



Observant reform,
late medieval society,
and the challenge of
Martin Luther (c.
1350-1550)

Later Medieval Europe

The Later Middle Ages witnessed a number of important developments, in addition to the intellectual ones we discussed last week (see Class 8 lecture)

Political

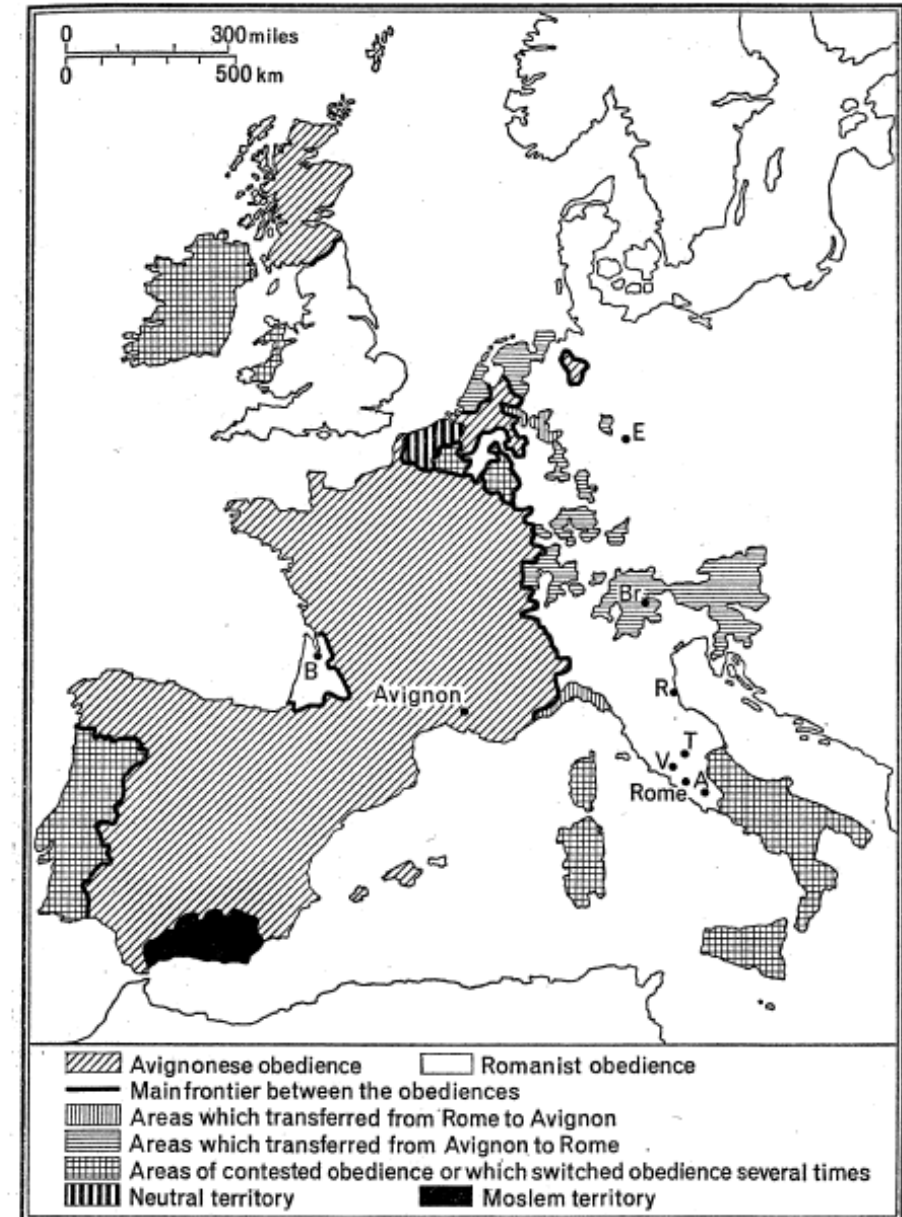
- The rising power of monarchical polities with increasingly advanced administrations: the power of local lords and fealty networks does not disappear, but certainly the influence of royal administration and officers is increasingly.
- Wars between these polities also became more intense – larger, better organised armies – and increasingly take on more of a ‘national’ quality: e.g. The Hundred Years War between the kingdoms of England and France was the beginning of a long running cultural rivalry and sense of difference between two regions that had been always been very closely linked
- In this period too, Islamic power in Spain was rolled back completely (by 1492); the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon were unified under the same king in 1479: the beginnings of the kingdom of Spain.
- On the other hand, the Crusader states in the Near East had collapsed with the fall of Acre in 1291. And the rising power of the Seljuk Turkish empire would soon threaten Europe itself, especially after the fall of Constantinople (the end of the Byzantine/Eastern Roman empire) in 1453.



Later Medieval Europe

Church and Religion

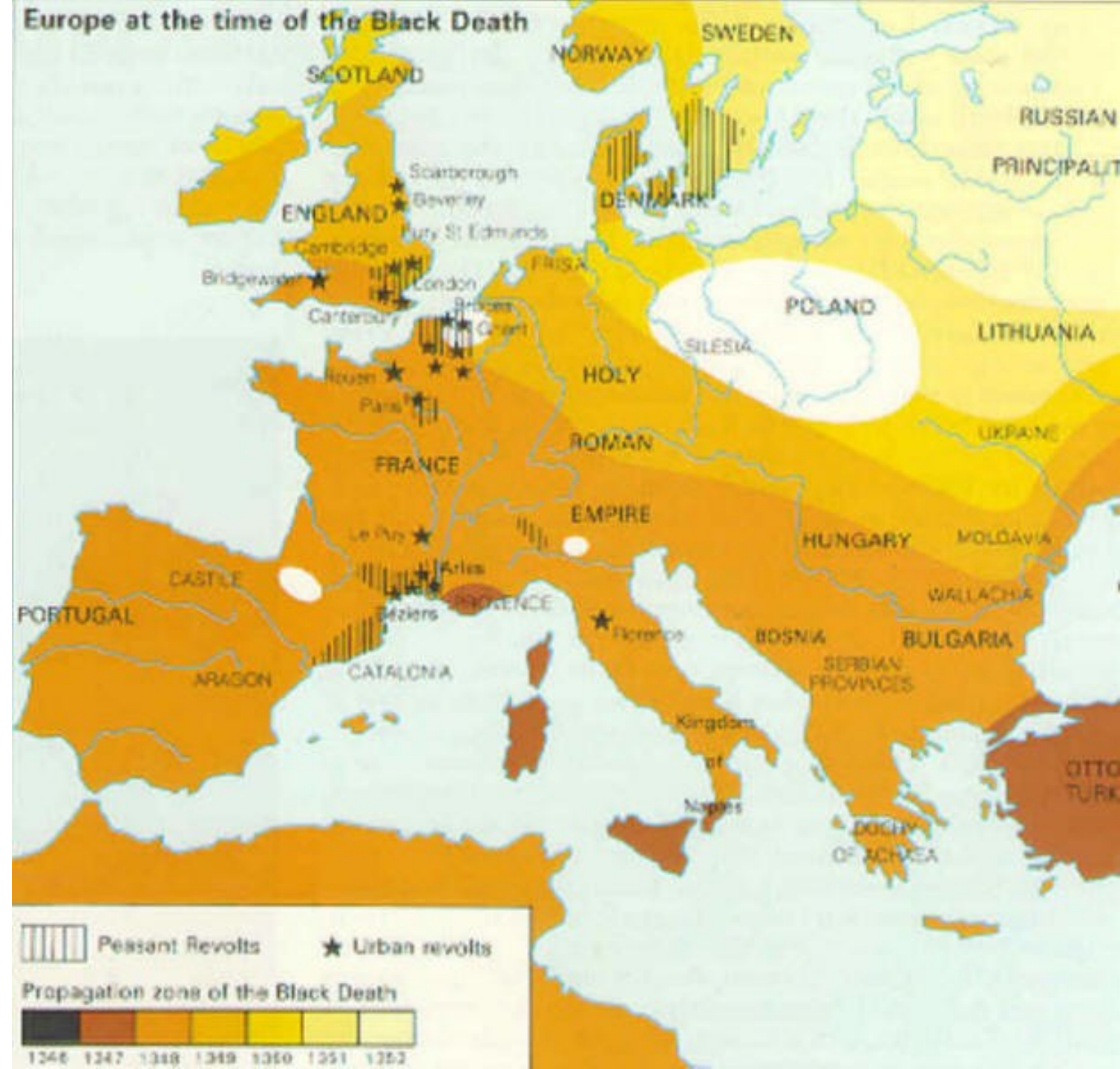
- Meanwhile, the high-tide of papal power and influence appears to have been reached.
 - Monarchies pushed back against the kind of claims to universal spiritual and temporal power that **Boniface VIII** (see lecture 7) had sought to claim.
 - **Philip IV of France** (reigned 1285-1314) was successful in securing a less aggressive papacy after Boniface's death: the papal court relocates to Avignon in 1309
 - **Gregory XI** moves back to Rome in 1376/7, against the wishes of the French king **Charles V**. When there is a dispute over the election of successor **Urban VI** in 1378, however, Charles supports a rival claimant, "**Clement VII**": this leads to the **Great Western Schism** of the Church (see map) that lasts until 1417.
 - The resolution to the Schism comes at the Council of Constance (1414-1418), where the church is reunited under a new pope, **Martin V**.
 - As part of this process, the papacy is made to submit to the rule of a regular general council of clerics from across Europe. While this system soon collapsed, the papacy could no longer make the kinds of claims that Boniface VIII had made.
- From c.1520, the rise of **Protestantism** redefined the map of Europe:
 - Protestants followed the inspiration of **Martin Luther** and **John Calvin**: they not only challenged the morality of many churchmen, but also rejected papal supremacy and challenged its theological orthodoxy
 - In particular, these groups challenged the Catholic conception of sacraments (denying all but baptism and the Eucharist and thus reducing the responsibility of the priesthood) and the religious importance of good works (Protestants emphasised that salvation was by grace alone, with faith the only thing that man could do to affect it).
 - Crucially, unlike earlier religious dissident groups, these men found some support from powerful lay rulers (e.g. some German princes, Henry VIII in England), leading to a lasting disintegration of religious unity in the Latin West and centuries of conflict between Catholics and Protestants.



Later Medieval Europe

Society and Economy

- Europe continued to become a better connected and more mobile society, in which trade and commerce were increasingly important sources of wealth
- It was also greatly impacted by the **Black Death** (c. 1347-1351) and recurrent waves of bubonic plague thereafter, killing perhaps over 30% of the European population
- Towns face particularly grave mortality (higher density population), but landowners face perhaps tougher economic consequences in the long term (less demand for land -> falling rents)
- Falling rents and rising wages also play their part in another development: gradually rising standards of living for many due to greater disposable income.



A “transitional” age?

- Traditional perspectives on late medieval history have looked on these developments and emphasised “**crisis**”: the painful collapse of medieval political, social and cultural norms, soon to be replaced by modern ones. This is the famous perspective of Jan Huizinga in his early 20th century work *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*
- Other well-known perspectives have reframed this perspective more positively, emphasising the emergence of the “modern” amid the “medieval” - e.g. Burckhardt’s perspective on “Renaissance humanism” (see lecture 8) – or even building on “medieval” processes – e.g. late medieval heretical sects (Waldensians, Lollards, Hussites) as forerunners of Protestantism.
- All these perspectives, however, leave us with the impression of the Late Middle Ages as a period of seemingly inevitable “transition”, all going in one direction: the replacement of the “medieval” by the “modern”.
- More recent perspectives – e.g. in religious terms, John Van Engen (see bibliography), in political terms, Bernard Guenée – try to push away from this. Aim is to understand the true character of late Middle Ages, without being prejudiced by pre-conceived ideas of a world trapped between the “medieval” and “modern”. This in turn can allow scholars to gain a new, more complex perspective on the significant changes that undoubtedly did occur in this period.



Late medieval monasticism: internal decline?

Later medieval monasticism for a long time received relatively little interest from historians, in no small part because of this idea of a collapse of the “medieval” (of which monasticism could be seen as a part) and/or the rise of the “modern” (in which monasticism is less influential).

Quite simply, medieval monasticism was assumed to be on the way out! Easy to see why:

- New monastic (including mendicant) foundations became less common in the late middle ages, while some existing ones disappear.
- Critically, the Reformation saw many monasteries attacked by Protestants (quite common in France and Central Europe) or dissolved by Protestant lay governments (e.g. the dissolution of the monasteries).

One older, but still lingering view of late medieval monasticism is that of **internal decline** (e.g. David Knowles, George Coulton):

- This view accepts that some of the difficulties that faced monastic institutions were external: the Black Death harmed the incomes of many monasteries, while royal governments often placed laws in the way of giving large grants of lands to the church (without paying a fine).
- Nevertheless, the inability to overcome these issues seen as **the fault of the religious men and women themselves**: the idea that religious houses – both older, coenobitic and newer, mendicant houses – witnessed a widespread decline in discipline, that led to increasing charges of hypocrisy (see John Gower source in lecture 7 for a mendicant example).
 - for older Catholic historians, often monks themselves, (e.g. Knowles), this view allowed them to see the Protestant reaction against monastic institutions as something simply caused by bad behaviour
 - for older Protestant historians (e.g. Coulton), the behaviour of monks helped to prove the necessity of Protestantism

Monastic irrelevance?

A perhaps more current and less moralising narrative is that of monasticism becoming **less relevant amid the rise of new socio-cultural norms**. Here the emphasis is more on monasticism being overtaken by new religious fashions and needs, rather than on internal “decline”.

- For instance, Hugh Lawrence (book in course bibliography) believes that ‘the great social and economic changes that overtook Western society after the middle of the thirteenth century, especially the growth of urban populations and the wider dissemination of literacy among the laity’ led to a more personal, less institutional approach to religion: this can be seen as a harbinger of the Protestant Reformation.
- This model essentially sees coenobitic monasticism being made less relevant by mendicant religion, and then both being made ultimately less relevant by rising lay piety.
- Lay pious groups like the **Modern Devout (*devotio moderna*)** in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century Low Countries, despite significant monastic influence, can be seen as something of a threat to traditional religious life lives under vow.

Late medieval monasticism – new perspectives

The most recent perspectives tend to seek to escape the simplifications caused by these strong, transitional perspectives and to look at the complexity and diversity of monastic life in this period and its relationships with society with fresh eyes.

- Some historians have emphasised the relative stability of ongoing connections between families and the monasteries associated with them (e.g. Karen Stober, *Late Medieval Monasteries and Their Patrons: England and Wales, C.1300-1540*), and the ability of even coenobitic monasticism to forge a new place in intellectual culture (see James Clark in Lecture 8 bibliography)
- Others have looked at the variety of more activist monastic groups that emerged and/or flourished in the Middle Ages that had previously been ignored. This is now a particularly flourishing area (see Mixson in bibliography)

Observant Reform

Late medieval monastic reform has frequently been viewed as quite a top down activity.

- In particular, earlier historians had pointed to the promulgation of extensive **papal reform statutes** across multiple orders in the early 14th century as evidence that reformist zeal had gone from monks themselves and that discipline needed to be enforced from outside

However, from the late fourteenth century and through the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a number of separate bottom-up, hard-line reforms emerged within existing orders, which actually went far further than these papal recommendations: such late medieval reformers tended to call themselves “**Observants**”. The name relates to the favourite maxim of such reformers: “regular observance” (*observantia regularis*).

A number of Observant congregations appear relatively independently in multiple orders, both coenobitic and mendicant orders, from the late 14th century onwards. Some key early examples:

Observant Franciscans

- Some have argued that the terminology of “regular observance” first emerges here in the mid-14th century in Italy, and that those who used it represented a successor movement to the Spiritual Franciscans. Less controversial regarding Church corruption, but nevertheless desired to live a stricter lives themselves and sought to reform houses within the order towards this.
- While its earliest known 14th century Observant Franciscan communities, led by **Paoluccio Trinci** from 1368, tended almost towards eremitic life, its most famous later members earned public fame as public preachers, encouraging not only Franciscans but also lay people to greater moral rigour: e.g. **Bernardino of Siena** (d. 1444) and **Giovanni da Capistrano** (d. 1456). Observants eventually win recognition as a semi-independent branch of their order under their own *vicar-general* in the early 15th century.
- In addition, the Franciscan world also saw the rise of the **Colettine Poor Clares / Coletan Franciscans**: this was an Observant-style reform begun in 1406 by **Colette of Corbie** (d. 1447), an anchoress who was given papal permission to join the Poor Clares and lead a reform that proved successful in France, the Low Countries and Germany in the 15th century. Unlike those formally called “Observant Franciscans”, however, they remained under the more direct control of the *minister-general* of the order.

Observant Reforms

Observant Benedictine Congregations

- The roots of Observant reform among the Franciscans in fact probably go just as far back among the **Black Monks**, and perhaps even further than among the Franciscans.
- From the mid-fourteenth century (from at least 1362), the monastery of **Subiaco** in Italy, founded by Saint Benedict of Nursia in the early 6th century, begins to introduce rigorous reform customs.
- Organised congregations follow combining previously independent abbeys: Kastl (1380), Melk (1418) and Bursfelde (1433) become very prominent in Germany; while the congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua (1407) does the same in Germany

Observants Canons Regular Congregations

- There is evidence that an Observant-style reform of the Augustinian canons at Roudnice nad Labem had already begun in the 1330s with the assistance of the archbishop of Prague.
- In 1380s, an Observant reform of the Augustinian congregation begins around the new house of Windesheim, that exerts significant influence on Canons Regular throughout Germany and the Low countries: its members also work to reform houses of other orders, working alongside German Observant Benedictines.

Observant Dominican, Carmelite, Augustinian Friar movements all also took root in the 15th century





Observant ideology

Due to it taking place across multiple orders, there was no single “Observant” ideology. Nevertheless, despite quite varied origins, some strong common features emerged.

Key Ideological features

- The terminology of “regular observance” referred to a particularly precise, often very literal observance of the founding Rule of an order.
 - This had a different feel to the Cistercian “return to the Rule” which cherished the spiritual simplicity of original text.
 - “Regular observance” usually referred to a more legalistic attitude in general, often involving voluminous additional ascetic statutes of a very precise nature, especially around physical things the monks used.
 - Things like the height of shoes, the exact materials of clothing, and the quantities of food, become points of obsession.
- The demands of papal reform legislation for tighter congregational systems with general/provincial chapter meetings across – already present among the Cistercians and the Mendicants – were not only taken up but taken to extremes
 - e.g. in demanding that Benedictine abbots stand down every 3 years, as in the 15th century congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua. No one was meant to be “above the law”!
- If they were obsessive rigorists, however, this did not remove other monastic ideological elements.
 - They were often no less obsessive about affective piety – as if sweetening their legalism – and could even show significant reflection on the limits of law, showing concern for troubled consciences and harmony among Observant brothers.
- Taken as a whole, Observant monasticism seems almost hyperactive – **seeking purity in every detail**, whether it be exacting conformity to physical ascetic practices or more fluid interior growth and concern for unity: even with the latter aspects, it was a uniquely demanding life!

Observants and Conventuals

Observant monks, friars, and nuns for the most part did not found new houses (as had been more common in earlier waves of monastic reform, e.g. the Cistercians, the mendicants).

Rather focused on converting, often forcibly, the so-called “conventuals” (*conventuales*): those who followed the more moderated, traditional observances within their own houses and orders. [see Mixson]

- These conventuals often proved very resistant: they had come to enjoy a culture of “little luxuries” that technically contravened monastic poverty but mirrored, at a lower level, the greater access to little luxuries in the outside world. Their views were thus culturally well-grounded too, and they could not see what they were doing as wrong.
- The severity of the clash between these two forces led to significant conflict, and likely further hardened Observant ideology and obsession with legislation (i.e. something they could enforce).
- As a result, Observants were also, in fact, the origin of some of the harsh critiques of “moral decline” that later historians have traditionally attached more generally to late medieval monasticism.

Other monastic hardliners

This is not to say that Observant culture was that of a minority of angry reactionaries: their rise across multiple orders suggests a genuine socio-cultural movement. **Other monastic movements mirrored their hard-line approach**, with more of a focus on founding new houses, and with more distinct religious identities.

The Carthusians

- First discussed in lecture 4, this semi-eremitic order of the 11th century had long been known for their harsh insistence of monks remaining in their cells at most times. They enjoyed a new spurt of growth, founding over 100 new monasteries across Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries.
- They have no formal “Observant” movement in this period – they had always been one of the strictest forms about – but become intertwined with it both in the distribution of texts and in having similar supporters. Observants often cite the Carthusians as a positive example and influence, both due to their asceticism and extensive legislative efforts

The Celestines

- A coenobitic order with eremitic roots, founded by **Pietro da Morrone** (d. 1296), an Italian hermit who gained many followers in the late 13th century and briefly reigned as pope in 1294.
- They took up the Benedictine Rule – in accordance with the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) legislation against new Rules – but had a more unique identity, founded on their own, lengthy and very strict constitutions. The Celestines had c. 100 houses in Italy by 1400 (both new houses and reforms of existing Benedictine houses).
- They would also grow rapidly in France (17 monasteries by 1450), solely through new houses: there, they received significant French royal support. In 1380, after the Great Western Schism began, the **French Celestines** became lastingly independent. Despite the **Italian Celestines** already bearing similarities to Observant monasticism, the French monks began to see themselves as the “Observant” wing of the Celestine order – they even managed to gain permission to reform some Italian Celestine houses in the mid-15th century!



Other monastic hardliners

The Brigittines

- **Birgitta of Vadstena**, a Swedish princess who became a religious visionary, founded a monastic congregation (approved in 1370) formed of double monasteries. Technically under the Rule of Saint Augustine, they were also governed by some very tough supplementary regulations.
- Not a large congregation – 27 houses by 1515 – but enjoyed some very high ranking supporters in both Scandinavia, Italy and Germany. They also received a major royal house in England (Syon), founded by Henry V in 1415.
- Well respected by outsiders, including other activist monks and nuns: e.g. enjoyed close connections with the Carthusians in England

The Minims

- **Francesco di Paola** (1417-1507), a Franciscan novice who left to become a hermit gained followers in Southern Italy and reputation as a healer from the mid-15th century
- His fame led to the king of France, Louis XI, asking for him to come to France to help him in his sickness. Francesco becomes his confessor up until the time he dies in 1483.
- With the support of the French monarchy, he achieved something that is very rare after the Lateran Council of 1215 (which banned new “rules”): he gained papal approval for an extremely strict and detailed new Rule and for the foundation of a truly new order.
- Technically a mendicant order, with First (male friars), Second (female enclosed nuns) and Third (lay) orders. Nevertheless, the First (male) order, had relatively strict rules on separation by comparison to other communities of friars (e.g. Franciscans, Dominicans): while they had some allowance for public preachers and confessors, they often appear more like enclosed monks than what we would expect of friars.
- Francesco’s congregation expands to over 30 convents across Italy, France, Germany and Spain by the time of his death in 1507, and much further afterwards.

The socio-cultural context of late medieval monastic activism

Such growing late medieval movements were quite diverse - in part a reflection of a more complex world, as well as the existing diversity of religious life. But they could also often find common cause around elements of shared ideology as they came into contact with each other: monastic reform in this period can be seen as a complex network rather than a single movement. (see Shaw). Such efforts also frequently shared similar (or even overlapping) social support networks and cultural grounding

Support of royal governments and professional classes

- Many of these groups quickly found a strong alignment with royal government – not just kings and queens, but members of their growing bureaucracies and administration.
- In addition, they proved successful in gaining many recruits and supporters from urban society more broadly. The detail-oriented style found support from - and was probably shaped by - a world that was increasingly influenced by law and professionalism.

Respected as intercessors.

- For religious benefactors, the growing belief in “purgatory” altered their needs – more masses / prayers = less ‘time’ spent in purgatory before reaching heaven. Secular priests – especially private “chaplains” with few pastoral responsibilities exploited this desire for sheer numbers of masses/prayers better than monasteries with existing liturgical duties – one of the economic reasons we see fewer new monasteries in this period.
- But this fashion also spoke to the rising influence of law and professionalism too. As it developed, the most rigorous, tightly ordered communities become respected for offering a premium service: not just lots of masses/prayers, but added purity and professionalism in their observance – they compete more successfully in this market for religious services than other religious houses, despite the fundamental difficulties.

Separate but connected guides for lay religious life

- These groups do well in the same parts of society that are most interested in lay piety. Rather than simply diminish the relevance of dedicated religious life, for some, the rise of lay piety made many look to more rigorous monastic models, who could go even further than them: e.g. the Augustinian canons reform of **Windesheim** found its origins through the support Modern Devout lay groups.
- The groups that seem to grow the most in terms of new houses are often congregations of enclosed monks and nuns that were willing to take new houses in or near towns: the Carthusians and the Celestines, for instance, who had previously preferred secluded locations, did this. They enforced their enclosure in these environments through even stricter legislation to maintain their reputation for purity as they moved, and were valued for the contemplative example and literature they would provide (see lecture 8).
- This represents something of a shift from the desire for simple, open and accessible asceticism and preaching which lay at the root of the thirteenth-century Franciscan and Dominican expansions, even if Observant Mendicants also do eventually very well in this period (especially from later 15th century)

The political context of late medieval monastic activism

This balance of precisely controlled separation from society with accessibility and openness to engagement can also be related to contemporary political culture and events

Royal religious leadership

- The desire of kings to step further into the realm of spiritual authority led to the championing of rigorous monastic activists: these houses function as a proof of spiritual purity for seemingly 'worldly' monarchies, and as royal sponsored religious examples that went beyond the norm within the Church.
- The "palace monastery" becomes a trend:
 - **Charles V of France**: established his major residence in Paris, the Hotel Saint-Pol, next to the new Celestine house in the city
 - **Henry V of England** builds Carthusian and Brigittine houses close by to his new palace at Sheen; attempts to build a Celestine house there too.
 - **Louis IX** and **Charles VIII** of France build Minim houses close by to their favoured palaces of Plessis-les-Tours and Amboise.

The Great Western Schism (1378-1417) and the Council of Constance

- The long running division of Europe into competing papal obediences genuinely troubles consciences of the intellectually and religiously aware.
- It is seen as the result of untamed greed and pride on all sides. Intellectuals – e.g. Pierre d'Ailly, Jean Gerson, Nicolas de Clamanges (see lecture 8) - explicitly cited monastic values and examples as part of their proposed solutions
- It thus does not seem entirely coincidental that many Observant and other rigorous reforms gained significant strength and growth in the Schism years.
- The Council of Constance, where the Schism was solved, featured a concurrent Observant Benedictine reform chapter meeting at **Petershausen**, just over the river from Constance, that effectively advertised itself as a model in miniature of the Council: both the Council and chapter emphasised the enforcement of law and corporate decision making.



Martin Luther and Late Medieval Monasticism

But if monasticism was not entirely in internal decay or declining in social relevance, then how do we explain the reaction of the Protestant Reformation?

- Protestants had no place for monasticism and encouraged monks and nuns to leave their monasteries
- Many houses were attacked and burnt by Protestants; Protestant kings meanwhile frequently took away monastic property.

A look at the origin of Protestantism suggests that **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) - the father of Protestantism - reacted in part against the rising power and influence of rigorist monasticism, rather than fading institutions

- Born in the town of Eisleben to a good family, he attended the University of Erfurt, where he studied theology.
- In 1505, however, he was almost struck by lightning, and came to fear the afterlife more greatly. Keen to repent for his sins and find greater purity, he became Augustinian Friar at the Observant influenced monastery of Erfurt in Germany, which had been very influenced by rigorous “Observant” reform.
- He was a very dedicated monk at first, but from 1517, it is clear that he had become disillusioned with the Church and, soon afterwards, even monastic life itself.
- His criticism of monasticism is multifaceted: like Observants themselves, he was critical of ascetic failings, which he saw as an example of the hypocrisy of the wider institutional Church.
- But more importantly, he rejected monasticism in specific theological terms:
 - ascetic striving represent a human attempt to win merit with God that led to arrogance, the belief that one would be saved on this basis, rather than by grace
 - Monastic vows placed an unfair, human, burden on the soul, contrary to evangelical freedom
- In his theological argument, the monasticism he attacked looks more like Observant monasticism – with its heavy focus on precise action and demanding observance of norms – than less strict varieties

Final thoughts

Despite challenges, monastic institutions actually remained very prominent in late medieval Europe: this fact does not fit neatly with “transition” narratives focused on the switch between “medieval” and “modern”

Many traditional ties between monasticism and society remained strong. Moreover, Observant reforms and other rigorous monastic groups became increasingly powerful, and both socially and politically relevant. Narratives of **inherent decline** or **growing irrelevance** appear very much overstated.

Arguably, late medieval monastic activists had found **a new and attractive solution to managing the tension we have seen running throughout medieval monasticism: of how to be out of the world while remaining available and useful to it**

- their relentless focus on precision and purity from every angle – and above all through extensive monastic legislation - allowed monks to draw yet closer to their supporters while maintaining a clear dividing lines.
- While lay piety was growing and a potential challenge to the place of monastic life in western society, Observants and other rigorists had often successfully positioned themselves as elevated but accessible points of inspiration

On the other hand, this hyperactive brand of monastic activism **arguably stretched the tension close to breaking point**

- These exacting zealots denigrated those monks who did not follow them in every detail as essentially worthless, feeding a public narrative that late medieval monasticism was frequently corrupt
- It is easy, moreover, to see, how they could easily appear overbearing and overly self-righteous – and thus worldly hypocrites themselves ! – both to monks and laity. Despite their popularity in this period with many people who found security in their approach, you can see why others who came into contact with them, like Martin Luther, might question the entire premise of their efforts.

A period of particularly energetic period of monastic reform would thus be followed by a period of unprecedented challenge for monastic life.

Sources – *The Life of Jean Bassand*, anonymous (c. 1450s)

Life of Jean Bassand (d. 1445)

- Jean Bassand was from a well-off urban background in Besançon in Burgundy (modern Day Eastern France)
- Originally an Augustinian Canon but joined the Celestines in Paris to take up a more rigorous life.
- Became the independent French Celestine congregation's most important leader in the first half of the fifteenth century, holding a number of key offices.
- He gained permission from pope Eugenius IV to begin initiate an “Observant”-style reform of certain Italian Celestine houses shortly before his death, beginning with the house of Aquila, the burial place of the Celestine founder, Pietro da Morrone (pope Celestine V).
- His Life was written up by a follower – most likely Jean Bertauld, a man from a similar urban background who became a very important Celestine leader himself.
- The text was largely read among the Celestines; provides a strong description of their monastic ideals and how they saw their place in the world in the mid-15th century.

Sources – *The Life of Jean Bassand*, anonymous (c. 1450s)

[At Amiens, France] [There was] a certain most devout religious woman by the name of Colette [Saint Colette of Corbie], surpassing all in virtue, by whose industry, or rather, by the merits of whose way of life, many monasteries of the Poor Clares – whose habit she had received from the hand of Pope Martin V when she was a young woman – were built. By the authority of the Apostolic See, she also led and sustained these [houses] in continual poverty, converting them to the regular observance of their blessed legislator, Saint Francis. When she was a young girl and a most pure virgin, she glowed with such a zeal of devotion that all the inhabitants of the town of Amiens stood in awe. This girl frequently visited blessed Jean, then prior of the Celestine monastery of Amiens; gaining healthy counsel from him, she grew daily in the grace of sanctity. And he did not cease from encouraging her to persist in her commitment to salutary virginity, advising her through his words when he could and little books when he could not. This woman reached such a perfection that she entered a recluse's dwelling in Corbie, from which she hailed. And finally, having received a revelation from God or from heaven, she went to Rome, explained her revelation to the Highest Pontifex, and received the habit of sanctity from him, just as previously described, so that she might show the right form of living and behaviour to consecrated virgins across France. [...]

[At Aquila, Italy] Virtuously carrying the burden of religion more than ever before, when he had found the monastery empty of all necessities for the brothers, he worked with them, enduring poverty. He endured tricks by false brothers, suffered injuries, and was attacked by threats and mockery. It happened, however, that, just before Lent, when those “conventual” brothers, who had remained falsely with the devoted fathers, formed a plan together, so that to the scandal of the people [of Aquila], and to the injury of the blessed Father and his brothers, who were still few in number, they would suddenly withdraw, and the church would thus remain without masses. Thus on the 4th Sunday of Lent, at the point when “Laetere Jerusalem” is sung in the church, they left. But behold, by divine provision, seven brothers newly arrived from France immediately entered the monastery through the church, and they were received by the blessed Father, and the Aquilan people with joy and exultation. The wrongdoers were bewildered and rejected: the monastery was now totally cleansed of undisciplined brothers, and regular observance remained unimpeded.

Sources – *Principles of the Old and the New Testaments*, by Matthias of Janov (1388-1392)

Matthias of Janov (Matěj z Janova)

- A Czech (Bohemian) intellectual churchman who had studied at Paris in the 1370s.
- During the Great Western Schism, he returned from Paris to Prague to teach, securing favour from the archbishop of the city Jan of Jenstein
- Detests the papal schism, which he attributes to the greed of churchmen more broadly.
- Sometimes regarded as a pre-Hussite figure for his emphasis on the reform of ecclesiastical morals, his concern that the laity should have more frequent communion in both forms, and his dislike of the cult of relics in churches.

Principles of the Old and the New Testaments

- A series of collected essays on Church reform, many of them written for Jan of Jenstein
- Matthias's compilation does not survive in complete, collected form: rather its essays were frequently copied and distributed in chunks or separately, attracting the attention of intellectuals and later Hussite writers.

Sources – *Principles of the Old and the New Testaments*, by Mattias of Janov (1388-1392)

And remember meanwhile, just how many devout, chaste, learned and humble men, wise and suited to all manner of good work for the building up of Christ's body and the people of the church are shut away in the houses and cloisters of the Carthusians, just how many young and old men, illustrious and well bred, are in convents of the order of Saint Benedict, how many remained enclosed in houses and cells of the Cistercians, how many are hidden in the dwellings of Augustinian friars ... That is why the holy people of the church, the flock of Christ's sheep, remains deserted and impoverished of spiritual men useful to them. Bring forth all these men who are hiding in inner places and search them out with the utmost diligence from all parts of the world. [...] Then you will see how much utility you will confer to the sacred unity of the family of Christ, how great will be the edification of the people believing in the crucified Jesus, and what common illumination of the unrefined and simple peasants will come to pass.

Sources – Foundation charter of the Minim house at Bracancourt, by Jean de Baudricourt

Jean de Baudricourt (d. 1499)

- From a knightly background
- Made his fame in French royal service, both as a soldier and administrator.
- Especially close to king **Louis XI** of France (reigned 1461), who appointed him governor of Burgundy

Foundation charter of the Minim house at Bracancourt (1499)

- This document records his foundation of the Minim house at Bracancourt, in his own domains: one of houses of the new Minim order (which received full papal approval for its own Rule in 1493) in France
- A rural house, unlike many other early Minim foundations in France, Jean de Bracancourt was nevertheless following in the footsteps of royal fashion: Louis XI had drawn the Minim founder, Francesco di Paola (d. 1507) from Italy to be his death bed confessor, and his successor, Charles VIII founded Minim houses.

Sources – Foundation charter of the Minim house at Bracancourt, by Jean de Baudricourt

We consider and understand that almighty God the Father is a just judge and that this lover and zealot of justice and equity gives and grants healthy counsel to humane fragility, so that while the said fragility will be joined and united with the body during life, it can purge and wash away its sins, faults, omissions and deficits by which it incurs the indignation of God the creator, by praises, suffrages, obsequies, the celebration of masses, prayers, fasts and abstinences, and hence recover grace. We consider also that glorious God, whose mercy knows no bounds, allows those who love his divine service and revere his churches - whether by assisting, augmenting or building them anew, -to participate in his heavenly blessings, and that he returns to each according to his merits [...]

We have thus decided to construct and build a Church and monastery [...] in a place commonly known as *Our Lady of Bracancourt*, so that this Church and monastery can be filled with 13 religious men, of which 8 will be priests and the others deacons, subdeacons and Minim brothers. They will daily serve God and the glorious virgin Mary, according to the institution and rule of their order, make supplications, pleas and prayers for the peace of the realm [of France], the health and prosperity of the King, and of ourselves.

Sources – *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, by Martin Luther (1520)

Martin Luther (d. 1546)

- Discussed in the slides.

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520)

- One of Luther's most strident, early articulations of what would become Protestant theology, published – in print! – at the moment of his final break with the Roman Papacy
- Heavily critical of the papacy for keeping the Church captive, it criticised the sacramental and penitential system of the church.
- Overall he argued these practices were representative of theology put too much emphasis on human action and merits in the pursuit of salvation, rather than simple faith in God.

Sources – *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, by Martin Luther (1520)

Vows should be abolished by a general edict, especially life-long vows, and all men diligently recalled to the vows of baptism. If this is not possible, everyone should be warned not to take a vow rashly. No one should be encouraged to do so. Permission to make vows should be given only with difficulty and reluctance. For we have vowed enough in baptism – more than we can ever fulfill. If we devote ourselves to the keeping of this one vow, we shall have all we can do. But now we travel over earth and sea to make many converts. We fill the world with priests, monks and nuns, and imprison them all in life-long vows. You will find those who argue and decree that a work done in fulfilment of a vow ranks higher than one done without a vow. They claim such works are rewarded with I know not what great rewards in heaven. Blind and godless Pharisees, who measure righteousness and holiness by the greatness, number or other quality of the works! But God measures them by faith alone, and with Him there is no difference between works except in the faith which performs them. These wicked men inflate with bombast their own opinions and human works. They do this to lure the unthinking populace, who are almost always led by the glitter of works to make a shipwreck of their faith, to forget their baptism and to harm their Christian liberty. For a vow is a kind of law or requirement. Therefore, when vows are multiplied, laws and works are necessarily multiplied. When this is done, faith is extinguished and the liberty of baptism taken captive. [...] And if there were no other reason for abolishing these vows, this one were reason enough, namely, that through them faith and baptism are slighted and works are exalted, which cannot be done without harmful results. For in the religious orders there is scarce one in many thousands, who is not more concerned about works than about faith, and on the basis of this madness they have even made distinctions among themselves, such as "the more strict" and "the more lax," as they call them. [...] However numerous, sacred, and arduous they may be, these works, in God's sight, are in no way whatsoever superior to the works of a farmer laboring in the field, or of a woman looking after her home [...] Vows only tend to the increase of pride and presumption.

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