

“Pray and Work”¹ – Monasticism in the Medieval Church

Medieval Church History – Session Two

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

—Colossians 2:20-23 NKJV

I. Introduction

a. Introductory Remarks

b. Defining Monasticism

i. Root Words

1. *Monos* (Gr. μόνος, MŌ-nōs), “alone”

2. *Zēn* (Gr. ζῆν, ZEEN), “to live”

ii. Definition: “Withdrawal from society into private groups that practice asceticism and other forms of spiritual discipline.”²

iii. Asceticism: The practice of physical self-denial for the purpose of spiritual discipline

II. The Roots of Monasticism

a. Dualistic View of Body and Soul

b. Desire to Escape from Grim Realities of Life

c. Encroaching Paganism of the Barbarians

III. The Rise of Monasticism

a. The Early Monastics and Movements

i. Solitary

1. St. Anthony of Egypt (AD ca. 251-ca. 356)

2. Simon the Stylite (sometimes Simeon Stylites; AD ca. 390-459)

ii. Communal

1. “Cenobitism”

a. *Koinos* (Gr. κοῖνος, KEE-nōs) = “common”

b. *Bios* (Gr. βίος, BEE-ōs) = “life”

2. East: Basil of Cæsarea (AD ca. 330-379)

¹ In Latin, *Ora et labora*, a traditional slogan of the Order of St. Benedict.

² From Millard Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

3. West: Athanasius of Alexandria

b. The Middle Ages

i. Most Important Figure: Benedict of Nursia (AD ca. 480-543)

1. Monte Cassino
2. The Rule of Saint Benedict

ii. Later Important Figure: Saint Francis of Assisi (AD 1181-1226)

1. The Rule of Saint Francis (AD 1223)

IV. The Results of Monasticism

a. The Good

b. The Bad

c. The Ugly



V. Conclusion

Recommended Reading

Bettenson, Henry, and Chris Maunder, eds. *Documents of the Christian Church*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; pp. 122-140.

St. Athanasius. *Life of St. Anthony of Egypt*. Translated by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Pantianos Classics, 1892.

St. Benedict. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*. Edited by Timothy Fry. New York, NY: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998. (A free version can be found here: https://www.solesmes.com/sites/default/files/upload/pdf/rule_of_st_benedict.pdf.)