

Monasticism

Traditions of Christian Devotion and Discipline



Super Bowl MVP

What type of lifestyle makes great athletes?

Athletes of God



Monasticism

- Monasticism literally the act of "dwelling alone" (Greek *monos*, *monachos*)
- Denotes the mode of life lived in seclusion from the world, under religious vows and subject to a fixed rule, as monks, friars and nuns.
- The object of this is to achieve a life whose ideal is different from and largely at variance with that pursued by the majority of society.
- Method, no matter what its precise details may be, is always self-abnegation or organized asceticism.
- The monastic ideal was foreshadowed in the asceticism of the Gospel and its first followers.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

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1 John 2:15-17

Main Cause

- The main cause which birthed monasticism was simply the desire to fulfill Christ's law literally, to imitate Him in all simplicity, following in His footsteps whose "kingdom is not of this world". So we find monasticism at first instinctive, informal, unorganized, sporadic; the expression of the same force working differently in different places, persons, and circumstances; developing with the natural growth of a plant according to the environment in which it finds itself and the character of the individual listener who heard in his soul the call of "Follow Me".

Kevin Knight, Editor of New Advent

Retrieved from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10459a.htm>

Means to the End

- For a monk or nun, asceticism is not an end in itself. For them, the end of life is to love God.
- Monastic asceticism then means the removal of obstacles to loving God, and what these obstacles are is clear from the nature of love itself.
- Love is the union of wills. If the creature is to love God, he/she can do it in one way only; by sinking their own will in God's, by doing the will of God in all things: "if you love Me keep my commandments".
- No one understands better than the monk or nun the words of the beloved disciple, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn. 15:13).
- For in their case, life has come to mean renunciation. Broadly speaking this renunciation has three great branches: poverty, chastity, and obedience.



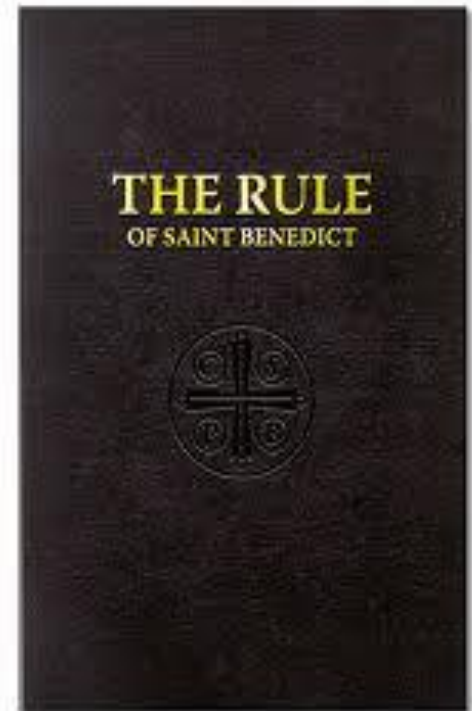
Benedict's Rule



The Monastic Rescue of the Church

- Benedict of Nursia gave the most decisive and beneficial shape to monasticism.
- His Rule provided invaluable gifts to the Christian Church:
 - Regulated a zealous spirit
 - Curbed a practice of asceticism
 - Preserved the centrality of Scripture
 - Recalled prayer to the heart of Christian life
 - Linked exalted religious experience with basic realities of work, study, eating, and sleeping
 - Provided an ideal of monastic life in which reformers found inspiration and encouragement for fifteen hundred years
- It won nearly universal approval as providing the shape for monasticism

Benedict's Significance



- The Rule was significant to monasticism and Christianity, because “it combined the zeal of earlier monastic pioneers with a carefully balanced concern for stability.” (Noll).
- It was famous for codifying vows of obedience, stability, and *conversatio morum* (continual conversation).
- Benedict’s Rule was not a manual for slackers.
- It was stern for theological reasons. For example, on the critical mandate to work: “Idleness is enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods of manual labor as well as for prayerful reading.”
- There is an emphasis on the spiritual realities that monasteries existed to embody (ex. the practice of prayer).
- The rule was not divorced from a life of service.
- The daily activities shaped by Benedict’s rule varied by place, era, personality of the abbot, and other factors.

Women and Monasticism



- Praise for virginity played a role in growth of female monasticism.
- Throughout the Middle Ages, monasticism provided few venues for women to publicly express the Christian faith.
- Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), founder and first abbess of a Benedictine community, renown for mystical visions, remarkable writings on scientific, theological and musical subjects. She corresponded with kings, bishops, and leaders of other monastic institutions.
- Hadewijch (writings from 1220-40), first great poet in Flemish.
- Catherine of Siena (ca. 1347-80), whose ministry included ecclesiastical and papal reform.

Rise of Monasticism





Significant Shifts

- 313 AD Christianitization of the empire begins
- Church of the Latin West changes focus.
- Moves the capital of the empire to Byzantium.
- The emergence of the prophet Muhammad and Islam.
- Persecution and Expansion of the East Syrian Church
- Christianity spreads to the north, south, east and west by monks and nuns of the monastic movement.

Depth of Influence

- Scripture in our native languages (Jerome ca. 342-420)
- Songs of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Gregory ca. 540-604) and Bernard of Clairvaux
- In theology, we are indebted to monks Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-74).
- The enterprise of Christian mission were pioneered by monks Patrick (ca. 390-460), Boniface (680-754), Cyril (826-69) and his brother Methodius (ca. 815-85), and Raymond Lull (ca. 1233-1315).
- Interest in church history in English speaking areas begun by the Venerable Bede (ca. 673-735).
- If we seek to find the goodness of God in creation, we can follow Francis of Assisi (1181/82-1226).
- Protestantism began with the monastic experiences of Martin Luther. Luther, Calvin, and other reformers drew support from Scripture and the writings of monks.
- Monasticism was not a perfect answer to how to live the Christian life. Yet, its impact cannot be underestimated.

- After Christ's commission to his disciples, monasticism is "the most important institutional event" in Church history (Noll).
- The movement's impact for over a millennium (300-1600 AD) strived after that which is "true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable" (Phil.4:8).
- Almost everything that aspired to these high goals of the gospel in the Church, were either done by monks or by those inspired by them.
- The monastic way included men and women who separated from the world and followed a rule of discipline in their Christian devotion to God.
- A superlative of this tradition in the twentieth century is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, founder of the Order of the Missionaries of Charity.

How can the Monastic tradition be a source of unity and renewal today?

- A prophetic witness of the Christian call
- This movement focuses to produce change of heart by a process that involved a simplification of life-styles. Is simplicity better for us today?
- How will service in Christ's name with no less than a concern in missions and learning impact our day?
- Although monasticism may have encouraged salvation by works at times, "moments of monastic renewal were inspired as thoroughly by trust in divine grace and dedication to God's unique holiness" (Noll). How does grace and dedication unite and renew us today?