaneously was embarking on a new type of spirituality that was deeply inward facing. He struggled to make the miracles, an outward-facing spiritual expression, part of his more personal brand of religion but ultimately achieved this by performing miracles in a way that avoided all forms of showmanship. The apparent contradiction between using miracles to enforce corporatism and simultaneously demonstrate inwardness was solved by Anselm through choosing the sites in which he performed. To a lay public his miracles were reluctant, and often in private, but within the monastic setting he was willing to enter into a more performative style of display.
St. Bernard: Miraculous Charisma and Personal Power

**Introduction: Curbing his Miracles**

St. Bernard of Clairvaux saw miracles as ways to attach power to his person. However, as the following anecdote demonstrates, the way in which his miracle working was remembered by his order was problematic. From 1180 to 1215 Conrad of Eberbach compiled the *Exordium Magnum*, a massive narrative history of the Cistercian order. Conrad was a Cistercian monk who after beginning his monastic life in Clairvaux moved to Eberbach where he was appointed abbot. The *Exordium Magnum* contains a brief account of several Bernadine miracle stories that Conrad thought worthy of mention because they had not been included in Bernard’s principal biography.

One of Conrad’s stories deals with the immediate aftermath of Bernard’s death. According to Conrad, after Bernard died his body was placed in priestly garments in the center of the monastery. A great crowd of people came to pay their respects to the deceased monk and the funeral celebrations lasted for two days. During the celebrations one of the Cistercian monks approached Bernard’s body. This monk suffered from epilepsy and Conrad describes how he begged and prayed over the body for a cure. Bernard, unable to resist helping those in need, cured the young monk. The next day a young boy with a “shriveled arm and a contracted hand” arrived in Cîteaux hoping for a cure. The monks took the boy to Bernard’s corpse and touched his shriveled arm against the saint’s body. Immediately the arm came back to life and “so great was the acclamation of all those present at this cure, loudly praising God, that the brothers’ discipline could scarcely be maintained.”

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Shortly after these miracles were performed the abbot of Cîteaux came to visit Bernard’s body and ordered the deceased Bernard to stop performing miracles. According to Conrad, the abbot saw a great crowd of people begging the dead saint for miracles and grew worried that this insistent crowd would only grow with time. He thought that “if increasing miracles were to draw an intolerable crowd of people, their unruliness might endanger the discipline of the order and that the fervor of holy observance might grow tepid in that place.” Bernard, even in death, obeyed his orders and ceased to perform miracles.

Conrad’s account, however, does come with a slight caveat: miracles were forbidden only if they were public miracles. Conrad does not fully explain what he considered to be “public”; however, his assumption seems to be that any miracles performed in front of a crowd of people or whose performance resulted in the gathering of a crowd were public. Conrad wrote that the abbot “was only averse to those signs which threatened the discipline of the order by attracting crowds of people.” Despite this ban, Bernard was unable to “let down any of the faithful” and he continued to perform miracles, albeit ones that were more private than public.

It is here, however, that Conrad’s account becomes complex. Several years had passed since Bernard’s death when a demoniac Italian woman arrived at a Cistercian monastery. The abbot of the monastery and the monks tried a number of different relics and prayers to rid her of the demon, but it proved resistant to their efforts. The abbot happened to have with him a few hairs from the beard and head of St Bernard. He tried to use these to force the demon out. Conrad describes the ensuing commotion: “The fiend, catching a glimpse of them, began kicking the sufferer’s footstool and spitting and involuntarily manifesting by the indecent movements of its

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3 Ibid., 158.
entire body what it was suffering inwardly.” The demon then shouted at the monk telling him to get the relics away, to which the monk responded by ordering the demon to leave. The demon, however, had the last laugh. He called back to the monk, somewhat sassily, “What? Does it escape you that he has been forbidden to work signs? Knowing this I rest securely in this my home.” In Conrad’s retelling the abbot and his monks appear taken aback by this but are ultimately unable to contradict the demon. The narration ends with the demon in possession of the woman and no resolution in sight.

This confusing and tangled miracle story suggests a peculiar relationship between performance and non performance. In Anselm’s case we have seen how his overwhelming desire to avoid showmanship dictated the kind of miracles he allowed himself to perform. In this Bernardine story we see something quite different, Bernard is actually prevented from performing miracles; Bernard’s showmanship was curtailed by official order. This miracle story was recorded by Conrad almost half a century after Bernard’s death. Conrad states that his intention in writing was to record the things that may have been omitted in Bernard’s biographies, commemorate Bernard, and edify readers about the “very splendid pillar on which our whole order rests.” Given that Conrad’s stated purpose was to commemorate the pillar on which his order rested, it is odd that he chose to tell a story that placed very clear limitations on Bernard’s miraculous power.

This chapter seeks to understand the role that the miraculous played in Bernard’s life, and why in this commemoration of his life his miraculous power was deliberately curtailed. It is also an attempt to offer a corrective to the neglect of the miraculous in scholarship about Bernard.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 129.
Bernard’s performance of miracles it will be argued that Bernard viewed political power as a personal and charismatic attribute that was accrued through wielding the miraculous. It will be argued that miracles were not a tangential product of later historiography; they were essential to the way Bernard operated and an all important tool for synthesizing his religious and secular authority. This will be done initially by analyzing a hagiography that Bernard wrote, then a number of Bernard’s own miracles will be discussed, before finally institutional concerns are bought in to explain Conrad’s anecdote.

**Historiography: The Ever-Living Abbot**

Much as was the case with St Anselm, historians have tended to neglect the study of Bernard’s miracles. According to Christopher Holdsworth, this oversight stems from the work of two great twentieth-century Bernadine scholars: Dom Jean Leclercq and Adriaan Bredero. Leclercq argued that the *Vita Prima*, one of Bernard’s biographies, tells us far more about William, its author, than it does about Bernard. Indeed, Leclercq himself is explicitly dismissive of much of the biographical writing surrounding Bernard. In an assessment of Bernard’s image and influence, Leclercq argued that Herbert’s book of Bernard’s miracles and Alan of Auxerre’s Life of Bernard had both showed “greater admiration and imagination than critical judgment.” Leclercq clearly attributes accounts of Bernard’s miracles to “admiration and imagination.” He disparages miracles as a product of “credulity” and spends almost no time in his book studying the miraculous works of Bernard. In a similar vein, Bredero regarded the miracles as being products of hagiographical commonplaces. He saw them as literary tropes and devoid of any importance for understanding Bernard’s thought.8

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8 Christopher Holdsworth makes this claim in “Reading the Signs,” 162. For evidence of this perspective in Bredero’s writings see Adriaan Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B.
Holdsworth is correct in arguing that Leclercq’s neglect of the miraculous is partly due to his distrust of the credulousness of Bernard’s biographers, but at a deeper level it is a product of the kind of history that Leclercq was trying to write. In a series of letters between the Trappist monk Thomas Merton and Leclercq, Merton wrote that he wanted to gather a group of students in line with Leclercq’s teaching who are “competent in all round spiritual theology, as well as scholarship, using their time and talents to develop the seed of the Word of God in their souls, not to choke it under an overgrowth of useless research as is the tradition in the universities of this country at the moment.”9 In his response Leclercq echoes these sentiments, writing that “I do not care about having a good reputation as a scholar among scholars . . . But I also know that many monks in several orders . . . find my books nourishing and find in them an answer to their own aspirations. I thank God for that.”10 Leclercq’s ultimate aim was to develop a scholarship that enabled his readers to draw closer to God. His project was actively theological as much as it was historical. For a scholar of the twentieth century, even a highly religious one, the kinds of miracles that were recorded in the twelfth century do have an absurd or even at times a “primitive” air to them. It is therefore unsurprising that in writing about Bernard both as an historical subject and a live, active object of reverence, Leclercq chose to ignore the part of Bernard’s spirituality that appeared most problematic. In the foreword to a series of essays on Bernard dedicated to Leclercq, Louis Leloir wrote that he hoped the book would be readily at hand “for all scholars, as well as in the hands of monks and nuns as they pursue their search for God under the tutelage of the ever-

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living Abbot of Clairvaux.”  

Because the scholarship on Bernard has been dominated by those who view him as an “ever-living” guide, his miracles, the aspect of his spirituality that appears most dead to modern scholars, have been neglected.

This neglect does a disservice to medieval religiosity which saw miracles as an inherent part of mainstream theology. Most of the medieval understanding of the miraculous was based on the work of St. Augustine. Benedicta Ward characterized the Augustinian view of miracles as wonderful acts of God that were not in opposition to nature; rather they were revelations of the hidden workings of nature that was all potentially miraculous. The Augustinian approach emphasized the holistic quality of the world; miracles did not violate natural laws, they flowed from broad understanding of the world as continually miraculous. Thus by neglecting to write about Bernard’s miracles Leclercq, and his fellow minded scholars, lose a potential avenue for understanding the great saint and mischaracterize medieval spirituality. They impose a set of historical standards that are at a very basic level anachronistic. Holdsworth has offered a limited corrective to this historiographical trend. But, his writing on miracles focuses on their moral implications, rather than on the type of religious sensibility that they participated in creating.

**Malachi: Miracles in Bernard’s Writing**

The first difficulty that one meets when attempting to grapple with Bernard’s miracles is knowing exactly whose view of the miraculous one is dealing with. Bernard’s most well known biography was written by four different authors relatively recently after he died. The account that opened

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13 For a discussion of the principal authors of the *Vita Prima*, their motivations for writing and their relationship to Bernard see Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 91–140.
this chapter was written almost half a century after Bernard’s death and by a writer with a different set of motivations. Conrad was explicitly concerned with how the memory of Bernard fit into the corporate structure of Cîteaux. Indeed, it might be that the best way to explore Bernard’s own view of the miraculous is through an analysis of a text that is not about Bernard but rather authored by him.

The only hagiographical work that Bernard wrote was about the twelfth-century Irish Saint Malachy. Ireland provided a convenient location for Bernard to map out his view of saintliness. The Danish invasions of the ninth century had left Ireland lacking a central government and dominated by warring nobility. But the country had a long history of learning and saintliness prior to those invasions. Because Ireland was separate from but familiar to the more European culture developing in continental Europe, and because it lacked the growing institutions of central government, Bernard could use it to express a form of sanctity that was familiar but somewhat old fashioned. This hagiography was one of Bernard’s last works and was written around the time that he wrote *De Consideratione*. Both show a distinct concern with how monks could, and should, interact with secular and ecclesiastical power.

Bernard chose Malachy because the problems Malachy faced during his lifetime were similar to those that Bernard wrestled with. He was thus a model onto which Bernard could build his own type of saintliness. When writing his history, Bernard would not have felt the same constraints that bind modern historians. He wrote history with a moralistic and explanatory purpose; to hold him to standards of impartiality and objectivity is at best anachronistic and at worst a fundamental misunderstanding of the kind of work he was engaged in. In the words of Christopher Holdsworth, Bernard “claimed to be writing history on the understanding that history

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was moral and exemplarist in purpose and that he had the right (and indeed the duty) to decorate and to adorn his story.”\textsuperscript{15} Bernard would therefore not have been worried about superimposing his views onto Malachy’s life story.

Malachy was an excellent model for Bernard because he was a saint who lived and worked on the cusp of the religious and secular worlds. A complete removal from worldly affairs was never a viable mode of living for Bernard. Bernard acknowledged this dual purpose when writing to the Carthusian prior of Portes saying: “May my monstrous life, my bitter conscience, move you to pity. I am a sort of modern chimaera, neither cleric nor layman. I have kept the habit of a monk but I have long ago abandoned the life.”\textsuperscript{16} Malachy had the same sort of dual existence. On the one hand he was constantly attempting to live a life of seclusion, but on the other he found himself a significant player in the Irish political scene.\textsuperscript{17} Unlike St. Anselm, Malachy never really shied away from exercising his miraculous power in the political sphere; when he was called upon he answered with the appropriate amount of power and determination to secure his desired results. Holdsworth suggests that hearing of Malachy’s struggles with nepotism in the bishopric of Armagh was what drew Bernard’s attention to him and encouraged him to write the biography.\textsuperscript{18} The political nature of Malachy’s religious career, combined with his deep respect for Cisterican monasticism, made Malachy an excellent subject for a biography that expressed Bernard’s own views on sanctity and the way miracles should be performed.

That Bernard considered Malachy a model is made explicit in the text; the first sentence of his preface is “It was always considered praiseworthy to record the illustrious lives of the saints so

\textsuperscript{15} Holdsworth, “Reading the Signs,” 134.
\textsuperscript{16} Bernard, \textit{St. Bernard of Clairvaux Seen through His Selected Letters}. (Henry Regnery Co., 1953), 244.
\textsuperscript{17} For examples of Malachy being forced to act in the secular, political, arena see Bernard, \textit{The Life and Death of Saint Malachy}, 26-7, 40-41, 46, 53-4, 64-5.
\textsuperscript{18} Holdsworth, “Reading the Signs,” 137.
that they could serve as a mirror and good example.” Miracles were a key tool with which Malachy navigated the boundary between secular and religious. Bernard was aware of this and made it clear that he only recorded the miracles he thought were worthy of imitation: “Who could even recount all of them? I admit that I’d rather dwell upon things worth imitating than on those worth marveling at.”

It has been argued that Bernard used Malachy to create an argument against the adoption of personal power. However, an analysis of Malachy’s miracles suggests this reading is incorrect. John Bequette argues that through Malachy Bernard was advocating a “profound attitude of non-possessiveness.” Bequette argues that the concept of haereditas was twofold in the Life of Malachy. On the one hand it represents the inheritance of the holy and on the other the corrupted inheritance that the ungodly assume to be their own. Bequette believes that Bernard constructed Malachy as a figure who through non-possessiveness, learned in the monastic tradition, was able to restore the church of Ireland to its natural position and redeem the inheritance of the Christian faithful. The view that Bernard was in favor of non-possessiveness in regard to power is corroborated by the findings of Elizabeth Kennan. In an analysis of the De Consideratione Kennan has argued that Bernard offered a description of how to be a good pope that was based around “the exercise of total power entirely without reference to personal interest.” Thus Kennan is able to argue that Bernard’s fundamental thesis was a distinction between office and person. Vices like wealth, which if accrued for personal reasons would be deeply sinful, could be accepted as long as the justifications for them sprung from the requirements of office. In her conception of Bernard’s

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19 Bernard, The Life and Death of Saint Malachy the Irishman, 11.
20 Bernard, The Life and Death of Saint Malachy the Irishman, 57.
argument therefore, the office takes primacy and the person is largely left as a vehicle for holy self control.

However, a close reading of Malachy’s miracles suggests that rather than non-possessivness Bernard was advocating a form of spirituality where personal political power accrued to an individual through his saintliness. Unlike St Anselm, Malachy appears to have absolutely no problem throwing around his supernatural prowess. The number of miracles that Bernard recorded is large and not once does Malachy decline or attempt to decline to perform a miracle. Indeed, he appears more than willing; on a number of occasions he volunteers his miraculous services without being asked.23 The other notable difference between Malachy’s miracles and St. Anselm’s is that Anselm’s tended to be performed in small groups or done privately. Malachy on the other hand has the feel of a supernatural celebrity. His miracles were performed with bombast and often before large crowds.24

In one particularly notable incident Malachy was attempting to assume control of a bishopric that he had been appointed to. He was competing against a local lord for the see and it seemed that there would be bloodshed: “Malachy got wind of this and entering a church nearby and lifting up his hands, he prayed to the Lord. There came clouds and darkness, and also dark water and thick clouds, turning the day into night. Lightings and thunderings and the awesome spirit of tempests threatened the day of judgement, all nature contrived to prophesy imminent death.”25 The next day the body of several of Malachy’s enemies were found burning and stuck in

23 For Malachy deciding with no outside prompting to cure an epileptic see Bernard, The Life and Death of Saint Malachy, 86. For Malachy sending a sick cleric food from his table as part of a miraculous cure, again voluntarily see Ibid., 33. For an example of Malachy choosing to miraculously curse someone of his own volition see Ibid., 78.
24 In one instance Malachy was debating with a heretic in public and Malachy said to the heretic “May the Lord force you to tell the truth” and the heretic was miraculously forced to admit the truth of orthodoxy. This miracle was performed in front of large crowd in a public disputation, see Ibid., 72. For Malachy changing the weather above an entire city and its population see Ibid., 40-41. For Malachy miraculously producing fish to feed a crowd see Ibid., 69-70.
25 Ibid., 41.
the branches of trees. According to Bernard, Malachy’s friends and associates, no matter how close they were to the place where the divine storm struck, were completely unharmed. This miracle was public, voluntary and highly performative. No one was required to beg the saint to intervene; upon seeing the signs of potential bloodshed he stepped in to prevent the violence from happening. Nor did the miracle worker make any attempt to keep the miracle private. Conversely, it seems that part of the power of the miracle was its public nature. Malachy left the bodies of his enemies burnt and rotting in trees around the town, a grisly testament to his power and righteous cause. Even the nature of the miraculous event itself was highly public. The storm was not bounded by the limits of a building or a particular place: it loomed massive over an entire city.

This miracle is also interesting because it shows Malachy using the miraculous to intervene in political events. Whilst this assertion must come with the acknowledgement that the political issue at hand, the fate of a bishopric, was also a highly religious issue, there are other instances when Malachy’s miraculous activities had ramifications beyond the explicitly religious sphere. At one point on his travels Malachy met the king of Scotland and cured his dying son by sprinkling him with water.26 Bernard says that the prince Malachy cured went on to become a successful leader and soldier. The recipients of Malachy’s miracles are not all private individuals as tended to be the case with Anselm’s subjects; rather, in some cases they were public figures and the results of a few of his miracles played out on a European political scale.27

Bernard illustrates the interdependence of Malachy’s miracles and political clout repeatedly. In one example two lords come to an agreement and then one promptly betrays the other. The betrayer is then cursed. Bernard claims that the the soldiers who were cursed knew that

27 For another example of this phenomenon see Ibid., 75. Here, Malachy forces the king of Ireland to respect a deal the king made with a noble, and then tried to renege on, through an invocation of miraculous power.
they had been cursed because “they had deceived Malachy’s messenger and spurned his name.”

As soon as bad things began to happen to the soldiers they knew that Malachy was responsible; they feared and respected the divine power he wielded. The impression of Malachy that Bernard constructs from this back and forth is of him operating as a charismatic figure whose direct and tangible miraculous power gave him political predominance. When either party broke their oath and was punished by divine intervention they knew that it was Malachy’s command that they had disobeyed.

This point is further made in the very next miracle story, in which Malachy acted as an arbiter between an Irish king and an estranged noble. The king betrayed the noble and so Malachy “entered the church. With his groanings and those of his companions he beseeched Almighty God that He should deem worthy of delivery out of the hand of the transgressor and unjust man the one who had been unjustly apprehended.”

At the end of this story Bernard includes a personal comment “From this, reader, note carefully what sort of princes and peoples Malachy lived among. How was it that he was not also a brother of dragons and companion of ostriches? And therefore the Lord gave him the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, to bind their kings in fetters and their nobles with manacles of iron.”

What all of these examples indicate is that miracles were, in Bernard’s formulation, tools that Malachy used to influence politics. Not only this, but miracles were key features of his personal and charismatic brand of power. They were his most emphatic and potent weapons, and the prestige that followed their performance accrued directly to Malachy and to his person.

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28 Ibis., 74.
29 Bernard, The life and Death of Saint Malachy, p. 74.
30 Ibid., 76.
Therefore, Malachy’s saintliness, as constructed by Bernard, and his political position were not in any real sense contradictory, nor is it satisfactory to go along with the current historiography in assuming that Bernard encouraged a distinction between an attitude of personal non-possessiveness and a willingness to accrue power in an official capacity. These miracles attached prestige and power directly to the person of Malachy. They were products of his sanctity but they served to legitimize and reinforce his own political power, a power untethered to any office.

Ultimately Malachy’s saintliness and his secular authority were interdependent and it was through miracles that this interdependence was established and reinforced. Malachy was able to act as an arbiter for the most powerful rulers in Ireland because of the power inherent in his person, a power expressed in miracles. These miracles were consequences of his saintly and holy disposition. The more he performed miracles, the saintlier he became, and the saintlier he became, the more lay power he wielded through his charismatic appeal. The historical understanding of Bernard’s vision for church life as embodied in a separation between office and personal non-possessiveness is inadequate. It was through showmanship and public performance that Malachy came to possess an authority that was deeply personal and not related to office.

**Bernard’s Miracles: Ratifying Power**

The ideal of sainthood as laid out in Malachy’s biography was of a saint willing to engage in politics who used his charisma and miracle working ability to enhance his own, very personal, prestige and power. It makes sense that, given Bernard’s attempt to exist as both a spiritual leader and a shaper of secular affairs, he would advocate for this kind of miracle working: a kind that

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31 The violent and often vengeful style of sainthood was a feature of Irish hagiography. As Holdsworth pointed out “Irish hagiography in the twelfth century was that of the saint as a powerful curser.” See Holdsworth, *Reading the Signs*, 131.
enabled political power to coalesce into an individual through his miracle working. It was only through this approach that Bernard could work effectively in both of the worlds he wished to exist in.

We can see the political nature of Bernard’s miracles in the *Vita Prima*, albeit they tend to be performed with less bombast and showmanship than those of Malachy. In one instance told by Geoffrey of Auxerre, Bernard punished the king of France by predicting the death of his eldest son: “Because you have offended the Almighty and He who takes away the spirit of the princes, formidable to the earthly kings, be sure that this offense will be punished by the death of your first born Philipe.”32 Sure enough shortly after Bernard’s prophecy the king’s son was dead. It appears from the text that Bernard’s prophecy has a certain agency in causing the events that it was predicting. Bernard gives this prophecy as a form of punishment and it is therefore likely that he was in some degree administering the punishment which he was prophesying. Bernard’s status as a miracle worker and possessor of charismatic power operating in the political sphere is therefore evident in the *Vita Prima*.

One other source that shows Bernard performing miracles is the *Historia Mediolanensis* by Landulf of San Paolo. Landulf was a Milanese chronicler who lived from roughly 1077 to 1136/7.33 Landulf recorded Bernard coming to Milan in the 1130s as part of his efforts to support Pope Innocent II against the anti-pope Anacletus II during the papal schism of 1130.34 Milan was

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a city of strategic importance and had been since the mid-eleventh century conflicts between the German emperors and the popes. According to Landulf, when Bernard entered into Milan the Milanese were dressed like penitents, their hair shorn and all gold removed from their churches. On Bernard’s arrival a series of signs took place, water turned into wine, devils fled and healings occurred. There was a sort of grass-roots public explosion of the miraculous upon Bernard’s entry into the city. Throughout his letters Bernard sought to wield a political power over the people of Milan, congratulating them when they followed his instructions and threatening the entire population when they wavered. This political power was ratified by the explosion of miracles that occurred when he entered the city. The theoretical power he attempted to assert from a distance burst forth in a series of supernatural events when he was physically in Milan. The miraculous was a facet of his power that justified and supported the rest of his political clout.

In his own writing on the theory of miracles Bernard acknowledged that there was a relationship between his power and the way his audience perceived him. However, he claimed that it was almost the direct opposite of what this chapter has argued. In the Vita Prima he is quoted as saying: “Nothing, therefore, belongs to me in the miracles I do; they are, I know, the result of the fame that I enjoy, more than my actual life, and they happen not to commend me, but to warn others.” What “caused” Bernard’s miracles is beyond the scope of this paper, but what we can say is that Bernard’s own assessment of his miraculous powers was wrong. When he performed

36 Holdsworth, “Reading the Signs,” 168.
37 For evidence of Bernard’s attempt to use his political power to influence the people of Milan see Bernard, “Letter 138: To the People of Milan,” in The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, trans. B James (Stroud: Cistercian Publications 1998), 207. In this letter Bernard praised the people and said that he took great satisfaction that he was to “assume the role of ambassador in such an excellent cause.” Later, when the Milanese’s allegiance began to waver, Bernard wrote in a sterner tone “So be careful that you do not suffer a relapse, because, unless I am very mistaken, you would not find a remedy for the consequences so easily.” For this letter see Bernard, “Letter 140: To the People of Milan,” 208.
38 Geoffray of Auxerre, Vita Prima, quoted in Holdsworth, “Reading the Signs,” 171.
miracles he claimed a power that commended him on a grand political scale. Perhaps with this quotation he was trying to express his modesty, but it was not a modesty that he practiced.

The story cited at the beginning of this chapter, however, suggests a different notion of the miraculous. Rather than wielding largely unbounded spiritual power to accrue personal prestige that manifested in political power, in the story in the *Exordium Magnum* Bernard’s miraculous ability was deliberately curtailed. What this suggests is that the type of miracle working that was attributed to Bernard was fundamentally changed by the people who controlled Bernard’s narrative. By the end of the twelfth century the Cistercian order had lost its initial impetus and growth.³⁹ It had started to become more involved in secular affairs, and it is a sign of this worry that Conrad, the author of the *Exordium*, sought to control Bernard’s miracle working by denying him the authority to perform them.⁴⁰

In life Bernard had expressed a religious philosophy that gleefully and unashamedly harnessed the miraculous towards the creation of a personal and charismatic power. After his death the very order that this charisma had created was attempting to control, limit and prohibit the type of miracle working that had been such a staple of Bernard’s character. That the tale in the *Exordium Magnum* ends on a note of impotence – Bernard is so bound by his monastic ties of obedience that he is unable to help the possessed woman – suggests that perhaps this is how the Cistercian order was attempting to control the unruly theologian and saint.

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³⁹ For a recent history of the Cistercian order that emphasizes the institutional ability of the order to adapt to changing circumstance see Emilia Jamroziak, *The Cistercian Order in Medieval Europe, 1090-1500* (London: Routledge, 2013).
⁴⁰ For information on Conrad’s reason for writing and his desire to justify and solidify the institutional apparatus of the Cistercian order see Paul Savage, introduction to *The Great Beginning of Citeaux*, 1-33.
Conclusion: Miraculous Prestige

Through analyzing the miracles that Bernard chose to record in his *Life of Malachy* and those mentioned in the *Vita Prima* we can see that Bernard engaged in and believed in a type of miracle performance that was characterized by a theatrical awareness of his audience and the impression he was giving. This type of miracle-working enabled him to engage in the secular world in a meaningful way while not relying on secular means of support. Through his miraculous workings he gained a deeply personal type of power that enabled him to cross back and forth between the religious and secular environments. Eventually the very order that he had helped grow had to wrestle with the highly individualistic type of power he had utilized. As the Cistercians moved away from their radical beginnings and their wealth began to grow they needed to focus on the institutional integrity of the order. So when Conrad recorded Bernard’s miracles in his *Exordium Magnum* he sought to deemphasize Bernard’s individual power and focus instead on the need to avoid miracles that would gather crowds; at the expense of Bernard’s individual potency Conrad reemphasized the traditional, institutional Cistercian hallmark of corporate seclusion.
St. Francis of Assisi and the Anxiety of Performance

Introduction: The Stigmata

In his First Life, Thomas of Celano gives an account of St. Francis of Assisi receiving the stigmata. According to Thomas in 1224 Francis was living in a hermitage called Alverna. While there, Francis had a vision of a six-winged seraph nailed to a cross. Francis did not understand the vision but the sight of such a beautiful creature in so much suffering filled Francis with a great deal of anguish: “the seraph was fixed to a cross and the sharpness of his suffering filled Francis with fear. And so he arose, if I may so speak, sorrowful and joyful, and joy and grief were in him alternately.” Unable to puzzle out the vision, St. Francis remained in confusion until the marks of nails began to appear on both his hands and feet, “the heads of the nails appearing in the inner side of the hands and on the upper sides of the feet and their pointed ends on the opposite sides of the feet. . . . small pieces of flesh took on the appearance of the ends of the nails, bent and driven back and rising above the rest of the flesh.” Alongside these marks there appeared a large cut on his side. This description was not the first literary account of the stigmata; Brother Elias’ Encyclical Letter predates it. But it was part of the first biography of St. Francis and it did establish certain features of Franciscan art and literature that have stood for almost a millennium.

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1 Thomas Celano’s biography of Francis was the first of the formal biographies of St Francis. It was written in the aftermath of the canonization proceedings and commissioned by Gregory IX. Thomas had joined the order whilst Francis was still alive and had probably met him on occasion but was not an intimate acquaintance. The narrative is one of the main sources for the life of St Francis and contains many of the more important anecdotes associated with him. It was written with the purpose of propagating the new saint’s cult and encouraging devotion. It does not deal significantly with the history of the friars after Francis’ death. For a brief discussion of the the Life see Eamon Duffy, "Finding St. Francis: Early Images, Early Lives," in Medieval Theology and the Natural Body, ed. P. Biller & A.J. Minnis (Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press, 1997), 194.
2 Thomas of Celano, “First and Second Lives of St. Francis, 309.
3 Ibid., 309.
The Neglect of the Smaller Miracles

Of the three saints this thesis addresses, St. Francis was the most explicitly performative. The stigmata described by Celano are in many ways the greatest saintly performance of the Middle Ages; they are the literal embodiment of Christ. But, beyond this, the whole spirituality of the friars was focused on and concerned with outward-facing performance, specifically performance to the lay public. It was a spirituality far removed from the cloistered world of Anselm of Canterbury. And while Bernard may have preached to crowds and sermonized to the public, he was not as deliberate in using public performance to demonstrate and construct a specific type of sanctity as was Francis. What is intriguing about the friars, and Francis in particular, is that the commitment to performance as a mode of religious activity did not engender a wholesale commitment to the benefits of luxurious performance; rather it resulted in a great deal of tensions and anxieties.

The role of the miraculous within this complex network of tensions is problematic. As the Franciscan origin story has been constructed in modern historiography, the stigmata are the central miracle. During the early years of the order this narrative was not fully established and the authenticity of the stigmata became a point of major contention. In modern scholarship this focus has led to a neglect of St. Francis’ other miracles. Much of this is due to the work of a late nineteenth-century French scholar called Paul Sabatier. Sabatier’s book is an imaginative reconstruction of Francis, in many ways more fiction than history, that attempts to discover the holy mystic behind the Catholic saint. The book strips away much of Francis’ miracle working because Sabatier believed that those miracles were a product of Catholic church orthodoxy.

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5 There were such serious doubts about the stigmata that between 1237 and 1291 nine different papal bulls were issued affirming the miracle’s veracity. For a brief summary of this process and the disputations surrounding the miracle see Arnold I. Davidson, “Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How St. Francis Received the Stigmata,” Critical Inquiry 35, no. 3 (January 1, 2009): 456–7.
attempting to assert control over Francis’ narrative. Despite the fact that many historians have recognized the problems in jettisoning much of Francis’ history because it was perceived to have been imposed directly or indirectly by the papacy, Sabatier’s view continues to hold a certain power in modern historical work. Eamon Duffy puts it well when he says that “although his [Sabatier’s] distinctive presuppositional themes has been widely recognized, acknowledged, and allowed for, they have in fact continued to shape much writing and thinking about Franciscan history and Franciscan sources.”

This chapter attempts to place the miracles of St. Francis within the context of Franciscan theology and performance, thereby breaking down the false dichotomy and opposition than has existed since Sabatier published his book. By placing the miracles in a broader context the chapter will argue that both Francis and those who wrote about him were attempting to resolve through descriptions of the miraculous many of the tensions that arose because of the performance-based nature of their spirituality. Concurrent with the project was an attempt to make Francis, through physical performance, into an image of Christ while simultaneously distancing him from other saints and other orders. Francis and his biographers used miracle stories to construct this Christ-like image. After analyzing the ambiguities created by performance-based Franciscan penitential practice the way miracles were used to resolve these ambiguities will be shown. And finally the posthumous miracle collection of St. Francis, included in Celano’s second biography, will be used to facilitate an understanding of the way Francis’ legacy was utilized and negotiated by his order.

Francis of Assisi has a continuing folkloric and mainstream popularity that is unrivalled by any medieval saint. Indeed, in 1980 Marvel comics even released a special comic entitled Francis:

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6 For an example of this kind of scholarly work see a recent biography of St Francis: Augustine Thompson, Francis of Assisi: A New Biography (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).  
Brother of the Universe. Beyond this, images of Francis praying with birds or standing erect bearing the marks of the cross are a part of our communal consciousness in a way that the prayers or revelations of St. Anselm simply are not. Within an academic context the miracles of St. Francis are a neglected point of study that can help shed light on the spiritual work of the friars and St Francis in particular. Given that the friars are often seen by modern scholarship to be the preeminent expression of a new religious sensibility coming of age at the beginning of the thirteenth century, a better understanding of their spiritual project carries broader implications for the study of spirituality in the High Middle Ages.

St Francis the Problems of Showmanship

From their foundation the friars engaged in a performance-based type of spirituality. Their founder, St. Francis, was born to a merchant family of Assisi in 1181 or 1182 and had inclinations towards showmanship. For example, after experiencing a religious vision Francis gave all of his property to the poor of his town and moved into an abandoned church. At one point shortly after this Francis was being prosecuted by his father; his father was trying to force him to renounce his claims to half of the family’s wealth. Bishop Guido, who acted as mediator, then advised Francis to relinquish his claim. Francis did so and to demonstrate his new-found dependence on God and freedom from the secular world he took off the merchant clothes he was wearing and in the court laid them at the feet of his father, revealing the hair shirt he had been wearing underneath. Even as he was just beginning to understand his own spiritual impulses Francis was already drawn to these kinds of public displays: public displays that showcased to an audience both the depth of his abandonment of riches and the intensity of his own personal penance.

8 Thompson, Francis of Assisi, 7.
9 Ibid., 15–6.
The public nature of Franciscan spirituality was not, however, purely a consequence of the taste of their founder. Rather it was a product of demographic, economic and cultural changes that were occurring throughout the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Throughout the twelfth century towns grew significantly in both size and economic clout. The new urban economy created a set of spaces, namely town squares and market places, that were well adapted to public performance. These urban locations provided gathering places where large audiences could observe preaching in a contained space. Rosenwein and Little have argued that even the form of the friars’ ministry was a product of the changing, increasingly urban economy. They claim that the friars were performing the type of transactions they saw played out in an economic setting, but translating that form of engagement into a style of preaching. Scholars have suggested that Rosenwein and Little may have overstated their case but what is undoubtedly true is that the friars engaged in a more interactive form of preaching. They harnessed the intellectual developments of the new universities and engaged in a type of preaching that was based on the newly developed dialectic model of disputation. As opposed to the lecture, this new model of learning focused on disagreement and discussion between scholars. When these scholars joined the friars they utilized the new academic tool to preach more effectively.

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12 For a modification of Rosenwein’s and Little’s view that the friars’ style of ministry was an expression of commercial barter in a spiritual setting, see Lawrence, *The Friars*, 121.
14 The mendicant preachers attracted university graduates because they provided the opportunity for focused intellectual work and economic support. For more on the interdependency of the universities and the friars see Southern, *Western Society*, 273-99.
A perhaps deeper cause of the Franciscans’ showy spiritual style was the town-based development of a new and increasingly literate middle class that were tired of shifting the responsibility for their salvation onto institutions of which they were at best passive observers.\textsuperscript{15} They wanted a personal proactive style of worship that could answer to their newly developing religious consciousness and sense of personal responsibility. By dispensing with the trappings of worldly wealth and exhibiting this publicly the Franciscans provided models for the pursuit of personal religious change. They even catered to those members of the laity that were not willing to join their ranks by creating lay confraternities. These organizations allowed members of lay society to pursue a holy lifestyle, taking control of their own salvation, while simultaneously existing in the secular world and pursuing secular professions.\textsuperscript{16} For these members of the new urban middle class it was not enough to have the bearers of their salvation exist in a separate and disconnected space; rather they required a personal connection. This connection necessitated that the friars appear in public both to perform and to facilitate the formation of groups that would allow communal performance of lay religiosity.

Within the life of Francis himself the importance of performance can be seen through a number of different stories. In a collection of stories about Francis entitled the \textit{Legend of Perugia} there is a story which recounts a time when Francis grew very sick.\textsuperscript{17} According to the story Francis

\textsuperscript{15} The Benedictine model of penance was based on a sense of corporate responsibility. Donations made to monasteries assured that prayers would be said on behalf of the donor which would in turn guarantee the donor a place in salvation. As Southern put it: “In the impersonal society of early middle ages one man’s penance was as good as another’s.” Southern, \textit{Western Society}, 227. For brief and eloquent survey of the penitential role of the Benedictines see Southern, \textit{Western Society}, 225–30.

\textsuperscript{16} For more information on the role of the lay confraternities within the broader history of the friars see Lawrence, \textit{Friars}, 112–16.

\textsuperscript{17} The \textit{Legend of Perugia} is a series of short stories, collected at the behest of Crescentius of Iesi who became minister general of the Franciscans in 1244. The collection was made in the years immediately following his appointment and deals with the two years that Francis lived after he received the stigmata. The purpose of the collection was to preserve stories about St Francis at a time when many of those who had known him personally and been present at the beginnings of the order were either dying or dead. Crescentius was part of the group of Franciscans who favored a move away from the extremely rigorous and absolute standard of poverty set by St Francis but this collection, written by a slew of different authors, came to represent the other school, those who advocated an intense pursuit of poverty.
was so ill that, although he tried to resist, he was eventually persuaded to eat chicken. After Francis was healed he began to feel remorse that he had been so self-indulgent, when his fellow brothers were making do with less. Francis then gathered a whole group of people and ordered them to wait while he went and confessed to brother Peter, who he had placed in charge of the order while he was ailing.  

He ordered brother Peter to order him to do penance and even specified exactly what type of penance. On brother Peter’s order, which was itself only an expression of an order given to him by Francis himself, Francis was dragged out naked and Peter place a cord around his neck before leading him in front of the gathered people. Not satisfied with this penance, “he ordered another brother to take a bowl of ashes, to mount the place where he had preached from and to sprinkle them on his head.”

The *Legend of Perugia* was created at a time when debates around the future of the Franciscan order were particularly intense. After Francis’ death the order had begun to bifurcate into those friars who believed that further institutionalization within the Catholic church was necessary and those who believed that this would inevitably lead to a renunciation of the very poverty-based ideals that Francis had stood for. The *Legend* was one of a number of texts that, through re-telling Francis’ life, attempted to provide an argument against increased institutional adaptation. It is therefore understandable that the kinds of renunciation portrayed in this text are particularly severe. For comparison both Anselm and Bernard fasted but neither ever forced themselves to commit physically degrading penances if they broke that fast. The contrast with Cistercian styles of sanctity is evident in the Cistercian program, which involved a shift from self

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The stories were later adapted by Thomas of Celano for his second biography of Francis. For a brief discussion of the origins of the Legend and its role in Franciscan debates about poverty see Duffy, “Finding St. Fracis: Early Images, Early Lives,” 195.

18 Peter was one of Francis’ more educated followers and had a legal training. He was appointed by Francis as his personal vicar in 1220. Thompson, *Francis of Assisi*, 75, 80.

19 "Legend of Perugia," 1017.
love to the love of God and was achieved through inward reflection and corporate responsibility.\textsuperscript{20} Within Cistercian monasteries, which were the preeminent expression of the spirituality of the twelfth century, there was simply no room for the kind of individualistic and demonstrative performance that Francis engaged in. Indeed, the trouble that the orthodox Catholic church had with these sorts of displays demonstrates the extent to which they ran contrary to established practices. In 1184 Pope Lucius III published a general condemnation of heretical sects and included both the the Poor Men of Lyons and the Humiliati, both groups whose style of worship was a direct precursor to that of the friars.\textsuperscript{21}

Beyond its severity the penance is of particular note for three reasons. Firstly, the explicitly public nature of the penance Francis decides he should receive suggests a concern with how his group was portraying itself and an awareness of the kind of reaction an audience would have to these astonishing moments of self denial. Secondly, the whole method by which Francis receives the penance is an odd sort of construct. It is clear that Francis is the one giving the orders and yet he feels the need to receive the instructions for penance from a brother, despite this brother being clearly subject to Francis’ orders. In short both Francis and Peter self-consciously perform roles that are inversions of their actual position. Thirdly, the penance itself has a highly theatrical quality; St. Francis does not simply confess nor does he pray privately; rather he publicly assumes a Christ-like role. Being led almost naked down the street by a collar is a highly visually arresting image with clear biblical overtones and the sprinkling of ash only furthers this impression.

If this story were a lone example of St. Francis being highly concerned with theatricality, then it would perhaps be possible to dismiss it as an aberration, but it is not. For example, at another point in the same set of legends St. Francis finds himself rebuking a leper and so decides that he,

\textsuperscript{21} Lawrence, \textit{The Friars}, 22.
Francis, should do penance. At the next dinner with all the brothers, he invites the leper he had rebuked to share his plate. The author of the *Legend of Perugia* describes the scene in vivid detail: the leper’s “fingers, which he used to eat with were eaten away and tinged with blood so much so that when he put them into the bowl blood dripped from them.”22 The same lurid visual expressiveness pervades both of these stories about Francis. He performed these acts of penance deliberately in front of people and in a way that was visually shocking. That is not to say that there was necessarily an insincerity in his penance, but rather it is to note that, just as performance was stylistically part of the way the Franciscans preached, so was it part of the life of their founder and the way he pursued his spirituality.

The attention to details of pain and suffering on the part of both Francis and the leper is partly just one incidence of a move towards more affective depictions of piety that occurred during the twelfth-century Renaissance. This was a broad shift that can be seen artistically in a new type of depiction of Christ. As noted in the introduction this new style focused on his suffering and his human nature. The afore-mentioned Franciscan stories fit into this cultural context; they emphasize suffering and individuality as opposed to saints in glory untouched by pain.

It is odd, given the kind of extravagant performance or showmanship that was so clearly a central part of Franciscan spiritual life, that St. Francis’ miracles, or at least those he performed while he was alive, seem to be – with the obvious exception of the stigmata – somewhat understated. The lack of theatricality in Francis’ miracle-working can be seen up until his death and it begins in his early childhood. In the accounts of Bernard and Anselm we have seen a distinct type of miracle performed during both of their early childhoods. While these were not necessarily healing miracles, both experienced visions that their early biographers describe in rich detail.

These visions contained promises of sainthood to come and are a fairly common feature of hagiographical literature from this period. None of this is present in Celano’s first Life: Celano does not even mention Francis’ birth and certainly does not include any portentous signs that may have accompanied his birth. Nor does he really mention Francis’ childhood beyond a brief critique of his idle youthful years spent in Assisi.\footnote{Thomas of Celano, “First and Second Lives of St. Francis,” 227-33.}

By the time of Francis’ religious conversion and the beginnings of his order miracles start to appear but again they lack any sort of bombast. In Bernard’s biography of Malachy, discussed above, Malachy announces himself as a major political player with clear demonstrations of his saintly power. Francis on the other hand seems to focus his miracles on building his small community of ever-expanding followers. Seldom does he heal or punish, but he does fairly frequently receive either visions of the immediate future or an insight into the consciences of his fellow mendicants.

For example, one of the first miracles in the text – although Celano does not explicitly refer to it as a miracle it certainly seems to fit that description – is an episode where Francis “became aware” of one of his brothers arrival and “of what was going on in his mind” namely his doubts.\footnote{Habig, \textit{St. Francis of Assisi}, 271.} Francis immediately reassures the brother and the brother goes away filled “with the greatest admiration at this; and as a result was even more reverent.”\footnote{Ibid.} The first time Thomas describes anything explicitly as a miracle it is when he is recounting how Francis used to preach to birds and the birds would listen. Especially when compared to the storms that Bernard writes about Malachy unleashing or the fires that Eadmer describes Anselm putting out, delivering a sermon to a group
of birds is, whilst public, lacking in the kind of extravagant showmanship that one might expect, especially given the extravagance of Francis’ penitential methods.

An understanding of this apparent contradiction can be reached by re-examining what the Franciscans, and St. Francis in particular, thought of their highly performative spirituality. There are several examples in both Celano’s Life of Francis and the *Legend of Perugia* that suggest that a great deal of anxiety, both within the Franciscan organization and within Francis himself, arose from and concerned performance. Three particularly prominent examples that highlight different aspects of this anxiety will be dealt with. The first concerns a time when St. Francis was disappointed with the feast the brothers were preparing for the Nativity; he thought it was too extravagant. So Francis snuck outside and dressed like a poor pilgrim. Upon his reentry he asked his brothers if he could join them at their table. The brothers recognized him immediately and allowed him to join but apologized for the lack of refinement since they were but poor religious types. In response Francis sat on the floor by the fire and said, still in character as the poor pilgrim, “When I saw this sumptuous and refined table, I did not consider it to be the table of poor religious who go from door to door every day.” Upon seeing their leader abase himself, the brothers “burst into tears.”26 The fact that the friars were engaged in a very public type of religion meant they were very open to scrutiny. One of the problems with the kind of elaborate penance that Francis engaged in was that failures to live up to his saintly example became very obvious. Given the strict nature of the Rule, and the frequency with which the friars were in densely populated townships, the opportunities for seeing them fail to perform their brand of spirituality were many. And because of the outward, almost showy, style of spirituality, lapses were made obvious. In this story, rather than simply rebuke the friars, Francis chose to adopt the role of an outsider to reveal how the order

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26 "Legend of Perugia," 1010.
could be perceived by the outside. It is intriguing that Francis himself chose to perform a different character in order to administer this lesson, but the key issue at stake is how the order would be judged by the public.

The second story is perhaps more revealing and is also taken from the *Legend of Perugia*. The story is entitled the “Imposture of a Brother who Passed for a Saint” and begins “Once there was a brother who led a holy and exemplary life.” The brother in question observed total silence and only confessed through sign language. Francis suspected that he was a fraud and told the brothers to test him by asking him to confess twice a week. The impostor brother failed this test and quickly left the brotherhood. The third story makes the same point: a brother attempting to join the order seems to fit all the criteria for entry and begs Francis for permission to join; however “Blessed Francis, informed by the Holy Spirit that he was a carnal man, answered: “Go your way, Brother Fly.”

What these stories point to is that because the friars’ style of religious life involved conforming to a set of behaviors that were deliberately outward facing, and more specifically facing towards a lay public, it was impossible to know whether a friar was inwardly truly a good disciple or merely acting like one. Texts such as Celano’s *First Life* and the *Legend of Perugia* were both participating in creating a set of behavioral expectations that would define the Franciscan order. But these texts also recognized the ambiguities that would come with this new theatricallity, principally the potential gap between outward and inward spiritual change. The clear and grand performance of spirituality made false mimicry a real and difficult-to-detect threat. In these stories Francis solves this anxiety by having an innate or God-given knowledge of who the trustworthy and who the untrustworthy were. When the authors of these texts set about establishing

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27 Ibid., 1065.
28 "Legend of Perugia," 997.
the canon of acceptable Franciscan behavior, they used Francis’ miracles to solve the fact that their highly performative spirituality was in some sense untrustworthy.

Against this setting, the fact that the Franciscan miracles tended to be underrated and not particularly theatrical is understandable. The miraculous powers of the founder were being used to solve anxieties created by theatricality. Therefore, to make sure that these miracles were protected from the sort of imitation that acts of showy penance or conversion were susceptible to, Celano and the authors of the *Legend of Perugia* focused the miracles of their founder onto inward knowledge and played down miraculous showmanship.

**The Stigmata and Asserting Christomimesis**

Of course there is an obvious exception to the idea that miracles were deliberately understated so as to resolve the tensions that performative penance and conversion created. Francis receiving the stigmata was, as has already been mentioned, a highly performative miracle. In an earlier chapter some of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity was drawn on and the quotation bears repeating now. Butler argues that “the body as a mode of dramatizing or enacting possibilities offers a way to understand how cultural conception is embodied and enacted.” 29 There is no more extreme way to enact a series of possibilities in the Christian tradition than to physically resemble the body of Jesus Christ. The stigmata were embodiment and performance at their highest level but unlike the more minor miracles it was impossible to downplay the reception of the stigmata; the biographies of St Francis, beginning with Celano’s, all give the stigmata significant attention as it was the act that made their order unique and their saint special.

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29 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 525
But, much like the uncertainty attending conversion and penitential practices, this piece of miraculous showmanship was highly problematic. There was a great deal of skepticism around the reception of the stigmata, Arnold Davidson notes that the Franciscan account of the stigmata “provoked deep hostility and incredulity by many different groups of people.”  

Between 1237 and 1291 nine papal bulls were issued by the papal curia affirming the reality of the miraculous stigmata. Indeed, almost all other stigmata that began to appear after St. Francis’ were declared by the papacy to be self-inflicted and carried with them the taint of heresy. 

Within writings about Francis the concern for corroborations of the reality of the stigmata was dealt with by specific and plentiful listings of witnesses. Celano, in his First Life, gives only two witnesses of the stigmata while Francis was alive: the brothers Elias and Rufino. But, on Francis’ deathbed he describes a great crowd gathering and all bearing witness to the wounds freshly displayed on Francis’ body.

In visual depictions of St Francis artists attempted to create the same impression. Initially witnesses to the moment of stigmatization, absent from the early written record, began to be included in paintings and later pieces. As the tradition developed these witnesses grew in number. For example, in Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco of the stigmatization, painted in the late fifteenth century after the numbers of witnesses depicted had steadily increased, there are several friars and at least three laymen witnessing the spectacle. These witnesses were entirely absent from earlier paintings; they are the consequence of a concerted effort by the order to establish the stigmata’s reliability.

The reason that the stigmata were defended so passionately by the Franciscans was their importance in establishing Francis as a Christ-like figure. This was a project near and dear to

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31 Ibid.
32 Thomas of Celano, “First and Second Lives of St. Francis,” 310, 324.
33 The fresco is in Santa Trinata, Florence. For more detail see Davidson, “Miracles of Bodily Transformation,” 472.
Francis’ heart. Modern writers have tended to identify the first Rule of St Francis as having been written in 1209; in reality it was probably little more than a collection of biblical quotations by which Francis had decided to live his life.\textsuperscript{34} The passage that is most often given as the key starting off point for Francis is Mark 10:17-21: “Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” As this passage suggests, unlike previous monastic orders, and their contemporaries the Dominicans, the Franciscans’ – at least in Francis’ imagination – were not concerned with attempting to recreate the \textit{Vita Apostolica}.\textsuperscript{35} They were trying to return directly to the life of Christ. For example, whereas the biographies of both Anselm and Bernard make comparisons to Christ, they also make many comparisons to saints from antiquity, drawing on biblical saintly precedents. St. Francis however, is not compared directly with other saints. His biographies implicitly argue that Francis was something new, comparable only to Christ.

The miracles that St Francis worked explicitly draw this direct comparison with Christ. One of the most striking examples of this is the moment Francis died. According to the \textit{Legend of Perugia} Francis miraculously knew that he was about to die on the day of his death and summoned the brothers to him in order to break bread in a way that the author explicitly says mimicked the last supper and Christ breaking bread with his disciples.\textsuperscript{36} He even asserts that Francis believed he died on a Thursday, the same day that the Last Supper took place. Celano makes this even more explicit when he writes that “even water was turned into wine for him. . . truly he is a saint whom creatures obey in this way, and at whose nod the elements change themselves to other uses.”\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} Thompson, \textit{Francis of Assisi}, 23.
\textsuperscript{35} For a brief explanation of the \textit{Vita Apostolica}, its historical context and its role in Cistercianism and other forms of the new monasticism that developed over the course of the twelfth century see Lawrence, \textit{The Friars}, 15–17.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Legend of Perugia,"} 1090–1.
\textsuperscript{37} Thomas of Celano, “First and Second Lives of St. Francis,” 280.
Even Francis’ casting out of demons is, in Celano’s account, closer to the biblical Jesus than prior saints. In the story, quoted at the beginning of Chapter Two, recorded by Conrad of Eberbach about Bernard dispatching a demon, the priest uses one of Bernard’s relics when a different relic fails. The process of exorcism is elaborate and clearly embodies a specific set of ritualistic conventions. In contrast, when Francis is recorded as expelling a demon the miracle is much more simple: Francis speaks and the demon leaves.\textsuperscript{38} The effect is to place Francis in line with Christ, whose exorcisms are noticeable for their simplicity, rather than one of his saints.

By eschewing saintly precedents and presenting a type of miraculous performance that harked back to Christ, Francis and his biographers emphasized the newness of Franciscan sanctity. This newness was established most clearly and significantly by the stigmata: they were an entirely novel form of miracle, but other miracles serve to reinforce this construction. When taken together the effect is a radical, revolutionary spirituality that had its sights firmly set on a return to Christ himself. Indeed, this is a fairly accepted reading of Franciscan spirituality and the \textit{sui generis} nature of the stigmata has been noted before, but what has been neglected is the role of his other less well known miracles in constructing and performing this vein of spirituality.

\textbf{The Posthumous Miracle Collection}

Where this interpretation of Francis’ miracles stands in need of nuance is when one considers the collection of posthumous miracles that were attached to Celano’s biography of Francis and included as part of his canonization process. Here it is useful to refer back to Sabatier’s initial idea that one had to strip away the miraculous to understand the ‘real’ Francis. Whilst Sabatier was wrong to discount the miracles that Celano records as occurring during Francis’ life and the

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 286-7.
miracles recorded in the *Legend of Perugia*, since it has been shown they arose organically from internal Franciscan anxieties and a desire to present Francis as a novel type of saint, his argument bears some truth when considering the miracle collection of Celano that was read out at Francis’
canonization.

Unlike the the miracles mentioned during Francis’ life in both the *Legend of Perugia* and Celano’s first life, the posthumous miracles fit very neatly into the standard model of saintly miracle working. Celano even breaks the miracles down into the most standard of miracle sections: “The Healing of the Crippled,” “The Blind who Received their Sight,” “The Sick Recalled from Death,” and so on.39 This apparent discontinuity resulted from the political struggle that occupied the order after Francis’ death. Unable to decide whether to accept increasing institutional structures, which seemed to inevitably mitigate the harsh poverty Francis had preached, two factions had emerged: one in favor of institutional development and generally in line with papal wishes, the other advocating a return to the rigors of the early days.40 The party that favored relaxing the rule of poverty decided that both Celano’s first *Life* and the *Legend of Perugia* were too radical in the type of religiosity they advocated and so it was Bonaventure’s less strident account that was declared in 1266 to be the only officially sanctioned account of Francis’ life. The miracles were a later addition to the text and are a consequence both of Celano’s desire to facilitate the process of Francis’ canonization and the fact that the most powerful faction within the order at the time was advocating for a relaxation of the demands for poverty. Therefore, in his posthumous miracle collection Celano was smoothing the rougher edges of Franciscan spirituality to make the

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39 For the posthumous collection of miracles see Thomas of Celano, “First and Second Lives of St. Francis,” 227-33
40 This conflict has been well documented and studied. Lawrence’s view is that the desire for the order to grow was inherently at odds with the call to extreme poverty. He sees the relaxing of Francis’ rigorous demands not as a failure, but rather as the consequence of the inevitable maturation of the order. For a good expression of his views see Lawrence, *Friars*, 43-64.
saint more appealing during the canonization process. The miracles were part of the mainstream papal tradition that tried to downplay Francis’ radicalism. So whilst his posthumous miracles, as recorded by Celano, might seem to offer a vision of a traditional saint, and not the sort of novelty that has previously been argued for in this chapter, that is a consequence of the effort made by one faction within the order to try to present a less radical and more institutionally viable model of sainthood.

Conclusion: The Two Functions of Francis’ Miracles

Thus, Francis’ miracles as they are presented in Celano’s *First Life* and the *Legend of Perugia* are part of the project to construct a saint who was fundamentally novel but they are also a product of a deep unease about the role of performance within this novel type of spirituality. Francis’ stigmata marked the culmination of the trend towards a visceral spiritual performance that we have seen beginning with Anselm and continuing with Bernard, but the result of this development was to encourage the Franciscans to look backwards to Christ and to have a profound distrust of their own theatrical style of spirituality. The miracles, therefore, served two purposes: firstly they established Francis as new and secondly they served to mitigate some of the problems that the new performative style of spirituality had thrown up.
Conclusion

Within the construction of the miracles of St. Anselm, St. Bernard and St. Francis we can see a number of contradictory impulses at play. Chiefly these three saints and their various biographers used miracles to resolve institutional issues while simultaneously constructing individual brands of sanctity. In Anselm’s case we can see that his miracles were part of an attempt to reinforce the mutual bonds of dependence that bound Benedictine communities while simultaneously expressing a new form of inward religion. Anselm refused to comply with miraculous norms, he performed non-performance, and through this non-compliance contributed to the development of a new type of sanctity and more general religious sensibility. St. Bernard on the other hand was a performer on a European scale. He was very aware of his audiences and used them to bolster his own highly personal brand of power. Bernard’s miracles enabled him to move between the world and the cloister but as his order matured, and became increasingly entangled with the world, this type of public power became a problem to be wrestled with. Conrad chose to curb Bernard, emphasizing his obedience to his superiors in the Cistercian hierarchy. St. Francis was, in many ways, the greatest performer of all three. But his very theatrical style created a set of problems that had to be negotiated and mitigated through miracles. The Franciscans were concerned with how to construct authenticity and a number of Francis’ miracles feature him miraculously spotting inauthenticity. While the institutional aspect to Francis’ miracle working has a parallels in the types of miracles Anselm and Bernard performed, the attempt to link Francis directly to Christ, passing by the older saints, was a new part of the Franciscan spirituality.

This thesis has pointed out several issues in the way medieval historians have tended to approach miracles. Often historians seem to view miracles either as ahistorical events or as entirely the product of hagiographical commonplace. Because of certain intellectual trends in writing about
great monastic figures from the Middle Ages, scholarship has tended to focus on intellectual and
spiritual history. Neglecting miracles is a problem but so is treating them ahistorically and
uncritically. For example, Bredero points out that a lot of scholarship has interpreted Conrad’s
story about Bernard being banned from performing miracles as an attempt to explain the lack of
miracles at Bernard’s tomb.¹ But this sort of explanation fundamentally misconstrues miracles: it
posits them as events outside of the cultural milieu. There was not a general attitude of skepticism
towards the miraculous during the twelfth century.² Therefore, if miracles were not commonplace
occurrences at Bernard’s tomb this was a feature of the type of sanctity that was being constructed
there or, as this paper posits, it was a product of an attempt to exercise institutional control. To say
that fewer miracles were happening misses the essential question: why was the prevailing
sentiment, at that time and in that place, that the saint should not, or could not, perform miracles?
Miracles were cultural creations and open to extensive interpretation. Once the right questions are
asked they provide a deep avenue into the medieval mind.

One potential subject of research that this thesis suggests could be of interest is the way
miracles interacted with the enforcement of worldly or governmental power. If the argument that
theatricality became a more significant feature of twelfth-century spirituality, culminating with St.
Francis, is accepted then there is an interesting parallel to be drawn with the style of affective
lordship T.N. Bisson argues continued throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³ Bisson
claims that medieval lords asserted their power in affective and personal ways long after traditional
scholarship has claimed governmental structures had begun to develop. These lords could be seen

¹ Adriaan Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, 70.
² For example, the shrine of Thomas of Becket witnessed a massive explosion of miraculous happenings in the mid-
to be performing their power, making public demonstrations of their military potency, in the same way that Bernard performed to mark his political jurisdiction. The extent to which these impulses overlapped, grew from each other, or facilitated each other is beyond the scope of this thesis but provides avenues for futures research.

This thesis has not exhausted the work that performance theory can do in medieval history. Butler’s theory has been used to great effect in gender history of the Middle Ages but the more traditional fields of medieval history have at their disposal a valuable tool. There is more work to be done applying the notion of performance to the miracles of the Benedictine, Cistercian and Franciscan orders. This thesis focused on three luminary individuals to provide narrative coherence but an examination of less well known monks within the different orders would further complicate and nuance the picture presented here.

The ways that Anselm, Bernard and Francis performed miracles were due to a number of factors ranging from personal preference and social pressure to institutional requirements. But always their styles of performance were firmly grounded in their own religious sensibility and the religious feeling of their age. Miracles were for them, and their biographers, a natural means of spiritual expression. The miraculous was a natural and powerful part of their world. Through their performance these three saints enacted the divine in the secular world in their own unique ways.
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