



MEDIEVAL AND  
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# Re-Reading the abuses of the age: **from seventh- century Ireland to twelfth-century France**

**CONSTANT J. MEWS**

Professor, Centre for Religious Studies, Monash University

**THERE** never was any single mode of reading within the monastic cloister. This paper looks at the transformation of reading practice between the seventh and twelfth centuries by comparing two influential, but largely unstudied texts that address perceived abuses in contemporary behaviour. One is the *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*, a text written in Ireland in the seventh century and widely circulated in the medieval period under the name of Cyprian (in the earliest manuscripts) or Augustine. It classifies moral failings into twelve categories, from a *sapiens* without good works to bad kings and bishops, and a people without law. The other is a text about abuses within the cloister, composed by an Augustinian canon, Hugh of Fouillois (d. ca. 1172), and included within his *De claustro animae*. It has not been realised that this text also circulated widely as a distinct composition, beginning *Duodecim autem sunt abusiones claustrum* (PL 176: 1058C-1086D). These two texts, one inspired by the other, are used to illustrate the inadequacy of conventional generalisations about medieval *lectio sacra* as uniquely focused on spiritual ends. Each text in its own way illustrates how monastic reading, inspired by the Bible, could engage in identifying moral failings either within society in general, or within the cloister in particular. Both texts illustrate how Brian Stock's notion of a textual community can help show how monastic reading could become a vehicle for criticising the contemporary social order.

**CONSTANT MEWS** is a Professor at the Centre for Religious Studies at Monash University. He completed his D.Phil. at Oxford University in 1980. He has researched and taught at the Université de Paris III (1980–1985), the University of Sheffield, and Monash University (since 1987) where he has served as the Director of Religious Studies since 2002. His major research is into medieval philosophical, ethical and religious thought, as exemplified by Peter Abelard and Heloise, Hildegard of Bingen and their contemporaries, looking at the evolution of theology and its relationship to non-scholastic modes of thinking and feeling. His research interests stretch from religious life in early medieval Ireland to late medieval France, with particular attention to writings addressed to women, as well as those of Christine de Pizan. He works with medieval musicologists on the intersection between liturgy, music theory, philosophy and religious thought, with attention to the way music was understood as affecting the emotions.

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Dr. Michael D. Barbezat  
MEMS Research Fellow, IRCI

[MEMS.seminar@acu.edu.au](mailto:MEMS.seminar@acu.edu.au)