

STUDIES IN
CHURCH HISTORY

EDITED BY W. J. SHEILS

VOLUME 22

MONKS, HERMITS
AND THE
ASCETIC TRADITION

For the Ecclesiastical History Society
BASIL BLACKWELL

STUDIES IN CHURCH HISTORY

Volume 22

Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition

Edited by W. J. Sheils
Borthwick Institute, University of York

Moral and spiritual exercise to train the character to virtue, or indeed to perfection, by inward or outward acts of self-discipline, has occupied a large role in Christian history. The aspiration has taken not only individual expression in the eremitic tradition, but also social expression through monastic communities where ascetic discipline, under rules of poverty, chastity and obedience, has been ordered and systematized. From time to time its forms have called for reform and renewal, and at other times they have met with resentment and rejection. The essays in this volume examine monastic traditions from Augustine through to the twelfth-century Cistercians and the revival of monasticism in the Anglican church of the nineteenth century. The eremitic tradition is discussed through the life of Romuald and the little known followers of the rule of St Paul, whilst its dramatic impact on political affairs is discussed in the context of the role of Peter the Hermit in the First Crusade.

The ascetic life as lived in practice did not always measure up to its ideals and the monks of the twelfth century created jurisdictional problems for reforming popes just as their eighteenth-century descendants provided material for the acerbic pen of Voltaire. He was writing, of course, in a post-Reformation world which had seen the development of new forms of the ascetic life within Catholicism, particularly in Spain and Italy, and the rejection of traditional monasticism by the Protestants.

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W. J. SHEILS

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