REFERENCES TO VIRGINITY AND MONASTICISM IN THE LETTERS AND IN THE MORAL AND ASCETICAL WRITINGS OF THE GREAT DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is twofold: to inquire what the Great Doctors of the Church have said about virginity and the monastic life, ant to investigate the development of those institutions within the lifetime of the Great Doctors. If it be asked why one solicits the opinions of those Fathers, it may be replied that their lives were contemporary with the rise of monasticism, and that the Church has declared them eminently worthy of the esteem of the faithful. If someone protest that the history of monasticism has been written "ad infinitum", the author answers that it has not always been written by persons who were themselves religious; moreover, it has usually been written either in form of continuous exposition or as a collection of source materials. In this thesis an attempt has been made to combine the two methods by enriching the narrative with quotations from the sources.

Since the subject of early monasticism is one of such immensity and contains so many disputed points, the limits of a thesis for the Master's degree do not permit of more than a cursory sketch of this great historical movement. In general, a "via media" between conflicting opinions concerning monastic developments has been followed, except that when the matter is of some religious consequence, the views of Catholic writers of repute have been accepted. In an effort to avoid too great bulk of material and obscurity of the main objective amid a haze of scientific data, it has been necessary to produce a work less definitive than might be desired.

In the first chapter of this thesis, where the history

of monasticism is sketched, the growth of eremitism in Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Greece has not been included because those countries did not make both permanent and novel contributions to that history, but were the scenes of ephemeral religious extravagances or ascetic practices of Egyptian origin. Similarly, the activity of Saint Columban has not been considered, because a discussion of Celtic asceticism with its spread into Gaul, Britain, and Italy, and the reasons for its decline in favor of Benedictine monasticism would have prolonged excessively the present work.

In the second chapter of the thesis, where the Great Doctors' references to virginity and monasticism are noted, certain omissions have been made. When the same idea or opinion has been expressed by several of the Great Doctors, the writer has taken the liberty of omitting the recurring reference, noting in a general way its frequent occurrence. References to virginity in works which reliable critics have adjudged doubtful or spurious have not been included.

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CHAPTER I

A HISTORY OF MONASTICISM TO THE TIME OF ST. BENEDICT

To the Jews the teachings of Christ were a stumbling block; to the Gentiles they were foolishness; and probably to a great number of persons today, the literal acceptance of Christ's teachings by religious men and women is likewise regarded as being either incomprehensible or ridiculous. It is fitting, therefore, that an inquiry be made into the historical background of asceticism to ascertain whether the unusual manner of life adopted by Christian ascetics has any parallel in the history of religions other than the Christian, and if so how widespread the institution became, and what ideals it upheld. Secondly, regarding Christian asceticism and that special ascetic development termed monasticism, investigation should determine whether the latter truly stems from the teaching of Christ, or whether it is an invention of the Early Church.

In the most general acceptation of the term, asceticism is the practice of certain austerities, whose immediate purpose may be either moral or religious.[1]

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[1] The following discussion of non-Christian asceticism is taken from the article "Ascetisme", in the Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique.

Considering first the practice of asceticism among non-Christians, the investigator finds that among the Jewish people as a whole, the only ascetic practices were a legal abstinence from various sorts of food, especially the meat of certain animals, as prescribed in Leviticus, and also the observance of several annual fasts. Within the Jewish priesthood there were no true ascetics similar to those of the Christian era.

Among the faithful the only cultivators of asceticism were: the Nazarite, who was specially consecrated to God by the vow of temporary or perpetual abstinence from intoxicating liquors; the type of life required among the schools of prophets, a life which was non-monastic in the fact that it lacked several elements indispensable to monasticism, such as separation from the world, celibacy, and a common Rule; and finally, certain exterior resemblances to Christian monastic communities among the Essenes, with their general practice of celibacy, observance of a Rule, and community of goods. True, as rigid Pharisees, they carried the practice of legal purity to the point of separation from the world, but they lacked several elements essential to monasticism, notably the obligation to celibacy binding upon all members.

In India, long before the advent of Buddhism, there was a large number of ascetics who practised great bodily austerities, as solitaries inhabiting forests, or as mendicant wayfarers living on alms. In the sixth century Buddha organized the common life in his Hindu convents of men and women, giving them a Rule in which he insisted chiefly upon the practice of poverty. While this institution was

developing in India, the Brahman ascetics, in order not to lose their influence, redoubled their austerities and finally succeeded in regaining and preserving a high degree of religious supremacy in almost all of India. Furthermore, when Buddhism penetrated into the neighboring countries of China and Japan, it did not succeed in transplanting there the asceticism practised in India. Hence, the importance of Buddhist asceticism is diminished by reason of its declining influence in India and its failure of adoption abroad.

In ancient Greece and in the countries subject to its influence, a type of asceticism which was philosophical rather than religious appeared at least as early as the time of Pythagoras, in the sixth century before Christ. Its three chief manifestations were Pythagoreanism itself, with its attempt to establish a community whose purpose appears to have been less religious than scientific; stoicism with its emphasis upon the extirpation of the passions; and the Neo-Pythagorean and Neo-Platonist sects of the first centuries of the Christian era, whose mystical tendencies and austerities were imitated from the Pythagoreans.

Egyptian asceticism was confined to the priests and priestesses of the sanctuaries of the god Serapis, whose worship flourished in the latter part of the era of the Ptolemies and during the Roman domination; however, the religious practises of these recluses appear to have been limited to the exercise of priestly functions.

Among the ancient Romans, asceticism does not seem to have existed except for the vestal virgins and particular

instances of certain ascetic practices among the pagan priests.

It may be said in summary that non-Christian asceticism presents certain exterior resemblances to Christian asceticism in the observance of abstinence, fasting, and other corporal morification, as well as in the practice of poverty, celibacy, and of a common life rather similar to monastic life. These resemblances may be explained by the following observations: there may exist outside of Christianity a more or less perfect knowledge of certain moral and religious truths; secondly, the imposition of voluntary sufferings and privations in a purpose of religious expiation or of moral training may be realized at least imperfectly outside of Christianity; and lastly, the exterior manifestation of this moral or religious idea can easily assume certain common forms imposed by the universal similarity of man's condition and the nature of the sentiments to be expressed.

The preceding inquiry into non-Christian asceticism indicates that the ascetic urge is not an anomaly peculiar to Christianity but that for a small portion of their number ascetic practices have existed among all religions that exerted a considerable historical influence, and also among widely, separated peoples.

That these resemblances to Christian asceticism were chiefly external will be seen by an examination into the spirit and purpose of the latter.

Christian asceticism may be defined as the practice of the evangelical renunciation required by Christian law, or simply counselled as a means of attaining more surely Christian perfection or of contributing more efficaciously to the common good of Christian society. To the Christian, asceticism is not the destruction of bodily desires as something essentially evil, but rather the transformation of the body into "an instrument of merit and salvation." 2

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2 Sister M. Rosamond Nugent, Portrait of the Consecrated Woman in Greek Christian Literature of the First Four Centuries, 3.

It is sometimes debated whether Christ wittingly established the asceticism that Christians have practised through the centuries, or whether he wished his words to be given a more figurative interpretation than the Church has accorded them. The question is too vast to be thoroughly explored here, but it may be said that it is the teaching of the Church that one of Christ's purposes in his life upon earth was to point the way to salvation, that he himself practised the evangelical counsels, and that the words of Christ which have formed the basis of Christian asceticism were not uttered as parables or figures, but as straightforward statements of fact.

The state of Christian perfection requires the observance of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. While there are numerous instances in the life of Christ in which he may be said to have counselled these

virtues, the following examples seem to express his advice to those who would follow him more closely. To the rich young man who inquired what was still wanting in one who had always kept the commandments, the Master replied, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me." 3

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3 Matth. 19:16-22.

On the same occasion the Pharisees questioned Christ concerning his teaching on the subject of marriage, separation, and divorce. When Christ stated unequivocally that a separation followed by remarriage, or marriage with a person still bound by the vows of matrimony constitutes adultery, the Apostles with their usual naivete remarked that in that event it was not expedient for a man to marry. And the gentle Christ explained, "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who were born so from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take (it)." 4

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4 Ibid., 3-12.

The words of Christ upon which is based the third great renunciation, that of obedience, are usually considered to be those in the Gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up

his cross, and follow me. For he that will save his life, shall lose it: and he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it." 5

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5 Ibid., 16:24-25.

That there were virgins living in Apostolic times who had interpreted literally Christ's invitation to a state of perfection is proved by the seventh chapter of Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, where the saint commends virginity, counselling the parents of a virgin in regard to her continuance in that state. Some writers have seen evidence of a monastic element in the Church of Jerusalem during the first years of its existence, basing their belief upon that passage in the Acts of the Apostles where the believers are said to have had all things in common, selling their possessions and dividing them according to need. 6

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6 Acts, 2:42-47.

A number of early ascetics devoted their lives to the promulgation of the Gospel, giving up their possessions and passing from one city to another in voluntary poverty as apostles and evangelists.

In the second century the class of Christians striving for Christian perfection was named "abstinents", or ascetics, and in this connection one recalls St. Justin Martyr's obser-

vation that Christians were commencing to abstain from flesh, wine, and sexual intercourse. Together with St. Ignatius and others, St. Justin lauds celibacy as the highest state. Cultivating the practices of celibacy, non-ownership of property, fasting and prayer, these "abstinents" had a most pronounced desire for martyrdom, as witness the sentiments expressed by St. Ignatius of Antioch in his Epistle to the Romans, where he writes, "I am His wheat and I am ground by the teeth of beasts that I may become His pure bread." 7

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7 J. Bollandus and G. Henschenius, Acta Sanctorum, Feb., 1:28; A.C. Flick, The Rise of the Medieval Church, 204.

The second and third century preoccupation with martyrdom may be noted in the works of Origen, that scholar declaring that the foremost sacrifice is that of the Apostles, then that of martyrs, and next that of virgins and the continent. However, Origen admits that the virgin's sacrifice is the one most holy and pleasing to God, provided that the virgin be unpolluted by pride, avarice, or sins of the tongue; for if her character is thus marred she is not presenting herself as a sacrifice. 8

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8 M.R. Nugent, op. cit., 13-14.

Near the end of the second century the "abstinents" were organized by bishops into quasi-communities, and were advised

to withdraw from society as much as possible, and to observe regulations regarding dress and recreations, though still continuing the early custom of living in the homes of their families.

At the beginning of the third century virgins were recognized as a special class in the Church, receiving Holy Communion before the laity. The Office of Good Friday mentions them after the porters, and the Litany of the Saints invokes them together with the widows. Indicative of the fact that the title "spouse of Christ" was understood in its literal sense is St. Cyprian's description of a virgin who had broken her vows as an adulteress. Moreover, both Origen and St. Cyprian bewail the scandal that some virgins caused by their wordly lives. In a treatise on the dress of virgins St. Cyprian asks what such maidens have to do with worldly dress and adornments, whereby in trying to please men to offend God. Why, he asks, does a virgin go abroad with her hair dressed as if she had a husband or were seeking one? Virgins of this sort have defiled their skins with lying cosmetics, dyed their hair with an adulterous color, and feel no shame at attending weddings, where they take part in unchaste conversation, hearing and saying things unbecoming. But what should be said of virgins who frequent the common baths and prostitute to lustful eyes bodies consecrated to modesty and chastity? 9

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9 Sister Angela M. Keenan, Thasci Caecili Cypriani De Habitu Virginum, 47 et seq.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the close of the third century witnessed the beginning of organized communities of virgins, one of these being the community in which St. Anthony placed his sister to be brought up by "faithful, well-known virgins". Martinez, a reliable French authority on early Christian asceticism, summarizes the ascetic development of the first three centuries of the Christian era as follows:

> "Depuis Ignace d' Antioche jusqu'a la fin du troisieme siecle, les ascetes Chretiens ont cru que leur fondateur etait Jesus Christ. C'est pour suivre son appel qu'ils embrassent ce genre de vie; ils n'ont d'autre regle de vie que l' Evangile." 10

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10 "Nuns", Catholic Encyclopedia; M.C. Murphy, op.cit., 6.

In his Symposium written by St. Methodius just before the peace of the Church, that saint offers a poetic apology for virginity in which he declares that the choir of virgins merits a place of closest proximity to Christ, since its members have endured a martyrdom, not for a moment of time but throughout their lives. The cessation of persecution in the fourth century brought with it many conversions to Christianity and a consequent relaxation of manners which necessitated marked changes in Christian disciplinary matters. First, the Church imposed a stricter rule of life upon ascetics and virgins in order to protect them from unnecessary contact with pagan vice; secondly, monarchism was established in the fourth century, an institution whose development was like-

wise motivated largely by a desire to escape "the enervating forces of paganism." It is the opinion of Dr. Kirsch that it was from the foundation of the ascetic life in the Christian communities of the first three centuries, and under the influence of social and especially religious factors which made themselves felt especially in the Orient, that monachism developed in the fourth century.

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11 M. R. Nugent, op. cit., 5, 16; Joseph Cardinal Hergenrothers, Handbuch der allgemeinen Kirchengeschichte, 1:389.

The middle of the third century saw the creation of a new type of asceticism, namely anchoretism, or hermit life adopted for the pursuit of Christian perfection. Our literary sources for this form of asceticism are most voluble for its development in Egypt. Leaving their families, many ascetics withdrew to solitary places near their villages, and then to the mountains and deserts of Egypt. St. Paul the hermit, the most famous of the anchorites, probably lived in a desert in Northern Egypt east of the Nile.

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12 A. C. Flick, op. cit., 205; Count de Montalembert, Monks of the West, 1:179; Sister Margaret G. Murphy, St. Basil and Monasticism, 9.

Twenty years after Paul, St. Anthony withdrew to the desert for the pursuit of ascetic practices. How truly the religious life is a vital thing, sensitive to changing needs and able to adapt itself to those needs is the fact that within fifty years another significant development had occurred: St. Anthony's establishment of a semi-eremitical life which contained within it some elements of the later cenobitism. St. Athanasius relates that many hermits came to Anthony's

desert retreat and begged him to instruct them in the ascetic life, some of them deciding to remain in the "outer mountain", where Anthony periodically instructed them. It is to be noted that the organization which Anthony was called upon to direct was simply one of spiritual guidance, each monk being the arbiter of his own ascetic practices, and continuing a solitary life in his own cell.

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13 The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers, E. A. T. W. Budge, (ed.), 1-11 (Introduction); E. C. Butler, "Monasticism," Cambridge Medieval History, 1:522; St. Athanasius, op.cit., 522.

The Vita Antonii by St. Athanasius will be cited later, in connection with its influence upon the development of western monasticism. At this point, however, it may be observed that a counsel which is familiar to every religious of our own day may be found in this pioneer work on the monastic life:

> "As though making a beginning daily let us increase our earnestness. As we rise day by day, we should think that we shall not abide till evening; and again, when about to lie down to sleep, we should think that we shall not rise up."

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14 St. Athanasius, op. cit., The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, 4:200-201.

The semi-eremitical life established by Anthony reached its greatest development in the deserts of Nitria and Scete, in the region of Alexandria. Dom Butler credits Cassian with having most completely expressed the philosophy of Antonian monachism in twenty-four conferences entitled Collations, which present the responses supposedly made by prominent monks of those deserts to questions proposed to them by

Cassian and his friend, who lived in Scete between 390 and 400 A.D.

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15 E. C. Butler, op. cit., 525

In the first conference Abbot Moses expounds his views concerning the immediate end or goal of a religious, the ultimate end obviously being the attainment of Heaven. That object - personal sanctification - is the motive of all ascetic works. At this point it is interesting to notice that those practices which are commonly thought to constitute a major part of a monk's life are ranked as secondary in the Antonian scheme:

> "Those things which are of secondary importance, such as fasting, vigils, withdrawal from the world, meditation on Scripture, we ought to practice with a view to our main object, i. e., purity of heart, which is charity, and we ought not on their account to drive away this main virtue, for as long as it is still found in us intact and unharmed, we shall not be hurt if any of the things which are of secondary importance are necessarily omitted."

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16 John Cassian, "The Conferences," The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, 11:297-298.

It is sometimes debated whether charity or humility is the greater virtue. In the fourteenth conference Cassian has Abbot Nesteros speak as follows:

> "Humility therefore is the mistress of all virtues it is the surest foundation of the heavenly building, it is the special and splendid gift of the Saviour.... For when He was returning to the Father, He prepared, so to speak, His will and left this to His disciples:

> 'A new commandment," said He, 'give I unto you that ye love one another, as I have loved you, so do ye also love one another:'....and this it is certain that none but the meek and humble can keep."

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17 Ibid., 448

However, Palladius seems to give a more vivid description of the early monks than Cassian. He possesses that literary art which enables him in a few words to depict the spirit that animated those pioneers and enabled them, by their own observation and experiment, to evolve spiritual principles which are taught in the novitiates of the present day. It was in the course of the monks' visits with one another for the purpose of discussing the spiritual life that such utterances as the following occurred:

> "Abba Moses entreated Abba Zechariah, saying, 'Speak a word of consolation unto the brethren," and Zechariah took his cloak, and laid it beneath his feet, saying, 'Except a man let himself be trodden upon thus, he cannot be a monk.'"

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18 Bishop Palladius, "The Sayings of the Fathers,." The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers, 2:123

Concerning the possession of books:

> "Abba Theodore of Parma possessed some beautiful books, and he went to Abba Macarius and said unto him, 'Father I have three books, and I gain profit from them; tell me, now, what shall I do with them?' And the old man answered and said, 'Ascetic labours are beautiful, but the greatest of them all is voluntary poverty.'"

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19 Ibid., 35

On one occasion four monks came to Abba Pambo and recounted their various works to him, the first declaring that he fasted often; the second, that he led a life of poverty; the third, that he possessed great love. Of the fourth, the others said,

> "'He hath been in subjection to the old men for twenty-two years.' Then Abba Pambo said unto them, ...'The spiritual excellence of this man is great Each of you hath chosen the ascetic virtue which he possesseth according to his own wish, but this man hath cut off his own desire, and hath performed the will of others.'"

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20 Ibid., 55-56

It was about the year 318, nearly fifteen years after Anthony consented to be spiritual father of a quasi-community of monks in the north of Egypt that Pachomius established his monastery north of Thebes in southern Egypt. By the end of the fourth century, Palladius testifies, there were 7,000 Pachomian monks.

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21 O. Bardenhewer, Patrologia, 265; "Monasticism," Catholic Encyclopedia; E. C. Butler, op. cit., 525

In the center of a Pachomian monastery was the church, while in other sections were kitchen, storeroom, library, and vestry. Numerous separate houses were provided for the various groups of craftsmen into which each community was divided, and in these were cells for twenty-four monks with large rooms for assembly and recreation.

Now, in the monastery in which Pachomius dwelt there were 1300 monks; in the other monasteries, from one to three hundred monks.

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22 Sister M. G. Murphy, op. cit., 10; "Monasticism," Catholic Encyclopedia; Palladius, "Histories of the Holy Men," Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers, 1:146.

Perhaps the Pachomian discipline can be seen best by considering the so-called Rule of Pachomius. (Modern Religious would hardly term it a Rule for personal guidance, but rather a set of regulations for an institution.) It is very brief, containing only six provisions, one or two sentences in length, the first of which is the most significant.

> "Let every man eat and drink whensoever he wisheth, and according to the strength of those who eat and drink impose work; and thou shalt restrain them neither from eating nor fasting. Furthermore, on those who are strong thou shalt impose severe labours; and upon those who are of inferior strength and upon those who fast thou shalt impose light labours."

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23 Palladius, op. cit., 144-145

Here, it will be seen, there is no attempt to regulate regarding food and drink, but every facility is offered for the fulfillment of individual wishes in the matter. In fact Palladius relates that some of the monks partook of food once a week, others once a day, and others more often, meals being served thrice daily and once in the evening. And all this with 1300 monks! The imposition of labour is also of interest, for it is indicative of the radical change in the attitude toward work which distinguishes Antonian from Pachomian monachism. In the former, work was undertaken to supply daily needs or to spend time which could

not be used in prayer or Scripture reading. But in the Pachomian system work was undertaken for its own sake, that which was superfluous for the monastic brethren being given to the convent of nuns that Pachomius had established.

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24 Ibid., 146; E. C. Butler, op. cit., 524-525.

It seems as if the guiding principle of Pachomius was to provide conditions in which the individual monk might rise to that degree of asceticism which he himself desired. Is not this the underlying theme of the words of the angel to Pachomius, as reported by Palladius?

> "Unto the perfect no law whatsoever is laid down, because their mind is at all seasons occupied with God, but this law which I have laid down for those who have not a perfect mind is laid down for them, so that although they fulfill only such things as are prescribed by the canons they can acquire openness of face."

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25 Palladius, op. cit., 146

In pursuance of this angelic command, it was Pachomius' practice to have an abundance of food cooked daily and set before his monks, so that by the daily practice of abstinence and self-restraint they might reach a higher degree of spiritual excellence. Hence we see that the spirit of Pachomian asceticism was not far removed from that of the anchorites, who set for themselves goals of individual endeavor. A further proof that Pachomian monasticism was merely the final development of individual asceticism is the fact that after sufficient discip-

linary formation, the monk proved his fervour by adopting the solitary life.

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26 "The Rule of Pachomius," "The Paradise or Gardan of the Holy Fathers, 1:292; "Religious Life" Catholic Encyclopedia.

Egypt was, as it were, the seedbed of monasticism: there, from about 250 until 400 A.D., was developed the semi-eremetical life, as taught by St. Anthony, and a nascent cenobitical life under the direction of Pachomius. After reaching a high point of growth about 400, monasticism exhibited that tendency so often remarked in the history of civilization in the fact that at this point there began a decay of monachism in the land of its origin, and its further development in foreign lands.

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27 E. C. Butler, op. cit., 525-526.

Taking a kind of bird's eye view of the scene, one notes three great propagators of Egyptian monachism to the Greek East and the Latin West, namely: St. Basil, St. Athanasius, and Cassian. Because the contributions of St. Basil were probably most significant for the later history of western monasticism, his contributions to the ascetic life will be considered first.

Passing over the idyllic youth of St. Basil, his early introduction to high spirituality, and his God - given preservation of "mens sana in corpore sano", one finds him in 357, journeying to Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia in order to observe the ascetic life

in those lands. Returning to Caesarea in 358, Basil, together with the friend who is known to history as St. Gregory Nazianzen, began to fulfill a resolution made during their student days in Athens, to withdraw from the world, though now the philosophical outlook was probably sublimated in their youthful minds in favor of a profound admiration for Christian asceticism gained by their observation of monasticism in Egypt and the Near East. On the banks of the river Iris, near Neocaesarea in Pontus, Basil's sylvan hermitage gradually became a quasi-monastery for the ascetics of Pontus and Cappadocia, and in 362 he was acknowledged as their leader. In 365, the saint, having formulated the main outlines of Basilian monasticism, left his Pontic retreat to take an active part in the service of the Church.

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28 R. J. Deferrari, St. Basil, the Letters with an English Translation, 21 (Introduction), III: Letter 223; W.K.L. Clarke, St. Basil the Great, 44 et seq.

It is quite apparent that the chief source of Basil's system was not the Antonian monachism of northern Egypt, but the Pachomian system as practiced at Tabennesus and perhaps its daughter institutions, for Basilian monasticism is wholly cenobitic, while the monasticism of northern Egypt and the Near East was highly eremitic. However, there are great differences between the Pachomian and Basilian ideals, one of the most significant being the fact that Basil declared the superiority of the cenobitic over the eremitic form of asceticism. It will be recalled that the Egyptian monks considered life in community a mere

preparation for the more perfect (sic) life of the hermit.

29
W.K.L. Clarke, op.cit., 42, 123; Ibid., The Ascetic Works of St. Basil, 163-166.

A visitor to monasteries of these two types would probably find the most striking difference between them to be the number of inhabitants: Pachomian monasteries housed from 100 to 300 monks; Basilian convents had, ideally, only thirty or forty religious. A third great difference is the marked restraint of individualism placed on his religious by St. Basil, as compared with the relative freedom possessed by Pachomian groups.

30
W.K.L. Clarke, Basil, 89 and 117.

After the preceding general comparison of the developments of the monastic tradition made by Pachomius and Basil, the practical achievements of Basil in the field of monasticism may be considered in some detail. Clarke groups them under four headings. First, Basil organized the ascetic life which was already in existence in Pontus and Cappadocia, but had only two aspects, namely, the celibate life in the world devoted to prayer and good works, and the solitary life. St. Gregory Nazianzen confesses that he would have adopted the eremitical life, had it not necessitated his renouncing sacred studies, and he goes on to extol Basil for having instituted "a middle way between the two extremes, combining the excellences of both."

31
Ibid. 46, 58, and 115.

Further, Basil founded a system of double monasteries of men and women, of whom he could write proudly in 375:

> "I desire you to know that we boast of having a body of men and women whose conversation is in heaven, who have crucified their flesh with its affections and desires...Their mouths do not proclaim the works of men, but they sing hymns to our God unceasingly, while they work with their own hands that they may have something to share with those who have need."

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32 St. Basil, the Letters III, Letter 207.

A second accomplishment of St. Basil was the moderation of individual austerities, substituting in their stead internal discipline and the fatigue of laborious duties. One can surmise the strain placed upon charity by the dwelling together of thirty or forty religious. And in Letter 22, which is a symposium of Basil's views on monastic life, one finds the saint devoting more admonitions to the subject of fraternal charity than to any other, requiring of his monks the most exalted practice of the virtue. In Precept 37 of the Longer Rules, the monk is told that he should accept the work assigned him; the manner and spirit in which the work is to be performed are also prescribed. Fasting should not be such as to interfere with the performance of work.

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33 Sister M. G. Murphy, op. cit, 94; St. Basil, the Letters I, 22; W. K. L. Clarke, Ascetic Works, 212-213; Dom Cuthbert Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 17.

The third contribution of Basil is the one most often attributed to him—the introduction of the common life. The spirit of individualism, which characterized Egyptian monachism, became under Basil a holocaust

on the altar of a life lived in common with fellow religious. The brethren are summoned together for eight canonical hours, none of which may be omitted. In the refectory there is a fixed order, one of the monks being responsible for the seating. The monks shall eat what is set before them. Articles of clothing are obtained from those in authority and are to be accepted humbly. The common routine is not to be interrupted by the presence of guests, who are to be received by a monk appointed as guest-master. Should another monk be addressed by a guest, he will silently point to the guest-master.[34]

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34 W. K. L. Clarke, St. Basil, 87 et seq.

Dom Butler agrees with Clarke in asserting that monasticism assumed under St. Basil its work of active service to humanity. Hospices for the poor and sick were attached to the monasteries by the saint, and in these the monks ministered to Christ. Near the monasteries orphanages were established, and within the monastery walls boys were admitted to be educated.[35]

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35 Cuthbert Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 16.

It seems that a fifth contribution of St. Basil might be found in his introduction of permanent profession. Hitherto, the cenobite was under no obligation to remain in the monastery. An illustration of this fact is given by Palladius, who describes a brief sojourn of Macarius of Egypt among the monks of Tabennesus, the apparent purpose

of his entrance being to "show the boys" what real austerity is. With fire in their eyes the monks soon approached Pachomius and informed him that if he did not dismiss the old ascetic, they would leave the monastery. Pachomius' consequent dismissal of Macarius is a gem of tactfulness. Regarding the monastic profession, it may be seen that the context of the monk's promise implied preeminently chastity, for then as now the ascetic life was viewed primarily as a life of continence.

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86 "Religious Life," Catholic Encyclopedia; Palladius, op. cit., 1:120-121; Sister M. G. Murphy, op. cit., 30.

Did St. Basil write a monastic Rule? Dr. Roy Deferrari of the Catholic University stated in 1926 that in his opinion there can be little doubt that Basil did write such a Rule, though we do not now possess it. What we do possess is two collections of Rules, the first of them, Regulae Fusius Tractatae (Longer Rules), being spiritual exhortations rather than Rules; the second collection, Regulae Brevius Tractatae (Shorter Rules), seeming to be answers to questions proposed to Basil at a kind of General Chapter. Clarke believes that the Rules that Gregory mentions as written by Basil and himself were drafted in 358-359, and that they form the basis of the Longer Rules, delivered between 362-365.

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87 St. Basil, the Letters, 1:21 (Introduction); W. K. L. Clarke, 69 et seq.

Many scholars are convinced that St. Basil considered the Bible the Rule for his religious and that the so-called Rules are primarily

principles of guidance concerning virtues to be practiced and vices to be avoided by religious. Section 47 of the Longer Rules seems to bear out this point in the fact that the Superior has the right to command in accordance with the Bible, no Rule being mentioned:

> "He who does not accept the decisions made by the Superior must publicly or privately contradict him, if he has any strong reason according to the intent and purpose of Scripture, or he must keep silence and perform what has been commanded."

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38 "Religious Life," Catholic Encyclopedia; Sister M. G. Murphy, op. cit., 41.

The following quotation from Section 8 of the Longer Rules is illustrative of the catechetical system in which they are written and the sermonettes that they contain.

> "Concerning Renunciation. Must man first renounce all and then come to the life that is after God's will? It is clear that the precious pearl of the parable is used as an example of the heavenly kingdom, which the word of the Lord shows us we cannot attain unless we have first sacrificed, in order to win it, all our possessions together--riches, fame, family, and whatever else is commonly cherished....If we reserve to ourselves some earthly possession and corruptible riches, our mind is buried therin as it were in mud, and in consequence our soul cannot see God, nor can it be stirred to desire the heavenly beauty and the good things stored up for us in God's promises."

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39 W. K. L. Clarke, Ascetic Works, 166-169

Becoming bishop of Caesarea in 370, Basil continued to further monasticism and to maintain a high standard among ascetics. Exhausted by ascetic practices and a difficult episcopate, Basil died in 379, at the age of fifty. Westward through Asia Minor and northward to the

Black Sea, throughout the Greek world Basilian monasticism spread. Rufinus translated the Longer and Shorter Rules into Latin and these had some influence in the West.

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40 "Rule of St. Basil," Catholic Encyclopedia; W. K. L. Clarke, St. Basil, 58-59; R. F. Deferrari, op. cit., 34 (Introduction).

It is somewhat of a coincidence that the one chiefly responsible for the spread of Egyptian monasticism to Western Europe was a churchman whose life had touched those of the three outstanding names in the historical development of monasticism. St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, had been the guest of the hermit, St. Anthony; supporter of the first great innovator, Pachomius; and defender of that intrepid soldier who fought to preserve the truths of the Faith, St. Basil. In 340, St. Athanasius came to Rome to seek the aid of the pope in his struggle against Arianism, and in the West as in the East his zeal for the Church showed itself in his enthusiastic descriptions of the lives of Egyptian solitaries and cenobites.

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41 St. Athanasius, op. cit., passim.

Attended by the monks Ammon and Isidorus, one of whom, as so often happens in modern "missionary duos", was of a quiet, retiring disposition, the other of a more sociable nature, Athanasius spent three years in Rome and three years in other Italian cities. One is not surprised, therefore, to learn that monasticism was espoused by the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Italy; by Eusebius, bishop of Vercelli in northern Italy, who was the first to combine the clerical and monastic states

among the clergy of his cathedral; by St. Ambrose of Milan, by St. Paulinus of Nola, and also by St. Jerome and Rufinus of Aquileia.

42
T. W. Allies, The Monastic Life, 98; John Ryan, Irish Monasticism, 51-52; E. C. Butler, "Monasticism," 532.

As to the type of monasticism adopted in Italy, it was almost exclusively the Antonian, semi-eremitical form. St. Jerome in his second letter to Paulinus of Nola sets as models, hermits of extreme austerity of life:

> "Every mode of life has its own exponents....Let us monks take as the patterns which we are to follow the lives of Paul, of Antony, of Julian, of Hilarion, of the Macarii."

43
"St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works," Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second series 6:121.

Italy of the fifth century was filled with monasteries, although none of them was as famous as several in Gaul. It is Butler's belief that Rufinus made his Latin translation of St. Basil's Rules in the hope that the Cappadocian observance would be adopted in Italy. Moreover, St. Jerome translated the Rule of Pachomius, but neither Rule exerted any considerable influence, Italian monachism of the period seeming to have been eclectic in character, borrowing largely from Egyptian sources.

44
E. C. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 20

Athanasius was instrumental not only in propagating monasticism but in effecting thereby the spiritual conversion of St. Augustine.

After the death of St. Anthony, St. Athanasius had written a life of the desert monk. Less than twenty years later, Augustine, hearing its effect upon two imperial courtiers, received and cooperated with the final grace necessary to relinquish a habit of sin, and to surrender himself to the love of God.

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45 Montalembert, op. cit., 224; T. W. Allies, 56

The "Vita Antonii", besides being a marvel of rhetoric, contains a matchless vindication of Christianity. Thinking of Augustine and its effect upon him, one recalls the following passage:

> "Two Greek philosophers once came to him. Antony said to them by means of an interpreter. 'Why, philosophers, did ye trouble yourselves so much to come to a foolish man?' And when they said that he was not a foolish man, but exceedingly prudent, he said to them, 'If you came to a foolish man, your labour is superfluous; but if you think me prudent become as I am, for we ought to imitate what is good. And if I had come to you I should have imitated you; but if you to me, become as I am, for I am a Christian."

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46 St. Athanasius, op. cit., 215

A graphic description of his reaction to the "Vita" is given by St. Augustine in his Confessions.

> "Thou, O Lord, while he was speaking, didst turn me round towards myself, taking me from behind my back where I had placed me, unwilling to observe myself; and setting me before my face, that I might see how foul I was, how crooked and defiled, bespotted and ulcerous....And if I sought to turn mine eye from off myself, he went on with his relation, and Thou

> again didst set me over against myself, and thrustedst me before my eyes, that I might find out my iniquity, and hate it."

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47 "The Confessions of St. Augustine," Harvard Classics, 7:134

In Letter 211 of Augustine's Correspondence occurs a set of rules that the saint wrote for the guidance of a nunnery under his care. It contains no new developments in its emphasis of essentials in the religious life, and it seems likely that he was simply enunciating principles of monasticism whose workings he had studied in Rome, Milan, and Africa, rather than presenting a definitive Rule for religious.

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48 "The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine," Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1:565-568; Gustave Bardy, "Chronique d'histoire de la spiritualite," La Vie Spirituelle, 44:124

St Athanasius visited Gaul several times after 335, and there, as in Italy, he inculcated within the native clergy a strong admiration for the solitaries of northern Egypt. To St. Martin of Tours is due the honor of having established the first monastery in Gaul. It was in 360, that Martin, after a sixteen-year novitiate in the school of persecution, exile, and the hardships of anchoritism, founded the monastery of Liguge, near Poitiers. Later, when made bishop of Tours, St. Martin frequently availed himself of the seclusion offered him amid a colony of monks, the so-called monastery of Marmoutiers, founded by the saint a few miles from Tours.

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49 Montalembert, op. cit., 265 et seq; Sulpitius Severus, "Life of St. Martin," Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, 11:4 et seq.

In the south of Gaul the great center of monastic life in the fifth century was the monastery of Lerins, near Cannes, founded in 410 by St. Honoratus, and famous as a school of theology and philosophy. Honoratus was taken from his monastery to be made archbishop of Arles, a see which was later to be occupied by two students of his discipline at Lerins, namely, St. Hilary and St. Caesarius. The last of these is remembered for his "Regula ad Virgines," composed for a convent at Arles that Caesarius endowed and in the building of which he worked with his own hands. It has been affirmed that this was the first Rule which obliged its observers to maintain strict cloister. Caesarius of Arles is also generally credited with the institution of "stabilitas loci," the promise of a religious to remain in the community of his profession until death.

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50 Montalembert, op. cit; Valentine T. Schaaf, The Cloister, 20

The great literary monument of fifth century monasticism in the south of Gaul is the work of John Cassian, previously mentioned for his description of Antonian asceticism. Cassian had been asked by Castor, a bishop whose see was about forty miles north of Marseille, to write a description of the customs that he had observed in Egypt and Palestine, as the bishop wished to establish monasteries in his diocese. Except for the monastery at Lerins and a few others, perhaps, monastic foundations in Gaul had been semi-eremitical in character, attempts being made to observe the ascetic practices of Egyptian monks. That these attempts at imitation were proving impractical for the men of Gaul there is clear evidence in the Dialogues of Sulpitius Severus and

in the criticism of Gallic monks made by St. Jerome.

51 "The Institutes of John Cassian," Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 11:199; E. C. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 22.

Whether Cassian was unconscious of the need for a drastic revision of monastic asceticism in the West, whether he felt unequal to the task of making that revision, or whether he deemed the attempt infeasible at the moment are problems that some future student of research may solve. In the preface to the "Institutes" Cassian declares:

> "I do not believe that a new establishment in the West, in the parts of Gaul could find anything more reasonable or more perfect than are those customs, in the observance of which the monasteries that have been founded by holy and spiritually-minded fathers since the rise of apostolic preaching endure even to our own time...Where I find anything in the rule of the Egyptians which, either because of the severity of the climate, or owing to some difficulty or diversity of habits, is impossible in these countries, or hard and difficult, I shall to some extent balance it by the customs of the monasteries which are found throughout Pontus and Mesopotamia.

52 John Cassian, op. cit., 199

The early reader of Cassian's writings must have felt the extreme admiration of their author for Egyptian asceticism. He must have sensed Cassian's belief that even the lives of Egyptian anchorites could be followed in Gaul, if only the desire to do so were strong enough. And so, supported by the influence of Cassian's writings, and favored by various bishops, Antonian monasticism spread throughout southeastern Gaul. Montalembert paints a woeful picture of the decline of the institution in Western Europe in the later fifth century. Chief among the disorders,

perhaps, was the intrusion, into the ranks of the monks, of men who were actuated by some unworthy motive. One group, the "gyrovagues," spent their lives wandering from place to place and living on alms wrested from the faithful; a second group, called "sarabaites", led worldly lives subject to no restraint. Besides a laxity of morals, there was a complete diversity of Rules and customs, dependent upon the will of individuals in control, and so, ever-changing. The fundamental cause of the disorders was, undoubtedly, the vain attempt to transfer a mode of living difficult in the land of its origin to a different race of people, living in regions where climate and terrain made such a life impossible for the person of average constitution.

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53 Montalembert, op. cit., 300-303; E. C. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 22.

In its general outline the early biography of St. Benedict is known to all. Of honorable descent and Christian parentage, he was sent to Rome as a youth to be educated, but apparently disgusted by the moral laxity among the students, he left the city and retired to a cave near the present town of Subiaco. Here, for three years Benedict followed the life of an anchorite in all its rigor. Then, as so often happened in those days, the report of his sanctity was bruited about, and in the course of time he founded twelve monasteries, each of which housed twelve monks and an abbot.

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54 St. Gregory the Great, Life and Miracles of St. Benedict, 1-15 Fernand Cabrol, Saint Benedict, 1-29

In considering the Rule of St. Benedict, one finds general agreement among investigators of the subject that the Rule was written at Monte Cassino, after considerable experience of monastic life by Benedict, probably about 530. Recently, Dom Chapman has advanced the theory that the Rule was drawn up at the request of someone in authority, and in support of this contention Chapman points to the legal phraseology of the Rule and its frequent reference to monastic abuses. The opinion is meaningful in this study because it has been seen that fifth century monasticism was at "low ebb" in the absence of any uniform rule or legislation imposed and approved by the Church.

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55 Edwin R. A. Seligman (ed.), Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, 2:510; Montalembert, op. cit., 301

In his study of the sources used by St. Benedict in the composition of his Rule, Butler discovered that after the Holy Scriptures (to which constant reference is made directly or indirectly), the author whose thought is most often followed is Cassian. The resemblance to St. Basil's Rules is also very marked, as Clarke has shown in his translation of the latter. It is possible that the insistence upon "stabilitas loci" was derived from St. Caesarius of Arles, but it seems that there was, generally, such a crying need for similar legislation that Benedict would not have had to find his inspiration in a Gallic source. Most writers think it probable that St. Benedict also knew the Rule of St. Augustine as well as Rufinus's translation of Pachomius' Rule.

Regarding his purpose and the principles which guided him in writing his Rule, St. Benedict is quite explicit. Almost incredulously,

the reader finds the former anchorite of Subiaco declaring, in the Prologue of the Rule, that he intends to establish "nothing harsh, nothing burthensome." In fact, study of the social history of the period proves that living conditions within Benedictine monasteries of the sixth century were probably not more harsh or difficult than they were in the secular world of that period.

56
E. C. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 34 and 46.

At various points in the Rule, one is conscious that the author is composing a religious Rule for persons unused to severe bodily mortification, as in the following passages in Rules 40 and 49:

> "Although we read that wine is not at all proper for monks, yet, because monks in our times cannot be persuaded of this, let us agree to this, at least, that we do not drink to satiety, but sparingly."

Quoting from Rule 49:

> "Although the life of a monk ought always to be a Lenten observance, however, since such virtue is that of few, we advise that during these days of Lent he...wash away all the shortcomings of other times."

57
The Holy Rule of Our Most Holy Father, Benedict, translated by Rev. Boniface Verheyen, 95 and 112.

As if to reassert his purpose of establishing a Rule not impossible of following, Benedict declares at the end of his Rule:

> "We have written this Rule, that, by observing it in monasteries, we may show that we have acquired at least some moral righteousness, or a beginning of the monastic life."

58
Holy Rule, Ch. 73:158

St. Benedict vividly sensed the ills of western monasticism and remedied those weaknesses by well-nigh revolutionary recommendations. He went further. He laid down a positive system of spirituality whose goal was the perfection of humility, to be acquired (with the grace of God) by the utter self-renunciation resulting from obedience, the common life, and the vow of stability. In the chapter on Obedience, Benedict writes concerning his monks:

> "Not living according to their own desires and pleasures, but walking according to the judgement and will of another, they live in monasteries, and desire than an Abbot be over them."

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59 Holy Rule, Ch. 5:30

The other essential points are contained in the vow of the monk's profession, which is found thus in the earliest extant text, in the Commentary of Paul Warnefrid:

> "Promitto de stabilitate mea, et conversione morum meorum saecularium, et obedientia coram Deo et sanctis ejus."

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60 E. C. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 122. Butler notes that recent research has shown that St. Benedict's word was "conversatione", in the sense of "conduct of one's life", rather than "conversione."

Studying the mitigations introduced into the monastic life by St. Benedict, the student examines his regimen concerning food, drink, sleep, and clothing. To each monk the patriarch would allow two daily meals, at which he was to receive one pound of bread per day. At each meal there were to be two kinds of cooked food; and if there were fruit

or vegetables, a third might be added. Moreover, the Superior was free to make further additions, if circumstances demanded them.

61
Holy Rule, Ch. 39:92-93; Ch.41: 96-97

Chapter 40 set the amount of wine at one half pint a day, though the superior had the right to increase the amount within the bounds of moderation, if circumstances made it advisable.

62
Ibid., Ch. 40: 94-95

As for sleep, St. Benedict permitted his monks eight hours of unbroken sleep during the greater part of the year, Matins being sung at two o'clock in the morning. In summer the night rest was shortened to five or six hours, but a siesta was permitted in the afternoon. When one recalls the battling with sleepiness carried on by their erstwhile models, the Egyptian hermits, one can imagine that St. Benedict must have appeared an angel in disguise to the monks of the West. Nor did Benedict command them to sleep in a sitting position, or, if lying down, with a stone for a pillow. For bedding the saint allowed a straw mattress, blanket, coverlet, and pillow.

63
E. C. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 41.

For the varying temperatures of a continental climate St. Benedict makes provision. Thinking, perhaps, of the different climates in

the several parts of Italy, the legislator grants the Abbot considerable freedom in the clothing to be given the monks, setting a kind of norm for temperate regions, as follows:

> "We believe...a cowl and a tunic for each monk are sufficient,- a woolen cowl for winter and a thin or worn one for summer, and a scapular for work; and stockings and shoes as covering for the feet."

64
Holy Rule, Ch. 55: 121-122

Nor did Benedict fear that the flesh would grow insolent against the spirit in a life which must have been far better than that which many of the rude inhabitants of his monasteries had experienced in the homes of that period. There is no reference to the wearing of hair-shirts, the use of scourgings, or any artificial, self-imposed penances. Only as punishments for incorrigible monks are such tortures inflicted.

65
E. C. Butler, Benedictine Monachism, 40.

Then of what does Benedictine asceticism consist? For the answer to this question, one may turn to the second part of Benedict's program — the training of his Christian athletes in the school of the Master, humility. Except for regulations concerning the Divine Office, the saint discusses the virtue of humility and its acquirement at greater length than he treats any other topic. Benedict compares the angels' ascending Jacob's ladder to the ascent of the soul to perfect love of God by humility. It would seem that in the thought of Benedict, humility is the cornerstone upon which the interior and exterior life of the

religious is established. As the first degree of humility, Benedict names the avoidance of sin and the fulfillment of God's will. As if this long exhortation were not enough, the saint repeats, in the second degree, that a man must renounce his own desires to perform the will of God. The third, fourth, and eighth degrees concern the patient, continual subjection to one's superior in all things. The fifth, sixth, and seventh degrees concern the interior spirit of humility: the monk revealing his thoughts and secret falls to the Abbot, being content with the meanest and worst of everything, considering himself a poor and worthless worker, believing himself the vilest of men and therefore humbling himself. Conversely, the next three degrees treat of the exterior practice of humility - remaining silent until one is addressed and then speaking gently, seriously, humbly and quietly, as well as not being easily moved or quick to laugh. The last degree, the twelfth, summarizes much of what has been enjoined, requiring that in all places the monk allow the humility which animates him to manifest itself in his whole exterior, the consciousness of his sins being ever before him.

66
Holy Rule, Ch. 7:33-45.

True, the discussion of humility is extended, yet it will be apparent that without profound humility the Rule which Benedict prescribes could not be lived. Chiefly, perhaps, the self-renunciation that Benedict requires is to be gained by obedience; moreover, that obedience must be performed promptly and with good will. If that which

is commanded seems impossible of performance, the monk may explain the matter to his superior; if the latter persists in his command, the monk is to attempt its fulfillment, placing his trust in God.

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67 Ibid., Ch. 68:152-155

The monk's day was to be made up of prayer, manual labour, and spiritual reading. Benedict's designation of public prayer as "Opus Dei", the Work of God, has been a source of edification to later Religious, and his insistence that it be considered the most important of all monastic exercises is equally memorable. Eleven of the seventy-three chapters of the Rule are devoted to the singing of what is now termed the Divine Office, St. Benedict prescribing that the whole Psalter be said in the course of a week. This vocal prayer was to be said at seven distinct hours of the day, and once at night.

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68 Ibid., Ch. 19:62; "St. Benedict," Catholic Encyclopedia

Although the "Opus Dei" consumed from four to four and one half hours daily, manual labor in field, garden, or buildings was allotted from six to seven hours, and devotional reading made up three to five hours of the day.

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69 E. C. Butler, "Monasticism," C. M. H. 1:538-539

The reader can surmise the demands made upon the heart and mind of a monk if he performed in a spirit of humility and obedience the services of prayer, work, and reading that the Rule prescribes. The limits of the present work make it impossible for the writer to indicate how such a life, carried out perfectly, is as austere in its discipline as was that of the earliest monks. A point which is also deserving of attention is the fact that Benedict did not permit the commission of faults to go unpunished. One was obliged to conform to the Rule "or else", as the saying goes. Chapter twenty-three begins as follows:

> "If a brother is found stubborn or disobedient or proud or murmuring, or opposed to anything in the holy Rule, and a contemner of the commands of his superiors, let him be admonished by his superiors once and again in secret----If he doth not amend, let him be taken to task publicly before all. But if he doth not reform even then, and he understandeth what a penalty it is, let him be placed under excommunication; but if even then he remaineth obstinate, let him undergo corporal punishment."

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70 Ibid., Ch. 24:67-68

The penalty of excommunication varied with the gravity of the offense. For smaller faults persisted in, the monk was forbidden to intone the psalm or antiphon, and to read a lesson in the oratory; moreover he took his meals alone several hours after the community refection. For more serious faults a monk was excluded from the oratory and common table, was forced to work alone, and was forbidden all communication with his fellow monks. The final penalty was expulsion from the monastery, though a monk might be permitted three times to re-enter the monastery, before the dismissal was irrevocable.

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71 Ibid., Chs. 25-29:67-76

No small part of the sanctification of the Benedictine monk consisted in his living the common life. In reading the Rule, one is always aware of the fact that Benedict is legislating for a community. Exceptions are granted rarely and only from necessity. There are no distinctions made because of a monk's previous condition in the world. The prescription of common life which appears most trying is that concerning sleeping quarters. Chapter 22 of the Rule states:

> "If it can be done, let all sleep in one apartment; but if the number doth not allow it, let them sleep in tens or twenties with the seniors who have the charge of them....Let the younger brethren not have their beds beside each other, but intermingled with the older ones."

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72 Ibid., Ch. 22:66-67

It has been said that by the vow of stability a monk sacrificed the last shred of his independence. Bishop Ullathorne thus describes the stability vowed by a Benedictine: "an irrevocable life in community, and in the community that has witnessed his training and profession." The ramifications of this vow in relation to the common life can be imagined.

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73 E. C. Clarke, Benedictine Monachism, 125

However, it is probable that St. Benedict did not intend the vow to be the source of mortification which it appears to those afflicted with twentieth century nerves, but to be merely a remedy for those impelled by sixth century wanderlust. In the first chapter of the Rule the saint

describes these monks as follows: "Their whole life long they keep going from one province to another, staying three or four days at a time in different cells as guests." And so again a development of monasticism met a need of the times.

Herein lies Benedict's greatest contribution to monasticism, says Dom Butler, himself a Benedictine and a leading authority on the history of monasticism. "Benedict adapted monasticism to western ideas and needs." Citing various eulogies paid to St. Benedict the Acta Sanctorum concludes:

> "At prae omnibus aliis Martyrologiis illustrius encomium profertur in hodierno Romano his verbis: In monte Casino natalis St. Benedicti Abbatis, qui mocherum disciplinam in Occidente pene collapsam restituit ac mirifice propagavit."

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74 Joannes Bollandus et al. (ed.), Acta Sanctorum, Martii Tomus Tertius:278; E. C. Butler, "Monasticism," C. M. H., 1:535

When the abbey of Monte Cassino was destroyed by the Lombards in 580, the monks fled to Rome, where they were installed by Pope Pelagius in a monastery near the Lateran Basilica. History records the conversion of Gregory, the popular praetor, a member of a very old and noble Anicia family, and the transformation of his palace on the Caelian hill into a monastery of the Benedictine Rule. This same Gregory, the first monk to be elected pope, did much for the spread of St. Benedict's Rule by the writing of the Dialogues, in which St. Gregory informs an imaginary inquisitor of the marvelous fervor and acts of penance performed by monks under the guidance of Benedict, and also includes a highly laudatory life of that patriarch of Western monasticism. It was

Gregory, too, who sent Augustine, formerly of St. Andrew's monastery, and his fellow monks to England, and who revived the Frankish monasteries. Hence, it is not surprising to find Mabillon testifying that by the death of the third abbot of Monte Cassino in line from Benedict, the Rule was generally observed throughout Italy, nor is it difficult to accept Chapman's supposition that the Rule was known in northern Africa and southern Gaul soon after its publication. Chapman also opines that Justinian used some of the saint's ordinances in his "Novellae" dealing with monasteries.

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75 Montalembert, op. cit., 357 et seq.; Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Loc. cit.; "Monasticism", Catholic Encyclopedia

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When Charlemagne visited Monte Cassino near the close of the eighth century, he found there a copy of the Rule believed to be St. Benedict's autograph. It was his desire that the Rule be disseminated through the monasteries of his empire, and at his request a careful transcript of the Rule was made. "The present Codex 914 of the St. Gall library was copied directly from Charlemagne's copy for the Abbey of Reichenau." St. Benedict's Rule practically superseded all other monastic codes, maintaining an almost exclusive position in the West until the coming of the mendicant orders.

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76 "Rule of St. Benedict," Catholic Encyclopedia; Valentine T. Schaaf, op. cit., 21

Summary. - In tracing the rise of monasticism, certain general trends of development are apparent, and this might well be expected if monasticism is what it claims to be, a form of Christian asceticism.

Of all the virtues of which Christ was the embodiment, there was only one to which He specifically called attention and which He asked His followers to practice: the virtue of humility. "Learn of Me," He counselled, "for I am meek and humble of heart." The earliest founders of the eremetical life in the deserts of northern Egypt, the institutors of cenobitism of southern Egypt, St. Basil, and St. Benedict -- all of these considered humility the basis of the ascetic life. Throughout the writings of Pachomius, Rufinus, and Cassian one finds those authors unwearying in relating deeds which prove the humility of heart so valued by the early Fathers, and St. Benedict devotes the longest chapter of his Rule to an analysis of twelve degrees of its interior and exterior manifestation.

If humility is the Christian virtue par excellence, renunciation is closely allied to it. How unforgettable are those words of Christ, "Unless a man deny himself, he cannot be My disciple." Whether a monk's possessions be those of a Francis Borgia or a Paschal Baylon, the leaving of self to follow Christ is the important point, and it is in this sense that one finds a continuity of development in the history of monasticism. At first, Christ's recommendation to renounce material possessions was accepted literally. The Egyptian ascetics had absolutely no possessions, in the belief that a monk should have nothing of hiw own, but as time went on, experience showed that one might practice the poverty of which Christ spoke, though he be given certain clothing and articles for his use, following the principle that the instinct which urges one to acquire

goods of various sorts can be sufficiently mortified by allowing the monk a qualified use of those goods, while depriving him of their actual ownership. Furthermore, interior abandonment of self is seen in the Egyptian neophytes' obeying the commands of their elders (the duration of such submission being purely optional with the individual). Pachomius modified this freedom of decision by the institution of a life in common, and that freedom was later curtailed by St. Basil's institution of permanent monastic profession, and finally by St. Benedict's prescription of "stabilitas loci." The value placed upon the renunciation of self-will is seen likewise in the gradual abandonment of self-imposed corporal mortifications in favor of the interior mortification required by submission to a religious Superior and Rule.

It is interesting to note that with the exception of Saint Basil, who definitely states his opinion that a life lived in common is better than the solitary life, all of the other monastic legislators of this period have conceded that the contemplative life of the solitary is higher than a life lived in community. Somewhat in line with this view is the fact that the number of persons dwelling together was steadily reduced from an average of 200 in the Pachomian monasteries, to 35 in the Basilian, and finally to 12 in the Benedictine houses.

In the matter of the partaking of food and the performance of work, a great change is apparent. One recalls the excessive fasting of the Egyptian hermits in contrast with the careful solicitude of St. Benedict for the amount, kind, and preparation of his monks' food. Closely allied with the subject of bodily nourishment is the matter of labor. Following upon the freedom of the Egyptian hermits in regard to the kind

and amount of labor performed, and their view that work is but a means of avoiding idleness with its attendant temptations, is Pachomius' prescription that work be assigned in proportion to the amount of fasting that the monk chose to inflict upon himself. St. Basil, in contrast, warned his monks to undertake no fasts which would interfere with their performance of work, while St. Benedict so greatly valued the efficacy of labor "per se" that he declared, "To work is to pray."

CHAPTER II

REFERENCES TO VIRGINITY AND MONASTICISM IN THE LETTERS AND IN THE MORAL AND ASCETICAL WRITINGS OF THE GREAT DOCTORS OF THE EAST

The statement that all of the Great Doctors of the Church were also Fathers of the Church, but that all of the Fathers were not Doctors is not as enigmatical as it sounds.

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1 The following discussion of the title, Great Doctors of the Church, is taken from the article on that subject in the Catholic Encyclopedia.

The Great Doctors of the Church lived in the early days of the Church, the last of them in point of time being St. Gregory the Great, who died in 604; hence the Great Doctors are also termed Fathers of the Church. Eight Fathers of the Early Church were honored with the title, Great Doctor.

In the Western Church the four Great Doctors were Saints Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory. They received this title in the early Middle Ages, when the Scholastics commonly referred to them as the four Doctors. In 1298, a papal decree ordered that their feasts be kept as Doubles throughout the entire Church. Three of the early Confessors of the Eastern Church enjoyed a common veneration, namely, Saints Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom. By analogy to the four Great Doctors of the Western Church, St. Athanasius was very fittingly added to the trio of Eastern Doctors.

As time went on, the title, Doctor, was conferred upon numerous saints of the Church, though the title, Great Doctor, was applied only

to the eight saints of the Early Church. The significance of the title may be understood by a consideration of the three conditions requisite for a saint's inclusion among the number of Doctors. The requirements are three: eminent learning, preeminent holiness of life, and proclamation by the Church. Two points worthy of note are the following: no martyrs are among the list of Doctors, since the Office and Mass are those of Confessors of the Faith, and therefore Saints Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Cyprian were not accorded the title; secondly, the title is not conferred as the result of an "ex cathedra" decision, nor does it indicate that the teachings of the Doctor are free from error.

As would be expected, the bulk of writing left by the Fathers varies in amount, circumstances requiring some to write much, others little. Some of them, for example Saints Gregory of Nazianzen and Ambrose, wrote prolifically in praise of virginity and St. Basil wrote a whole code of Rules for the monastic life. On the other hand, St. Gregory the Great wrote little containing critical references to virginity and monasticism.

A consideration of what the Great Doctors of the Church have written about the religious life seems, at first thought, to be extremely dull, and recollection of those early saints recalls pictures of grave patriarchs of lofty stature weighed down by heavy robes and ponderous tomes, or perpetually-laboring scribes seated in a dusty, book-crammed study, pen in hand, and gazing skyward. "Hopelessly antiquated," one murmurs. Yet, on the contrary, a perusal of some of the writings of the Great Doctors proves them to have been engagingly human - subject to loneliness, experiencing chagrin at their own weaknesses, fearful of being misunderstood, longing for the consolation of their friends' companionship - in short, experiencing all the emotions and desires common to most men this side of Heaven.

First of the great doctors of the Church in point of time was Saint Athanasius, born about the year 297 A.D. According to Sozomen, the "wisdom and acumen" of the saint were recognized in his youth, and he was early prepared for an ecclesiastical career, being made Bishop of Alexandria before the age of thirty. Tixeront asserts that Athanasius was, more than all else, a man of character. Of him he says, "It would be hard to find another man so determined, so inflexible, and yet so noble." Was it because of the milieu in which Providence placed him that Athanasius is known to us as a man of action rather than as a literary man? It would seem so, for there is a clearness and strength in his prose and an underlying sincerity and idealism in his thought which render the patriarch's writings as enjoyable to the modern reader as those of a more rhetorical type.

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2 A. and M. Croiset, Histoire de la litterature Grecque, 924; J. Tixeront, A Handbook of Patrology, 153; "Saint Athanasius," Catholic Encyclopedia.

When St. Athanasius was about twenty-three years of age, he wrote a treatise on the Incarnation in which he sounded the keynote of his entire life-devotion to the divinity of Christ. In the course of this work Athanasius marvels at the fact that while all of the eloquence of the philosophers failed to persuade even a few of their fellow-countrymen to embrace their teaching concerning immortality and to pursue a life of virtue, Christ alone, in lowly language unused by men of eloquence, prevailed upon numerous persons throughout the world to consider earthly glory as nothing and to aspire after that which is eternal. Proof of

their inward convictions are the lives of those youths and virgins who profess chastity, confident of a glorious immortality in the band of the martyrs of Christ.

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[3] Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi, P.G., 15:953.

After his third exile from Alexandria, an Arian bishop having been appointed to that see, Athanasius retired to the deserts of northern Egypt, where for six years he lived the monastic life and composed a number of works, of which the "Apology to Constantius" is one. It is as one of the gifts of God to man that Athanasius here reckons virginity - that life upon earth which is an image of the life of the angels in Heaven. After recollecting the title, "Spouse of Christ", by which the Church is accustomed to call them, and that other title, "Temples of the Word", under which men admire them, Athanasius affirms it to be the greatest proof of the truth of Christianity that among no other people is this venerable and heavenly profession cultivated. Athanasius pleads with Constantius to put an end to the infamous persecution of virgins which is being perpetrated by the Arians and declares that in this cruelty they are exceeding the madness of Pilate, who commanded that the side of the Savior be pierced, for the heretics have pierced not one but both his sides: "membra enim virginum....membra Salvatoris sunt."

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[4] Apologia ad Constantium, 15:1167.

One of the loveliest of Athanasius' tributes to virginity is that contained in his commentary on the words of the Magnificat:

"He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaid, for behold, all future generations shall call me blessed." Remarking that anyone desiring to practice other virtues is directed by law, this Great Doctor declares that virginity is above the law, constituting a way of life for the winning of a more excellent goal, and being in itself a disclosure of the future life. Of all which can be said of virginity, the saint reflects, that which most truly marks its excellence is the fact that God wished the mother of the Word Incarnate to be a virgin. It was through Christ that the grace of virginity was conferred upon men, and by strengthening the initial grace, men have the power to persevere in that virtue. Moreover, the virgin birth which was accomplished in Mary redounds to the glory of all virgins.

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5 Fragmenta in Lucam, 16:1378-1379

In a letter to a monk, St. Athanasius compares the marital and virginal states, designating the latter supreme over all other ways of life. However, both marriage and virginity bring forth fruit: marriage, thirty-fold and virginity a hundredfold. In return both conditions will be rewarded; yet virginity, being the more rugged and difficult path, will receive more excellent awards.

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6 Epistola ad Amunem Monachum, 16:518-519.

The transition from a consideration of St. Athanasius' dicta concerning the ascetic life to that of St. Basil and his contribution to the literature regarding that vocation is made by Mourret, who writes as follows:

"Between the School of Alexandria, which gave the Church Saint Athanasius, and the School of Antioch, which would give her Saint John Chrysostom, the School of Cappadocia formed a sort of via media, less inclined to allegorical interpretations than the former, and less confined to literal interpretation than the latter."

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[7] Fernand Mourret, A History of the Catholic Church, 2:241.

One of the most renowned products of the Cappadocian School was St. Basil the Great, born about thirty-three years after St. Athanasius, and second only to the latter as defender of the Eastern Church against the heresies of the fourth century. Their lives offer many points of similarity, both men suffering much from "false brethren", and both of them zealous for the spread of monasticism. Concerning his literary talent, outstanding critics agree that Basil was "a Roman among the Greeks," that is, philosophy and rhetoric were in him subordinate to the spirit of government and activity. His mind was judicious and practical, his speech noble in its simplicity. Significant of his consummate religious and classical education is his facile meingling of references to Holy Scripture and the classics.

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[8] Ibid.; A. and M. Croiset, op.cit., 938-939; J. Tixeront, op.cit., 170.

One of the most stirring passages of Basil's prose, a real "pep talk" in modern colloquial parlance, is his Praevia Institutio Ascetica, or Introductory Ascetical Instruction. St. Basil speaks figuratively of the monk as a soldier in the service of Christ the King. That the

march of the soldier is heavenward the saint deduces from the Scriptural text: "If anyone will serve Me, let him follow Me. And where I am, there too, let my servant be." The reward is rightly one of deeds performed, and the crown is his who will have accomplished preeminently a life made up of the performance of noble deeds. The reward: to be promoted to first rank, to be called a friend of the King, to stand close by the King's side, hand clasped in His hand, to be reverenced by the soldiers of the King, to secure the command over subjects, and to intercede with the King on behalf of friends outside the ranks, for whatever favors they desire.

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9 Praevia Institutio Ascetica, P.G., 18: cols. 360-361.

From St. Basil's vast correspondence are gleaned various references to the monastic life. The saint believes that a definition is required by which one may determine who is rightly named a virgin. Basil designates her as one who has freely offered herself to the Lord, has renounced marriage, and has embraced a life of holiness.

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10 Epistola 99, P.G., 18, col. 1275.

Concerning a candidate for "this truly blessed life," St. Basil recommends that there be placed before his mind's eye the trials and hardships of this restricted and confined life, and that he be established in those good things to come which are as yet unseen, but which have been prepared for those who show themselves worthy of the Lord.

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11 Epistola 25, P.G., 18, col. 1097.

Complaints had been made of large numbers of men who had withdrawn from the world to join Basil in his retreat, of these the saint writes that they bear about with them the sufferings of Christ, and carrying their crosses they follow God. He declares that he would give his whole life that his faults should be to have had with him, under his guidance, men openly professing this holy discipline.

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12 Epistola 207, P.G., 18, cols. 1293-1294.

Writing to monks under his direction, St. Basil is apparently concerned lest their faith should be affected by the heresies of that time. Basil warns them that strictness of life, unless it be illumined by faith, is useless; nor, he cautions, can open confession of faith, if it be devoid of good works, render us pleasing to God. But it is necessary that they should exist concurrently in order that the man of God may be sound and without blemish.

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13 Epistola 295, P.G., 18, cols. 1409-1410.

The subject of "fallen virgins", as they were called, was truly perplexing to early churchmen, as one can readily understand when he recalls that the vow of permanent profession was not introduced until the time of St. Basil. The latter's keen disappointment in the defection of one of them is relayed by the translator:

> "What has become of that dignified bearing of yours, that decorous character, that simple dress befitting a virgin, that beautiful blush of modesty, and that comely pallor, which blooms through temperance and

vigils and has a radiance more charming than any ruddiness of complexion? How often, when you prayed that you might preserve your virginity spotless, did you perhaps shed tears?....Why need I even speak of the honors which you have received through Him from His ministers? Or of the life you lived among the virgins? Of the words of commendation for your virginity?....But now, when a slight breeze of the spirit of the world has reached you, ...you have renounced all these things, and have exchanged that honored and highly prized possession for a brief moment of pleasure, a pleasure which tickles your palate for the moment, but which you will soon find more bitter than gall."

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14 Letter 46, translated by Roy J. Deferrari in St. Basil, The Letters, 291.

The second of the "Great Cappadocians" was St. Gregory Nazianzen. Were he alive when he was designated one of the four Great Doctors of the East, he would have been the first to challenge the title. Is it, perhaps, because Newman felt himself to be a kindred spirit to Gregory that he has written so touchingly about him? "Personally winning" is Newman's description of this saint, and in the paraphrase that he has made of Basil's poetic "apologia" one might fancy that Newman was reflecting upon his own character:

"I have no sway amid the crowd, no act
In speech, no place in council or in mart;
Nor human law, nor judges throned on high,
Smile on my face, and to my words reply.
Let others seek earth's honours; be it mine
One law to cherish, and one track to live;
Straight on towards heaven to press with
single bent,
To know and love my God, and then to die content."

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15 J.H.C. Newman, op.cit., 92.

A study of the lives of Saints Basil and Gregory would supply a veritable mine of comparisons and contrasts, so closely parallel were those lives in the saints' initial social position, education, and ecclesiastical preferment; so divergent did they become through differences in talent, character, and personality. Tixeront foresees the future decadence of patrological literature in Gregory's style, which he terms "ornate, graceful, and slightly affected." To speak in paradox, it was in spite of, or because of Gregory's lack of simplicity, that of all Christian writers he was the most admired in the Byzantine period.

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16 J. Tixeront, op.cit., 174.

How serious was Gregory's attitude concerning his literary talent is seen in his sixth oration, in which he relates his renunciation of worldly pursuits and possessions upon his adoption of the monastic life. He concludes:

> "Discourse alone I retain, as being the servant of the Word, nor should I ever willingly neglect this possession; rather I honour and embrace and take more pleasure in it than in all other things in which the many take pleasure."

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17 J.H.C. Newman, op.cit., 81.

In St. Gregory's famous oration on St. Basil, delivered, doubtless, on the first anniversary of the saint's death, Gregory takes occasion to praise the zeal of Basil in furthering monasticism in the East. He observes that by being born of a virgin, Christ seemed to sanction the life of

virginity, as withdrawing one from this life and separating him from the world, or rather transmitting him from one world to another, from the present life to that of the future.

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18 Oration 43, P.G., 20, col. 1007.

Another of the saint's orations, that delivered at the death of his sister, Gorgonia, contains a reference to the two great vocations in life. Of these St. Gregory considers virginity more sublime and God-like, though more abounding in trial and hardship.

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19 Oration 8, P.G., 20, col. 502.

In a group of poems addressed to others (in contrast to his autobiographical poems) St. Gregory intercedes with a certain Hellenius in behalf of monks. In the course of this exhortation the saint speaks of them as "Christ-bearers." Estranged from earthly possessions, their only possession is that which is supreme, which will not perish nor pass to another, namely, their serene confidence of life eternal. Those who have essayed to live the solitary life have attained the highest virtue of the wisdom of Christ. Others, who live the simple life with their monastic brethren, are "gleaming stars invisible to the multitude, images of the Immortal One, luminaries clothed in flesh." Again he extols them as his glory, "the most brilliant ornament of our flock" and "those excellent sheep of Christ's right hand."

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20 Poemata Quae Spectant ad Alios, P.G., 21: 842 et seq.

In St. Gregory's moral poems, there are many hundreds of lines on the subject of virginity. In a collection of thoughts expressed as distichs, the saint recommends complete renunciation, calling upon virgin spouses to offer all things to God; the monk is advised to withdraw his soul from the world and to let it remain far detached from his body.

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21 Poemata Moralia, P.G., 21:519.

In a treatise on the virtue, St. Gregory envisions a double chorus of men and angels singing alternately and in unison the praises of the divine nature and majesty.

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22 Ibid., 419.

Another section of the moral poems treats of the beatitudes of the various kinds of life. After remarking that there is no life suitable to all Christians, the saint affirms, "If you will have advanced in a perfect manner along the highest path, you will be no longer of mortal nature, but a celestial being."

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23 Ibid., 442.

Interesting for their terseness of expression, and in contrast with St. Gregory's usual profuse expression are a series of definitions entitled Definitiones minus exactae. Virginity is defined as a going out of the body; a monk is one who lives for God and Him alone; and a

monastery seems to the saint to be a multitude assembled together for the purpose of salvation.

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24 Ibid., 545.

Perhaps nowhere in the Poemata Moralia is the fatherly solicitude of St. Gregory shown as clearly as in his admonitions and counsels to virgins. Repeatedly, he exhorts to internal purity and its exterior manifestation-modesty. Here, too, is exemplified the fact that chastity meant not only bodily continence but an all-embracing purity of mind and act. St. Gregory assures the virgin that she has many safeguards of chastity. Let the fear of God make her strong, fasting render her free from desire, her entire love be strongly directed to God, Who can still every desire foreign to celestial beings. In another passage St. Gregory admonishes the virgin to be always an honor to her spouse. Let her purify her mind by learning and wisdom, that she may live honorably a life of honor. She has practised corporeally the virtues of the intellect, pursuing here upon earth the angelic life.

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25 Ibid., 551 et seq.

St. Gregory stresses the importance of simple, unaffected dress. Let the virgin's adornment be to be without adornment, for she is adorned with a hidden beauty, the spouse of Christ the King.

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26 Ibid., 559, 523.

Lest too frequent contact with people soil that chastity of the affections that her Spouse requires, let the virgin's lips, like rose-petals, remain closed. Among virgins the saint praises those whom men do not know, and he declares that the virgin should not glory in her sweet desire for virginity, if deep within her, she opens her heart to other affections than those of Christ. Limits should be set to the hospitality of the convent: a home without a guest is better than one filled with many guests, for modesty will perish in a crowd, and from this it happens that virginity is dishonored. Nor should the virgin be eager to leave her convent to go on pilgrimages to distant holy places, for "Christ the King is within the home of everyone, and close, yea, in the very heart of His beloved."

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27 Ibid., 325 et seq.

Although St. Gregory's prose and poetry is not of a sustained excellence, it contains frequent flashes of brilliant form or thought. Moreover, there is a passage in the section of the Moralia entitled "In Praise of Virginity" which is like one of those jewels of epic description so frequent in the Aeneid. It will be quoted in its entirety in Latin translation because even with the disadvantage of translation, it exemplifies the refreshing imagination and fluent style of Saint Gregory.

Quemadmodum pictor inanimis tabulis
imagines illinens,
Levibus primum et opacioribus notis
Speciem adumbrare tentat; deinde vero
Omni colorum genere totam absolvit
effigiem:
Sic virginitas, Christi pars semper
existentis,

Priusquidem in paucis videbatur, et
umbris abdita erat,
Quandiu lex coloribus obscure apparentibus
Regnavit, et occultus splendor paucis
affulsit.
At Postquam Christus ex casta Matre
virgine
Jugi experte, Deo simili, incontaminata
prodiens. . .
Sanctificavit feminas, Evamque acerbam
repulit. . .
Tunc profecto virginitas mortalibus
illuxit splendida,
Saluta mundo, ac mundum infirmum solvens,
Tanto praestantior nuptiis ac vitae
vinculis,
Quanto anima praestat carne,
Et terra latum coelum, et vita fluitante
Stabilis beatorum vita, et Deus homine.
Tunc chorus circa Regem luce circum-
fluentem stetit immaculatus,
Coelestis e terra properans fieri Deus,
Christifer, crucis cultor, mundi con-
temptor,
Mortuus terrestribus, coelestibus deditus,
Mundi lumina, clara lucis specula,
Qui Deum contemplantur, quorum Deus est,
et qui Dei sunt.

28
Ibid., 294-295

For sheer beauty of literary expression it would be difficult to surpass Newman's translation of Gregory's plea for understanding of his flight from active life to the solitude of Basil's retreat in Pontus. There is also a remarkable similarity between the sentiments here expressed and some of those uttered by Thoreau in Walden:

> "Nothing seemed to me so great, as by closing up the senses, and being rid of flesh and world, and retiring upon one's self, and touching nothing human, except when absolutely necessary, and conversing with one's Self and God, to live above things visible, and to

> bear within one the divine vision always clear, pure from the shifting impressions of earth, - a true mirror unsullied of God and the things of God, now and ever, adding light to light the brighter to the dimmer, gathering even now in hope the blessedness of the world to come, -- and to associate with angels, while still on earth, leaving the earth and raised aloft by the Spirit. Whose of you is smitten with this love knows what I say."

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29 J.H.C. Newman, op.cit., 82.

To inquire into the character and writings of Saint John Chrysostom after considering those of St. Gregory Nazianzen is, indeed, to encounter a totally different personality, if one can judge correctly at a chronological distance of fifteen centuries. Gregory fled intrigue; Chrysostom as bishop of Constantinople was neighbor to, and inescapably involved in that great embodiment of intrigue, the Byzantine court. Gregory grasped at the disaffection to himself of his subordinates in order to tender the resignation of his bishopric; Chrysostom endured censure, temporary exile, and attempts upon his life before he surrendered himself to the soldiers of the emperor. Yet, intellectually and spiritually, their experiences had been similar. Chrysostom was well educated in the classics and rhetoric at Antioch, and like Saints Gregory and Basil, spent a number of years in the practice of rigid asceticism in his earlier life. In fact, he returned to Antioch because his health was being undermined by two years of life as an anchorite. For the rest of his life, as was also the case with the two Cappadocians, he suffered from physical disabilities. Hence, it will be seen that Chrysostom was not a man who could be regarded with indifference. He was, as Newman describes him, "a man to make both friends and enemies ...

but his friends loved him with a love 'stronger' than 'death', and more burning than 'hell'; and it was well to be so hated, if he was so beloved."

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30 Ibid., 237

General statements are always dangerous, it is true; yet they are almost always interesting, if only because they furnish an opportunity for debate. If one were to hazard a generalization regarding the four Great Doctors of the East, he might opine that among twentieth century men, Saint Athanasius would appeal to the churchman; Saints Basil and Gregory to the scholar; and Saint John Chrysostom to the average man. The latter was, preeminently, a man's man. His virility is overpowering, sweeping all before it, demanding that his warnings be heeded, his commands obeyed.

Tixeront avers that his eloquence was preeminently popular and practical, although his language was of a purity unrivalled among Greek writers. Seldom is his reader conscious that Chrysostom is applying rules of oratorical rhetoric. Avoiding philosophical and abstract reasoning, the saint prefers illustration, comparisons, and arguments possessing popular appeal. Newman quotes Photius' statement of the latter's admiration for Chrysostom: "He ever in all his writings puts before him as his object, to be useful to his hearers . . . and as to all other matters, he either simply put them aside, or took the least possible notice of them."

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31 J. Tixeront, op. cit., 202; J.H.C. Newman, op. cit., 234-235

Chrysostom's writings, more numerous than those of any other Greek Father, can be grouped in three classifications: "opuscula", homilies, and letters. Dating from the earlier period of his life, when he lived in ascetic retirement among the mountains near Antioch, the chief "opuscula" concern monasticism or ascetic subjects in general. Of this group a work which well exemplifies Chrysostom's oratory is his comparison of a monk and a king, in which he offers proof that the solitary is richer and more powerful than a prince. He who devotes himself to the philosophical life, as the monastic profession was frequently called, is richer, more redoubtable in war, more capable of doing good to men, and more happy in his last moments. The philosopher has dominion over his own passions and emotions, the monarch over a limited number of cities, countries and peoples; hence the philosopher is more powerful because he makes the divine law the rule of his actions, while the king is slave to his passions. Concerning the wars they wage, the philosopher, or monk, comes to blows with demons, marches to war with God Himself as his helper, for the purpose of defending the cause of righteousness and the worship of God. Conversely, the monarch wars against barbarians for the sake of gaining possession of some territory and is impelled by greed and an unjust desire to extend his dominion. Chrysostom goes on to compare the happiness of the solitary and the king at night, the nature of good they are able to do for others, and lastly, compares the monk and king in the next life.

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32 Comparatio Regis cum Monacho. P.G., 26, cols. 387-394.

It was probably during the period of his deaconship that Saint John Chrysostom wrote three small works against the enemies of the monastic life. In the first book the saint explains how much danger they incur who attack holy people and friends of God, in reality harming only themselves, as is proved by the Jews, who put Christ and His apostles to death and thereafter suffered the misfortunes related by Josephus. He concludes by showing from what great dangers they free themselves who withdraw from the society of this world. The second work is addressed to a pagan whose son, a convert to Christianity, has become a monk. With the aid of logic and examples drawn from the history of ancient Greece, Chrysostom proves that true wealth lies in the scorn of all wealth, that virtue gives greater splendor than opulence does, and that it raises one beyond the power of envy. Developing these points, he describes the love of riches as more violent than sensual love, for that reason becoming a source of the greatest torture. To prove his contention that the youthful monk was really richer than his father, Chrysostom affirms that if the former were to ask any sum of a Christian distinguished for his wealth and piety, the Christian would comply with the request more eagerly than one of the father's servants would obey his command. If the father regrets that his son will not enjoy the renown which surrounds men of wealth, let him consider who acquired the greater renown, the monarch Archelaus, or the philosopher Plato, who lived in absolute poverty. Another privilege enjoyed by the monk is the fact that it is not only impossible for persons to harm him, but no one has the desire to do so; hence he enjoys a double security. Furthermore, because of his ascetic life the monk's influence in the moral sphere is great both at home and abroad: he is listened to

with respect at court, and he is able to comfort the sorrowful and unfortunate. Finally, in exchange for a life of earthly glory, the monk receives a life of obscurity; yet among his equals he is singled out for the highest admiration, for they see in him not a man, but an angel.

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53 Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae, P.G., 26, cols. 331-348.

In the third book against opponents of monasticism, Chrysostom addresses another father opposed to his son's entering upon the religious life, but this father is a Christian. The contrast of reasons adduced argues a keen knowledge of human pychology. He warns the father not to urge his son to abandon his desire to enter the religious life and criticizes the negligence of parents concerning the safety of their sons. The great corruption of morals which has invaded the city is described, while the life of monks is praised. The good example of the Antiochenes is brought to bear, the latter having been accustomed to send their sons to monasteries for training in manliness and right living, after which education the young men returned to their homes.

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54 Ibid., cols. 348-387.

Before investigating St. John Chrysostom's more original contributions to the literature of monasticism, it might be well to mention a few of the stronger evidences of similarity in thought to works previously considered. First of all, in his treatise on virginity Chrysostom's

definition of that state is an epitome of what has repeatedly been noted: a virgin is one who is pure in body and soul. The fact that virginity is considerably more than bodily continence "per se" is paramount with these early writers. Again, bodily adornment and rich clothing are utterly unbefitting a virgin.

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35 De Virginitate, P.G., 26, cols. 537, 515.

The sympathetic heart and Christ-like courage of St. John Chrysostom are reflected in his admonitions concerning the difficulties inherent in the attempt of religious to lead a supernatural life. To live upon earth, he says, to obey the inescapable laws of mortal nature, and yet to rise to such a high degree of virtue as the state of virginity demands — what strongly reasoned philosophy that requires! Among the Greeks some few were so zealous in their pursuit of philosophy that they contemned wealth and overcame their passions, yet the flower of virginity, in which they always yielded first place to the Christians, never existed among them, acknowledging as they did, that virginity is not within the power of man, but is supernatural.

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36 Ibid., col. 551; Quod Regulares Feminae, P.G., 26, Col. 514.

There are further references to this subject in Chrysostom's lengthy treatise on virginity. The saint asks if there be anyone who can walk on coals without burning his feet. Yet the virgin so walks, and endures therefrom a crucifixion. Or who will place fire next to his breast and

not burn his clothing? But the virgin endures a wildly-raging fire deep within her heart and conceals its crackling blaze. The saint comforts her by declaring that he knows the difficulty of the virgin's enterprise, the violence of the combat, the heavy burden of that war. A brave, courageous soul is necessary, a heart filled with aversion for sensual pleasures. The strength of passion is not less than that of iron and fire. A soul which does not steel itself to resist such sufferings will be lost. One must have a heart of adamant, wide-open eyes, and patience in every trial. Strong walls and vigilant guards must surround one, and above all, firm reliance on the divine assistance.

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37 De Virginitate, P.G., 26, cols. 548 and 556

Saint John Chrysostom seems to be in disagreement with other Fathers on the origin of the strength to lead a supernatural life. It has been seen that other writers attribute the moral strength required for the practice of chastity to a special grace of God given to individual souls. St. John Chrysostom, on the other hand, bestows the credit for this virtue upon the resolution and efforts of the individual himself. As proof for his contention, the saint quotes the Gospel passage in which Christ says, "There are eunuchs that have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take (it)."

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38 Matt: 29:12.

Chrysostom emphasizes the element of personal decision and achievement in the foregoing quotation. In answer to an objection which might be raised on the score of St. Paul's statement in the latter's great epistle on marriage and celibacy that "Everyone hath his proper gift of God", Chrysostom declares that the apostle was speaking here in his usual humility and did not really consider continence to be a gift of God.

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59 De Virginitate, Col. 558

Uncompromising is the saint in his requirements of her who has consecrated herself as spouse of Him who is holiness itself. In a section of the treatise "On Virginity", the saint remarks that the garment worn by the virgin is indeed mean, but virginity is not a matter of clothing or its color, but the condition of soul and body. Would it not be absurd, he asks, for a virgin, one who has undertaken so preeminent a state of life as surpassing all other human endeavour, carelessly and without purpose to cut her hair, to go about with downcast eyes, to wear dark garments, and yet not to investigate carefully the spiritual application of this virtue? Chrysostom goes on to say that to subdue the fury of one's passions and to repress the impetuosity of nature is truly admirable and worthy of a brilliant crown. However, it is much more admirable to join to this self-discipline a daily life of similar excellence. Apart from this, virginity is only weakness, incapable of saving its admirers. If one retract her perseverance in holiness and fervor, she removes from virginity all its strength. Similarly, if a fervent life be added to the

practice of virginity, the virgin becomes a source of every kind of good. As the sky at the highest point of the meridian, undarkened by any cloud, looks pure and unsullied, so persons of virginal nature should remain shining, full of light, and free from all immoderate desire.

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40 Ibid., col. 538 et seq.

In his treatise on the priesthood St. John Chrysostom stresses the holiness of life which is expected of the virgin, and the pitfalls which await the unwary. The saint declares that the virgin must equip herself for a double war, since the enemy attacks her from within and without: besides the passionateness of their own human nature, there is the arch enemy of holiness who is ever lying in wait for virgins, ready to devour any one of them, if she should slip and fall.

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41 De Sacerdotio, P.G. 26, col. 856-857.

As an example of Saint John Chrysostom's style, a selection will be quoted from a pastoral letter written by the saint shortly after he had become Archbishop of Constantinople. In this he protested against the unlawful custom according to which some virgins permitted men to dwell in their houses as their protectors. The beauty and inventiveness of some of the thoughts here expressed are characteristic of the writer.

"Nam si quae sponsum in terra acceperit regem
omnibus se putat esse beatiorem, tu cum habeas
non terrenum, nec conservum, sed eum qui...
terribilis est Cherubinis, inaccessus Seraphinis,
non sponsum solum, sed amatorem quovis homine
ardentiorem, quomodo non omnia relinquis quae
hic sunt, etiamsi animam ipsam relinquere oporteat?"

42
Quod regulares feminae, P.G.., 26, cols, 531-532

Another of the "Opuscula" of Chrysostom's earlier life is an exhortation addressed to a certain man, probably Theodore of Mopsuesta, the possessor of great intellectual gifts, who had abandonned the monastic life in favor of the whirl of city life and the charms of a lovely lady, Hermione. And truly, Chrysostom presents a most compelling portrayal of the depths of iniquity into which he believed that Theodore was plunging. In the treatise on virginity the saint's apparent animus toward marriage is expressed in even more exaggerated terms. The saint answers the objection that the human race will become extinct if all embraced the practice of virginity by asking of what marriage Adam was born, to what dolorous childbirth Eve owed her life. Myriads of angels obey God; millions of archangels assist before Him: none of these owes his existence to procreation. With stronger reason, therefore would God have created men without the instrumentality of marriage, for marriage is only a concession granted to our weakness, unnecessary before the Fall. And even now it is not to marriage, properly speaking, that the multiplication of the human race is due, but to Our Lord's word, "Increase and multiply and fill the earth."

44
Adhortatio ad Theodorum lapsum, P.G.,26: passim; De Virginitate, P.G., 26; col. 545 et seq.

The 283 extant letters of St. John Chrysostom were all written in the period of his exile. One of the most curious of these, in fact the that its sentiments seem so opposed to the spirit of his earlier utterances on the subjects of marriage and virginity, is the second letter to his very good friend, the widow and deaconess Olympias. The saint informs her that he sees no reason why she should not be numbered among the choir of virgins and even be placed above them, since in other matters she has given proof of great asceticism. Appealing to St. Paul for corroboration, Chrysostom says that when that Apostle was describing virgins, he named as a virgin not only the continent, unmarried person, but also the woman who was attentive to those things which pertain to the worship of God (1 Cor. 7:34). Moreover, Christ Himself, showing how greatly almsgiving excels virginity, rejected half of a chorus of virgins because they had strayed from the practice of that virtue, or rather because they did not possess it abundantly enough, for they had oil in their vessels but less than was fitting. On the contrary, those who had served Christ in his mystical body, because they were adorned with mercy, he received with honor, calling them blessed of His Father, bestowing upon them the inheritance of the kingdom, and proclaiming their virtues throughout the world (Matth. 25). (St. John Chrysostom apparently refers in the latter section to Christ's description of the Last Judgement, when he declared that they who had practiced the works of mercy would be placed at his right hand.)

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45 Epistola ad Olympias, P.G., 28, cols 559-60

Is it plausible that when St. John Chrysostom wrote the preceding letter, he was experiencing that effect of years of hardship and contradictions which sometimes change a person's whole outlook upon life? A later passage in the same letter would indicate this, for it seems to be the expression of one who is utterly weary of life. The saint acknowledges that virginity is so great an undertaking and requires so much toil that when Christ had descended from Heaven in order to make angels of men and introduce the celestial way of life, He did not venture to command virginity, or make it the object of a precept. He commanded that men should die, that they bear their crosses unceasingly, that they do good to their enemies, but not that they embrace virginity. He left this to the free will and desire of His listeners, saying, "He who can take let him take (it)."

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46 Ibid., 563.

CHAPTER III

References to Virginity and Monasticism in the Letters and in the Moral and Ascetical Writings of the Great Doctors of the West

Before inquiring into the views concerning virginity and monasticism expressed by the Great Doctors of the West, it will be well to recall the chronological relation which these early saints of the Eastern and Western Church bear to one another.[1]

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[1] The following discussion is based upon biographical data contained in the respective articles concerning these saints in the Catholic Encyclopedia.

With the two exceptions of Saints Athanasius and Gregory the Great, these men were of the same generation--all of them having been born between 329 and 354 A.D. A century later, in 430, St. Augustine died, the last of his great contemporaries. St. Athanasius was born just before the turn of the century--in 296, while St. Gregory the Great lived not in the fourth but in the sixth century, having been born in 540, exactly two centuries after the birth of Ambrose.

The close friendship of Basil and Gregory Nazianzen is one of the classic examples of friendship. St. John Chrysostom's treatise, "On the Priesthood," is replete with testimonials of his love of, and esteem for St. Basil. The inter-relationship of the Western Doctors is equally

well-known, St. Augustine's conversion having been indissolubly linked with the preaching of Ambrose, and his lively correspondence with St. Jerome being only less well-known.

That these contemporaries of the East and West were known to, and admired by one another is equally certain. St. Ambrose indoctrinated himself with the learning of the Greek Fathers. St. Jerome was for a time a pupil of St.-Gregory Nazianzen in the study of the Scriptures. Butler, in his Lives of the Saints states that at the time of St. Ambrose's promotion to the bishopric of Milan, St. Basil wrote to congratulate him.[2]

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[2] Alban Butler, op.cit., 3:94

What stupendous changes were wrought by the dissolution of the Roman Empire of the West may be seen by the fact that two centuries later, that scion of one of Rome's great patrician families, sent as papal nuncio to Emperor Tiberias at Constantinople, was ignorant of the Greek language. Is it rash to conjecture that if the language barrier had not grown up in those countries where formerly a knowledge of Greek and Latin seems to have been considered indispensable for cultural and business relations, the Greek Schism might never have occurred?

To one unfamiliar with the character of St. Ambrose, the testimony of St. Augustine in the Confessions is sufficient recommendation, "I began to love him ... as a person

kind to myself." Born in 340, of an old Roman family which had early embraced Christianity, Ambrose seems to have been endowed with a high degree of magisterial aptitude, combined with moral idealism. His father, as prefect of Gallia Narbonensis, had held the highest honor obtainable by a Roman subject; and Ambrose, at the time he was made Bishop of Milan, was consular prefect of Liguria and Aemilia. On the other hand, the death of his father, when Ambrose was but fourteen years of age, necessitated the family's removal to Rome, where the religious influence of a holy and cultured mother, combined with the example of Ambrose's older sister, who practised the ascetic life in her own home, made of Ambrose the foremost exponent of virginity for all future ages. Nor was his but an empty zeal, for upon his election as bishop of Milan, Ambrose distributed among the poor his great riches, and as bishop, practised the virtues of Christian frugality and unceasing toil.[3]

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[3] "Saint Ambrose", Catholic Encyclopedia.

Abbot Bardy calls Ambrose a "rare type of humanity" because he was able to fuse so perfectly the dissimilar qualities of action and contemplation. This fact is nowhere so well-attested as in St. Augustine's description of his contact with the saint:

> "I could not ask of him what I would, as I would, being shut out both from his ear and speech by multitudes of busy people, whose weaknesses he served. With whom when he was not taken up (which was but a little time), he was either refreshing his body with the sustenance absolutely necessary, or his mind with reading.... Ofttimes when we had come (for no man was forbidden to enter, nor was it his wont that any who came should be announced to him), we saw him thus reading to himself, and never otherwise; and having long sat silent (for who durst intrude on one so intent?) we were fain to depart, conjecturing that in the small interval which he obtained, free from the din of others' business, he was loth to be taken off."[4]

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[4] St. Augustine, Confessions, 6:81-82.

One is reminded by this verbal picture of Ambrose's persistent reading, of the difficulty experienced by the latter in attempting, at the age of thirty-four, to compensate for a lack of theological training after his unexpected election to the episcopal office. It was apparently to Origen and St. Basil that Ambrose applied himself in order to fill this gap in his knowledge. Hence, Tixeront can say of his writing, "A delicate touch of mysticism, -- the result of his intercourse with the Greeks and of his personal piety,-- enhances what would otherwise sound cold and spiritless in the official language of one who had been a Roman magistrate."[5]

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[5] J. Tixeront, op.cit., 236.

One feels as if he is doing St. Ambrose somewhat of an injustice in passing judgment upon the saint's literary ability from his extant works, for most of these were originally discourses, and were worked over into treatises from notes taken down in the course of their delivery. In some passages the meaning is all but obscured by faulty Latin rendering, yet the genius of the man shines throughout his works. An abundance of Scriptural quotation suggests the influence of St. Basil, and the reader marvels at the patient, diligent effort by which this man of varied activities mastered the Holy Scriptures. Ruminating upon the unmitigated labor of this saint, one recollects St. Augustine's description of Ambrose's reading habits:

> "His eye glided over the pages, and his heart searched out the sense, but his voice and tongue were at rest....and perchance he dreaded lest if the author he read should deliver anything obscurely, some attentive or perplexed hearer should desire him to expound it, or to discuss some of the harder questions."[6]

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[6] St. Augustine, Confessions, 6:81-82

Among the numerous writings of St. Ambrose concerning virginity, perhaps the most famous is De Virginibus, a collection of sermons transposed into treatises by Ambrose, at the request of his sister Marcellina, who had received the veil from Pope Liberius in 353.[7]

In truth virginity is not praiseworthy because it is a quality found in martyrs, but because it is the stuff which produces martyrs.[10]

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[10] Ibid., 202.

Showing himself true to his calling as a shepherd of souls, Ambrose addresses numerous precepts to virgins, encouraging them to be rich, but with the qualification that they be rich towards God's poor, in order that they who participate in the poverty of the poor may share with them their abundance.[11]

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[11] Ibid., 211.

Both St. Ambrose and St. Augustine insist upon certain externals of conduct in virgins which remind one of the fervent novice of today, rather than of a Mother Cabrini or a Sister Madaleva. Yet, if the conditions of a later civilization permit a certain amount of aggressiveness in virgins, does not the world still look expectantly to its virgins for that sweet modesty Ambrose so well describes? Let virginity be first noted by the voice, he advises... let her religious gravity first announce a virgin to me -- her shy approach, her subdued gait, and her modest countenance.[12]

[7] Pierre de Labriolle, History and Literature of Christianity, 278.

The treatise recalls the happy occasion of Marcellina's veiling, and contains, together with Ambrose's own contribution, a resume of the precepts that Pope Liberius had uttered a quarter of a century earlier. St. Ambrose here indites the highest encomiums of virginity. Not unfittingly, declares St. Ambrose, has she who found her Spouse in Heaven sought her manner of living from Heaven.[8]

[8] De Virginibus, P.L., 16:202.

These blessed virgins are fragrant with divine grace as gardens are fragrant with flowers, as temples with divine worship, as altars with the priesthood. In fact St. Ambrose would not hesitate to admit virgins to the altars of God, inasmuch as he would feel confident in calling the souls of virgins altars, on which Christ is daily sacrificed for the redemption of the body. For if the body of a virgin is the temple of God, what is her soul, which exhales a vapour of divine fire when the ashes of the body are shaken off, and the soul is uncovered by the hand of the Eternal Priest?[9]

[9] Ibid., 223.

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[12] Ibid., 235.

Not that St. Ambrose advocates too great attention to externals, for spiritual loveliness is the ultimate goal. May God alone be sought as the judge of your beauty, the saint cautions, Who even in less beautiful bodies loves the more beautiful souls.[13]

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[13] Ibid., 208

Many times, Ambrose reminds virgins that they lack no model for their state. Let the life of Mary, he advises, represent to you virginity itself as if depicted in a portrait, from which, as from a mirror, gleam the loveliness of chastity and the beauty of virtue.[14]

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[14] Ibid., 220

At various points in his writings St. Ambrose expresses the opinion that greater austerity of life should be required of younger religious than of those who have grown strong in the service of God. Calling his sister Marcellina a veteran in religion, though she had been veiled but twenty-five years before, Ambrose reminds her that a good husbandman... works his land by turns, or if he will not let a

portion lie fallow, he alternates his crops, so that the fields may rest through change of produce. Let Marcellina, too, sow different seeds, now moderate nourishment, and again fasting, with reading, labor, and prayer, in order that change of work may permit a renewal of the bodily faculties.[15]

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[15] Ibid., 236

So startling and numerous were the repercussions aroused by St. Ambrose's treatise De Virginibus that he soon attempted to refute them by a second treatise entitled De Virginitate.[16]

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[16] P. De Labriolle, 279.

Rather amusingly at times, yet with irrefutable logic, he answers each objection. They had told him that the institution of marriage would disappear, that society would perish, and the human race be destroyed, if his counsels were adopted. No, replies the saintly bishop, there is no dearth of wives, for what young man ever sought a wife and was unable to find one? It is the absence of men from their homes caused by their long terms of service in foreign campaigns: it is the slaughter of large numbers of men in foreign wars that are responsible for the decreasing popula-

tion. But when was a virgin ever the cause of a war? Who was ever slain for the sake of a virgin? If anyone thinks that by the consecration of virgins the human race is becoming extinct, let him consider that where there are few virgins, there also men are few; where the pursuit of virginity is more prevalent, there the number of men is greater, as witness the Alexandrian, Oriental, and African Churches, in comparison with the Milanese.

To those who protested that virgins should not be veiled until they had reached a more mature age, Ambrose acknowledged that the ministering priest should exercise caution. Let him consider the maturity of her modesty, her possession of gravity, her oldness of manner, her years of virtuous living, her spirit of chastity; moreover let him ascertain whether her mother's guidance is careful, the zeal of her companions prudent. If these qualifications are present, the girl is the possessor of a hoary old age. If they are lacking, the girl's consecration should be deferred because of her immaturity of manner and habits rather than of age, for we do not speak of virtue as the acquirement of an individual of a certain age, but conversely, of the age of her virtue.[17]

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[17] De Virginitate, P.L. 16:289-290

Seeming to take as his general topic the places and times where Christ is to be sought by the consecrated vir-

gin, St. Ambrose formulates his instruction around various verses of the "Canticle of Canticles". Here, the saint uses the allegorical method, which he was the first to popularize in the West. Although the device becomes wearisome to the modern reader, it must be admitted that Ambrose employs it with consummate skill. The saint begins by admonishing virgins to avoid the public thoroughfares, quoting that section of the Canticle where the spouse laments, "The keepers that go about the city found me: they struck me: and wounded me: the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me" (Cant. 5:7). Not in herself, daughters... but in us is the Church wounded. Let us beware, therefore, lest our fall become an injury to the Church; lest anyone remove from us our mantle, that is, the cloak of prudence, the badge of patience.[18]

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[18] Ibid., 292.

How easy it is to rid oneself of this worldliness and to come close to Christ is brought out by Ambrose's referring to the words of David, "O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet. Blessed is the man that hopeth in him." (Psal. 33:9). She who was afflicted with an issue of blood hoped in him and was immediately cleansed: yet because she was faithful, she drew near. Do you, O daughter, but touch with faith the hem of His garment and

and soon the flood of worldly pleasures, now overflowing in torrents, will be dried up by the heat of the salutary Word.[19]

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[19] De Virginitate, 305-306.

Again emphasizing the need of retirement from the world, St. Ambrose quotes the reminder of St. Paul, "You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Coloss. 3:3). If it be hidden with Christ in God, continues Ambrose, let it not be seen by the world; for Christ is dead to the world: he lives to God.[20]

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[20] Ibid., 300.

St. Ambrose has often been called a mystic, and his exhortations to nuns to develop a deeply interior spirit of union with Christ appear frequently in his writings on virginity. The following passage exemplifies his thought as he quotes again the Canticle of Canticles: "I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him and I will not let him go, till I bring him into my mother's house, and into the Chamber of her that bore me" (Cant. 3:4). What are the home and bedroom of your mother, asks the saint, if not the interior solitude of your soul? Keep pure the inmost parts of this home that it may be an immaculate

dwelling for Him. May the Holy Spirit take up his abode therein, and may this inner citadel, joined as a corner-stone to the holy priesthood, rise as a spiritual edifice unto the glory of God.[21]

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21 De Virginitate, 299.

St. Ambrose's reflections on that beautiful line of the Canticles in which the spouse is described as "a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed" provide an example of the running commentary of the saint, his clipped phrases, and his emphasis upon thought rather than form:

> "'Hortus conclusus, soror mea Sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus' (Cant. 4:12); ne facile aperiat os suum, nec vulgari designet alloquio. Neque enim de ipsis divinis decet, nisi Verbo Dei interpellata, respondeas. Quid tibi cum caeteris? Soli Christo loquere, soli fabulare Christo."[22]

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22 Ibid., 292.

The treatise, Liber de Institutione Virginis, written in 391, on the occasion of the veiling of Ambrosia, a girl who had been placed under Ambrose's guidance, has little new matter on the subject of virtinity. The saint repeats his admonition concerning retirement, solitude, silence, mortification, humility, and devout praise of God by the chanting of psalms. He expatiates on the

greater excellence of the virginal state as compared with the conjugal. After refuting various heretical utterances regarding the Mother of God, the saint returns to the subject of virginity, calling upon all virgins to display a God-like purity.[23]

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[23] Liber de Institutione Virginis, P.L. 16, cols. 319-348, passim; Pierre de Labriolle, op. cit., 279.

Speaking of Christ under the title, Lily of the Valley, St. Ambrose explains the appellation as indicating that Christ was meek and humble of heart. It behooves the spouse of Christ to imitate these virtues in order that Christ may dwell in her heart as in a lily. Continuing this theme, St. Ambrose recalls a line of the Canticles, "His lips are lilies distilling the finest myrrh" (Cant. 5:13). Rightly may they be called lilies of Christ who recall his Passion and praise it with their lips, bearing about in their bodies the mortification of Christ; yet the title is especially applicable to holy virgins whose virginity is immaculate and shining.[24]

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[24] Liber de Institutione Virginis, 342.

The treatise, Exhortatio Virginitatis, is a recast of a discourse of 393 A.D.[25]

[25] J. Tixeront, op. cit., 236.

Here, the reader experiences a more vivid sense of the personality of St. Ambrose than in some of his other works, for there are passages in which Ambrose develops at greater length the ideas that he wishes to present, and the multiplicity of Scriptural quotations is lessened. Addressing in this exhortation virgins of both sexes, the saint speaks first to youths, entreating them to surrender themselves to Him whose custom it is to repay His own with a remuneration far beyond the due reward of their labor. In graphic manner Ambrose urges virgins to Christian endurance, bidding them to take up in their hands the cross of the Lord Jesus, and raising it aloft by their good works, to tread upon the wickedness of the world and to pass beyond it.[26]

[26] Exhortatio Virginitatis, P.L. 16, cols. 364-365.

Explaining those words of the "Canticle of Canticles" in which the spouse laments, "vulnerata charitatis ego sum" (Cant. 5:8, St. Ambrose says that the arrow which inflicted the wound is the Christ, to whom the Father declared that He had made him as a chosen arrow (Isa. 49:2). Because God is Love, it is with darts of love that he wounds those who seek Him. And in chains they follow Him,

for those whom He wounds, He binds fast. These are the chains of love by which St. Paul was bound when he spoke of himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Philem. 1).[27]

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[27] Ibid., 365.

St. Ambrose is of that school which recommends long periods of prayer, copious tears, and rare laughter. Be persistent in praying, he counsels, and let the face grow pale with assiduous prayer. Concerning joy, the saint would permit only that holy joy in work accomplished. Even a moderate rejoicing is unbecoming in a virgin. If she has no cause for which to weep, let her weep for the world; let her lament the falls of sinners, for she who bewails the falls of others will beware of her own. Finally, let them weep in the belief that by weeping here, they may receive consolation hereafter. The Book of Ecclesiastes has this to say of immoderate laughter, "As the crackling of thorns burning under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool" (Eccle. 7:7). For when thorns burn, they produce sound and are quickly consumed, so that there is no resultant heat.... So likewise is the laughter of foolish men: it produces sound devoid of charm.[28]

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[28] Ibid., 374.

Let the maid who is a virgin strive above all for sobriety, St. Ambrose cautions. Sobriety, he repeats, not abstinence from wine but from bodily lasciviousness and worldly vainglory, by which one is intoxicated more deeply than by wine; for these errors supply a chalice of destruction and goblet of wrath.[29]

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29 Ibid., 375-376.

It is with a prayer of surpassing beauty that St. Ambrose concludes his exhortation. When Thou lookest upon that saving Victim through Whom the sins of the world are taken away, do Thou look also upon these victims of holy chastity, and protect them by Thine everlasting aid, that they may become to Thee as an odour of sweetness, acceptable victims, pleasing to Christ the Lord; and do Thou deign to preserve in them an upright spirit, and blessings of body and mind, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son.[30]

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30 Ibid., 380.

There are moments in the life of every Religious when the following opinion of St. Ambrose would serve as consolation:

> "They who have fulfilled the commandments are able to say: 'We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do.' The virgin does not say this, nor he who sold all his goods, but

> they rather await the stored-up rewards like the holy Apostle who says: 'Behold we have forsaken all and followed Thee, what shall we have therefore?'"[31]

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[31] Concerning Widows, translated by Rev. H. DeRomestin in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd series, 10: 403-404.

St. Ambrose is extremely harsh in his condemnation of the fallen virgin. He reiterates the opinion found in earlier Fathers that the person who has vowed herself to Christ and received the veil has already married, and is united to an immortal man. If that person marries according to the common law of marriage, she commits adultery.[32]

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[32] De Lapsu Virginis Consecratae, P.L. 16, col. 389.

An appeal against worldliness is addressed to one who thinks to compromise with that world. You have vowed yourself to be the spouse of Christ, he reminds her. You are spoken of as a person devoted to God. What have you to do with the people of the world? I know not what you are seeking, what sort of friendships or conversations you have with them. You have consecrated your soul for the destruction of the things of this world. Why then, do you seek the world that you have renounced?[33]

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33 Ad Virginem Devotam, P.L. 17, col. 599.

As one would expect in a person so sincerely interested in the religious life of women as St. Ambrose shows himself to have been, his correspondence likewise contains references to that vocation. The eighteenth letter of the correspondence is addressed to the Emperor Valentinian, and in this letter St. Ambrose replies to the Memorial of Symmachus, a prefect of Rome. In the latter memorial Symmachus had protested against several encroachments of Christianity upon the old paganism, declaring it unjust that the vestal virgins and priests be deprived of ancient legacies. St. Ambrose reminds the emperor of the small number of vestals who had been received, despite the privileges and wealth heaped upon them. In contrast, he draws attention to the Christian virgins:

> "Let them look upon a people of modesty, a people of purity, an assembly of virginity. Not fillets are the ornaments of their heads, but a veil common in use but ennobled by chastity, the enticement of beauty not sought out but laid aside, none of those purple insignia, no delicious luxuries, but the practice of fasts, no privileges, no gains; all things, in fine, of such a kind that one would think them restrained from enjoyment while practising their duties. But whilst the duty is being practised the enjoyment of it is aroused. Chastity is increased by its own sacrifices."[34]

[34] Letter 18, translated by Rev. H. DeRomestin in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd series, 10:418-419.

In Letter 77, St. Ambrose refutes the notion that they who vow their lives to the service of God have renounced their liberty. The testimony of St. Paul is again sought as St. Ambrose quotes the Scriptural text: "He who is called, being free, is the bondman of Christ" (1 Cor. 7:22). This is a servitude of the heart, not a servitude from necessity. Therefore, we are servants indeed of our Creator; but we possess the liberty which we have received by the grace of Christ... And so, as if born of a freedman, let us offer the sacrifice of our liberty, signed on the forehead as becomes freedmen; that we may not be put to shame but may glory, signed by the Spirit, not by the flesh.[35]

[35] Epistula 77, P.L. 16, col. 1319.

The man who won the love of St. Augustine is heard in a later letter. Let us follow Jesus always and we shall never fall; for He gives strength to those who follow Him. And in proportion as you are near to virtue, to the same degree you will be more courageous.[36]

[36] Epistula 85, P.L. 16, col. 1338.

A very near contemporary of St. Ambrose was St. Jerome, though the tasks destined for them in the work of the Church were quite dissimilar. Whereas Ambrose was called from secular life for the immediate purpose of participating in Church administration as Bishop of Milan, St. Jerome, according to DeLabriolle, was ordained to the priesthood with the understanding that he was to remain free from any pastorial or liturgical obligation. For Jerome was preeminently a scholar, and, says Tixeront, "incontestably the most erudite of the Latin Fathers, not excepting even St. Augustine."[37]

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[37] P. DeLabriolle, op. cit., 339; J. Tixeront, op. cit., 254.

If St. Jerome was outstanding as a scholar, he was not less so as an individual, and even today, as Abbot Bardy asserts, that saintly scholar excites either profound sympathy or great antipathy.[38]

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[38] G. Bardy, The Christian Latin Literature of the First Six Centuries, translated by Mother M. Reginald, 99.

The fact is that St. Jerome was a passionate and a keenly sensitive man. One has but to read his correspondence with St. Augustine to see how eagerly he longed for the latter's friendship, and yet how bitterly he resented

any supposed lack of appreciation on the part of the younger man. Hence, it seems that it was his passionate, sensitive nature which caused him to suffer greatly from the antipathy toward him which it aroused. How largely that difficult disposition was a result of his extreme penances and incessant application to study, translation, and composition, a psychologist might guess--God knows.

In his attractively-written volume, Founders of the Middle Ages, E. K. Rand terms St. Jerome a Christian humanist in the sense that the latter put his scholarship at the service of the Church.[39]

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[39] E. K. Rand, op. cit., 104.

It would seem that the definition is equally apropos by reason of the fact that St. Jerome was truly interested in the world of his day, for although at Bethlehem he presided over a monastery of men whose fervour and holiness were remarkable, he took an active interest in all the contemporary events of the Christian world. "Messengers travelled incessantly between Rome and Bethlehem, and the latter became a sort of intellectual center of Christianity."[40]

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[40] G. Bardy, Christian Latin Literature, 101.

It is the opinion of Tixeront that if St. Jerome was far from exemplifying the ideal of Christian perfection, he was a writer of the first rank. "He has, when he desires, all the correctness of Lactantius and all the life, color, clever sarcasm and variety of Tertullian."[41]

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[41] J. Tixeront, op.cit., 255.

One of the chief uses to which St. Jerome put his literary talent was to encourage and instruct virgins and monks in the ascetic life, and to urge others to adopt that life. DeLabriolle believes that the reason for Jerome's constantly praising the religious life is the fact that his student days in Rome left with him the conviction that so great are the dangers offered by life in the world that frail souls must inevitably succumb to them, "unless they place between themselves and temptation a barrier that is almost impassable."[42]

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[42] P. DeLabriolle, op.cit., 279.

The bulk of St. Jerome's writings on virginity occurs in his correspondence, but the profession of that virtue is defended also in some of his treatises. A certain Jovinianus had published at Rome a treatise in which the latter asserted, among other things, that a virgin as such is no better than a married woman, in the

sight of God. Jerome's answer is based largely upon St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. He expresses the idea, hitherto encountered, that virgins are dear to Christ in a special manner because they freely give what is not required, thereby indicating the bestowal of a greater gift than they make who render only what is commanded.[43]

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[43] Contra Jovinianum, P.L. 23, col. 238.

Regarding the states of marriage and virginity, St. Jerome declares that there are diversities of gifts in the Church, marriage being one gift--virginity another. Hence it follows that there is likewise a distinction in the matter of rewards for the married and for virgins.[44]

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[44] Ibid., col. 232.

One of the early letters of St. Jerome is that to Heliodorus, reproaching the latter for having abandoned the ascetic life in favor of the clerical. Using the rhetorical question, Jerome asks whether the erstwhile monk dreads poverty. Christ declares the poor blessed. Does labor frighten you? Except he has toiled in the sweat of his brow, no athlete is crowned. Does the matter of food cause anxiety? Trust is fearful of no

famine. Do you dread a bed on the hard ground for limbs emaciated with fasting? The Lord lies beside you... You are over-eager for enjoyment, my brother, if you wish to rejoice with the world in this life and to reign with Christ in the next.[45]

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[45] Epistula 14, P.L. 22, col. 354.

Perhaps the most famous of St. Jerome's letters is that to Eustochium, the daughter of Paula, who with her mother accompanied St. Jerome to Palestine and there formed a part of the company of virgins in a convent at Bethlehem, near the monastery presided over by St. Jerome. The letter belongs to that numerous class of letters written by the saint with the avowed purpose of inspiring monks and virgins to persevere in the life of celibacy. To know the excellence of virginity is not sufficient; it must be guarded with the most jealous care by those who have chosen it.[46]

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[46] Epistula 22, P.L. 22, col. 409.

Speaking of the love of Christ for his virginal spouses, St. Jerome quotes St. Paul's description of the conjugal state, "they shall be two in one flesh" (Eph.5:31). Not in one flesh, but in one spirit are the Heavenly Bridegroom and His spouse, and this is the consummate reward of

those who have chosen Christ. Hence it is that Jerome addresses Eustochium as Lady Eustochium, since she is the bride of Our Lord.[47]

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[47] Ibid., 395

With the mother of one who would embrace the life of virginity, St. Jerome expostulates. Why does she begrudge her daughter the virginity she possesses? It was your watchful love which preserved her a virgin. Are you displeased with her because she has desired to be the wife of a king, not of a soldier? She has bestowed upon you an exalted privilege: you are now the mother-in-law of God.[48]

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[48] Ibid., 407

St. Jerome shows in his letters an understanding of human nature which is at times amusing, and at other times pathetic. From personal experience he knew the craving of most human hearts for affection, and so in this letter to Eustochium he acknowledges:

> "It is hard for the human soul not to love something, and our mind of necessity must be drawn to some sort of affection. Carnal love is overcome by spiritual love: desire is quenched by desire; what is taken from the one is added to the other."[49]

[49] "The Virgin's Profession", translated by F.A.Wright in Fathers of the Church, 239.

St. Jerome admits that it involves a difficult struggle to be like Christ, his apostles and martyrs, and that the things which he sets forth will seem hard to her who does not love Christ. But she who has learned to despise the things of the world will cry out, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword... I am sure that neither death, nor life.... nor things present, nor things to come.... nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:35-39).[50]

[50] Ibid., 422-423.

It is a frequent experience in reading the admonitions of the Early Fathers to virgins to ruminate, "Ah, this advice is surely outdated. For contemplatives, perhaps." Yet, invariably, further consideration forces the conclusion that if the literal application of their counsels be no longer required, the spirit of those counsels still rules the conduct which the Church and society expect to see in Religious. It is thus with a

section of the present letter. St. Jerome stresses the need for guarding chastity, for shielding from the public gaze the vessels of the Lord's temple, for surely, no gold or silver vessel was ever so dear to God as the temple of a virgin's body.[51]

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[51] Ibid., 409.

St. Jerome advises rigid mortification, recommending that she who says she cannot do without the luxuries she knew in the world, renounce the ascetic life and live according to her own rule, since God's rule is too difficult for her. Not that a rumbling stomach and fevered lungs are in themselves pleasing to God, but they are necessary for the preservation of chastity.[52]

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[52] Ibid., 400

The only fitting return that we can make to Christ is to give blood for blood, to lay down our lives for our Redeemer. What saint ever won his crown without a struggle?[53]

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[53] Ibid., 423.

In this materialistic age it is not always easy to obey Christ's injunction that his followers, though in

the world, be not of the world. Apparently, the matter caused the young virgins of St. Jerome's day some uncertainity, for the latter quotes a typical plaint as follows:

> "So-and-so enjoys her own property; she is honoured by men; the brethern and the sisters assemble at her house. Has she ceased to be a virgin?"[54]

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[54] "The Virgin's Profession", op. cit., 262.

St. Jerome declares it doubtful if she be a virgin "holy both in body and spirit." But one must follow better examples.[55]

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[55] Ibid.

St. Jerome was well aware of the snare that vain glory sets for a Religious. Do not wish to appear very devout nor more humble than necessary, lest by avoiding glory you seek it. For many who hide their poverty, charity, and fasting wish to arouse admiration by their very scorn of it, and, strange to say, they seek glory while professing to renounce it. It is the opinion of St. Jerome that few are free from this defect. Elaborating this advice, he cautions virgins not to harbor the secret thought that having ceased to court attention in garments of gold, they will do so in lowly attire. When you enter a room filled with brethern and sisters,

do not take too low a place, or protest that you are unworthy of a footstool.[56]

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[56] Epistula 22, P.L. 22, col. 413.

The oft-repeated advice that virgins seldom leave their dwelling-places is reiterated by St. Jerome. Shrewdly the "irascible hermit" remarks that one will never lack an excuse for going out if she goes out whenever there is need to do so. Rather sardonically, the saint queries whether a Brother be dead, or the body of a Sister need to be carried to burial. Take care lest you yourself die in too frequently performing such offices.[57]

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[57] Ibid., 413.

In this connection Jerome condemns visits paid by virgins to married women of the world. Learn in this matter a holy pride, he remonstrates; realize that you are superior to them.[58]

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[58] Ibid., 413

Letter 48 of St. Jerome's correspondance is a kind of apology for his two books against Jovinian, to which reference has been made. In this letter to Pammachius,

Jerome defends himself against the charge that he had been excessive in his praise of marriage and depreciation of virginity. The saint expresses surprise that clergymen and monks, both groups living celibate lives, refrain from praising what they themselves practise. Cutting themselves off from their wives in order to imitate the chastity of virgins, they nevertheless maintain that married women are as good as virgins. If they continue to live apart from their wives, they will have to admit that in preferring virginity to marriage, they have chosen the better course.[59]

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[59] Epistula 48, P.L. 22, col. 494.

Concluding this letter, St. Jerome asks why persons delude themselves and are vexed if they find the palm of chastity denied them, while they continually seek sexual indulgence. Shall there be but one reward for hunger and for surfeit, for sackcloth and for silk?[60]

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[60] Ibid., 510-511.

St. Jerome's letter to Paulinus of Nola breathes the solicitude of sincere friendship. He congratulates the latter for his complete break with the world, recalling the case of the millionaire, Crates, who threw away a huge

amount of gold when he was on his way to Athens for the study of philosophy, believing that wealth is incompatible with virtue.[61]

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[61] Epistula 61, P.L. 22, col. 580.

The important thing is to be a Christian, not merely to appear so to be. And yet, this lovable old man muses, they most please the world, who please Christ least.[62]

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[62] Ibid, 584.

I am not satisfied with mediocrity for you, Paulinus: I wish that everything you do be of the highest excellence.[63]

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[63] Ibid, 586.

A great part of this letter is devoted to St. Jerome's defense of his belief that the country is better suited for the pursuance of monastic life than the city. He assures Paulinus that it matters not in what part of the world one lives--in the Holy Land or elsewhere--as long as one lives in the country. Keep out of cities, he cautions, if you desire to be a monk, for cities are the homes of crowds, not of those who live alone. In a later letter he asks why monks long for cities, they whose very name

signifies loneliness.[64]

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[64] Ibid., 583; Epistula 125. col. 1076.

Parallel with this thought is St. Jerome's ban upon a monk's participation in social gatherings and visitations of an official or complimentary nature.[65]

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[65] Ibid.

Letter 66 of St. Jerome's correspondance was written to Pammachius, formerly the husband of Paula's daughter, Paulina, but for two years a widower. Following the death of his young wife, Pammachius had adopted sombre garb, renouncing his wealth for the benefit of the poor, and devoting his life to the service of the sick.[66]

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[66] Epistula 66, P.L. 22, passim.

Yet, St. Jerome was not content that Pammachius should stop at that point in the spiritual ascent. It is not enough, if you would be perfect, merely to despise wealth. You must likewise follow Christ, forsaking your sins and walking hand in hand with virtue. Christ is all things; hence he who leaves all for Christ finds One in place of all.[67]

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[67] Ibid., col. 644.

In Jerome's view, voluntary poverty is a lesser sacrifice than are chastity and obedience. One must leave not only his money, but also his very self. In the Book of Job, Satan is quoted as declaring, "All that a man hath he will give for his life: but...touch his flesh, and...he will bless thee to thy face." (Job 2:4-5). Herein the ancient enemy reveals his knowledge that the war with impurity is more difficult than that with covetousness. To relinquish what clings to one from without is easy, but a war within our very selves involves far greater danger. One must loosen things joined together: one must separate things firmly united.[68]

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[68] Ibid., 646.

In proof of his contention that the sacrifice of one's own will is superior to the sacrifice of one's possessions, St. Jerome instances the case of Zacchaeus, who restored four-fold those whom he had defrauded and gave half of his goods to the poor, and yet was not numbered among the apostles. The latter, on the other hand, gave up nothing as far as wealth is concerned, but as regards

their own will, they gave up the whole world.[69]

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[69] Ibid.

In his letter of consolation written to Eustochium upon the death of Paula, Jerome expresses the same thought. He recalls the apostles' saying, "Behold we have left all things, and have followed thee" (Luke 18:28). Now, there is no evidence, says St. Jerome, that they left anything but their boats and nets; yet they were crowned with the approval of Christ. Why? Because in giving themselves, they left all things.[70]

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[70] Epistula 118, P.L. 22, col. 965

In his panegyric of Paula, St. Jerome declares that the virtue which constituted her particular charm was humility, which he terms the first of Christian graces. There was nothing in Paula's dress, speech, manner, or gait to make her remarkable among her virgin companions.[71]

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[71] Ibid., 891

A letter to a young monk of Toulouse praises the cenobitic way of life in preference to the anchoritic. From companions in the monastic life one may learn many

things: the one teaches humility, another patience, a third silence, and a fourth, meekness. You will do as others desire, eat what you are told, wear the clothes given you, perform the work assigned; you will obey a person whom you dislike; you will go to bed tired out, and be obliged to rise before you have rested sufficiently; if you are wronged, you will endure the wrong in silence. You will fear the superior of the community as a master, but love him as a father. Whatever he commands, you will consider to be beneficial for you. You will not judge those placed over you, for it will be your duty to obey. You will have so many tasks to perform that while you pass from one thing to the next, you will be able to think only of the duty of the moment.[72]

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[72] Epistula 125, P.L. 22, cols. 1080-1081.

Thirty years after St. Jerome wrote to Eustochium a letter which may well be called a treatise on virginity, he wrote to Demetrias, another young lady of noble birth, who had embraced the life of holy virginity. His counsels regarding ascetic practices in this letter are considerably more moderate than his earlier advice to Eustochium. He declares that he would not impose upon her an obligation of extreme fasting or abnormal abstinence because such penances soon break down weak consti-

tutions, causing bodily sickness before they lay a foundation of holiness. While curbing the desires of the flesh, however, one must keep sufficient strength to read the Scriptures, sing psalms, and keep vigils. Fasting in itself is not complete holiness, but only a foundation virtue, upon which other virtues may be built; and the same may be said of chastity. None of these virtues alone will suffice to win the virgin's crown.[73]

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[73] Epistula 130, P.L. 22, cols. 1116-1117.

Demetrias is warned to avoid the company of married women devoted to their husbands and to the world, lest the tales of "what he said to me and what I said to him" (in modern parlance) should cause her mind to become unsettled.[74]

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[74] Ibid., col. 1121.

Virgins who live in large communities ought never to go out alone. Sheep who stray from the flock fall into the jaws of wolves. Some holy virgins remain at home on holy days, and entirely avoid public places.[75]

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[75] Ibid., col. 1122.

Like Solomon's praises of wisdom is the conclusion of this letter of a Christian humanist. Love Holy Scripture, and wisdom will love you. Love wisdom and it will keep you safe. May the gems on your bosom and in your ears be the jewels of wisdom.[76]

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[76] Ibid., 1124.

Both St. Jerome and St. Augustine were geniuses, though differently gifted; both were actively zealous in the defense of the Church and in the promotion of the virginal way of life; and finally, each of them had the highest esteem for the talents of the other. Indeed, the correspondence of the two saints offers the greatest exoneration from the charge of perversity regarding that one of them whom someone has called an "irascible hermit." For if Augustine could excuse Jerome's cutting jibes, who are we to condemn him? And excuse them he did, totally, understandingly, in the manner of that One to whom he had given all his love.

In the following excerpts from St. Augustine's works, there is noticeable a strongly personal element. Concerning this characteristic of Augustine's writing, Reverend Father D'Arcy states:

> "He has the same power as Pascal and, at times, of Newman of making what is intensely personal pass into the universal, so that the reader seems to be following his own story. To use the language of his system, his own

> experience evokes in the memory of others an echo which is recognized to be true. Hence his mark on philosophy has been described by a modern writer as that of interiorizing it. He is the first explorer of the hinterland of self."[77]

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[77] M. C. D'Arcy, "The Philosophy of St. Augustine", A Monument to St. Augustine, 156.

Vernon Bourke attests Augustine's success in the use of this method of self-inquiry by his affirmation that Augustinism is "a spirit which stems from the intuitive wisdom of a great personality." Bourke considers the ultimate source of this Augustinian spirit to be the love of God, quoting Gilson's declaration that a doctrine is Augustinian in the measure in which it tends more completely to organize itself around charity.[78]

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[78] V. J. Bourke, Augustine's Quest of Wisdom, 301-302.

Now, the love of God upon which St. Augustine especially insists in regard to persons dedicated to God, is the reciprocal love which they, as the chosen brothers and spouses of Christ, owe to Him. Quoting St. Thomas, Gilson says in this connection, "'There is a circulation of love which departs from God and returns to Him.' If this be true, one must conclude that to love God is to possess Him, for since he who seeks God loves Him, he

who seeks Him possesses Him."[79]

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79 Etienne Gilson, L'Esprit de la Philosophie Medievale, 272.

It is the fear of St. Augustine that those souls to whom he has bequeathed extraordinary spiritual favors will interrupt that circulation of divine love which should flow unceasingly between the Creator and His creatures, and by centering upon themselves the love which is His, they will deny Him the love which He expects from them.

If love be the source of his effective thinking, the virtue of humility receives almost equal attention in St. Augustine's advice to Religious. And is not this virtue which sets man in his proper relation to His Creator, essential for any true love of God, for is it not the self-esteem of pride which deprives God of His creature's love? That St. Augustine himself possessed the virtues of charity and humility which he preached is seen, among other instances, in that passage of his Confessions where he relates his strongly-felt need of talking with St. Ambrose, and the complete frustration of that wish:

> "I had no opportunity of inquiring what I wished of that so holy oracle of thine, his breast, unless the thing might be answered briefly. But those tides in me to be poured out to him, required his full leisure, and never found it."[80]

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80 Confessions, 6:82.

It will be recalled that Augustine then explains Ambrose's manner of utilizing the few free minutes at his disposal, concluding as follows his description of the man who apparently failed to recognize in Augustine anything beyond the common run of humanity, "But with what intent soever he did it, certainly in such a man it was good."[81]

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81 Ibid.

In 388, a year after his baptism, St. Augustine wrote two books on the customs of the Catholic Church and the customs of the Manichaeans, contrasting the virtues of the Church in her religious, clergy, and laity, with the secret immorality of the Manichaeans, and establishing the theory of charity as the source of all holiness.[82]

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82 Gustave Bardy, The Christian Latin Literature of the First Six Centuries. 142.

By way of introduction to his description of the lives of solitaries and of monks, St. Augustine observes that it must be something transcending the human by contemplation of which men can live without sight of his fellowmen.[83]

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83 De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae et de Moribus Manichaeorum, P.L. 32, col. 1337.

Describing the life of monks, St. Augustine dwells especially upon the fraternal charity insisted upon in monasteries, asserting that monks realize that charity was recommended by Christ and the Apostles to the extent that if this virtue alone be lacking there is emptiness; if it be present, there is a plenitude of all the virtues.[84]

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84 Ibid., col. 1373.

After narrating the holiness of life practised by men and women ascetics, St. Augustine concludes:

> "Such customs, such a life, such arrangements, such a system, I could not commend as it deserves, if I wished to commend it; besides I am afraid that it would seem as if I thought it unlikely to gain acceptance from the mere description of it, if I considered myself obliged to add an ornamental eulogium to the simple narrative."[85]

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85 "Of the Morals of the Catholic Church", translated by Rev. Marcus Dods, in The Works of Aurelius Augustine, 5:43.

About the year 400, St. Augustine wrote a treatise concerning the work of monks. This exposition of the obligation of monks in regard to work was written at the request of Aurelius, Bishop of Carthage, who desired to know whether certain monks of his diocese should be allowed to persist in their contention that they were not obliged to perform manual labor. St. Augustine proceeds to state the position of the troublesome monks who declare that they are but obeying the command of Christ who said:

> "'Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body what you shall put on....Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them....Consider the lilies of the field how they grow: they labour not, neither do they spin....And if the grass of the field, which is today, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe: how much more you, O ye of little faith?'" (Matth. 6:25-30)[86]

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86 De Opere Monachorum, 40:549.

If this is the desire of the Lord, say they, how could St. Paul in conscience instruct us to be solicitous for our bodily needs and burden us with the labors of handicraftsmen, saying "If any man will not work, neither let him eat." (2 Thess. 3:10)? Obviously, St. Paul refers to spiritual works. And we do perform such works,

reading with the brethren who come to us weary from the turmoil of the world, that in prayers, psalms, and hymns they may find rest. We also speak to them, consoling and exhorting them as we see them to have need.[87]

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87 Ibid., 549-550

With his clear and pointed logic St. Augustine lays bare their self-deception in three brief responses. If we are not to be called away from prayers, psalms, and reading, he says, then neither ought we to eat, nor our daily food itself be prepared. But if we are forced to take time for these things, why do we not also allot certain times to the observance of the Apostolic precepts? As for divine songs, a servant of God can meditate upon the law of the Lord and sing unto His name while working with his hands. And lastly, do they who give their time to reading not find in that very reading that which St. Paul enjoins? What perversity it is for him who wishes to give up his time to reading to refuse to be guided by his reading! For who does not know that a person more quickly profits by reading good things the sooner he puts into practice that which he has read?[88]

88 Ibid., 564-565.

In 401, St. Augustine undertook the composition of two treatises: the first, on the good of marriage; the second, on holy virginity. It is probable that the work on marriage was completed before that on virginity because St. Augustine wished to avoid any misunderstanding of his position concerning the two states, and any accusation of condemning marriage by exalting virginity. How little guilty he was of excess in either direction will be apparent in the following discussion.

So excellent is Christian marriage, says Augustine, that a more obedient married woman is to be preferred to a less obedient virgin; for an obedient married woman is necessarily chaste, being commanded to refrain from unchaste acts; while a woman may preserve her virginity and yet may slight precepts, indulging talkativeness, curiosity, covetousness, and pride. We often reflect, says Augustine, that there are some monks and virgins who are negligent in obeying precepts after having enthusiastically forsaken things permitted. Nor should boys who have preserved virginal innocence and who have followed the Lamb, consider themselves better than the first holy fathers, who used marriage without sexual excess.[89]

89 De Bono Conjugali, P.L. 40, cols. 393-394.

As if to make clear his position St. Augustine says that at the present time, not to marry, to practise chastity, and to be subject to Christ is surely the holier course, provided that men think upon the things of God, how they may please Him, or in other words, that they be both continent and obedient.[90]

90 Ibid., 395.

The point of view taken by St. Augustine in his treatise on virginity may be guessed by a statement found in the first paragraph of that treatise. Thinking, perhaps, of previous writings on the subject, St. Augustine declares that virginity should not only be set forth that it may be loved, but ought to be admonished, so that it be not puffed up.[91]

91 De Sancta Virginitate, P.L. 40, col. 397.

Commenting upon virginity, Augustine avers that no fruitfulness of the flesh can be compared with it. Nor is virginity as such held in esteem, but it is honored as having been dedicated to God. Similarly, although

virginity is kept in the flesh, it is spiritual in the fact that it is vowed and kept by religion and devotion of the Spirit.[92]

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92 Ibid., 400.

Furthermore, there is no reason why the virgins of God should be sad because they are unable to become mothers, for they are the mothers of Christ, if they do the will of His Father.[93]

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93 Ibid., 398-399

In a rapturous passage reminiscent of the Confessions, St. Augustine expatiates upon that passage in the Apocalypse in which St. John says of virgins that they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth (Apoc. 14:4). Do you ask me where I think that He goes? There, I think, where the grasses are joys: not the vain joys of the world, nor the joys which they who are not virgins shall experience in the Kingdom of God, but the joys of the virgins of Christ, joys of Christ, in Christ, with Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. Follow Him therefore by perserveringly maintaining the virginity that you so ardently vowed.[94]

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94 Ibid., 410-411.

It is not surprising that he who prayed, "Sciam me; sciam Te" should see the danger of self-exaltation in the members of a profession that is avowedly superior to all other ways of life. Augustine's keeness of vision concerning pride seems to be epitomized in a quotation from The City of God made by the Jesuit Father, M.C. D'Arcy, in his essay on Augustine's philosophy.

> "Two loves have built two cities: the love of self, which reaches even to contempt for God, the earthly City; and the love of God, which reaches even to contempt for self, the heavenly City. One glories in itself, the other in the Lord."[95]

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95 M.C. D'Arcy, op.cit., 241.

Against this danger of egocentricity, in contrast to Theocentricity, Augustine warns virgins, admonishing them that when they discover their superiority to married persons both in work and in wages, according to the testimony of the Scriptures, they bethink themselves immediately of that other verse of the Scriptures, which commands a person to the extent that he is great to humble himself to the same extent. The extent of a man's humility has been prescribed by the measure of his greatness. And if all Christians ought to guard humility, since the Gospels prove Christ to have been a teacher of that virtue, it is becoming that they who excel the rest of men in any great

virtue should most faithfully practice the virtue of humility. More specifically, because virginity is a great virtue, it behooves virgins to beware that their virginity be not corrupted by pride. Indeed, can one explain God's permitting the presence, among those of your profession, of monks and virgins who are about to fall, except that by their fall your fear may be increased, and thereby your pride may be repressed? For so hateful to God is pride that against this single sin the Almighty humbled Himself. I fear for you, virginal soul, lest when you boast that you will follow the Lamb wherever he goes, you be unable because of your swelling pride to follow through strait ways.[96]

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96 Ibid., 413 et seq.

And truly, St. Augustine continues, it may provide food for thought if a virgin consider that she knows not whether certain married women are able to suffer for Christ, whereas she is unable, and is spared by reason of the fact that her weakness is not put to the test by trial. For it is one thing not to consent to flattery and enticement, but it is quite another thing not to yield in the face of blows and torture. Hence, that a virgin be not proud because of that which she is able to do, let her consider that she knows not whether

there be something more excellent that she cannot do. Moreover, let her consider that they who are not virgins may be able to do that which is impossible for her.[97]

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97 Ibid., 424.

It was the fear of Augustine that pride concerning her state would cause a virgin to love God less than she should. I do not tell you to be such as she of whom it was said, "Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much", but I fear that by thinking you have little forgiven you, you will love little. As if you ought not to love with much greater affection Him who did not permit you to fall into sin. For by what strange perversity do you love less Him from whom you have received more?[98]

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98 Ibid., 418 et seq.

The only guardian of the virginal good is God Himself, Who gave it, and God is Love. Therefore the guardian of virginity is Charity, but the place of the Guardian is humility, for He Himself has told us that His Spirit rests upon the lowly and humble, and upon him who trembles at His word. For the Lamb leads wherever He goes those in whom He will have found a place to lay His head.[99]

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99 Ibid., 426.

In his treatise on the philosophy of St. Augustine, Reverend Father D'Arcy sets it forth at St. Augustine's thought that "When we are inflamed in His presence with a pure and holy love, then we burn sweet-smelling incense in His sight."[100]

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100 M.C. D'Arcy, op.cit., 247.

Hence one would expect St. Augustine to urge to great heights of love of God those who have given their lives to His service. If you despise marriage with the sons of men, writes Augustine, love with all your heart Him who is beautiful above the sons of men. You have leisure. Your heart is free from marriage bonds. With the eyes of the mind gaze on the wounds of the Crucified, the scars of the Risen One. And whatever love you had to expend upon marriage give to Him. It is not just for you to love but little, Him for Whose sake you have not loved that which is lawful. But loving Him who is meek and humble of heart, I have no fear for you.[101]

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101 Ibid., 426 et seq.

Adding another work to the literature on the subject

of holy widowhood, St. Augustine writes upon that state to the "religious handmaiden of God, Juliana." In the course of this letter St. Augustine remarks that since Christ said that all do not receive this word (a life of holy virginity), they who have undertaken this life ought to persevere in it, giving no occasion to the adversary and withdrawing no oblation from Christ. Now, once virginity is offered, not only to marry, but to wish to marry is matter of condemnation, as the Apostle says, "when they shall have lived in delights in Christ, they wish to marry: having condemnation, in that they have made of none effect their first faith" (1 Tim. 5:11-12). Not that the marriages even of these are adjudged matter of condemnation, but a wrong done to purpose is condemned, a broken faith of vow, and a fall from a higher good.[102]

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102 De Bono Viduitatis, 437-438.

In the matter of the marriages of those who had vowed virginity, St. Augustine differs with earlier writers in that he denies that such marriages are adulteries, for when this contention is pushed to its obvious conclusion, it is clear that it is not based upon true logic. In proof of his position, St. Augustine instances the case of a married woman who, with her husband's con-

sent and within his lifetime, vows continence to Christ. Now, according to the former theory, no one ought to make such a vow, lest she make Christ Himself an adulterer, by being married to him during her husband's lifetime.[103]

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103 Ibid., 438.

However, the saint continues, though I do not consider such marriages to be adulteries, I should not hesitate to say that such falls from a holier chastity are worse than adulteries. For if it is an offense against God when a married woman breaks faith with her husband, how much more serious is the offense against God when faith is not kept with Him, in a matter which He requires when once it is offered, though He did not require that it be offered. For when a person fails to render that which he vowed, not by command but by counsel, his violation of the vow is greater in proportion as the necessity of his vow was less.[104]

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104 Ibid., 439.

St. Augustine takes this occasion to refute certain errors regarding grace and free will in which he sees certain of his brethren entangled. These persons think that when they are exhorting to righteousness and piety,

their exhortation will lack force unless they place these within the power of man, by the choice of his free will, and unaided by grace, to perform. It is true that were we not to will, we should not possess continence. But if it be asked whose gift it is, listen to the Holy Scripture in which Solomon writes, "I knew that no one can be continent, unless God give it, and this itself was of wisdom to know whose gift it was." (Wisd. 8:21).[105]

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105 Ibid., 444.

In a reply to Faustus, the Manichaean, St. Augustine contrasts the Christian glorification of virginity with the Manichaean prohibition of marriage. Paul, he says, cannot have said that to dedicate virgins to Christ is a doctrine of devils; for I ask: is it the making of virgins, or the prohibition of marriage which is the doctrine of devils? If it is the prohibition of marriage, this does not apply to us, for we maintain that it is as foolish to prevent one who wishes to marry from doing so, as it is criminal to force one to marry who feels reluctant to do so.[106]

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106 Contra Faustum Manichaeum, P.L. 42, cols. 492-493.

Furthermore, if you Manichaeans taught that marriage is good and virginity is better, as Christ's Church

teaches, you would not have been described as forbidding to marry, for a good thing may be placed second to a better thing without its being forbidden. You, on the other hand, while not forbidding intercourse, do forbid marriage, although marriage is not merely for the gratification of passion but for the procreation of children. You see, therefore, that to exhort virginity as the better of two good things is far different from forbidding marriage by denouncing the true purpose of marriage.[107]

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107 Ibid., 494-496.

Vernon Bourke, in his admirable work, Augustine's Quest of Wisdom, summarizes as follows the saint's teaching:

> "Perhaps the greatest lesson that Augustine has to teach is that wisdom and true happiness are... solely the result of divinely aided, personal effort. Each man may reach a different degree of understanding of his own nature and its destiny--such understanding is always the culmination of a private and somewhat solitary quest of wisdom....Contemplative repose of soul is found only in God."[108]

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108 op. cit., 301-302

The tenth letter of Augustine's correspondence is addressed.

to Nebridius and concerns itself with the problem of how he and Augustine would be able to spend more time together. St. Augustine declares the need of much retirement from the things that are passing, that man may be able to say, "I fear nothing." Thus, too, man attains that abiding happiness with which no pleasing excitement can in any way compare. But if such a life is not the lot of man, why is calmness of spirit occasionally experienced by us? And why is this experience more frequent in proportion to the devotion with which one in his inmost soul worships God?[109]

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109 Epistula 10, P.L. 33, col. 74.

It would be difficult to find a more beautiful exhortation to embrace the Religious life than the letter of St. Augustine to Licentius. Augustine expresses the fear that while rejecting the restraints of wisdom, as if they were bonds, Licentius is becoming bound to mortal things. Although it is true that wisdom at first restrains men and subdues them by the discipline of labour, it presently grants them real freedom, enriching them with the possession and enjoyment of itself. I acknowledge that these early restraints are rather difficult to bear, but the ultimate restraints of wisdom I cannot call severe, because they are most sweet; nor can I call them easy, for they are very firm: in brief

they possess an indescribable quality, but one which can be the object of faith and hope and love.[110]

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110 Epistula 26, P.L. 33, cols. 103-104.

With sweet persuasion, Augustine urges this soul which must have been very dear to him. That He may heal us, let us take His yoke upon us and learn of Him who is meek and humble of heart, and we shall find rest for our souls, for His yoke is sweet and His burden light. If you found in the earth a golden chalice, you would give it to the Church of God. But you have received from God talents which are spiritually as valuable as gold.[111]

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111 Ibid., 107.

Letter 145 is apparently a letter to a member of a Religious community, and in the course of it Augustine speaks of the attraction which the world exerts upon those who have forsaken it. This world holds more danger for us in hours of pleasure than in hours of pain, he observes. Although "all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16), nevertheless, even in the case of men who prefer to worldly pleasures the things which are spiritual, unseen, and eternal, the

charm of earthly things insinuates itself into their affections and dogs their steps in the paths of duty with its seductive allurements. Now, the violence with which the things of this world acquire sway over our weakness is in proportion to the superior value by which future things command our love.[112]

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112 Epistula 145, P.L. 33, col. 593.

The reader of St. Augustine's letters notes again and again the warm affection expressed by the saint for many of those whose lives touched his. If this capacity for loving led astray the youthful Augustine, his correspondence proves how well he learned to turn this affection to the service of God. An example of his loving manner of treating the members of the Christ he served occurs in a letter to a certain Darius. Do you, begs Augustine, ask for us in prayer what we ask for you, that we may live a quiet, peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Let us ask this for each other wherever we are, for He to whom we belong is everywhere.[113]

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113 Epistula 231, P.L. 33, col. 1026.

Saints Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine had to make in Heaven the acquaintance of the distinguished churchman whom later ecclesiastics associated with them, for

it was twenty years after the death of Augustine that the saint who is known to later ages as St. Gregory the Great, was born. Yet the latecomer added distinction to the Latin Fathers, being the only one of the Great Doctors to have been made pope. F. H. Dudden, one of the best-known historians of St. Gregory, calls him

> "one of the most notable figures in Ecclesiastical History. He has exercised in many respects a momentous influence on the doctrine, the organization, and the discipline of the Catholic Church. To him we must look for an explanation of the religious situation of the Middle Ages: indeed, if no account were taken of his work, the evolution of the form of medieval Christianity would be almost inexplicable."[114]

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114 F. H. Dudden, Gregory the Great, 1:5

At the age of thirty Gregory was the prefect of Rome and one of its wealthiest citizens. About four years later, he renounced the world, sold his lands and possessions, and built seven monasteries with the revenue accruing from their sale.[115]

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115 Alban Butler, op. cit., 3:203; J. Tixeront, op. cit., 363.

Monsignor Battifol, who has written a scholarly work on St. Gregory (superbly translated by John L. Stoddard),

states that the grace of conversion was for Gregory the call to a more perfect life. In the words of the saint, "I deferred the grace of conversion for a long, long time....while my mind persuaded me to serve the world merely outwardly, and in appearance only, that service managed to attach me to that world, in spite of myself."[116]

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116 Pierre Batiffol, St. Gregory the Great, 16.

According to the custom of the Christians of the time, a custom which may be observed as early as the period of Ambrose and Jerome, Gregory did not retire from the city in order to pursue more intensely the spiritual life, but retired to a house on the Clivus Scauri, that he had inherited from his father. Remodelling into a monastery this house on the straight, ascending street leading to the Caelian hill, Gregory placed the monastery under the protection of St. Andrew. It is indicative of the character of the man that he did not become abbot of the new monastic foundation, but placed it under the direction of a certain Valentio, formerly at the head of a monastery harassed by the Lombards. Gregory refers to the latter as "superior of my monastery and of myself."[117]

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117 Ibid., 23.

That Gregory introduced the Benedictine Rule into the monastery of St. Andrew's is inferred by Grutzmacher from Gregory's praise of the Rule in the Dialogues, from certain passages in his correspondence, and from the fact that Augustine and his fellow-monks, who were monks of the monastery of St. Andrew, introduced the Benedictine Rule in their Anglo-Saxon mission.[118]

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118 Justin McCann, op. cit., 226-227.

It was during this period of approximately five years that St. Gregory acquired from apparently excessive fasting the gastric disorders from which he suffered severely during the remainder of his life.[119]

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119 Pierre Batiffol, op. cit., 24 et seq.

Under Pope Benedict I, Gregory was made a cardinal deacon. By Pope Pelagius II, he was appointed papal nuncio to the Emperor Tiberias at Constantinople, and it is probable that he left Rome for Constantinople in 579.[120]

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120 O. Bardenhewer, op. cit., 651; F. H. Dudden, op. cit., 122.

Although no notable achievements accrued from this embassy, the experience was a valuable one, for it apprised him of the fact that no help in the future was to be expected from Byzantium: if Rome and Italy were to be saved, it must be by their own independent action. Leaving out of account supernatural guidance, it is to this early acquired conviction that his later momentous course of action is due.[121]

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121 "St. Gregory the Great", Catholic Encyclopedia.

Returning to Rome in 584 or 585, he shortly after became abbot of the monastery of St. Andrew, from which he was to issue as pope in 590.[122]

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122 C. Bardenhewer, op. cit., 650-651.

It is quite evident that St. Gregory's literary work is that of one who is above all things a moralist. In broad outline one might think of Gregory as speaking for the edification of his bishops, his religious, and his people in the Regula Pastorlia, Moralia, and "Dialogues," respectively. In the Regula, he sets the ideal for the bishops under his supervision; in the Moralia, he meditates with his fellow monks on the moral lessons to be derived from the Book of Job; and in the "Dialogues" he

inspires the common folk of his time with awe and respect for the holy persons and miraculous events of their time.

The style of St. Gregory is quite unlike that of the other Latin Fathers whose works have been studied, for Gregory exhibited indifference concerning pagan authors and classics, showing no attempt to imitate them. (That this was a result of the decline of education at this period, rather than personal disinclination, is obvious.) On the contrary there is apparent in his compositions, consent to the prevailing taste for subtle allegory, antithesis, and play on words. Yet, despite these characteristics, there is a charm of dignified simplicity of his style.[123]

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123 J. Tixeront, op. cit., 364.

Bardy remarks a "precision, moderation, calm, and rectitude of judgement that belong to none but the great leaders of men."[124]

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124 G. Bardy, op. cit., 198-199.

It is to the Magna Moralia that one turns in order to ascertain Gregory's reflections on the monastice state and advice to monks. Composed in Constantinople at the request of Leander of Seville, and apparently delivered

before the monks who were his companions during the period of this embassy, the Moralia were revised and published by Gregory during the period of his abbacy.[125]

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[125] "St. Gregory the Great", Catholic Encyclopedia.

Since the Moralia is a very considerable work and is addressed primarily to monks, there is much in the way of precept and exhortation which might be quoted; the following quotations will illustrate the deep sincerity and love of contemplation which are characteristic of the saint. In Book IV, expounding the text, "They build for themselves solitudes" (Job 3:14), St. Gregory describes the tumult of a heart in which the passions hold sway. By way of contrast, he pictures the life of spiritual men, asserting that these men are free from all disturbance of heart because they seek after nothing of this world. Having abandoned all inordinate desires, and despising the things which are transitory, they do not suffer the distractions arising from these things. Seeking only the eternal homeland, and loving naught of this world, they enjoy great tranquillity of mind. Hence it is rightly said that they build for themselves solitudes, for "to build solitudes is to drive away from the depths of one's heart the torment of earthly desires, to fix one's gaze upon the soul's eternal fatherland, and to breathe only the

love of spiritual tranquillity."[126]

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126 Moralium Libri, P.L. 75, cols. 667-669. The quotation is a summary of the latter section of the commentary on this verse, and is taken from John L. Stoddard's translation of Monsignor Batiffol's work on St. Gregory, p. 126.

In Book VI, St. Gregory declares that everyone is not suited for the contemplative life and that it often happens that those who seek admission to a monastery are capable of bringing to it nothing but disorder. Then the saint proceeds to offer some advice to those considering the adoption of the monastice life. Let them who seek to lay hold of perfection and desire to possess the citadel of contemplation, first prove themselves; let them earnestly consider whether they inflict sufferings upon their fellow-men, or, if the contrary be the case, whether they bear injuries with equanimity; let them consider whether their mind gives way to unrestrained joy when temporal goods are bestowed, or whether it be disturbed by excessive grief if those goods be taken away. Next, let them consider whether, when they retire within themselves in moments of meditation, they carry with them the distracting phantasms of corporeal things, or, if present, whether they rid themselves of these hindrances. Let them ask themselves whether they who desire to gaze upon pure light are ridding themselves of all self-deceit, and inasmuch as they are striving to arrive at that which is above

their own nature, whether they are trying to overcome their human weaknesses.[127]

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[127] Moralium Libri, 75:col. 763.

St. Gregory has expressed some beautiful thoughts on the quest of the soul for God in the contemplative life, while Monsignor Batiffol and John L. Stoddard have interpreted and translated those thoughts with exquisite skill. On the text in Job, "God will thunder wonderfully with his voice" (Job 37:5), St. Gregory says through the medium of translation:

> "The voice of God thunders wonderfully, because, with a secret power, in some incomprehensible way, it penetrates our hearts. By hidden movements it presses them into a state of fear or moulds them into love, or cries to them in some way silently, in tones which it is necessary to heed attentively. There is then produced in our minds an irresistible impulse, even when the voice continues to be silent, and this is all the more urgent in us, because the ear of the heart is rendered by it more insensible to the outer tumult. The contemplative soul in its self-communing admires what this inward clamour causes it to fear and feels overflow within it a flood of contrition never known before."[128]

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[128] P. Batiffol, op. cit., 128.

Surely, the monks to whom St. Gregory was speaking must have been spurred on to more vigorous efforts in the pursuit of union with God when the saint pictured so attractively the life of perfection as he does in the following meditation upon the joys of the spiritually-minded:

> "The invisible language of contrition silently speaks in them; and for them the heavenly song does not slumber, because their minds know the sweetness of the celestial anthem and strain the ear of love to catch its melody. Within, they hear what they so long for, and their desire for God reveals to them the heavenly blessings that shall be their recompense. The present life, antagonistic as it is to them, is endured by them with difficulty, even if at times it favours them. It is not to this life that they aspire... and the song of heaven which penetrates their souls through the ear of the heart, establishes them every day more firmly in the company of the citizens of the celestial home."[129]

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[129] Ibid., 129-130.

For this union of the soul with God, Gregory considered retirement from the world an absolute necessity; in this connection he asserts that they who eagerly and energetically seek the reward of their eternal promise, just as they despise self for love of God, in like manner relegate to the last place whatever they consider to be a hindrance to them in the spiritual ascent. Thus, every monk should

become detached from all his relatives, even those nearest of kin, if he wishes to be more truly united with the parent of all, since he loves so much more genuinely those individuals whom he neglects for God's sake, ignoring the natural affection of blood-relationship.[130]

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130 Ibid., 75:790.

Was it, perhaps, because the spiritual conversion of St. Gregory came rather late that he felt so strongly about the conversion of manners which should be characteristize one who adopts the religious life? He speaks at length upon the subject. God's chosen ones, he says, are filled with so great love of Him that in their altered view of things they seem to be strangers to their former selves, fulfilling that which is written, "If any man wishes to come after me; let him deny himself" (Matth.16: 24). Now, that person may be said to deny himself who changes for the better, and begins to be that which he was not, and ceases to be that which he was.

However, St. Gregory continues, we often see persons struck with compunction at some word of a sermon, change their outward appearance, but not their characters; donning the religious garb, but not conquering previously-formed faults. We see such persons overwhelmed by torrents of anger, afire in a malicious attack upon their neighbour,

exhibiting pride concerning certain external goods, seeking with eager desire the riches of the present world, and possessing an assurance of holiness only in the habit that they have assumed. To these individuals what can be said other than to quote St. Paul's admonition to certain persons devoted to external practices of the law, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by charity" (Gal. 5:6). For externals are of no great concern, but what goes on within the mind is a matter of the greatest importance.

For to despise this world, not to love the things that are transitory, inwardly to bow down one's spirit in humility before God and one's neighbour, to exhibit patience in the face of insults, and having preserved patience to expel the bitterness of malice from one's heart, to give what one has to those in need, to love one's friend in God, to love even those who are unfriendly to us for God's sake, to deplore the misfortunes of one's neighbour--ah, this is a new creature! Of him the same teacher of the gentiles declares, "If anyone is a new creature in Christ, old things have passed away, for behold, all things are made new" (II Cor. 5: 17).[131]

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[131] Ibid., 889.

The correspondence of St. Gregory is chiefly occupied with the multitudinous cares of his pontificate, but in some of the early letters a personal note is found in his expressions of profound regret at having been obliged to leave the seclusion of his monastery for the distracting cares and activities of the papal office. The reader senses Gregory's sincere conviction that he was not sufficiently grounded in the religious life to be able to engage in active pursuits in the midst of the world without detriment to the virtues of contemplation. If it be true that one can judge the character of a man by his standard of values, how transparently is St. Gregory's contempt of the world and his complete abandonment to things spiritual seen in the fifth letter of his correspondence, that addressed to Theocista, sister of the Emperor. Gregory here laments that he has lost the deep happiness of quiet, asserting that while he seems to have risen outwardly, inwardly he has fallen. He relates that he used to attempt daily to win his way outside the world and the flesh, to drive the phantasms of the body from the eyes of the soul, and incorporeally to see supernatural joys. And he had succeeded to the extent that, desiring nothing and fearing nothing, he looked down upon the things of the present world which seem lofty and glorious.[132]

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132 Epistula 5, P.L. 77, col. 448.

In picturesque imagery Gregory explains his grief by affirming that he had loved the beauty of the contemplative life as a Rachel, barren, but keen of vision, and beautiful (Gen. 29), who, though less fertile in her quietude, sees the light more keenly, But, by some unknown judgement, Leah, the active life, had been coupled with him in the night; Leah, fruitful, but tender-eyed; seeing less, but producing more.[133]

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133 Ibid.

Conclusion

It is the purpose of this thesis to learn what the Great Doctors of the Church have written about virginity and monasticism. Having reviewed the contributions of each of those Fathers to the literature upon that subject, one seeks to synthesize these disjointed contributions into a composite whole. In such an undertaking one inquires first, what the Doctors have said about virginity--their definition, criticism, and evaluation of the virginal life. Secondly, one asks what the Doctors have said concerning monks and virgins--their opinions of the character and rewards of persons who have followed a religious calling, and their advice to such individuals.

Among the definitions of virginity is that of St. Augustine, who states that although virginity is kept in the flesh, it is essentially spiritual, since it is vowed through the virtue of religion and kept by the devotion of spirit. St. John Chrysostom denies that virginity is a matter of the color or quality of garb, but is rather the condition of soul and body. St. Ambrose further characterizes the state of virginity as a voluntary servitude of the heart, a service freely undertaken for the love of God.

With a single exception, the Great Doctors agree that the moral strength necessary for persevering in a life of virginity is given by God as a special grace to certain souls whom He has chosen. Chrysostom, however,

disagrees with this belief, basing his contention that it is to human determination and effort that the life of chastity is due, upon St. Paul's statement regarding eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs, and the latter's advice that those who can take this way of life take it (I Cor.7). St. Augustine seems to refute Chrysostom's theory by acknowledging the truth of the fact that if an individual does not will to accept the grace of continence, he cannot possess that virtue. However, says Augustine, that grace is given to the individual as a gift of God.

Concerning the nature of virginity, Augustine opines that it must be something transcending the human, or natural, which enables a man to live without sight of another man, and Chrysostom corrobates this view by asserting that the Greeks always yielded first place in the practice of this virtue to Christians, declaring virginity to be beyond the unaided power of man, being supernatural. In St. Gregory Nazianzen's pithy utterance, virginity is a going out of the body. The life of one striving for perfection in the Religious state is, according to the generality of the Fathers, an image of the life of the angels in Heaven, and Ambrose considers it fitting that one who has found her Spouse in Heaven should likewise seek her way of life from Heaven. For the soul who gives herself completely to the development of the virtues of the contemplative life, affirms St. Gregory the Great, the song of heaven penetrates her soul through the ear of the heart, establishing her daily more firmly amid the company of

citizens of her celestial home. St. Gregory Nazianzen explicitly declares that she who has advanced perfectly along this highest path, namely virginity, is no longer of mortal nature, but is a celestial being.

Of what excellence do the Great Doctors consider the virtue of virginity? Several of them have echoed the pronouncement of St. Athanasius that of all which can be said of this virtue, that which most truly marks its excellence is the fact that God wished the mother of His Son to be a virgin. This thought is developed by Gregory Nazianzen when he asserts that by being born of a virgin, Christ seemed to sanction the life of virginity. Nor would St. Ambrose concede virginity a borrowed splendor as being a quality found in martyrs, but rather, terms virginity the stuff which produces martyrs.

That virginity is a virtue difficult to practise is admitted by all of the Doctors, the earliest of them observing that one who desires to practise the other virtues is directed by precept, but virginity alone is above the law, a way of life for the winning of a more excellent goal. Athanasius considers it to be the greatest proof of the truth of Christianity, that virginity is cultivated by no other people but Christians. That Christ did not command virginity is remarked by numerous Fathers. St. John Chrysostom thinks that Christ considered virginity so great an undertaking that he did not command it,

leaving it to the free choice of men, although he did command that men love their enemies, that they bear their crosses unceasingly, and that they die. A strongly-reasoned philosophy of life is required of her who obeys the laws of a mortal nature subject to the temptations of concupiscence and the assaults of Satan, and who nevertheless rises to such a high degree of virtue as the state of virginity requires. Apropos of this thoughtis Pope St. Gregory's warning that the life of virginity is not suitable for all, and that oftentimes they who seek admission to a Religious Order are capable of bringing nothing but dishonor to a community. Such persons ought to make a serious self-inquiry, asking themselves whether they cause suffering to others, and conversely, whether they are able to accept injuries with equanimity. Let them consider whether they who are aspiring to enter upon a supernatural life have conquered the faults of their own nature.

A considerable amount of patristic literature dealing with virginity is concerned with the comparison of marriage and virginity. St. Augustine declares that no fruitfulness of the flesh can be compared with virginity, yet he emphasizes the fact that it is not virginity in itself that is held in esteem, but it is holy virginity which is honored, as having been dedicated to God. The mathematical expression of the comparative rewards of marriage and virginity, as computed by St. Athanasius, receives practically universal acceptance by later writers, the saint declaring that

marriage brings forth thirty--fold fruit, virginity a hundredfold. Both states will be rewarded, but virginity, being the more rugged and difficult path, will receive more excellent rewards. Yet, Saints Jerome and Augustine, especially, insist that chastity alone will not win the virgin's crown, but that the virgin must join to the virtue of chastity the other virtues taught by Christ. Of these two ways in life--marriage and virginity-Gregory Nazianzen considers virginity to be more sublime and God-like, though more abounding in trial and hardship.

Though at first thought the terms, "monk" and "virgin", scarcely appear to require definition, there was some difference of opinion among the Early Fathers upon the qualities which mark the virgin. St. Gregory Nazianzen beautifully describes the monk as one who lives for God and Him alone. It would be difficult to find a flaw in St. Basil's definition of a virgin as one who has freely offered herself to the Lord, has renounced marriage, and has embraced a life of holiness. Repeatedly, the Great Doctors stress the fact that the title virgin implies more than bodily integrity, that a corresponding purity of mind and heart is likewise necessary. Chrysostom epitomizes their view by naming that person a virgin who is pure in both body and soul. However, at a later time he maintained that he would place the widow Olympias among the choir of virgins, for although she did not possess the virtue of virginity, she gave proof of great asceticism in all other matters, thereby fulfilling

St. Paul's description of a virgin as one attentive to the things of God.

It seems as if the Doctors used all the resources of their superb literary talent in composing epithets concerning those who dedicate their lives to God. The most ancient of these, perhaps, is the title, Spouse of Christ, applied not in a complimentary, eulogistic manner but sincerely, literally, insofar as the spiritual interpretation is concerned. St. Athanasius declares that the members of a virgin are the members of Christ, and that they who persecute virgins go beyond the command of Pilate, who ordered that the soldiers pierce the side of Christ, for such persecutors pierce both his sides in their torture of virgins. Among the lovely tributes to virgins and monks in the poetry of Gregory Nazianzen are the appellations that he has applied to monks: they are Christ-bearers, gleaming stars invisible to the multitude, and the most brilliant ornament of his flock.

With the exception of St. Augustine, the Great Doctors have been profuse in their praise of monks and virgins, St. Jerome, among others, expressing their common opinion that virgins are dear to Christ because they have freely given that which is not required. Echoing the Psalmist, Gregory Nazianzen declares the Spouses of Christ to be adorned with a hidden beauty. In eulogies which equal those of the latter writer, St. Ambrose honors virgins as being fragrant with divine grace, as gardens are fragrant

with flowers. He would even admit virgins to the altars of God, contending that if the body of a virgin may be called a temple of God, what is to be said of her soul, in which Christ is daily sacrificed for the redemption of the body?

Since the Great Doctors considered the life of Religious a noble and commendable thing, it is not surprising that they believed that the rewards of such a life would be correspondingly great; in fact, they believed that some of those rewards might be enjoyed in the present life, though most of the Doctors stress the eternal, rather than temporal recompense. In St. Jerome's opinion the consummate reward of those who have chosen Christ is that Christ and his spouse are two in one spirit. St. Basil assures the monk that his reward shall be one of deeds performed--to be called a friend of the King, to stand close by the side of his King, hand clasped in His hand. Gregory Nazianzen observes that though Religious are estranged from all earthly possessions, their single possession is one which is supreme, a possession which cannot be destroyed nor delegated to others, namely, their serene confidence of life eternal. St. Chrysostom declares the monk richer, more powerful, and more secure, even in this present life, than a king. Moreover, the moral influence that a monk exercises at home and abroad, and the respect that he is accorded are considerable. Together with these things the monk is himself consoled by the fact that he is able to comfort the sorrowful and encourage the unfortunate. While it is true that in exchange

for earthly glory, a monk receives a life of obscurity, nevertheless among mankind the monk is singled out for the highest admiration, for men see in him not a monk but an angel. Lastly, St. Gregory Nazianzen believes that monks can be free from all disturbances of heart, since they are free from desire for the things of this world. Seeking only the eternal homeland, they enjoy great tranquility of mind. Yet, St. Basil sees a greater recompense than any of a temporal nature in the Heavenly reward which has been prepared for those who show themselves worthy of the Lord. And St. Athanasius promises youths and virgins who profess chastity a glorious immortality among the martyrs of Christ.

Are there some who, though inwardly admiring the lives of holy Religious, refrain from encouraging young men and women to enter the Religious life on the plea that it is an exceedingly difficult vocation, that one can reach a high degree of sanctity by leading a holy life in the world, that many Religious do not live up to the obligations, or avail themselves of the opportunities of their state? The Great Doctors of the Church did not argue thus. St. Ambrose exhorted youths to surrender themselves to Him whose custom it is to repay far beyond the due reward of service rendered. With that keen insight into human psychology which was his particular gift, St. John Chrysostom reminds young women that she who is chosen to be the bride of an earthly king is looked upon by other women as being more fortunate than

they. Yet, the saint continues, the virgin has, not only as her Spouse but as her Lover, One whose love for her is more ardent than that of any mortal man. For such a Lover, why would they not leave all things, even life itself? Although St. Augustine does not minimize the sense of restraint which the novice in the Religious life experiences, he declares that the newcomer soon realizes the real freedom which the life affords, and that while the abiding restrictions of such a life are firm and unyielding, difficult to bear, nevertheless these same restraints may be made the objects of great faith, hope and love. The same thought is expressed by St. Ambrose, when he remarks that it is with darts of love that God wounds those who seek Him, binding fast those whom He wounds. St. Jerome notes the profit that one gains by adopting the monastic life, learning the various virtues exemplified in the lives of different individuals. The assignment of almost every minute of the day to some particular employment or recreation is an excellent means to the acquirement of obedience and self-restraint.

When the Fathers counsel monks and virgins concerning the virtues that they should practice and the external manner and appearance which should characterize them, there is a remarkable similarity in their advice. But the admonition which occurs more frequently, and is explained at greater length than any other is the necessity for retirement from the world, and for silence. St. Gregory the Great, who

spoke so persuasively to his monks about the cultivation of union with God, declared that retirement from the world is absolutely essential for the attainment of this goal. Persons who are truly in earnest about their spiritual progress, he asserts, relegate to the last place in an order of values those things which are a hindrance to their spiritual life, even omitting the attentions that might be paid to relatives and friends, since they know that he who neglects for God's sake those who are dear to him, in reality loves them the more genuinely.

Quite frankly, St. Ambrose recalls St. Paul's admonition to the early Christians. If you are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God, it should not be apparent to the world. It is St. Jerome's opinion that virgins who live in communities ought never to go out alone. The saint praises the custom of some virgins of avoiding public gathering-places, and of remaining within their convents on holy days. He recommends that virgins do not make visitations of an official or complimentary nature. Above all, visits should not be made by virgins to women of the world. Pithily, Jerome reminds virgins that if they purpose to go out whenever necessary, they will seldom lack an excuse for doing so. If St. Gregory Nazianzen's protest against virgins' leaving their convents to go on pilgrimages had been heeded, Chaucer would have lacked material for the character of the nun in the Canterbury Tales. Virgins should not be eager to participate in pilgrimages to distant holy places, Gregory

warns, for Christ the King is within the home of everyone and close, yea in the very heart of His beloved. St. Jerome recalls the ancient custom of shielding from the sight of all but priests, the sacred vessels of the Lord's temple, and asks when a gold and silver vessel was ever so dear to God as the temple of a virgin's body. Among virgins, St. Gregory Nazianzen extols those whom men do not know, and St. Augustine affirms that there is need of much retirement from the world, if one wishes to obtain that abiding happiness with which no pleasureable excitement can be compared. Gregory Nazianzen and other Doctors counsel virgins to avoid being among a large concourse of people, Gregory even recommending that limits be set to the hospitality of the convent, since modesty will perish in a crowd, and hence virginity be dishonored.

St. Ambrose speaks much about the modesty which should characterize virgins, urging that a virgin so conduct herself that she be recognized by her subdued gait, downcast eyes, and gentle voice. Let a virgin's lips, like rose petals, remain closed, advises Gregory Nazianzen. Oftentimes, the Great Doctors couple their admonitions of internal purity and modesty, thereby seeming to illustrate their view that chastity is not only bodily continence, but an all-embracing purity of mind and act.

To go to the lengths that a virgin does in undertaking a life of chastity, and not to investigate the virtues which should characterize one who professes virginity seems

to Chrysostom absurd. It is the virgin's duty to join a holy and fervent life to the practice of virginity and thus be a source of edification to others. Yet, St. Basil cautions against the notion that strictness of life, if it be devoid of faith and good works, is sufficient. Of the virtues which should characterize monks, St. Augustine remarks that in monasteries charity is usually stressed above all other virtues, for the reason that if charity is present, so are all the other virtues, whereas when charity is lacking, all other practices are as nothing.

Addressing virgins, Gregory Nazianzen exhorts them ever to be an honor to their Spouse. Cultivate your mind by learning and wisdom, that you may live honorably a life of honor. Frequently, St. Jerome encourages virgins to cultivate a love for the Holy Scriptures. Like a later St. Francis de Sales, St. Chrysostom addresses monks and virgins, advocating hearts averse to sensual pleasure, souls steeled to endure suffering, wide-open eyes, and patience in every trial. But above all, they must rely upon the help of God. Give blood for blood, tersely urges St. Jerome. What saint every won his crown without a struggle?

The care with which virginity must be guarded after one has embraced it is the theme of St. Jerome's treatise on virginity, for the saint believes that it is not sufficient for the virgin merely to know the excellence of the virtue. For the preservation of chastity, St. Jerome admonishes the virgin to let her fear of God make her strong,

fasting render her free from desire, her love be entirely directed to God, Who is able to still every desire foreign to celestial beings. Nor should a virgin glory in her sweet desire for virginity, if deep within her she opens her heart to other affections than those for Christ, says Gregory Nazianzen. The natural desire of the human heart to love and be loved is not denied, but St. Jerome explains that this carnal love can be overcome by the spiritual. And St. Ambrose bids the virgin draw close to Christ, touching with faith the hem of his garment, and lo, the torrent of desire for worldly pleasures will cease. St. Augustine summarizes the matter by assuring Religious that the violence with which worldly loves gain influence over them is in proportion to the extent to which the things that are unseen command their love.

The saint who, more than all the rest, stresses the need of humility in Religious is St. Augustine, yet this virtue is considered suitable and necessary by all the Great Doctors. St. Ambrose exhorts virgins to imitate Christ's meekness and humility. St. Augustine cautions virgins that when they discover their superiority to married women in both work and wages, they then consider that it is their duty to be humble to the same degree. Let them consider, too, that it is entirely possible that were they put to the test of torture, they might show themselves less courageous than married women. If all Christians should possess humility, Augustine continues, how

much more should she who professes to be an imitator of Christ exhibit that virtue.

If Religious follow the path marked out for them by Christ, they will not fall, for he gives strength to his followers. Observing the admonitions of St. Paul, a Religious should perform a certain amount of manual labor and should also offer devout prayer to God by the chanting of psalms, that with spiritual reading, meditation, and periods of relaxation, her life will be a well-regulated offering to God. The great apostle of mortification in the Religious life is St. Jerome, who considers it necessary in order to check the insolence of the flesh and to maintain the supremacy of the spirit. Not that corporal mortification is in itself a virtue, but because it is a means to the acquirement of holiness. Quite bluntly, Jerome warns that the Religious who wishes to rejoice with the world in this life, and to reign with Christ in the next, expects the impossible. And always, in the midst of her activity, the Religious should be mindful of her ultimate aim--union with Christ. St. Ambrose and St. Gregory dwell at length upon the possibilities open to Religious of developing great beauty and serenity of soul. Ambrose entreats the virgin to guard the purity of her soul that it may be an immaculate dwelling for Him, and that, joined as a cornerstone to the holy priesthood, it may rise as a spiritual edifice to the glory of God.

Is love of God the magic Key, as it were, to perser-

verance and success in the Religious life? Saints Jerome and Augustine consider it so. The former acknowledges that many of the admonitions that he has addressed to virgins will seem too difficult to one who has insufficient charity, but to her who loves, they will not appear too difficult. St. Augustine is impressed with the obligation of Religious to reciprocate insofar as that is possible, the special love that God has shown them in choosing them to be the Spouses of His Son. He declares that the virgin should withdraw by no act or desire the entire oblation she has made of herself to Christ. It is Augustine's great fear that by a certain obtuseness or perversity of human nature, they who have been specially chosen recipients of divine favors will turn inward upon themselves, the love that they vowed to God, and that they will develop a certain self-complacency in their virginal nature, rather than loving with all the greater affection that God who did not permit them to fall into sin. Augustine declares that he has no fear of pride for her who loves Him Who is meek and humble of heart. Love Him, he pleads. The leisure which is yours as a result of detaching yourself from worldly cares is His, to be used in His loving service. Gaze upon the wounds of the Crucified, the scars of the Risen One. He is the Spouse of your soul!

Throughout these writings the emphasis has been placed upon the virtues of contemplation, with relatively little emphasis upon the virtues required in a Religious

dedicated to a life of activity. The contemplative life is the "beau ideal" in the minds of the Great Doctors. Before a thousand years would pass, another Great Doctor, the Angelic Doctor of the thirteenth century, was to declare as superior, a life in which the virtues of the active life are combined with those of the contemplative. A few centuries later, a great Religious Order would arise in which there was to be no public recitation of the Divine Office. Clearly, the Religious life is a vital thing, paralleling the changes of the times. It is another of those great movements in history which are pregnant with life, and which have within them something of the divine, being guided by the Providence of God.

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