



Servants' Preparation Program



Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the
Southern
United States

*"For I have given you an example,
that you should do as I have done to you"
John 13:15*

**Coptic Orthodox
Diocese of the Southern United States**

**HIS 101
Christian Monasticism**

Servants' Preparation Program

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✠ TABLE OF CONTENTS ✠

- **Main References of Christian Monasticism**
- **Christian Monasticism & Non-Christian Ascetic Disciplines**
- **Principles of Christian Monasticism**
- **Why Is Egypt the Origin of Christian Monasticism?**
- **Disciplines of Christian Monasticism**
- **Important Monastic Groups**
- **The Effects of Egyptian Monasticism**
- **Advantages of Monasticism for Church and Society**
- **Monasticism in the West**

Main References of Christian Monasticism

- **The Life of St. Anthony:**

Written by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (the 20th pope of Alexandria) 328 AD – 373 AD. St. Athanasius was the first person who wrote about the fathers of monasticism. St. Athanasius was known to be a disciple of St. Anthony and authored his book in his exile in Treve (336 AD – 338 AD). This great book had a profound effect on all the Christians in Europe at that time and was the main contributing factor in the establishment of the monastic movement in Europe. Also St. Anthony's life as portrayed in the book written by St. Athanasius brought many lives to repentance; one such of those was St. Augustine.

- **The Paradise of the Holy Fathers:**

Also known as Lausiaca History written by Palladius, the bishop of Helenopolis in Asia Minor to Lausus a royal minister in the royal court of King Theodosius the Youngest. Palladius was born in Galatia in Asia Minor about 364 AD and was ordained as a monk on Mount Olive. Bishop Palladius visited Egypt two times. The first visit was in 388 AD and he stayed until 399 AD where he visited and lived with the Egyptian monks in Alexandria, Natria, Natroun's Valley and St. Pachomius' monasteries in Upper Egypt. He was ordained as a bishop in 400 AD. His second visit to Egypt was in 406 AD where he was exiled to Aswan because of his support of St. John the Chrysostom. He lived in Antony area (Mallawi) for 4 years and visited Akhmim's monasteries. He returned home in 412 AD.

- **St. John Cassian's Books:**

He was a monk and lived in Bethlehem with a friend called Germans. St. John Cassian and Germans left Palestine and came to Egypt where they lived with the fathers in Natroun's valley. St. John ordained Cassian as a priest. He went to France and established St. Victor's monastery and another monastery for the nuns.

- **The History of the Ascetics in Egypt:**

Written by the scholar Rufinus of Aquila who visited Egypt in 372 AD where he spent 13 years.

- **The History of the Church by Sozomen:**

Written between 439 AD and 450 AD. It discusses the establishment of monasticism in Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor.

- **St. Pachomius' Life**

- **The Ascetic Writings:**

By St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John the Chrysostom, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine.

Christian Monasticism & Non-Christian Ascetic Disciplines

Monasticism as ascetic life was well known among many nations thousands of years prior to Christianity. It was known among the Indians, Buddhists, ancient Egyptians, ancient Greeks, and Jews. Many people decided to leave worldly living behind for the ascetic life seeking a better eternity. The question is: “Does Christian monasticism differ from other ancient disciplines?”

Buddhism taught that salvation was only through its ascetic life and held disrespect for manual work. Manual work was considered only for the beginners while their monks lived on beggary. Christianity doesn't teach that salvation is through asceticism but through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and also requires all monks including the abbots of the monasteries to manually perform work. Beggary was not known in Christian monasticism at all in its history. Buddhism prohibits the eating of meat Christian monasticism does not. There was not universal worshipping in Buddhism while this is fundamental in Christian monasticism. In Buddhism there were no rules for monks as every monk had the freedom to do what he desired but in Christianity there are rules that govern monasticism. In Buddhism the ascetic life developed from hermitic to coenobitic life so therefore if Christian monasticism was an extension it should have begun directly with coenobitic life but it developed in the same way from hermitic to coenobitic life. Nowadays, there are no hermits in Buddhism but they are still present in Christian monasticism.

Asceticism was also known among ancient Greeks such as Orphic and Pythagorean philosophies as well as Neo-Platonism. We should know there are no relations between these pagan philosophies and Christian monasticism where these philosophies taught salvation is through asceticism and meditation but this is not in Christian monasticism. The Christian monasticism was Coptic in its discipline and spirit and not affected by these Greek philosophies.

Among ancient Egyptians there were some people who remained pagans and practiced beggary, adultery and other pagan practices. There was no relation between the pagans worship and Christian monasticism.

St. Jerome called the prophets' children mentioned in the Old Testament ascetics. They were mention in 2 Kings 2:3, 7 and Amos 7:14 but those groups disappeared many centuries before Christianity. Essenes were a Jewish group which appeared one century before the Lord Jesus Christ and were contemporary with the Lord in His flesh and continued until the destruction of Jerusalem 70 AD. Their doctrine and rituals were pure Jewish and they were opponents of the Pharisees. According to manuscripts this group disappeared in the first century after Jerusalem's destruction and its rituals and disciplines were different from Christian monasticism. The second Jewish ascetic group was Therapeutae group which means “group of healing” appeared in the time of the

Jewish philosopher Philo. This group lived close to Marriott Lake in Alexandria. This group adhered only to Greek Philosophy and held disdain for manual work. They lived in solitary and gathered men and women on Saturday evening. Christian monasticism does not follow or resemble this discipline.

Principles of Christian Monasticism

The principles of Christian Monasticism were based mainly on the Lord Jesus Christ's life and lives of many honorable persons in the Old and New Testaments. The main principles of Christian Monasticism include: virginity, **solitary life**, dispossession and obedience.

✠ Life of Virginity and Celibacy

Virginity was well known in the Old Testament as it was documented that Elijah and Elisha preferred to live in the desert and mountains. In the New Testament, St. John the Baptist lived in Jordan desert until the day he began his preaching and teaching to Israel. Other than this, there were some Jewish groups that preferred the life of celibacy as a model of life such as Essenes and Therapeutae.

The Lord Himself praised the life of virginity in the Holy Book of Isaiah (A man who has been castrated should never think that because he can not have children, he can never be a part of God's people. The Lord says to such a man, "If you honor Me by observing the Sabbath and if you do what pleases Me and faithfully keep My Covenant, then your name will be remembered in My Temple and among My people longer than if you had sons and daughters. You will never be forgotten") Isaiah 56: 3-6 and also Matthew 19:12.

Overall, our role model is Our Lord Jesus Christ who lived His earthly life in virginity and was born from the Everlasting Virgin, St. Mary. St. Jerome in his eloquent commentary on "Why St. John the Virgin was the only one among the Lord's holy disciples who recognized the Lord Jesus Christ when He appeared to the disciples in Galilee?" "John the Virgin was the only one who knew The Virgin, The Son of the Virgin!"

After He talked with the Pharisees regarding Holy Scriptures about the holiness of marriage and that divorce should not be allowed for any reason, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself praised the life of virginity (His disciples said to Him, "If this is how it is between a man and his wife, it is better not to marry." The Lord Jesus Christ answered, "This teaching does not apply to everyone, but only to those whom God has given it. For there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some, because they were born that way; others, because men made them that way; and others do not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let him who can accept this teaching do so") Matthew 19: 10-11. It is very clear; this life is a heavenly and Godly gift to those whom it were given. In His teachings to Sadducees regarding the rising from death, The Lord praised the life of virginity and considered it similar to the life of Heavenly Angels (For when

the dead rise to life, they will be like the angels in Heaven and will not marry) Matthew 22:30 and Luke 20:35.

Our teacher St. Paul, the Apostle praised the life of virginity in his First Epistle to Corinthians in his answer to a question directed to him by the believers about virginity, marriage and marital life (Now, to deal with the matters you wrote about. A man does well not to marry. Now to the unmarried and to the widows I say that it would be better for you to continue to live alone as I do. I would like to be free from worry. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work, because he is trying to please the Lord. But a married man concerns himself with the worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife. And so he is pulled in two directions. An unmarried woman or a virgin concerns herself with the Lord's work, because she wants to be dedicated both in body and spirit; but a married woman concerns herself with the worldly matters, because she wants to please her husband. So the man who marries does well, but the one who does not marry does even better). 1 Corinthians 7:1, 8, 32-34, 38. This question clarifies; the life of virginity was of believers' concern very early in the church, three centuries before the appearance of monasticism. In other words, the life of virginity is not an event invented by monasticism but it was a core principle in the life of the early believers in the church.

The history of the church is full of many stories that show many married couples did not participate in marital relations for their love of virginity's life and lived together as sisters and brothers. In his dialogue with the Lord, St Peter spoke up (Look, we have left everything and followed you. Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ said to them, and I tell you that those who leave home or wife or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the Gospel will receive much more in this present age. They will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields – and persecutions as well; and in the age to come they will eternal life) Mark 10: 29 -30. When St Peter said we have left everything, he also meant he left his wife regarding their marital relations and so the Lord Jesus Christ who knows the hidden, He knew what St Peter meant and so He said (..... or wife). The same was said by St Paul (Don't I have the right to follow the example of the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Peter, by taking a Christian wife with me on my trips?) 1 Corinthians 9:5 She was a wife and became sister.

The Holy Book of Revelation clearly demonstrates the high rank of the virgins in the Heavenly Kingdom (Then I looked, and there was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion; with him were 144,000 people who have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from Heaven that sounded like a roaring waterfall, like a loud peal of thunder. It sounded like the music made by musicians playing their harps.

The 144,000 people stood before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders; they were singing a new song, which only they could learn. Of the whole human race they are the only ones who have been redeemed. They are the men who have kept themselves pure by not having sexual relations with women; they are virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They have been redeemed from the rest of the human race and are the first ones to be offered to God and to the Lamb. They have never been known to tell lies, they are faultless). Revelation 14: 1-5. These verses clarify the highest rank of virgins in the eternal life as they follow the Lord Jesus Christ wherever He goes and they will sing a new song, which only they could learn.

Our Church fathers and scholars praised virginity and life of purity in their writings such those by St. Polycarp, St. Augustine, St. Hermas, and St. Clement the Alexandrian. St. Methodosios, the martyr and Bishop of Sour wrote a book "The Ten Virgins". Also, St. Gregory, the Bishop of Nisus wrote a book of the life of virginity. Origen the scholar praised the life of virginity and described it as the most holy sacrifice which pleases God. St. Ambrose wrote three books in praising the life of virginity. St. Jerome wrote a detailed letter to Eustochium the virgin from Rome regarding the blessings of the life of virginity.

✠ **Solitary Life**

Tendency toward solitary life appeared very early in the Church as recorded by Makean the Scholar in his book "Christian Monasticism in Egypt". Solitary life was one of the role behaviors of Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Days in the Flesh ("He went to a hill to pray" Mark 6:46), ("At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God" Luke 6:12), ("Jesus spent those days teaching in the Temple, and when evening came, He would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives" Luke 21:37). The Holy Gospel stated that before the Lord began His teaching and preaching, spent 40 days in the desert of Jordan (Luke 4:1 & 2). Also, the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ took place on a high mountain (Luke 9:28-36). The tendency for solitary life was strengthened by the persecutions and tortures of the state against the Church and by the spread of moral corruption in the world.

Elijah lived near the Cherith Brook where The Lord sent ravens to feed him. St. John the Baptist lived all of his life in the desert of Jordan (Luke 1:80) and so St. John the Chrysostom called him the father and teacher of monks.

St Paul, the Apostle after his call on the way to Damascus, went to the desert of Arabia to the east of Damascus (I did not go to anyone for advice, nor did I go to Jerusalem to see those were apostles before me.

Instead, I went at once to Arabia, and then I returned to Damascus) Galatians 1:15-17. St. Paul commended in the Holy Book of Hebrews those who left the world and lived in desert for their great love to the Lord Jesus Christ, the King (“They wandered like refugees in the deserts and hills, living in caves and holes in the ground”) Hebrews 11:38.

It is of no wonder that our early fathers left the world and wandered in caves and in the deserts to live only with God away from everyone. St. John Saba in his meditation said (“I stop talking with people to talk only with you. I close my door to open your door. I deprave myself from the natural sun to shine upon me, you the sun of goodness and healing in her wings”).

✠ **Forsaking the Worldly**

Forsaking the worldly, leaving everything in the world, every property and poverty by the own will, is one of the main principles of monasticism. The Lord Jesus Christ lived all of His life in the flesh poor and had no place to lay His head.

The Lord Jesus Christ warned the believers about the lust of riches and money as He taught in His Sermon on the Mount (“Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for you in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are.” Matthew 6:19-21). Also, The Lord said (“No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a slave will hate one and love the other or be loyal to one and despises the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Luke 16:13). (Jesus then said to his disciples, “I assure you: it will be very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I repeat: it is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.” Matthew 19: 23 & 24). And when His disciples asked Him who can be saved, The Lord said (“This is impossible for human beings, but for God everything is possible.” Matthew 19:26). The Lord called every one to leave everything for the Gospel and promised to get the Heavenly rewards in the eternal life (“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for My sake, will receive a hundred times more and will be given Eternal Life.” Matthew 19:29).

A Jewish leader asked the Lord Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to receive the Eternal Life?” You know the commandments: “Do not commit adultery; do not commit murder; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; respect your father and your mother”. The man replied, “Ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments.” When the Lord Jesus Christ heard this, He said to him, “There is still one more

thing you need to do. Sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in Heaven; then come and follow Me. But when the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very rich” (Matthew 18: 18-23).

No wondering, that our fathers in early Church literally understood The Lord’s words and did as He taught. In the Holy Book of Acts we read about the life of economy our Christian fathers, in the early Church, lived and how rich people sold their properties and gave the money to the Apostles and the Church such as Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira (Act 4 & 5).

St. Paul, the Apostle encouraged leading the life of forsaking the worldly, he taught that money’s love is the source of all kinds of evil and asked the believers to escape from the lust of money (1 Timothy 6:10 & 11) . But also he taught saying (“What did we bring into the world? Nothing! So then, if we had food and clothes, that should be enough for us. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and are caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires, which pull them down to ruin and destruction.” I Timothy 6: 7-9).

Our ascetic fathers taught many teachings about this life. St. John El-Tibasy of Assuit in his teaching about spiritual planning said “Forsaking the worldly is the beginning of the rank of perfection as it is the beginning of Faith’s way. When man believes in the Eternal Life, he will disrespect the world and all of its things and focus only on the Heavenly way. This will help him to disrespect the hidden sin which show itself in money’s love, anger, enmity with other people, etc. So if a man does not begin his way with forsaking the worldly it will be impossible for him to get rid of devil thoughts and so it will be impossible for him to get the purity and holiness of his soul which is the basic of the new man.”

St Filoxinos, one of the famous hermits in the Syrian church in the 6th century in his teachings said “Man cannot grow in the way of perfection unless he has released his riches on the earth as according to what he has it will be obstacles for his spirit to fly to the Kingdom of Heaven. World’s possessions are binders for all senses which bind the human being internally and externally.”

✠ **Obedience**

Obedience is a Christian virtue and The Lord Jesus Christ is the highest role model in His obedience as St Paul said (“But even though he was God’s Son, he learned through his sufferings to be obedient.” Hebrews 5:8) and (“He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death – His death on the cross.” Philippians 2:8).

Why Is Egypt the Origin of Christian Monasticism?

Geography of Egypt:

Egypt is a narrow valley surrounded by deserts and mountains to the East and the West. This gave birth to love of asceticism and the desire to leave the world and its lusts. In addition the good temperate weather in Egypt encouraged the establishment of life in deserts for monks and hermits. The nature itself offered good shelters for our monks and fathers.

Spirituality of Egyptians:

The Egyptians instinctually are spiritual beings having maintained a religious culture even within the pagan times. The Pharaohs' civilization is the best indicator of the religious beliefs of Egyptians very early in the history. Temples, pyramids, statues, and mummification display the dogma of ancient Egyptians as religious people looking for the eternal life. This explains why thousands and thousands left the world to live the monastic life, it is the same belief. Two centuries before the birth of monasticism, St. Clement of Alexandria wrote about asceticism, and virginity. Origen the Scholar showed in his writings his great love for asceticism, virginity and life of poverty.

Religious factors:

In the beginning of the 4th century, the state converted from the paganism to Christianity and so the persecution and martyrdom ceased. The people recognized that through monasticism and asceticism they could offer sacrifices for the Lord instead of martyrdom, it is a great love for the Lord Jesus Christ the King!

Political factors:

The persecutions that our Christian fathers suffered in the early Church resulted in fleeing of many believers to the deserts away from the persecution waves. Pope Dionysius (246-264 AD) with many of the believers fled to Scete and Shehat and most of them favored to remain following the brutal persecutions. We should recognize that this factor is secondary as we know very well that monasticism flourished after the conversion of the state from pagan to Christianity. The 4th century was the golden age of monasticism although there were no persecutions.

Disciplines of Christian Monasticism

✦ Discipline of Solitary Life

All scholars, in history of monasticism, agreed that Christian monasticism appeared in Egypt in the early centuries (the 3rd century) and St. Anthony was the first monk. However, Coptic papyruses showed that ascetic life started in late of the first and early of the second centuries. It becomes very clear that under the effect of the Holy Spirit and the message of the Holy Gospel many left the world and lived the ascetic life in the deserts or on the borders of villages and cities. However, there was no specific discipline and order for those primitive ascetics.

Although we do not have many resources that supply us with enough information about the early trials of Christian monasticism, there are a few examples of monasticism that go back to the beginning of the second century. The first one was mentioned in the encyclopedia of saints' life (Acta Sanctorum). It was a rich man, Frontonius, in Alexandria of Egypt, in 150 AD, during the time of Emperor Anthony Pius (138 – 161 AD), with seventy men went to Natria desert and lived the ascetic life but did not become very successful. Wallis Budge, the scholar commented on this saying it was just a trial from many trials of Christian monasticism which was not recorded because of the Christian principle of self-denial.

The second example is St. Paul the Hermit who lived all of his life in complete solitude away from everyone and St Jerome wrote his biography in 374 AD as the first hermit in Egypt. St Paul was born in the city of Tiba about 235 AD. His parents were very rich and he became orphaned after the departure of his parents who left wealth for him. His brother-in-law tried to steal his wealth and lock him in jail. When St. Paul knew this he fled to the desert (the area where his monastery is today near the Red Sea) where he lived about 90 years a complete solitary life, did not see any man's face, ate palm dates, and dressed of palm fibers. St Anthony thought that he was the first monk and the first one to live in the desert, so God inspired in him the knowledge that there was another man who lived in the desert many years before him. God led St. Anthony to meet St. Paul (about 341 AD) and on that particular day a raven brought a complete loaf and so St. Paul commented on the raven bringing an entire loaf, "I have now abided here for 60 years and the raven brought daily a half of loaf but on this day for the first time, it brings an entire one!). St Paul told St Anthony "The Lord sent you to bury my body, so go and bring the robe that St. Athanasius; the Pope gave you to shroud me." St. Anthony went to bring the robe and on his return to St. Paul he saw the angels were carrying St. Paul's spirit to the Kingdom of Heaven. When St. Anthony entered St. Paul's cave, he found him kneeling and praying so he thought that St. Paul was still living so he kneeled and began praying but after sometime he recognized that St. Paul departed. The Lord sent

two lions to dig a tomb for St. Paul. St. Anthony buried him and took the cloth of palm fibers and gave it to St. Athanasius, the Pope who was known to wear it on great feasts. St. Anthony wrote St. Paul's biography.

St. Anthony himself lived the solitary life on the beginning of his ascetic life after that ascetics gathered around him. In addition, Palladius mentioned many others who preferred to live the solitary life such as John El-Tibasy from Assuit, St. Elijah who lived in Antony desert for 70 years, St. Solomon who lived in a cave in the same desert for 50 years. St. Chaeremon and St. Joseph who lived solitary life in Panephrisis, and Archebius, St. Moses, St. Paul who lived the solitary life in Calamus desert (the Eastern Desert). These are just few names but there certainly many other names which only God knows.

✠ **Discipline of Monastic Groups**

This discipline was established by St. Anthony who is known as the father of all monks. This discipline is considered the basic of the known current monastic life. This discipline is based on the gathering of monks around one of the spiritual monastic fathers where every monk lives the solitary life in a separate cell and all monks meet together on every Saturday's eve where they spend all night in hymns and prayers with confession and guidance by the spiritual elders and then attend Sunday Divine Liturgy and partake in the Holy Communion, after that, each monk goes back to his cell till the next Saturday eve. The word monk came from the Greek word "μοναχος" which refers to who live a solitary life, however, its translation in Arabic (RAHB) means who scares of God doesn't fulfill the perfect meaning of the Greek word.

The important monastic groups appeared in the following areas:

✦ The Eastern Desert:

Where St. Anthony established the first monastic group in the history of monasticism. The core of the monastic life of St. Anthony is based on complete solitary life, much fasting, asceticism, and praying, in addition to manual labor. The life of St. Anthony is considered the life exemplifying the highest role model of all those who have entered into the monastic life. Pope Athanasius, the Apostolic, a disciple of St. Anthony, wrote his life “νίτα αητοηί” and this biography was the main reason for the spread of monasticism in Europe during the 4th century AD.

✦ The Life of St. Anthony, the Great “νίτα αητοηί”

St. Anthony was born at Coma (Beni Suief), near Heracleopolis Magna in Fayum, about the middle of the third century (251 AD). He was the son of well-to-do parents, and on their death, in his twentieth year, he inherited their possessions (about 300 Acres). He had a younger sister. He had a desire to imitate the life of the Apostles and the early Christians, and one day, on hearing in the Church the Holy Gospel words, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all thou hast." Matthew 19:21; he received them as spoken to himself, disposed of all his property and goods, and devoted himself exclusively to religious exercises.

It was about 270 AD, when St. Anthony withdrew from the world and began his career by practicing the ascetical life. He used to visit the various ascetics, study their lives, and try to learn from each of them the virtue in which they seemed to excel. Then he took up his abode in one of the tombs, near his native village, and there endured conflicts with demons in the shape of wild beasts, which inflicted blows upon him, and sometimes left him nearly dead.

After fifteen years of this life, at the age of thirty-five, St. Anthony determined to withdraw from the habitations of men and retire in absolute solitude. He crossed the Nile, and on a mountain near the east bank, then called Pispir, now Der el Memun, he found an old fort into which he shut himself, and lived there for twenty years without seeing the face of man, food being thrown to him over the wall. He was at times visited by pilgrims, whom he refused to see. But gradually a number of would-be disciples established themselves in caves and in huts around the mountain, thus a colony of ascetics was formed, who begged St. Anthony to come forth and be their guide in the spiritual life. At length, about the year 305, he yielded to their imploring and emerged from his retreat, and, to the surprise of all, he appeared to be as when he had gone in, not emaciated, but vigorous in body and mind.

For five or six years he devoted himself to the instruction and organization of the great body of monks that had grown up around him. But then he once again withdrew into the inner desert that lay between the Nile and the Red Sea, near the shore of which he fixed his abode on a mountain where still stands the monastery that bears his name, Der Mar Antonios. Here he spent the last forty-five years of his life, in seclusion, not as strict as Pispir, for he freely saw those who came to visit him, and he would journey across the desert to Pispir with considerable frequency.

On two occasions he went to Alexandria, once after he came forth from the fort at Pispir, to strengthen the martyrs in the persecution of 311 AD, and once at the close of his life (350 AD), to preach against the Arians. He died at the age of a hundred and five, and St. Jerome places his death in 356-357 AD. At his own request his grave was kept secret by the two disciples who buried him, lest his body should become an object of reverence.

Of his writings, the most authentic formulation of his teaching is without doubt that which is contained in the various sayings and discourses put into his mouth in the Life, especially the long ascetic sermons spoken on his coming forth from the fort at Pispir. It is an instruction on the duties of the spiritual life, in which the warfare with demons occupies the chief place.

St Jerome knew seven epistles translated from the Coptic into Greek; the Greek appears to be lost, but a Latin version exists, and Coptic fragments exist of three of these letters, agreeing with the Latin. There exists a Monastic Rule that bears St Anthony's name, preserved in Latin. The monasticism established under St Anthony's direct influence became the norm in Northern Egypt, from Lycopolis (Assuit) to the Mediterranean. In contradistinction to the fully coenobitical system, established by St. Pachomius in the South, it continued to be of a semi-eremical character, the monks living commonly in separate cells or huts, and coming together only occasionally for church services. They were left very much to their own devices, and the life they lived was not a community life according to rule, as now understood. This was the form of monastic life in the deserts of Nitria and Scete, as portrayed by Palladius and St. John Cassian.

Such was St Anthony's life and character, and such his role in Christian history. He is justly recognized as the father not only of monasticism, strictly so called, but also of the technical religious life in every shape and form.

The influence of St. Anthony's life extended to all states of the Old World outside Egypt. Thirty years after his departure, a copy of his life by St. Athanasius was found in Tréves in France where many ascetics gathered together practicing his life. His life was the main reason of conversion of St. Augustine from a life of sin to a life of holiness and piety. Although St. Augustine did not live in the deserts like St. Anthony he practiced the same life saying, "The man should not think that perfection is impossible or it is strange to human nature. People sail to study the

Greek philosophy but God's city is present inside the heart of everyone. The perfection that God wants is inside every being and it doesn't need anything except submission of our will to God's will and authority".

The rules of St. Anthony's life were mainly practicing the vigorous religious practices of asceticism, eating dried bread, salt and drinking only water. He used to fast for four days. He also used to spend his nights working his manual duties and would sleep on palm fibers. He had only one dress and never had a bed covering for himself during sleep except during old age. He didn't set ascetic rules for the ascetics and only requested them to live the life of asceticism, fasting, praying and manual work guided by the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and St. Paul, the Apostle and as he was inspired by the angel who appeared to him in the beginning of his monastic life and dressed him with the monastic robe and guided him in the manual work to overcome weariness. He established the prayer hours for monks as to when they should pray the Holy Psalms.

It is no great wonder, that St Anthony the Great, attracted many to ascetic life and to discipleship. Indeed, he became the perfect scale for those who seek the life of perfection for their love in the Lord Jesus Christ, the King. Of his great many disciples were, St. Hilarion, the great Ascetic who established the monasticism in Palestine, St. Marcarius the Great, the Father of Scete and St. Paul, the Humble.

✠ **The Western Desert (Wadi El-Natroun "Natroun Valley"):**

Natroun Valley is a rectangular valley that extends along the north-east border of the Western Desert and surrounded by a chain of mountains known as Nitria. The monastic groups focused in three areas; Nitria, Cells, and Scete.

This valley was blessed by the visit of the Holy Family. The monks of this valley were very famous for their theological and ritual knowledge, in addition to their holiness and piety. The majority of Alexandria's Popes were chosen from among these monks. It was a tradition that the Pope, after his ordination should visit St. Marcarius the Great Monastery. It was a tradition also in the middle centuries, that the Pope should make Chrism (Maroon) in St. Marcarius the Great Monastery.

▪ **The Mountain of Nitria**

It is the desert to the western south of Damanhour. In Greek and Latin it is called $\eta\acute{\iota}\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ but in Coptic it is called Barnoug. It was very famous for a shore that exported salt. Natria was closer to the country than to the desert and so monks who wanted more solitude went deep into the desert to the area of Cells. In the 4th century there were around 5000 monks. However this number began to decrease particularly in the middle of the 5th century as a

result of persecution from non-orthodox due to doctrinal disputes. Pope Athanasius visited this area during his 3rd exile (356-366 AD).

Also, in this area Pope Cyril the Great lived and was a disciple of St. Serabion. Rofenios of Aquila, St. Jerome, St. Paula of Italy, St. Melanie of Spain visited this area in the 4th century. Of the ascetics of this area was St. Ammon who established monasticism of this area, St. Theodore, St. Oar, St. Nathaniel, and St. Peaor.

St Ammon was born around 275 AD in Alexandria. His father departed while he was a child and his uncle forced him to get married in his twenties. He lived with his wife in perfect virginity and piety for 18 years. He chose the monastic life in Natria and Cells region. He departed in 337 AD after 72 years of monastic life. The Church celebrates his departure on 22nd of Bashans. Palladius wrote his biography in the Paradise of the Holy Fathers and Rofenios in his History of Monasticism.

✠ **Cells Region:**

It is known in Greek as κελλα which means cell of the monk and in Coptic it is called ηίρί which also means monk's cell. St. Anthony on his visit to Natria upon St. Ammon's request chose this area for ascetics who wanted more solitude that was not accessible in Natria, that more close to the country. Of its famous saints St. Macarius of Alexandria and St. Isodore the Priest.

St Macarius of Alexandria was a baker in Alexandria and worshipped pagans. He was baptized in his forties and visited St. Anthony in 335 AD. He was a disciple of St. Ammon in Natria. He was ordained as a priest in 355 AD. He succeeded his spiritual father St Ammon after his departure in overseeing Natria's and Cells' monks. He was close to St. Marcarius the Great in Scete. He visited St Pachomius' Monastery. He used to fast all the week and eat only on Sunday. The Lord granted him the gift of healing sickness and performing wonders and miracles. He departed at the age of 100 years on 6th of Bashans 393 AD.

✠ **Scete "Shihat Desert":**

Shihat in Coptic means scale of hearts but Scete in Greek means the house of asceticism ακκήριση and from which the word ακκίτης that means ascetic came. It is about 50 Km to the eastern south of Cells region. St. Marcarius the Great was the first monk there and he established the monasticism there. Of its saints are St. Bishoy, St John the Short, St. Isodore the Priest, and St. Shishoy.

St. Marcarius the Great was born in Shenshor, Menofia in 300 AD. His father forced him to get married but he kept his virginity with his wife until his

departure. He began his monastic life on the border of his village for 10 years where he was ordained as a priest upon recommendations of the people there in 340 AD. In that place he was accused by a lady that he committed adultery with her and that she became pregnant by him. So the people there persecuted him and during her labor the lady came close to death and so she confessed her lie. The people wanted to honor him but he fled to Scete in 340 AD. He visited St. Anthony in 343 AD and was a disciple for some time.

He achieved a high rank in the monastic life where he was the head for about 5000 monks in Scete. In his times there were 4 monasteries in Scete Paramos, St Marcarius, St. John the Short, and St. Bishoy. Of his disciples were St. Maximos, St. Domatious, St. John the Short, St. Bishoy, St. Isodore the priest, St. Moses the Strong, St. Isaiah, St. Siloanos; and St. Bevnotios his disciple and his successor in overseeing the monastery. He departed in 390 AD.

✠ **South of Egypt:**

It was famous for the following monastic groups.

- Pispir: in the mid of Upper Egypt where St. Anthony began his monastic life.
- Bahnasa: It was also in the middle of Upper Egypt. It was famous for its thousands of monks and nuns.
- Antinoe: Near Mallawi. Palladius visited this area in 406 AD and 412 AD and mentioned about 12 monasteries for nuns and 1200 monks. Of its famous saints St. Elijah the Ascetic.
- Lycus: near Assuit. Of its famous saints St. John from Assuit who lived in this place 330 AD – 394 AD until his departure. He was granted the gifts of prophecy and wonders making. Palladius called him the prophet of Egypt.
- Schenesit: Near Qina. Of its saints St. Palamon the spiritual father of St. Pachomius.

✠ **Discipline of Coenobitical Life**

This first form of the coenobitic life founded by St. Pachomius can perhaps be compared to fire in straw. A straw fire spreads quickly, generates much heat and light. In the same way Pachomian coenobitism grew very quickly. Coenobitism is, an organized whole having its own laws and structures. St. Jerome speaks of fifty thousand monks there. It also generated heat and much light, for the Pachomian monks were the most famous at the time. They were the pick of the bunch, and if one had not seen them, because they lived a long way from Alexandria, one pretended one had done so, as did St. John Cassian. This first form of coenobitism had great influence on the Church; not only because of its spirituality, but also

because of its legislative system. Rules of Pachomius affected rule of monasticism in the west such as that of St Benedict.

✦ **Life of St. Pachomius:**

St. Pachomius was not born a Christian, but a pagan. He was born in 292 of a family of well-to-do peasants at Schensit on the borders of the Nile a little higher up than Thebes. He had at least one brother and one sister known to us through the Lives.

At that time Egypt was under Roman domination. In 312 the Emperor Maximin Daza needed soldiers to wage war against Licinius. At that time, when one had no soldiers, one took them; people were conscripted by force. Some soldiers came to Pachomius' village and took him away with other young men. He was about twenty years old and made for military service whether he liked it or not. So he was taken to Alexandria. As prisoners, he and his companions took a ship on the Nile and went down to Thebes, the first large town, where they stopped for the night. The soldiers took the conscripts to the prison in the town, and there, the Christians brought them food and assistance. Pachomius, the pagan, was moved by the charity of these Christians. It remained with him all his life; for him, a Christian does well to everyone. This conviction which came home to him then influenced his conception of the monastic life in which the idea of the service of God and the brethren had great importance.

The war being over, Pachomius was set free at Antioe. He went back up the Nile but he did not go home. He ardently desired to serve God, he settled near a village (Seneset) where he was baptized about 313 AD. In accordance with the promise he had made to serve mankind, he helped the people round about him in any way he could. Then, he too became a disciple of an ascetic who lived nearby. He underwent many temptations. The founder of the coenobitic life had no thought of starting something new related to monasticism; he began in the same way as St. Anthony. But God had other ideas.

About 323 AD St. Pachomius left St. Palamon to live in an abandoned village called Tabennesi, always with the intention of being a hermit. His brother John came to join him. Then one night St. Pachomius had a vision; God intervened. During the following days a disagreement arose between the two brothers. John wanted to remain faithful to the eremitical way and continue to live in their little cell, while St. Pachomius, after his vision, wanted to build a monastery.

In fact, St. Pachomius had the gift of gathering people round him "because of his goodness." He proposed a way to God: the common life (in Greek *Koino-bios*), and establish a *Koinônia*, a community. From this time, St.

Pachomius' *Koinônia* really started, and very quickly. The map shows the area in the Upper Nile where St. Pachomius lived: Schensit, his birth-place; Thebes, the capital where he was imprisoned; Antinoe where he was set free. You can also see his foundations (small letters), a chain of monasteries in Upper Egypt on the borders of the Nile where the land could be cultivated. There were also communities of nuns. St. Pachomius departed in 346 AD, during a plague. He was only 54. His disciple succeeded him, St. Theodore. Fortunately, in 404 AD St. Jerome, then at Bethlehem, translated the 4 Rules into Latin, as well as the 11 letters of St. Pachomius, one of Theodore and the book of Horsiesius. Thanks to these translations the Pachomian experience left its mark on the West.

✦ Rules and Organization of Pachomius Koinônia :

St. Pachomius's monastery was remarkably well organized as a small village. In each house of this small village there lived about forty brothers all exercising the same craft; there was the house of bakers, the house of cooks, the house of cobblers; the house of scribes, etc. In each house the brothers lived under the authority of a housemaster, a 'superior' assisted by a 'second'.

Three or four houses formed a 'tribe'. A monastery was composed of 10 tribes; thus 30 or 40 houses each with 40 brothers adds up to more than a thousand monks in a monastery (1200-1400).

At the head of each monastery there was an abbot and one or two stewards. There were 9 monasteries of men and 3 of women. St. Pachomius' sister Marie had founded a monastery for virgins near Tabennisi under his direction. Two others followed, one near Tsmine and the other near Phbew. Everything was well organized there too; the sisters had a copy of the Rule of the brothers. A chaplain, Peter, was there to give them spiritual guidance.

These 12 monasteries formed an Order governed by an Abbot General, St. Pachomius, and a head steward who lived at Phbew. Each year, all the monks gathered at Phbew to celebrate the Glorious Resurrection, and in August to hold a sort of chapter of faults and reconciliation.

This structure of the whole Order establishes that the life of the *Koinônia* was led under an Abbot, who was represented in each house by a superior - life under an Abbot, but also under a Rule. St. Pachomius had already put into writing some precepts taken from the Holy Bible. As the Order developed, it became necessary to go into further detail, to elaborate rules. This resulted in 4 series of precepts which are called the "Rules of Pachomius". They are (1) The Precepts and Institutions, (2) The

Precepts and Decisions, and (3) The Precepts and the Laws and (4) The Precepts of Worship and Manual Labor.

✠ St. Pachomius' Spirituality

✠ A double aspect

To get a better understanding, let us go back to the beginning. St. Pachomius was born 30 years after St. Anthony and died 10 years before him. The man who might be considered as the founder of the first coenobitism started among anchorites. Coenobitism was not yet standardized, while the eremitical monasticism of St. Anthony had already had quite a history in Egypt. St. Pachomius, like all those who wanted to become monks, was formed by a hermit. Then his dispute with his brother John arose because the latter wanted to keep his eremitic solitude while St. Pachomius, faithful to the Voice he had heard, wanted to build up something for others.

The birth of a coenobitic order among anchorites gives us a glimpse of two contrary aspirations at the root of Pachomianism which had to be brought into harmony: on the one hand, the concern for individual perfection as found in the desert fathers where each one sought his own way according to temperament and the call of grace; and on the other the aspect of common life required by coenobitism.

The solution found by St. Pachomius, faithful to his intuition, was that each one should find his own perfection in serving others. He was convinced that personal individual perfection cannot be realized on this earth; this ideal of perfection can only be found in a community of brothers, the holy *Koinônia*, where all help each other in spiritual combat.

So we have here the first paradoxical aspect by which Pachomian spirituality harmonizes two contraries; personal perfection is brought about in community, in the service of the brethren.

Another paradox stemming from the strong personality of St. Pachomius is this: in the Pachomian *Koinônia*, which applied specifically to cenobites, there is one element taken from the anchorites of Lower Egypt where the beginner was formed by an Abba or Elder. St. Pachomius was the sort of man who attracted others to him, one on whom the Spirit rested. It was the desire to learn from such a man which resulted in the cause of so many monks gathering round him. Thus on the one hand, we find a *vertical coenobitism* as in the monasticism of Lower Egypt, for the Pachomian monk wanted St. Pachomius for his Father. Even later, when the Order had grown so enormous, St. Pachomius was still the father, though the head of the monastery chosen by him was his intermediary. In practice,

this vertical aspect of monasticism was expressed by the hierarchical organization we have already seen.

Yet on the other hand, Pachomian spirituality was one of community; and here we have a *horizontal coenobitism*. St. Pachomius' conversion had been brought about by the charity of the Christians of Thebes, and he was haunted by the image of the primitive community in Jerusalem where everything was held in common. His vocation, confirmed by Heaven, was to "gather men together". He would be the father of the community even more than father of his monks. The community of mutual service, the holy *Koinônia*, would have a very important place in his spirituality. Charity would be expressed in deeds.

In fact charity, the foundation of the Christian life, was also the basis of the Pachomian legislation; at the beginning of the *Precepts and Sentences* we read: "Charity sums up the whole Law". As charity has for its object both God and the brethren, Pachomian spirituality developed along two axes: union with God and union with the brethren.

✠ **Union with God**

St. Pachomius was a man animated by the Holy Spirit, a man of prayer; he was able to spend the whole night in prayer, even several nights, as many passages from the Lives witness. Union with God was all-important to him. To encourage it, the Rules insist above all on the Holy Scriptures and the Common Office. Asceticism was not forgotten, for St. Pachomius, a practical and experienced man, knew well that this encounter with God cannot come about without renouncing all that is not God: the world, one's family, and above all one's own will the source of sin. All these elements were to be taken into account; they contain the essence of monastic conversion.

✠ **Holy Scripture**

Prayer and reading of the Holy Bible go together in Pachomian spirituality. At this time people had very good memories. On his arrival in the monastery the novice must first learn to read in order to learn certain passages of the Holy Bible by heart so as to be able to meditate on them. "To meditate" was not, for these first monks, to reflect on a text, but rather to "digest", either by recitation from memory or by reading in a whisper. The monk must meditate on the Word of God all the time, going to the Office, in the refectory or his cell, going to work and while at work.

Holy Scripture is the Rule of life of the Pachomian monk. Three times a week the various superiors comment upon it, and after having listened

to their explanations, he shares with his brethren what he has remembered before going into his cell to meditate on it. The Lives of St. Pachomius have vividly preserved for us the profound impression St. Pachomius made on his brethren when he commented on the Holy Gospel.

✠ ***The Divine Office***

There were two assemblies in the Church, called "synaxes", one in the day and one at night, there was also an assembly for prayer in the evening, but in each house rather than in the Church. The Holy Psalms or passages of Holy Scripture were recited alternating with the Maten and silent prayers. They lasted a long time, but the monks were not idle, their hands were occupied in light work such as plaiting cords or making rush mats, as the Rules describe.

But although they were simple, they had great importance for the Pachomians; it was a communion in prayer which had a very special value for them. They had great faith in the Word of the Lord: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them". The evening prayer in the houses was even simpler: six Psalms and six prayers. This is how the Rule speaks of them.

✠ Union with the brothers: the Koinônia

This communion in prayer before God demonstrates what lay at the root of the Pachomian community: a group of brothers just like the primitive Christian community.

In practice, this is seen in the community of goods and the various consequences which flowed from it.

✠ ***Community of goods***

The symbol of this is the enclosure wall with only one well-guarded door. This wall defines two worlds; the exterior world and that of the life in common, the *Koinônia*. We have seen that after his painful experience in the beginning Pachomius demanded community of goods of every postulant; they could take it or leave it.

He meant not only material goods in common, but even one's own person by putting oneself at the service of others both concretely and physically. This idea of service - even of bondage - is the basis of Pachomian coenobitism and of its organization in houses with housemasters and subordinates. This bondage to one another also constituted the practical expression of a monk's imitation of the Lord

Jesus Christ who became the servant of all. For Pachomius, it was this service which made coenobitism superior to anchoritism. St. Basil took up the idea. So too for Horsiesius, St. Pachomius' successor, community life is itself the "Work of God".

✦ **Consequences**

This community of goods brought with it mutual service, but, concretely, practical observances as well.

✦ The same rule of life

This sought to give expression to a particular quest and to bring about the same observance for all, even superiors.

✦ Poverty

The poverty demanded by this ideal was characterized by dispossession. Pachomian poverty was not primarily privation, but rather life in common; not an ascetical exercise but a community exercise. It was the cement, which bonded the community.

✦ Work

This came from the idea of service and was intended for the support of the poor. St. Pachomius believed that dispossession. Pachomian poverty was not primarily the community's possessions really belonged to God; the community itself possessed nothing. Thus sharing with the poor is not a virtue, it is the normal thing to do.

✦ Obedience

To break the bonds of self-love which are injurious to love of the community, St. Pachomius insisted on obedience so that within the community each member learned to suppress his own rights, his own desires. But obedience itself had a community character. It meant not so much being dependant for a time on an ascetic whom one took as a spiritual master on the road to God, like the anchorites, but to enter into a regime of obedience which had value in itself. So it was not a school for beginners, but a way of love, a permanent and definitive state, on this earth at least. From this come three characteristics of obedience:

1) Each superior has his own sphere of authority, which he must not exceed.

2) The command does not come from a charism, but is a temporary appointment, by the authority of a higher superior.

3) It is above all the Rule which one obeys; and the Rule is incumbent upon the Superiors as well as the subordinates.

As the Pachomian Order developed, the Rule became more central. In his writings, St. Pachomius gave great importance to Holy Scripture; there one reads: "According to the Scriptures". But 40 years later, in the Life of Pachomius, this expression is replaced by: "According to the Rule".

✠ Mutual forgiveness

Here we have the final aspect of community of goods, mutual forgiveness. At the beginning the Pachomians had two annual assemblies which were concerned with financial matters, they studied the accounts.

With St. Pachomius, we have the birth of a true coenobitic Order right at the beginning of monasticism, which is surely remarkable. At the head of the Order was a rich personality, a man of prayer, a man on whom the Holy Spirit rested and who was gifted with abundant mystical graces. We are told that just before his death he saw Heaven. Yet he was a humble man who had his feet on the ground; he kept these visions in perspective. We read in St. Pachomius' writings: This man who was a mirror of God wanted the *Koinônia* to be a mirror of the thousand facets of God. St. Pachomius had an exalted idea of coenobitism: he bequeathed it to us in three kinds of parables which are just as valid for ourselves.

✠ St. Shenouda the Archimandrite

He was born 333 AD in Akhmim for a well-to-do family who raised him in God's fear and wisdom. He showed high spiritual state since his childhood. His father sent him with shepherd men to train him for work. However, he used to stay alone close to a well praying till sunset. When his parent recognized his love to the Lord and for the prayers sent him to his uncle St. Bijol who prophesized that he would be a father for monks. One of the elder monks saw his fingers lighting like candles during praying. He was ordained as a monk in the Red Monastery in Sohag where his uncle was its head. Then St. Shenouda chose solitary life in a cave far way from the monastery in praying, fasting, and manual work. After 5 years he returned back to the monastery where he became the head of that monastery after St. Bijol's departure. One of the elder monks heard a voice from Heaven saying "Shenouda became Archimandrite".

St. Shenouda lived about 118 years, spending 66 years as a head for many monasteries for monks as well as nuns. He found the White Monastery to the west of Akhmim. He was a high-ranked scholar respected by everyone in his time for his vast knowledge and his spirituality. He followed Pope Cyril the Great to Ephesus in the 3rd council 431 AD. He served his people socially and politically. He supported his people against Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. He persevered many trials to free his people from the Roman authority and settlement and he accepted only Coptic's in his monasteries, in contradiction to

St. Pakhomios who accepted both Coptic's and non Coptics in his monasteries. He was pure Coptic. He wrote many ceremonies and teachings for monks and laymen. He departed on the 7th of Abib 451 AD.

His monastic disciplines had the following unique characters. Outside monastery's gates, St Shenouda built special houses for those who wanted to be monks. In these houses, they had to spend certain period of time for testing to be sure of their call to be monks. There was a special vow for the monk upon his ordination. The worship in his monasteries had the first rank and included short prayer before any work, private prayers of Holy Psalms and hymns for every monk in his cell, the Church prayers in the morning, afternoon, sunset, and night, and the Divine Liturgy where the monastery would open the gates for people on Saturday night to attend the Vesper, Midnight Prayers and hymns and the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning with offering Agape food in addition to ceremonies and teaching. He provided special care for education of the monks, nuns and people in the villages around his monasteries. He offered health care for people in the villages around his monasteries through the physician monks. The manual work was a main feature in his monasteries where it was a necessity for every monk. Every monk practiced his handicraft before monasticism. St. Shenouda founded two schools in the White Monastery for teaching the craft of manuscripts' copying. In his monasteries there were coenobitic and hermitic lives. For administration, there was superior father for all monasteries called Archimandrites and one assistant. There was a head for every monastery responsible for arrangement of work but the spiritual leadership was only for the supreme father. There were 4 annual meetings for all monks in all monasteries including hermits.

✠ **Asceticism and Monasticism of Virgins (Nuns)**

It begun very early in the Church and nearly passed the same stage that men monasticism had passed before. The first stage begun in the houses, as virgins stayed in homes for worshipping, reading the Holy Scriptures and keeping their virginity. An example of this stage is St. Phillips' daughters who were four virgins in city of Caesura and they had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9). This stage was well known in the early Church as understood from 1 Corinthians 7:25.

The second stage begun by appearance of what was known as Houses of Virgins. These houses were under church's supervision. In these houses, virgins and widowed who vowed to remain without marriage lived (1 Timothy 5: 3-10). In these houses, Pope Demetrius sent his wife after a virginity life of 48 years (188 – 230 AD). St. Ammon also sent his wife before his asceticism in Natria. St. Anthony sent his sister who became a head of a Virgins' House.

In the 3rd stage, virgins' monasteries were established as known to us today. The founder is St. Pachomius who built a monastery for his sister Mary in Tabennisi in which 400 nuns lived and this is followed by another monastery in Phbew near Adfo. St. Pachomius set rules for nuns in these monasteries which spread all over Egypt.

Palladius wrote that he visited a monastery for virgins near Akhmim in Upper Egypt supervised by one of the elder monks who lived in a separate high room. Amelineau mentioned St. Pachomius built 3 monasteries only in Akhmim. Later, St. Shenouda built a monastery in Akhmim in which about 1800 nuns lived. In Antoine region there was a huge gathering of nuns under supervision of Mother Talis. In Bahnasa, there was another huge nuns gathering of 20,000 nuns under supervision of a bishop. In Assuit, there was another nun's monastery. In Quena, St. Theodore, St. Pachomius disciple built a monastery for nuns. In Kaft there was another monastery named for St. George. There were many monasteries in Fayum, and Giza.

In Lower Egypt, there was St. Demiana's monastery where she begun her asceticism with her 40 fellow virgins and all were martyred. Abou-El-Makarm, the Historian mentioned there was a big nuns' monastery in Demaro in the 11th century under supervision of Mother Kamoria with another monastery in Sonbat. St. Armios monastery for nuns was in Menouf where 300 virgins lived.

In Cairo there were 7 nuns' monasteries in the 15th century as mentioned by El-Makrizy, 2 in Ziuala area, one in Avenue of Romans, the hanging church "El-Moalka", St. Barbara Monastery, St. George monastery in Ancient Cairo, and St. Mina Monastery in Ancient Cairo.

In Alexandria there were numerous nuns' monasteries in most of Alexandria districts usually on the borders of villages and cities. Saverius, the Scholar mentioned in his book "History of Patriarchies" many of these monasteries. A nuns' monastery known as Monastery of Glass "Dir El-Zugag" was established by St. Anthesia in the 6th century before here moving into Scete. In the 5th century St. Tomaees lived in a monastery called eighteen monastery "Octazikanon", about 18 miles west to Alexandria. Also, in the 5th century there was Dekostoun monastery "Twenty Monastery" about 20 miles west to Alexandria.

In addition to nuns' monasteries there were many women lived in deserts, and caves. St. Lydia from Tasseloniky, who lived as a man, visited St. Macarius of Alexandria and spent one year in a cell in cells region. St. Apollinarie the daughter of Emperor Antimos the Great lived in Scete as a monk under the name of Dortheos during the time of St. Macarius the Great and on her burial they discovered she was a woman. Some virgins

lived in a complete solitude and became anchorites such as St. Mary the Egyptian who was anchorite for 48 years did not see any human being until St. Zocima the Priest met her.

Now, there are 6 nuns' monasteries St. Mary the Virgin and St. George in Ziuala, St. Theodore the Prince, St George and St. Phiopater in Ancient Cairo and St. Demiana in Belkas.

St. Anthesia was a rich virgin from Constantinople in the era of Justin the emperor (527 – 565 AD). The emperor tried to marry her and so she fled to Alexandria where she established Dir E-Zugag. After that when she knew that the emperor sent his soldiers to bring her she dressed as a man and fled to Scete where she met St. Daniel the Hegomen of Shehat who helped her to live in an isolated cave for 28 years and departed in 576 AD.

St. Apollinarie was a rich virgin from Constantinople for well-to-do parents in the time of Theodosius, the Second. She loved the life of virginity and solitude. She went to Jerusalem to visit the Holy Places and fled to Alexandria where she was blessed by the relics of St. Mina the wonders maker. She dressed as a monk and lived in that area and named herself Doro. Then she moved to Natria where she met St. Macarius of Alexandria. She received the gift to exile demons. Her sister suffered for many years of demons and so her parents sent her where St. Apollinarie exiled demons out of her. When her sister went back to Constantinople, demons returned back to her and so her parents requested St. Apollinarie to come to Constantinople where her sister cured her. Her parents knew her and under her begging they let her to go back to Scete where she continued her asceticism. Before her departure she asked St Marcarius to bury her in her cell without removing her clothes and St. Marcarius did. However, the Lord revealed her life to St. Marcarius who wrote her story.

✠ The Effects of Egyptian Monasticism

✠ Egyptian monasticism spread all over the world through the following:

- The biography of St. Anthony written by St. Athanasius, the Apostolic and published in Rome during his second exile (340 – 349 AD) was the main means by which the believers in the West knew monasticism and through which many monasteries in Europe were established.
- Palladius who visited Egypt two times and wrote his book The Paradise of the Holy Fathers.
- St. John Cassian, who visited Natria and Scete and Upper Egypt, wrote two books Institutes and The Conferences in the 5th century.
- The History of the Monks by Rofenios of Aquila
- St. Jerome who visited Egypt with Paula of Italy 385 AD and translated St. Pachomius' Rules to Latin on 404 AD.
- Those who visited and lived in Egypt for sometime such as St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nisus, St. Gregory the Wonders Worker, St. John the Chrysostom, St. Ausabios of Vercelli, and St. Hilary of Poitiers.
- The Egyptian monks who established monastic life in Egypt.

✠ The Monastic Life out of Egypt:

✠ In the East:

In Palestine, Jordan, and Syria: the monastic life there established by St Hilary of Gaza (291-371 AD) where he was a disciple of St. Anthony, and St. Pachomius.

In Asia Minor: St. Basil the Great established the monastic life after his visit to St. Pachomius monasteries and set his rules which were translated by Rofenios from Greek to Latin. Eustathius who was borne 300 AD and lived for some time in Egypt established monastic life in Armenia.

In Iraq: St Augin the Egyptian of St. Pachomius monasteries with 70 Egyptian monks established monastic life in Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Persia.

In Cyprus: St. Ibevanios who visited Egypt established monasticism in Cyprus.

In Ethiopia: Nine Egyptian monks of St. Pachomius Monastery went to Ethiopia after Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD and established monasteries there.

✠ **In the West:**

St. John Cassian built St. Victor Monastery for monks and another one for nuns in 410 AD.

St. Jerome, Paula and her daughter Eustochium established a monastery in Jerusalem and another monastery established by St. Melanie. They had great effects on monastic life in the West. St. Jerome translated St. Pachomius Rules to Latin.

St. Ambrose founded the monastic life in Milan.

St. Martins in Liguge of France (362 AD), St. Honoratus in Lerins in France (400 AD), and St. Augustine (395 AD).

✦ **Weakness of Monasticism in Egypt**

Nowadays, Egyptian Monasticism is in strong standing through the organization and continual progress of His Holiness Pope Shenouda who rearranged the monasteries, built new ones and portrays monasticism in its golden age. However, in the 7th century, monasticism suffered a state of weakness due to:

- The Barbarian attacks against the monasteries in deserts.
- The theological and doctrinal arguments
- Invasion of Egypt by Arab Muslims

The first and second reasons are considered secondary reasons for monasticism weakness, however, the third reason, Arab invasion, was certainly the main reason and here are some examples of what those Barbarians did.

After their invasion to Egypt, the Muslim General Amr destroyed all monasteries and churches in Alexandria and Fostat.

Maron, the Second destroyed most of monasteries in the Upper Egypt in the 8th Century.

The Muslim governor El-Asbagh ordered his soldiers to castrate every monk in Scete and Shehat and assigned a tax of one Dinar for every monk in the time of Pope Alexander the Second the 43rd Patriarch (705-730 AD).

The Muslim soldiers destroyed most of the cells, churches and monasteries in Scete and Shehat, as mentioned by Saverius the Scholar. This was in the time of Pope Mark the Third the 49th Patriarch (799- 819 AD) who asked The Lord to let him departed from this world because of this hard persecution and his request was answered and he departed.

In the time of Pope Shenouda the 55th Patriarch (859-880 AD), they destroyed St. Shenouda, St. Samuel Monasteries and St. Mary Church in Atrib and killed many monks and nuns.

In the time of Pope John the Fifth, 72nd Patriarch (1147-1166 AD) they destroyed many churches in Cairo. El-Makrizy in his history mentioned the most horrible persecution happened to the monks by El-Nasar Mohamed Ebn Kaloon in the time of Pope John the 8th (1300-1320 AD) and Pope John the 9th (1320-1327 AD) where countless Churches were destroyed.

✠ **Advantages of Monasticism for Church and Society**

✠ **Spiritual advantages:**

The main advantages of monasticism were the monks who offered a role model of the life of love, prayers and true Christianity. No wonder that the biography of one person such as St. Anthony changed the lives of many sinners such as St. Augustine. Our fathers the monks never stop praying for our lives, the Nile, land, air and all of creation. We believe that Christianity still remains in Egypt despite of huge suffering and the persecution of our fathers and we suffer because of the monks' prayers who intercede on our behalf.

✠ **In doctrine and dogma:**

Our monks fathers defended against heresies, we read about St Anthony who supported Pope Athanasius against Arians and St. Shenouda supported Pope Cyril the Great in 431 AD in Council of Ephesus. St. Samuel the Confessor refused Leon's book and Council of Chalcedon and so he suffered persecution from the Romans and lost his eye.

✠ **Theological sciences:**

There are many texts and volumes in different specialties of theological sciences written by monks to support the Orthodox dogma.

✠ **Education:**

St. Pachomius in his rules offered education to the monks and didn't let those illiterate to become a monk. St. Anthony, St. Pachomius, and St. Macarius the Great had many ceremonies to educate their monks. We read about monks who could memorize all of the Holy Bible as Palladius mentioned Mark the Monk who memorized before him the 4 Holy Gospels, Aaron the monk who memorized the Holy Book of Isaiah, the Holy Book of Psalms and the Holy Book of Jeremiah before him. Rofenios of Aquila mentioned his wondering about the ability of Egyptian monks in memorizing many Holy Books of Old and New Testaments. The monasteries became schools and centers of Theology after the collapse of the School of Alexandria. In addition to this, the efforts of the monks in copying of old texts and books before the invention of recent copying machines.

✠ **Social advantages:**

The virtues of monks became models, the believers in the community practice. Also, monks become the spiritual leaders and bishops of the Church for their virtues.

✚ In the West

Where the monasticism built by Egyptian monasticism, it has many advantages. In the middle centuries, the schools of monasteries were the main sources of education and became universities later on such as University of Oxford and University of Cambridge. Also, in the monasteries there were hospitals for treatment of the sick and houses for strangers and the poor. Also, the monasteries were societies for sciences, industries and education.

We read about Columbus who brought with him the Dominicans monks to preach to the American Indians in America. Ferdinand who discovered Mexico, Pizaro who discovered Brazil, Peter Philadelphia who discovered Shelly all of them brought Dominicans, Jesuit, Franciscans, Benedictines monks to preach to the people there and convert them from pagans to Christianity.

We read also about many scholars in the middle centuries such as the British monk Pida (675-735 AD), the Franciscans monk Roger Bacon (1214-1292 AD) was a great scientist in physics and astronomy and the founder of the recent experimental science.

Monasticism in the West

Before we finish up our introduction about monasticism, it is good to take a look at the monasticism in the West today.

✠ Benedictines:

Established by Benedict (480-547 AD) who is considered the founder of monasticism in Western Europe. Benedict was borne 480 AD in Trichina of Italy for a well-to do family. He studied in Rome but he liked the life of asceticism and sought solitude in a cave in Subiaco. Then he got very famous and had many disciples where he established a monastery in Monte Casino near Napoly in 520 AD. He built many monasteries for monks and others for nuns headed by his sister Scholastica. He set rules derived them from St. Pachomius rules.

✠ Cartesians' Monasticism:

It combines the hermitic and coenobitic lives. Every monastery has a Church in the middle of the monks' cells. Each cell has 3 rooms and a small yard and it is not permitted for the monk to leave his cell except for the Church. Every monk has his own prayers and readings in his cell. The monks also are very conservative in fasting.

✠ Franciscans:

Established by Francis of Asis (1182 – 1226 AD) and were concerned about preaching to non Christians. Many monks were martyred in Spain during the Muslim invasion. This monasticism is characterized by strong asceticism and poverty.

✠ Dominicans:

Established by Dominick (1170-1221 AD). This monasticism combines fasting, prayer, asceticism, rituals and preaching as Franciscans. They are very famous for their knowledge and theology. Of them Tomas of Aquinas the Scholar is considered one of the greatest scholars in the Catholic Church. They study other religions and other philosophies and defend Christianity against these.

✠ Jesuits:

Established by Ignatius De Leola in 1534 AD. They don't practice assembly worship and ritual prayers in the Church but they practice individual prayers. They don't practice much fasting. They care about preaching for non Christians, teaching in schools and seminaries, spiritual guidance, service of sick and those in jail, in addition to ceremonies and writing.

✠ **Younger Brothers of Christ:**

Established in our time and live in houses in the cities and they work with people in different industries to be able to connect them and guide them spiritually.

✠ Chanaines Regulier:

They are priests whom live according to monks' rules and serve the congregation in liturgies and different rituals. Example of this monasticism is Premontres who follow St. Augustine's rules which combine the monastic life and priesthood.