

AN UNINTENDED ORDER: THE CENTRALITY OF CHARACTER AND CIRCUMSTANCE IN THE TWELFTH-CENTURY GILBERTINE COMMUNITIES

Daniel J. Menold

Dr. Lois Huneycutt, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines questions related to the emergence of the Gilbertine Order in twelfth-century England. While scholars have noted the importance of circumstantial necessity in the order's early history, I believe that their studies fail to fully account for the origin and early development of these distinctive monastic communities. While local necessity undoubtedly played a key role in the formation of the order's early character, I believe that the peculiar personality the order's founder, Gilbert of Sempringham, played an equally important role.

The *Vita Sancti Gilberti* provides the most detailed description of Gilbert's life. However, as a piece of hagiography, the *Vita* is permeated with numerous hagiographical *topoi* that need to be identified and discarded. It is then possible to examine the more unusual aspects of Gilbert's life in the context of other, more traditional sources. In addition to the *Vita*, I rely heavily upon a variety of twelfth-century documents, as well as previous scholars' interpretations of the Gilbertine *Institutes* and a variety of secondary source material. In the end, I conclude that Gilbert's distinctive and at times contradictory personality was largely responsible, not only for the foundation of his peculiar order, but also for the evolution of the early Gilbertine communities.