

GUIDO CARIBONI, *Il nostro ordine è la carità: Cistercensi nei secoli XII e XIII*. Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2011. Paper. Pp. 204. €20. ISBN: 978-88-343-2154-6.
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Medieval Cistercian studies continues to be a vibrant field, to the good fortune of the scholars of medieval religion in general. Having been established after the traditional monastic orders of Benedictines and Cluny, but before the mendicants, Cistercians occupy a strategic place in the history of the medieval religious orders. However, the singular question of to what extent each of the individual monastic houses adapting the particular way of life of a grand abbey, be it Cluny or Cîteaux, can be studied under a unifying concept called “order” is a perennial problem, to which every historian has to provide her or his solution. A modern analogy would be to ask to what extent the study of the social culture of New York, Texas, or Alabama could tell us about the culture and people of the United States in general, or vice versa. The “confederate” nature of the Cistercian order, to use Cariboni’s term, is of particular importance to those who study the Italian Cistercian houses. Due to the scattered nature of religious archives, Italian scholarship of medieval religious history tends to be local, and Italian historians almost always become specialists of a single region, be it Tuscany, Umbria, or Campania, and avoid monographs of generalizing nature. Cariboni’s *Il nostro ordine* is an important exception in this respect, perhaps signaling a change in the new generation of Italian scholars. His undertaking also has a lot to do with his participation as a researcher in the *Forschungsstelle für Vergleichende Ordensgeschichte* (FOVOG) in the University of Dresden, directed by Gert

Melville. The influence of the methodology for comparative analysis of religious orders adapted and conclusions reached by FOVOG's team of researchers are prominently visible throughout the book: Cariboni heavily cites many of the meticulous and erudite studies conducted by FOVOG scholars and published in the *Vita Regularis* series.

Even though the title gives the reader the idea that this is a general examination of Cistercian life and spirituality, its scope is more limited. What Cariboni sets out to do is to understand the role and place of the Cistercian order within the larger ecclesiastical establishment. He does this through analyzing the relations between Cistercians, bishops, and the papacy. He tries to get at the question mentioned above, that is, whether Cistercians constituted an "order," by looking at the way bishops and popes treated Cistercian requests and privileges, and by considering the language they used in their correspondence with Cistercian houses.

The book consists of an introduction and five chapters. A bibliography is unfortunately missing. The introduction lays down some of the arguments concerning the origins of the Cistercian order brought forth by scholars like Jean-Baptiste Auberger, Constance B. Bouchard, and Constance H. Berman. Cariboni calls attention to the archival research done in Italy on single Cistercian houses, which exhibit a great variety of practices, and, citing the work of Grado Merlo, mentions in conclusion the near impossibility of treating the Cistercians as a single, homogeneous monastic order. Further, he reminds us that the latest historiographical trend sees the foundation of an order as a continuous act rather than as sealed in a static moment with the acceptance of a *propositum*, or the approval of a rule.

The first chapter is intended to provide a context for the place of monasteries and religious orders in the larger ecclesiastical establishment. Here, Cariboni lays the groundwork for the comparative analysis of the juridical position of an individual monastery and its institutional relations with the abbey of Cîteaux and with the bishops and papacy from the eleventh to the first half of the thirteenth century. In separate sections here, Cariboni discusses the juridical steps taken in the foundation of a new Cistercian monastery; the problem of the papal privileges often given *in perpetuum* but with the canonical reserve that they could be revoked by the papacy or even by the diocesan bishop; the effects of the papal privileges bestowed on single houses on the uniformity of the order.

The second chapter's title in translation is "'Ordo noster est caritas': Observations on the Ideals of Guidance, Normative Texts, and Institutional Dynamics in the First Generation of Cistercians." It investigates the normative steps by which a newly founded Cistercian monastery was included in the Cistercian network of houses, and how the order responded to the enlargement. Cariboni identifies four steps: the adaptation of the *Carta caritatis* and *Ecclesiastica officia* to reflect the reality of the enlarged monastic network; the intensification of the activity of the general chapter in terms of its normative functions and control; the efforts to slow down the expansion of the order by blocking new monastic foundations; and lastly, the request to the papacy for the confirmation of the *Carta caritatis* in its revised form.

The third chapter deals with the crisis that took place between the Cistercians and the papacy in the first decades of the thirteenth century. Cariboni writes that this dispute originated in 1199–1201, when the papacy asked for 2 percent of all income and profits of the Cistercians for the support of the Crusades. The situation quickly escalated to a crisis, fed by worries within and outside the Cistercian houses, that led to a dissolution of the order. The course of this crisis is examined in five chronological stages from 1199 to 1223, in which Pope Honorius III reprimanded the order for failing to preserve the agreement the order had reached with Innocent III in 1214–15.

The relatively short fourth and fifth chapters deal with the exemption of the Cistercians from episcopal jurisdiction and the appeals to the papal court respectively. In the appendices

attached to the fourth chapter, Cariboni provides editions of the papal exemptions given to the two Cistercian monasteries of Santa Maria di Chiaravalle and of Fontevivo. A concluding chapter that would put all these developments within the general religious context of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is unfortunately missing, and as such this book is more suited to those who are well versed in the history of the medieval papacy and medieval religious orders. The more general reader would have difficulty contextualizing the evidence presented, as not much context is provided in the book. Another drawback is its overwhelming reliance on Italian, German, and French scholarship: the considerable North American and English scholarship on the Cistercian order is only referred to in the introduction and almost entirely missing in the rest of the book.

The overall project and importance of this book is to note the tension between the growing supremacy of the papacy over local ecclesiastical jurisdictions and its recognition as the central court to solve disputes, and the development of the self-governing religious orders with their *ius proprium*. This is a phenomenon that affected all religious orders and their relations with the papacy, and as such it is a good topic for examining the comparative history of the religious orders. Cariboni is successful in illuminating the history of this growing tension by using the Cistercian evidence.

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