History 332: Monasteries and the World in the Middle Ages

Monks and Nuns, Malcontents and Saints

Block 1, 2018-2019

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# Overview:

Though originating with many Christians’ desire to retreat from the world and focus on their interior spiritual lives, monasteries became wealthy and powerful institutions throughout medieval Europe. This clash between ideal and reality formed a complex set of circumstances that monks and nuns navigated in many different ways, both individually and collectively.

This course examines the ideal and reality of the Christian monastic life in Europe until the start of the Protestant Reformation, exploring the guiding spiritual values of the monastic life as well as how monasteries remained enmeshed in the wider world. The quest for spiritual purpose through self-discipline bred its share of discontents, so we’ll explore issues of disorder and rebellion within the monastery. We’ll also explore monastic learning, economics, and gendered norms, and throughout the course we will deal with the tension between those ideals and the wealth and power that monasteries acquired in medieval Europe, through examining the works of reformers and critics of monastic institutions from Bernard of Clairvaux to Martin Luther.

As an upper-level history course, this course has substantial reading and writing assignments, including critical analysis and discussion of both primary and secondary sources.

Course meetings

Class will ordinarily meet weekdays at 9 am, and will end between 11 and 11:30 am. Please bring the assigned readings with you to class so that you can refer to them during discussions. Since this course meets fewer hours during the block than the typical course at Cornell, students should understand that the out-of-class work expectations will be high. I deliberately schedule class once a day so that you have time to devote to your reading, research, and writing. Please refer to the description of assignments and readings below for details.

# Texts

The following books have been ordered from the college bookstore:

* C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*. 4th ed. Pearson, 2015. 4
* Daniel Marcel La Corte and Douglas J. McMillan, *Regular Life: Monastic, Canonical and Mendicant* Rules. 2nd ed. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004. 9781580440790
* Timothy Fry, ed.,*The Rule of St. Benedict in English*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982. 9780814612729
* Gregory the Great, *Life and Miracles of St. Benedict*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press. 0814603211
* Jocelin of Brakelond, *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. 9780192818102
* Constance H. Berman, *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe: Sisters and Patrons of the Cistercian Reform*. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002. 1580440363
* Sister Bartolomea Riccoboni, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395-1436*, ed. and trans. Daniel Bornstein. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. 9780226717890

Additional assigned readings will be posted to the course website. Please be sure to bring these with you to class, either in print form or electronically.

# Course Objectives

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on knowledge, inquiry, communication, and intercultural literacy. Through taking this course, you should develop the ability to:

* Describe the typical way of life of medieval monks and nuns (Knowledge)
* Compare different ideas about the monastic life, including variations on an ideal, differences between ideals and reality, and critiques (Knowledge, Intercultural Literacy)
* Discuss how monasteries affected, and were affected by, the world around them, culturally, intellectually, politically, and economically (Knowledge, Communication, Intercultural Literacy)
* Analyze primary sources (including rules, chronicles, charters, and other documents) (Knowledge, Inquiry, Communication)
* Locate and use sources and scholarship appropriate to historical research (Inquiry)
* Read, analyze, and evaluate historical scholarship appropriate to the topic (Inquiry)
* Express historical interpretation verbally and in writing (Communication)

# Assignments

Participation (15%): This course will be conducted largely as a seminar, which means that the focus of our class time is talking with each other about what we are reading and learning. Ideally, this is a collaborative space in which all participants learn from each other. Each of you should be prepared to take part in class and contribute to discussion by sharing your questions, reactions, and ideas. I will grade participation based on my observation of your attendance, engaged listening, and contributions to class discussions. (objectives: build communication skills)

Reading responses (15%): This course is reading-intensive, and some of the course material may be challenging in its unfamiliarity. It is therefore important that you make the effort to engage with and reflect upon the assigned reading. To prepare for class discussions, you should write 10 short reflections over the reading assignments over the course of the block. Each day’s reflection is due via Moodle at 8:30 am on the day of class. This reflection should consist of a paragraph analyzing some portion of the day’s assigned reading and a discussion question. Reflections do not need to refer to all portions of a long reading assignment; a preferable strategy is to reflect upon a few chosen points.

The purpose of this assignment is to encourage careful reading and thoughtful reflection on that reading. (A quasi-monastic approach to reading, if you will.) Reflections will be graded credit / no credit. If the reflection does not demonstrate thoughtful reading of the assigned material, or does not include a question, it will not receive credit. **Late reflections will not receive credit.** While I do not generally give detailed feedback on these reflections, I will inform you if you are not receiving credit and offer suggestions on improving.

Source commentary (10%): This assignment asks you to do a short, close reading of a primary source for medieval monasticism. You will need to interpret the text both through careful reading and through the context we have explored to that point. (Knowledge, Inquiry)

Article evaluation (10%): Choose a scholarly article on a relevant topic. For the article you’ve chose, write an abstract that summarizes the article, accompanied by an evaluation in which you discuss how effective this article is, in your reading.

Monastery directory assignment (10%): This assignment asks you to collect information about historical monastic communities and present a short description of the monasteries and any notable features about them. The purpose of the assignment is to explore sources of information for the history of these institutions and examine the variety of monastic communities that existed in medieval Europe. (Inquiry, Intercultural Literacy, Communication)

Proposal and bibliography for final project (5%): See final project description below.

Final essay (35%): The culminating assignment of this course is an essay, 8-10 pages long, accompanied by an annotated bibliography. The goal is to explore the subject beyond the course readings, do additional research in secondary and primary sources (as available), and communicate your own ideas about the role of monasteries in the medieval and early modern world. (Inquiry, Communication)

# Course schedule:

The following schedule is subject to change. Any needed changes will be discussed in class and communicated via email. In the absence of any changes, read all the assigned materials before class meets.

| **#** | Date | Topic | Reading assignments | Other a**ssignments** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Aug. 27 | Course intro |  |  |
| 2 | Aug. 28 | Origins in the east | Lawrence, ch. 1  *Regular Life* 13-42  Harmless, ch. 1 & 13 (Moodle) |  |
| 3 | Aug. 29 | A monastic rule | Lawrence, ch. 2; Life & Miracles of St. Benedict; Rule of St. Benedict |  |
| 4 | Aug. 30 | Early medieval monasteries | Lawrence, ch. 3-5; *Regular Life* 43-68, 87-100 |  |
| 5 | Aug. 31 | Cluny and Benedictine monasticism | Lawrence, ch. 6  *Regular Life* 105-109  Raffaello Morghen, “Monastic Reform and Cluniac Spirituality” (Moodle)  Kenneth J. Conant, “Observations on the Practical Talents and Technology of the Medieval Benedictines” (Moodle) |  |
| 6 | Sept. 3 | Cluny and its properties | Lawrence, ch. 7  John Van Engen, “The Crisis of Cenobitism” (Moodle)  Rosenwein, ch. 2 from *To be the Neighbor of Saint Peter* (Moodle) |  |
| 7 | Sept. 4 | The Cistercians and their origins | Lawrence, ch. 9  *Regular Life* pp. 122-128  Cistercian documents (Moodle)  Excerpt from Louis Lekai, *The Cistercians* (Moodle) | Source analysis due |
| 8 | Sept. 5 | Cistercian monks and nuns | Lawrence, ch. 10  Cistercian documents (Moodle)  Caroline W. Bynum, “Jesus as mother and abbot as mother” (Moodle)  Constance Berman, “Were there 12th-century Cistercian nuns?” (Moodle) |  |
| 9 | Sept. 6 | Other 12th-century movements | Lawrence, ch. 8 and 12  *Regular Lives* pp. 111-121  Penny Schine Gold, “Male-Female Cooperation” (Moodle)  Fiona Griffiths, “Men’s duty to provide for women’s needs” (Moodle) | Proposal and preliminary bibliography for final project due at 11 pm |
| 10 | Sept. 7 | Women and patronage | Berman, *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe* |  |
| 11 | Sept. 10 | Monasteries and the World | Jocelin of Brakelond, *The Chronicle of Bury St. Edmunds* |  |
| 12 | Sept. 11 | The Military Orders | Lawrence, ch. 11  Tom License, “Military Orders as Monastic Orders” (Moodle)  *Regular Life* 129-138 |  |
| 13 | Sept. 12 | The Mendicant Orders | Lawrence, ch. 13  *Regular Life* 139-158  Excerpt from Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and The Profit Economy* (Moodle) | Article abstract and evaluation due |
| 14 | Sept.13 | Female mendicants | Elizabeth Petroff on Clare  Lezlie Knox, “Audacious Nuns” (both on Moodle) |  |
| 15 | Sept. 14 | Discipline and decline | Katherine Gill, “*Scandala*”  Penelope D. Johnson, excerpt from *Equal in Monastic Profession* (both on Moodle) |  |
| 16 | Sept. 17 | A late medieval monastery | Lawrence, epilogue  Sr. Bartolomea Riccoboni, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent* | Monastery directory assignment due |
| 17 | Sept. 18 | Criticism of monasteries and the Reformation | Lorenzo Valla, *The Profession of the Religious*; Augsburg Confession article 27; excerpts from *Convents Confront the Reformation* and *Nuns Behaving Badly* (all on Moodle) |  |
| 18 | Sept. 19 |  |  | Final essay due at noon |

# Policies

Disabilities: My goal is for every student to have the opportunity to succeed in this course, and I am happy to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. College policy requires that all accommodated disabilities be documented with the Coordinator of Academic Support, and that the instructor be notified within the first three days of class. Therefore, please contact me as soon as possible if you need accommodations. The official college policy follows:

Cornell College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Students should notify the Coordinator of Academic Support and Advising and their course instructor of any disability related accommodations within the first three days of the term for which the accommodations are required, due to the fast pace of the block format. For more information on the documentation required to establish the need for accommodations and the process of requesting the accommodations, see <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/disabilities/index.shtml>.

Electronics and the learning environment: To ensure that everyone in the class has the opportunity to learn, please avoid conduct that may be disruptive or distracting to others. Phones, music players, and other electronic devices should be turned off or silenced during class. Laptops, netbooks, iPads, and other tablet devices may be used for note-taking or referring to online source materials, but I reserve the right to ask you to turn them off.

Submitting assignments: Most written assignments should be turned in **electronically, through Moodle**. Daily responses should be posted to the appropriate Moodle forum; for other assignments, I will create links on the Moodle site for you to use in submitting your work. Please use Microsoft Word format (either .doc or .docx files are fine), or save your work as a .rtf or .pdf file. I cannot always access files in other formats (Mac users, please take note); it is your responsibility to give the work to me in a form I can read. Please do not send me work via email unless I have specifically given permission for you to do so.

Absences: Attending class, by itself, does not count as part of your grade. Participation does, which means you should be not only present in class frequently, but prepared, engaged, and contributing to discussion in class.

I understand that sometimes you may have to miss class due to illness or other issues. Missing up to two classes will not affect your participation grade.

If you miss class, you should complete all assigned work for that day, obtain notes for the missed class from a classmate, and then see me if you wish to discuss what you missed. If you are missing class due to an athletics or other co-curricular obligation, please inform me as soon as you are aware of the upcoming absence. In other circumstances, I appreciate your informing me of your absence as a courtesy.

Academic honesty: It is vital to an academic enterprise both that you complete your own work, and that you acknowledge how the work of others has informed your thinking. We all build our own ideas on the thinking and research of others; what is important is to give credit to others when it is due. If you are uncertain about whether, how, or when to cite something, please discuss it with me. The following is the college’s official statement on the subject:

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College’s requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading “Academic Honesty."

In this course, the consequence of plagiarism is a grade of 0 either on the assignment or for the course, depending on the severity of the plagiarism.

# Explanation of Grade Scale

I use the following standards to assign letter grades to major assignments. Plus and minus grades indicate variation within each category. Each assignment description will also contain an explanation of its specific criteria for evaluation.

* F (Below 60): Work which does not meet the basic requirements of the assignment, including work which is incomprehensible, or which ignores the assignment instructions and course topics. Plagiarized work will receive an F.
* D (60-69): Work which completed the assignment in a perfunctory way, but which shows no evidence of original thought, is very difficult to understand, or contains serious factual errors.
* C (70-79): Work which is acceptable, shows an understanding of the factual content of the course and some effort at original thinking. Writing may be awkward and poorly organized, but I can still understand it. Factual mistakes are common or easily understandable.
* B (80-89): Good work, which contains clear original thinking, a solid understanding of the factual content of the course, and has few errors in writing.
* A (90-100): Exceptional work, which demonstrates a mastery of factual course content, original thinking, sophisticated handling of historical evidence, and lively, skilled writing.