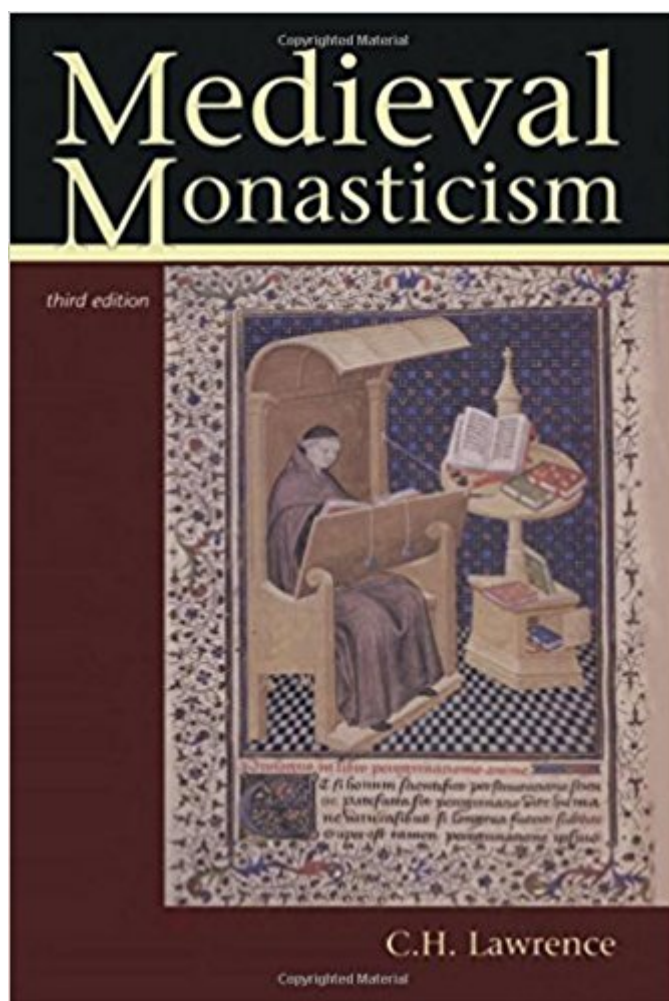


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# Medieval Monasticism: Forms Of Religious Life In Western Europe In The Middle Ages



## Synopsis

Hugh Lawrence's book ranges right across Europe and the Middle East as well as reconstructing the internal life, experience and aims of the medieval cloister, he also explores the many-sided relationships between the monasteries and the secular world from which they drew recruits. This Third Edition contains new thoughts and perspectives throughout.

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## Customer Reviews

"Professor Lawrence goes straight to the head of the class for his brilliant survey" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*

"Professor Lawrence goes straight to the head of the class for his brilliant survey", wrote the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* on the publication of *Medieval Monasticism*. This thoroughly revised and updated Third Edition retains the qualities of the original, phenomenally successful book. For a thousand years the monasteries and religious orders were a prominent feature of the social landscape of the West, and the service they rendered to European civilization is incalculable. Richly endowed by kings and magnates, the great monastic houses and their leaders figured as much on the political as on the spiritual map of the medieval world. Hugh Lawrence traces the Western monastic tradition from its fourth-century origins in the deserts of Egypt and Syria, through the many and various forms of religious life it assumed during the Middle Ages. As well as reconstructing the internal life, experience and aims of the medieval cloister, he also explores the many-sided

relationships between the monasteries and the secular world around them. In this Third Edition Professor Lawrence has added or elaborated on a number of important themes such as the impact of the friars on the religious experience of their time, the controversy between the Benedictines and the champions of the Cistercian movement of the twelfth century, and even new details of monastic lodgers and of monastic food. C .H. Lawrence was from 1970 to 1987 Professor of Medieval History in the University of London, where he is now Professor Emeritus.

An excellent scholarly history of the development of Catholic monasticism. The book is 292 pages of text, not including a valuable glossary of monastic terms at the back. I usually don't go in for lots of pictures, but in this case I think the work would have profited with more examples of monastic art and architecture. There are only eight pages of photos included. For a book covering a movement that had perhaps the greatest influence upon Western art I think more visuals would have been good. Lawrence spends a lot of time on the influence of Charlemagne, St Benedict of Aniane, and Cluny. This was a big plus as these areas seem to go missing a lot in the huge shadow of the Cistercian and other later orders.

C.H. Lawrence's MEDIEVAL MONASTICISM is a good summary of the origins of monasticism from c. 500 A.D. to c. 1500 A.D. Lawrence examines the earliest monastic movements through the Age of the Friars or about 1400. His comparisons and contrasts of the different abbots and abbesses give readers an introduction of the complexity of Medieval monastic movements. The early sections of the book give the reader a good introduction to early monastic movements both in Italy, France, and Ireland. One reviewer suggested that Lawrence should have given more attention to St. Patrick (389-461) which may be a valid criticism. However, readers should know that they can get a good assessment of the Irish Celtic monks and nuns c. page 40 to page 51. An interesting anecdote is that the Irish monastics included women who rose to positions of prominence as teachers and even leaders of some monasteries. An interesting conflict among the Medieval monastic leaders was that of of seclusion or cloistered monks vs. those who wanted to do missionary work and teach. The discipline imposed on monks and nuns seems too severe and strange to modern readers, but Mr. Lawrence tries to contrast the life of a cloistered monk or nun with that of secular men and women and their difficult lives at a time when living standards were not even remotely as high as they are now in the 21st. century. To paraphrase one of Lawrence's quotes attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the latter said that the Cistercian monks were to lament and not to evangelize. This conflict was brought into clear focus in the disputes between St. Bernard and St. Peter the

Venerable. Much of the book deals with these conflicts between leaders of different orders. When the Mendicant orders such as the Franciscans or Friars Minor (The Little Brothers) began their order, St. Francis of Assisi was adamant about Franciscan poverty and refused to let any of his brothers to own any property at all. Yet, as Lawrence makes clear, this extreme poverty could not last if the Franciscans were to have facilities to assist the poor and the forgotten. As Lawrence explains, the Franciscans became imbued with the New Learning or Scholasticism that swept Medieval European Universities in the 12th and 13th centuries (the 1100s and 1200s). Even the cloistered monks were attracted to the New Learning and sent some of their monks to the universities which dismayed, among others, St. Bernard of Clairvaux. The Order of Preachers or Dominicans were clearly a missionary and learned order who were very attracted to Scholasticism and university teaching and learning. The Dominicans were taught so they could counter arguments of heretics such as the Albigensians. The Dominican Friars produced some of the best men in philosophy such as St. Thomas Aquinas. The Franciscans could boast about St. Bonaventure and William of Occam. In other words, what began as cloistered orders of contemplative monks became a "more worldly" arrangement whereby the latter Medieval monks and friars contributed not only to missionary efforts but the creative teaching and scholarship. One minor criticism of this book is that C.H. Lawrence should have given more attention to the Dominicans and the influence that the Friars exerted on Medieval university learning and scholarship. Of all the achievements of the Medieval Catholic Church, the development of the universities was one of their most enduring. C.H. Lawrence may have considered this beyond the scope of his book. In spite of this mild criticism, C.H. Lawrence wrote a good book. He explains the history and the seemingly strange monastic phenomenon to modern readers who might otherwise think that Medieval monks and nuns were not rational men and women to submit to such strict discipline and rules. This book is recommended to anyone who is interested in Medieval History which was an lively and interesting age.

I loved the book

This book sets out to provide a general overview of medieval monasticism. Starting with its development in the 3rd Century in the Middle East, Lawrence describes its early forms, such as strict adherence to ascetism, cenobitism or a combination, and key founders such as Pachomius and Basil. He then traces its spread westward and the explosion of monasticism that occurred shortly after Benedict wrote his Rule for monastic life. From here he touches on Irish monasticism, though perhaps not as thoroughly as warranted, as well as Columbanus and his work in Gaul with

the Merovingians. Interestingly, he mentions St. Patrick only briefly and, to me, massively understates Patrick's role in founding the Celtic church and subsequent Irish Monasticism. Perhaps a bit of English bias? To continue, Lawrence examines the founding and influence of Cluny as the first "restoration of Benedictine life" as well as its decline and how it was eventually eclipsed by the Cistercians and subsequently the Friars, each of which also claimed to be getting back to the roots of Benedict's Rule. Throughout, he details not only the religious but also the secular roles that monasteries played in medieval life. These include such topics as the social, economic and political roles played by monasteries and their abbots. The effects of lay patronage and feudal obligations on monastic life are also detailed. He also describes the rise, decline and fall of the Knightly orders as well as the role of women in monastic life, detailing the Cistercian nuns and Beguines in particular. A discussion of the Friars concludes the work. In this, he details their origins and how they believed in a life of piety among the people rather than separated from them. This led to them undertaking roles as preachers and Samaritans among the populace. He also details how the Friars came in conflict with the clergy (as they often siphoned off parishioners and, concomitantly, money, from established parishes) and the resolution of the dispute. He concludes by detailing the decline of the monasteries, both in numbers and importance, as the need for their social assistance declined and a more secular life became prevalent. Lawrence's overview is well researched, annotated and easy to read. The included glossary is an immense help for the monastic neophyte!

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