

Notes to SESSION 3

The formation of an order: the *Carta Caritatis* and the Statutes

Measured by any yardstick the success of the Cistercians was phenomenal. Cîteaux was founded in 1098. According to the historical traditions of the Cistercian Order, the 'new monastery' as Cîteaux was known, was on the verge of extinction when a young nobleman named Bernard of Fontaines (later St Bernard, first abbot of Clairvaux) entered the house in 1113. However by 1115 the mother house is traditionally said to have established its first four daughters - La Ferté (1113), Pontigny (1114), Clairvaux (1115) and Morimond (1115), though if you look at Burton and Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages* you will see that there is some evidence to suggest that Morimond was founded a little later.

By the time of the death of St Bernard in 1153, the order had swelled to a total of 343 abbeys throughout Europe. By 1500 there were 738 abbeys for men and 654 for women. The effective leadership of the monastic world – and a considerable degree of moral influence in the church as a whole – had passed to the White Monks. There were Cistercian archbishops, bishops, cardinals, even a Cistercian pope, Eugenius III. Cistercians influenced ecclesiastical policy; St Bernard preached the Second Crusade, and lectured popes, emperors and kings on their affairs. It is small wonder that a contemporary remarked that the whole world was threatening to turn into one vast Cistercian monastery.

In this session we shall begin to look at the reasons for the success of the White Monks. Success demands two things: recruits and patrons. For the Cistercians to flourish there had to be men who wished to become Cistercian monks - in preference to Benedictines, Cluniacs, or Augustinian canons, or hermits. There also had to be men and women who chose to found and endow Cistercian houses in preference to one of any other order. What was it about the Cistercians that appealed so effectively to men and women?

But it was not just that a large number of Cistercian houses were founded, or indeed that they followed the way of life of Cîteaux. The Cistercians have been called the first true monastic order, in that they developed a machinery to hold this vast congregation together. In this unit we look closely at the *Carta Caritatis* (literally, the 'charter of love', or 'charter of charity'), the constitution of the Cistercian order. The *carta* was an organic document: it grew and developed as the order grew and developed. It survives in the forms known as *Carta Caritatis Prior* (the closest to the original, which we no longer have), *Summa Carte Caritatis* and *Carta Caritatis Posterior*. What do these tell us of the way in which Cistercian self-awareness and identity developed?

What was the significance of the General Chapter and the annual visitation?

The early *instituta* were incorporated into the *Exordium Parvum*, chapters 15 and 17. These were later codified or brought together as the *capitula*, the rules of the order. The traditional date for the codification is 1134, and you will still see this date referred to in secondary works. However, Christopher Holdsworth has shown that the date rests on a misunderstanding as far back as the seventeenth century, and it may be that the *instituta* were not brought together before the middle of the twelfth century, possibly around 1150.

The *capitula* were added to and supplemented by successive annual general chapters (the meeting of all the abbots of the order). They show how Cistercian thinking developed on matters such as the liturgy, clothing, buildings and architecture, food and drink, economy, and relations with the outside world.

Reading: as previous session