

Separate but Equal: Cistercian Lay Brothers 1120-1350. By James France. Cistercian Studies Series 246. Cistercian Publication. Collegeville, MN; Cistercian Publications and Liturgical Press, 2012. Pp. xxxviii + 372. Price \$39.95 (pbk). ISBN 978-0-87907-246-9.

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This book offers a comprehensive history of the function, identity and representation of Cistercian lay brothers from their introduction to the order in the early twelfth century to their severe numerical decline in the fourteenth. The topic is explored through an introduction and thirteen chapters, arranged broadly chronologically and thematically. As one might expect from the author of *The Cistercians in Medieval Art* (Kalamazoo, 1998), France's argument is well supported by a judicious and interesting selection of 24 black and white illustrations, including manuscript images, stained glass, stone carving, architecture and building plans. The three appendices provide details of exempla material relating to lay brothers and a copy of Chrysogonus Waddell's translation of the Cistercian lay brother *Usages*. As such it offers an important reference work on this topic, but one which also builds on and significantly extends revisionist interpretations of the lay brotherhood. It is, in short, a very welcome addition to the scholarship and will be of great use to both academic and more general audiences.

Until recently, attitudes to Cistercian lay brothers remained strongly influenced by James Donnelly's 1949 study, *The Decline of the Medieval Cistercian Laybrotherhood*, which portrayed them as a particularly disruptive group within the order. France follows the lead of Megan Cassidy-Welch and Brian Noell in re-assessing this view and makes the clear and consistent argument that the problems particularly associated with the lay brothers were also present among the monks – and, therefore, that such problems represent the decline of the order as a whole rather than a particular subsection of it.

France's book can be divided into three main sections: chapters 1 to 7 explore lay brother identity and the reality of their daily existence; chapters 8 to 12 investigate the representation of lay brothers in different sources; and chapter 13 discusses the decline of the lay brotherhood in the broader economic, religious and social context of the fourteenth century. The first section provides a detailed, but deservedly nuanced, overview of lay brother life, ranging from their social origin (chapter 1); some interesting and counter-intuitive discussions of attitudes to labour and learning in the order (chapters 2 and 3); the distinctive appearance of the lay brothers (chapter 4); the spatial segregation that separated them from the monks within the monastery (chapter 5); and their activities on the granges without (chapter 6). Chapter 7 examines the question of equality that is at the core of the study and concludes that the inferiority of the lay brothers was both assumed and enacted from the outset. The second section explores the main literary and legislative sources for lay brothers, beginning with the overlapping genres of hagiography and exempla in chapters 8 to 11. Chapter 8 focuses on the exemplary narratives found in contemporary Cistercian hagiography in which the lay brothers take both leading and auxiliary parts, while chapter 9 tends to concentrate on the more negative, transgressive representations found in exempla. The two chapters that follow continue to discuss this material, but through a slightly different lens: they concern lay brother interactions with demons, the Virgin Mary and their experiences in the other world. The extended discussion of these literary sources reflects the rich and varied insights provided by this material, but also means that the focus remains firmly on the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries from which these sources date. Chapter 12 turns to another important source for the lay brothers, the Cistercian statutes, and allows France to move the discussion towards the later part of the period covered (even if the detailed case studies of lay brother revolts take us firmly back to c.1200). The final section, chapter 13, covers the decline of the lay brotherhood from the mid-thirteenth century and places it firmly in the wider context of economic stagnation, competing religious orders and the social dislocation caused by famine, wars and the Black Death. France concludes that the introduction of the lay brotherhood as a pragmatic response to economic expansion in the early

twelfth century, combined with the inherent inferiority of their role, left them in a precarious position when circumstances started to change just over a century later.

Only relatively minor criticisms can be levelled at this work. The table in appendix 1 is lacking a much-needed explanatory subtitle and a couple of factual errors remain in the text, for example: Jocelin of Furness was the author of four saints' lives rather than three (p. 194), and Peter of Cornwall is mistakenly called John at one point (p. 251). Of greater significance is the reliance on exempla material. These, admittedly lively and engaging, sources date from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, which means that the focus of the study is significantly skewed towards this period with very little attention paid to the twilight years of the institution from 1250 onwards. In addition, although France promises a close reading of exempla material, an even closer reading of these complex and highly constructed narratives is possible – here the demands of the broader argument often result in a more descriptive than analytical approach being taken. Finally, the choice of the title for this study might be questioned. Although France justifies his title in the introduction, stating that it denotes the dichotomy between monks and lay brothers that proved unsustainable in the long term, this does not reflect his main argument that, in reality, inequality was inherent in this relationship from the very beginning. Likewise, the subtitle 'Motivation: Necessity Rather than Fear of God' in chapter 1 reflects an argument made by Constance Berman rather than France's own take on the issue, which stresses, quite rightly, that religious motivations remained the main factor in lay brother recruitment. However, these remain minor quibbles against what is a substantial achievement.

France's study provides an easily navigable and admirably nuanced picture of the Cistercian lay brotherhood, which both engages with previous arguments and suggests new ways of understanding this institution. As a comprehensive guide to this topic, it fills a hole in the current literature by providing a refreshingly complex – and more realistic – view of lay brother life than has previously been offered. The price makes this book an even more attractive prospect and it deserves to become an essential volume in any Cistercian studies library.