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Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages, by John Van Engen

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F.'s well-woven writing style accompanied by 39 pages of notes and 29 pages of bibliography may place this text beyond popular or undergraduate readers. For the historian of religion, however, and in particular for the medical ethicist of whatever theological stance, the volume uniquely and valuably contributes to understanding and appreciating a distinctive in the origins of and Christian perspective on religion, medicine, and ethics. Finally, for the graduate student, F.'s scholarship will serve as a model of professional research.

EDWIN L. LISSON, S.J.
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SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF THE COMMON LIFE: THE *DEVOTIO MODERNA* AND THE WORLD OF THE LATER MIDDLE AGES. By John Van Engen. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008. Pp. ix + 433. \$59.95.

Van Engen offers a detailed, comprehensive study of the 15th-century Netherlandish New Devout movement (1380s–1560s), based on little-studied primary sources. It is hard to imagine a closer, “on the ground” view of the context, lives, practices, and goals of these dedicated, creative, and misunderstood “gatherings”—often under suspicion by the Inquisition and other authorities. V.E. covers female (paucity of sources) as well as male branches, showing how, against opposition, they carved out a way of life “between” vowed religious and laity in the ordinary sense. He situates the Devout on a broad canvas of new religious ideas and forms that include beguines, tertiaries, Lollards, Hussites, Wycliffites, and Free Spirits.

Key themes include: conversion; details of Devout piety (resolutions, exercises, reading, meditations, self-examination, scrapbooks, mutual reproof); influence of early figures such as Jerome, Cassian, and Gregory; founding figures Geert Grote, Florens Radewijns, Gerhart Zerbolt, John Pupper, and Dirk of Herxen; social, political, and legal interactions with civic and ecclesial authorities; the role of literacy and access to vernacular works; schools for boys; the

importance of poverty; and livelihood in textiles and bookmaking.

The influence of the Devout endured in the lives and work of Calvin, Erasmus, and Ignatius Loyola. Above all, the shadow of Thomas of Kempen's *Imitation of Christ* fell far and wide across the Christian world. Even today, select themes of Devout life resonate with contemporary concerns: pushing boundaries and living in tension between church and world, religious and lay, work and prayer, contemplation and action, interior prayer and external ministry; their emphasis on freedom and interiority; their willingness to redress what was perceived as a spiritually lax, superficial society; and their conviction that there was but a single Christian religion under Christ and the gospel.

V.E.'s study should be required reading for specialists in late medieval and early modern European piety and culture. A more attentive editor would have eased the burden of reading overly complex, run-on sentences, and minimized the frequent, seemingly random, parenthetical inclusion of phrases in their original languages.

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SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY IN THE REFORMATION: STUDIES IN THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION AND ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATIONS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY. By Charlotte Methuen. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008. Pp. viii + 128. \$110.

Methuen insightfully probes the different ways in which key Protestant thinkers (primarily Lutheran) related the new astronomical knowledge, generated by the Renaissance, to theology. As M. stresses, they all affirmed that the natural order manifests the glory of the Creator. But while some (e.g., Philip Melancthon) saw the natural order intimately related to the divine and moral orders, others (like Luther) were reluctant and even dismissive of the significance of any such link, because nature had been corrupted by sin. Melancthon forged a critical but scientifically attuned strand of Lutheran