

THE MONKHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

THE MONASTIC FOUNDATION
OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

GREG PETERS


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To those who have taught me the most about monasticism:

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this book, I owe most of what I know about Christian
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FOREWORD

Virginia Woolf once wrote that there is a spot the size of a shilling at the back of one's head, and that "one of the good offices" that men and women can perform for one another is to describe that spot. There are, she suggests, things about us that we just cannot see for ourselves.¹

Suppose it is the same in the church. Suppose that there are things about each ecclesial body that it cannot see for itself. Suppose, then, that Lutherans can know themselves better when Roman Catholics describe them, that Copts can learn about themselves by listening to Methodists.

If that is the case, we ought not to be surprised to find a cradle Baptist seeing something in the history of monasticism that has often been overlooked. Though he is now an Anglican, Greg Peters retains the Protestant attention to personal devotion, centrality of the laity to the life of the church, and suspicion of any two-tiered account of holiness.

What Peters finds—and here is where he will surely ruffle some feathers—is that the church of Jesus Christ is "composed exclusively of monks." By virtue of our baptism into the life of Christ, every believer is called to love God with an undivided heart, is called to an "interior monasticism." *All* believers are monks. Further vows do not intensify this primary calling; they only specify its location. "I Surrender All" is a song for all believers, not just those behind the cloister wall.

This would be an easy argument to get wrong. Even if we grant the necessity of personal holiness, does not this obscure the witness of historic monasticism? It certainly might, but it might just as easily serve to highlight something often neglected: the common call to holiness in life together. As Peters points

1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), 90.

out, recognition of the common priesthood of all believers rarely leads to the elimination of church leaders; rather, it invites and empowers the laity to take responsibility for the work of the church. Similarly, universal monasticism need not signal the end of the cloister; it might instead awaken believers to the uncomfortable reality that monks and nuns are not surrogates, that even engineers and teachers are called by Christ to be entirely devoted to God. Peters himself insists that he is no iconoclast. In arguing that all Christians are monks, he does not suggest that we are in a postmonasticism moment. No, God continues to call women and men into monastic institutions, not least to exemplify the call that all Christians receive in baptism to be single-minded toward God.

Furthermore—and this is salient to Peters’s argument—his is not a particularly Protestant argument. The monastic life has always been about the “interior singleness of heart”—rather than, say, celibacy, perpetual vows, or religious orders—and Peters argues (mostly from non-Protestant sources) that this best accounts for the diversity of expressions and self-understandings of monks. This is not merely a critical corrective, but an “ecumenical theology of monasticism.”

Matt Jenson
Biola University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have had the welcome opportunity of writing several books over the past few years, and I have come to learn something about the task of writing; or at least I have learned something about writing nonfiction, academic books—they start and end with great enthusiasm, but there is the *longue durée* in the middle. During this season I have often wondered, what have I gotten myself into here? Or, why did I think this was a good idea when I first proposed the book? Or, more simply, will I ever finish? This has been my experience several times now, and I have come to realize that getting through this *longue durée* takes a large dose of good, old-fashioned self-discipline. But it also takes people, and the assistance they provide, which is sometimes obvious but more often less apparent than we realize. During the writing of this book I was assisted by a number of people, who were often just being themselves but who, in the long run, made this book possible.

I would like to thank my colleagues and students at Biola University and, especially, those in the Torrey Honors Institute. Release time was provided through a research and development grant from Biola University and from a generous course release provided by Jamie Campbell Whittaker, dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Nadia Poli and Rebecca Collins, my research assistants, were valuable in their support. I would like to offer a special word of thanks to Matt Jenson for writing the foreword and to the Torrey Honors Institute office staff past and present (Jessamy Delling, Ellie Martin, Chad Glazener, Juliana Semione, David Walton, and Megan Johnson) for many great conversations and distractions during arduous days of research and writing. The students of the Torrey Honors Institute continue to ask insightful questions that help refine my thinking. I am grateful for their thoughtfulness and relentless pursuit of the truth. My former colleague

Robert Thomas Llizo and his students at Houston Baptist University helped with the translation of Robert de Sorbon's sermon on marriage, for which I am grateful.

I would also like to thank Bob Hosack, my editor at Baker Academic, for seeing something in this project and for shepherding it to completion. A number of years ago Bob assured me that there was something in the Christian monastic tradition that Christian believers needed to hear today, so he has given me not only one but two opportunities to make that case. I deeply appreciate his support and friendship. Steve Ayers, also of Baker Publishing, not only has become a good friend but also is a constant supporter of my work. Conversations with Steve remind me that books are life-giving, and I hope this modest contribution does indeed bring life to the Christian church.

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No matter how monotonous research and writing becomes, I also get the chance to come home every night to a wonderful family who knows how to laugh and tolerate a husband and father who has monks and nuns on his mind all the time. My wife, Christina, literally makes it possible for me to do what I do, and a mere "thank you" will never be enough to repay her or show her how thankful I am for her. Without my sons, Brendan and Nathanael, life would be boring. I am grateful for their presence in my life.

Last, I am thankful for the women and men who have taught me so much about monasticism over the years, both formally and informally. I have had the opportunity to visit many monasteries and to have countless conversations over a refectory table or in a monastic church after prayer. These folks shared with me not only their "book knowledge" of monasticism but also their personal experiences. I am thankful for every one of these providential moments, too many to recall, but particularly to the students of my Monastic Spiritual Theology course at St. John's School of Theology in summer 2015 who listened and discussed with me many of the ideas presented in this book. I dedicate this book to those few who have been my primary teachers about all things monastic. I am grateful for each of them and for their assistance along the way.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
FC	Fathers of the Church
LW	<i>Luther's Works</i> . Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1958–86, 2008–.
NPNF ¹	<i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . 1st series. Edited by Philip Schaff. 14 vols. New York: Christian Literature, 1886–89. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
NPNF ²	<i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . 2nd series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 14 vols. New York: Christian Literature, 1890–1900. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
PG	Patrologia Graeca. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–86.
PL	Patrologia Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–64.
RB	Benedict of Nursia, <i>Regula</i>
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke</i> [Weimar Ausgabe]. 136 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009.

INTRODUCTION

Sometime during 1971–72 a bronze bas-relief titled *Monaco* (*Monk*) was made from the Italian painter and sculptor Lucio Fontana's (d. 1968) plaster original, which had been submitted in a design contest for Door V of the Duomo in Milan in 1951–52. Though Fontana and another sculptor named Luciano Minguzzi (d. 2004) won the contest, the production of the door was ultimately entrusted to Minguzzi alone. In 1973 the Fabbrica del Duomo di Milano donated *Monaco* to the Vatican Museum. In its own description of the work, the Vatican Museum notes that the whole composition turns around an imaginary diagonal line that runs from the head of the monk to his feet. This highlights that the monk is kneeling on a bench while writing or copying a manuscript on a desk-like shelf in front of him. The monk's habit is clearly visible, for he has pulled his hood over his head. Above the desk hangs a cross, though the monk's gaze is intently focused on the work at hand.¹ This bas-relief, though somewhat straightforward in its composition and simple in its elegance, communicates a lot about monasticism. First, monastics are called to an expression of the Christian life that is unique, symbolized in the relief by the monk's habit. The habit does not make the monk, of course, but the presence of a habit always identifies the monk. Second, his kneeling posture is indicative of a monk, as one who prays and one who reads and studies for spiritual growth and edification for the good of the church. Monastic life is a life of mind and heart. Third, his posture and the presence of a stylus in his hand suggest that he is copying a manuscript, highlighting that monks not only pray but also work: *ora et labora*. Finally, the cross on the wall indicates

1. For an image, see "Lucio Fontana, *Monaco*," Musei Vaticani, http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/collezione-d_arte-contemporanea/sala-3--milano-e-litalia-settentrionale/lucio-fontana--monaco--ii-grado-.html (accessed June 15, 2017).

both the source of the monk's life (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ) and the *telos* (end) of his life (death to self in full conformity with the Son of God through the taking up of his cross daily). With these four aspects before us, this introduction will show why monasticism is important and relevant to all believers. I will then provide a highly selective historical overview of Christian monasticism, focusing on the fact that it has always been present in the Christian church and is a lived reality in all major branches of Christianity: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant.

The Importance of Monasticism

No exact date, no day or time, marks the beginning of Christian monasticism.² In the words of monastic historian Claude Peifer, “The origins of monasticism are shrouded in obscurity.”³ There is no person who bears the title “Christianity’s First Monk.”⁴ In one sense the institution of monasticism has always been part of the Christian church. Over the centuries a certain historiography about monasticism has come into being and often gets repeated, though its historical accuracy is easily disproven. For example, there is a tradition that claims that Anthony of Egypt (d. 356) and his followers were the first monks, exemplified in statements such as “The first monks were those of St. Anthony, who, toward the close of the fourth century, formed them into a regular body, engaged them to live in society with each other, and prescribed to them fixed rules for the direction of their conduct”;⁵ or monasticism “began with St. Anthony of Egypt.”⁶ More accurately, there has been some form of monastic presence in the Christian church since the first century.⁷

But it is not the details of its origin that make monasticism an important Christian institution. Rather, it is the nature and end of the monastic life that justifies its existence and, as I will argue later in this book, a robust theology of vocation that demands monasticism's existence. For now, using Fontana's

2. A nuanced definition of *monasticism* will be offered in chap. 1, but for now the following will suffice: monasticism either signifies men and women who live alone, in a solitary manner, or refers to a group of men and women who live together in community according to a particular form of life. See Peters, “Monasticism” (2011).

3. Peifer, *Monastic Spirituality*, 31.

4. The English word *monk* comes from the Latin word *monachus*, which is a transliteration of the Greek word *monachos*. The original meaning of *monachos* was likely equivalent to the English word *solitary* and was not meant to refer to male monastics. Thus, it is appropriate to refer to men *and* women as “monks.”

5. Watson, *Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 666.

6. Sorg, *Holy Work*, 25.

7. See Peters, *Story of Monasticism*, 1–20; and Peters, “Monasticism” (2014).

Monaco as a guide, I will isolate three other areas that commend monasticism to the Christian church: first, prayer; second, work, a kind of which is accomplished particularly well by monastics; and third, self-denial, as found in Jesus's command to take up our cross.

Prayer

That Christians ought to pray is to state the obvious because it is commanded and expected by God in the Scriptures: “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17); “when you pray” (Matt. 6:5, 6, 7); “we will devote ourselves to prayer” (Acts 6:4); “be constant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12); “praying at all times in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18); “continue steadfastly in prayer” (Col. 4:2); and “I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day” (2 Tim. 1:3). Prayer has always been God's chosen method of communication and God's answer to the difficulties and challenges of daily life. When I am in trouble, I should pray. When I am doing fine, I should pray. When we gather together as the church, we should pray. “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people . . . [and] I desire then that in every place [people] should pray,” writes the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 2:1, 8). Prayer is a *sine qua non* of the church and for all Christian believers. Yet from the start monastics have been characterized in particular by their commitment to pray.

For example, the cenobitic communities that came into existence in the third century in the deserts of Egypt, under the initial leadership of Pachomius, made prayer the central act of the community.⁸ In fact, “no one shall find pretexts for himself for not going to the *synaxis*, the psalmody, and the prayer. One shall not neglect the times of prayer and psalmody, whether he is on a boat, in the monastery, in the fields, or on a journey, or fulfilling any service whatever.”⁹ The *Regulations of Horsiesius*, one of Pachomius's successors, describes in detail the liturgical horarium (schedule) of the community: (1) the signal is given for prayer; (2) another signal is given to kneel; (3) the monks make the sign of the cross before kneeling; (4) while lying prostrate the monks weep in their hearts for their sins; (5) all rise and make the sign of the cross again; (6) all say the Prayer of the Gospel; (7) all say, “Lord, instill your fear into our hearts that we may labor for eternal life and hold you in fear”; (8) each monk, in his heart, says prayers for purification; (9) a signal

8. Monks who live in community are known historically as “cenobites,” with their form of life termed “cenobitic.” *Cenobitic* has its roots in the Greek words κοινός (common) and βίος (life); hence, “life in common.” Cf. Peters, “Coenobitism.”

9. Pachomius, *Precepts* 141–42, in Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 2:166. For a full study of Pachomian prayer practices, see Veilleux, *La liturgie*.

is given to be seated; (10) the monks sign themselves on the forehead with the sign of the cross; (11) all sit; (12) the Scriptures are recited; (13) all are dismissed, reciting additional Scriptures to themselves until they reach their cells.¹⁰ Prayer continued, of course, in the cell and even when the monks were not praying together in community.

A more curious example of monastic commitment to prayer is the Constantinopolitan “Sleepless Ones” (ἀκοίμητοι).¹¹ This monastic community, purportedly founded by Alexander the Akoimetos (i.e., the Sleepless One) between 405 and 425, was “pledged to perpetual praise of God; their offices . . . were continuous and uninterrupted, performed by three choirs in succession, each doing one eight-hour shift per day,” which “was actually a mitigation of Alexander’s original ideal of perpetual prayer” in which “he had imposed an unending cycle of 24 offices, one per hour, with a minimum of time permitted for unavoidable bodily needs.”¹² Many years earlier Alexander had settled along the Euphrates River, where he was joined, we are told, by four hundred monks. So “Alexander divided these disciples into fifty-man choirs and marshaled them according to a schedule of prayer that conformed to that of the apostles. Later . . . he scrupulously devised a more ambitious cycle of genuflection, hymn-singing, and doxology, performed in liturgical shifts that never ceased.”¹³ Next, Alexander selected a number of his followers to walk up and down the Euphrates, endlessly singing psalms, and then went to Antioch to start a community but was driven out by the local bishop with help from the resident military commander. Finally, he made his way to Constantinople, after an absence of fifty years, organizing the “Sleepless Ones.”

By the mid-fifth century the Constantinopolitan monastery of the ἀκοίμητοι was thriving under the direction of Markellos the Akoimetos, whose *vita* says that monks joined the monastery “because they believed that they were bringing back not only the exactness of asceticism, but they were also [returning] a certain holiness (*bagiasmon*) to the houses and men devoted to God.”¹⁴ Though all monastic communities followed a demanding horarium, a schedule of the daily recitation of the psalms, the ἀκοίμητοι did so in a more rigorous manner. According to Peter Hatlie, for the ἀκοίμητοι “the unceasing chanting of the Psalms and the fulfillment of their other liturgical obligations were

10. Horsiesius, *Regulations of Horsiesius* 8–10, in Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 2:199–200.

11. Stoop, “Vie d’Alexandre l’Acémète,” 700–701: “τὸ ἐπιλεγόμενον τῶν ἀκοιμήτων διὰ τὴν ἀκατάπαυστον αὐτῶν καὶ πάντῃ ἄϋπνον δοξολογίαν.” (That which is said about those who are sleepless on account of their unceasing and never-resting praise.)

12. Talbot and Taft, “Akoimetoι, Monastery of,” 46.

13. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 131. See Stoop, “Vie d’Alexandre l’Acémète,” 677–78.

14. *Vita of Markellos of Akoimetai* 13, quoted in Hatlie, *Monks and Monasteries*, 103. Greek text in Dagron, “La Vie ancienne,” 298.

themselves considered a monk's proper form of asceticism and single most important activity."¹⁵ So much so they ensured that members of the community were praying at all times; and not just in private but corporately. For them this was the only way to fulfill the apostle Paul's injunction to "pray without ceasing." Whereas for many monastic communities each monk would pray the "standard" seven (sometimes eight) canonical offices, the ἀκοίμητοι opted for a much more ascetic approach to monastic prayer.

Now, given that prayer is such an essential element of the Christian life and the Christian church, and that it is enjoined upon all believers, it needs to be done. And if it is commanded by God, then it seems reasonable to assume that there will be some believers who perceive that they have a vocation to intentional prayer. This, of course, does not necessitate the existence of monasteries, but perhaps it is only reasonable to assume that if some are called to intentional prayer, then there should be intentional communities of prayer to pursue this vocation. The church is *the* primary community for this activity, but monasteries are merely extensions of the church (sometimes referred to in Christian history as *ecclesiola in ecclesia*), so they too should be communities of prayer.¹⁶ If Christians are to pray, and if God calls some women and men to a life of prayer, then monasteries would be meeting an essential need, fulfilling a divine command, and thereby should be viewed as gifts of God to the church. To be clear, this alone is not an *unmitigated* reason for monasteries to exist, but it is a *sufficient* reason.

Work

Since the monks needed to eat, work (i.e., manual labor) also became a standard fixture of Christian monastic life. This work was not meant to compete with a life of prayer but to complement it. In the words of the *Regulations of Hirsiesius*: "Even if we are laboring at perishable things in order to sustain the body—which is necessary—let us be watchful not to render our soul . . . a stranger to eternal life under the pretext of a necessity which will disappear. . . . Let us fulfill the canons of the prayer; those of the *synaxis* and those of the Six Sections at their fixed hours in accord with the precept."¹⁷ Manual labor was practiced by monks living alone as solitaries and by those living in communities. Anthony of Egypt, we are told, taught that a monk was to be doing three things in her cell: working with her hands, meditating

15. Hatlie, *Monks and Monasteries*, 103.

16. *Ecclesiola in ecclesia*: "little church within the church." See Driscoll, "Monastic Community," 211–24.

17. Hirsiesius, *Regulations of Hirsiesius* 37–38, in Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 2:210.

on the Psalms, and praying.¹⁸ Anthony's biographer, Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), records that Anthony followed his own advice: "He worked with his hands, though, having heard that he who is idle, *let him not eat*. And he spent what he made partly for bread, and partly on those in need. He prayed constantly."¹⁹ Another desert monk, Pambo, is quoted as saying, "From the time that I came into the place of solitude and built my cell, and dwelt in it, I do not call to mind that I have eaten bread save what my hands have toiled for."²⁰

For those living in community, both the Pachomian foundations in Egypt and the Basilian foundations in Asia Minor prescribed manual labor. Jerome's preface to the rules of Pachomius says that "Brothers of the same craft are gathered together into one house under one master," implying that the monks were active in different forms of manual labor (e.g., as linen weavers, tailors, and shoemakers).²¹ Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) in his so-called *Long Rules* writes, "The Apostle bids us labor and work with our own hands the things which are good. . . . It is, therefore, immediately obvious that we must toil with diligence and not think that our goal of piety offers an escape from work or a pretext for idleness." Basil goes on to postulate that manual labor is beneficial for two reasons: "bringing the body into subjection" and "showing charity to our neighbor."²² Added to that, of course, is the need for monks to be self-supporting. In fact, John Cassian (d. mid-430s) goes so far as to say that monks *alone* are truly self-supporting: "The whole human race relies on the charitable compassion of others, with the sole exception of the race of monks which, in accordance with the Apostle's precept, lives by the daily toil of its hands."²³ Whether Cassian is correct in this assessment is secondary to the point that monks *must* be self-supporting to be true monks.

But beyond being self-supporting, what kind of work might monastics engage in that makes their work *monastic*, if you will? Like life in general, monastics were engaged in a lot of necessary but ordinary work: growing and harvesting food, making clothes for members of the community, and so on. Yet one type of work that was exceptionally suited to a monastic rhythm and ethos was the making of books and thereby preserving and disseminating literary culture. Jerome (d. 420) was perhaps the most learned and productive of all the monastics of the early Christian church. Though he moved around frequently in his lifetime, he remained at heart a hermit, and he knew that as

18. Sorg, *Holy Work*, 25.

19. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 3 (Gregg, 32, italics original), quoting from 2 Thess. 3:10.

20. Waddell, *Desert Fathers*, 63.

21. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 2:143.

22. Basil of Caesarea, *Long Rules* 37 (FC 9:306).

23. Cassian, *Conferences* 24.12.2 (ACW 57:834).

a monastic he was to be engaged in manual labor. Yet Jerome's scholarship, consisting primarily of translating the Bible into Latin (the Latin Vulgate), was not always viewed by others as manual labor, as work appropriate to a monastic. If this were truly the case, then Jerome would not have been self-supporting but would have been freeloading off the generosity of others. On occasion Jerome was forced to defend his scholarly activity as being not only properly monastic and theologically orthodox but also as fulfilling the apostle's admonition that those who do not work should not eat: "I have taken nothing from anyone. I accept nothing as an idler. It is by the sweat of our brow that we daily seek our food."²⁴ He goes even further in his preface to his translation of Job, in which he equates his scholarly work with the monastic basket weavers of Egypt:

If I were to weave a basket from rushes or to plait palm leaves, so that I might eat my bread in the sweat of my brow and work to fill my belly with a troubled mind, no-one would criticize me, no-one would reproach me. But now, since according to the word of the Savior I wish to store up food that does not perish, and to purge the ancient track of the divine volumes from brambles and brushwood, I who have made authenticity my cause, I, a corrector of vice, am called a forger, and it is said that I do not remove errors, but sow them. . . . So, therefore, Paula and Eustochium . . . in place of the straw mat and the little rush baskets, the small presents of the monks, receive these spiritual and enduring gifts.²⁵

What is at stake here in Jerome's defense of his literary activity is captured well by Megan Williams:

The goals of the monastic life, and its underlying worldview, were deeply at odds with the literary culture that was Jerome's real qualification as a writer. The central values of monasticism were humility, poverty, and obedience. . . . Monastic *askesis* aimed at subduing, even at eradicating, self-seeking impulses. . . . Humble, even degrading manual labor played a central role in the monastic program of radical self-transformation. . . . To equate literary production with the characteristic labor of the monk was implicitly to represent it as a way of destroying, rather than maintaining, those carefully cultivated dispositions.²⁶

In the end Jerome was fully justified in his defense of literary activity as a true form of monastic manual labor; and in the decades ahead not only

24. Jerome, *Letter 17.4* (ACW 33:77).

25. Quoted in M. Williams, *Monk and the Book*, 167 (Latin text in 167n1).

26. M. Williams, *Monk and the Book*, 168 (italics original).

would thousands of monks take up literary activity as their chosen form of work (writing, copying, and illustrating books), but they would do so to such an extent that the monks have even been credited with saving much of early literary culture.²⁷ Such vital work seems to speak well of the institution of monasticism, so much so that it perhaps justifies its very existence. The making of books is now so quintessentially monastic that Fontana can simply place his monk in that posture without qualification.

Self-Denial

In Matthew 16:24 Jesus told his disciples that if they wanted to follow him, they would need to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him, for it is in losing one's life that one truly finds life. Thus, self-denial is not life-taking but life-giving. It is the primary way in which one becomes a true disciple, a loyal follower of the Christ, and it is the proper way in which to live the Christian life. And it is Jesus's own *via crucis* that is both the source and summit of the Christian's life and, in definitive ways, the monk's life. Monks, of course, are called to the same ascetical and spiritual standards as nonmonastic believers. Yet monks frame their very existence around a number of ascetical-spiritual practices and with an intensity and particularity that is often not characteristic in nonmonastic settings. There is also, unfortunately, an excessive mortification that accompanies some expressions of Christian monasticism. These aberrant practices aside, monasticism is known for its ascetical balance and example.

Perhaps no one in early monasticism was as vocal about the ascetical life as Basil of Caesarea. In a series of short treatises Basil laid out his vision for monastic asceticism: "Set before yourself a life without house, homeland, or possessions. Be free and at liberty from all worldly cares, lest desire of a wife or anxiety for child fetter you."²⁸ "[God] calls us to Himself, inviting us . . . to make haste to embrace the cross-bearing life of the monks by ridding ourselves through confession and good works of the load of sins contracted by our use of worldly goods."²⁹ As in most ascetical treatises from early Christianity, a tension exists between the spiritual and the worldly in Basil's thought. There is a sense that the world holds one back from being as spiritual as one can be, angelic even.³⁰ In particular, by necessity most people will

27. See, e.g., Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*.

28. Basil of Caesarea, *An Introduction to the Ascetical Life* 1 (FC 9:10; PG 31:620).

29. Basil of Caesarea, *An Ascetical Discourse and Exhortation* 1 (FC 9:15; PG 31:625).

30. Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetical Discourse and Exhortation* 2 (FC 9:18): "an active participant in the angelical life" (καὶ τῆς ἀγγελικῆς διαγωγῆς πραγματευτῆς) (PG 31:629). See also Basil of Caesarea, *An Ascetical Discourse* 2.

marry and reproduce, and although these married Christians can receive the same counsels regarding renunciation of the world and observe Christ's precepts, those who aspire to something higher must "betake [themselves] to the company of the monks."³¹ And what does it look like to join the company of monks? Basil's *Discourse on Ascetical Discipline* goes into great detail, but two points in particular are worth noting. "First and foremost," writes Basil, "the monk should own nothing in this world," and "before all else, also, the monk must abstain from the society of women and wine-bibbing."³² The dangers of owning possessions and keeping company with women are commonplace monastic tropes, though Basil's ascetical theology cannot be reduced to just these two concerns.

Basil believes that humans were made in the image and likeness of God but that sin has marred this image, making us prone to passionate desires (τὰς ἐμπαθεῖς ἐπιθυμίας).³³ When we lost this likeness to God, we lost our ability to participate in the true life of God; thus "separated and estranged from God . . . it is impossible for [humankind] to enjoy the blessedness of the divine life." Through the gift of God's grace, however, humanity is able to return (ἐπανέλθωμεν) to the beauty of God's image by the "quieting of our passions" (διὰ τῆς ἀπαθείας).³⁴ In a beautiful and moving passage Basil writes, "He who, to the best of his ability, copies within himself the tranquility of the divine nature attains to a likeness with the very soul of God; and, being made like to God in the manner aforesaid, he also achieves in full a semblance to the divine life and abides continually in unending blessedness."³⁵ Monks make this return to God and attain again this divine likeness when they aspire to the life of virginity,³⁶ quell their passions, steady their emotions, regulate their dependence on material goods according to need, and live well together in community, under obedience. Though most of these ascetical practices should be observed by nonmonastics as well, it is with particular devotion that monks do so, not because they are better or more worthy than nonmonastics, but in order to return to the true life, which is the divine life. Such a return is especially monastic, commending the institution's existence.

31. Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetical Discourse and Exhortation 2* (FC 9:18).

32. Basil of Caesarea, *A Discourse on Ascetical Discipline 1 and 2* (FC 9:33, 35; PG 31:648–49).

33. Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetical Discourse 1* (FC 9:207; PG 31:869).

34. Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetical Discourse 1* (FC 9:207; PG 31:869, 872).

35. Basil of Caesarea, *Ascetical Discourse 1* (FC 9:207; PG 31:872).

36. In this use of "virginity" Basil does not mean only the procreation of children but that "our whole life, conduct and moral character should be virginal, illustrating in every action the integrity required of the virgin." *Ascetical Discourse 1* (FC 9:208).

The History of Monasticism

Though it did not flourish and become a cultural phenomenon until the middle of the fourth century, monasticism is as old as the church itself.³⁷ The seeds for monastic life were sown throughout the biblical era but did not rise above ground until the first century, ultimately blooming in the fourth century and beyond. In many ways the history of monasticism is an unlikely story inasmuch as there is no explicit biblical command to “go, therefore, and become monks and nuns.” Benedictine monk Columba Stewart writes, “Understanding the differences between the real history [of monasticism] and the received version, why parts of the story have been privileged and others left out entirely, is a pressing issue for those of us interested not only in the past, but also in how monasticism may yet develop.”³⁸ Nonetheless, the genesis of monasticism may be found in Jesus’s commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39). Though Jesus’s words come from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, he uses them to establish the so-called new covenant—the covenant that becomes the spiritual and moral norm for all believers following Jesus’s advent. This covenant is binding for all Christian believers, whereas the old (Mosaic) covenant was binding only for the people of Israel. The new covenant is universal in ways that the old covenant was not. When Jesus establishes this foundation he is providing the *telos* of the church, the spiritual ground upon which believers are to live obediently. Within this context, some men and women chose to obey this covenant as monastics. Thus, not just Israel but all followers of the Messiah are invited to partake of the divine life, the divine love existing between the Father and the Son. And this divine life of inter-trinitarian communion became the model for how all humans were to love one another. “[I ask] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us,” prayed Jesus (John 17:21). Though the earliest Christians adopted a posture of eager anticipation for the return of Christ, when that did not happen, their desire to be united with God, along with commands, for example, to “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15), led them to create institutions to support their common life together (e.g., the enrolled widows of 1 Tim. 5:9–12). Monasticism grew out of this ethos of expectation and obedience to God’s commands.

37. Peters, *Story of Monasticism*, 23–36.

38. Stewart, “Origins and Fate of Monasticism,” 258.

Early Monasticism

According to Timothy Barnes, “The Christian monasticism of the later Roman Empire appears to derive ultimately from first-century Judaism, whose traditions of asceticism, preserved in Mesopotamia, may have been reintroduced to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt by Manichean missionaries.”³⁹ Though this monastic genealogy is debatable, it supports the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea’s (d. 339) own observation regarding the Therapeutae.⁴⁰ Philo of Alexandria (d. 50) in his *De vita contemplativa* records the existence of an ascetic community living near Alexandria that he called the Therapeutae (“healers”), who are at times equated with the Essenes of Qumran.⁴¹ Philo, while discussing the ritual associated with a banquet held among the Therapeutae every seven weeks, describes the virtue of charity as extolled by the ascetic sect:

The women, too, take part in the feast; most of them are aged virgins who have maintained their purity not under constraint . . . but voluntarily through their zealous desire for wisdom. Eager to enjoy intimacy with [wisdom], [the aged virgins] have been unconcerned with the pleasures of the body, desiring a progeny not mortal but immortal, which only the soul that loves God is capable of engendering unaided, since the Father has sown in her intelligible rays whereby she can behold the teachings of wisdom.⁴²

Thus, the Therapeutae are men and women who practice lifelong virginity. Philo also tells us that they “each live apart in seclusion,” although they are able to hear one another, and that they engage in prayer and study.⁴³ Therefore, the Therapeutae provide proof that there was a group of men and women who lived together, although physically separated, observing lifelong virginity, engaged in intentional prayer and study in the early first century. Further, Philo tells us that these individuals “lay down self-control [ἐγκράτειαν] as a sort of foundation of the soul and on this build the other virtues.”⁴⁴

In the hands of Eusebius, the Therapeutae become Christians, in particular because of their emphasis on self-control: “We think that these words of Philo are clear and indisputably refer to our communion” (that is, the church), for these practices “cannot be found among any, save only in the worship of

39. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 195.

40. Daniel Caner goes so far as to say that “Christian monasticism was a late antique invention” and that it was not “until the late fourth and early fifth centuries” that monastic history began “to be written or, rather, invented.” Caner, “Not of This World,” 588.

41. See Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies*, 8–36; and Schürer, *Jewish People*, 2:591–97.

42. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 8.68 (Winston, 53). Greek text in *Philo*, 9:112–69.

43. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 3.30 (Winston, 46–47).

44. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 4.34 (Winston, 47).

Christians according to the Gospel.”⁴⁵ This means that there were *Christian* ascetics living in the early first century. Furthermore, Eusebius compares the Therapeutae to other Christian ascetics, which shows that he was aware of a group of Christian ascetics with whom he could compare the Therapeutae: Philo’s “very accurate description of the life of *our* ascetics.”⁴⁶ Moreover, Philo uses language that became standard in later Christian monastic vocabulary. For example, “In each house there is a sacred chamber, which is called a sanctuary or closet [μοναστήριον].”⁴⁷ “Closet” is more appropriately translated as “monastery”⁴⁸ and is, in fact, the first ever use of the word.⁴⁹ In the end Eusebius, writing a history of the church, identifies monasticism as existing as early as the first century.

By the second century the Christian church placed great emphasis on the practice of asceticism, and this manifested itself frequently and consistently in monastic communities, especially in Syria.⁵⁰ The communities in Persia, Mesopotamia, and Syria were fundamentally ascetic and seem to have developed completely independently of the monastic movement in Egypt.⁵¹ Moreover, up until the time of Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), the martyr was the quintessential image of a faithful Christian. Beginning with Clement, however, this began to change. Clement understood a martyr as (1) someone who by her death confesses her Christian faith and fidelity to her baptism; (2) someone who through death bears witness to the doctrine of Christ; and (3) someone who “bears witness to the ‘truth of preaching’ by the Church.”⁵² Clement understood that not all Christians were called to die as martyrs, so he “proposed a new ideal of Christian perfection which he called gnostic martyrdom.”⁵³ Clement writes, “If therefore confession before God is martyrdom, every soul that has lived purely in the knowledge of God, that is, that has obeyed his commandments is, in whatsoever manner it be released from its body, a martyr both in life and word pouring out its faith like blood, throughout its whole life even to the end.”⁵⁴ By the time of the legalization of Christianity in the early fourth century, this concept

45. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.17.18 (Lake, 1:153).

46. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.17.2 (Lake, 1:145, italics added).

47. Philo, *Contemplative Life* 3.25 (Winston, 46).

48. See Lake, *Eusebius*, 149.

49. Winston, *Philo of Alexandria*, 317n15.

50. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*.

51. Vööbus, “Monasticism in Mesopotamia.”

52. Malone, *Monk and the Martyr*, 7.

53. Malone, *Monk and the Martyr*, 8.

54. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.4, quoted in Malone, *Monk and the Martyr*, 8, with Greek text.

of the monk as the successor of the martyr was a commonplace in monastic theology and literature.⁵⁵

By the fourth century there were, if we can trust the reports, thousands of monks and nuns living in every corner of the Roman Empire, but no corner was more populated than the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and the Holy Land. For example, John Cassian writes that there were five thousand monks in one Pachomian monastery in Egypt, and Palladius of Galatia (d. ca. 420s), in his *Lausiatic History*, reports two thousand monks in the hills of Lower Egypt.⁵⁶ The aforementioned *Life of Anthony* reports that

when, entering the Lord's house once more, [Anthony] heard in the Gospel the Lord saying, *Do not be anxious about tomorrow*, he could not remain any longer, but going out he gave those remaining possessions also to the needy. Placing his sister in the charge of respected and trusted virgins, and giving her over to the convent [παρθενῶνα] for rearing, he devoted himself from then on to the discipline [i.e., monastic life] rather than the household. . . . There were not yet many monasteries in Egypt, and no monk knew at all the great desert, but each of those wishing to give attention to his life disciplined himself in isolation, not far from his own village. Now at that time in the neighboring village there was an old man who had practiced from his youth the solitary life [τὸν μονήρη βίον]. When Antony [*sic*] saw him, he emulated him in goodness.⁵⁷

Of significance is that Anthony's sister was able to be placed in a monastic community and that he himself was able to be tutored under a solitary, evidence that monasticism was alive and well not only in the Egyptian desert but in urban Egypt too. Similar patterns were beginning to manifest themselves in other parts of the late antique world. Cenobitic monasteries and solitary monks emerged everywhere, with monasteries located in cities (Rome, Jerusalem, and Constantinople), in towns (Bethlehem), in deserts (Egypt and Sinai), on islands (Lérins), in caves (St. Sabas in Palestine), and even on pillars (Syria). It was a golden age of monasticism.

Moreover, during the fourth and fifth centuries monasticism began to spread to such an extent that it became a "global" phenomenon. In particular monasticism took hold in Gaul (what is now France).⁵⁸ One of the most well-known, if not *the* most well-known, early monastic centers was on the island of Lérins,

55. See chap. 5 of this volume for a twentieth-century take on this line of thinking in the thought of Paul Evdokimov.

56. Cassian, *Institutes* 4.1 (ACW 58:79); and Palladius, *Lausiatic History* 7.1–2 (Meyer, 40).

57. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 3 (Gregg, 31–32, italics original), quoting from Matt. 6:34.

58. It appears that the first monastery founded in Gaul was Marmoutier, established by Martin of Tours on the outskirts of Tours ca. 372.

just off the southern coast of France from Cannes. In the early fifth century Honoratus, Caprasius, and Eucherius settled on a neighboring island, which by the early 430s had become the gathering place for a number of individuals seeking the monastic life, perhaps as “a refuge from political perils.”⁵⁹ Many of these early monks became bishops throughout Gaul, but monastic life on Lérins continued to flourish, resulting in a number of early monastic rules that exercised an influence beyond their original context.⁶⁰ These rules tend to give the abbot, prior, and elder monks a great deal of authority and place great emphasis on prayer: “nothing may be put ahead of the [Divine] Office.”⁶¹

As the influence of these Lérinian rules spread, so too did other forms of monasticism. Some monasteries began in houses and villas. Marilyn Dunn writes, “Many minor monasteries were created throughout Gaul and Italy throughout the fifth century, as the result of personal devotion or asceticism, small and informal communities where no rule would have been required. House and villa ‘monasteries’ sprang up as aristocrats or the prosperous took to a life of religion and turned their own homes into religious retreats for family and friends.”⁶² Monasteries were also founded at this time in places that held important saints’ relics (e.g., Nola in southern Italy) and at principal basilicas (e.g., St. Sebastian on the Appian Way outside Rome).⁶³

The fifth and sixth centuries saw the rise of many communities for women and the appearance of rules written especially for women, perhaps none more significant than that associated with the Lérinian monk Caesarius of Arles (d. 542).⁶⁴ Caesarius’s first attempt at founding a community of women failed in 508 because of the so-called Barbarian Invasion, but a new monastery, located within the city walls, was consecrated in 512.⁶⁵ Setting the community on a stable financial footing, Caesarius then composed a rule for the nuns. Dunn summarizes:

His *Rule for Virgins* divides into five sections. The first sets down regulations for admission and practice based on Cassian and those of Lérins. . . . A second section is partly based on the *Rules* ascribed to St Augustine of Hippo . . . [that]

59. Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 82.

60. E.g., *The Rule of the Four Fathers* and *The Second Rule of the Fathers*. See Kardong, *Pillars of Community*, 191–241.

61. *Second Rule of the Fathers* 6.31, in Kardong, *Pillars of Community*, 228.

62. Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 90. See also Percival, “Villas and Monasteries.”

63. Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 90–93.

64. E.g., see *The Life of the Jura Fathers* 25: “Romanus and Lupicinus with paternal love installed an abbess for virgins and handed over to her the governance of that religious community; there she ruled one hundred fifty female monastics.” Vivian, Vivian, and Russell, *Jura Fathers*, 113.

65. See *The Life of Caesarius* 28 and 35.

lay down the spiritual basis of the community's life. . . . The third section of the rule contains Caesarius' own ideas; a fourth is the so-called *Recapitulation* in which he goes over and confirms or revises what he has set down already, while the fifth consists of regulations for fasting and liturgy based on those of Lérins.⁶⁶

Caesarius's rule for nuns came to exercise great influence in Gaul, which had the good benefit of bequeathing to Latin monasticism continuity with earlier forms of monastic life since *The Rule for Virgins* was dependent on earlier texts. Largely, there is a continuity of monastic tradition from the East to the West (by way of Cassian and Caesarius, for example), a progressive developmental arc as opposed to a series of parallel movements, so much so that monastic history can be viewed as a garment made from numerous threads, many of which are related historically or textually to one another. Subsequent monastic history continues this story and enlarges the thread count.

Eastern Monasticism

Early Christian monasticism in Asia Minor and Greece gave birth to a thriving monastic culture during the Byzantine Empire, exemplified by Mount Athos.⁶⁷ Before cenobitic monasticism was recorded on the peninsula in the tenth century, there is textual evidence of hermits on Athos from at least the mid-ninth century. According to Joseph Genesius (ca. tenth century), Mount Athos was a major monastic center by 843. In 883 the Byzantine emperor Basil I issued a document protecting the Athonite monks and their lands, suggesting that a number of monks on the peninsula were organized in some manner. The permanence of cenobitism was given a boost by the arrival of a monk named Athanasius (d. 1000) in 957/58. He had entered the monastic life around 952 on Mount Olympus, drawing the favor of the future emperor Nicephorus II Phocas, who came frequently to Mount Olympus because his nephew Michael was Athanasius's abbot. Athanasius allegedly came to Mount Athos to avoid the fame that he was receiving for his holiness on Mount Olympus, initially settling for a year in a hermitage with the Athonite monk Zygos and then moving to a cell in 959. Yet it was Nicephorus who implored Athanasius to establish a lavra.

The Greek word *λάβρα* ("lane" or "alley") originally referred to the paths that connected individual monastic cells to a central church but later came to designate a monastic complex where the monks spent the week praying,

66. Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*, 100.

67. Mount Athos, or the Holy Mountain, is the name given to the northernmost projection of land on the Chalkidiki peninsula of Greece.

working, and eating in their individual cells and coming together once a week for a common liturgy.⁶⁸ Because Athanasius was not convinced that Nicephorus's idea was worth pursuing, he spent the year 960 living in solitude on the tip of the Athonite peninsula. Nicephorus returned to Constantinople, becoming emperor for six years before his assassination in 969. As emperor, Nicephorus sent the monk Methodius to Athanasius with a letter and financial assistance. In time Methodius prevailed on Athanasius to have a lavra built with financial support from Nicephorus and other donors. In 963 Athanasius wrote the monastery's rule (dedicated to Mary the Mother of God but known as the "Great Lavra"), which borrowed heavily from a previous rule written in the ninth century by Theodore Studites (d. 826) for the monastery of St. John Stoudios in Constantinople.

By the close of the tenth century many monasteries had been built on Mount Athos, and by 1001 there were forty-six monasteries on the peninsula. Vatopedi (its first historical attestation is from 985) was most likely a restoration of an earlier, ruined monastery undertaken by three disciples of Athanasius. The Iviron monastery was built by Georgian monks, and Esphigmenou is first mentioned in 998, becoming the home of many Chalcedonian Armenian monks. Hilandar was likely established in the late tenth century, but by 1015 it was deserted while under the oversight of the Kastamonitou monastery, then rebuilt by Serbian monks in the twelfth century. Finally, the Panteleimon monastery originally consisted of two monasteries that merged in the twelfth century to become home to Slavic-speaking monks from medieval Russia.

Monasticism had arrived (again?) in medieval Rus' at nearly the same time as the (re)introduction of the Christian faith. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, Christianity was first brought to ancient Russia when the apostle Andrew crossed the mouth of the Dnieper River, passed over the hills on which Kiev was later founded, and went as far north as the ancient city of Novgorod.⁶⁹ More realistically, however, Christianity was known in ancient Rus' from at least the middle of the tenth century. Prince Vladimir I's grandmother Olga had been a Christian, and a Christian church was operative in 944. Yet it was only in 988 that the country "officially" adopted Christianity.⁷⁰ The earliest material for monasticism in Russia is also found in the *Russian*

68. Thus, lavriotiic monasticism had three primary characteristics: (1) a combination of both an eremitical, solitary monastic lifestyle and coenobitic, communal aspects; (2) monks spent time in private and communal prayer and in eating individual and communal meals each week; and (3) monks performed manual labor that benefited the whole community.

69. Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia*, 47.

70. An account of the Christianization of Rus' is found in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. See Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia*, 67–71.

Primary Chronicle and comprises notices and sections on the origin and early history of Kievan monasteries, in particular the Monastery of the Caves.⁷¹ From this source we learn that a priest named Hilarion walked a hill near the Dnieper River to say his prayers in private, digging a cave in the side of the hill to use as his oratory.⁷² He later became metropolitan (i.e., archbishop) of Kiev, so his cave lay unused until Anthony, a layman, became attracted to the monastic life, made a pilgrimage to Mount Athos, and was professed monk around 1051. He was instructed in an Athonite monastery and sent back to Russia to spread monastic life. In Rus' he found the Kievan monasteries inadequate until coming upon the empty cave of Hilarion, settling there as a hermit. He enlarged the cave and was visited by pious laypeople and supplied with food by faithful Christians. Soon his name spread throughout Rus', and he was joined by others called to the same manner of life. In time Anthony was the head of a monastery, though this ran counter to his desire for a solitary life. He therefore appointed another superior, leaving to dig a new cave, where he lived for another forty years. The community increased, so a monastery was built on the site of the first cave. With this "the superior and brethren founded there a great church and fenced in the monastery with a palisade. They constructed many cells, completed the church and adorned it with icons."⁷³ From these humble beginnings monasticism grew and spread across Russia, where it continues to thrive today.⁷⁴

Western Monasticism

As the institution of monasticism grew beyond its place(s) of birth, it eventually took root in every area of the world that boasted a Christian presence. In short, where there was Christianity there was monasticism, even if these local manifestations, in time, ceased to exist. Moreover, it was often the religious orders that were the vanguard of Christian missionary activity.⁷⁵ The sixteenth-century Reformation proved a bit of an exception to this general pattern in ecclesiastical history. For various reasons, not all of which are fully understood today (and likely will never be fully understood), King Henry VIII of England (d. 1547) began in 1536 to dissolve all the monasteries in his lands. Though he was likely motivated by financial or political reasons

71. These are found in the entries under the years 1051, 1072–75, 1089, 1091, 1096, and 1107–10.

72. See R. Casey, "Early Russian Monasticism"; and Heppell, *The "Paterik."*

73. Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia*, 108.

74. See, e.g., Kenworthy, *Heart of Russia*.

75. See, e.g., Smither, *Missionary Monks*; Addison, *Medieval Missionary*, 75–105; and Dawson, *Mission to Asia*.

over theological convictions, the result was the same. By the end of the 1540s all the monasteries in England no longer existed, and the newly reformed Church of England lacked a monastic presence, a situation that lasted until June 6, 1841, when the Anglican Marion Hughes (d. 1912) took the traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience before Edward Pusey (d. 1882). Because I have discussed this reintroduction of monasticism into Anglicanism elsewhere, it is unnecessary to belabor the point.⁷⁶ Further, not only has the Church of England seen the reestablishment of monasticism, but so have other Protestant traditions (e.g., Lutheran) and sometimes in the most surprising of places.⁷⁷

Initially trained in monasticism at Glasnevin near Dublin, the monk Columba (also known as Columcille; d. 597) moved to the islands west of present-day Scotland in order to spread monasticism and Christianity. In 563 he and his companions landed on a small island (known in Gaelic as *I* and now in English as Iona) that was soon to become an important center of monastic activity, leading to the founding of other such important monasteries as Lindisfarne, Whitby, and Melrose. Iona's importance is attested to by the church historian the Venerable Bede (d. 735), who writes that the "monastery [of Iona] was for a long time the principal monastery of nearly all the northern Scots and all the Picts and exercised a widespread authority."⁷⁸ Despite its early history of influence and artistic triumph (e.g., the Book of Kells was made there ca. 800), the island was plundered and the monks murdered by Vikings in 806 and again in 986. In 1203 the monastery became Benedictine, but monastic life ceased in the 1500s as a result of the Reformation and Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. The medieval buildings gradually fell into disrepair, and the island's influence in the church became a memory, captured well by William Wordsworth's poem "Iona" from 1833:

How sad a welcome! To each voyager
Some ragged child holds up for sale a store
Of wave-worn pebbles, pleading on the shore
Where once came monk and nun with gentle stir,
Blessings to give, news ask, or suit prefer.
Yet is yon neat, trim church a grateful speck
Of novelty amid the sacred wreck
Strewn far and wide. Think, proud philosopher!
Fallen though she be, this glory of the west,

76. See Peters, *Reforming the Monastery*, 53–90.

77. See Peters, *Story of Monasticism*, 224–42.

78. Bede, *History of the English Church and People* 3.3 (Sherley-Price, 145).

Still on her sons the beams of mercy shine;
 And hopes, perhaps more heavenly bright than thine,
 A grace by thee unsought and unpossesst,
 A faith more fixed, a rapture more divine,
 Shall gild their passage to eternal rest.⁷⁹

Wordsworth is able to understand the former glory of the island and also, amid the ruins, to sense the spiritual importance of the island. He was not alone in his assessment.

In 1899 the sacred buildings and sites were given to the Iona Cathedral Trust after some preliminary restoration work, but it was the Church of Scotland minister George MacLeod (d. 1991) who restored monastic observance to the island. MacLeod, a Presbyterian minister, had pastored a church since 1930 in Govan, Scotland, and before then in Edinburgh. But over the course of his eight years in Govan, MacLeod felt that the church was not doing enough to reach the large numbers of working-class people. He became convinced that only new patterns of Christian living would reach the masses. “What MacLeod envisioned was a company of pioneers who would be willing to live under economic and devotional disciplines but in the midst of modern industrial society. He saw the necessity for a training center in Christian living that would be more or less removed from the pressures of modern culture.” Thus, he “grasped the opportunity that was then open to him to rebuild the ancient abbey of Iona.”⁸⁰ When the Duke of Argyll entrusted the island to the Iona Cathedral Trust, he included in his bequest that Christian groups be allowed to worship in the abbey. Thus, in 1938 when MacLeod began the Iona Community, he was in one sense simply fulfilling the duke’s request.

To begin his community MacLeod gathered together ministers, laypeople, and craftspersons to restore the abbey’s building. They spent every summer working and praying on the island, completing the restorations in 1965. Since that time the community, which now consists of a number of members who live on the island year-round as well as members scattered around the world, has run retreats and youth camps alongside welcoming thousands of visitors each year who come to see the restored ancient monastic site and join the community for daily prayer. From its start the Iona Community has sought to maintain a balance between prayerful contemplation and social relevance. What the Iona Community represents well, however, is the fact that monasticism is part of the Protestant tradition again, demonstrating

79. William Wordsworth, “Iona,” part 2, “Upon Landing,” lines 15–28, <http://www.bartleby.com/270/3/216.html> (accessed June 27, 2016).

80. Bloesch, *Centers of Christian Renewal*, 101.

that the institution of monasticism is a fixture of the Christian church *in toto*: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant. Therefore, given its presence in the historical and present Christian church, it is necessary to understand monasticism and to articulate a theology of monasticism that is not sectarian but relevant to the whole church of God. This book attempts to offer such a theology.