

Discipline, Transgression and Punishment

Discipline

Discipline over the whole Cistercian order was maintained by the General Chapter when it convened at Citeaux Abbey (France) around Holy Day (14 Sep). General Chapter lasted five days and all abbots were expected to attend, unless too ill to travel; all other monastic matters were to be put aside. For abbots of distant abbeys, this could involve a round trip lasting several months which, for those who were also required to undertake annual filial visitations, could become extremely burdensome. The General Chapter acknowledged this burden, where they felt it existed, and from 1180 it was decreed that abbots of abbeys in Scotland need only attend General Chapter once every four years. In 1190 this concession was subsequently extended to abbots of abbeys in Ireland, and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the concession was extended to abbots of abbeys in Sicily (to attend once in four years), Norway and Greece (to attend once in five years) and Syria and Cyprus (to attend once in seven years); interestingly, war or schism and the resultant impedance to, or prevention of, travel were not considered reasons for an abbot not to attend General Chapter.

General Chapter followed the same format as the daily Chapter meeting of all abbeys in the order; reading of the Martyrology, reading of the Rules or Statutes of the Order, then daily business. On the first day of General Chapter, legislation issued at the previous General Chapter and letters received since that meeting were read out. On the second day, punishments were given to those abbots who had failed to attend without valid excuse, visitations that had not been carried out in the preceding year were discussed, and definitors (executive committee) who were responsible for drawing up new legislation were appointed. The third day included prayers for those of the Order who had died during the preceding year, whilst the fourth day incorporated the General Chapter of lay brothers. The fifth day included prayers for 'rulers' and 'protectors', and a promulgation of the statutes - which each abbot read out to the community of his own Abbey on his return. From 1235, abbeys were expected to contribute to the costs incurred by Citeaux Abbey in holding the General Chapter, at first by a voluntary payment but very shortly after by taxation. There were four levels of taxation, dependent on how much money was required by the General Chapter; *moderata* (9,000 *livres tournois* (l.t.)), *mediocris* (12,000 l.t.), *duplex* (double the *moderata*) and *excessiva* (double the *mediocris*). Abbots were expected to bring their contribution with them to Citeaux Abbey or to an agreed collection point in a Cistercian house.

The abbot of a motherhouse (Father Immediate) maintained discipline over all its daughter-houses through annual visitations, which ensured uniformity of practice, guidance and support. The General Chapter could instruct additional visitations be carried out on a particular monastery in order to investigate allegations of abuse or disorderly behaviour, or to implement reforms. Visitations were to be a constructive process in order to strengthen the community of the daughter-house and as such, the Father Immediate was to be just and reasonable, and act with paternal charity. His visitation was to determine proper celebration of the liturgy and monastic observances, that silence was preserved, the customary diet maintained, there were copies of the Order's statutes, there were no underage novices, hospitality and charity were provided in an appropriate manner, the obedientiaries were responsible in their offices, the financial affairs of the Abbey were in good order and they met their financial obligations to Citeaux Abbey, there were no instances of sodomy, sorcery or other 'superstitious arts', that women were kept from the cloister, and that there were no hawks or falcons within the precinct. The community being visited were to welcome the Father Immediate and embrace his corrections. When it was too dangerous for a Father Immediate to travel, due to war or political unrest, he would often appoint an abbot near to the daughter-house(s) to be visited to undertake the annual visitation on his behalf.

Although abbeys were subject to the annual visitation of the Father Immediate of its mother house, the abbot was ultimately responsible for the maintenance of discipline over all the monks, lay-brothers, novices, guests and hired help of his Abbey, its granges and other houses. He ensured those who faulted atoned for their wrong-doing in order that they could be without sin and receive their heavenly reward of salvation; for, at the Day of Judgement, the abbot himself would be held accountable for all the sins of his monastic flock as well as his own sins. The basis of discipline within the Abbey was primarily that of self-discipline of the monks, lay-brothers and novices; each was to judge himself by his own conscience in order to resist sin but, more importantly, to willingly confess his faults.

Transgression

Transgressions were commonly by the individual, although there were instances when the transgression was committed by groups of even entire communities.

Abbatial transgressions included; failure of an abbot to attend the General Chapter without good cause (this was penalised at the General Chapter in the following year and would receive heavy penalties imposed by the abbot of Cîteaux Abbey with the consent of all other abbots attending the Chapter), failure to provide hospitality to other abbots travelling to General Chapter or to conduct visitations on daughter-houses was punished by the General Chapter (such hospitality could be costly and disruptive to the host abbey), receiving an underage postulant into the Abbey, mismanagement, financial abuses, coming into conflict with neighbouring abbeys, hosting and entertaining guests of status in the infirmary, talking without good reason after compline, partying, permitting women to work at granges, other offences (as determined by the General Chapter), founding a daughter-house without permission of the General Chapter (from 1190).

Common (actual or suspected) transgressions committed by any member of the monastic community included; conspiracies against the abbot, fracture of the community into cliques, failure to meet the demands and responsibilities of office, failure in the duties of their office, lateness, laziness, breaches of silence and gluttony, improper behaviour, singing psalms at the wrong tempo, not bowing to the altar in the prescribed manner, favouritism, other lapses in Cistercian customs (of liturgy, living arrangements, food and relations with the outside world), taking of abbey property when leaving the Abbey, cleaning shoes without permission, dozing off during service, possessing private property or money and attachment to small items of private property.

Common (actual or suspected) transgressions committed specifically by lay brothers included; wearing of cloaks of new cloth or new skins, washing the head of another lay brother, lateness, laziness, breaches of silence and gluttony, improper behaviour, taking of abbey property when leaving the Abbey, possessing private property or money and attachment to small items of private property. In Wales, and to a lesser extent England, alcohol was a common attribution to the violent and unruly behaviour of lay brothers. In the thirteenth century there was an increase in lay brother transgressions.

More serious offences committed by any member of the monastic community included; murder, apostasy and disregard of the basic monastic vows (poverty, charity and obedience), rebellious monks or lay brothers and arrogance.

Hostility to Fathers Immediate when conducting their visitations was not uncommon and, on occasion, resulted in open rebellion. In 1228, Stephen of Lexington visited the abbeys of Ireland where he met strong resistance throughout and was physically attacked at Mellifont, Mauge (Monasteranenagh) and Suir (Inislounaght) Abbeys. At Mellifont Abbey, the monks and lay brothers armed themselves, fortified the Abbey, built a tower above the high altar and grazed cattle in the cloister.

In Wales, and to a lesser extent England, alcohol was a common attribution to the violent and unruly behaviour of lay brothers. Consequently, wine and beer was banned at granges; a prohibition that, out of necessity, was repeated in 1180, 1184, 1186 and 1192. These prohibitions appear to have been regularly broken as, in the fourteenth century, a monk of Fountains Abbey (Yorkshire) was suspected of attempting to poison his abbot, and the lay-brothers of Meaux Abbey (Yorkshire) attacked and pursued their abbot and cellarer after they were deprived of ale.

Punishment

If an entire community were found to be scandalous, or to have conspired against its abbot, it could be dissolved and dispersed to other distant abbeys, and replaced by monks (and lay brothers) from a neighbouring abbey.

In 1285, the community of Sulejów Abbey (Poland), a daughter-house of Morimond Abbey (Ireland), were found to be scandalous, they were dispersed to the Abbeys of Byszew (Poland) and Szpetal (Poland), and replaced by a colony of monks from the neighbouring Abbey of Wąchock (Poland); this punishment was endorsed by Abbot Hugh of Morimond Abbey (France) as the Father Immediate of Sulejów Abbey.

Punishments against abbots were imposed at General Chapter by the abbot of Citeaux Abbey with the consent of all attending abbots. Punishments against members of the monastic community were imposed by the abbot. Great importance was attached to correcting minor breaches of discipline in the belief that failure to do so would lead to more serious transgressions. A Bishop could only be involved in punishment if the transgressor was an ordained monk.

Abbots could be investigated by the General Chapter, and deposed if warranted, for mismanagement, financial abuses and other offences. Investigation was carried out by an appointed delegation of abbots from neighbouring abbeys who would judge the allegations against each abbey involved in the conflict, inspect documents presented by the involved parties, pass judgement, enforce sentences and the payment of expenses and damages, and witness a charter of settlement signed by the involved conflicted parties. If, after admonition, an abbot continued to violate the Rule, he could be deposed by the abbot of the principal abbey of the affiliation on the advice of other abbots of that affiliation; the abbots of the four principal abbeys could depose the abbot of Citeaux Abbey but not without a General Chapter.

Examples of transgressions committed by abbots and the subsequent punishments include:

For failing to attend General Chapter, the abbots of Quarr (Isle of White), Stoneleigh (Warwickshire) and Forde (Dorset) Abbeys were penanced to six days *in levi culpa* (of light punishment) - one day of which on bread and water, to eat late and not to intone *antiphones* in choir.

The abbots of Jouy (France) and Bonnefont (France) Abbeys were also penanced to six days *in levi culpa* (of light punishment) - one day of which on bread and water, to eat late and not to intone *antiphones* in choir for failing to carry out their filial visitations.

The abbot of Berdoues Abbey (France) was also penanced to six days *in levi culpa* - one day of which on bread and water, to eat late and not to intone *antiphones* in choir for the six days, for not attending the General Chapter. However, for giving a frivolous excuse for his non-attendance his punishment was extended to forty days of

the above, and was additionally instructed to pay an outstanding debt to the abbot of Le Thoronet Abbey (France) before the Christmas.

In 1275, the lay brothers of Piscaria Abbey (Italy) laid violence on abbots travelling to General Chapter and took their belongings. The abbot of Piscaria Abbey was ordered to restrain the lay brothers involved and to compensate the abbots who had been assaulted. In 1276, the abbot was accused of not having reported to the General Chapter, reminded to recompense the harmed abbots and punished with remaining outside of his abbatial stall for three days - one on bread and water. By 1277, he still had not carried out the ruling and was instructed to carry out the punishment of the lay brothers by that Easter, and to satisfy the harmed abbots; he was also to remain outside of his stall and was not to ride a horse until the ruling was fulfilled.

The abbots of Rosières (France) and Balerne (France) Abbeys were punished with one day of bread and water only for talking to monks and lay-brothers after compline.

The abbot of Tintern Abbey (Monmouthshire) committed several transgressions; talking to the Bishop after compline, having a party with the Bishop and some monks after compline, and having women working at the granges (his punishment is unknown, but was probably more than bread and water for one day).

The abbot of Longpont Abbey (France), who did not build the *dormitorium* according to the Rule, received punishment of being forty days outside of his stall, and six days *in levi culpa* - one day of which on bread and water. He was also given three years to alter the *dormitorium* to accord with the Rule; if, after the three years, he did not, no one would be permitted to sleep in it.

An abbot who received an underage postulant into his Abbey would typically be punished with three days *in levi culpa* - one on bread and water.

In 1215, Abbot Hugh of Beaulieu Abbey (Hampshire) was found to have eaten and drank with noble lay visitors in a manner unbefitting the monastic setting by eating from silver plates. He was also found to have kept a dog on a silver chain to guard his bed.

Abbots were often punished for hosting and entertaining guests of status in the infirmary. In 1205, the abbots of Pontigny (France) and Reigny (France) Abbeys were punished for hosting and accommodating the Queen of France and a local bishop in their infirmaries.

In 1217, two Portuguese abbots travelling to General Chapter, with a small party of lay brothers in company, broke their journey at the Benedictine monastery of Marmoutier (France) and complained loudly about the poor quality of food served them. They were denounced to the General Chapter who punished the abbots too fast for a day on bread and water at Marmoutier, and punished the lay brothers to walk the fifty miles to Mamoutier where they were to be whipped in the Chapter House of that monastery; these punishments were intended as both a deterrent and as a demonstration of Cistercian standards of behaviour.

Punishment for common (actual or suspected) transgressions included dismissal from office, fasting, flogging or the withdrawal of privileges and humiliation - such as eating meals on the floor of the refectory rather than with the community at table (to symbolise temporary exclusion from the community). Examples of such transgressions and subsequent punishments include:

If the sacrist rang the bell too early or too late he had to make satisfaction for this at the chapter meeting. If he rang the bell so late on a feast day that the monks had to speed up the chant or cut the reading, then he had to stand bowed over the presbytery step in the church from when the *kyrie* was sung until after the *deo gratias*.

Monks and lay brothers who left their abbeys taking abbey property with them, were permitted by a General Chapter statute of 1195 to return to their abbey, and were to wear the clothing of monastic servants rather than the attire of a monk or lay brother; if they reoffended, a lay brother was to be expelled from the Order, and a monk was to be sent into permanent exile at another abbey.

Punishment for more serious offences included imprisonment, removal to another house, expulsion; from the thirteenth century it was common for abbeys to have a prison or cell used to hold violent monks, and those who had committed apostasy but had been detained and returned to their abbey. Imprisonment was the punishment of last resort after the failure of all other punishments such as admonishment, exclusion from communal meals and prayers, and flogging in chapter. Prisons were usually located in the east precinct near, or within, the infirmary. If the gatehouse included a cellar, this cellar could also be utilized as a prison or cell. Imprisonment within the abbey cell (or other room of isolation) could be for life, although the abbot would endeavour by any means necessary to elicit remorse and repentance from the offender for his sins. Removal to another house was in the hope that this would bring about a change of heart, but more importantly, prevented the spread of ill-feeling within the offender's abbey. Punishment for the rebellious and arrogant who refused to repent and change was expulsion, not just from the abbey, but from the order itself.

Lay brother transgressions, which saw an increase during the course of the thirteenth century, were typically punished with; expulsion from the Order (the most severest of punishments), being put into perpetual prison - restrained by chains and sustained on the 'bread of tribulation and water of distress' for the remainder of their life, being held in the abbey prison by authority of the General Chapter, being sent to a remote abbey and not permitted to return to his own abbey without permission of the General Chapter, being on bread and water until Easter, having to eat outside of the refectory, not receiving communion, not permitted to enter the oratory and occupying the lowest place for a year. Examples of such transgressions and subsequent punishments include:

A lay brother of Heilsbronn Abbey (Germany), who wounded his abbot with a cudgel and struck him in the head and arms with a knife was put into perpetual prison, restrained by chains, and sustained on the 'bread of tribulation and water of distress' for the remainder of his life.

In 1195, a group of lay brothers of Szentgotthárd Abbey (Hungary) who had subjected a monk of the Abbey to 'an unheard-of cruelty' were banished not just from the Abbey and the Order, but from Hungary also and ordered never to return.

Lay brothers who were found guilty of possessing private property or money were no longer permitted to be buried in the monks' cemetery. This punishment could be applied retrospectively, as in the case of a lay brother from Theuley Abbey (France) and a lay brother from Zwettl Abbey (Austria). Both were found, after death, to have possessed private property (the former money and the latter a coat) and were subsequently exhumed from the Abbey cemetery and re-interred outside of their respective Abbey precincts. The significance of such an offense is highlighted by the fact that in 1191 it was later determined that the lay brother from Theuley Abbey had been given the money by his abbot to be used on Abbey business; the lay brother's remains were again exhumed and re-buried in the Abbey cemetery.

In 1228, the General Chapter denied the burial of a lay brother in the Abbey cemetery who, at the time of his death, was found to be in possession of money that he had not confessed and having received communion at Christmas.

A granger who failed to meet the demands of his responsibilities could be dismissed.

A lay brother who washed the head of another lay brother was to be flogged in the lay brothers' chapter.

A lay-brother in a grange who broke silence was to have bread and water only the next day and could not receive communion until they had accused themselves in chapter.

Lay brothers were not permitted to wear cloaks of new cloth or new skins. If they continued to wear such items they were barred from Communion, and if they persisted, they were expelled from the Order.

In Wales, and to a lesser extent England, alcohol was a common attribution to the violent and unruly behaviour of lay brothers. Consequently, wine and beer was banned at granges; a prohibition that was regularly broken, for which punishments imposed by the General Chapter included excommunication of inebriates and a suspension on the receiving of lay brother novitiates into the abbey concerned.

In 1190, the General Chapter noted that the abbot and lay brothers of Margam Abbey (West Glamorgan) had not done their penance for allowing beer into the granges, and until they made their penance the abbot was to have his faculties withdrawn. In 1191, their penance not done, the abbot was ordered to vacate his abbatial stall for forty days and to receive the penance of *levis culpa* for six days - one on bread and water, and the lay brother leaders of this disorder were to report the motherhouse of Clairvaux Abbey (France) to be advised of the General Chapter's penance.

In 1195, when the abbot of Cwmhir Abbey (Powys) enforced the prohibition of beer in the granges, the lay brothers stole his horses. They were ordered to Clairvaux Abbey on foot to receive their sentences.

In 1195, the General Chapter issued a statute to all the abbots of abbeys in Wales reminding them of the prohibition of beer in the granges and ordered that they were not to receive any more novice lay brothers until water was the only drink available at the granges.

A founding endowment of Garendon Abbey (Leicestershire) was an estate devoted to beer production. In 1196, the General Chapter decreed that the beer produced was not to be consumed by the lay brothers of the Abbey but sold and the income put to other uses, or the grange was to be returned to the benefactor; later that year the abbot was seriously wounded for enforcing the ban.

In 1202, the abbot of Croxden Abbey (Staffordshire) was punished for permitting lay brothers to drink wine in the granges. Undeterred, the lay brothers were still drinking wine in the granges of Croxden Abbey seven years later.

In 1206, the lay brothers of Margam Abbey conspired against their abbot, threw the cellarer from his horse, armed themselves and chased the abbot for fifteen miles; after which they barricaded themselves in their dormitory and withheld food from the monks. The offending lay brothers were punished as conspirators and the ringleaders were sent to Clairvaux Abbey on foot, then dispersed to other abbeys.

Until this was observed, Margam Abbey was not to receive any more lay brother novices without the consent of the General Chapter.

Notes:

apostasy - the formal disaffiliation from, abandonment of, or renunciation of a religion by a person

livre tournois - the 'Tours pound', a medieval French currency equivalent to 80.88 grams of fine silver that was sub-divided into 20 *sous tournois*, each of which was further sub-divided into 12 *denier tournois*; the only sub-division to be minted as a coin was the *denier tournois* each of which weighed approximately 4.4 grams, 240 of which equating to one *livre tournois* (an abbot contributing the lowest taxation to the General Chapter would, therefore, travel with 2,160,000 coins - modern comparison would be to travel with £21,600 in one pence pieces)

Martyrology - book of martyrs and saints listed in order of their anniversaries

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