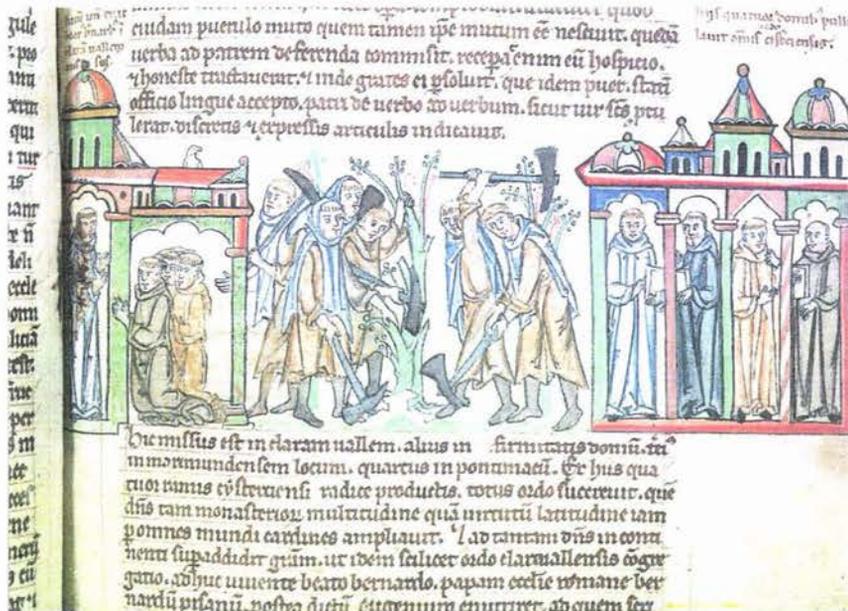


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Schola Caritatis

Twelfth Century Cistercians and the Ideas of Monastic Caritas and Amicitia



A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History at Massey University

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Illustration on Title Page

From Alexander's *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, c. 1243 and depicts on the left Stephen Harding commissioning a group of kneeling monks to found new monasteries; on the right the abbots of La Ferté, Clairvaux (Saint Bernard), Pontigny and Morimond – Alexander's 'Four Branches from the Cistercian Root' – within their respective churches; and in the middle a group of working monks testifying to the centrality of manual labour in the Cistercian reform. (James France, *The Cistercians in Medieval Art*, Stroud: Sutton, 1998, plate 6)

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Introduction

In the sixth century Saint Benedict recorded that he was composing his rule for monastic communities 'to safeguard love [*caritatis*]...' The idea of fraternal love, or *caritas*, had for a number of centuries been developed as the foundational concept and guide for monks living together in communities. Ever since Pachomius had brought monks together in the fourth century the centrality of the idea of *caritas* had never been disputed. For Saint Benedict the practice of *caritas* within a community led to *caritatem perfectam*, or 'perfect love' of God – the goal of all who followed the monastic life. The Rule of Saint Benedict became the fundamental observance for most of Western European monasticism, and the idea of *caritas* as Saint Benedict had expressed it was the bond that held these communities together. A related idea, the idea of *amicitia*, or friendship, with its implications of exclusivity and distraction was marginalised, although never really disregarded completely. *Amicitia* was always possible, according to monastic rules and institutions written by men such as John Cassian and Saint Augustine, and also in the Rule of Saint Benedict, but in practice the idea was discouraged. It was not until the growing affectivity of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that, within some monastic communities, the distance between these related ideas of *caritas* and *amicitia* began to narrow. In particular, a redefined idea of *amicitia* began to be integrated with *caritas* and to assume a more central position than it had previously held.

The late eleventh and early twelfth centuries were a period of challenge and change for the monastic houses of medieval Europe. The appearance of new reforming orders challenged the older Benedictine orders such as Cluny and similar abbeys, refuting and abandoning their splendour and power for a new life centred on prayer and the practice of asceticism within a supportive community. Of these reforming orders, the Cistercians were the greatest and most successful. The Cistercians defined their Order by the *Carta Caritatis*, or Charter of Love. This document not only instituted a strict observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict, but gave the idea and practice of fraternal *caritas* a central role in maintaining a uniform observance in all abbeys throughout the rapidly growing Cistercian Order, so that they would 'live by one charity [*sed una*

caritate], one Rule, and like usages'¹. It was within the nurturing reform environment where the practice of fraternal *caritas* was openly and deliberately encouraged by the cultural framework created by the charter that individual abbots began to redefine the idea of *amicitia* and relocate its practice within the monastic environment. The work of Bernard of Clairvaux indicates a shift in acceptance of the idea of *amicitia* in which it became an acceptable, even desirable, part of monastic experience and was linked with the practice of *caritas* – friends and brothers together. The later work of Aelred of Rievaulx integrated the two ideas further. The idea of *amicitia* became located within the context of fraternal *caritas*. For Aelred *amicitia* was an exclusive form of *caritas* reserved for one or two close and intimate companions within the abbey environment. These close bonds of *amicitia* embedded within fraternal *caritas* could lead to what Aelred called *amicitiae perfectionem* – the 'perfect friendship' of God.

This study analyses the development and operation of the idea of *caritas* within the context of the early Cistercian monastic environment and later attempts to integrate the related idea of *amicitia* into Cistercian ideals and practices of fraternal *caritas*. It demonstrates the centrality of fraternal *caritas* in the Cistercian Order, and also demonstrates the movement of *amicitia* from a marginal position in monastic culture to a position where it became recognised by some Cistercians as a special type of *caritas* and was centrally located within that ideal. The key primary texts are those related to the establishment of the Cistercian Order. The Rule of Saint Benedict regulated the idea of *caritas* and these regulations became the foundation for Cistercian ideas about *caritas*. Early Cistercian narrative and legislative documents such as the *Exordium Parvum* and the *Carta Caritatis*, and the earliest customary, the *Ecclesiastica Officia*, were used by the Cistercians to create a monastic environment conducive to the practice of fraternal *caritas*. Works written by both Bernard of Clairvaux – his *Apologia*, *De gradibus humilitas et superbiae*, *De diligendo deo*, and his *Sermones super Cantica canticorum* – and Aelred of Rievaulx – his *Speculum Caritatis* and *De Spiritali Amicitia* – are also examined. These abbots used their works to locate the idea of fraternal *caritas* within the individual monk's spiritual journey. Their work also explored the idea of *amicitia* and its place within the monastic environment, eventually integrating the two ideas together. All of these texts use the language of monastic culture to describe the ideals of relationship within the monastic community. This language is used in different ways to idealise these relationships – regulatory in the Rule of Saint Benedict, institutionally in the Cistercian

¹ Chrysogonus Waddell, (ed.), *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux: Latin Text in Dual Edition with English Translation and Notes*, Cîteaux: Commentarii cistercienses, 1999, p. 444.

founding documents and customary, and spiritually in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx.

Caritas is often defined by the English word 'charity' – that is, charity as self-giving love. The Christian idea of *caritas* comes from the biblical commandment of Jesus to love God and then to love your neighbour as yourself, and is defined in monastic culture in terms of a monk's love for God and also his love for his brother monks. In monastic writing these ideas are often related to each other – in order to love God a monk must love his brother, and by loving his brother a monk learns to love God. God's love for humanity as a whole is also represented by the word *caritas*. *Caritas* therefore can have three different but related meanings – God's love for man, man's love for God, and man's love for his neighbour. The primary definition of *caritas* for this study is man's love for his neighbour, the idea of fraternal *caritas*, although the other meanings for *caritas* do occur within the context of the thesis. The word *caritas* is a Latin word – the corresponding Greek word is *agape* – and is only found in noun form. Medieval authors used other Latin verbs to describe *caritas* in action – verbs such as *amor*, *amare* and *diligere* – making translation into English with its single word for love, and the multiple meanings this word can have, a difficult and often inexact task. *Caritas* then, for the purposes of this study, is predominantly defined as fraternal or brotherly love.

The basic definition of *amicitia* is the idea of friendship. The medieval idea of friendship relied heavily on classical ideas and constructions of friendship expressed in the works of the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato, and the Roman statesman Cicero. Cicero defined *amicitia* as a 'complete identity of feeling about all things divine and human, as strengthened by mutual goodwill and affection'². Other definitions of *amicitia* contributed to the medieval idea. Biblical ideals of *amicitia* are based on examples of friendships such as Jonathan and David, Jesus and Lazarus, and also Jesus and John 'the disciple Jesus loved'. While these biblical examples of *amicitia* ensured that the idea could never be entirely dismissed from the agenda of the monastic community, the implicit exclusivity and self-centredness of these relationships threatened the basic principles of a community committed to the practice of fraternal *caritas*. Any definition of

² Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350 –1250*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988, p. xiv.

amicitia within monastic communities must take into account the inherent tensions that this idea brought into a culture of fraternal *caritas*. A definition of *amicitia* for this study then, is the idea of exclusive and individual friendships that may or may not have had the capacity to threaten the very basis of the monastic culture in which they were practiced.

While there has been a considerable amount of recent work regarding medieval Cistercians and their place in medieval culture, only a small amount of this work gives attention to the ideas of *caritas* and *amicitia*. Generally these two ideas are considered separately. The present study is informed by two recent works – Martha G. Newman's *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (1996), and Brian Patrick McGuire's *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (1988). Newman's work concentrates on the political and social activities of twelfth century Cistercians and argues that these activities grew out of their interpretation of monastic life – particularly their interpretation of *caritas*. She focuses on the Cistercian concept of *caritas* as an active component of their involvement in society outside the monastic community. While she carefully defines the role of *caritas* in creating a unique monastic culture – it is this section that informs the present study – she says nothing at all about any role or relationship that *amicitia* might have within the context of fraternal *caritas* and the Cistercian's inward journey towards God. McGuire's work on *amicitia* shows a similarly singular focus. He comprehensively examines the concept of monastic friendship through the late classical and early medieval periods. Throughout his work he develops a consistent argument for the existence of individual friendships within monastic communities with many examples from monastic and secular literature from the period. His work concentrates solely on the idea of *amicitia* and he makes no attempt to contextualise these friendships within the idea of fraternal *caritas*. While his work on the Cistercian period deals with Bernard of Clairvaux's supposed friendship with Peter the Venerable, and Aelred of Rievaulx's development of the idea of *amicitia*, he does not seek to place these within the context of Cistercian *caritas* – he examines them solely from the perspective of friendship. McGuire accentuates the growth and exclusivity of individual friendship within the context of monastic communities but makes no explicit attempts either to compare or integrate the idea of *amicitia* with that of *caritas*. What the present study does is draw from both these secondary sources among other minor ones, and situates itself between them to show the related development and connection of two ideas that for both Newman and McGuire were singular foci.

While this study will focus on the development of Cistercian ideas of *caritas* and *amicitia*, the prologue will briefly examine these ideas in the context of early Eastern and Western monasticism in texts by Pachomius, Cassian and Saint Augustine. A developing concept of fraternal *caritas* was central in each of their works. While the idea of *amicitia* was thought to be closely related to *caritas* it was always considered marginal within the monastic community, although never disregarded completely. The practice of *amicitia* was limited because of its exclusive nature and the potential for it to disrupt monastic life. Saint Benedict and his Rule will be examined in the first section of the thesis. The Rule was the foundation of Cistercian monasticism and the particular Cistercian interpretation of fraternal *caritas*. The idea of fraternal *caritas* was given a central position within the Rule. Saint Benedict ensured that the ascetic values of the monk's individual journey towards God were defined within the context of fraternal *caritas* practiced in a community. For Saint Benedict it was this combination that aided a monk to strive for the goal of *caritatis perfecta*, or perfect love. The idea of *amicitia* received little attention from Saint Benedict and, as with many other minor details he left this up to each individual abbot's discretion. For these early monastic leaders then, the idea of *caritas* was central to monastic life, while *amicitia* was marginal, sometimes even disregarded, and at best considered with caution.

The second section of the thesis will examine the texts used by the Cistercian founders as they established their communities and their particular emphases of monastic practice. The Cistercian *Carta Caritatis* espoused a strict observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict with particular emphasis on manual labour and an austere and ascetic lifestyle lived within community. The *Carta* gave the idea of fraternal *caritas* the central role of binding the rapidly growing number of communities together in a uniform observance and practice. The Rule of Saint Benedict was the final authority for the new Order and all, including the abbots and the General Chapter were subject to its regulations just as the monks were. However, using the idea of fraternal *caritas* as a force to unify and order the communities was a new development – the Rule had used the idea as motivation for unity within the community, but the Cistercians institutionalised *caritas* to validate and control their programme of reform. This particular interpretation of *caritas* did not go unchallenged and these challenges will be examined in section three of the thesis. The Cistercians were challenged from within their own Order by their laybrothers. According to the prologue of the laybrothers own customary they were to be treated as equals with the monks in Cistercian communities, but this same customary instituted practices that maintained clear divisions between both groups. The exclusion of laybrothers from the ideal of fraternal *caritas* led

to increasing tensions and finally, open revolt within communities. The Cistercians attempted to control the damage with *exempla*, or stories that rehabilitated and exalted the laybrothers role and position within the community. Challenges from the wider monastic community again attacked the exclusivity of fraternal *caritas*. The famous and well-documented controversy between the Cluniacs and the Cistercians that was initiated by the accusations and counter accusations of Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter the Venerable was a confrontation over *caritas*. The Cluniac interpretation of *caritas* stressed unity, flexibility and compromise within the wider monastic environment, while Cistercian *caritas* was unchangeable, exclusive and superior. Both of these challenges were never fully resolved and the internal and external tensions continued well into the next century.

The final section of the thesis will show how the Cistercians developed the ideas of *caritas* and *amicitia* in their own spiritual aspirations within the context of the affectivity of the twelfth century. The centrality of fraternal *caritas* in the *Carta Caritatis* provided the framework for these ideas to be explored in a nurturing and encouraging environment despite the seeming inflexibility of the *Carta*. Bernard of Clairvaux's work located the idea of fraternal *caritas* within the second step of his three steps to God – love of self, love of neighbour, then love God – giving the idea a clear role in the individual monk's journey towards God, not just within the community. For Bernard the idea of fraternal *caritas* was totally integrated into an individual monk's love for God. Bernard also embraces the idea of *amicitia* as he locates his own feelings about individual monks within the context of fraternal *caritas* and expresses a need for 'intimate human relationships' within the community. The later work of Aelred of Rievaulx took these ideas further. Aelred also located fraternal *caritas* within the context of the individual monk's journey towards God in the same way as Bernard, but he considered that the three steps were more dependent on each other than Bernard suggests. For him the idea of fraternal *caritas* permeated all three steps as each of the loves nurtured and encouraged the others. Aelred then embraced the idea and practice of *amicitia* within the monastic community more fully than it had been before. For him *amicitia* was the highest ideal of fraternal *caritas*. He considered that intimate, encouraging and comforting friendships within the community were an exclusive form of fraternal *caritas* and, in spite of the potential for discord, could be an integral part of the journey towards the perfect friendship, or *amicitiae perfectionem* of God.

The representation of fraternal *caritas* and *amicitia* by both Bernard and Aelred was a significant development in monastic culture. These developments originated in the traditional practice of monastic communities, but also in the new affectivity of the twelfth century. While the integration of *amicitia* into the idea of fraternal *caritas* seemed a logical step within the context of this affectivity, in the long term it clashed with the more ascetic values of Cistercian monasticism and had to be discouraged. In the short term the practice of these integrated ideals did much to encourage growth in communities and in the individual monk's journey towards God.