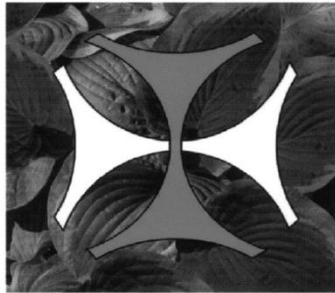


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**Brotherhood in the Order
of the Holy Cross, 1210-2014**



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BEFOREHAND

The following formulation of the care for the confreres in the Order of the Holy Cross, among it also the relationship between the clerici and the other confreres, caught our attention. At one time it seemed natural to address a Brother of the Holy Cross with the title *brother*. Was with that title also life in common reflected? A life directed to action and/or contemplation? Was this life in agreement with the practice of praying the choir by the canons regular? Which components of the original community culture of the Order of the Holy Cross disappeared or transformed as soon as the Brethren of the Holy Cross accepted clerical tasks in the style of Trent? In what way was tried to maintain the unity among the different monasteries within diverse sovereign, national states? Did the re-start of the Order after the French Revolution create a distance from the original ideal and heritage? How and why was the return to the early ideals of the Brethren of the Holy Cross in the latest decennia of the twentieth century facilitated?

Let us first clarify that the term *brother* in the Middle Ages could be related to different contents. First of all there were the fraternities (*confrerie, brotherhood*), which came into being and were directed without interference of Church authorities. They obtained a certain influence as a form of expression of sociability, as competitors of the clergy, as patrons of artists, as institutions of the care for the poor and also because of their political influence in an urban society. Most fraternities could not be called common because of the high registration fees and contributions, and if they were common, then the number of members was so large that one could no longer speak of a real social life for the nuclear group. In many cases there were once or twice a year a gathering of members.¹ In this a change took place in the early modern times with the existence of a new post-Trent type, characterized by control and direction by clergy, imbedded in the parish structure, confession and communion as conditions for obtaining indulgences, concentration on spiritual matters at the expense of social functions (conviviality and care for the poor) and a low threshold of admittance. Briefly the fraternities were seen as an instrument for disciplining the people in church. In spreading these fraternities the different Orders played a

¹ P. Trio, *Middeleeuwse broederschappen in de Nederlanden*. Trajecta, 3 (1994), 2, pp. 97-109

large role. All these new elements were however not executed all over in an evenly strong way. The pastor was not always any longer the head and the care for the poor was in some fraternities still an important activity.²

Furthermore there were prayer-fraternities. Individuals or groups obtained rights to the fruits of prayers and good works (*confraternite, Fraternity*). At prayer-fraternity people thought first of all of abbeys and monasteries. The religious accepted the obligation to pray for each other and for the deceased religious and to fulfill other liturgical services. In *books of the dead* the names of the deceased *confreres* were written, added shortly with the names of lay people, regardless of an exchange of a generous gift. All those registered were part of the *fraternitas* of the monastery and were supposed to participate in the abundance of heavenly fruits of the *Opus Dei* of the monastery. The promise of eternal *commemoratio* or remembrance as a member of the spiritual community of religious and benefactors was a powerful means to assure redemption for oneself.³ From the twelfth century on, the benefactors were also called *participantes*. The possibility existed even to be buried in the *claustrum* (the monastery corridor around the court yard of the monastery) or in the monastery church. Because they were registered in the *calendarium*, they were considered forever after their death as *confrater*. According to some historians the prayer-fraternities were the origin of the lay fraternities in the Middle Ages.⁴

Thirdly *brother* was the title in the church to address church authorities of equal rank and to indicate a monastery community or the brotherly relationship

² After a decline during the Enlightenment, when the brotherhood-concept as a whole was rejected by libertarian Catholic laity and a part of the clergy, the number of foundations from about 1840 on grew again in numbers. This development was a result of the increasing orientation of the Roman Catholic world towards the figure of the pope (*ultramontanism*) and his profound aversion of liberalism, secularization and everything that was modern in general. A re-appreciation of devotions and fraternities fitted perfectly in that, but more solid established in the Church structure and hierarchy.

³ The *donation* was often named a donation *in elemosinam*, as alms, *pro anima*, for the soul, *pro salute animae* or *ob remedium animae*, for the salvation of the soul. The prayers for the benefactors, who had joined the *fraternitas*, took place in the daily Mass, during the daily ceremonies of the Office of the dead and the Chapter office and in the private prayers and Masses offered by the individual religious

⁴ E. Berliere, *Les confraternités monastiques au Moyen-Age*. In: *Revue monastique et liturgique*, 1925-1926, pp. 134-142; N. Huygebaert, *Les Documents nécrologiques. Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental*, 1972

among the religious (in the monastery, chapter) mutually.⁵ In the sixth century in Western Europe monasteries came into existence, where believers put their lives at the service of God, segregated from the world. The brothers (*monks*) and sisters (*nuns*), who lived separately, made all the same profession. Furthermore each monastery had its own rule of life. A number of monasteries with the same rule formed a monastic Order. The countless churches, chapels and monasteries witnessed to the very devote attitude of the faithful of the Middle Ages and of their strong direction to the things hereafter (*memento mori*).

Fourthly the fraternity was highly respected among the Canons Regular, the hospital Brothers and the orders of Knights. The service to the sick and suffering people was their continued concern. Also the threat to the Christian West by the advancing Islam brought about unexpected initiatives (weapon service, protection of pilgrims). They made a choice for the Rule of St. Augustine. This monastery rule, which described every form of the Christian attitude within the frame work of community life, was fitted to monastery communities with the most diverse goals.⁶ Around 1500 almost two thousand chapters of Canons Regular existed. Some estimates speak even of four thousand. Under the influence of the Protestantism the number would drop to half.⁷

Fifthly from the thirteenth century the concept of fraternity was connected with the living of the evangelical councils, especially the one of poverty (examples were the Dominicans/Preachers and Franciscans/Friars minor).⁸ In analogy of the question, which the Franciscans ask regarding their origin, namely whether Francis wanted to found an fraternity or an Order, we can ask ourselves regarding the Brethren of the Holy Cross, in the period between 1210

⁵ **A.J. A. Bijsterveld & P. Trio**, *Van gebedsverbodering naar broederschap. De evolutie van het fraternitas-begrip in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden in de volle Middeleeuwen*. In: *Jaarboek voor middeleeuwse geschiedenis*, 6, (2003), pp. 1-48

⁶ From the Rule of St. Augustine, "To live harmoniously in your house" (ps. 68, 7), "in oneness of mind and heart" (Acts 4, 32), intent upon God". Isn't this exactly the reason for living together? Quotes of Chapter One, numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. "Let all of you then live together in oneness of mind and heart (Acts 4, 32; Rom. 15, 6), mutually honoring God in yourselves, whose temple you have become (2 Cor. 6, 16)". We also refer to Chapter 5, 2 (in English version no. 31).

⁷ **R. Hostie**, *Leven en dood van de religieuze instituten*. Brugge-Utrecht, 1972, pp. 103-104

⁸ Interesting ideas around fraternity and canon law, fraternity outside of canon law and developments of fraternity towards a religious order can be found in **J.A. de Kok ofm**, *Acht eeuwen minderbroeders in Nederland*, Hilversum, 2008, pp. 12-28

and 1248 goals were formulated around the merging of communities of Brethren of the Holy Cross into one Order of the Holy Cross and which actions were undertaken to model the fraternity, ecclesial legally and organizationally.⁹

When the life *in communis* at the end of the fourteenth century began to show cracks in all of Western Europe, the observance movement tried to restore and to renew the fraternity. The Modern Devotion played an important role in all this. The Brethren of the Common Life (*Fratres Vitae Communis*, *Bruder vom gemeinsamen Leben*, *Freres de la Vie commune*) were clergy and lay people who lived together under one roof in community of goods without making profession. On the spiritual and material level they could provide for their own needs and developed from their house all sorts of social and church activities for the benefit of their urban environment. They inspired the monastic [religious] observance of a number of religious Orders.¹⁰

⁹ R. Janssen, *Oord van helder licht. 800 jaar Orde van het Heilig Kruis 1210-2010*. St. Agatha-Cuijk, 2010, pp. 32-34

¹⁰ H. van Engen & G. Verhoeven red., *Monastiek observantisme en Moderne Devotie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*. Hilversum, 2008, 270 p.