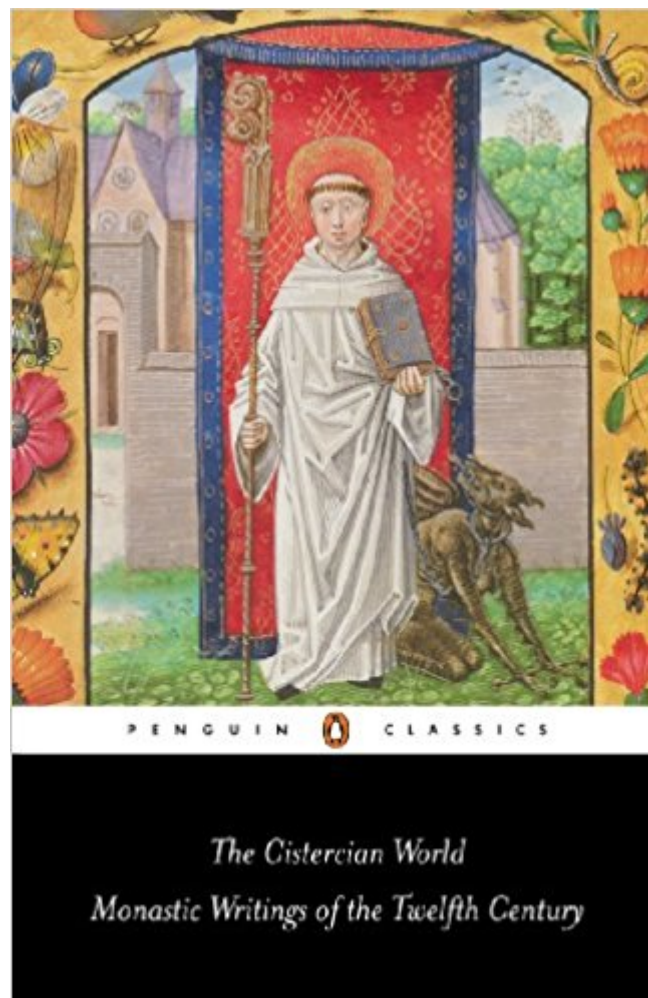




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# The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings Of The Twelfth Century (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

The Cistercian Order was born in Burgundy at the start of the twelfth century as a movement of radical renewal—•an Order that survives to this day with the greater part of its written heritage preserved. This volume brings together a selection of its finest works, which speak powerfully across the centuries to modern readers. Writings by St Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090-1153)—•including his letters, The Life of Malachy the Irishman, sermons on the Song of Songs and the sharply satirical Apologia for Abbot William—•reveal him to be a highly individual and influential writer of the Middle Ages. Also included here are a charming description of Clairvaux, biographies of abbots and a series of exemplary stories, all drawing on the Scriptures to express intensely personal forms of monastic theology. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700—• titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the—• series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date—• translations by award-winning translators.

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## Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Latin

Translated and edited with an introduction by Pauline Matarasso

This is a brilliant and much needed book. It contains short (several page) extracts from all the great Cistercian writers (Bernard, Aelred, Gueric), which Pauline Matarasso has beautifully translated. The book has two great strengths. 1. The best bits of these great authors have been chosen so that the reader receives a taste of their wisdom without being drowned in thick theological tomes. 2. The subject matter is fascinating, ranging from monastery tales, even at the time of St Bernard, through contemporary biographies of great men like Aelred of Rievaulx, to a beautiful description of Clairvaux. This book was a joy and I thoroughly recommend it.

This is a wonderful selection of Cistercian monastic writings from the 12th century. While Bernard of Clairvaux is well-represented here, as he should be, the book also includes important writings from other Cistercians of the period. It was very nice to see these others included, especially since many sources tend to focus almost solely on Bernard. This variety gave greater depth and breadth to the writings of the period. And since these are only selections, rather than entire texts, the reader is provided with the best of the available writings, so he/she doesn't have to wade through long works to glean the crucial information. While the historical selections are excellent, it is the introductions that make the book stellar. The introduction at the beginning is concise but informative. And each selection starts with its own introduction, placing it in broader context, and also providing useful concomitant information. Excellent work by Penguin Classics!

Whenever I feel in need of a spiritual tonic, I return to this exquisite collection of writings from 12th century Cistercians. It never fails, to use the words of William of St. Thierry, one of the authors collected in it, to "wipe away the rheum of prolonged sleep." Most of us think of medieval theology in terms of scholasticism, the method of the schools or academies (hence its name) brought to its finest point by Thomas Aquinas. Scholasticism sought to apply the logic of Aristotle to theological issues. It is rigorous, consistent, sometimes brilliant, and typically dry as dust. But predating scholasticism, and exemplified by the 12th century Cistercians, was monastic theology, which adopted a meditative, prayerful, poetic approach. The monastic theologians were more mystics than philosophers, more interested in wisdom than Aristotle, allegories than syllogisms, scripture than schools. The greatest among them are represented in this collection: Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, Gueric of Igny, Aelred of Rievaulx, Isaac of Stella (my personal favorite!), Gilbert of Hoyland, John of Ford, Adam of Perseigne, and Stephen Harding. Reading these men is

like savoring an exquisite taste. Here's a small sampling to whet your appetite:--Bernard of Clairvaux:"It is a cruel mercy that kills the soul while cherishing the body." (p. 48) and "You will find that it is a hoe, not a sceptre, that you want for doing a prophet's work." (p. 88)--William of St. Thierry (speaking of God): "Sometimes I hear the voice fo your spirit, a passing whisper like the faintest breeze, and I understand it to say, 'Come to him and you will be illumined.' I hear and I am roused from my torpor." (p. 112)--Aelred of Rievalux (from his marvelous treatise on friendship): "Some men perversely, not to say impudently, want their friends to be what they are incapable of being themselves. They are the sort who are intolerant of the slightest faults in their friends, criticize them fiercely and, with a sad want of discretion, neglect important things while making an issue of details." (pp. 183-84)--Gilbert of Hoyland: "He who cleaves to God will become one spirit with Him." (p. 219)

The book is a marvelous closeup view of Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, Abbot Suger, Stephen Harding and others. Reading their own writings gives insights to their own spirituality, as well as to the monastic life of the 12th century, and the relationships among the members. It is so much more than a mere historical account of the time. I find it inspiring. Bernadette

I find the book very enlightening as to the thinking of St. Bernard, and his "history", plus that of his time. I would recommend it to all that are interested in the Cistersian part of of what still may play a role in our lives today.

Excellent!! A really great read at a great price!

Love

This book introduces the reader, through the exploration of multiple primary sources, to the twelfth century rise of the Cistercians. It provides a wonderful look into the mind of these dynamic individuals who attempted to escape from the increasingly complex world of twelfth-century Western Europe and create an internal relationship with God through the external bond of mutual friendship.

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