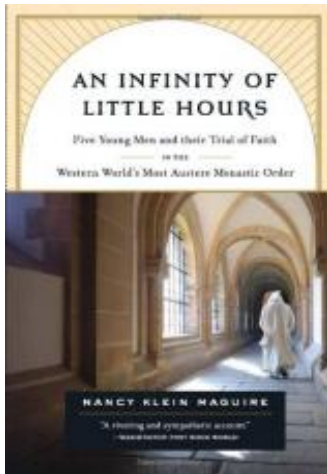


An Infinity of Little Hours

by Nancy Klein Maguire



About the Book

In 1960, five young men arrived at the imposing gates of Parkminster, the largest center of the most rigorous and ascetic monastic order in the Western world: the Carthusians. This is the story of their five-year journey into a society virtually unchanged in its behavior and lifestyle since its foundation in 1084. **An Infinity of Little Hours** is a uniquely intimate portrait of the customs and practices of a monastic order almost entirely unknown until now. It is also a drama of the men's struggle as they avoid the 1960s—the decade of hedonism, music, fashion, and amorality—and enter an entirely different era and a spiritual world of their own making. After five years each must face a choice: to make "solemn profession" and never leave Parkminster; or to turn his back on his life's ambition to find God in solitude. A remarkable investigative work, the book combines first-hand testimony with unique source material to describe the Carthusian life. And in the final chapter, which recounts a reunion forty years after the events described elsewhere in the book, Nancy Klein Maguire reveals which of the five succeeded in their quest, and which did not.

Discussion Guide

1. Were the descriptions of the monks and their lives what you expected? Were the types of people who decided to become monks those that you would expect?
2. What do you think were the novices' motivations for pursuing the monastic life? Were other factors, besides religion, involved?
3. Which people did you think were going to "make it" to solemn profession? Were you surprised by those who were actually professed?

4. The monks, just like the rest of the world, seem not to be without their prejudices. What kind of prejudices do they have? Are they different from those of the outside world? How do you think these prejudices arise?
5. What do you think of Dom Joseph's approach to his novitiate? Do you think that he was a good novice master? What does Maguire seem to think?
6. How do politics and hierarchy affect the character of Charterhouse life? Novices must be "voted in" to be solemnly professed. Do you think this is a fair system?
7. Why do you think that reading (as opposed to discussion) is considered such an important part of a Carthusian monk's life?
8. The Carthusians always resisted intrusions from the outside world, yet they invited Maguire into their world, and recently allowed filmmaker Phillip Gröning to make a documentary (Into Great Silence) about them. Why do you think they have lately opened their doors to outsiders?
9. Could you see yourself entering such a monastery? What do you think you would find the hardest part about being a Carthusian monk?
10. Is there any question you would like to ask these young men, now in their senior years?

Author Bio

Nancy Klein Maguire is the author of numerous publications on the relationship of theatre and politics in the seventeenth century. She frequently reviews books, most recently for the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. She has been a Scholar-in-Residence at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, since 1983.

Critical Praise

"It is fascinating to enter, if only for a few hours, into this way of life, where extreme devotion forms at least a bit of a bulwark against humanity's digressions."

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