

# ***Ora et Labora:***

## The Scandalous Concept of “Monastic Capitalism” and How the Cistercians Did NOT Make It Happen

**David K. Ma**

When historian Ludo Milis opines that “Often monastic economic decline has been explained by the Church as being the result of moral decadence and not often enough of managerial incompetence,”<sup>1</sup> he has offered an insight to be at once credited and cautioned. Credited, since an ideological determinism often excessive of religious sentiments easily oversimplifies the historical reality; yet cautioned, because the seemingly practical emphasis on “incompetence” doesn’t actually reach beyond the narrow confines of individual character any more than “decadence” would. As we meander through the historical passage cutting across the 12<sup>th</sup> century monastic scenery, the full interplay between the ideological and the contextual, and in particular the socioeconomic conditions, must be acknowledged to highlight its explanatory significance.

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1 Ludo J. R. Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men* (Suffolk: Boydell, 1992), 20.