

# Monasticism



I want to live and work with the poor as Jesus did.

## Time Alone

"Meg?" Mom gently tapped on the bedroom door. "Meg, Pedro is here again to see you. Will you come and talk to him?"

"I just can't right now, Mom," came the quiet reply. "Tell him I'll see him at school tomorrow, okay?"

Mrs. Jackson slowly returned to the front door with the news for Pedro. "I'm afraid Meg's still pretty upset about the school elections for class president. You'd better go on ahead to the library with your friends. And thank you for thinking of Meg. She'll see you at school tomorrow."

Mrs. Jackson sighed as she stepped back inside the house and slowly closed the door. It had been four days since the school election results were announced. Since then, all Meg wanted was to be alone. Oh, she went to school and did her chores around the house. But the rest of her time was spent in solitude.

Why do you think Meg wants to be alone? Talk it over.

Are there times when you want (need) to be alone? Name some positive results of being alone. When can being alone bring negative results?

## Origins of the Monastic Life

Toward the end of the third century, a rich, religious young Egyptian named Anthony gave his land to the poor, sold his belongings, and used the money to feed the hungry. Still, Anthony feared that temptations might distract him from following God. So, instead of living and working with the poor as Jesus had, Anthony went off to live alone in the wilderness. There he fasted, prayed, and studied God's Word.

Soon others followed Anthony's example and withdrew from the world to serve God in private. Referred to as monks or hermits, they organized colonies called monastic orders or societies of monks. Many of these religious orders took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In time, the monastic colonies spread to other parts of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Colonies for women, called nunneries or convents, later developed. The women living in the convents were called nuns.

Centuries later, an Italian named Francesco (Francis) Bernardone was growing up in an educated and wealthy family. But Francis was saddened by what he saw of the sinful world. On February 24, 1208, Francis heard these words of Jesus: "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts" (Matthew 10:7-9).

These words gave new direction to his life. Francis started a new order of monks who would work among people, helping them in sickness, poverty, and need. Saint Francis of

Assisi became a model for many Christians. He committed himself to working for peace and love, vowing that he would never possess more than the poorest person he served.

Another monastic order was started by Benedict of Nursia. Benedict wrote a document or "Holy Rule," detailing the features of monastic life. The "Holy Rule" was adopted by other monasteries throughout Europe. Benedictine monks became the most skilled craftsmen and farmers in the Middle Ages. They also started mission work in outlying countries.

### A Life of Solitude and Devotion

Life in monasteries and nunneries varied from order to order. In addition to not marrying, most monks and nuns took vows, or promises, of poverty and obedience. They usually gave up comfort and pleasure, giving themselves to a life of devotion, study, and work. Troubled by their sin, monks sometimes tortured themselves, hoping to rid themselves of evil. The monks felt they were doing the will of God by remaining separate from the sinful temptations of the world and devoting themselves to Him.

Monks and nuns lived in individual rooms called cells, but they got together regularly and frequently for prayers, devotions, and worship. They worked long and hard on little to eat. Some grew food for the poor as well as for the monastery. Others worked as carpenters or bakers. Some worked with calligraphy, painting, music, and other fine arts. Monks copied the Scriptures and the other sacred writings they studied.

The monastic orders made many contributions to society. Since much of their time was spent in study, monks and nuns became the most highly educated people in their community. Some became excellent teachers, musicians, and other church leaders. Later, when colleges and universities were developed, educated monks and priests often became the professors. They helped to train the rest of the community. Many monastic orders still exist today.

### Living in Faith

1. Why is being a Christian hermit inconsistent with the true Christian life? See Mark 16:15.  
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2. Read Ephesians 4:11–13. What should be the work of Christians in the world?  
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3. How was monasticism a blessing for the church?  
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4. How did monasticism benefit the community?  
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5. What problems may monasticism have created? Explain your answer.  
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### To Review and Remember

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will. *Romans 12:2*