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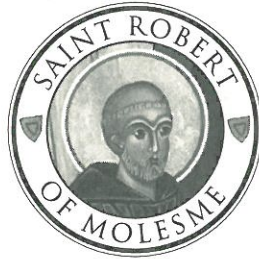
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**SAINT
ROBERT
of molesme**

SAINT ROBERT OF MOLESME

THE PLACE AND DATE of Robert's birth, as well as his family background and youth, are wrapped in mystery. Detailed studies have led historians to form theories which may be regarded as very probable. From the date of his death, which occurred in 1111 when he was in his eighty-third year, we are able to deduce that he was born in 1028 or 1029. His parents were Thierry and Ermengard, and they belonged to the family of the counts of Tonnerre, a branch of the Maligny. Accordingly, Robert was probably born and raised in the Tonnerrois or in Champagne.

Among the marvels that are said to have surrounded the birth of this blessed infant, there is one which interests the historian. While carrying this child, who was to play an important role in the kingdom of God and become an apostle of Marian devotion, his mother had an apparition of the Blessed Virgin who gave her a beautiful ring and told her that the child she would bring into the world was called to a spiritual espousal with her, the Queen of Heaven. This dream is only a legend, but it attests to an historical fact: the great renown of Robert's sanctity and the popular belief that he had a special vocation. Of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin we have only one direct and explicit testimony: the consecration of the church of Molesme to the Queen of Heaven and Earth and the very ancient law by which the Cistercian Order followed this example in all its foundations. Since Robert had laid the spiritual groundwork for the Order and this sign of his devotion to Mary was

transmitted to posterity, he must be assigned the merit of having communicated to the Cistercian Order the cult of Mary, whose great herald was Saint Bernard. We should, however, note that on this point, as on a number of others, Cîteaux merely followed a tradition cherished by the great abbots and saints of the Cluniac world.

Beginnings at Montier-la-Celle

Since the call to monastic life coincided with his parents' desire that he take up studies, Robert embraced the religious life in the abbey of Montier-la-Celle. He entered, according to his *Vita*, at the age of fifteen. At some unknown date he became claustral prior, though it is generally believed that he was still relatively young when he was appointed to this office. His family background, his virtues, and his personal talents, as well as the local custom of appointing rather young abbots and priors, justify the hypothesis that the year 1050 was the probable date of this nomination.

At the time he held this office, a group of hermits was living at Colan, in a forest near the abbey. He himself had helped to found the group—an argument of devotion. And thus another legend based on the future evolution of this hermitage was born: that the foundation of Colan was the germ from which sprang both Molesme and Cîteaux. Very soon, these hermits received direction from a monk of Montier-la-Celle, but whether Robert added this charge to his priorship is not known.

Around 1068, at the earliest, the monks of Saint-Michel-de-Tonnerre elected Robert as their abbot. He agreed to this choice on one condition: that the monks accept the reform he considered necessary for their salvation. They promised, but did not keep their word.

At this point, the hermits of Colan asked Robert to become their leader, but in vain. Either because he disagreed with their eremitical way of life or because he felt obligated in conscience to continue the already-begun reform, Robert did not accede to their

request. A short time later he was obliged to leave Saint-Michel-de-Tonnerre and he returned to the monastery of his profession. The monks' lack of docility had left him no choice. The hermits renewed their request, but were again rebuffed.

The Foundation of Molesme

When the priory of Saint-Avoul-en-Provins, a daughter-house of Saint-Michel found itself without a superior, the monks requested and obtained Robert as their prior. But the hermits of Colan, refusing to give up, made one last attempt to attain their end. They appealed to the authority of the pope. The reigning pontiff was Gregory VII, a former monk and a zealous champion of monastic as well as church reform. He assented. This papal intervention, which shows that the pope shared the hermits' esteem for and their confidence in Robert, marks Robert's first contact with the leading monastic center of the eleventh century. Robert's name, already famous in his own region, from then on was also known in Rome. Unfortunately, we are not well informed about the details of this event and this gap also extends to the transfer of the hermitage of a new location—Molesme—in the following year.

The transfer no doubt had something to do with the situation and the location where the hermits had been living. Even though their resources had been adequate until then for maintaining one, then three, and finally seven monks, they could foresee that they would not be enough to support future members of the group. And, although the privations and hardships imposed by the circumstances of the place had been bearable for one man or a small group of men filled with a high ideal, they were likely in the long run to exceed the capacities of the growing numbers of recruits. Seeking a suitable location (*congruentiam loci desiderans*)¹ where they could establish themselves, Robert must have foreseen the establishment of a regular benedictine monastery, with a stream for

1. Kolumban Spahr, *Das Leben des hl. Robert von Molesme. Eine Quelle zur Vorgeschichte von Cîteaux* (Freiburg in der Schweiz: Paulusdruckerei, 1944) 11.

the needs of the kitchen, the mill, the laundry, and other facilities, and with nearby lands which could in time be made arable through the reclamation of the brushwood and trees.

Judged by its future success, the new location fully satisfied these expectations. But it also leads us to think that the intention to transform the hermitage into a regular benedictine abbey had been in Abbot Robert's mind and reform plans. Was this aspiration similar to the one plan he later conceived with Alberic, Stephen, and the other founders of Cîteaux? It is impossible to know: but it would be rash to deny it out of hand. Certain aspects of the foundation of Molesme foreshadowed the reform at Cîteaux and the establishment of the mother abbey of a new monastic order; but it would be difficult to see the essential points of the reform project of 1098 and 1100² in the reforming elements of 1075 and the following years at Molesme.

Still, there are a number of important similarities. We have already mentioned that, following the example of Molesme, all cistercian churches were dedicated to the Mother of God. Then, too we must remember that when Robert accepted the direction of the hermits of Colan, he wanted to impose a reform on them. He obliged them to give up the eremitic life to embrace the pure cenobitism of Saint Benedict; and the cenobitism of Saint Benedict was the specific objective of the cistercian reform.

Another detail should also be pointed out: the choice of an isolated, wooded and wild area. Manual labor did not frighten the founders in their zeal for poverty. The same resolve can be found in other contemporary reforms, especially those that issued from Molesme. The restoration of manual labor may have been part of the new foundation's program. But Cîteaux surpassed it in the demand it made in the realm of poverty and the esteem in which it held manual labor.

2. Jean-Baptiste Van Damme, *Autour des origines cisterciennes*, Extraits des *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorem* (Westmalle, Typis Ordinis Cisterciensis, 1958–1959) 79

Finally, let us note this important element: The domain of Molesme, which belonged to the lords of the Maligny, was given to Robert and his group as an allod, that is, it was not subject to rental obligations. The first Cistercians similarly strove to hold lands offered to them in this manner. In this way they could stay free of every inopportune contact with the world—such as having to put in an appearance in the courts and castles of the lords or being subject to the incessant comings and goings between abbeys and great land owners, or between the abbeys and their tenants of farmers, as would be necessary in the transportation of tithes. The Cistercians actually sought exemption from tithes; they wanted no longer to exploit the labor of their farmers and serfs in this way. But oftentimes they achieved complete success only after many years of waiting, numerous interventions, and repeated pleadings.

At Molesme, the domain had been donated absolutely, in frank-almoyn; the monks were full owners and the donor retained no rights. An exception was made, however, for a group of serfs living on the estate of Molesme; they were allotted the land and supplied part of the tithe which this land paid to the church of Pouilly.³ The property of Molesme had been donated by the Maligny family, the same family which had also endowed the foundation of Colan. This double donation leads us to conclude that the family was somehow related to Robert, the founder of both monasteries. The act of donation was signed by the principal donor, Lord Hugh of Maligny, and by his sisters and relatives. Tescelin the Red, the father of Saint Bernard, signed as a witness. The donation was made to Our Lady and the thirteen monks who pledged themselves to her service.

The Observance of Molesme

From the point of view of observances, one may be tempted to see in the foundation of Molesme a prelude to Cîteaux, a 'premature

3. Jacques Laurent, *Cartulaires de Molesme*, 2 vols (Paris: 1907–1911) 1: 115–116 and 2: 5–6.

Cîteaux', as some have written.⁴ But, several reasons argue against this. In fact, Molesme lacked more than one essential element of the cistercian reform: for example, foundations which became true abbeys, the major importance accorded to certain points of the Rule regarding food, clothing, manual labor and the like, and the corollary institution of the lay brothers. On the other hand, the points it had in common with Cîteaux—solitude, flight of the world and love of poverty—can also be found in the other monastic reforms of the period. Still, it must be granted that the ideal of Molesme held in germ the ideal of Cîteaux and that the first cistercian house was an outgrowth of the former. The fact that one and the same man presided over both reforms supports this point of view.

Molesme was not yet Cîteaux. This becomes clear if one recalls the crisis of poverty it had to overcome around 1080. Between 1075 and 1079 the abbey lived in a poverty that was sometimes extreme. At times there was no bread. After a day of hard labor, the monks had nothing but vegetables to eat. In such circumstances no one would think to legislate about moderation in food or simplicity in clothing, as was later to be the case at Cîteaux.

The Growth of Molesme

One day the bishop of Troyes, Hugh II of Dompierre, passed through Molesme with a large retinue and was received with dry bread, the only nourishment the monks could afford at the time. The prelate was edified and deeply moved by this, and from then on maintained a generous friendship with them. He redoubled his generosity when he learned that, in spite of the gifts he had given them, they were obliged to go begging, even going as far as his episcopal city, to find relief. On the recommendation of the good bishop, the lords of La-Ferte-Loupiere donated to them arable lands and the churches of Flacy and Senan in the Senonais. These donations made possible the erection of priories bearing

4. *Ibid.*, 1: 111ff.

these names. By 1081 at the latest, a priory had been founded at Vaucouleurs in the Champagne, on land granted by the lord of Joinville, Geoffrey II the Elder. At this same time, the priories of Radonvilliers, in the region of Brienne, and of Seche-Fontaine, in Bar-sur-Seine, came into existence. Expansion through the establishment of priories clearly shows that the model then in vogue was the cluniac regime. This institutional proliferation was accompanied by a growing spiritual radiation from the young abbey.

After the death of the bishop of Troyes, the monks' own bishop, Hugh Raynald of Langres, took it upon himself to care for the monks and to help them continue their expansion. In 1083 he appealed to the loyalty of his vassals and friends, authorizing them to donate churches and other ecclesiastical goods in their possession to the monks. Duke Odo I of Burgundy headed the list of benefactors. He gave the abbey a church located at Louesme in the Lassois, and it became yet another new priory. The number of daughter-houses had risen to eight by 1084, when Bishop Hugh Raynald died and was replaced by Robert of Burgundy, the duke's brother. The new bishop was to play an important role in the life of the saintly Founder, and the two Roberts died in the same year—1111—as friends and brothers in Saint Benedict. Duke Odo was also to maintain close ties with Molesme, where he later held his feudal court on a number of occasions. And he was to be the donor and indispensable protector of Cîteaux in 1098.

The prestige of its benefactors explains the fact that by 1085 Molesme had become a rich and powerful abbey. The nature of the gifts demonstrates that the ideal governing before 1080 had given way to the customs of Cluny which disregarded manual labor as a means of subsistence in favor of an economy based on the acceptance of churches and the foundation of 'cells' and priories.

Holy Nostalgia

While the rhythm of foundations moved steadily ahead, a silent struggle began to unravel on the spiritual level. It was soon to

wanted to hold on to the place for his hermits. His action shows how greatly he loved this solitude in the vicinity of Robert's abbey.

To the broad observance of Molesme and its frequent contacts with the world, the Carthusian opposed a rigorous seclusion which rejected every non-essential contact with the outside world. They adopted a poor and simple way of life devoted exclusively to prayer and silence. From the cluniac system they borrowed several elements: first of all, expansion through priories, which provided a stronger economic system for the central monastery and simplified the temporal administration of the daughter-houses; secondly, the exploitation of their arable lands by farmers. They refused gifts of churches and altars, for these would have entailed the obligation of exercising a ministry among the faithful.

The Hermitage of Aux

When Bruno took leave of Molesme and Seche Fontaine in 1083, the spiritual unrest fermenting in Robert's community burst into the open. Bruno's example must have influenced the more fervent cenobites. Some of them, including Robert himself, longed for the poverty and adherence to the Rule of the early years and pondered the restoration of the discipline of manual labor (in particular). The abbot tried to raise the spiritual level of his community, which adopted a rather easy lifestyle and had even fallen into certain abuses contrary to the recently introduced cluniac observances.

This regression is partly excusable. The repeated departures of swarms of monks to new priories under the leadership of resolute men could easily stifle the fervor of the thus impoverished community. Yet one fact above all must be kept in mind: the monks of Molesme had just exchanged their primitive austerities for the must less rigorous customs of Cluny. To step backwards to the past would have been extremely difficult for them. As they saw things, it was enough to adhere to the cluniac observance which was honorably followed in other monasteries—even though, in practice, they were unable to keep to it.

After a few years, Robert had to give in in the face of this impasse. Believing that his salvation was in danger, he joined a small group of hermits living at Aux, a place where the nuns of Jully were later to have a farm called Blanchevaux. The monks, of a carthusian cast, had introduced manual labor and by this modest means of subsistence, led a simple poor life in the ideal setting for virtue.

Back at Molesme, the abbot's absence had a very bad effect on progress and even on the maintenance of the abbey's spiritual and temporal life. His personality had lent prestige to the monastery in the eyes of its benefactors and other neighbors with whom he had had dealings on official occasions, as well as in the eyes of the neighborhood abbots, to whom he was bound by ties of friendship. The monks who did not choose to follow him in his attempts at reforming the observance (which he had nevertheless somehow managed to maintain at a relatively high degree of fervor), were still attached to him as a person and acknowledged his personal and spiritual greatness, even though it was too late. Encouraged by Bishop Robert of Burgundy, they went to the abbot to ask him to return to his monastery. But Robert saw his duty clearly and his conscience remained secure: he could not give up the life he had embraced after so much reflection and struggle, nor could he resume the charge of monks who had refused his patient, faithful pursuit of an authentic monastic ideal.

The monks, supported by their bishop, refused to give up; they solicited a papal order. The move turned out in their favor. A letter of Urban II (1088–1099) obliged Robert once again to take up the abbatial cross at Molesme. After an absence of approximately five years, the abbot returned to Molesme, probably in 1094. This was the second time a papal order had imposed a special obedience to Molesme on him. There would be yet a third.

These papal acts confirm the renown and esteem which Robert enjoyed among his sons and the lords of the region and help us to see the man through the eyes of his contemporaries: a real monk, a champion of the monastic life, and a true saint.

New Reform Attempts at Molesme

After returning to Molesme, Robert, still filled with zeal, set out once again to reform discipline. Soon several of his sons joined him in this effort. Among the most ardent was an English brother, Stephen, who enthusiastically embraced his abbots' views. Although relatively young—he may have been between thirty-five and forty at the time—he had had exceptional opportunities to enrich his knowledge and acquire experiences of the monastic life. We shall return to this later in discussing his abbacy. Destined by Providence to become abbot of Cîteaux and the organizer of the Cistercian Order, Stephen soon demonstrated that his enthusiasm was neither passing nor superficial. According to his compatriot William of Malmesbury, he was the first person to raise the idea of a foundation. This let us deduce that Stephen must early on have conceived a reform plan worth being discussed. William, who was Stephen's contemporary and may even have visited him, also claims that the general outlines as well as the specific details of his plan were debated by the community. This custom of consulting the community, in conformity with the Rule of Saint Benedict, was subsequently held in great honor.

Little by little, certain points of the Rule which had fallen into disuse were reintroduced. As the reform began, one of its first and most fervent champions was the monk Alberic, who was named claustral prior at Molesme probably in 1094 or 1095.

Robert's Journey to Flanders

At this point Robert undertook a long journey to Flanders. The fertile soil of this county, the industriousness of its people, the wisdom of its peaceful rulers and the christian charity practiced there all made the region a refuge for those in need. Robert went there in the hope of restoring his abbey's finances, which had been greatly compromised during his sojourn at Aux. The journey resulted in several donations of churches and other goods

as well as the establishment of a new priory at Cohem in Therouanne.

Flanders too had important monastic centers. Robert doubtless came into contact with several abbeys, foundations, and reform attempts. He must have visited the abbeys of Saint-Vaast-la-Haut and Saint Martin of Tournai, which lay along his route: perhaps he even went as far as Afflighem. In any case, contacts between these three abbeys and the monastery of Cîteaux were later frequent. Of the monk-founders of Cîteaux, two were natives of Arras. Around 1124, Stephen, too, would visit the abbey located near that city.

By 1094, Saint Martin of Tournai followed, inspired by the same spirit as that soon to be found at Cîteaux: strict enclosure, poverty, the obligation of manual labor, the refusal of goods—like tithes—which were thought to belong by right to clergy and not to monks, the suppression of all superfluity in food and even in liturgy, the admission of lay brothers from all walks of life, the suppression of the house of nuns that had been started the previous year, and a preference for solitude, which keeps the monk from the clamor and distractions of the world. But Abbot Odo's excessive generosity and the failure of the monastery of nuns brought about a financial crisis which led to the abandonment of the scarcely begun reform and the resumption of the traditional observances. The experience would have given ample insight to anyone thinking about a reform of the monastic observance at the time.

The founders of Afflighem, under the influence of the itinerant preacher Werv, had also put into practice an *ordo monasterii* whose spirit bore a great resemblance to the spirit which a short time later inspired the reform at Cîteaux. They sought solitude, practiced almsgiving and hospitality, did manual labor to earn their living, and avoided luxury, even in the liturgy. The *Exordium Affligemense*, drawn up around 1122, not long after the *Exordium Parvum*, of Cîteaux, resembles the latter at a number of points. The two authors undoubtedly knew each other and the monk of Afflighem

must have kept one eye on the work of his cistercian confrère and friend.

A Divided Family

At Molesme, while Robert was on his journey the discussions among the brethren about restoration of discipline and the eventual introduction of radical reform heated up and degenerated into squabbling. In time the tension between the two groups became so high that the opponents of a new observance, remembering an article of the Cluniac Customary that authorized them to use physical restraint against any disturber of the established order, seized, manhandled and imprisoned Prior Alberic.

This event, disedifying though it may be, must be seen in the light of the rough manners of the Middle Ages. People were used to violence. Even so, it reveals the inflexible opposition. The perpetrators of this violence entertained these arguments: when Saint Benedict sent his disciple Maur to Gaul, did he not authorize him to make adaptations which the food, clothing, climate, and customs of that country made necessary? Is the traditional adaptation to local conditions, which has been made by all the great monks, preferable to the practices of the Desert Fathers who fasted and did manual labor, not as a matter of principle but out of necessity? What is more, the opponents said, and it is imprudent to lay an unbearable yoke on people or a burden harmful to health, and it is iniquitous to make someone suffer in peacetime what the martyrs of the faith endured under persecution.

It proved impossible to convince these monks, most of whom knew only the customs of Cluny, that there could be a more perfect and more authentic benedictine life than the one they knew.

When he returned to his monastery, Robert tried to calm tempers. Although he favored reform, he realized he could not compel anyone, lest, in the word of Saint Benedict, being too zealous in removing the rust, he should break the vessel (RB 64). He allowed the two sides to co-exist. Even though they did not attack each

other openly, the discord created uneasiness in the community. The family spirit was gone.

Aulps

In 1097, the reform movement experienced a solid gain. The cell at Aulps, which had been earlier founded by Molesme and remained its dependency, was raised to abbey status. The reason for this was the desire of the monks of Aulps to move on to a more faithful observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict. But the Rule does not know priories; in fact, it excludes them. On every page, it presupposes an abbot who leads the community as a father, who forms his sons in the monastic life, and enjoys an autonomy limited only by the rights of the bishop.

Stipulations of the act still reflect the cluniac regime: the honors to be accorded the abbot of Molesme when he visits Aulps; his authority to correct and, if need be, depose his abbot-son and to replace him by choosing his successor from among the monks of the mother-abbey, and to reduce the abbey to the status of a cell if it were to become lax. All these details are patterned after the cluniac constitutional regime.⁶

But the rationale was heavy with meaning and rich in consequences. It contained in a way the germ of the future cistercian constitution and the principles of its reform. The intention to observe the Rule of Saint Benedict in its totality, combined with the rejection of priories, logically opens the possibility of a totally new life style based on the Rule and the expansion of an Order through the foundation of new abbeys.

We must realize that the system of priories was, in fact, not in harmony with the spirit of the Rule, for it was detrimental to monastic discipline. Leadership which, according to the Patriarch of western monasticism, must be both firm and paternal, requires a measure of autonomy and stability. The prior or superior of a cell, nominated or recalled by an absent abbot, could not know the sons

6. Laurent, *Cartulaires*, 2: 7-8; Van Damme, *Documenta*, 3

entrusted to him well enough to command their confidence and filial devotion. A monastic family is not a residence for missionaries. It presupposes regular, well-balanced and faithfully executed community exercises. The comings and goings between priories and cells, farms, courts, and castles, for the collection or payment of tithes, and the trips to the abbey of Cluny for professions and various temporal or spiritual transactions made stability and regular observances virtually impossible. In addition, the cluniac regulations imposed protracted psalmody and liturgical functions on the monks. Anyone who wanted to restore the benedictine life in its integrity had to attack the governance of Cluny and its observances. This was not an easy thing to do.

Founding an abbey was a difficult enterprise. By definition, an abbey had to be *sui juris*, that is, without any ties of dependence to its mother-abbey. No juridical bond could any longer existed between the mother-house and foundations, which could multiply. Even more: to be able to deal with secular benefactors and bishops in their own name, the new abbeys had to obtain a privilege from Rome. But, for Rome, the granting of privileges beyond the limits of the existing law, or in opposition to it, seemed a breach of good order and an obstacle to the preservation of discipline. In 1100, Paschal II forbade the elevation of priories to abbeys, in order to prevent the multiplication of isolated abbeys. A former cluniac monk, he must have been well aware of the concern an abbot of Cluny had for his daughter-houses. Aulps, erected before the accession of Paschal II, escaped this prohibition.

We should note one significant and enlightening detail: to the act which elevated Aulps, to abbey status, the three witnesses for Molesme were Abbot Robert, Prior Alberic, and Stephen, the secretary—the very group which was very soon to take the initiative in founding Cîteaux. This action, on a principle in direct agreement with their own reform plan, clearly represents a victory for them. It must have encouraged them to go ahead with their project but, at the same time, also have caused them to lose hope of bringing about reform at Molesme.

The First Official Step

It was under these circumstances and in this psychological atmosphere that the three future leaders of the reform, joined by four of their zealous companions, decided to go for permission to leave to Hugh of Die, archbishop of Lyons and permanent legate of Urban II. Why this appeal to the archbishop-legate? Not, of course, in order to withdraw from the authority of their own bishop, Robert of Burgundy, for shortly afterwards they were to make a foundation in the same diocese. It is possible they had earlier sought his advice. The sole reason was that several years earlier Robert had been recalled to Molesme by papal order; only the authority of the pope or of his legate could therefore annul that measure. The monks accordingly sought papal authorization from the legate to secede, for their enterprise had no chance of success at Molesme. Hugh wholeheartedly favored the gregorian movement; they knew this and were encouraged by it. Robert of Burgundy, the bishop of Langres, could have authorized the emigration of a group of monk-founders: he could not have allowed Robert to be one of them.

After listening to their hopes and difficulties, the legate was fully convinced that they could never implement their plans at Molesme. He advised the seven monks to leave the place and seek a new location.

Vivicus

Free to make a foundation, Robert did not go. Had his sons begged him to stay? Or did he prefer to send out a small advance group to prepare the buildings and grounds? Whatever the reason, he did not leave; instead four of his monks went to Vivicus. They were Alberic, Stephen, and two others whose names are not mentioned but their identity can be conjectured with great probability: on the list of the seven original petitioners Odo and John are mentioned between Prior Alberic and Stephen.⁷

7. Spahr, *Das Leben*, p. 15.

Their departure by no means pleased the opponents of the reform. They alerted the bishop, for Vivicus, like Molesme, lay in the diocese of Langres. The bishop listened to their complaints and requests and agreed to recall the founders. To add force to his order, he added the threat of excommunication for disobedience.

Why this appeal by the monks? And why the bishop's action? The brethren surely wanted to see the reform fail at any price. Informed by them, the bishop was bound to disapprove of Robert's absence. Even the intervention of the legate turned into a drawback, for the monks fell under his authority only because of Robert's presence. Had the abbot not been in the group, the bishop could have authorized them to make a settlement anywhere they wanted, away from Molesme.

The bishop also had the right to refuse them a site in his diocese. They had little choice but to obey. But having seen their resolve to embrace a more perfect life come to grief under his jurisdiction, they sought another means of carrying out their plan.

The Legate's Decision

The four founders of Vivicus returned to Molesme only long enough to talk with their abbot and to add to their group him and two other monks who had been present at the first audience. Then they made a second visit to the legate. Hugh was not at Lyons. They found him at some unidentified place, probably making visitations in his diocese. The matter suffered no delay. The legate gave them a friendly reception, listened to their explanation of the new situation, and sent them away, armed with the following letter:

Hugh, Archbishop of Lyons and Legate of the Apostolic See, to Robert, Abbot of Molesme, and the brothers who with him desire to serve God according to the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Be it known to all who rejoice in the progress of Holy Mother Church that you and certain of your sons, brothers of the monastery of Molesme, have stood in our presence at

Lyons and stated your wish to adhere henceforth more strictly and more perfectly to the Rule of blessed Benedict, which so far you have observed poorly and neglectfully.

But since it is obvious in view of many obstacles that this cannot be accomplished in the aforementioned place, we, providing for the welfare of both parties, those departing and those remaining, have concluded that it will be expedient for you to retire to another place, which Divine Providence will point out to you, and there serve the Lord in a more salutary and peaceful manner.

To you, therefore, who at that time presented yourselves—Abbot Robert and brothers Alberic, Odo, John, Stephen, Letaid, and Peter—as well as to all others whom you shall decide to add to your company according to the Rule and by common consultation, after due deliberation we issue the order that you persevere in this holy endeavor [and] we confirm this forever by the authority of the Apostolic See through the impression of our seal.⁸

The legate was happy to grant the request of Robert and his companions, whom he had twice received in audience. Having given the support of his authority, he was content with granting the permission they asked. He advised them to leave Molesme on the first occasion: on the second, he ordered them to do so. Far from evading responsibility in the matter, he obliged the monks to take this step by giving them a formal order to leave their abbey even before they had any idea of where they could settle. This radical measure was justified, first, by their duty to follow their conscience in leading a more perfect monastic life; and second, by the duly ascertained impossibility that they could put this ideal into effect at Molesme. Hugh did not merely take the side of those departing. He understood that he had a responsibility as well for

8. *Exordium Parvum*, ch. 2, in Van Damme, *Documenta*, 6. English translation by Bede K. Lackner, in Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians. Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1977) 451.

those who believed they were to remain in place. In practical terms, his decision amounted to a division of the community. Robert was to remain the abbot of the monks who left and those who remained were to elect a new abbot and profess their obedience to him, once they had been released from the vow which bound them to Robert. Those who left would remain obedient to Robert and merely transfer their vow of stability from the monastery and community of Molesme to Cîteaux and its new monastic family.

Robert and the Group of Founders

Robert's decision to join the founders did not have these changes of profession as its sole, even its chief, consequence. It also affected—and this is much more important—the whole future of the New Monastery and the new observance. Had Robert stayed at Molesme, the foundation would have remained under its mother-abbey either as a priory or, in the manner of Aulps, as a semi-autonomous abbey. This would have been a limping solution. If the monks were to succeed, they had to found an abbey that was fully *sui juris*. The necessity of founding abbeys to propagate their observance was later affirmed at the very beginning of their new constitution—which clearly indicates the fundamental importance of this statute and of Robert's presence among the founders. The legate had good reasons for giving the abbot an explicit order to join the group of founders.

Satisfied with the outcome, the seven monks returned to Molesme to give an account of the audience and to inform the community of the liberty that had been given to join them or to stay. The monks could reflect on the vow they had taken to observe the Rule faithfully and on the guarantees which the legate's authority offered them for fulfilling this obligation. They could see that the prelate had taken a personal interest in the reform and entrusted its leadership to their abbot. Fourteen other members of the community decided to join the founders.

So they departed, twenty-one in number. With them they took only what was strictly necessary in liturgical furnishings and books.

Devoid of all material aid, they had nothing but their trust in Divine Providence.

The Problem of Dates

Here we must pause to take a look at the rather thorny problem of dates. The year in which Aulps was raised to an abbey is stated in the act: 1097. The same document, however, is also dated to the fourth indiction.⁹ This seems to conflict with the other date, for it refers to the year 1096. The indiction—and this has escaped several authors—begins not with the beginning of the year, but on 25 September.¹⁰ The fourth indiction refers to the year which elapsed between 25 September 1096 and 24 September 1097.

The act also gives another point of reference. It is dated to the ninth year of Urban II's pontificate; this ran from 12 March 1096 to 11 March 1097. Hence, the act must be dated to the period between 25 September 1096 and 11 March 1097. But, because the year—1097—is given, we have to conclude that the event took place before 11 March 1097, but after the preceding Christmas, (December 25), for the data can be reconciled only if we assume that we are dealing with the roman or papal indiction, which begins the year on 25 December (or the 1st of January).

This conclusion is confirmed by the date of Cîteaux's foundation, which is similarly established with the help of two references that can be reconciled only if we admit the same indiction. The *Exordia* date the foundation at the 1098th year of the Incarnation, while the *Exordium Magnum* places it exactly on the 21st of March and Palm Sunday—a detail which only can be true if we are dealing with a roman (papal) indiction.

The sojourn at Vivicus lasted for some time, for Robert's *Vita* mentions that the four solitaries were driven from it *aliquanto*

9. A period of fifteen years. When completed, the cycle began again with the initial unit.

10. The roman or papal indiction, which is still used today in papal bulls, begins on the first of January, but here we are dealing with the imperial indiction which began on 25 September.

tempore. This expression could mean several months after their arrival, which must have occurred in the fall of 1097, or at the beginning of the following winter. Thus, one must calculate that approximately one year passed between the elevation of Aulps and the departure of the twenty-one monks from Molesme.

As for the two meetings with the archbishop-legate Hugh: the first must have taken place in the spring of 1097; the second, in the winter or early spring of 1098.

A Group of Benefactors

The legate's protection had the additional advantage that, at his intervention, Robert and his monks received considerable help from Duke Odo I of Burgundy. The duke had already shown his goodwill toward Molesme in 1085, on the recommendation of his brother Robert, who had just been named bishop of Langres. This gesture on his part was quite remarkable, for he never or rarely showed any interest in abbeys. His interests lay in riches and exploits and—when there was no opportunity for combat—in periodic rampages with his soldiers, and he had no qualms about ransacking traveling bishops or abbots.

One day in 1097, Odo learned that the archbishop of Canterbury, Saint Anselm, was passing through the duchy on his way to Rome. Hoping for rich spoils, he went after him to plunder his possessions. A great surprise awaited him. The modesty, poor trappings, affability and admirable manners of Anselm wholly confounded him. He immediately begged the saintly prelate's pardon, promised assistance and protection, and had his party escorted to the frontier of his duchy.

On his return, the English archbishop was the guest of Hugh of Lyons. The resignation Anselm had submitted from the pope had not been received, and he had to wait for a favorable opportunity to return to Canterbury. He enjoyed the legate's hospitality for quite some time and must have been at Lyons in 1098, when the first Cistercians made their foundation.

Another prominent churchman also used his influence to promote the monks' cause: Archbishop Guy of Vienne, the son of

Count William the Bold of Burgundy and the brother-in-law of the duke who married his sister Matilda. William of Malmesbury, writing around 1120, confirmed this in the following words: 'There [at Cîteaux] they began their admirable work with the support of the archbishop of Vienne, who is now supreme pontiff.' Guy of Burgundy continued to be a friend and protector of the Cistercians until his elevation to the Apostolic See and, as we shall see, even after his death.

To round out our report about the friends and benefactors of the foundation, we must mention finally the Viscount of Beaune, one of the first donors and in all probability a member of Robert's family.

Abbot Robert obviously approached this group of friends. According to two seventeenth-century cistercian historians, Bernardo Brito¹¹ and Angelus Manrique,¹² he was accompanied and assisted by Stephen, who, as we already know, was his secretary and who because of his nationality may also have attracted the attention of Anselm of Canterbury. Both historians print the text of two letters, one of them addressed to the duke and thought to have been written by Stephen in his abbot's name; the other the duke's purported reply. But the two letters cannot be considered authentic. Their style and the titles employed in them do not agree with the practices of the late eleventh century. The content of the duke's letter, promising to win over the pope and the bishops of the duchy to Robert's cause, is wholly unlikely for, according to the official account, it was instead the papal legate and the bishops who asked for the duke's help.

The Foundation

The principal and most important temporal benefactor of the foundation was the Duke of Burgundy, Odo I. He persuaded his vassal, Viscount Raynald of Beaune, to cede to the monks

11. Bernardo de Brito, *Chronica de Cister . . . Primeira parte* (Lisbon, 1602).

12. Angel Manrique, *Cisterciensium seu verius Ecclesiasticorum Annalium a condito Cistercio . . .* 4 volumes (Lyon, 1642–1659).

a tract of land being newly cleared at a place called Cistellum. This land, a portion of the patrimony of Hodierna, the viscount's wife, was an allod, that is, a property free of any feudal obligation. In a first deed, Raynald ceded an area large enough to allow the construction of the regular buildings and outbuildings and as much arable and untilled land as the monks needed for their livelihood. A second deed confirmed the first and enlarged the donation by giving up any and all claim to a chapel already on the site. The monks refused the gift of the church, thus avoiding any implicit recognition of a layman's right to possess or to donate churches. Accepting this gregorian view, Raynald declared that he had no right over this sanctuary which, he now claimed, belonged to God alone—thus allowing the monks to take possession of it as if they had been its original owners (*primi occupantes*). The donation was completed by a third act which ceded an entire allod to the monks and requested that one strip of arable land be left to the use of two male and one female serfs. The tract needed for the monks' livelihood was to be designated by the viscount, by Lady Hodierna (if she wished to concern herself with it), and by Abbot Robert, and it was to be at a good distance from the lands cultivated by the monks. The three serfs were to remain subject to the viscount, not to the monks, who would certainly have refused any stipulation of this kind as contrary to their principles. This enlargement of the original donation was actually the work of the duke who had obtained it from the viscount by offering him in compensation an annual rent of twenty *sou* (gold *solidi*) and by giving permission to him and his heirs to plant as many vineyards on their domain as they could cultivate.

All these donations were confirmed, as required by Church law, by the hand of the local bishop, Walter of Chalon, on the day the church was dedicated. On the same day Odo made a new grant, giving full permission to the monks to fish, hunt, pasture and cut wood on lands he held adjacent to the abbey. Taken together, these measures assured the monks the peaceful possession of their privileges, exemption from any secular encroachment, and perfect

tranquility—indispensable conditions for a life devoted exclusively to God according to the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Inexhaustibly generous, the duke made yet another donation to the New Monastery—the name given at the foundation—in the form of animals, building material and whatever else was necessary for the completion of their wooden buildings. He also assumed responsibility for all their needs for a long time to come.

The exact dates of the dedication of the chapel and the erection of the monastery into an abbey are not known. The two ceremonies, presided over by the bishop, may have taken place on the same day, for the chapel was already there when the founders arrived. The occasion may also have coincided with the bishops confirmation of the donations. All these official acts could not have been delayed long after the monks' arrival at Cistellum, for the abbot had to be canonically installed by his ordinary and the monks had to vow stability to the new place and community without delay.

One last event marked the foundation. On Christmas Day, 25 December 1098—the only Christmas Robert spent at Cîteaux¹³—the duke made an important donation to Robert: a vineyard located at Meursault. Soon afterwards the Founder was to be asked to give up the place which fulfilled his lifelong aspiration and to accept being separated from the sons who had shared his ideals, his joys, and his sorrows.

New Crisis at Molesme

While the foundation was moving forward, the founders' former confrères at Molesme elected a new abbot and daily life went along in the traditional manner. The two communities seemed fully resigned to the division enacted by the legate. But the peace did not last long: it was broken in a way no one had apparently foreseen.

While the Cistercians were enjoying the favor of the magnates, prelates, and lords, and their life being admired, their temporal

13. Jean Marilier (ed.), *Chartes et documents concernant l'Abbaye de Cîteaux, 1098-1182* (Roma: Editiones Cistercienses, 1961) nn. 4-12, pp. 36-38.

security clearly assured, and their spiritual life heartened by the entrance of a large number of postulants, Molesme, once a rich and powerful abbey, saw its prestige decline because of the departure of its saintly abbot and several of its members outstanding in virtue, talents, and illustrious birth. This had a disheartening effect on the monks and greatly upset their neighbors and benefactors. Donors may have lost confidence in the new management of the abbey's goods. Perhaps the tithes they received from Molesme fell below their expectations. They spoke derisively about the abbey and became increasingly hostile toward it. One of them, Count William II of Nevers, swayed by rumors or simply anxious to exercise his 'right of arson'—a form of extortion accepted as legitimate—burned down one of the abbey's dependencies. This was like throwing a stick into a flock of hens; it brought instant and widespread attention to what was happening.

The monks of Molesme claimed they had been unjustly treated by their confrères and blamed them for their misfortunes. As if to avenge themselves and turn the ridicule from themselves, they seized every opportunity to revile and annoy them. To restore good order in their monastery and peace with their neighbors, and thus also recover their material prosperity, they asked the bishop to use his full influence to restore their abbot Robert to them. As we will see later, they also hoped to destroy the reform, for they had certainly realized by then that without Robert's leadership it would be in great danger. But the bishop, the brother of the recently converted duke who had taken a great interest in the foundation, was not about to cooperate in any reversal of the work under way, especially as this would also have meant going against the decisions of his archbishop, and the papal legate. At the same time he had to save Molesme at any price and risk bold action.

The only chance of success lay in appeal to Rome. In spite of his kinship with the duke and his subordination to the legate, Bishop Robert of Burgundy supported the initiative of the monks, who selected two or perhaps several of their number as delegates. These representatives arrived around Easter, which in 1099 fell on

16 April. On the 24th of April a synod was convened, chaired by Pope Urban II. Giving a detailed description of their unhappy situation, the monks of Molesme insistently begged the pope and the cardinals that Robert be returned to them as abbot. The pope himself bore witness to their unusual pleading when, in writing to his legate, he remarked that they had reclaimed their abbot with considerable vehemence (*vehementius*). He added, as if to excuse himself to the legate, that he was obliged and even constrained (*coacti quidem*) by his brothers, the cardinals, to grant them a favorable hearing. He invited the legate to investigate the possibility of Robert returning to Molesme and, if it was feasible, to ensure that it happened. At the same time the legate was to see to it 'that those who love solitude [Cîteaux] may live in peace, and those who are in the monastery [Molesme] observe the regular discipline'.¹⁴ In the face of this reserved and somewhat diffident papal attitude, the legate judged it unwise to assume responsibility in the matter. He, even more than the pope, had reasons to be apprehensive about the reactions of the offended party. He therefore summoned a council of *viros authenticos*, that is, important persons in official positions, to discuss the measures to be taken.

The Meeting at Port-d'Ansell

According to the official report, the meeting was held at Port-d'Anselles.¹⁵ Several bishops and religious superiors attended it. One of the most directly interested dignitaries, Robert of Burgundy, the bishop of Langres, did not. Why was he absent? No document tells us. Since his absence is, to say the least, surprising, may we assume that he felt slighted at not having been allowed to resolve this problem, which under normal circumstances would have fallen under his authority? Having previously managed to effect Robert's return from the foundation of Aux, moreover, he

14. *Exordium Parvum*, chs. 5–6; Van Damme, *Documenta*, 7–8.

15. *Exordium Parvum*, ch. 7; Van Damme, *Documenta*, 8–9.

may have been afraid that requesting the same favor a second time from the same pope would meet with refusal. Even if papal and legatine interventions were proper from a canonical point of view, Robert may have felt slighted at having the matter referred to the court of the legate whom he had bypassed in appealing directly to Rome. He was content to be represented by Godfrey, the new abbot of Molesme, and by several monks of the abbey who were as interested as, indeed more interested than, he in resolving the case and equally capable of presenting an exact account of their situation and making a convincing plea. The assembly must have met in May or early June of 1099; the legate could have received the papal letter only after the Roman synod which was held at the end of April. The pope who had written it died on 29 July, and on that day every commission, including Hugh's legatine office, automatically came to an end. One of the decisions taken at Port-d'Anselme was that a breviary which had been taken along from Molesme by the founders was to be returned to that abbey by the feast of Saint John Baptist, 24 June. If the breviary was not to be returned until 24 June 1100, this would have been specified in the decree: besides, the delay would have been too long. On the other hand, the interval between the synod and the feast of Saint John 1099 seems rather short, but not too short if the scribes worked as a team. One monk could prepare the parchment, another mark the lines of the margins and spaces, a third ready the ink, a fourth trim the pens, and so on.

Robert's Return to Molesme

At the meeting at Port-d'Anselme Robert's fate was decided: he was to return to Molesme. A report sent to the bishop of Langres describes the discussion and its outcome. This valuable document also helps us reject the biased accounts several authors have given of Robert's behavior. Misled by national prejudices or by rumors of petty jealousies among the monks, some medieval and modern writers have accused the founder of Cîteaux of weakly and cravenly

failing to discharge his obligations toward his sons and toward God. To those who judged him this way, the meeting at Port-d'Anselme was, so-to-say, Robert's trial. It is easy to demonstrate that these accusations are without serious foundation.

Before the panel, composed of the legate, several bishops and abbots and other prominent persons of the region, appeared the monks of Molesme, led by their abbot Godfrey, who had been elected after Robert's departure to Cîteaux. Their bishop was absent, having contented himself with a written recommendation which the monks handed to the legate. Their common request was urgent and allowed but one solution: that Robert be obliged to return to Molesme. Since the alternative left open by the pope was clearly unworkable, the parties themselves discarded it in favor of the only possible solution. Abbot Godfrey declared himself ready to relinquish his office to Robert.

Having listened to the monks' report and re-read Urban II's letter, the legate and his advisers decided that they must resign themselves to the facts and the situation. They therefore granted the monks' request: the return of their abbot. But they did so on the condition that Robert renounce all his rights over Cîteaux: the pastoral staff of Cîteaux was to be returned to the bishop of Chalon. This symbolic gesture meant that Cîteaux would remain an abbey and that the bishop, in accordance with canon law, would preside over a new election. In the meantime, Bishop Walter would free Robert from obedience to himself and his diocese, and Robert would in turn release the monks of Cîteaux from the vows which bound them to himself. Those among them who expressed the desire to do so were given the freedom to return with their abbot and become members of the Molesme community once again. Finally, it was agreed that from that time forward there would be no further transfers between the two abbeys, except in the manner prescribed by the Rule, as these things were always done between independent abbeys.

The legate had once again saved the reform, this time by preserving the abbatial status of the new foundation. Thenceforward

it would exist alongside Molesme, but without any tie of dependence. It was also stipulated that if Robert should ever again leave Molesme *solita levitate*—as had happened more than once before—then Godfrey would resume his office, unless the legate, the bishop, or Abbot Godfrey decided otherwise.

With his apostolic authority, the legate ordered the bishop of Langres to receive Robert with courtesy and reinstall him as abbot. Although the bishop had not requested it, this order was issued in writing, for the procedure which had been followed was not the ordinary one and had received its force from the supreme authority of the Church as represented by his legate. The liturgical books and ornaments which had been taken along from Molesme, it was decided, would remain at Cîteaux except the breviary mentioned earlier.

Bishop Walter of Chalon and Abbot Robert did as the legate had ordered. Robert and several of his sons returned to Molesme. He had no choice, and there can be no doubt that the separation caused him great distress. He was taken from the work that crowned his constant efforts and from those of his sons who had best understood him and shared his struggles, sufferings, joys, and hopes. Those who returned with him to Molesme made use of the liberty that had been given them, because they did not find the desert to their liking. Robert's presence likely played a role in their decision, but one cannot ascribe to him a lack of love for the desert. Nothing in his conduct or in any document justifies such an interpretation of the facts or of his conduct.

Behind the foundation of Cîteaux, as we have already seen, lay the conscientious duty its monks felt to live according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, according to their profession. It could, therefore, be objected that if Robert was mindful of this duty in leaving Molesme for Cîteaux, then his return constitutes a condemnation of his conduct. By leaving the place where he knew he ought to live in accordance with his profession, he made himself guilty of perjury. In truth, however, the law which authorizes the espousal of a more austere life must yield to the law of necessity if there is

a clear conflict between the two obligations. The synod of Port-d'Anselles had publicly and solemnly stated that such a necessity existed for the monks of Molesme, and the decision taken at it had been made by common accord and confirmed by the apostolic authority invested in the papal legate.

The account as we have given it, wholly consonant with the documents and the spirit which inspired these events, lets us reject as false the accusation of disobedience levelled against Alberic and his three companions who had for some time lived at Vivicus.

Here we must pause to take a brief look at the mordant expression, *solita levitate*, which was inserted into the report. Abbot Godfrey willingly relinquished his place to Robert, it states, and then goes on to say: but if with his usual inconstancy Robert should again leave his post, no one shall be put in his place without the prior consent of the legate, the bishop, and Godfrey. These words undoubtedly refer to Robert's numerous relocations, that is, to the readiness with which he always obeyed the inspirations of grace and the orders of his superiors. He had just been given a new order which, through the legate, went back to the pope: he was to give up his stability at Cîteaux. This was the third papal order obliging him to return to Molesme. His inconstancy was not a blameworthy fault which the legate denounced, but a quality he appreciated in Robert. He used a figure of speech suited to the literary taste of his time. To him Robert's inconstancy, like the mobility of the angels, was simply a readiness to go wherever obedience called him. The prelate knew that he was utterly faithful to his obligations and obedient to the injunctions of his superiors. He was to give proof yet again of this docility. We might also add that Hugh may have wished to be diplomatic, either to free himself from any blame he may have incurred or else to break the tensions and thus help those who had been suffering from this rather tragic situation. In any case, he had to consider the possibility that Robert might once again return to Cîteaux, because his mission at Molesme had either failed or come to an end once he had restored order and groomed a capable successor.

This battle of procedures inspired one final document: Robert's dismissory letter, given by the ordinary of Chalon to his colleague at Langres.¹⁶ The author of the *Exordium Parvum* calls it a 'shield of defense' (*scutum defensionis*), a biblical turn of phrase dear to medieval writers. We may be astonished to read at the end of this letter: 'Do not be afraid to accept him and to treat him as a man in good standing'. This clause does not suggest that Robert had been cleared of some reproach which he may somehow have deserved. We need only recall the efforts of the bishop of Langres, Robert of Burgundy, both at the court of Rome and later at the synod of Port-d'Anselles, at first to keep Robert at Molesme and the second time, to make him return there. He could only be happy to see Robert return to Molesme and his jurisdiction and edified by his submission.

Several other details emerge from the report of the meeting addressed to the same bishop of Langres. Liberty was given to those who had followed Robert to the 'desert' to return with him if the new life was too difficult for them. 'Several' (*quidam*), says the *Exordium Parvum*, took advantage of this permission, because 'they did not find the desert to their liking'. Occasionally, this reproach has also been applied to Robert: William of Malmesbury claims that Hugh's councillors 'compelled the writing [Robert], *volentem cogentes*'.¹⁷ The *Exordium Parvum*, the only authentic source but one which William seems to have ignored, does not allow this interpretation. When speaking of Robert, it says that upon the formal request of the pope and the counsel of persons worthy of trust, the legate announce: 'We have decided to return him because the monks who had been asking for him had no hope of seeing peace and tranquility restored in the monastery of Molesme in any other way'.¹⁸

16. *Exordium Parvum*, ch. 8; Van Damme, *Documenta*, 9.

17. William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum libri quinque*; PL 179:1289 B.

18. *Exordium Parvum*, ch. 7; Van Damme, *Documenta*, 8.

Which and how many monks returned with Robert to Molesme? The term *quidam*, given the total number of twenty, could mean half a dozen. For a lesser number the author would have used *aliqui* or *pauci*. If half of the community had been involved one would expect *plures*. Among these returning was Peter, friend of Stephen Harding, and also English by birth, who later became chaplain to the nuns of Jully and attended Bernard's sister Humbelina on her deathbed.

At the end of the report the legate named the persons who have been present in the deliberations: the bishops of Autun, Chalons, Macon, and Belley; the abbots of Tournus, Dijon, and Ainay; the pope's chamberlain, named Peter, and several other 'upright persons of good repute'.

This was the second time that Hugh of Die, who was more Gregorian than Gregory himself, had saved the reform. The future seemed assured, thanks chiefly to the legate's sure and unwavering protection. Even so, the peace established by the prelates' arbitration and the legate's decision was not to last long.

On the following July 29th, scarcely two months after these measures were taken, Pope Urban II died and Hugh's mandate came to an end. The right moment had come for the monks of Molesme to resume their attempts to destroy the reform which both humiliated and scandalized them. Hugh was still there as archbishop of Lyons, however, and others were soon to enter the scene to continue the struggle and provide for the stable and unassailed existence of the foundation.

Twilight of a Saintly Life

Robert was seventy years old when he took up the abbatial cross at Molesme once again. During his twelve remaining years, he undertook remarkable activities and raised his community to great renown. A notice from 1105 gives us the following testimony: 'The good odor of the renown of the monastery of Molesme is recognized far and wide. The lords shower it with gifts and ask it

monks to make new foundations in their midst'.¹⁹ Within a short time, the abbey's influence extended as far as Luxembourg, where the priory of Ueseldingen sprang up, and in the dioceses of Basle and Lausanne, where foundations were made.

Among the numerous transactions in which Robert or his monastery were involved, we must mention the elevation of a former 'cell' to the rank of an abbey and the agreement concluded between Molesme, her daughter Aulps, and Aulps' daughter Balerne. In 1107, at the latest, an act was drawn up between Duke Thierry of Lorraine, Bishop Pibo of Toul, and Abbot Robert, raising the monastery of Chatenois in the diocese of Toul to an abbey at the duke's request. That the new abbey was to be independent of Molesme was expressed by a symbolic gesture of the new abbot: he received the pastoral staff, not from any prelate or prince, but from the altar. He and his government were to be under the vigilance and jurisdiction of the bishop and the abbot of Molesme.²⁰

In 1110, the *Concordia Molismensis* was drawn up: to this we shall return when discussing Stephen's abbacy.

Robert died in the Lord on 17 April 1111, after a life of unceasing struggle and immense labors. Through his great zeal he acquired numerous merits which he deployed on behalf of a truly fervent monastic life.

19. Laurent, *Cartulaires*, 1: 152, 11.

20. Laurent, *Cartulaires*, 2: 126-127.