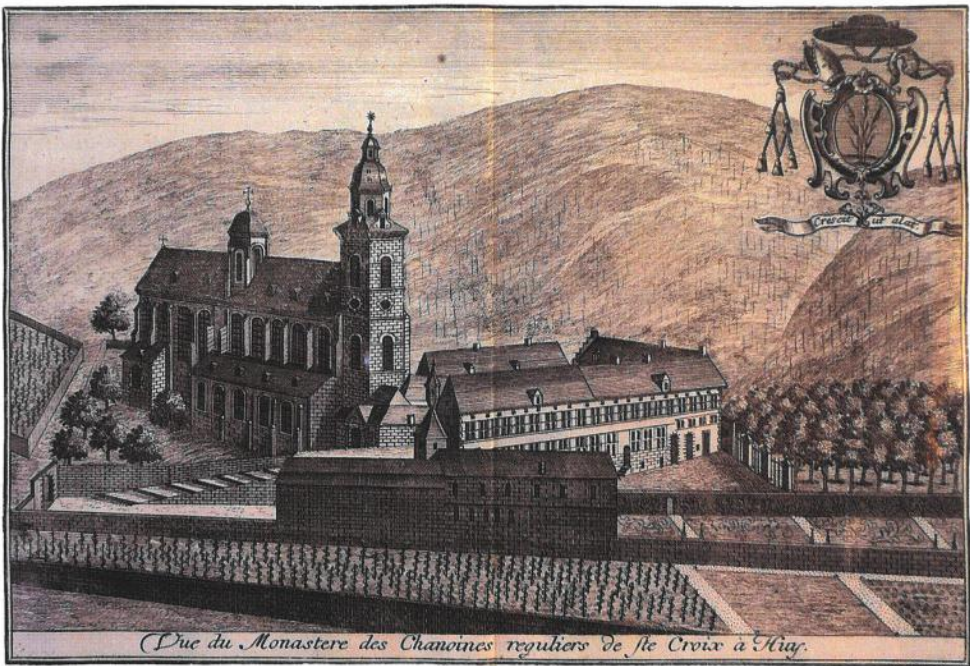


**Identical missions resulted in
different structures of fraternal economy
for the Brethren of the Holy Cross and the Crosiers,
1248–1840**



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The Brethren of the Holy Cross treasured the 'domus' as their fundamental structure, circa 1248 – circa 1530

It is not possible to determine where and when the Crosiers first presented themselves in society. In the early centuries of their existence, they were called the *Crutched Friars* or the *Brethren of the Holy Cross*. Most of their communities disappeared quickly after the foundation. However, in the prince-bishopric of Liège - a region fostering a special devotion to the Holy Cross - a few communities survived at town edges or near a noble estate.

In 1248 the Brethren of the Holy Cross petitioned to be recognized as canons regular. This included their special intent to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and to hold all possessions as community property. They studied the Dominican Constitutions and adopted those in part. Almost all communities mentioned in the foundation charter disappeared soon after 1248, but the Brethren of the Holy Cross in Huy persevered. Soon, new monasteries were established, also outside the prince-bishopric of Liège, even in England, giving the Order an international character. The Brethren of the Holy Cross were successful in maintaining good relations with the French king Louis IX (1226-1270), who embarked on crusades more than once. Their monastery in Paris, established before 1258, soon became prestigious. In the following decades, they established new monasteries in France and in Germany.

Policies to form a network of monasteries, connecting Huy, Cologne, London, Paris, and Toulouse, did not yet exist. The individual monasteries were mostly established by local initiative. Brethren of the Holy Cross from a nearby monastery would respond to an invitation from a fraternity, noble family, prince, or bishop and settle in some rural or urban setting.

In those early centuries, each monastery was a *domus*, a house for living and working. A part of the house was set aside for the religious (the *claustrum*), other parts were used as workspaces and housing for workers, servants, and guests. This shows the Brethren of the Holy Cross exercised the *vita mixta*, and aimed for a sound balance combining communal activities 'in house' (*vita contemplativa*: prayer, study, meals, recreation, sleeping, working in the fields, the kitchen, the brewery, etcetera) and apostolate outside the home (*vita activa*: ministry in a chapel, a place of pilgrimage, an infirmary, prayer service for the deceased, helping out in parishes, etcetera). The revenues of the *vita contemplativa* had to provide the sustenance for the monastery. To supplement this income, donations from rich burghers and noble families, in the form of farmlands, farms, mills, rental income, and leaseholds, were very welcome.

The Crosiers treasured the '*canonia*' as their fundamental structure, circa 1530–1840

During the period of the Reformation, a reduced membership moved away from the contemplative emphasis and increasingly engaged itself in pastoral and intellectual activities. The Order's name changed as well. The Brethren of the Holy Cross remained true to their ideals as canons regular, but they now emphasized the active dimension of the *vita mixta*. Hereafter, they were called Crosiers. The financial capabilities of most monasteries were limited, because they received less donations and endowments, because a number of possessions were lost to the Protestants, and because collecting alms was often made impossible. In England all Crosier monasteries were dissolved, in the Netherlands twelve were lost. Many monasteries were also lost in the Rhineland. The remaining communities worked hard to stay true to their ideals. Early on, they started promoting the rosary to the people. In 1516 Pope Leo X granted special indulgences for praying rosaries that were blessed by the Crosiers. Such an indulgence became known as a Crosier Indulgence. The remaining Crosier monasteries engaged with the public through monastery schools and Latin schools. They were also involved in parish ministry and showed even greater activity in their monastery churches. In consequence, their monasteries transformed from *domus* into *canonia*. Occasionally, the population of a monastery was decimated by an outbreak of the plague or by casualties during warfare, but no monasteries had been suppressed because of depopulation. Certainly between 1517 (Luther) and 1648 (end of the Thirty Years' War and the Eighty Years' War) the activities of the *vita activa* did not provide the *canoniae* with the necessary financial support, and the Crosiers had to ask the faithful to provide them with sustenance. Some monasteries could survive financially, because many lay-brothers (*donates*) joined. Some monasteries suffered from serious internal disagreements and heated discussions between supporters and opponents of both Lutheran and Calvinistic teachings. Because the basic necessities could not be guaranteed, community life inside the *claustrum* was endangered...

In the 1630's the General Chapters took action. The Order was now restructured into provinces. Each province had a Vicar General, who governed as the representative of the Prior General and supervised the common novitiate. The Chapter also provided regulations for solidarity (affluent monasteries helped the impoverished ones; competent confreres were temporarily assigned to monasteries in need: teachers, musicians, preachers) and for collegiality (formation in the individual monasteries was replaced with new philosophical and theological studies at a designated monastery or with studies at a university; all monasteries in a province jointly paid for the formation costs; competent Priors 'moved' between monasteries).