

***Male and Female, Clerk and Lay:
Odd Alliances in the Order of Sempringham during the Late Middle Ages***

By

Katherine Sykes

(Harris Manchester, University of Oxford)

Abstract

Double houses were, and are, communities which house both male and female religious within the same economic, legal and liturgical unit, and have existed from the origins of monasticism in the deserts of Egypt in the late antique period. The double houses of the later middle ages (c.1200–c.1500) were particularly explicit about the symbolic meanings and practical strengths of their union of distinct groups (male and female, religious and lay, literate and illiterate, rich and poor) within a single unit.

This paper examines the legislation of an order of double houses, namely the order of Sempringham, to see what it can tell us about medieval attitudes to gender, status and authority, and to alliances between male and female religious in particular.

Ends