

Reformed Monastic Orders: Cluniacs, Carthusians, Cistercians

Adapted from Eva March Tappan's 'When Knights were Bold'.

From the 6th to the 10th centuries, most monasteries in the west followed the rule of Saint Benedict. The Benedictines were bidden to be so poor as not even to claim as their own the gowns that they wore; to pray seven times daily (and once at night), to chant the Psalms of David every week; and also to labor with their hands. "Ora et Labora (Pray and Work) was one of Saint Benedict's favorite mottoes. The monks were required to spend seven hours a day in manual labor and two hours in reading and study. They were rarely permitted to speak. They fasted often, and during Lent they ate nothing until after vespers. They had to promise to bear reproof and even corporal punishment with the utmost meekness.

But as one century after another passed, the customs of both monks and nuns became far less strict. As an act of piety, children were often led in by their parents or even taken in as infants to grow up in the convents that they might become monks or nuns. But these children were not always adapted to the monastic life, and when they grew up, they preferred less severe rules.

Then, too, the monasteries had become very rich. It is true that no individual monk or nun could hold property; but the convent as a whole could hold an unlimited amount. Kings and nobles had made them large gifts. By the 900s, a Benedictine monastery was no longer the home of a group of self-denying monks living in obscurity and poverty; it was the abode of a community so rich that it was a power in the country in which it was situated. The rule grew more and more lax. Abuses sometimes crept in and wrongdoing.



Cluny Abbey

Some earnest folk did not feel that this comfortable fashion of living was at all what life in a monastery should be; they were eager to go back to the simple, severe rule of Saint Benedict. That was why the convent of Cluny was founded. The Cluniacs did some manual work, but spent most of their time in prayer and study. They taught, and in their bookrooms they made beautiful copies of the ancient manuscripts. They cared for the poor, and they did everything they could to increase the power of the Pope. The house at Cluny was only the beginning; for soon it became too small for the earnest men who wished to join the community; and one house after another was founded to make a place for them. Cluny, however, kept the control in its own hands. The Abbot of Cluny often visited the other priories and examined them to make sure that they were carrying out the Cluniac rules. The Congregation of Cluny grew so rapidly that in two hundred years after the parent house was founded in 910, there were fully two thousand priories, all under the rule of the abbot of Cluny.

The Carthusians

In spite of the two thousand Cluniac convents, there were still many people who were not satisfied. They felt that even the rule of Cluny was not strict enough. Those who are in earnest in wishing to lead lives of devotion, they said, ought to be entirely free from all worldly matters and give themselves up wholly to poverty and self-denial. This belief was most strongly held in France, and during the last quarter of the eleventh century several other orders were founded to carry out the idea. The first of these was the order of Grammont, which was founded by a French nobleman named Stephen Harding. He certainly practiced self-denial, for he lived upon nothing but bread and water. Others followed his teachings, and in time the order was formed. Its rule was far more severe than that of Cluny. Stephen took special pains to free his monks, or "good men," as he preferred they should be called, from the temptations of wealth; for he decreed that, no matter how rich their convent might become, they should have nothing to do with the



management of the property. This was all to be in the hands of some lay brethren. Unfortunately, the lay brethren and the "good men" did not agree, and at length the order fell to pieces.

The Carthusian Order was founded a few years after the Order of Grammont by one Bruno, a canon of Cologne. This was the most strict of all the orders. Bruno chose for his abode a wild tract of land in southeastern France. There he and six others built a chapel and a group of rude huts. These finally became the Grande Chartreuse. He and his six companions entered upon a life of the utmost rigor. The men could hardly be called companions, for each had his own little cell, or rather, a tiny house, and in this

he spent his life, praying, meditating, and copying manuscripts. He was seldom permitted to speak, and indeed, he seldom had an opportunity. Once a day food was silently passed in at his window. Three times a week he took only bread and water. Twice a week vegetables were given him, which he might cook for himself. On Sundays and Thursdays he was allowed to eat cheese or eggs, and even fish if any had been given to the convent. Meat he was never permitted to taste. On Sundays and feast days he had the rare indulgence of dining with the other monks, but in silence of course. He wore constantly a shirt of the roughest haircloth and over it a white cassock. Over the cassock he wore a scapular, that is, a long piece of cloth, hanging down in front and behind and joined at the sides by a band. His hood was white.

Carthusian houses were established throughout Europe and each was known as a Chartreuse in honor of the first home of the order. In England, Chartreuse became Charter-house."

The Cistercians

It was not many years after the founding of the Carthusian Order that another reformed order arose. The first monastery of the new order was built at Citeaux, so the order was called Cistercian. The Cistercians built their monasteries as far from cities as possible and the houses were very plain. There were no hours of study for the Cistercians. They learned how to say their prayers, and that was enough. Instead of studying or reading, they spent much time in manual labor. Their food was rude and scanty, and during the greater part of the year they ate only one meal a day. Their gowns and hoods were made of undyed wool, and therefore they were often called the "white monks." The Cistercians were successful farmers. In England they raised immense flocks of sheep, and in the thirteenth century they were the greatest wool merchants in the land. They had also large iron works; and their wealth increased until they became as rich and powerful as the Cluniacs.

Founders of the Reformed Monastic Orders

CLUNIAC REFORMS

CLUNY ABBEY — 1098

William I, Duke of Aquitaine (<i>d. 918</i>)	French Nobleman who founded and build Cluny Abbey, supported the order, and encouraged reforms of monasteries.
Berno of Cluny (<i>d. 927</i>)	First Abbot of Cluny, appointed by William of Aquitaine, who started reforms carried on by his successors.
Odo of Cluny (<i>d. 942</i>)	Second Abbot of Cluny who was given Papal privileges to influence monastic reform throughout France, and restore Benedictine observances.
Majolus of Cluny (<i>d. 994</i>)	Abbot of Cluny who was a close advisor of Emperor Otto the Great and his family. Declined offer to become pope.
Peter Damian (<i>d. 1073</i>)	Reformer monk of the eleventh century who wrote scathing critiques of Church abuses during the Investiture controversy. Supporter of Gregory VII.
Gregory VII (<i>d. 1085</i>)	Reforming pope involved in the Investiture controversy who was associated with the Cluniac reforms. (aka Hildebrand)
Hugh of Cluny (<i>d. 1109</i>)	Very influential Abbot of Cluny, driving force behind Cluniac reforms in late eleventh century. Rebuilt Abbey of Cluny, largest church in Europe at the time.
Bernard of Cluny (<i>d. 1150</i>)	Twelfth century monk who wrote a satiric poem ('On Contempt for the World') criticizing corruption in the church, later used as Protestant propaganda
Peter the Venerable (<i>d. 1156</i>)	Abbot of Cluny renowned for his scholarly and authoritative, although critical, writings on Islam and Judaism.

CARTHUSIANS

GRAND CHARTREUSE — 1084

Bruno of Cologne (<i>d. 1101</i>)	Philosopher, scholar, and theologian who was the founder of the Carthusian order of contemplative monks.
Hugh of Grenoble (<i>d. 1132</i>)	Bishop of Grenoble, and student of St. Bruno who supported Bruno and seven monks to found their hermitage in the Chartreuse Mountains.
Hugh of Lincoln (<i>d. 1200</i>)	Early member of the Carthusian order, founded first Charterhouse in England with help of Henry II, and become bishop of Lincoln.

CISTERCIANS

CITREAUX — 1098; CLAIRVAUX — 1115

Robert of Molesme (<i>d. 1111</i>)	Founded the Citeaux Abbey in 1098, mother house of the Cistercians, with the purpose of restoring the a strict adherence to the rule of Benedict.
Alberic of Cîteaux (<i>d. 1109</i>)	Founded the Cistercian order with Stephen Harding and Robert of Molesme and petitioned pope for recognition of the order. Second Abbot of Citeaux.
Stephen Harding (<i>d. 1134</i>)	English monk who joined Robert Molesme and helped found the Cistercian Order and as third Abbot of Citeaux, was responsible for much of its growth.
Bernard of Clairvaux (<i>d. 1153</i>)	Early Cistercian monk whose eloquence and scholarship persuaded many to join the order. Established the order's second Abbey at Clairvaux and promoted the crusades.
Stephen of Obazine (<i>d. 1154</i>)	Founded a hermitage at Obazine that was later established as a Cistercian monastery.