

# OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

## LECTURE 12 - MONASTICISM AND MENDICANTS TO 1500

We'll start with a prayer from the period to be studied.

Jesus, the very thought of thee  
With sweetness fills my breast;  
But sweeter far thy face to see,  
And in thy presence rest.

Jesus, our only joy be thou,  
As thou our prize wilt be;  
Jesus, be thou our glory now,  
And through eternity.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), (translated)

(for Bernard, see page 11)

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture.

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In preparation, read Cairns, 144-149, 193-4, 217-221; Lion, 82-4 (Benedict), 212-224, 267-275 (C11-C13), 307-314 (overview of 600-1200); Hanks, *Great Christians*, 86-8 (Benedict), 88-93, (Bernard of Clairvaux), 93-7, (Francis of Assisi).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Asceticism and monasticism

Distinguish ‘asceticism’ (disciplined lifestyle within society, which Christians practised from New Testament times, e.g., Paul), from ‘monasticism’, from the Greek *monos* = alone, solitary, apart from other people; a monk originally meant a ‘person who lived alone’, wanting physical separation from society. This became popular in the last quarter of the C3 as a protest against ‘worldliness’ within the Church after the Emperor Constantine effectively merged Church and State, as we saw in Lecture 7.

‘Monasticism’ later came to mean communities which physically separated themselves, as a group, from society. Monasticism is not exclusive to Christianity - it is one of the fundamental features of Buddhism, for example, but this Lecture looks at only Christian monasticism.

It was one of the most alluring movements in Christianity from the late C3 onward, and deeply influenced succeeding generations. It became increasingly popular as ascetically-minded Christians judged that living in society was not conducive to Christian ‘perfection’, based on Jesus teaching as recorded in Matthew 19.21: ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor ... and come, follow me.’ They took that to mean either embarking on a solitary life as a hermit or joining communal life in the desert under monastic rule. However, that was only one reason for becoming a monk.

1.2 Motivation to become a monk was varied, and included:

(a) Matthew 19.21

Some genuinely sought Christian ‘perfection’. When they found that town life no longer provided the ethos to practise such a lifestyle, they moved into the desert.

(b) Wanting to ‘do their own thing’

Some objected to priests controlling the Church, which was becoming increasingly structured, with bishops, elders, deacons and the wanted to ‘do their own thing’ outside the Church. Monks did not at first want priests to join them – monasticism was originally a lay movement – a protest at the institutionalisation of the Church.

(c) Escaping the law or taxes or tensions in relationships

Some had less exalted motives for leaving the towns - escaping the law or taxes, or just wanting a hippy lifestyle. One of basic motives for withdrawal into desert was flight from tensions in relationships – some crisis in human situations.

(d) Substitute for martyrdom

Some sought desert life as a substitute for martyrdom. Before the conversion of Constantine, martyrdom was the ultimate expression of Christian commitment. Martyrs chose death rather than conformity to the Roman way of life. When peace and toleration came in the C4, accompanied by an influx of newcomers, whose faith might be only skin-deep, monks began to replace martyrs as Christian heroes, that is those who chose to die to secular lifestyle.

## 2. THREE MAIN TYPES OF MONASTICISM

### 2.1 Hermits

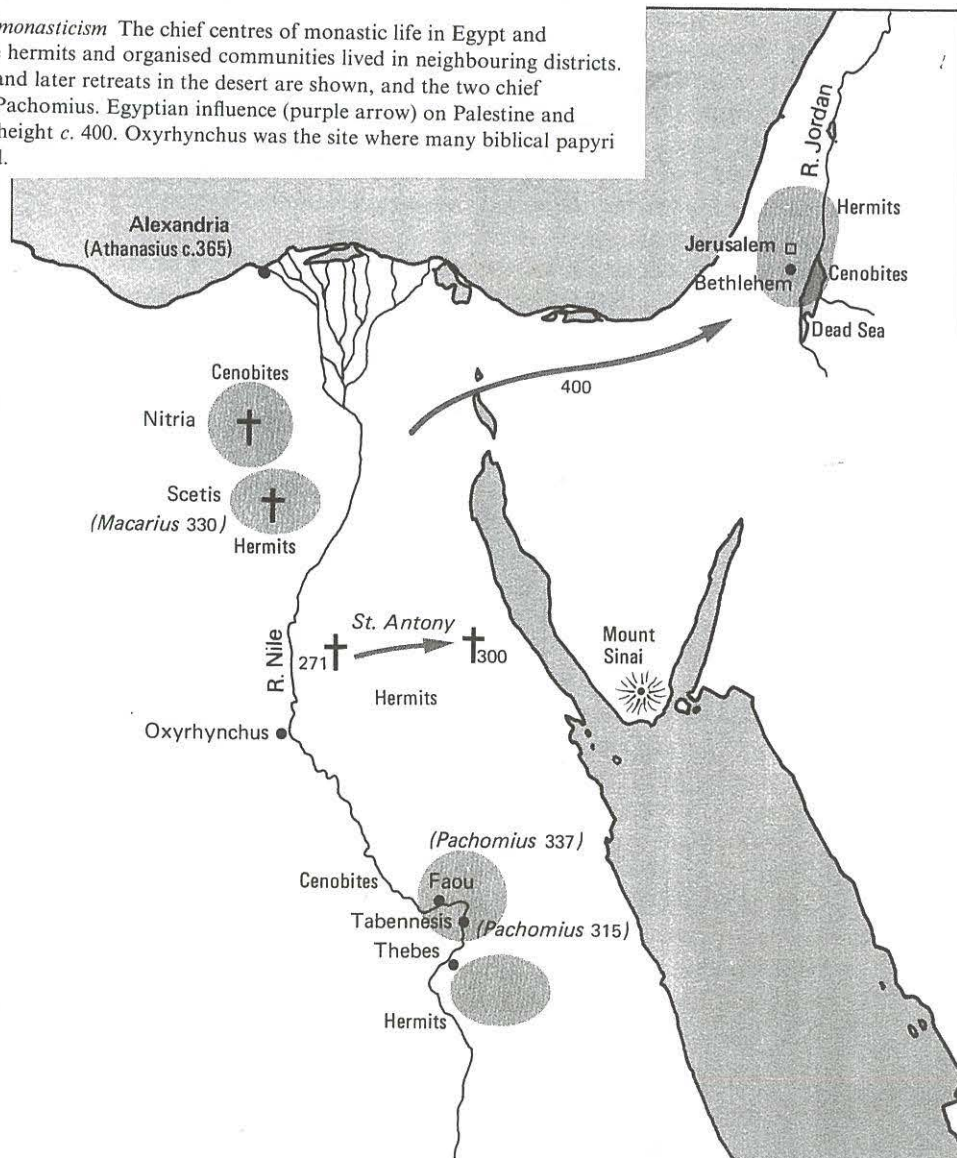
The word 'hermit' comes from the Greek *eremia*, desert. We probably think of monks as living in communities, but the original concept was someone who went into the desert to be alone, away from human society. Even after communes arose, some preferred to live alone as recluses or hermits. This is technically called 'anchorite' monasticism; the word monastery derives from the Greek *monasterion*, originally meaning a hermit's cave but later used both for individual hermit's cell and for a communal cloister.

#### Anthony

The first to hear the call of the desert was an Egyptian called Anthony (251-356). He was born into a rich Christian family, but his parents died while he was in his late teens. One day he heard the gospel being read: 'If you want to be perfect ...' (Matthew 19:21). He withdrew from society about age 19, giving away his property to the poor. He went to live among the tombs of his village, and acquaintances brought him food at intervals. c271 he went alone into the Egyptian desert, to a ruined fort - see his name on the map below - where he fasted, prayed and studied the Scriptures.

Later he went into the mountains, where he lived for twenty years, to return with a glowing divinity within him. For the next ten years, he travelled, promoting asceticism.

*The cradle of monasticism* The chief centres of monastic life in Egypt and Palestine, where hermits and organised communities lived in neighbouring districts. Antony's early and later retreats in the desert are shown, and the two chief foundations of Pachomius. Egyptian influence (purple arrow) on Palestine and Syria was at its height c. 400. Oxyrhynchus was the site where many biblical papyri have been found.



People asked him to ‘give them a word’. The story is told of a young man who asked, ‘Master, have you a word to give to me?’ Anthony quoted the first part of Luke 10:27, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’. The young man went away and came back, ten years later, to say that he felt he had fully accepted that challenge, and had the ‘master’ another ‘word’ for him? Anthony quoted the second part of Luke 10:27, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ The man went away and never came back.

To escape the pressure of people coming to him in this way, Anthony again withdrew into the mountains, but he was soon surrounded by disciples, each living in his own cell, each pursuing his individual battle with ‘the world’.

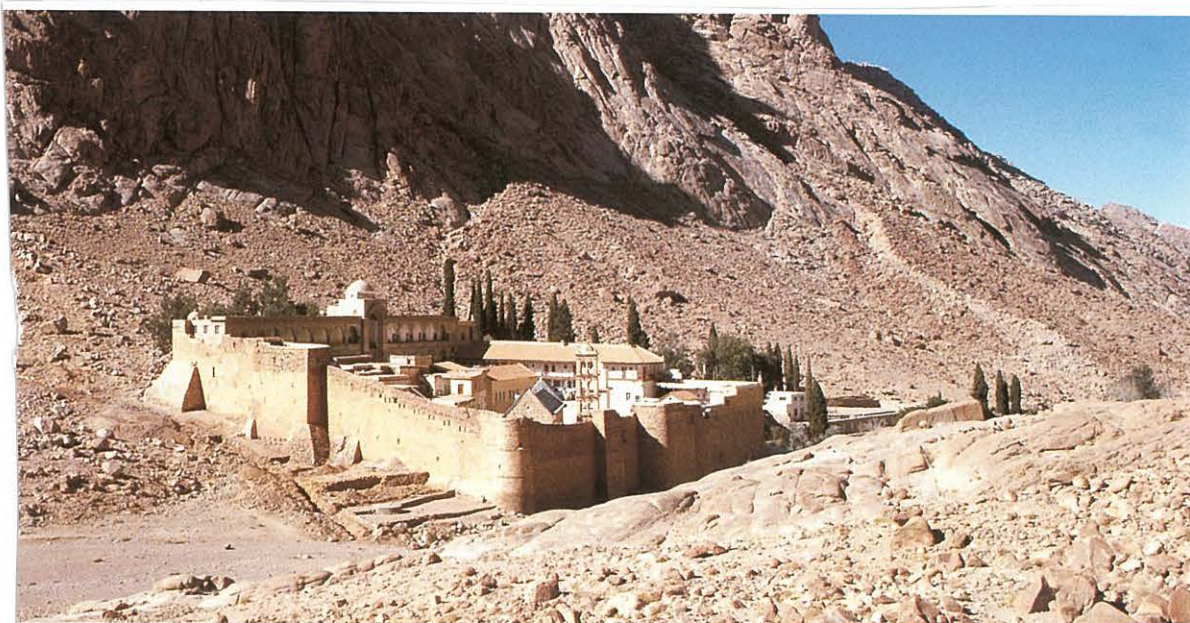
People looked on Anthony as an awesome figure, living on a higher spiritual plane than ordinary Christians. Thousands followed him into the deserts near the Nile delta. After his death at the age of 105 - with all his teeth - Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria - our topic in the last Lecture - wrote his biography and it became a best seller. This played a significant part in the conversion of Augustine in 386, as we saw in the last Lecture.

So that was one type of monasticism – another was:

## 2.2. Communal life under monastic rule (cenobite monasticism) Pachomius (290-346)

Some monks preferred living together in community, which was known as cenobite monasticism (*cenobite*, from two Greek words for ‘common life’). The inspiration behind this was an ex-army man called Pachomius (290-346) - see his name on map, further south at the bend in Nile. Following his conversion to Christianity, he believed in the ascetic life but also that human beings are created for society, so he gathered a group of men around him, organising them along military lines.

This picture is not of a Pachomius community but, as the note below it says, of a later development.



St. Catherine’s monastery is under Mount Sinai, at the place where it was believed Moses saw the burning bush and where he received the Ten Commandments. Founded c557, it is still a working monastery, but monks also provide hospitality for tourists.

Under Pachomius, each settlement had an Abbot (Father) in charge; monks lived three to a cell, but with cells grouped in houses, with a high wall enclosing them. Every house had a trade, as work was seen as having a positive and not merely a penitential purpose. Houses took turns in cooking, caring for the sick and dealing with novices and with the outside world. Work was done in individual cells. Life was hard but not extreme. Excesses of fasting were discouraged. Everyone had one meal a day, though this might be postponed until evening for the particularly zealous. The monks kept their heads concealed within their hoods at mealtimes to avoid talking. Prayers were said twelve times a day and the same number of prayers every night. The Eucharist was administered by visiting clergy twice weekly; Wednesday and Fridays were fast days. Catechetical instruction was given at early morning services by the head of every house. Discipline was strict. Every monk was clothed in uniform dress, a brown habit with a hood, sleeveless tunic, a mantle of goatskin, a girdle and had a stick.

Note that 'monks' were not 'priests' – theirs was a different vocation from priesthood, and the original monks wanted as little as possible to do with the professional priesthood.

Pachomius' movement spread and soon he had 1300 monks living with him and 7000 others throughout monasteries in Egypt. When he died there were nine monasteries and two nunneries.

### 2.3. Variety of life-styles between these extremes

There were various life-styles between these two extremes. One example was 'skete' monasticism, named after the Skete region of Egypt, where groups of 12 monks lived together with a more experienced monk, who acted as their spiritual director. They met together with other sketes for joint services on Sundays and other holy days.

Although most monks by the fifth century were not living in isolation, the term 'monasticism' continued to be used, is still used, for people who belong to a religious order which takes them away from normal society.

### 2.4 Nuns

The monastic movement was not confined to men. Christian women established communities devoted to cultivating spiritual life - they were called 'nuns' and their communities 'nunneries', from the Latin word *nonna*. The head of a nunnery was an 'abbess', the feminine form of abbot. Monastic life allowed women many opportunities that were closed to them in larger society.

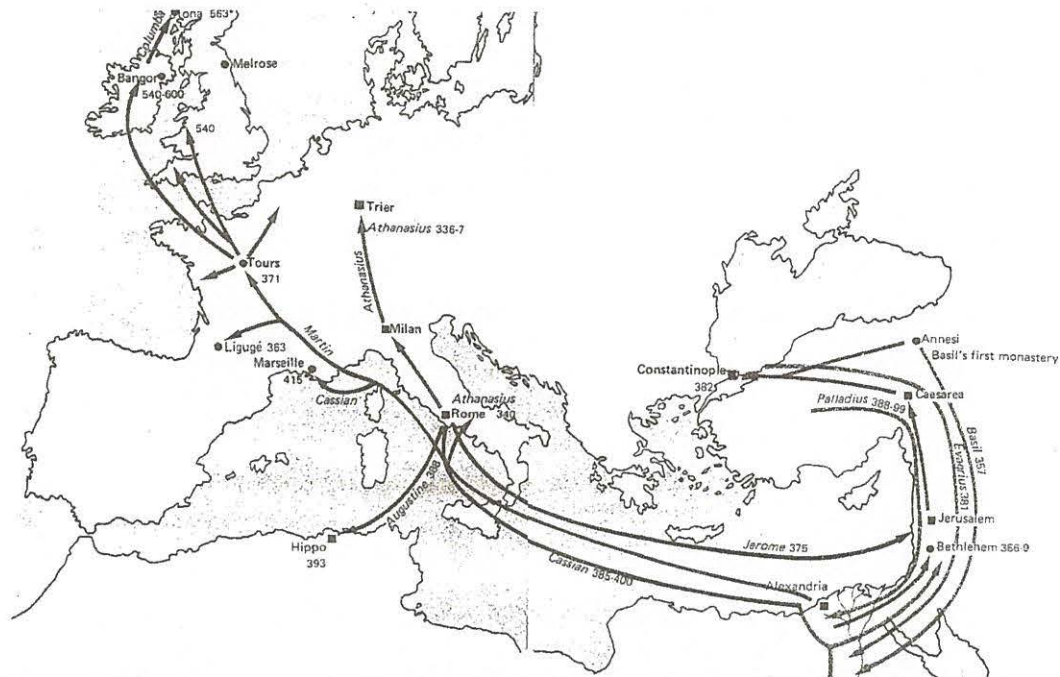
## 3. REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF MONASTICISM

Monasticism spread from Egypt as shown on the map on the next page, and we'll look at half a dozen regional variations.

### Palestine

There was nothing significantly different between monasticism in Egypt and monasticism in Palestine – both had desert areas. Bethlehem had the 'kudos' being the birthplace of Christ, but any Biblical sites attracted both hermits and communities. We saw, in Topic 8, how Jerome made his home in a cave near Bethlehem for last 34 years of his life.

This map shows monasticism spreading northward from Egypt to Palestine and Syria and to (what we call) Turkey and westward to Italy and to (what we call) Western Europe. Some of the characteristics of Eastern monasticism are mentioned below and on page 7. Western monasticism developed differently, as described in section 4, on page 8.



### Syria

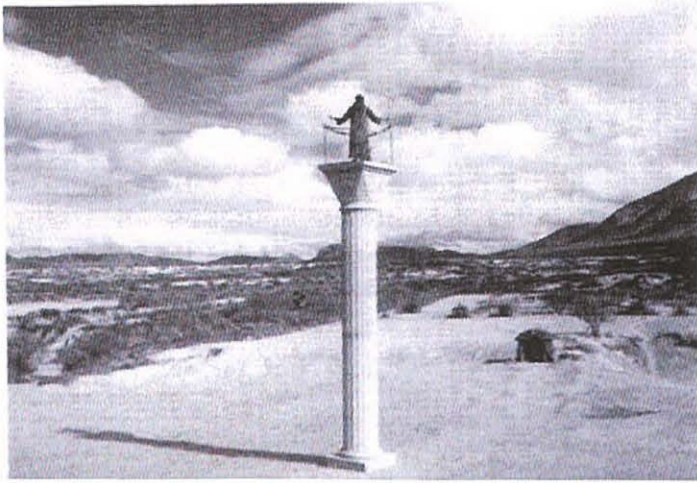
Syria had had some distinctive features, one of which was Pillar ascetics. These were hermits who lived on the top of a column or pillar - Greek word *stylos* = 'pillar', hence 'stylite'. The first and most famous was Simeon the Stylite (c390 - 459). The son of a shepherd, he began his monastic career as a teenager in Antioch, then he left his monastery to live in a mountain cell. He then moved to the top of a mountain near Aleppo in 423, where for thirty six years he lived on pillars, progressively moving to higher and higher ones, finally living on platform only 4 metres square on top of pillar about 18 metres high (reconstruction on the next page). Crowds came to watch him. He engaged in continuous prayer, accompanied by rhythmical falling on his knees, and bowing his forehead to the platform. A visitor counted 1,244 obeisances before he gave up counting. An enormous font at the side of the column was used for baptising Bedouin who had come to watch and were converted to Christianity, so his method had considerable evangelistic impact. After his death, the column was enclosed in a huge *martyrion* (shrine / church designating place of witness), and a modern picture of the remains of the *martyrion* is also on the next page. (Whether the shrine survived the civil war in 2016, which devastated Aleppo, is not known.) Others followed his example of living on pillars, and the practice continued until the tenth century.

### Cappadocia

This was in the east of modern Turkey – see the name Basil at the top right of the map; he largely shaped Cappadocian monasticism. While Egyptian and Syrian monks tended to cut themselves off from society, Basil (who had been to Egypt, see the arrow) discouraged Cappadocian monks from living alone; he preferred them to live together in communities and to have links with the surrounding culture; he organized them into service and social life. His Rules are still influential in Eastern Orthodox monasticism today.

### Constantinople

Alexander, a former Roman army officer, built a monastery outside Constantinople c400 to fulfill Paul's exhortation to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17). Known as 'the sleepless ones', they divided into six choirs, rotating throughout day and night, every new choir relieving the one before, creating uninterrupted prayer and worship, twenty-four hours daily.



A reconstruction of the column near Aleppo in Syria, where Simeon, the first and the most famous stylite, lived for many years on the small platform on the top of the column. All that remains of the column today is its base, preserved amid the ruins of a huge *martyrion* (shrine / church) which was erected over it in his honour after his death.



### Etheopia

Etheopia was one of the first nations to accept Christianity, officially converting to it in 341. Ethiopian monasticism has continued to flourish despite wars and persecutions. Ancient and inaccessible monasteries are still occupied to this day throughout the Christian regions of the country.

### Armenia

Armenia was another country to become a Christian country at an early date. Monks and nuns there continued the pattern of life which they admired from the time of Anthony.

### Mesopotamia

Monasticism was very popular here and originally all monks and nuns were hermits and then, later, monastic communities thrived.

So far, we have looked only at the Eastern half of the Church – the Greek-speaking half. We'll turn now to:

## 4. WESTERN MONASTICISM FROM 800 (Lion, 216-224, 267-271, 307-315)

### 4.1 Distinctives of Western monasteries

Monasteries in the West were different from monasteries in the East in two respects. First, monks lived not only in groups, but the groups lived in substantial buildings. It was all very well to live in the open in the deserts of Egypt and Syria, but it would be difficult to concentrate on your devotions without shelter in a Northern European winter – so they built solid and substantial monasteries in the West. There is a reconstruction of one on the next page - we'll look at the details in a moment.

Secondly, Western monasticism meant not just withdrawing from the world to cultivate an ascetic life, but also to cultivate the mind through the study of literature. Western monasteries accumulated huge libraries, for study and meditative reading, so they attracted converts from the aristocracy.

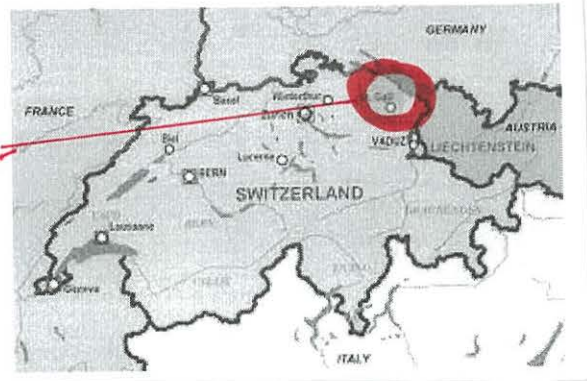
TOPIC. Before we go further, we need to think about our Topic, because BENEDICT (480-c540) AND HIS 'RULE' became the model for Western Monasticism. He was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, the notes about him are printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

Taking up the story – by 800, the Rule of Benedict was universal in the West, replacing Celtic and Italian and all other Western forms of Monasticism. However, Benedict's ideals were hard to achieve, and harder still to maintain. By the C10, most Western monasteries largely ignored his 'Rule'. Reform originated with monastery of Cluny, in Burgundy in SE France, founded in 909, which created a network of Cluniac monasteries across France and Germany. This will be taken up on page 10, but before we look at it, glance at an artist's reconstruction (on the next page) of a typical Western monastery; it started as a community of Benedictine monks.



An artist's reconstruction of the medieval monastery at Saint Gall, in present-day Switzerland, c820, an outstanding example of a large Benedictine monastery.

In 612, an Irish monk, Gallus, came to live in the remote valley of Steinach, in present-day Switzerland, as a hermit. In 747, a community of Benedictine monks founded a monastery in the area made famous by St Gall and called it 'The Abbey of St. Gall.' About 954 the monastery was surrounded by walls, as a protection against invaders, and a town, now the city of St Gallen, grew up around it.

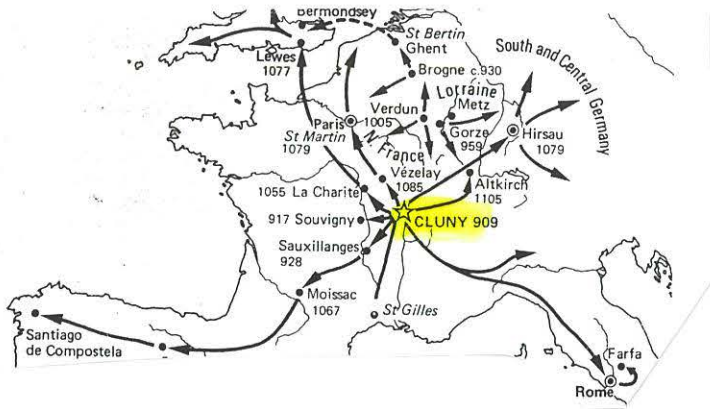


#### Key to sketch

1. Church
2. Dormitory
3. Refectory
4. Stables
5. Kitchen
6. Bakery
7. Workshops
8. Guesthouse



4.2 The Cluniac reform movement (Cairns, 193-4; Lion, 309-10)



The site for the monastery of Cluny was well chosen, because it lay on one of pilgrim routes to Rome. Founded in 909, it was led by a series of great abbots, who restored vigour in Western monasteries, and a network of Cluniac monasteries spread across France and Germany. Within 200 years, there were a thousand Cluniac monasteries.

What was distinctive about Cluny? These monks made worship their main, almost their only, business, not agriculture, not learning, not evangelism, they devoted almost the whole day to services of worship, so they decorated their churches inside the monastery magnificently, to make their worship as glorious an experience as possible.

However, over the years, as happened so often in the history of Monasticism, Cluniac monasteries got rich and lax and lost their vitality. Nearly two hundred years after Cluny was founded, some thought that Cluny itself needed reform and founded a new monastery at Cistercium (also known as Cîteaux), near Dijon in modern France in 1098.

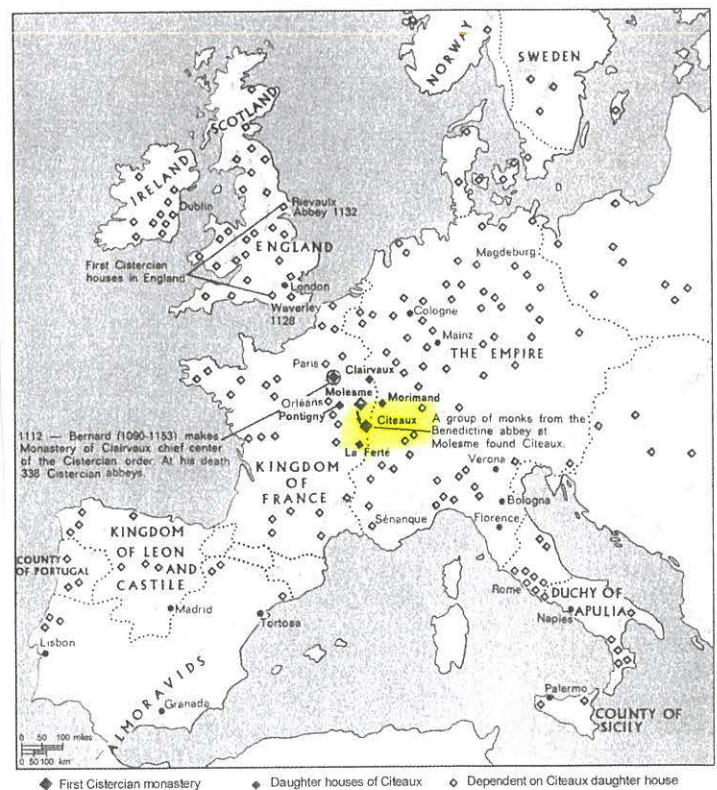
4.3 The Cistercian reform movement (Cairns, 217-8; Lion, 267-71; Vos, 71)

They revived Benedictine life. Their church services were simple and their buildings were plain, with none of the decorations of Cluniac churches. They built their monasteries in remote and desolate places, where the brothers could worship and work and practice mutual aid without interference. Because of their high ideals, Cistercians were highly regarded by people round about, and they soon became a major force for reform.

They were allowed seven hours of sleep in the winter and six in the summer. Gathering for communal prayer periodically, they spent the rest of the day in manual work, farming, cooking, weaving, woodworking, meditation and reading. They ate vegetables and cheese, once a day in summer and twice a day in winter, and even in the coldest regions, a fire was allowed only on Christmas Day.

This strict rule met with a phenomenal success, within a hundred years there were 530 Cistercian monasteries and nunneries, and they continued to grow rapidly.

CISTERCIAN REFORM MOVEMENT 12TH CENTURY



**Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 - 1153)**  
(Hanks, *70 Great*, 88-93; Lane, 92-4)

The Cistercians were fortunate when a remarkable man of noble birth, called Bernard, came to Citeaux, aged 22, and asked to become a monk. So many were asking for admission to the movement at Citeaux that three years after Bernard was accepted he was deputed to lead 12 other monks to found a new monastery in a desolate and forbidding wasteland called 'Valley of the Wormwood'. Ever the optimist, Bernard changed its name to 'Valley of Light' which in French is 'Clairvaux'.

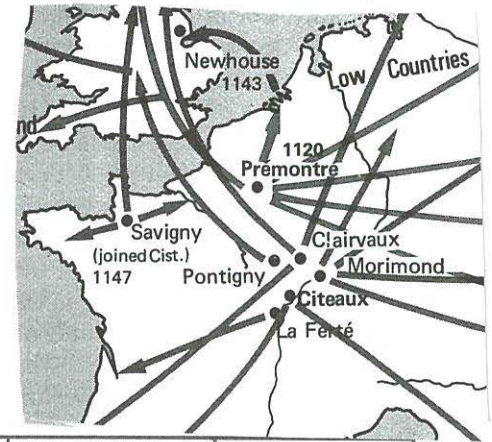


Bernard of Clairvaux

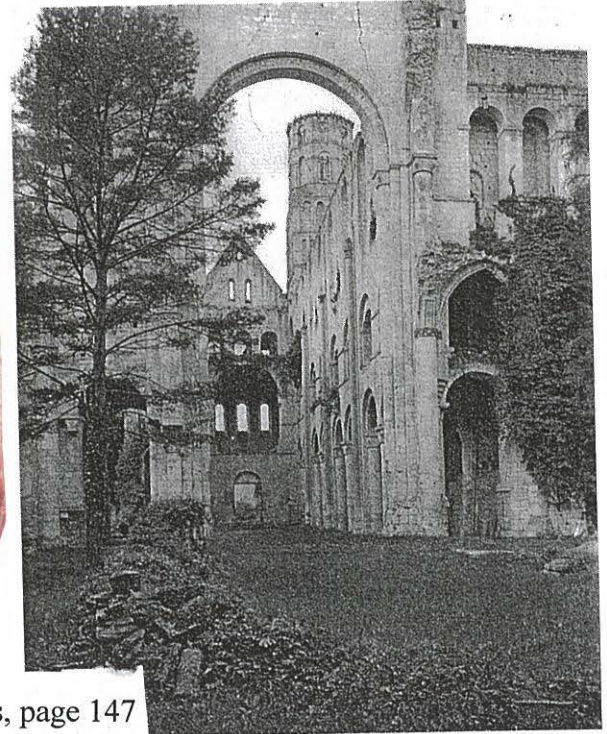
Bernard was a man of many talents. He wrote devotional hymns, including some we sing today: 'Jesus, the very thought of thee', 'Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts', 'O sacred head, sore wounded.'

He was also a great preacher, nicknamed 'The Honey-flowing Teacher' because of the power of his preaching. When he preached outside the monastery, 'Mothers hid their sons and wives their husbands, because many who heard him followed him into monastic life.' Bernard founded sixty-five new monasteries.

Here is a précis of the four main Western Monastic Orders – we've not mentioned the Augustians yet; different Orders were a feature of Western Monasticism only. All Eastern monks lived according to the guidelines drawn up by Basil of Caesarea in the C4. The Benedictines and Augustinians were known as 'black monks', because they dyed the cloth from which they made their 'habits' (cloaks) black, while the Cistercians used undyed wool, and so were known as 'white monks'.



ORDER	FOUNDATION	IMPORTANT FEATURES	LEADING FIGURES	CHIEF BRITISH HOUSES
BENEDICTINES (or Black Monks)	* Benedict of Nursia (c480-550) Monte Cassino, Italy 529	* First of monastic orders * Drew up own rules: -combined practical living in community with spirituality; -self-sufficient family unit under care of Abbot * Main activity: Opus Dei - praise and prayer to God * Prosperity led to decline in religious fervour	* Pope Gregory the Great * Augustine of Canterbury * Venerable Bede * Boniface	Canterbury Dunfermline Gloucester Westminster Winchester
CLUNIACS	* Williams the Pious, Duke of Aquitaine Cluny, France, 910	* Under direct control of Pope * A return to Rule of Benedict * Origin of 10th century revival of Church * Emphasis on liturgy and elaborate ceremonies * Influence declined 12th century	* Hugh of Cluny * Pope Gregory VII * Pope Urban II	Few in number include: Lewes, Bermondsey, Castle Acre, Pontefract
CISTERCIANS (or White Monks)	* Stephen Harding (d 1134) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) Cîteaux, France, 1098	* Austere form of Benedictine Rule * Monks were 'soldiers of Christ', disciplined and drilled * Monasteries built in remote places - each one autonomous	* Ailred of Rievaulx * Pope Eugenius III * Pope Benedict XII	Beaulieu, Fountains, Kirkstall, Melrose, Tintern, Waverley
AUGUSTINIANS (or Black Monks)	* Arose out of communities of clerics, in North Italy and South France in the 11th century	* Lived a common life of poverty, celibacy and obedience * Adopted Rule of Augustine of Canterbury * Spread Western Europe 12th century over 140 houses in England * Known in England as Austin Canons	* Dominic de Guzman * Thomas à Kempis * Martin Luther	Carlisle Cirencester Colchester Holyrood, Oxford St Andrews Waltham



Cairns, page 147

**Ruins of a Benedictine abbey, founded in 654 by Saint Philibert.**  
This church was built in 1040–67 in Jumieges, France.

### Abbey, Convent, Monastery, Nunnery, Priory

Prominent in mediaeval Church life were communities of religious people, living together in buildings secluded from the world, devoted to religious life. Many of the above words were used interchangeably, so here is a brief (and not too exact) guide to them.

Abbey was a building for either sex (but not both), presided over by an abbot (men) or an abbess (women), or, sometimes, the church building attached to a monastery or nunnery. Nowadays it may refer to an establishment which has long ceased to function as an abbey, in some cases for centuries, for example Westminster Abbey.

Convent was also a building for either sex (but not both), and was often used as an alternative for the words 'monastery' or 'nunnery'. Nowadays it almost invariably refers to a community of women.

Monastery was for monks (men) only and is often used inter-changeably with abbey or convent. Technically, a monastery was a community of monks and a convent was a community of mendicants, but the latter was sometimes also called a Friary.

Nunnery was a building in which nuns (women only) lived as a community.

Priory was a building which ranked below an abbey, and, like an abbey, was for either sex (but not both) and was presided over by a prior (men) or a prioress (women). Nowadays it almost invariably refers to a community of men.

## 5. MENDICANTS (Cairns, 219-221; Lion, 269-270)

### 5.1 Introduction

The late twelfth century saw a new form of full-time Christian service, known as 'mendicant', because its members begged for their living (Latin, *mendicare* = to beg) or as 'friars' (*fratres* = brothers). Until then, there had been two forms of general Christian service, (1) priests, who lived among their people in parishes, pastors of local congregations, and (2) monks, who lived in monasteries, often out in the countryside. However, as more towns and cities sprung up in the late C12, the parish priests couldn't cope – they were poorly educated and they were overwhelmed by the growth of the population. Who could teach the people and do social work in the towns and cities? Not the monks – they had their own agenda, based on their monasteries. To meet this challenge, people formed groups to live together in houses in the community; they were under a strict rule, like monks, taking the same vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but they went about as preachers and teachers and social workers among the people.

Although Francis (below) intended members of his Order to support themselves by work rather than begging, growth in numbers led to increasing reliance upon the latter, from which arose name the 'Mendicants'. This was because, unlike monks, they had no farmland to provide food, and no endowments to buy things, so they supported themselves by asking the community, among whom they lived, for donations or practical support. This was not random. Each house agreed with its neighbouring houses where each could canvass, and the brothers, generally two by two, made regular visits to patrons to ask for alms (support).

This started because they were challenged by the contrast between the Church's wealth and the poverty of the New Testament Church, and the Church's weakness (now) in meeting the pastoral needs of people. They determined to live in 'apostolic poverty', applying the simple teachings of Jesus to their lives. Mendicant Orders renounced all common as well as all individual possessions. They preached in parishes and town squares, taught in schools, and eventually dominated universities. They exercised immense influence on popular religion, social conditions and learning.

### 5.2 Founders of the best-known Mendicants / Friars: (Cairns, 219-21; Lion, 271-275) (apart from Friar Tuck in Robin Hood's adventures in Sherwood Forest.)

'Franciscans', named after St Francis (1181-1226) (Hanks, *Great Christians*, 93-97; Lane, 97-9)  
'Dominicans', named after St Dominic (1170-1221)

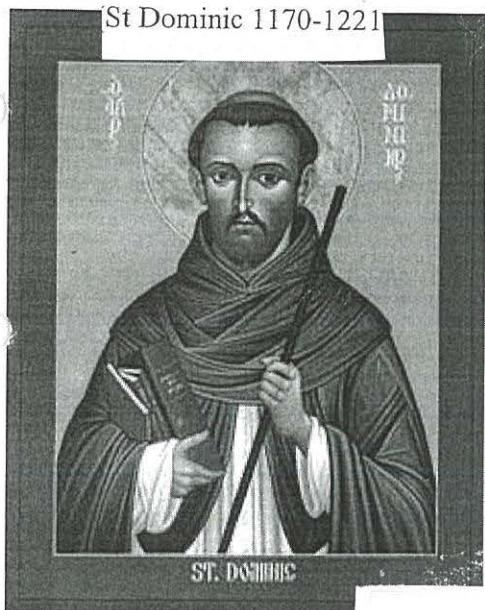
ORDER	FOUNDATION	IMPORTANT FEATURES	LEADING FIGURES	CHIEF BRITISH HOUSES
DOMINICANS (or Black Friars)	* Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) Spain, 1216	* An order of friars - travelling preachers who also cared for the sick * Practised poverty and lived by begging * Attracted intellectuals - taught in schools, universities * Preached against heresies * Conducted Inquisition, 1232	* Thomas Aquinas * Albertus Magnus * Johannes Eckhart * Savonarola	Over 70 houses but few material remains
FRANCISCANS (or Friars Minor)	* Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) Italy, 1209	* Laid down own Rule - life of simplicity and poverty following the Lord's example * Churches simple and designed for preaching * Friars went out among people, tending the sick and preaching * Received stigmata in a vision 1224	* Bonaventura * William of Ockham * Roger Bacon	About 50 houses, but few remains: Canterbury Chichester King Lynn Kirkcudbright Lincoln
JESUITS (or Company of Jesus)	* Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) Spain, 1534	* Two aims - to encourage reform within the Church of Rome; - to undertake mission work * Members regarded as 'soldiers' devoted to the Pope's service * Established successful missions from South America to the Far East * Implicated in plot to assassinate Queen Elizabeth I, and accused of interference in secular affairs of state * Suppressed by Pope, 1773, restored 1814	* Francis Xavier * Robert de Nobili	

To look, even briefly, at the biographies of Francis and Dominic at this point in the lecture would leave no time to consider the Significance of Monasticism and then to Evaluate it. The two biographies are therefore appended to the Lecture, after the Topic, and of course they are also widely available in books or on the Internet.

Francis established a Second Order, for women only, known as the 'Poor Clares' – see the picture below. Then, in 1221, a Third Order, for men and women who could not leave their secular life because of family or business commitments, but who accepted Francis' ideals, lived simply and faithfully, and were generous in gifts to Church and service of needy.

As in the caption for the bottom-left picture below, the Franciscans dyed their cloaks grey – leading to their being known as Grey Friars; for example, Greyfriars Church off George IV Bridge in Edinburgh and the landmark statue known as Greyfriars' Bobby.

St Dominic 1170-1221



St Francis 1181-1226

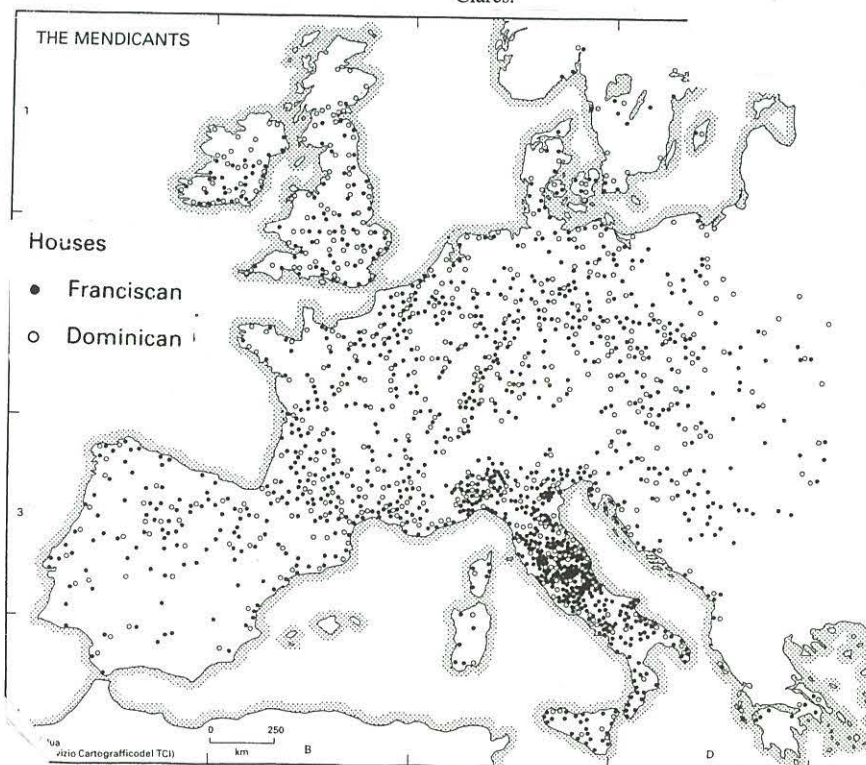


Cairns, page 219



St. Clare of Assisi. A disciple of St. Francis, she was allowed at age eighteen to establish an order for women called the Order of Poor Clares.

Franciscans were called Minorites from the designation *Fratres Minores*, and in England they were popularly called Grey Friars from the color of their dress.



### 5.3 Work of mendicants

#### Teaching

When universities were established, both Orders worked among youth and did much to keep Western Europe loyal to Catholic faith. Both had Second Order, for women, and Third Order, for men and women in ordinary life who accepted their ideals and lived in simplicity.

#### Mission

Both Orders did missionary work. Dominicans were soon at work in what is now south Russia, and both evangelised in Middle and Far East.

#### Social work

Friars tended lepers and sick, which stimulated study of medicine within their Orders. In medieval plagues, they gained especial honour for their work among sick and dying.

Before we leave the Mendicants, a humorous story about the difference between them and Monks. Until recently, there was a monastery of Cistercian monks at Nunraw, near Haddington in East Lothian, where anyone could visit or stay for a few days of retreat. I was in a group being shown round and when we came to the kitchen, one of the monks was preparing fish and chips for supper. One of our group said jokingly, 'you must be a Friar'. He was horrified and began to explain, earnestly, the difference between Friars and Monks, and then he realised it was a joke and said, with a laugh, 'No, I'll never be a Friar but I am a Chip-monk.'

## 6. SIGNIFICANCE OF MONASTICISM

### 6.1 Monks as guardians of knowledge

In Western monasticism, withdrawing from the world to cultivate an ascetic life included cultivating the mind through the study of literature. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, monasteries were guardians of culture and civilisation, vital centres of education. Monasteries saved not only Christianity but Western civilization. Examples of their work are illustrated on the next page.

### 6.2 Monks as evangelists

Monks were a great missionary force; free from the ties of marriage and family and disciplined to live in poverty, they took the Christian faith to pagan lands, planting and watering it there.

### 6.3 Monks as educators

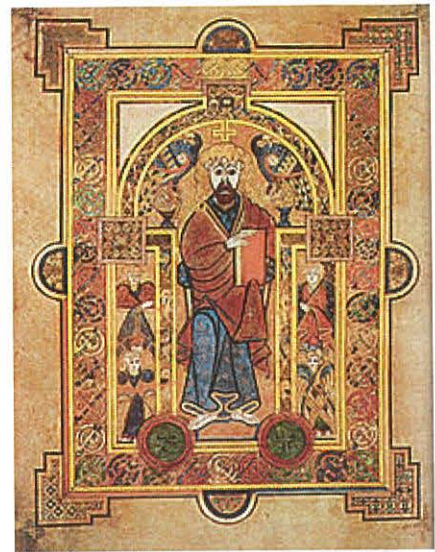
The barbarians who swarmed across the northern frontier of the Roman Empire, that is across the Danube and the Rhine, at the beginning of what we call the Dark Ages, were not only pagan in their religion but many were uneducated, almost uncivilised. So the Church now had a double challenge - first to Christianise and secondly to educate their new neighbours - and also the tribes still living outside the former Roman Empire,

(continued on page 17)

Monks copied precious manuscripts, which were preserved for posterity. Best example is Book of Kells, illuminated manuscript of Four Gospels in Latin, done about 800 by Irish monks, probably living on Iona in Scotland. After a Viking raid, it was moved to Abbey of Kells in Ireland, and is now on permanent loan to Trinity College, Dublin.. Monks also wrote historical records, which are primary sources of information about the history of the period.



The Book of Kells, (folio 292r), c800, showing the lavishly decorated text that opens the Gospel of John



The Book of Kells Folio 32v shows Christ enthroned.





The Church, largely through the efforts of the monks, met the challenge, and in the 500 years following the barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire, that is by the year 1000, nearly all the nations of Europe were not only nominally Christian, as we'll see in the next Lecture, 13, but also better educated. Once established in an area, monastery schools provided education for those nearby who wished to learn.

#### 6.4 Monks as model farmers

The local monastery often served as the medieval equivalent of a modern experimental farm in demonstrating better methods of agriculture. The monks cleared the forests, drained the marshes, made roads, and improved seeds and breeds of livestock. Nearby farmers often emulated the better techniques that they saw the monks using.

#### 6.5 Monks' social work

Monasteries provided a refuge for all sorts of people in need of help. Monks who were not out evangelising elsewhere make themselves available, in their monastery, where sick would usually find loving care, weary travellers could be sure of food and a bed in the hospice, and those who were tired of the worldliness of their day could find a refuge for their souls.

#### 6.6 The decline of Western monasticism from 1300 (Lion, 315)

In the West, monasticism gradually, from c1300, became less appealing. There were still plenty of monasteries, old and new, but three things (in no particular order) led to their decline.

- (a) Many monks now ran their monasteries like large estates, respected more for their agricultural skills than for their spiritual life. Because they had turned remote wasteland into productive agricultural land, their farming, especially sheep-farming, made them wealthy. They gave up manual work and left this to lay people, whom they employed as hired labour and who lived in separate buildings. Spoiled by worldly success, they lost their spiritual vitality.
- (b) Many of the services, which monasteries had provided to the community, were now being done more effectively by Mendicants (section 5, above).
- (c) Because of more peaceful times, libraries could be kept in public places without fear of being destroyed by vandals, so more people sent their sons to the local bishop, in the nearest city, for education. This will be taken up in Lecture 16.

There were some returns to the Rule of Benedict, but monks no longer had the respect they had enjoyed for seven hundred years.

### 7. EVALUATION OF MONASTICISM

How do we as evangelical Protestants assess monasticism? First, two comments, at (a) and (b), about all forms of monasticism and mendicants.

- (a) ? Salvation by works. The emphasis on what the monks did encouraged many to believe that their salvation was being achieved by their works – many, indeed, went into monastic life in the hope of saving their souls by their works.

(b) Protestants believe that life in ordinary society and marriage are gifts of God to be highly prized, and neither of these were permitted to monks and nuns. Their lives were essentially unnatural, abandoning the ordinary relationships of life, shunning marriage and all that a Christian home signifies. To many, that is not the Biblical view of life.

The other three concerns, at (c), (d) and (e) below, apply to those who entered self-sufficient communities, with the fields and orchards walled for privacy, and who had little or no contact with the outside world.

(c) Holiness of character is internal, not environmental.

Monasticism was based on the belief that holiness could be achieved by physical separation from the world, but monks and nuns took their human nature with them into the monastery, and there are many accounts of jealousy, selfish ambition, even treachery.

(d) Two-tier Christianity.

The Church taught that monks and nuns lived on a higher plane and ordinary Christians lived on a lower plain. There was even a distinction between monks and nuns on the one hand, who were known as 'religious priests', and parish priests on the other hand, who were known as 'secular' priests, because they lived in the world.

You may remember that the seeds of this were sown away back in the year 200, by the converted lawyer at Carthage, Tertullian, who introduced, for the first time, the concept of the Higher Will of God and his Lower Will (Lecture 5). The ordinary Christian just 'got by' in daily living, but if one wished to be a 'higher' Christian, one had to adopt a particularly ascetic lifestyle; over the following centuries, this was defined as becoming a monk or a nun.

Ordinary Christians could never rise above the 'lower-level' of Christian living. They were to learn the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, confess that their sins to a priest and observe the Lord's Supper – that was it.

To an evangelical's way of thinking, Christian living recognises and encourages spirituality, but not based on your location. This is a huge subject, and not to be explored here, but is there not one aim in life for all Christians, be they in full-time Christian service or laypeople?

(e) A world in need

Is it 'Christian', to use the word in its widest sense, to turn away from the world's practical needs and challenges, to bury oneself in a life of prayer and contemplation? Jesus certainly encouraged prayer and meditation, but also selfless Christian service. His High Priestly prayer in John 17:15 was: 'I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil'. We need Christianity which penetrates and heals a world in need, not that a Christianity which withdraws from it.

However, in seeing (from our perspective) problems that monasticism could lead to, we should not underrate the immense service monks rendered in the spread and development of Christianity and civilization in a difficult period of European history.

## OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

## TOPIC FOR LECTURE 12 – BENEDICT AND HIS RULE

Please tell us about Benedict, about how he became a monk, about life in one of his monasteries, what was distinctive about his 'Rule', its influence on Western Christianity, and anything else you find of interest.

Cairns, 147: Lion, 218-221; Hanks, *Great Christians*, 86-88; Lane, 82-84

Those who watch or read the *Brother Cadfael Mysteries* by Ellis Peters will be familiar with Benedictines.

The timetable for the Benedictine monks' day is set out below and some excerpts from Benedict's Rule are overleaf.

Timetable: known as *Opus Dei* (Latin for 'the work of God' or 'the divine office'), based on: 'Seven times a day I praise you' (Ps.119:164), and 'at midnight I rise to praise you' (Ps. 119:62).

Name	Meaning	Time
Matins	Morning	midnight
Lauds	Praise	dawn
Prime	First	6 am
Terce	Third	9 am
Sext	Sixth	12 noon
None	Ninth	3 pm
Vespers	Evening	dusk
Compline	Completion	bedtime



**BENEDICT PREACHES TO HIS DISCIPLES**  
Benedict's rule, composed in Latin, is simple and practical, with sensible admonitions and advice. Basil's rule was written in Greek and guided those who followed it to a different, more mystical development of monasticism.



## LEGACY OF SIMPLICITY

Still a monastery today, Monte Cassino was founded by Benedict of Nursia in 529 and became the principal monastery of the Benedictine order. Benedict and his sister, Scholastica, are buried in the crypt underneath the church.

Benedict of Nursia (480 - 547)



Sample paragraphs from Rule of Benedict:

Once you have entered a monastery, you must stay there until you die.

All monks must take turns working in the kitchens, and waiting at table.

Monks must remain busy, either with manual work, or in study and prayer.

Monks must remain silent, unless they have to speak.

Every monk must take a vow of chastity.

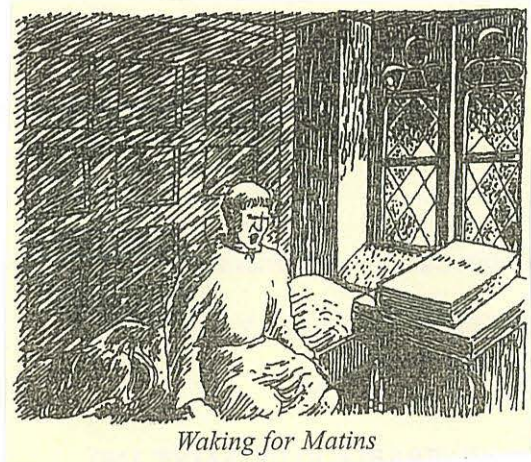
No one should own anything.

Monks must pray together seven times a day.

At every meal, there must be a reading from the Bible.

Great care must be taken of those who are sick.

Rule 22. Each monk shall sleep in a separate bed. In arranging the dormitory, the abbot shall take account of seniority and spiritual progress. If possible, everyone shall sleep in the same room. But if their numbers do not permit, then they shall sleep by tens or twenties, with their seniors among them to take care of them. A lamp shall burn in the room throughout the night.



They shall sleep in their habits, and girt with their girdles or cords: not with knives at their side, or they might hurt them selves in their sleep. Thus they will be ready to rise the instant the bell rings and hurry to be first at the divine office, yet with all gravity and composure. The younger brothers shall not have their beds near each other, but split up among the seniors. As they rise for the office, they shall softly exhort each other, to take away the excuses of those who are sleepy.

Rule 48. Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore the brothers must spend a fixed part of their time in sacred reading, and another fixed part in manual labour. From Easter to September 14th they shall go out and work at any necessary task, from 7 a.m. until 10 a.m. or thereabouts; from 10 a.m. until about noon, they shall employ their time in reading. After dinner at noon, they may rest on their beds in silence; if anyone would rather read a book, he may, provided he does not disturb others. The hour of None is to be said about 3 p.m. and afterwards they shall return to their work until Vespers.

## Appendix: Biographies of Francis and Dominic

Francis (Hanks, *Great Christians*, 93-97; Lane, 97-9)

Francis was born in Assisi in Tuscany in northern Italy in 1181, the son of a wealthy textile merchant. He was not christened 'Francis', but Giovanni (John), but his mother was French and his father travelled often to France for trade, so when young John began to sing French songs, his friends started to call him 'Francesco' (Francis) and the nickname stuck.

As Francis grew up, his father allowed him enough money to have a horse to ride, and to share fun and adventure with young nobles of the district. He received the usual education for his time and enjoyed a carefree life. He joined the army but had to resign through illness.

Francis' thoughts then turned to serious reflections. In 1205 he made a pilgrimage to Rome, after which he had a vision in which God told him to rebuild the Church of St. Damian near Assisi. He sold his horse and some cloth (which he had stolen from his father and so caused a family row), and gave the money to the priest to rebuild the church.

Then in church he heard read, and took to heart, Jesus' commission to his disciples in Matthew 10:7-11: To go throughout the countryside and 'As you go, preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts: take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave."

He took this literally. He gave up all his possessions, renounced his inheritance, and attached himself to an old priest and lived just outside his native town, in a life of prayer and poverty. When his friends said: 'Francis, are you going to take a wife?' he answered: 'I will marry a nobler and a fairer bride than ever you saw, Lady Poverty.' Gradually he collected a band of followers to lead the same life. He made destitution sound glamorous by calling it Lady Poverty. On a pilgrimage to Rome, he changed clothes with beggar, to see what a day in the life of the poor was like. He began helping lepers.

In 1209, Francis wrote a Rule for his group of followers (remember Benedict's Rule for monastic living), to govern their life together. They renounced ownership of all property, and were spiritually married to "Lady Poverty", and, based on the Matthew passage just quoted, 'for the worker is worth his keep', they begged for their food.

### Franciscan Order

In 1210, Francis and eleven companions travelled to Rome to ask Pope Innocent III to give the new movement his backing. After some hesitation - the Pope feared that their rule of absolute poverty might be too strict - Innocent recognized them as a new Order. It meant that the Franciscans remained within the Catholic Church, and were not forced out as other reforming groups had been - we'll come to that in Lecture 18.

Francis was never a priest or a monk; he was a friar, a leader of this new style of Christian service. Franciscans were known as 'Grey Friars' because they dressed in dark grey. (Hence, for example, Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh, mentioned on page 14.)

Francis spent the rest of his life organizing and inspiring the huge number of men who joined him in his Order. Franciscans spread all over Europe, based in cities but visiting towns and villages, working on the harvest or wherever casual work was offered, sleeping in the open, or in the shelters of lepers whom they nursed. They found all nature friendly and beautiful: all animals their friends, because animals depended, as they did, on heaven for subsistence. The picture of him on page 15 of the Notes illustrates this. Francis taught that only those who had themselves stood barefooted in market-place, asking for alms, could have real compassion on the poor.

### Mission

Francis had missions to Syria (1212) and Morocco (1213-14), but was unable to complete them due either to illness or other misfortune. He travelled to the Middle East in 1219 in an unsuccessful attempt to convert the Muslim sultan. Francis impressed the sultan deeply but did not win any converts.

By 1217 there were so many Franciscans, including those outside Italy, that Francis appointed local leaders, but he avoided using the usual monastic terms, and called the head of each friary 'father guardian'. He travelled through Europe, preaching and collecting followers. Francis composed a prayer which has come to be known as 'The Prayer of St Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

There was a Second Order, for women only, and a Third Order, for men and women who could not leave their secular life because of family or business commitments, were both mentioned briefly in the Lecture at page 14.

### Francis' final years

Francis spent the final years of his life in solitude and prayer, retiring to a hermitage on Monte Alverno in 1224. He was nearly blind by this time, and his followers observed with awe in 1224 that his hands and feet and side had received *stigmata* (Latin for "marks") or wound prints of the passion of Christ.<sup>1</sup> He died in 1226, in the church where he had first heard his call.

He was canonized (Saint) by Pope Gregory IX two years after his death. Franciscans are today the largest Order in the Roman Catholic Church, with 650,000 members, and six Popes have come from the Order.

The other great new preaching order of the C13 was another Mendicant Order, this one founded by Dominic Guzman and known as the Dominicans. Dominic's biography is on the next (and final) page

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<sup>1</sup> Francis was first known person to experience *stigmata* - mysterious bleeding from the hands, feet and side, places where Christ's body was pierced. Since then, some 300 others are known to have undergone the experience, many of whom were later 'canonised' (officially declared by the Pope to be saints). *Stigmata* are a Roman Catholic phenomenon, unknown within Eastern Orthodoxy or Protestantism (although some Anglicans have more recently experienced them).

## Dominic (1170-1221)

Dominic Guzman was a native of Calaroga in Castile, northern Spain. He was 12 years older than Francis, but he founded his Order later. He was destined for a clerical career from childhood, and was ordained when he was 25; he became canon in the Spanish cathedral at Osma. His outstanding abilities prompted Dominic's superiors to send him in 1206 as a missionary to correct the influence of the reforming groups, the Waldensians and Albigensians. Dominic believed that dissenting movements had to be fought with their own weapons – they were pure and good preachers, so Catholic missionaries had to be pure in lifestyle and as good at preaching as Waldensian and Albigensian evangelists. Dominic got among the people, preaching in market places and on roadsides, living in poverty and begging for his food. At first he had little success, however, he stayed faithful to his original convictions, and in 1214 he gathered group of followers, training them to become mendicant missionary preachers.

## The Dominican Order

In 1215 Dominic travelled to Rome and sought the Pope's backing for his disciples to be a new religious order of preaching monks. The Pope supported the Dominicans, and in 1217 they took name 'Order of Friars Preachers;'. They were known popularly as 'Black Friars' because they wore black in distinction from the grey dress of the Franciscans.

Although the initial mission of the Dominicans was to preach to religious dissenters of southern France, under Dominic's leadership they soon became an international organisation devoted to evangelising and teaching theology across the whole of Europe. They were not as well-liked as Franciscans for two reasons; Francis was above all a lover of people, whereas Dominic was a servant of the Catholic Church, but, even more, Dominicans staffed 'the holy office of the inquisition. When, in 1233, they were given this fearsome power over other orders, including persecuting and martyring dissenters.

## Teachers

Unlike Franciscans, who were country people, Dominicans were from the outset committed to scholastic theology, which we'll define in Lecture 16. They cultivated the study of theology above all else; to concentrate on this, they abolished the requirement for monks to beg and to do manual labour, which until then had been an essential feature of the mendicant Orders. The Dominicans concentrated their influence on the academic centres of Europe, and they produced outstanding theologians, most famously Thomas Aquinas.

Like the Franciscans, the Dominicans had a Second Order, for Women, and Dominican nuns were well-known for providing education for girls, and also a Third Order for men and women in ordinary life who accepted their ideals and lived in simplicity and faithfulness. Dominican nuns became well-known for providing education for girls.

Dominic died, at the University of Bologna, North Italy, where he was buried, and in 1234 he was canonized (made a Saint) – just 13 years after his death.