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The Age of Monks.

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THE AGE OF MONKS

BY MAURICE ROWDON

THE BATTLE OF THE MONKS

The story of the monks should of course---but for a better reason than that he started Christianity---begin with Christ. For a long time I have thought that he brought something not simply new to Judah but of an ancient origin, more ancient than Judah itself. When I first began to sense this I knew nothing of the fact that there were early trade routes between India and Mesopatamia, and between India and Greece---perhaps as early as that first oral tradition called the Vedas, which some people put at about two thousand years before Christ and others very much earlier indeed. Nor did I know that the theory that man started in southern Africa was being displaced by findings that a very much earlier 'ancestral humanity' was to be found at the northern tip of India. We are told that Christ's mission was very much the child of Greek influence, and it seems to me that we can go further and supply the root not only of Greek thought but of the Mesopatamian cradle of feligion from which Judah itself came. If you look, for instance, at a commentary on the Upanishads---some of which might be called the Vedas written down---it is astonishing what aptness some of them have to the ideas of Plato. But, for the kind of book I have in mind, the important thing is that Christ pointed outside Judah to the kind of renunciation never practised in Judah, namely a solitary or monastic one. Buddha overcame the world east of India. Christ overcame the world west of India: and there are parallels between their approaches---always to the poor, the simple, the neglected. And that, I am saying, has a long monastic tradition in India behind it. This should be the basis of the book, the key to its story, in the sense that the

Upanishads and the behaviour of the sannyasin or monk should be cast back to all the time, especially when we are talking about the first monks of the desert. It will certainly, among other things, give us a much clearer understanding of why the Jews detested Christ so much: he was digging into the very sources that had made the survival of Judah---the bare survival, not even its victories---possible, namely the race itself, the idea of the race. 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and his mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple' (Luke, 14.26), 'Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven' (Mark, 10.21) and 'Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?' (John, 10.34)---these I take to be the three key statements towards a monastic tradition quite contrary to Judaism not to say the running of Israel. In them the family (seed and guarentor of the race), wealth (power of the state, essential to and identified with the race) and the social hierarchy (which made it not simply blasphemy but social blasphemy to declare oneself a messiah let alone a 'god' and therefore equal to the highest) were hit very hard. This is why his trial was perfunctory, and why Pontius Pilate could see nothing wrong in him (knowing nothing of the facts---quite different from Roman facts---that held the state of Israel together), and above all why Christ's death should seem to have been thought a political necessity, 'for the people'.

More even than this, the eastern parallel (or, as I shall maintain, background) can give us a much clearer picture of what Christ was doing, and how people were listening to him, than we could have with simply the bare narrative of events in the four books of the apostles. With the record before us of the holy men of India, talking quietly in people's homes, moving about the country with a group of devotees (the nearest record to us is the day-to-day account of Sri Ramakrishna's life at the end of the last century), we can capture not only remarkable parallels between what they said, and how they influenced the people closest to them, but also a definition of the whole thing as a tradition going far back in time beyond Judah and beyond the first Mesopatamian stirrings of religion. And perhaps we shall find that Hinduism, being the oldest of the religions and the one based not on a book or books but on trial and error over many centuries, had far more opportunity to extend itself across continents than any kind of doctrine: and its basic tenet, that the paths leading to God are very many, and that God has very many names, summarised its utter lack of doctrinal contentiousness. Judah, with its urgent need to survive, could apparently not afford this kind of tolerance: and certainly the society that grew out of its trial of Christ and established itself eventually in every part of the Mediterranean, and then superseded the Roman empire, and became the new Roman empire, had the same urgent need to a

greater extent, and could afford to be as little tolerant. We shall see only the beginnings of this in the book, but they are all we need to know in order to understand how the later crusades, inquisition, and religious wars and persecutions came about.

The question as to why Christ alone of many prophets and many people of divine presence came not only to change people's lives long after his death but to change an entire empire, and to create a new society, has not really to my knowledge been examined properly. The Church, with her insistence on the immaculate birth, her deep horror of the Arian heresy, has put up as much obstacle as possible to a really careful explanation that wants to delve into any deeper background than the fact of Christ's divinity and the destiny that brought him into being. The fact to my mind is that Christ introduced monasticism---that is to say, the solitary experience as basic to all divine awareness---to the Greek and Roman worlds with a devastating effect that supported and accompanied and endorsed the sense of his divinity that the books of the apostles give us. He gave a world thoroughly ignorant of it---he lived in a society ignorant of it---the suggestion of a technique. And this, coinciding with the Greek tradition of the philosopher as one who wandered and humbled himself much like the eastern sannyasin (the first desert monks were called 'philosophers'), provided the beginning of Christianity.

I think therefore that a book of this kind is worthless if it tries simply to be a narrative of events without looking into the experience itself, the technique itself, the 'path' itself, lauriae or otherwise. I think there is more awareness now---certainly than in the nineteenth century---that far from having created ~~xxxx~~ an enviable civilisation, far from having based a civilisation on a religion, we have really and truly hardly begun the work of producing either, in comparison with certain examples we can find in the east. Chinese scholars, Max Müller, the lectures of Vivekenanda in this country and above all the States, the translations from the Sanskrit, the interest in Yoga and Buddhism are what I am thinking of---together of course with two world wars which have somewhat shaken the sense of a clear and rising path.

It will also be necessary to distinguish between 'pagan' and 'barbarian' and 'Christian'. Here again the Church has had a certain formative influence, towards deflating the ancient world, or pagan world, to below the level of religion, which is wrong, and also to putting it on the same level as the barbarian world, which is wronger. I have even seen an Italian guidebook---much written by the ecclesiastical arm---that described the Etruscans as barbarians. They were quite distinct psychologies. And it was only possible to equate them because the Roman world degenerated into Lucretian materialism, and the body-bound barbarian seemed not so distant from that. It tooks years of grooming---deliberate and

with a special accelerating force of its own towards that end---and ~~the~~ some of the desert fathers had the feeling that there were vast armies of spirits at work with no other job to do than disconcert and degrade. Nature, in the eastern tradition, does its work by blinding its victim, especially with the illusion of permanence, which is called maya, the veil of space and time or 'reality' which is not the true reality at all but seems to the victim inescapable. This is the reason for exercises, worked out over centuries or thousands of years. They represent a technique, so to speak, for undoing the coils of maya with its everlasting cycle of pleasure-and-pain: that is the function of meditation, the essential act of throwing off the illusion. At once the reason for solitary living will be seen: in those who are just starting out on the journey it is essential. The finding of a method was the whole work of the desert fathers. Failure to understand this involves one (it seems to have involved most of the historians) in the idea that they were simply the rather selfish precursors of the later cenobitic arrangements, looking after their own salvation but nobody else's. The desert was really a search for freedom---for when maya would loosen its chains---and a 'still seat' would at last be found, requiring and fearing nothing, and the recluse would know that he was the brief expression of something everlasting, and that in the dual possession of the brief and the eternal inside the same body was his struggle. And the devils were so to speak a pagan nature being exorcised.

How was it that Christianity took hold of the Roman empire? Gibbon asks this, and the fifth of his reasons is the most immediately convincing, that the Christians formed a disciplined republic inside the empire, and eventually the only discipline there was. But the difficulty of making a clear ~~xxxxx~~ answer, at least for historians, is that there is little visible to work on, in those first centuries of Christianity, while the empire was still flourishing. True that the best man for the job increasingly became the Christian, because he was reliable, vigourous and optimistic. But the power that made him so was very invisible---I say 'very' because the non-Christians, when they saw how happy the martyrs were to suffer and to die, and to provoke the greatest cruelty with the utmost serenity, thought them simply 'desparate' creatures---they had no further use for life: that is to say, they saw only a frantic external behaviour, and the light inside was as hidden to them as could be. In fact, the Christian had inherited two things, which exercised themselves in ~~two~~ ways that secured the fall of the empire to Christianity when it happened: they had all the strength of Mosaic law in them but, as Gibbon says, 'delivered from the weight of its fetters', and they had what can only be called a new source of ecstasy; and the two played an overlapping role, sometimes in one and the same person. All the way through the early history of Christianity ---from the first Nazarene church in Jerusalem to the slow

displacement of that church as the sole authority by Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Ephesus, Corinth---we shall see the most ecstatic zeal (to be burned, to be eaten alive by lions, to be mocked and spat at) combining with the quiet taking over of the key positions of state, until with the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century (coinciding with the first Pachomian monasteries) Christianity becomes the religion of an empire. But my point here also is that the apparent hunger of the first Christian martyrs like Ignatius, and the fact that the Roman persecutions under Nero and Domitian and Trajan only stirred Christian feeling to greater zeal, is simply the story of an astonishing state of reckless ecstasy that happened when a man had seen as a whole new experience that far from death being the story of the ~~corruption~~ of the body and of pleasures (and of pains as well, Cicero said, to ease the melancholy of it) ~~into dust~~ was only an exchange of condition, and no barrier at all, in fact a complete taste of the ecstasy so far just hinted at. And what we have in the desert of the Thebaid is simply a different technique ~~so to speak~~ of getting rid of the body---the pagan body, that craved pleasure and (other side of the same coin) feared death. My point also is that Christian organisation---the fact that many bishops became 'defenders of the city'---and the increasing conversions in high places were not enough in themselves on which to base the actual Christian society that did come about, or even the actual Church that did come about. It was first the martyrs, and then the monks, who did this. It was quite logically the Benedictine monks who, at the climax so to speak of the whole operation, were sent to unify all Europe (that is, all the monasteries of Europe) under one head.

The first Christian asceticism is said to have come about---as a doctrine, distinct from the spontaneous asceticism of the first martyrs---at Alexandria, in a school of thought that combined Platonic and Judaistic ideas. It was for this reason that the first ascetics were often called philosophers, because of the Platonic distinction between the life of nature and the life (essentially contemplative) above nature. The first actual movement towards the desert of the Nile (Paul, Antony and Ammon) seems to have taken place towards the end of the third century, at the time of the Decian persecutions, which stimulated these men to imitate the martyrs but by leaving the world altogether, as a polluted area, very much on the lines of Alexandrian thought. And this movement later spread beyond the Nile no doubt because of the existence of other sects, in Syria and Asia Minor and Italy, which similarly saw the world as by definition polluted. St Paul settled in Thebes (Egypt) supposedly towards the middle of the third century and lived there in solitude for one hundred and thirteen years, ~~leaving behind him a comfortable life~~. The story says that a crow fed him for sixty years, and that he was clothed in palm leaves. St Antony settled finally in Mount Qolzum, some miles from the Red Sea, after visiting Paul and being

present at his death. He and Ammon after him left increasing numbers of desert disciples.

It was not all a matter of successful concentration. There are some entrancing and some funny stories. Macarius the Egyptian solved the problem of a man who had found a horse in his bed instead of his wife by turning the horse back into his wife again. Magic, on this low level, was involved together with the armies of devils. The desert of course attracted all sorts. There was also something of the competitive atmosphere of the Olympiad. When Macarius the Alexandrian heard of any self-mortification more extreme than His he imitated it, so that in the end he held a sort of desert record. There is the story that his way was lost for him by demons but that he sucked the udders of an antelope for food and the antelope then guided him back to his cell. In other words an atmosphere that some would call madness and some would call ecstasy ('the ecstasy of the angels') hangs round the persons of the first monks, and it all becomes extravagant legend when told by eyewitnesses, especially the ones who do not quite understand. There is hardly a hermit community in the world that hasn't had tall stories told about it. But, more important than that, there is hardly one to which strange things have failed to happen, so that it seems as if a certain kind of concentration produces unworldly results, as certainly as another kind of concentration produces worldly results. So we shall have to pick our way through these stories trying to select the actual real, but not unstrange, event. And on top of this we have to remember the eastern injunction that the powers of concentration are not to be tampered with lightly, and can lead in the unwary and the unprepared to madness. There was probably plenty of madness too.

But here the book might usefully dispose of the idea that the monk was a complete man standing alone against waves of paganism of barbarism, according to the epoch and place he lived in. He was himself the pagan, himself the barbarian, and his awareness came precisely from the conflict inside him. One can say that the monasteries (whether of one monk or many) were the only sources of light in the darkness of the decay of Rome, but the decay was being fought inside those monasteries and not outside. That and that alone was the reason for the light. Therefore we should expect to see signs of great conflict in the first monks, especially the solitaries. They were so often exorcising their own ignorance. The abbot Serenus told Cassianus that the space between heaven and earth was filled with invisible spirits whose entire preoccupation was causing trouble, but that he thought they had a lot less power than in earlier times. Here we have to remember---in case we think that entirely a joke---that nature before it is tempered and controlled by thought, before the new order of thought displaces the decayed old, before the things outside begin to look like a reflection of the things inside, can give a man that feeling of a hostile magnetism always about to burst, partly through being unknown and untried. Above all

we have to realise that the psychology which sees the possibility of a clement order in the world outside has to be made: we who have inherited it find it difficult to believe not only that once people did not have it but that it had to be made with exacting patience and trial.

The cenobitic or community form of the monastery grew quite naturally from the first anchorites of the desert. St Antony organised his followers somewhat. In the wastes of Nitria there are said to have been about five thousand hermits, with a church, a council of elders, and a whip for punishment. It was from this first laura, which means literally 'the path', referring both to the path that went between the hermits' huts and the path of truth, 'the only path'. It was Pachomius (286-346) who first organised the loose communities into settlements under a superior who guided the weak and the novices. He became an anchorite in 307, having been baptised at Thebes. He built his monk's village at Tabennesi, and surrounded it with high walls against desert brigands, who were frequent visitors. When the settlement got going, after some years of trial and error, the first real method set in---three monks to a cell, and inside the settlement a complete self-sufficient population of bakers, potters and so on. They ate vegetables, olives and cheese, and some wine was allowed. There was complete silence during meals. There were periods of prayer for those who were not yet the 'elect' (and could be left alone to practise their own meditation). They were not priests, and Pachomius was careful not to allow any sense of a social hierarchy to creep in. As community-life developed from the Pachomian seed the 'pollution' of the world came in, and there were quarrels and even persecution. Among some Pachomian nuns there was a young woman taken to be mad by the rest of the community, and persecuted as such. But a male priest, happening to visit them, and disliking what he saw, declared her to be not mad but a saint. The women promptly began worshipping her, which drove her away: clearly she had taken and perhaps encouraged the persecution as her form of self-mortification.

Many of the hermits came to the desert from other motives than holy ones: some wanted to escape army service, others were on the run from the police, who never ventured into the desert. And there were those who simply could not face persecution any more. The desert fathers had tremendous difficulty with sexual temptation, like all devotees everywhere. The voluptuous woman in the mind was one of the most frequent of the demons, and his visits were the longest. A vast amount of effort was spent on a passion that seemed only to thrive on any attention, whether rejection or indulgence. One anchorite told a woman in a burst of indulgence that he could deal with ten of her. They left the desert together, but she led him such a life that he came back after a few months.

There was something of the later Islamic rigour about a few of the superiors. Shenute, who died in 466, insisted on absolute obedience to his rule, and blindness to any but his word. He used to beat his monks---and once beat a man to death. He followed Pachomius to the letter except that he reversed his compassionate firmness. Thus the first seed of community gave rise to the element of something like civil war, which was never quite to leave Christian society at any time, except in brief localised patches of civilisation soon razed by war again. It was this seed among the first Egyptian devotees ~~to~~ that led, from small beginnings in the form of group ~~of~~ attacks on idol worshippers, to the crusades many centuries later. A punitive, a disastrously aggressive note entered Christianity early and made it perhaps the most destructive civilisation ever known. The actual person of Christ was early left behind (perhaps in that first Nazarene church established forty days after his death) for what looks like now a gigantic social operation using his name, to unite and order all the barbarian and pagan races, and ultimately all the races of the world, until some kind of global unity was established. That, after all, may be the hidden meaning of Christ's ~~to~~ to bring not peace but the sword. On the other hand, we cannot say that this global operation was exclusive function of Christianity, since Christianity came from a root, the same one as Islam, and when we examine the root we shall find something of the same urge, to work beyond the frontier until the concept of the frontier itself was broken down.

L promise

The movement ~~was~~ spread east from Egypt early. St Hilarion, an itinerant monk, lived among other places at Gaza (307), and died in Cyprus. His friend Epiphanius (bishop of Salamis) had a Pachomian settlement at Besanduc near Jerusalem. Epiphanius, said to be a quarrelsome man, given to anger and heresy-hunting, became bishop of Cyprus. This early we get a shadow of the later Inquisition. In that first form it looks like a tendency to fix orthodox systems out a quite justifiable fear. In the case of the later Spaniards, the fear was of Jews and Moors. In the case of Epiphanius the fear lay, as perhaps all fear does, in self-doubt. And perhaps the Inquisition was the climax of the self-doubt that ran all thw way through Christianity. Epiphanius even denounced his friend John Chrysostom, the bishop of Constantinople, and had him banished. He had St Jerome's brother consecrated by force---gagged and bound: and he failed to understand what all the fuss was about afterwards.

In Syria the rigour was greater even than in Egypt. The monks staggered under heavy loads of iron or sand. Some lived in trees (the Dendrites), others in the forest (the Grazers). St Simeon, a Syrian born in 389, first lived in a cistern and once tried to have himself walled up without food for the whole of Lent: he was walled up according to

his wish but food was put inside, though he did not touch it. He was released after forty days, at the last gasp. And he repeated this every Lent afterwards. From his column, where he spent thirty-seven years, he exercised an astonishing influence over the whole countryside, and was asked again and again to use this influence in affairs of state. But he refused to answer the emperor, and left the quarrels over Nestorianism (Nestorius was Chrysostom's predecessor as bishop of Constantinople, and the 'heresy' of his name was similar to that of the Briton ~~Pelagius~~ Pelagius) that were bothering not only heads like John Cassianus's and St Augustine's but those of the secular imperial court as well. All in all, the brawling over creeds that went on, the wild gang-fights that were the later religious wars in embryo, should perhaps be treated without the awe usually given to theological discussion and seen in terms of the barbarian and pagan appetites that unavoidably engulfed the gospel.

The shift of the first monasticism goes from Egypt to Palestine, and then up to Constantinople, seeming to correspond with a gradual shift of political and social power into the hands of the Christians: and perhaps the brawls, spoken or written or fought out with knives, were a symptom of this change. St. Chrysostom among others tried to stop the monks going into the cities, and he was hated and reviled by both the monks and the priests for this; and perhaps in ~~this~~ their criticism of Chrysostom---that he didn't 'join in'---we can hear the first note of that element of blame that began under Christianity to be attached to solitude, with the paraellel commendation of anything communal, which has reached its climax in our epoch.

St Basil marks the shift of monasticism into the Greek world. He lived roughly between 329 and 379. The desert fathers were expected to be good at rhetoric---which word was not the empty one it is for us today. It really meant knowing how to expound a system of thought, and therefore how to think. St Basil wrote a book called 'To Young Men on the Uses of Hellenism'. He was interested in the Pachomian form of monastery but thought it too much like a town, while the superior was too much like an administrator. He devised a smaller version of the same thing where contact between the monk and his superior would be easy and daily. It was a much more workaday affair than ever before, and already we begin to see the first solitary concentration in a distilled form. Austerities were discouraged. Prayer and study were as much part of the day as manual work. St Basil's simple Rule spread through the Byzantine world. He ran schools for children---one type for those who were going to be monks, and another for those who were going into the world.

St Basil, in choosing his Cappadocian site, seems to have had something like a monastic concept in the mediaeval sense: that is, he chose a (for him) pleasant spot and not a scrap of desert as barren as possible. That his friend Gregory thought the place damp and squalid makes no difference to the new idea of clemency that seems to enter with the Byzantine influence. He rejected solitary asceticism because the monk in solitude had a tendency to see himself as perfect too easily, having no means of comparison: he all too often needed someone to love him and therefore guide and sustain him. St Basil advocated a community of thirty or forty monks, not the vast establishments of Nitria; they were to be no more than could be served by 'one lamp and one fire'. He gave absolute power of decision to the superior. There was nothing like the democracy which the later monasteries practised. But the scholars among the Basilian monks could tell the superior off if they felt it necessary, and the lower monk could appeal to them. Extreme self-mortification was discouraged. But on the other hand St Basil allowed for the necessity to some of the solitary element by providing cells, though these were not too far dispersed from each other. This if anything was closer to eastern doctrine than the extreme austerity of the desert anchorites: the doctrine being that the act of meditation is the necessary thing, and the presence close or far of other people is irrelevant to this. The utterly solitary life does not seem to be favoured in the Upanishads as that likeliest to achieve purity. In bringing about his changes St Basil brought the monasteries further into the organisation of the church, and whatever concentration was lost resulted more from this than from his changes in themselves.

Monastic discipline was tightened further when it came (by the Council of Chalcedon in 415) under the control of the local bishop. Monks were definitely forbidden by this council to dabble in secular or even ecclesiastical affairs. They were too much seen in the cities. And some of them liked a brawl. Later in the sixth century Justinian ordered that cells should always be incorporated in the main nucleus of monastic buildings, and that the bishop must supervise the election of the abbot: thus early do we find an active hostile attitude towards solitary practises by authority. At the Second Synod to take place in the Trullan chamber of the imperial palace at Constantinople in 692 it was laid down that no one under ten years of age could be a monk and that a monk had to have three years in the community before being allowed a cell of his own. The hermits were also to keep off the streets. Theodore's reform of the Studion monastery (the 'sleepless' monks) hundreds of years later in the eighth century was much like the self-reform of the Church after Luther at the hands of the Jesuits. It was provoked, that is, by criticism from

outside. Theodore had read St Basil's writings on asceticism and emphasised community work---but for the community outside the monastery now, in the form of hospital care for the sick and food for the poor. This new discipline spread to the great centres of monasticism at Kiev and Mount Athos. This latter is the oldest of the monastic states, so to speak: in the tenth century a monk called Athanasius organised the community on Studion lines, and the hermits lost caste even further. The community even tried to claim independence from the outside world (that is, from the patriarch of Constantinople). They were successful, and only in 1312 was this permission revoked by the emperor. The shift we are noticing here is towards making the monastery an embryo-city: something of the social operation, to produce a world outside that would perfectly reflect the faith inside, had begun. But also this was part of a fight that developed between the monks and the secular arm, which more and more, through the bishops, and exercising control even over the habits of hermits, tried to control every aspect of the Church, including its monastic outsiders, for political and social purposes. The monks put up more fight than the clergy, and Theodore's work was an aspect of this fight.

In Paulinus, who gave up social life in Rome and a vast property to become a monk, in 395 when he was just turned forty, we have/perhaps one of the first hints of a distinct Christian civilisation in Europe, still in the vague glow of Greece and brought up in a Rome where it was thought inconceivable that its greatness could ever wane. He began a monastery at Nola in the Campania. He remained urbane and kindly, wrote verse, continued to read Lucretius and Virgil and Horace. He drew devotees from Gaul, Spain, the Balkans and the rest of Italy. In him the desert asceticism was tempered to something like a classical refinement: the exercises were no less than those of the desert but they were against a formed background of olive groves and vineyards.

To the west, in the outer reaches of the Roman empire where barbarism and the Church sometimes seemed not so different, some effort was made to introduce asceticism, but a vigorous action nipped it in the bud. Priscillian, a wealthy Spaniard, was squashed by the Synod of Saragossa (386) which ordered that a priest who became a monk should be shut outside the church on grounds of pride. It also ordered that no virgin could take the veil under the age of forty. And here, in Europe, we enter a different story from the other one of the desert and the 'eastern' Church. There are new forces of a tribal kind, quite different from the background supplied by ancient Greece and Rome. St Martin of Tours, for instance, was an imperial soldier before he became a monk and founded a monastery in Milan. He worked among the sick---the story of his dividing the

cloak epitomises his life (361-397). He was living among Barbarians, and at once we see that the 'social operation' I have been talking of had to be different in the north of Europe from that in the pagan world: conversion stretched further into behaviour and manners and the minutest conduct of daily life. The cities established by the Romans were at best distant affairs, with their suggestion of refinements, and belonged to a former world. Martin could not stop the usurper Maximus putting the monk Priscillian to death, but he complained loudly. He was aware of the need of the desert traditions. And above all he was aware of the fact that the business of persuasion and conversion among his own kind, namely the Barbarians, took away from the personal powers that a solitary life endows. He said once that as a bishop he had much less 'power' than he had had as a monk: as a bishop he raised one man from the dead, as a monk two. Here was the kernel of the conflict---I mean the conflict inside one and the same man---that was more or less forgotten in the next thousand years of Christianisation for the outside conflict, that 'social operation'. In the eastern tradition there is a clear distinction between the 'householder' as he is called and the monk. The 'householder' has his special tasks, which if anything are more difficult than those of the monk because he is mixed up all the time in the frots of the world. But in Christianity nothing like the disciplines of self-purification to be found in Hinduism awaited the ordinary 'householder'. The Church, not to say the monasteries, became more and more institutions as time went on, and it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise, given the task---not of turning everyone into one of Christ's disciples, so to speak, but of producing a more or less presentable human being. The apparently mechnical nature of the whole thing---the fact that the monasteries got hold of people's manners, and evolved a quite new society, but necessarily without the deep universal conversion to spiritual awareness that all disciples hope for---was what made Luther and men like him do what they did many centuries later. Luther suddenly became anxious for his own soul---one can put it like that: he realised that in himself there was no unquestioning assumption that the Church could satisfactorily be left to look after its own. His action looks like a sudden panic measure to recapture the earlier ascetic model that had fallen out: that is, not the practices of self-mortification but the degree of concentration and purity.

St Augustine too, when he left Milan in 384 to travel other parts of Italy, preferred the cenobitic monastery to the solitary cell because of the work that had to be done. And the nature of this work was recognised in his monasteries which were centres not of conversion on the one hand and personal salvation on the other, nor of contemplation on the one hand and outside duties on the other, but of the active pursuit of ideas. Here the mediaeval monastery takes form, and it is easy to see how his writings dominated it. The ideas, the studies---these were the new form of a solitary

act for the Christian world, ~~the~~ a transmutation of the literary act of the Roman world into not only a new but a whole experience, involving not only the divine but the attempt to permeate the whole world with this divinity, through the writing and the thinking. Really and truly that was a new definition of literature, something far removed from what the ancient authors had been doing: we all know the sense in which literature to be real for us has to be 'committed', and how being called 'literary' is tantamount to being called artificial or irrelevant. The peculiar inter-involvement of writing and thinking and living, the construction of a society, ~~that came to be assumed under~~ the heading of literature, ~~after the monasteries had ceased to be virtually the government of life,~~ originated in the period we are talking about. In other words, Augustine is often called 'the first humanist', but that is a hare best avoided, since the title is given to so many, and begs further definition.

It is interesting that Augustine's first inkling of what his life would have to be came to him as a result of a certain disgust with himself as a 'merchant of words'. Therefore he belonged to the classical tradition: he was born in a Roman colony (Hippo). Virgil brought tears to his eyes. His job was to bring back the philosophy, and the writing, but as the arts of contemplation. His first monastery was a centre of contemplation, conversion, study and parochial duty all in one. And his type of monastery grew out of a series of discussions that took place first at Cassiciacum near Milan and then at Thagastus in Africa. The meals, especially at his establishment at Hippo, were filling. The monks could drink wine, and sometimes meat was eaten, as well as succulent dishes now and then sent over by the nuns. Sometimes there could be talk at the table. Like all other monasteries, his rather frowned on ablutions of any kind: the classical background---the association of the baths with scandalous behaviour---accounts for this close companionship, that can be traced right through the centuries, between filth and Christian feeling.

His City of God perhaps laid the basis of mediaeval life more consciously than any other writing. The two cities---the celestial city and the terrestrial city---are in fact not states of the body politic at all but of the soul: A Christian, for instance, could easily be of the terrestrial city while a heathen could be close to the celestial city. The actual political state, the real city, lay unsatisfactorily between the two, its peace necessarily uncertain and much like the restlessness of the soul. And the Church (with the Roman organisation of political life close behind it, prompting) took this to mean that she herself was the city celestial and the state the city terrestrial, which gave her the right of the terrestrial control of everything. It is difficult to see how that, too, could have been avoided, given the nature of the job in hand.

St Jerome, St Augustine's contemporary (he finished translating the Bible---in 385---the year before Augustine's conversion) had in one important way the same function as Augustine, and that was to take monasticism a further---one might almost say/sophisticated---step away from the desert traditions. His writings from Bethlehem gave a vivid picture of the last days of the Roman empire ~~in~~ and he is the one doctor of the Church who freely uses Roman history in his theological studies. He knew Virgil by heart. We have to remember that for men like him the future did not at all look as if it would contain, of all things, a Christian empire or even a Christian state. For one thing, few people could imagine the fall of Rome after six centuries of power. But more than that, a thought like the 'Christian empire' must have seemed a contradiction in terms. Measured against this idea, we can see what sort of change Augustine's work, particularly his City of God, brought about, by its association of Christian feeling with status quo. St Jerome had to fly from Bethlehem during a barbarian attack: to a scholar it must have seemed that the Gospel would have little to do with tempering their actions in the future. On the whole masses of people do not take to the ldvel of truth represented in the story of Christ: they tend to go for easier prizes. It was nothing short of a marvel. It altered the lives of the apparently most unsuitable people. St Jerome himself was to be found in the best Roman society at one time. He denounced marriage savagely, but had many friendships with women. Some of them turned their salons on the Aventine into places of medi&ation, much like monasteries, under his guidance. The doctrine worked in and out of life in the most extraordinarily fertile way which we are in danger of not seeing because the ground has been gone over so many times. St Jerome never mastered his own hatreds, and therefore never fulfilled the first and preliminary state before the act of meditation, according at least to the eastern tradition, namely a wave of good will towards all creatures. The battle was going on in him in other terms: he was grappling with the pagan in himself. He was brilliant and turbulent. He worked enough for ten men. He learned Hebrew simply in order to give the world a translation not from the Greek versions of the Bible, but from the original tongue: and he translated the Old Testament as well so that the Jews could not say that their Book was a mystery closed to the rest of mankind. Rome was a Babylon---a 'two-footed donkey'---for him. He ~~has~~/lavishly vivid descriptions of the women trying to look younger than they were, and of the clergy waving their hair. His attacks made life in Rome so hot for him that he had to leave. Not only this but his working life ~~was~~/the opposite of fulfilling the eastern injunction, 'never contend'. He contended with contending people. He knew the level on which they had to be addressed, and scolded. Thus it looks as if the needs of Christianity, to fill every available crack in life at that time, brought into being its own specialists

wrote/

did/

in every quarter.

At this time, towards the end of the fourth century, perhaps the most widely read monk, never sanctified, was Origen, one of the earlier (185-254) 'philosophers' of Egypt, master of the school of Alexandria and often called the most brilliant of the Greek Fathers of the Church. He and Tertullian (the Latin father) came in for a lot of reserve, and the general Church attitude seems to be one of gratitude but regret about the 'errors'. Pachomius once flung a piece by Origen into the water and said that he would have flung it into the fire had it not contained the name of God. Origen himself had reserves too, about the nature of some of the asceticism practised: he was in doubt about the idea of the stuff of life being by its nature polluted. He thought asceticism was right for discipline, but that the idea of condemning things 'innocent in themselves' was wrong. It will be clear that this ran into trouble with the Augustinian doctrine of original sin later, which won---as far as Church orthodoxy goes---over its opposite, the Pelagian doctrine, which no doubt derived a lot of benefit from the Origen writings. Origen was the first to organise Christian teaching into something like a system, so that a book of this kind must start talking about him very early. Jerome called him 'the master of the Church after the Apostles'. But when Origen was declared by a lot of people a heretic, Jerome promptly dropped him. And because his friend Rufinus refused to do this Jerome concentrated his always very fierce attacks on him, calling him among other things a hypocrite and a swine. One of the reasons why he was so quick to find heresy in himself was his sentivity about the very classical learning he loved: he once had a dream in which God told him that he was more a Ciceronian than a Christian. The doubts he had partly account for the terrific energy of his work. The former Greek version of the Bible that was studied everywhere---the work of Alexandrine Jews who had lost a lot of their Hebrew in exile---now took second place to his, venerated as it was. And of course in the Council of Trent in 1546 Jerome's was declared the official version. Yet he always talked longingly about the desert fathers (Life/Paul, Life of Malchus, Life of Hilarion). If there is an equivalent for him in the eastern traditions at all it would be the so-called karma yogi, whose discipline is work, whose self-purification is work: work as 'destiny' (karma).

The struggle between the Roman church and Arianism (I wish to keep clear of the words 'orthodox' and 'heretical') was really the struggle between the old empire and the newly converted Barbarians. Yet the Barbarian doctrine was a platonic interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, and held that only God was divine, and Christ half-divine (rather like the Sumerian god Golgemesh). It was condemned in the Council of Nicea (325), which made it clear that the

Roman doctrine of the Trinity, with its suggestion of three divine powers in one, was the more attractive one for people of imperial background rather than ~~a~~ tribal ~~one~~. I am in danger here of over-simplifying. But what I want to do is to keep that kind of argument, about three-in-one or just half-a-one, on the level it belongs to, namely sect-warfare. A lot of Christian bishops testified to the fact that some of the Vandals for instance showed more Christianity than their own people. And the doctrinal struggle was fought out in terms of power. When Augustine died (430) his native Africa was being colonised by the Vandals. St Fulgencius, one of Augustine's followers, was banished by them to Sardinia for his Roman views. And there he denounced their clergy for ignorance, their soldiers for brutality. By the time of his death (533) the imperial structure, based on the Byzantine world, which had temporarily got the upper hand and wrested Africa back from the Vandals, and pacified Italy, was apparently safe.

The imperial structure was in fact having a double and contradictory effect on the monasteries. Imperial protection made life in the monasteries safe, whether at Hippo or in the Campania, but at the same time it was defining monastic life as definitely exterior not only to administration, which was obvious, but to the Church. Here it is useful to hark back to the story of Priscillian. He was brought down by the gossip of two Spanish bishops (who were later found out and flung into a gaol in Naples, but after Priscillian's execution) and handed over to a tribunal of the empire. It was the first time the Church had failed to deal with one of its own quarrels, and it was the shape of things to come. Priscillian was tortured for heresy, a concept that of course increased precisely with that of orthodoxy, and sentenced (385). Now this meant not at all that the Church had become weak but that its quarrels were now important enough, its hierarchy public and influential enough, to be regarded as a state affair. That is what I mean by saying that the idea of heresy developed with that of orthodoxy.

Priscillian's followers---who continued to flourish long after his death, in fact for nearly two centuries--- were hunted down. The monks---notably Martin and Ambrose--- complained bitterly, and said that heresy should not be punished physically under any circumstances. The fact that the two bishops Ithacus and Hydacus were banished to a Neapolitan prison had---like all exonerations post mortem--- no effect on the precedent. The long birth of Christianity in the world was not a pretty business.

In Spain the Vandals were superseded by the Swabians and the Visigoths, 'federals' of the empire (no less a part of the empire than Rome) and Arian by persuasion. It was their conversion to Roman doctrine---undertaken by men like the monk (not the saint) Martin, who started a monastery at

increasingly systematic---to produce a society as self-sufficient as mediaeval society, not to mention the turbulent (but no longer distinctly barbarian or pagan) society that followed it. For a thousand years after the fall of Rome monasticism was the most important force in the Western world (in which I include what was once called the 'eastern' world, namely what became comprised in the Muslim and the Greek Orthodox faiths). So far from our society being the most 'secular' that has ever existed, it is based quite as squarely and minutely on religious argument as any other that has ever been. A book might very usefully clear up a lot of ignorance of nineteenth-century origin here.

There is the question of whether the asceticism that came very near to Greek athleticism in some of the first Egyptian solitaries was not already a departure from or a degeneration from eastern practice. Again and again in the Upanishads the idea is sounded that self-mortification is bad. The argument behind this is that the degree of pain is to the degree of the pleasure in life, and that a concentration on either the pleasure or the pain will have the same effect of missing the bliss---the best pleasure of all---that is beyond the pleasure-pain cycle. This is not the whole story. Asceticism has always been practised in India, and as exaggerated as that in the Thebaid desert. The Vedas had nothing to do with it---neither asceticism nor renunciation, and it looks as though these were already ~~prized to~~ practised by an Indian civilisation before the Aryan invasion of India that is said to have come about about two thousand years before Christ (the Vedas were the tradition of the Aryans). And the marriage of the two peoples produced Hinduism. That events and thoughts far away in India were not at all irrelevant to what happened in ancient Greece and Rome, much less in the Thebaid, is shown by the fact that the Vedic god of the sky, Dyaus, is clearly the same as the Greek Zeus and the Roman Jupiter, while the Mithra cult that became diffused in the Roman empire during the third and fourth centuries after Christ has its obvious root in the Hindu god Mitra, or sun god, ~~[illegible]~~, via the Persian empire.

Dorotheus of Thebes (Egypt) was asked why he was destroying the body so determinedly and he replied, 'Because it is destroying me'. He tried not to sleep. He never lay down. He rarely allowed himself even to sit in a relaxed position. Buddha on the other hand simply sat under a tree and concentrated, and swore that he would not leave his position until the body had been subdued. But Buddha was born in the sixth century before Christ, that is under the influence of the Upanishads and long after the Vedas and the first ascetic trials of the original Indian peoples. What I am saying is that when a religion is being tried for the first time, when its endowment of ecstasy is discovered by numbers of people who have grown up unaware of it and,

more, who have grown up in a society more or less closed to it, and when it is also discovered that this ecstasy is endowed in return for a certain self-denial, there is a terrific desire to leave the old body of ignorance behind, scorned and lashed, its old tendency to self-indulgence beaten out of it, and to prepare in onseself a wholly new psychology for generations of other people to inherit. I think this, above any other, is the reason for that extraordinary zeal in the first monks. Something was being done that had been done in India thousands of years before, perhaps many thousands of years before, to make Buddha's concentration (which means his influence on millions of people) possible without the slightest self-mortification. The ease and harmony that all forms of Yoga insist on, in fact, as the essential of concentration, are perhaps the lessons learned from thousands of years of intense psychological effort.

Some explanation of terms is always useful. Ascetic comes from the Greek for 'exercise', and implies no rigour in itself. Exercise is the basis too of much of the eastern tradition, whether it is the physical exercise of Hatha Yoga or the act of meditation itself. The great difficulty of Christianity was that it lacked any form of exercise, and there was the danger that liturgy and spoken prayer and reading aloud would take the place of real concentration. It is interesting, for example, that while we have the words ascetic and monk intact from the first Greek root, the word for meditation---haesychia---has disappeared, and we shall have to look at the problem of whether the tradition of meditation, firmly established in Hinduism and inherited by the desert fathers, did not at some point drop out, and where this point was, and why. Partly this will become clearer in the rest of this synopsis.

The stories of how the solitary creatures of the Thebaid lived peacefully with wild animals---the incidence of animals in the first story of St Antony visiting the cave of St Paul the Hermit---are in exact accordance with the stories of holy men in the east, before whom the wildest creatures are still. There are many stories from every epoch including our own of the sannyasin who stays a tiger or an elephant by remaining still. But the desert fathers were always struggling with devils, who took various shapes, ~~They tended to~~ acting under a commander-in-chief, the devil himself, ~~and~~ their objective ~~was~~ to bring as much fret and annoyance into the life of the monk as possible, besides the obvious function of tempting him to greed and fornication. This in the Hindu tradition---and here we see a close resemblance to the Platonic and Pythagorian doctrines---is simply nature with its coils of pleasure and pain. That is to say, left unbridled either outside or inside a man, nature will lead quite implacably to chaos. It will even be seen to work

Dumio in Spain (560) and converted the Swabian king Cacaric,--that produced a new kind of imperial patriotism, and the possibility of an imperial Christianity for the first time. The bishop of Seville converted the Visigoths (587). The conversion also involved the surrender of pagan habits, such as the sacrifice and the tacit acknowledgement of ancient gods in holidays and certain rituals. This new patriotism was still towards Rome, but no longer back-looking, to the ancient glories: it saw Rome as the Christian city. And the Visigoths and Swabians and the other federals were those who provided the backbone. In fact Martin's brother Idadore, who became bishop of Seville, wrote that the Gothic nation 'has raised you (Rome) up in the splendour of its power'. There is the seed of the Holy Roman Empire that would later have its seat in Frankfurt. Like those of the Moors later in the eighth century, the Barbarian attacks, the Barbarian savagery, in some way stimulated and homogenised Christian feeling, so much that they themselves, even in victory, capitulated to it.

The success of the Church---as against that of the monks--- was increasingly of a social nature. That point must be made. St Martin's biographer Sulpicius Severus made the point (in a manuscript that sped through Europe and the Byzantine world) that priests all too often preferred well-padded carriages to the donkey, marble halls to cells and extravagant robes to simple habits. The struggle against barbarism (namely a form of behaviour) was waged either in the form of a new society not unlike the Rome that was in decline, heavily inclining towards luxury and refinement, or else inside one and the same man, so that his very boorishness cried out to him to be transformed. There is no better example of the latter than St Martin, who had been a high-ranking cavalry officer in one of the federal armies before the famous episode of the cloak took place. The miracles credited to him by Severus (apart from Severus's own inclination to surround the saint with a certain barbarian glamour) were half of them gauche and crude in atmosphere. He once found a group of peasants apparently practising some heathen rite and decided with his divine magic to make them all so stiff that the most they could do was to twist round on their heels ridiculously like puppets. Then he realised it was a perfectly Christian burial, and quickly unstiffened them all. When the emperor refused to receive him he simply walked into the palace, presumably stiffening the guards too, and when Valentinian failed to rise from his throne Martin had it hotted up for a few moments to scorch his backside. Naturally the emperor jumped up with a yell.

The important thing here is the play of the barbarian imagination, still centred on revenge and the crude reduction of other people into archetypes, frightened or good or bad,

and good or bad according to whether they assented to your will or not. In the end one cannot doubt how it was that the Roman doctrine of the Trinity won over the Arian doctrine, despite the fact that the number of Arians outnumbered the Romans by far: there was everything for the barbarian to admire in the refinement both of mind and behaviour---the simple power of being able to grasp a situation in all its subtleties---which for good or for evil the Roman could command. Martin travelled everywhere denouncing pagan idol worship, which was officially forbidden by the imperial government at about this time, and his crudeness of delivery was the very thing that won hordes of peasants over to him. It is said that because of him alone certain roads in Gaul were littered with ascetics and processions. The later St Gregory of Tours (he died in 594) was quite as uncouth, and could hardly form a decent sentence. But he claimed (rightly) that while few people understood an orator many understood an uncouth creature like himself. This is the double action going on all the time---crude conversions, and refinement waiting to scoop the victory up.

During the fifth century perhaps the most fertile settlement in Europe was that formed at Lerins in Provence by Honoratius, and in its fertility (the fact that it drew people from Syria, Greece, Spain, Africa, Egypt and Italy) we can see the later society of the chansons, the seed of chivalry itself, from which St Francis drew in his laude, these first hymns of humanism. A kind of embryo Christendom quickly formed round Honoratius. The fact that his successor Hilary (later canonised) was summoned to Rome by pope Leo and flung into gaol for sacking the bishop of Besançon, shows to what extent by this time the bare structure of the Christian empire was beginning to show itself. By the time of St Francis, in the twelfth century, communication between Provence and Italy is easy and natural, since precisely the same order, spiritual and otherwise, permeates life in both places, and Latin has been accepted as the common Christian language.

All these roots have to be pointed forward to their later maturity. Although I see the book as not going beyond the Benedictine era, some looking forward to mediaeval practise will bring out the whole meaning. We are looking into how a civilisation (if we want to call Christendom that, and I myself would not be quite happy about doing so---but that will be one of the problems faced) came into being out of a religious experience: this I see as the whole character of the book.

There was another monastery in Provence, started at about the same time (415) in Marseilles by John Cassianus. Now Cassianus brought to Europe the clearest exposé of desert life, an eye-witness account which show a great fascination with the anchorites but an implicit rejection of them. He was first a monk in Bethlehem before going with his friend Germanus on a tour of Egypt. He spoke to many monks along

the Nile and wrote down what they said, though he did not go to the Thebaid desert itself. Then he settled in Marseilles and died there in 433. His Conferences became the classic basis for conventual life, more than St Athanasius's Life of St Antony. His authority was very great---he had travelled among the desert monks not only of the Nile but of Syria and Palestine and Mesopatamia for twenty years: he left the desert at the time when there was fierce controversy over the writings of Origen, and the whole question of solitary asceticism was in question. He did perhaps more against it than any single man. And apart from that his Conferences and Institutions were an interesting development in themselves, quite apart from the fact that they presented to the Roman world for the first time a compact account of the articulate wisdom of the desert: the point is that this early religious life is being articulated in a written form at all, and the future market in manuscripts so to speak (requiring supplies of papyrus brought from Egypt by Syrian merchants), not to mention the later acceleration of the hand-to-hand manuscript into the compact and more easily marketably form of the book, that in turn required supplies of paper and the first printing presses, seem to originate in Cassianus's epoch. Cassianus's act alone in itself was important and decisive. If Marshall McLuhan were writing this book (I mean this seriously) he would no doubt make this his focal point, leading events forward and back towards it. The whole literalisation of the religious experience, which is one of the most striking developments of Christianity, quite unparalleled in any other form of society, seems to show a first clear beginning towards the end of the fourth century with the work of Jerome, Augustine and Cassianus. Cassianus was a Barbarian by origin, a Scythian from Dobrudja. It will be noticed that none of the three men I have mentioned are actually Romans. But the classical influence is clear, and perhaps it was all the stronger in these men because it represented a glimpse of a civilisation that was not only far from the world they lived in but far from themselves too. I tentatively offer the suggestion that the Augustinian doctrine of original sin had much to commend it---with its hint of an indelible shame and also punitive action---to barbarians. And that this went with a certain intellectualisation of the religion may not seem strange. The intellect is the most shared faculty, in that it alone can cut through tribal differences. This intellectualisation became more and more evident, until we reach the Schools of the middle ages. It reached perhaps its climax in St Thomas Aquinas. The existence of God is reasoned. It is a major departure from the first very markedly eastern traditions followed in the desert, which made no bones about God being a concept accessible to reason, or indeed a concept at all, but an experience to be had then and there. In the eastern tradition God can be none other than experience, and all exercises, written or otherwise, articulate or otherwise, are nothing but methods to capture this experience. Thus the Upanishads offer the advice that

in the end they themselves have to be thrown away. The mind, far from being stimulated to reason with itself, is asked to become still. Reason is not seen as a guide: only when it is stilled can it be seen to be the function it really is---the instrument of something beyond it and something infinitely stronger. And in some it is never stilled: this was the vast danger that Christianity ran into, that the religious experience would finally be made impossible by the weight of intellectuality. No one could say that the religious experience---as a ready faculty available to people almost by inheritance---survived that.

All the loud argument that surrounded Pelagianism too showed the same tendency to strain away from the first desert experience to a formula that could be seized upon easily by the mind, which had before it, after all, the urgent job of creating a society out of a dozen different races and languages and traditions ranging from the primitive to the over-refined. Pelagius, a Breton or Englishman, and a contemporary of Cassianus, laid it down that a man could attain by exercises to a state where he was virtually incapable of sinning. He could do it by his own effort. It depended on his will. This had a long and deep influence in Britain, right up to the time of Augustine of Canterbury's arrival as an emissary of Gregory the Great. The doctrine was the purest distillation of eastern doctrine, in its emphasis on the will and therefore freedom. The notions of brahman and atman, namely God that pervades everything and God that is the essence of the man, reducible to the same thing (Chandogya Upanishad VI 12-13), are surely there somewhere. The whole idea, too, of unveiling the light inside by an act of will is implicit. And the whole Hindu attitude to sin, as a basically extraneous symptom of conflict in the journey towards the divine, and without inherent existence, as little as the body itself, and belonging to the body and not the true self, seems to have found its way into the Pelagian doctrine. And of course the Augustinian doctrine of original sin is quite foreign to its serene acceptance of all life as an expression of God alone. Such an idea was one of utmost blasphemy for what one might call the African school.

Yet at the same time the Upanishad theme that 'all paths lead to God' makes itself felt in the fact that even ~~Pegianism~~ Pelagianism and Augstinianism can be reconciled, once it is seen that 'predestined by God's will' is precisely the meaning of free will, if God is the seat of self, is the self in purest essence. Or rather, Pelagius and Augustine could no doubt have been reconciled, had it not been for the struggle going on about them, which made little of the religious experience in itself, compared to what I have called the social operation.

Unlike in the east, where such ideas (that is dualism against non-dualism) have been discussed for thousands of years, and caused divisions for thousands of years, in the

west they were turned into a state affair, where the politics of the Church required a dogma that could be spelled out to everyone, entailing torture or death in the case of its denial. It is impossible not to recognise the heavy Barbarian hand here.

Augustine waged war on Pelagius politely, and recognised the sincerity and even devoutness of Pelagius and his followers. Jerome waged war on him, as he did on everyone, rudely. And in 417 Pelagius was condemned. 'Original sin' was accepted, and the 'error' was rejected. It is easy to see why, if affairs were like this in the fifth century, at the virgin dawn of Christian feeling, the history of Christianity should have been one of endless bitter invective, involving burnings and the use of the most subtle instruments of torture, and witch-hunting, and the persecution of intelligence, and Church-endorsed pillagings (the Crusades), not to say the long religious wars themselves.

And yet it cannot be explained in terms of the doctrine itself, certainly not in terms of the doctrine of original sin in St Augustine's writings. Something like the same idea has its place in eastern teaching: maya binds us in space and time from earliest childhood, and only the exercise of the will may unloose its coils. What is absent from the eastern idea is the over-rational zeal of the Christian theologians, with its sideways look at the organisation of life, at the terms of power. St Augustine said when Pelagius was condemned, 'The case is over. May the error also be over,' as if a battle was under discussion. Again we cannot afford to underestimate the atmosphere of fear in which the first Christian feeling grew up. It looks as if even the great men could not afford to recognise any idea not strictly in accordance with their own experience, in case their experience was invalidated. There is something distinctly pre-civilised in the tone of Augustine's remark. This atmosphere of restless and suspicious fear, producing a reluctance to discuss, and a tendency to build a massive library of doctrine and commentary, almost as if to persuade us that one man alone could never get to the bottom of it, never really left the Church. Yet it has to be shown also that the kind of social operation that had to be put through required centuries of vigilance supported by a strong arm. The nature of the social operation can be put simply: it was the christianisation of slaves and brutes. And to my mind---I am not asking for disciples---this process has not so much as reached its half-way mark. It is interesting in this context that whatever else may be said about the Church, when it got real control of Italy in the sixteenth century, the nightmare of endless war between villages and towns ceased under its sleepy hand.

Some mention will have to be made of the passion for relics which was alive as early as the fifth century, and seems to have escaped the Church as a perfect example of the continuation of pagan idol-worship. St Radegund of Gaul

(she died in 587) shared this passion. Her ancestors had fought under Attila the Hun. But, more than a survival of old habits, relic-hunting was a symptom of the anxiety and insecurity in which the first doctrines of Christianity were conceived: people felt the need to have something in the hand at the end of a pilgrimage, tactile evidence of an experience of the divine which they may have felt none too sure of in themselves, with belief in the visible and the visible alone almost written in their blood. St Radegund sent to the emperor Julian in Constantinople for a piece of the true cross, and actually got it. She had it brought to her monastery in Poitiers. And she even persuaded king Sigisbut to instal a new bishop, because the old one refused to be present at the ceremony. And Barbarian ineptitudes of this kind tend to increase, not diminish, as the power of the Church increases. And they were not entirely ineptitudes, given the yearning for a sign, which ~~[illegible]~~ bedevilled even Christ's disciples. They were a frailty indulged to the point of a roaring tribal market.

Once we have read the horror-stories of how the Merovingians or Frankish kings (and their Christian priests) lived, in the History of the Franks by St Gregory of Tours, we shall know quite enough about the kind of temperament Christianity had to deal with, the kind of soul it so successfully and astonishingly entered not only in spite of but by means of the cruelty and bestial insentience to everything but the appetite felt at the moment. It even begins to look as if Christ came into being when he did to prevent a race of monsters engulfing the whole world. His influence was just ripe enough when the barbarian invasions were at their height; and it was established by the time Barbarian rule was.

At some point in describing this long and painful social operation (mostly called the Dark Ages by historians in the dark as to what was going on) we shall have to ask whether the idea of punishment is not absolutely foreign to a religion. The smallest glance at the Upanishads or the Bhagavad Gita may convince us that it is. What I am saying is that perhaps in these fearful tales of hell, these sometimes artful and sometimes ecstatic promises of heaven (I am not referring to the desert fathers, much less to the martyrs), and in the concepts of heaven and hell themselves, there is the old Barbarian insistence on revenge and punishment, taken up and resolved into something like an imitation of spiritual terms. The child-like repetition of Hail Maries as a punishment (or, to dress it up, a penance) for a kiss, a thought in the dark or a burst of anger may have a lot to do with the social operation but as little as possible with religion. And this is not an attack on the Hail Maries, which achieved miracles of change: it is simply a description of the process by which the Barbarian

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imagination, with its need to punish and its corresponding need to be punished, required a certain type of conversion, and how this shaped the form of the religion, until the whole question of the religion itself (namely the experience of the divine) was lost and, by the sixteenth century, nationalism and the development of vernaculars had killed Latin, and nothing Charles V or Philip II could do could hold any kind of spiritual commonwealth together. The Church, I am saying, served its term, in the form it had: and the term was limited because it belonged to a definite function which turned out to be, paradoxically enough, not even primarily religious in scope, except in the very long run.

Fifth-century Christendom was as complicated as possible. Not only were the Barbarians divided from Rome, but there was the schism between Byzantium and Rome that lasted thirty years or more. The actual Roman people were divided between the Arian king Theodoric the Ostrogoth (who succeeded Odoacer, who had deposed Rome's last 'little emperor' Marcellinus in 476) and the emperor in Constantinople. The emperor Julian virtually outlawed the Arians in Constantinople and closed their churches. Barbarian troops serving under Byzantine officers tried to wrest Italy back from the Barbarians, in a war that went on up and down the peninsula for twenty years or more, producing carnage and famine. Which brings us to the fact that life in Rome and Constantinople has to be described, not only to give the two poles of the embryo Christian empire, so to speak, but to point up the disgust the monk felt when he left them, or heard about them, and his sense that the world as it was could not be relied on to receive Christianity without special efforts of meditation and prayer on his part. He was affected by decisions taken in these capitals, and by the constant shifts of power. Rome veered between luxury and over-refinement on the one hand and the surrender of civil life (as at the end of Theodoric's reign) to pillage and murder by factions on the other. We must of course picture a Rome that as yet had none of those squat, self-concentrated buildings with slits for windows that came about in the middle ages. It was still ancient Rome, tall and marbled and full of vistas, and crumbling to pieces. And Constantinople was the ancient Greek colony of Byzantium: when people went to school they learned in the classical manner. Rhetoric was still the mark of a man's mind. Anything that could be called a Christian literature was only being begun, and did not in any case include a method of teaching mathematics or logic. Theodoric was surrounded by learned (and of course Christian, often Catholic) Romans, who hoped through him to save what they could of Italy: men like Boethius, Cassiodorus.
It is clear that conversion to Christianity in the cities was very much an act of assent towards the new administration. But it is not so clear that the force behind these conversions,

however slight or expedient some of them may have been, was the work of the desert fathers, who are often described as selfish because they looked after their own salvation and no one else's: but this was precisely the power of their influence, as it radiated through the 'western' and 'eastern' Churches, that they never expressed themselves in power terms, but developed the experience itself to where it could be carried from person to person and even articulated. This is difficult to convey---we have the nineteenth century with its enthronement of the idea that something must always be done close behind us---but it is the kernel of the book.

By the time we reach St Benedict's third and most successful experiment on Monte Cassino (529) it looks as if the desert experience has been distilled to a safe community form, compared to which even the previous cenobitic or lauriac forms of monastery are made to look solitary and ascetic. It would be easy to say so. But the desert fathers had quite different problems before them than monks four or five centuries later, at a time when the empire was occupied by Barbarians, and when the monks themselves were invariably Barbarians. The desert fathers abandoned cities which were firmly flourishing or firmly decaying. But the Italian countryside at the time of Benedict was very much as parts of it are at this moment---abandoned, the olive trees and the vines 'gone wild', and vipers in the ascendancy. The human creature was in a similar sense abandoned too: he was not a formed and thinking being like those men of an earlier empire, who spoke Greek or Coptic or Syriac; he had nothing like a background of 'philosophy' like the desert fathers, however ignorant they might have been, however much like St Antony, innocent of any reading. When one of Benedict's monks was seen to be always fidgetting in church he was taken outside and given a good beating, and a 'little black boy' was seen to run out from under his habit, and after that he was all right. That was the level of belief and perception among the men Benedict was training for Christianity. Such a training could never have been in terms of the simple exercise of meditation, given the kind of Barbarian psychology that had to be slowly and patiently unravelled. Benedict's way was not, for that reason, the hard way. He had tried the hard way in youth---and his monks had tried to poison him. At Cassino he was mellowed and tolerant. He asked not for silence at meals but at least 'the spirit of silence'. He was, as superior, the father of a family. And here lay perhaps his greatest single contribution: the family was to be the new affiliation, but under a father as much like Christ as possible, no longer the absolute, power-hungry father of either the pagan or the barbarian worlds. He kept a loose rein on the monks, and whatever punishment he exacted was always understood to be in the nature of a medical cure---some weakness had to be driven out. He allowed his monks nine hours sleep in the winter---an extraordinary

number for the monastic ~~mmmmm~~ world. But he calculated that people were easier to live with---that the family would be more harmonious---if ~~people~~ got plenty of sleep. In the summer there were five hours sleep and a siesta in the afternoon. He had the monks working in the fields, reclaiming the land. He drew outsiders to the family---there was a special lodging house for visitors. The act of meditation in the desert---the haesychia---now became reading aloud or ruminatio ('chewing over' a book), and this crude and primitive version became common practise in the mediaeval monasteries. That was how the Barbarian child, so to speak, learned---he had to say the words over and over again, and this gradually set up a sense of schedule in his mind; and there is nothing better for controlling wild appetites than a regular schedule. It is not at all an accident that our sense of time, out of which the clock grew, ticking out the moments regularly and mechanically, was born in the mediaeval monastery.

The potential monster not only had to be disciplined, he had to be treated with respect too: that is, he had to learn respect. He had to learn---far from acts of self-mortification---how to treat his own body with respect. This is emphasised in the Benedictine Rule. The vengeance enacted by the desert fathers on their own bodies was simply not understood in the Barbarisn context. The mind had to be taken off all kinds of bloodshed and mortification, even if it meant being accused---and the Benedictines were and always have been---of 'luxury'. The monks had two habits, one for winter and one for summer. They had a mug of wine with their meals, although Benedict himself felt that wine was unsuitable for the monk. And their relationships among themselves were emphasised: people bent on self-mortification simply could not have made the kind of meditating family that Benedict had in mind. Thus while the first desert experience was distilled something from even further east was retrieved---namely, the idea that the degradation of the body is nothing more nor less than the degradation of God's careful work. A steady self-denial took its place. The monastic tradition of vegetarianism was kept; like the peasants round them, the monks would have felt the lack of wine more than that of meat.

Benedict required of himself a quite different performance. He was nearly fifty when he started the Cassino monastery, and had practised forms of asceticism since at least the age of twenty, when he had turned away from the temptations of Roman life. And from his earliest years he had an extraordinary influence on people. Mothers brought their children to him to be educated. At one time he had had to leave a community of ascetics near Rome because something happened---the story is a vague one, but probably involves something miraculous---which threatened to make him proud: he had to get away from the admiration of the others. That is, some sign of unusual spiritual power made the others turn

to him with awe, and perhaps it was his own first inkling of it too. He had what among the Hindus has always been a distinguishing mark of the genuine yogi, namely the ability to divine the life-story of anyone standing before him, however much a stranger. And this ability was what made people offer their lives to Benedict again and again: and the monastery he made was by reason of this ability a kind of stable for Barbarians, just because he knew the subtlest needs of each of his men. One of the qualities he tried to cultivate---and that least to be found in the Barbarian or even the pagan psychology---was pudore, which is not exactly shame or exactly modesty but something in between and of the nature of self-examination. He once said---apparently perfectly conscious of the social operation going on---that all he was out to achieve was a change in behaviour. He wanted to make people honest---and that word carries a sense not only of its modern meaning of sincerity but the more ancient one of integrity. He has been called the inventor of Christian civilisation because his home---as Cassino was for its monks---represented a rescue from the darkness and uncertainty all round it, in the Roman countryside, not to say Rome itself. Monasteries like his began to proliferate in every part of Europe: they did the same work, reclaiming abandoned lands, so that the actual appearance of the monastery and the fields round it would be a mirror of what was going on inside the cells. It was Benedict who again turned Europe, certainly Italy, into a garden, after the pioneering work of Ancient Rome.

Forty years after he started the Cassino settlement, and twenty-one years after his death, there was a fresh wave of Barbarian invasions into Italy, after it had become to seem that some form of life might be possible under the Byzantines. These new Barbarians were the Lombards. Few of them were Christians. In a short time they secured for themselves an unprecedented reputation for heartlessness and bloodlust. They established themselves in two capitals, Spoleto and Benevento, and hoped to dislodge the Byzantines completely: wherever they found them in positions of power they threw them out. But again the story is that no army more effective than Christian feeling was ever found to work against them. They destroyed Monte Cassino (577) but built it up again after they had been converted nearly a century later. Thus wave after wave of Barbarians, intent only on extending terror of themselves as an end in itself, and laying claim to as much property as possible, were drawn into the Church with its gospel of the denial of terror and the denial of property. And this particular seventh-century operation has much to do with the single effort of Benedict.

Gregory the Great, the first pope in anything like a modern sense, namely handling a western Church and an impressive wealth (lands in Sicily, Africa, Corsica, Dalmatia, Gaul and Sardinia) to persuade and cajole and

sometimes plainly bribe was the means by which this was possible. He was a monk, and a Benedictine monk. He followed Benedict's injunction to govern with firmness and compassion combined, always with an eye to what people could be expected to do. Every aspect of the Church--- the smallest details of its property---interested him. He built it---paradoxically, given the monastic tone of his ideas---for the first time into a recognisable state, a political and social body capable of purveying a law all its own. And this was done during one of the most terrible invasions and occupations Italy had ever had. It was made possible by the fact that when the Lombards began to ravage the country the Benedictine experience was formed, an example of the best behaviour. 'The art of all arts,' Gregory said, 'is governing souls'.

He became pope in 590, the first monk in that place, and the Lombards were just establishing themselves. What he did was to use them as his means of establishing a Church independent of Byzantium, whose help had necessarily become a cipher, since its troops were everywhere being mopped up. He began to make do without Constantinople for the first time. Gradually he pushed ~~thexidea~~ into the past the idea that the pope was simply bishop of Rome and of only provincial importance. He re-established Rome, as a capital not of something glorious and dead but of an organism the like of which no one, least of all the Barbarians, had seen before, namely an empire held together not by armies but by an at least nominal religious assent.

Five years later he sent Augustine, the superior of St Andrew's monastery in Rome, to Britain on a missionary enterprise. The ancient Romans had never penetrated as far as Ireland. Caesar had raided Britain in 55 BC, and then Claudius and Agricola had reconquered it between 43 and 85 AD. In Italy it was thought of as the land of fog and magic (or monsters). Augustine was so terrified by the stories he heard of it at the Lérins monastery in Provence that he turned back and had to be given new courage by Gregory, who told him that the stories were simply not true. In fact, Christian settlements had begun to appear in Britain from the beginning of the fourth century. The Roman roads of course provided missionaries (native ones) with their means of travel; and the Roman cities seem to have given people that glimpse of civil behaviour which was always useful in the matter of quick conversion. Across the water in Ireland the fog was thicker, and so was the magic. Patrick (born at Daventry in 389) had a great struggle with the Druids. Some of the stories make farcical reading. Patrick was a fighting monk, and the fact that his story was written centuries after his death may account for the farcical element. At least, some struggle went on between Christians with their magic and the Druids with theirs. In a rationalist or would-be

rationalist epoch like ours it is difficult to evoke quite the atmosphere it must have had, that struggle: where the two sides bring an enormous concentration to bear on the other's rout and failure. They had 'tests'--- competed with each other. Perhaps Voodoo is the nearest equivalent we have in the world today. The Druidical background is quite different from the Barbarian one, and not only Patrick but St Columba of Iona and St Brendan (both sixth century) are quite distinct, to judge from the stories told about them, from the 'Roman' or desert saints. The Druidical struggle perhaps accounts for the hardness and rigidity, above all the exclusive isolation of Celtic monachism when it developed. St Brendan and his disciples had a gryphon fly over their boat, as big as an ox and with the beak and claws of an eagle. They moored up on a tiny island that appeared to be covered not with rocks or moss but skin, and only discovered when they lit a fire and the skin began to twitch that it was a huge fish. St Columba had his famous fight with the abbot of Moville monastery, his former teacher, for a psalter of priceless worth that had been brought all the way from Rome. He managed to get to the cell where the psalter lay, and a monk was sent to spy on him. Columba had no candle to read the manuscript by, but light poured out of all his fingers. God endowed his Irish saints with magic equal to that of the Druids. In the pitched battle outside the monastery for possession of the ~~xxxxx~~ psalter (the saint overlooked that it wasn't his) there were three thousand dead on the abbot's and---because of God's support---only one on Columba's, and that was because the silly chap disobeyed orders. Something of this atmosphere persists even in the story of St Columban (born about 540), though his work was consistently practical, and he set up monasteries on the continent which were the closest rivals to Benedictine models/that existed. He was appalled by the state of affairs in Gaul, when he travelled through it. The ancient society had all but disappeared, under the Frankish occupation. He saw that while there was a certain element of Christian awareness in the cities, the countryside was barren of it, a desert of pagan and Barbarian superstitions. Like St Benedict he saw his work as an approach to behaviour. Like most other monasteries his had penitential lists--- to deal with murder, fornication, drunkenness, greed; one of the punishments was to be shut up with a corpse for a number of nights. They were harder than those of the Benedictine Rule to the degree to which the populations they were designed to handle were harder. While in the Campania the Roman background was more or less intact, in Gaul it was a matter of the past. The Columban ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ monasteries were really agricultural settlements, reclaiming the land, and their influence in Gaul was great because---as the Frankish kings saw---their discipline was in healthy contrast to the laxity all round them. Columban first set himself up in Burgundy, at Luxeuil: he was banished eventually for differences with the local bishops, whose permission he was careful never to ask for anything. He went down to Italy and est-

ablished a monastery at St Gall on the way, and another at Bobbio near the Po. It is worthwhile pointing out here that Britain and Ireland exercised in these years a certain preserving effect on the Latin tongue, simply by being cut off from the continent (where it was languishing under Barbarian occupation) and keeping it as a dead language, with the awe due to dead languages. It was also alive to the extent of being the only way of communicating with Rome. It was this that made Gregory hopeful of bringing the Britons and eventually the Celts under Rome.

In 407 the Romans had withdrawn from Britain, leaving the country open to Barbarians---Saxons, Jutes, Angles, who were now free to settle there. The Britons proper were pushed to the west---Cornwall and Wales---and some contact was made with the Irish monasteries. By the time Augustine, Gregory's emissary, arrived (on the Isle of Thanet in the Thames) there was something like stability. The king of Kent, Ethelbert, was converted, though this did not mean the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon people. A monastery was established at Canterbury, and the Roman liturgy was cleverly adapted to local expectations. The Anglo-Saxon temples were taken over. It was done in that blandly tolerant but firm way that only Rome knew how to command. In 617 the monks went north as far as Northumberland. And they went to Ireland, where they faced a people nurtured by isolation to an obstinacy and determination they could hardly have expected after their British experience. They came to the Celts to establish among other things the Roman calendar as far as Easter was concerned (this difference of date was one of the reasons why Columban was banished from Burgundy) and the Roman liturgy of the baptism, as well as the Roman way of consecrating bishops. And the tonsure by which Celtic monks were everywhere recognised---a half-crescent band of hair at the front of the head---would have to go for the accepted complete tonsure favoured by Rome and called 'St Paul's', or at least the tonsure of the crown, called 'St Peter's'.

Augustine met a group of Irish priests at Bristol and tried to persuade them to help Christianise the Anglo-Saxons. And with real Roman astuteness he suggested a kind of test of faith between them, showing that he understood the Druidical background thoroughly: they were to try to give a blind man sight. Augustine won. On the other hand, he failed on diplomacy. Some Irish bishops asked a wise man, an abbott, whether they should submit to his proposals, and were told that they should do so only if he rose to meet them when they arrived for the conference. He did not---a hint that Rome looked on its leadership of the Church with some of the arrogance of the ancient empire. As a result the Romans became, literally, 'untouchables' for the Celts---they would not touch any utensil or food that the Romans had used. But gradually the appeal to them to convert others became stronger than their insularity, and the Celts began to join

in the work on the mainland. In fact a monk from Iona, St Aidan, set up a monastery in the northern part of Northumberland (635)---Lindisfarne or Holy Island. And it was the abbot of Lindisfarne, Colman, who retired into silence when the Romans---using a crude argumentum ad hominem suitable to the crude mind of the men they were trying to convert to their liturgy---persuaded King Oswin to go over to their side.

Now this whole story is really one of the spread of Benedictinism, not simply because of Gregory's decision to unify the Celtic and Roman churches at all costs, but because the missionaries themselves were Benedictine monks, who made it their business to understand the kind of minds they were dealing with, and to appeal to them in their own terms. Illuminated manuscripts, libraries came with this influence. Even the Columban establishments gave way to the Benedictine Rule eventually. It was, as Pirenne says, 'a masterpiece of tact, reason and method'. Perhaps not paradoxically, the first universal monastic Rule in the western territories of the Roman empire produced the first suggestion that Rome---the new, the Christian Rome---was a power again, a sovereign state, even an empire. Further than this, it might be that the success of Benedictinism brought about a universal intellectualisation of Christian feeling which made the printed book centuries later a necessity, for the simple reason that a method of intellectual control was the surest way of mastering the Barbarian nature. The reading eye renders the life it reads about cool, detached; and the intellect, especially when developed excessively, tends to freeze the other faculties into inaction.

St Benedict and the success of Benedictinism would alone of themselves round off an epoch that begins with the desert fathers and ends with the establishment of a western (and therefore 'eastern') church, were it not for the fact that something far more devastating, far less expected rounded it off by cutting it off: namely, Islam. Mohammed died in 632. He called into action---in a sense called into being---the Arab race. They had simply not been noticed before. They now disrupted the Persian empire (637-644). Syria, Egypt, Africa and Spain went the same way. The Mediterranean world was cut in half for the first time. I have used the word 'eastern' to mean mostly India, China. But before Islam the Mediterranean world had its own east and west---the east of course being Constantinople, Egypt, Palestine, Syria. It had denoted the Hellenised areas. Now these areas were stripped of their Hellenic past. The African provinces lost their Roman background. Now they all came under Baghdad. The implication for the Church of Rome was obvious. While the patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria had regarded the pope simply as an equal, it was now clear that Rome alone could

be responsible for Christianity in the non-Islamic part of the Mediterranean and in Europe, even apart from Gregory the Great's clever use of the monasteries to bring about a vestige of unity, for the first time, based on Roman usages.

One might call Islam the second eruption in the desert after the Fathers. There was clearly an astonishing ferment stemming from the Mediterranean area, and we cannot overlook the fact that the roots of Islam might have been precisely those, in the furthest and deepest sense, of Judah and Christianity. The sense of the world being through and through polluted, of the human being suffering this pollution until he got divine assistance, which accounts for much of the early Christian asceticism, is clearly the basis of Islamic fervour too---and of the breathtaking sweep of its onslaught, the unhesitating unity of its soldiers, theecstatic heartlessness with which they murdered. And this had much to do with producing an answering Holy murder centuries later, organised this time by the Burgundians and the Venetians, in the first Crusade.

From the æventh century to the eleventh century (when the mediaeval form of monastery, and mediaeval life, were æstablished) Islam was the master of the Mediterranean: all the trade between the Straits of Gibraltar and the Indian Ocean was theirs, while the Christian world of the west lay closed in on itself, as if destiny had decided to force unity on it by means of a universally felt outside threat which even divided barbarians could share, and with it a concentration on ideas necessary for a wholly new society. And my book will have to describe those ideas onn which they concentrated at that time, during their long incubation from the first century onwards. We shall be able to see what an astonishing achievement mediaeval society was, and how a light was poured on to it---far from darkness---from the first centuries of Christianity.

This does not mean to say that THE BATTLE OF THE MONKS will be a discussion of ideas (the Alexandrian school, Nestorianism, original sin etc) current at the time, but a dramatic narrative of events that will take these ideas up as part of the story, not as a separable intellectual activity. No ideas between the first and the eighth centuries were that. The battle of the monks was fierce and prolonged, and on all fronts.

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Monks

Note that this is the age of Yugavatara
— vice at its height. Note the
two ages, beginning & the Golden Age.

Note that Sri Ramakrishna said
all God being everything — the executioner,
the ~~block~~ victim and the block.

MONKS AND ALEXANDRIA

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In the 4th monasticism spread to Syria (the 'pillar hermits'), Persia, Babylonia, Arabia. It waned after 500 in Egypt.

Eustathius of Sebaste was the first to introduce Greek monasticism ~~to Asia Minor~~ (340), who went to Rome and spread it in Italy, from there it went to Gaul and North Africa.

SV Benedict (Cassino) perfected the European model.
See
E. C. Butler = Benedictine Monachism.

F. A. Gasquet = Sketch of Monastic Constitutional History.

He introduced the corporate idea — the monk sunk in the community. He also emphasised work: for the first time there was more work than public devotion. (One could compare Pachomian with Benedictine monasticism).

Benedictine style governed western monasticism with the exception of the Irish or Celtic, which was close to the Egyptian model. The Irish rule of St Columbanus and the Roman rule of St Benedict met in monasteries founded by Irish monks in Central Europe. The Benedictine supplanted the Irish rule to completely that it was adopted even in Columbanus' own monastery of LUXEUIL. Traces of the rules survived in Spain, by Charlemagne's time, but Benedictine influence had civilised the Teutonic races.

The first Order was all Clergy. The Benedictines had never been an order, only individual monasteries. When orders came in (10th) it was considered the perfection of the Cistercians who came in to revive St Benedict's rule to the letter.

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Apophthegms

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[?A nun called Egeria or Silvia or Etheria described her journeys to the monasteries in the middle east for her female Spanish sisters.]

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and Sermons and City of God

~~St~~

Sulpicius Severus – Life of St Martin.

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The Letters of Pope Gregory, and his Dialogues

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Monks and Civilisation by Jean Décarreaux (avoid this for the work except for good description of the decline of Roman life at the beginning)

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Christian Monasticism by Hannah (very bad)

The Early Monastic Schools of Ireland by W. G. Hanson, 1927. (Heffer).

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Use Gibbon's, Fall of the Roman Fall

Also see Lucretius The Nature of the Universe (Case Compendium Penguin)

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MONKS

On the subject of Augustine – Pelagian row, look into the result of the idea ~~that~~ of original sin, —— Donne =

I sing the progress of a deathless soule,
Whom Fate, which God made, but doth not controule ...

(Progress of the Soule – I lines 1–2.)

This absurdity in the end drives out God as the complete presence. It really is an intellectual version. How could the creation – a cultural process – be divided between two powers (except intellectually) The 'creation' itself = seen as a static, intellectual affair.

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THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MONKS
(AD 250-650)

MAURICE ROWDON

Introduction

Something like an infection began to grip the ancient world about the time of Christ. This was a desire for absolute renunciation. Even the Jews--who had never had monks or advocated the solitary ideal---had developed two sects of recluses, the Essenes near the Dead Sea and the Therapeutae near Alexandria. In fact, Christ seems to have emerged from and expressed this new need, rather than provoked it. Both the Greek and the Egyptian worlds had known something of the solitary ideal---the belief that perfection was only achieved by prolonged solitude. Both worlds had had their ascetics and hermits, their holy men who went from place to place. But after Christ the need seemed to quicken, until it became a movement that spread through the Roman empire. It started as far as we know in the Egyptian desert, with lone men who retreated into solitude for years on end. But there is evidence of Christian hermits settling near the Dead Sea in caves during the second century after Christ, so that some form of monastic tradition may have bridged the years between the crucifixion and the first known settlements in the Egyptian desert around 250. Paul and Antony, the first two famous monks, both of them Egyptians, begin the story precisely because of their fame: it was their influence on other men, first on other Egyptians and then on people as far away as Rome and Constantinople, that turned the solitary need into a great movement, and brought the words 'monk' and 'monastery' into the Greek vocabulary for the first time. It was this influence, beginning from the utmost solitude, that spread with remarkable speed throughout Egypt and Greece and Israel until it had laid hold of the whole Roman empire, and led in the end, through many stages and changes, to the highly developed Benedictine monastery of the sixth century, where solitude had become a communal thing. Much had been lost by this time of the original concentration achieved by those first men in the

ALEXANDRIA (3)

desert---Antony and Pachomius and Amoun---but then a new order had been created out of the ruins of the Greek and Roman empires which stretched from Ireland to Kiev and included much of the Balkans and the Mediterranean lands, in which the monastery was the essential organ.

1. Antony the Great (AD 251-356), a hermit of the Egyptian desert, was the first great monk of Christianity. Paul of Thebes (?-341) may have preceded him in the same area close to the Red Sea at the time of the Decian persecutions in AD 251. The custom of retreating into the 'desert' or deserted countryside behind Alexandria seems to have begun at this time among a number of men. There had always been 'philosophers' in the Greek world who had wandered from place to place: today we would call them holy men. They were ascetics: the Greek word 'askeo' meant simply exercise, and implied a rigorous course of self-training. In Christian times this tradition was kept by men---usually old---who lived in villages but kept solitary habits and received devotees. Paul and Antony certainly learned the Scriptures from these men, and the way to fast, meditate and pray. Antony like all the other ascetics worked with his hands, in or near Alexandria---rope- or mat-making. He 'trained' himself before retiring into the desert, shutting himself in a tomb for long periods in order to defeat fear and doubt (called 'demons' in the records of the early fathers). He was 35 when he went to live in an abandoned fort between the Nile and the Red Sea. He stayed there for twenty years (his 'father', the ascetic who had taught him everything, refused to follow him). 'Bread' (probably sacks of grain) was brought to him twice a year, and for the rest he grew his own food. At all stages of monasticism a vegetarian diet was considered the basis of physical purity, and meat and wine stimulants of desire (we find this in the pre-Christian sects too). Antony emerged from his retreat shining with health, 'God-borne' and apparently all the better for his protracted fasts.

News of these men travelled to Alexandria and as far as Rome. The desire to imitate them moved many others to leave their homes, and communities began to form in the desert behind Alexandria. The word 'monastery' was used by Athanasius in his biography of Antony to mean a monk's cell, and the em-

phasis in his use of both 'monk' and 'monastery' was on the single or solitary (monos) man in search of perfection, though he might still share his life with other solitaries. The ancient Greek world was used to men initiating themselves into 'mysteries' in this way. Thus the new religion did not come into the ancient world as a disturbing revolutionary force: it was persecuted by the Romans simply for what appeared to be its subversive side---above all for its treasonable refusal to believe in the divinity of the emperor. The monks had little to do with this. They believed in persuasion by other---invisible and silent---means. Antony did go to Alexandria to plead for Christian martyrs in the law courts, in the first years of the fourth century, but he did not provoke the judges in any way. He was by this time (about 306) the 'father' of many solitary men in the desert. The courts ordered that no 'monks' should appear. Thus at least fourteen years before the first organised group-monasteries solitary men were felt to have a power in themselves, quite unrelated to wealth, position or numbers. Their role in the conversion of the empire (the last persecutions were in about 313) was a basic if not the principal one.

2. Pachomius (AD 286-346) organised the loose communities of the desert into settlements under a superior for the first time at Tabennesis (AD 320), far south along the Nile valley. It was an abandoned village, and at first only he and his 'father' Palamon had cells there. His brother joined him later but was against accepting other followers. Pachomius went through the same self-training as Antony to defeat the demons of pride, shame and fear, in order to rely with utter confidence on the will of God. He too was a rush-maker, and presumably his products were taken up the Nile to Alexandria by boat. His community quickly grew. Bricks for his buildings were made on the banks of the Nile and dried in the sun as they are still today. The design for his monastery was probably influenced by his previous military career: it was surrounded by a wall with a gatehouse, and had a refectory, hospital, kitchen and halls or houses containing twenty to thirty monks each. These halls had their own stewards, who organised the work of the men under them. Some monks worked the fertile land round the monastery, others cooked or baked or cleaned, and others managed commercial relations with the outside world. The first monastery in our sense was thus a self-supporting and self-protecting unit. There was always a certain amount of danger from brigands, though nothing like what threatened the later monasteries in Barbarian times.

Pachomius taught his followers the techniques of the night-vigil, the fast, and prayer and meditation, which had already been developed by the desert hermits. Amoun (AD 283-352) founded another settlement at Nitria ('the gateway to the desert' from Alexandria) and Macarius the Egyptian founded one at Scetis close by, both in about 330. It meant that Cells were now within easy access of the city. The so-called 'Cells' themselves were founded as a second Nitrian community in 338, so great was the number of new followers: there were six hundred cells spaced so as to be out of earshot of each other. It was designed as a place for the Nitrian monks to pass on to, when they had proved themselves ready for solitude.

The monastery had thus become an institution for the first time, and the monk a member of what would much later be known as an 'order', namely a fraternity bound together by a common 'rule'. Thus already at the desert-stage the monk was ceasing to be a hermit pure and simple. The idea of a discipline or rule binding him not only to a faith and a God but a community was growing. The new development was necessarily fraught with contradictions, which only showed clearly centuries later.

The Scetis monks, apart from their work producing rope and baskets, hired themselves out as labourers at harvest-time. The natron-miners in the area often acted as their agents in the sale of their products, when the natron camel-trains returned to Terenuthis on the Nile, and their goods were loaded on to boats.

It was usual for laymen to 'minister' to monks in their cells. They would come from town to collect their work and take it away for sale. And they would bring food and clothing, no doubt for a commission on the sales they made.

Introduction The Desert Fathers

The monk's greatest inner struggle was naturally against sex desire. A great proportion of the stories about the desert fathers (and the desert nuns) deal with their success or failure in this 'warfare'. A certain young monk troubled with lust, his mind 'obscured by the heaviness and visions of the nights', went to Pachomius (an old man now) for advice. Pachomius told him that there was nothing unusual in it---certainly nothing brought on by negligence on the young monk's part. He implied that lust could be the result of both robust health and the most extreme austerities. He added that he himself, when fifty years old, began to be wracked by the most violent lustful desire which did not leave him night or day for twelve years. The girl of his sexual daydreams was a young Ethiopian he had seen 'gathering canes' one summer long before. In the daydreams she would come and sit on his knee and they would begin making love, but when he was on the point of

a climax she would lift herself off him and 'fly away'. He decided to offer himself to the beasts, and one night lay down naked outside a cave of hyenas. They licked him all over during the night but otherwise did not molest him. He felt this as a reprieve from God and returned to his cell in a calm state of mind. But the desire came back, only more powerfully. His hand felt polluted for two hours after he had 'touched' the Ethiopian girl in his daydream. He tried to committ suicide by pressing asps to his hand but they would not suck his blood. And then in his sixty-second year (though this contradicts his official dates) he found peace. A voice told him that God had inflicted lust on him to show that he was not 'mighty' or 'perfect' as he might think.

Others were less successful in the warfare. A monk after years of austerity returned to the city and fornicated almost to madness. He caught a horrifying disease and had to have his sex organ removed. A virgin of Jerusalem was in sackcloth for three years but then 'opened her window' to the man who ministered to her, and made love to him. She never returned to her solitary life, and her cell became a whore's bedroom. There was the nun seduced by a 'singer of psalms' who starved herself to such an extent that she almost died. She prayed that her child by this man would not live, and it did not. She mortified herself implacably for thirty years before feeling a mild sense of forgiveness. A 'holy virgin' who had won over desire was found lying helpless in a cave in the Scetis area by monks. She told them that she had been living in the cave, 'eating grass', for thirty-five years and had not set eyes on a man in all that time. There is the story of the bishop who 'fell into fornication' and lay down at the porch of his church so that his congregation could walk over him on their way out. Some stories are ugly. There was the herdsman who saw a pregnant woman pass him in the desert and was curious to know what her child looked like. He ripped her open, killing both her and the child. He became a monk soon afterwards. He mortified himself for thirty years, before achieving a sense of having been forgiven the double murder.

Thus not all the monks were of the quality of Antony and Pachomius and Amoun. Many came to the desert to escape conscription and Alexandria's excessively heavy taxes. Many went in for what the Hindus sometimes call 'monkey-renunciation'---one of show. One monk, seeing a woman pass his cell, rushed out to tell her that given the chance he could deal with ten of her. She took him at his word and they lived together in Alexandria for several months. He returned to the desert exhausted.

Something of a competitive atmosphere started

up among the more austere monks. Macarius the Alexandrian held a kind of desert record in self-mortification, and imitated any new austerity he heard about (he died at the age of 100). There was a lot of superstition, and 'demons' began to be the name of spirits more external than fear and pride and shame. The same Macarius once said that demons had taken him off the right road in the desert and that he would have been lost forever had he not found an antelope and sucked her udders: she then guided him home. He also claimed that a man had come to him with the story that he had found a horse in bed with him one morning instead of his wife: Macarius had changed her back to human form again. The abbot Serenus told John Cassianus, who kept a record of all his conversations with the desert hermits, that the space between heaven and earth was filled with invisible spirits whose only interest was causing trouble, but that these were many fewer than in earlier times. For men who had lived most of their lives in towns and villages the uninhabited areas had a genuinely evil atmosphere. It was to defeat this false trust in other men's company that the monk chose solitude as the basis of his training. But with the influx of great numbers of men it was perhaps inevitable that the communal forms of monastic life should become emphasised at the expense of the solitary, especially when the movement began to spread abroad. What began as a quest for extraordinary spiritual power ended in an attempt to create new civilisation

CONTINUE P. 2.

3. Monasticism spread east from Alexandria to Israel, Cyprus, Syria, Constantinople. Hilarion was born near Gaza in AD 293 and went to school in Alexandria, where he heard of Antony and met him. He spent 22 years in a hut near Gaza, until about 330, when other monks joined him. There is evidence of very early anchoritic life near the Dead Sea, not only among Christians in the second century after Christ but among the Jews long before Christ. An interest in monastic life seems to have come about long before the Roman empire was in crisis, perhaps as a result of Buddhist missions in various parts of the Mediterranean as early as the third century before Christ, and the presence of Indians in the Persian army.

Epiphanasius was another monk who learned his disciplines in Alexandria: he founded a Pachomian monastery between Gaza and Jerusalem, at Besanduk, before becoming bishop of Cyprus in 367. He was a quarrelsome man, with a hint of the future inquisitor. He is said to have consecrated Jerome's brother by force: the man was bound and gagged by other monks, and dragged to the fount.

Basil of Cappadoccia in Anatolia (AD 329-379) was baptised a Christian in 397, and then began a

tour of Egyptian and Israelite cells. He founded the first Greek community at Cappadocia but returned to the pre-Pachomian, simpler model, where contact between superior and monk was easy. He discouraged great austerities. He even ran schools, and his simple Rule spread throughout the Byzantine world. He also discouraged solitary life on the grounds that the devotee could find himself 'perfect' too easily, through lack of comparison. The Studion monastery emphasised care for the sick, and became the model for other great monastic centres at Kiev and Mount Athos. In the Greek or Basilian monastery the idea took shape of prayer and solitude being the springboard for a kind of mystical participation in the life outside. Helping the sick, teaching the young, sheltering the destitute and hopeless were the new forms of self-abnegation. One did not bind oneself in chains, or starve almost to death. One's austerity was seen in and through the sick world all round in which one worked. Not for nothing is Palladius's history of the desert fathers called The Book of Paradise. That early sense of paradise in the Egyptian desert gave place to something less meditative and less solitary, precisely as monastic forms moved from the more or less clement desert areas to the wilds of Anatolia and places north of the Alps. It was not a matter of the weather, however. Egypt had for centuries been the home of religious feeling. Alexander the Macedonian had after all chosen the Egyptian coast near Memphis as the site for his new city for this reason above any other---that the air seemed full of God. Whereas one visitor described Basil's site in Cappadocia as 'a damp and squalid place'. Others described it as sweet and serene. It depended how you felt: but in Egypt religious thought seemed to have become physical.

In Syria, a country not unlike Egypt from a geographical point of view, the settlements were in the strict desert-tradition, only rigorous to an almost suicidal degree. Monks staggered under loads of iron or sand. Shenute (died 466), a superior, beat one of his monks to death. St Simeon (AD 359-459) frequently had himself walled up without food for long periods, before he retreated to his column, where he spent 37 years. A meagre and plain diet, and long periods of fasting, were found aids to health and long life. Thus by the fifth century plainly ascetic and solitary forms existed side by side with communal ones.

4. Monasticism spread to Italy with Paulinus, who gave up a vast property to found a settlement at Nola south of Rome in 395. And here monastic life entered one more phase of development. It was not only a public institution now. It was a place where

a certain type of public behaviour was desirable. For the first time attention was paid to the way monks lived together---to their states of mind outside the religious context, and to the atmosphere they created within the monastery walls. With Paulinus the monastery became a nucleus of civilisation. He himself continued to read the classical authors, and he drew followers from Gaul, Spain and the Balkans. The new role was partly explained by the Barbarian invasions which were nowbthreatening the survival not simply of the Church but of all memory of the ancient world. Alaric sacked Rome in 410, the Vandals again in 455. St Augustine left Milan in 385 to establish monasteries which were further removed from the original desert pattern than any before. They were centres of conversion, in a world dominated by Barbarians. He allowed his monks on certain occasions to eat meat, drink wine and talk at table. When he died in 430 Africa, his birthplace, was being colonised by the Vandals.

One of the fascinating aspects of this book will be its research into the way these new monks lived together behind the monasteryvwalls. The stories are quite different from those of the desert fathers. We know less of the private desires and conflicts of these new men, and more about the public frictions between them. But where there are quarrels between one monk and another which require the interference of the superior it is often possible to read a private stress between the lines. And there was much work to do, of a kind that tended to discourage physical austerities on one side and meditation on the other. The fields round the monastery had to be ploughed and planted, and defences had to be built against passing Barbarian armies. Sometimes whole monasteries were wiped out. This was a phase which changed the monastic tradition more than any other before or since: a monk's life was now precarious, and concentration difficult. This was so in Italy, in Ireland and Scotland, and northern Europe, wherever Franks or Ostrogoths or Vandals were to be found. The wild stories about St Patrick and St Columba and St Brendan in the sixth century may be largely apocryphal but they give a hint of the warfare that went on between monk and monk, monastery and monastery, quite apart from that with marauding tribes. St Columba had numberless pitched battles with a neighbouring monastery over a precious psalter which he claimed to be his.

5. Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman empire in 323. This too altered both the prestige and the behaviour of the monks. Power-interests started among them. A great dispute over the nature of Christ divided the embryonic Christian

world. The protagonists were Arius, the patriarch of Alexandria, and Athanasius (his secretary). The Athanasian creed won, after much violence. It was the first of many bitter theological struggles which often ended in street brawls and even battles, for the simple reason that they were power-issues as well. Athanasius saw the political disadvantages of the Arian description of Christ as of 'like' substance to God but not the 'same' substance: it tended to reduce Christ to the status of the pagan gods, with one foot on the earth. Church authority might easily diminish with this divisionnof Christ from the Godhead.

John Chrysostom, made bishop of Constantinople in 398, tried to stop monks entering the city, on account of their unruliness. Monks now all but ruled Alexandria. They murdered Hypatia, the last protagonist of Greek learning, dragging her from her carriage and beating her to death with tiles. A monk murdered the imperial prefect from Rome. The first Barbarian attacks in the Egyptian desert began in 407, and monks fled from their retreats in great number. Some of the wisest felt that it was deserved. There was a second Barbarian devastation in 434. The Egyptian settlements degenerated fast, and homosexuality became widespread. A fifth-century Macarius said, 'When you see trees, it is at the door, but when you see boys, take up your mantles and withdraw.' A child (Zacharius, son of Carion) immersed himself in a natron lake until he was totally disfigured, out of fear of being taken as a monk's boy.

New monasteries in France on the other hand (Lérins in Provence, and that of John Cassianus in Marseilles) were flourishing as centres of cultivation and learning. Initiates came to them from every part of the Mediterranean and Europe. Cassianus's Conferences and Institutions became the classic basis of monastic life in Europe (he wrote his history of the desert fathers in the second decade of the fifth century). The monastery was now a storage-house of the Christian and classical past, ~~amid the general darkness of the age.~~ There was increasing schism between Rome and Constantinople on points of doctrine, and most Barbarians clung to the Arian theology which was declared heretical by St Augustine. The one stable element in all this was still the monastery--- but now in Europe.

In the sixth century the long and difficult social operation of converting (and thereby taming) the Barbarians gave Rome a new splendour as the western centre of the Church, no longer the museum of a fallen empire. The Swabian king Cacaric was converted in 560, the Visigoths in 587. Rome's last 'little emperor' Marcellinus had been deposed

by the converted Ostrogoths in 476. The monk of these times, living among Barbarians, was himself invariably a Barbarian too. He tended to teach a simplified, in some cases brutalised, religion. Gregory of Tours, who died in 596, could hardly form a proper sentende, and claimed that this was precisely the reason poeple followed him. An orator would have made them feel excluded, he said; whereas he showed them their own uncouthness in the new language of Christianity. St Martin too had a crude delivery, which he used for the ends of conversion. Hordes of peasants went over to Christianity because of his simple message. It was said that the roads of Gaul were 'littered' with processions and pilgrimages also due to him alone. The crude doctrines of heaven and hell and retribution which dominated the later mediaeval psychology may well have had their roots in the Barbarian craving for revenge and punishment and reward. The penitential telling of hail maries may have sprung from a simple need for regularity and repetition. Gregory of Tours in his History of the Franks describes this race as the most unthinkably cruel one that ever existed. And it was these men that the monks (Franks themselves, in many cases) had to influence, so that some colouring of the doctrine should be expected. All monasteries at this time had penitential lists to deal with murder, fornication, greed and drunkenness (the most common vices). St Columban in Ireland shut up his monks with a corpse for nights on end if they got too unruly. In fact the Columban settlements were essentially agricultural settlements, rigidly disciplined, and their success with the Franks was due to their exemplary hardness, in contrast with the social collapse all round them.

A certain luxury entered the Church at this time. A safely established priesthood drawn from the Barbarian tribes was, according to St Martin's biographer Sulpicius Severus, 'all too often happier with well-padded carriages than the donkey, with marble halls rather than cells and with extravagant robes rather than simple habits'.

6. St Benedict founded his third and most successful monastery at Cassino in 529: in it the new communal form of monastic life reached its climax. The solitary act of meditation--haesychia as it had been called in the Greek of the desert fathers---now became reading aloud or ruminatio, suitable for the untamed Barbarian mind which was such different material from the Greek and Jewish and Coptic mind on which the Christian faith had first fallen. A new thought-system had to be created, under the guidance of monks who knew some-

thing of both the ancient world and the fathers of the desert. The concept of zero and also our (perhaps rather odd) concept of time as being ticked away regularly in seconds came into being in the mediaeval monastery. The outer world---its silences and voids fearful to the Barbarian mind---had to be tamed too into some kind of order: and that this order was rather mathematical may not seem odd in the light of the Barbarian craving for safe foreseeable events and therefore regular laws. 'Christian' mathematics was for that reason distinct from ancient (Greek or Alexandrian) mathematics, though it was rooted in both. Christianity brought about in the deepest sense a 'new order' after the Roman collapse, and this was pre-eminently the work of thinking monks. The attempts today to 'pierce the imprisonment of mathematical time' are perhaps efforts to release the mind from a Barbarian-based regularity.

Under St Benedict conversion became a carefully planned operation. He once said that all he was out to achieve in his monks was a change of behaviour. He had much Barbarian superstition to deal with. When one of his monks was seen to be fidgetting about in church he was taken outside and beaten until 'a little black boy' was seen to run out from under his habit. St Benedict allowed his monks an unusual nine hours sleep in the winter months and a siesta in the summer. The monastery was now virtually a self-supporting little town, the seed of the later walled city of the middle ages. Its monks reclaimed the land all round, and visitors were given lodgings. There was less sense of a retreat than ever before, and more sense of an immediate and even social function. The participation of the monks in the life of the country round them was perhaps lacking in the mysticism that the Greek or Basilian monks had brought to it. The Benedictine settlement was a practical and above all rational concern. It flourished in an abandoned and dangerous countryside, more a desert in the real sense than Nitria or even Scetis. There was constant danger from Barbarian armies passing northwards or southwards. There was danger to the health. The monastery now had a clear practical task---to reclaim the land and with it the civilisation: so clear that it seemed to exclude much of the mystical side. The Church had to be made safe. The Christian had to be created not simply as a man of a certain faith but as a man of a certain civilisation, recognisable as much the same kind of man from Bari to Northumberland. It was even something of an imperial ideal, and it explains the important social role (unashamedly rational and public-minded) of the mediaeval monastery that sprung from the Benedictine model in every part of Europe.

St Gregory the Great, who became pope in 590, was a Benedictine monk. He made Rome independent of Constantinople and sent Benedictine monks to every part of Europe (St Augustine of Cantberbury was one of them) not only to convert men from tribalism or Arianism but to integrate the former Roman empire north of the Alps under one Roman Church. These monks underwent great hardship, settling among the Angles or Celts or Franks as missionaries-cum-ambassadors, in which work they had been trained at the blandest school of government in the west, namely Rome. In Ireland Augustine had to deal with the Druidical magic that still tended to underpin monastic life there. But even the implacably exclusive Columban settlements accepted the Bendictine rule in the end.

The Islamic invasions which disrupted first the Persian empire and then the whole of the Mediterranean began in 637, and completed the process of dividing Rome from Constantinople and producing an eastern and western church. The entire Hellenic world from Alexandria to Constantinople came under Baghdad. Rome was back to something like its ancient position. By 650 the monastery had developed its utmost public function. It was now a walled city---a model for the world round it. And all the monastic orders that developed later, including even the Jesuit order in the sixteenth century, were only variations on it. The monastery became a basic social institution of the middle ages, and the contradiction that this involved with the original solitary ideal may have brought about its later dissolution as an influence on life.

This book will be concerned less with theological argument than the lives of the monks themselves, how they looked after themselves, how they divided their days, how they got on with each other, how the world round them saw them. Nothing could be falser than the idea of a monk's life being necessarily 'uneventful'.

The sources are enormously rich. No TV company today could have done the amount of interviewing carried out by Palladius among the desert hermits. For twenty years he travelled from cell to cell in Egypt, Syria and Israel. His work has been translated from the Syriac by E.A.Wallis Budge (nearly a thousand pages of it) and from the original Greek by Dom Cuthbert Butler.

2 Continued

But even for Budge most of what the hermits 'believed' in was superstition. This sensible Victorian churchman gave no credence to the stories of how the hermits 'attained' to taming wild beasts

and foretelling the future and healing the sick and surviving the most terrible physical tests. Today we know much more about Eastern experiences of hermit life. At least two film companies have shown yogis walking on red-hot coals. Once we reject the idea of the first monks as somehow 'primitive' their stories come alive in the most vivid way. Their so-called war against sex-desire becomes as anguished as it was for them, when seen in the light of the Hindu doctrine of the kundalini or sex-area.

And the later 'war' against the Barbarian becomes more real too. This was no less an inner war than the earlier one. And it was squarely based on the now sacred memory of the desert fathers.

We have a mass of eye-witness accounts (Cassianus's Institutions of the Desert Fathers is one of them) and biographies (of Pachomius and his follower Theodor, of Macarius and Shenute and Simeon), with endless maxims collected from the earliest hermits. Whole books have been devoted to the Fayoum and Nitrian monasteries, notably those of N. Abbott and Evelyn White, apart from the later Benedictine literature.

OTHER BOOKS

There seem to be few books on this subject---apart from the sources, that is. The nearest, though he stops before the Benedictine period, is Jacques Lacarrière's THE GOD-POSSESSED (a bad translation of the excellent original French title of MEN DRUNK WITH GOD) published in Britain by Allen and Unwin in 1963. Though always accurate, its approach is rather intellectual. There is the same disbelief as in Budge towards the 'illusions' of the hermits.

THE DESERT A CITY by Derwas Chitty (Blackwell 1966) is an archaeological study and treats only Egypt and Israel. It mentions the dearth of books---'At the moment even such an introduction is sadly needed'. The reason seems to be that books on monks have been relegated to Church History---and written that way too.

THE BATTLE OF THE MONKS MAURICE ROWDON

The General Theme

This book is about the first eight centuries of Christendom---what could be called the age of the monks. It is about their battles---against the elements and their own temptations and voluptuous dreams (in the Thebaid desert), against the first vagueness of a new religious experience (Alexandria), against tyrannical abbots (Syria), against each other in vituperous writings on biblical interpretation (Jerusalem), against animals in the arena and against pogroms (Rome), against the 'fallen man' in themselves (Italy, Africa), against other monks in street-brawls on points of doctrine (Constantinople), against the barbarian outside and sometimes inside themselves (northern Europe), against the emperor, against the Church that was based on their thoughts and their struggles and now wished to disown them, against the increasing orthodoxy that protected the Church on the one hand and the increasing 'heresy' that caused and resulted from the orthodoxy on the other.

The book will counter the idea of a later 'dark age', because the entire basis of mediaeval society was laid down then, carefully and even systematically, by the monks. The first eight centuries of Christendom were the incubation period before the emergence of something like a Christian order in the middle ages. Everything from the walled city to agricultural implements were prepared then, and the classical modes of writing and worshipping and reasoning transformed to new uses. The monastery became in fact the nucleus and heart of the new world. Thus the incubation went on in the monks. Their centres were the only available means of continuity from the time of the crucifixion through the fall of the Roman empire to its dismemberment by the barbarian tribes: they made out of this prolonged turmoil a new thought and a new society, the one the mirror of the other.

THE BATTLE OF THE MONKS is the story of that struggle, and the ferment that made the later society possible, and which drove deep into the Christian psychology a sense of sin.

The 'dark age' is actually the story (one that has never been properly told before) of what the book will call the 'vast social operation' of converting the barbarian. It was the climax of the period treated in this book, not an eclipse or a collapse. In the first martyrs, the first fathers of the desert and the doctors of the Church, a whole new world was pioneered and fought out, and the remarkable conversion of savage tribes in every part of the European (and Mediterranean) worlds was the result of that.

THE BATTLE OF THE MONKS will suggest that the monastic tradition came from India, and travelled long before the birth of Christ along the trade routes (or perhaps migratory routes) from the Ganges to Mesopatamia and Greece. It will suggest that Christ's whole mission and story came from that, and that the horror felt by the Jews towards him was essentially a horror of the monastic ideal as a force destructive of social life. The battle of the monks was a fierce and prolonged effort to cope with new spiritual demands made in Christ's teaching, which brought trouble with Roman and later Christian emperors, and then the Church itself, for the same reason that it had brought trouble in Judah.

The book will describe something of the Indian background (the oral tradition of the Vedas and the written tradition of the Upanishads) which was perhaps the model for the Christian monk. We have a good account of the sannyasin or monk in nineteenth-century Hindu writings, which will provide us with fresh terms by means of which to understand the monastic experience, while Christian terms would sound stale and played-out to most ears.

The approach will be as chronological as possible, so as to get the idea of a development, though not a 'progress': the book will not be saying that mediaeval life was the crown of an endeavour that had been going on since the crucifixion. It was more a distillation of the first experience, a distinct (even an argued) watering-down to make mass-conversion possible.

11.

The Working Plan

INTRODUCTION

What it meant to be a monk, with reference back to the Vedas and the Upanishads, and some mention of the work of Sri Ramakrishna in the late nineteenth century. The possible ways in which this discipline could have reached Mesopatamia and Greece. The methods of this discipline: the fight against desire and the 'illusions of Maya'. The terror and distraught sense of deprivation in the early stages. Then, following the influence through to Christ, the fact that Greek thought (perhaps the transmitter of the discipline) was a dominant influence in the Judah of Christ's day. The extraordinary identity of views expressed in Plato, Pythagoras and in the Upanishads. The pre-Christian models of asceticism (the 'transmitters') were the Essenes, the Therapeutae and the neo-Platonists of Alexandria.

1. The crucifixion: how Judah resisted the monastic ideal. The gospel and its clear laying-down of the new monastic discipline. The failure of the disciples to understand Christ at the Last Supper was their unfamiliarity with the spiritual discipline he had in mind.

2. The first Nasarene church that came about after the crucifixion: the story of these men---the first proponents of the Christian experience. They were Jews who believed in the Second Coming though they still went to the synagogue. The first attempt to convert other peoples took place in Antioch, where Jews preached to Greeks. There were Christians in Damascus even before the conversion of St Paul. It was St Paul who took the gospel abroad in something like a conscious and planned way. It was he who prevented it from remaining provincial or sectual. A century after Christ there were Christian communities in all the major cities of the Roman empire. Still a 'church' (meaning assembly of people, ecclesia) was not the contradiction of 'monk' (man by himself). The groups were collections of monks. That is to say, the monastic discipline was inherent in the Christian teaching: the first hermits were renouncing the world in the sense of abandoning the 'illusions of Maya' and

accepting reality. The monastic ideal described the world as unreal: the real only transpired in solitude. It was not a renuciation of society. The solitude could as well be practised in society, and the Indian teachings had in fact never advocated avoiding other men. The desert was only a fit place for the maximum concentration, the maximum self-purification from pagan (meaning worldly) environments in the cities. The idea that in religion there was a necessary friction between the one-man ideal and the society-ideal only grew up later, when the Church and the state began to identify themselves with each other. It is for this reason that history books tend to make so little of the whole period, and especially of the 'dark age', because only the social development is noticed, and not the experiences of the men who made it possible.

3. The Roman persecutions of Christians under Nero (AD 64), Domitian (AD 96), Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-38). They became mass-affairs much like the pogroms of this century, under Marcus Aurelius (161-80). Christianity was seen as a 'Jewish heresy', a subversive doctrine designed to overthrow Judah and therefore to bring disturbance into the empire. The fact that the martyrs wept with joy on their way to death struck so many people as mad that it began to have a compelling force which no amount of conscious conversion could equal.

4. St Paul the hermit settled in the Thebaid desert in the third century. St Antony on Mount Qolzum. The school of Alexandria with its combination of Judah and Plato was the system of thought behind the desert experience. The 'philosopher' of rhe Greek world was precisely the wandering monk, the sannyasin, of the Hindu world. The desert fathers were called 'philosophers'. The idea of philosophy as academic and intellectual only came into being centuries later as a result of mediaeval scholasticism, which tried to throw the whole Christian experience up into the head, so to speak.

Origen (185-254) was a 'philosopher' of Egypt. He was master of the school of Alexandria, and one of the most brilliant of the 'Greek' fathers of the Church. Much of his work was described as 'error' when the catholic faith became more clearly defined.

5. The state of the Roman empire in the third century. Army whole basis of imperial structure. Lack of Roman volunteers meant that legionaries now recruited from the barbarian tribes. Collapse of slave market, inflation. The Christian experience broke through the mystery religions (Mithras etc) because of the monastic discipline behind it.

6. Pachomius (286-346) first organised the loose communities of the desert into settlements under a superior, with novices. The monastery in the Christian sense appears for the first time. I describe the spread east of Christian monasticism---to Gaza, Cyprus, back again to Jerusalem. The first light begins to flicker. Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, was a heretic-hunter, perhaps the first. I take the increasing concern with heresy to be a sign of fear caused by doubt. I trace the most bitter conflicts of later times to this doubt that grew as the number of Christians grew.

7. The first clear punitive element enters Christianity with Shenute (died 466). He once beat another hermit to death. The rigour of the Syrian monks. St Simeon (born 389) was one of these.

8. The shift of the first monasticism from Egypt to Palestine and then Constantinople. This coincided with the accumulation of social and political power by the Christians. They were the most reliable servants of the state. Basically this was responsible for the adoption of Christianity as the empire's official religion by Constantine (323).

9. Now that monasticism was not essential it came under the control of local bishops by the Council of Chalcedon (415). The emperor Justinian ordered the monk's cell to be within the main nucleus of a monastic building. A social emphasis enters Christianity. The monastic ideal of solitude is for the first time seen as the source of possible unruliness. And the monks were often unruly. They had gang fights on points of doctrine.

10. The monastic tradition entered Italy with Paulinus (395). Here is the first monastery as the seed of a new civilisation. The classical world here softens the rigour and also the ecstasy of the first experience, and begins something that will centuries later find a powerful imaginative expression in the Renaissance. In 384 St Augustine left Milan to begin his work. He was the first perhaps to advance the Christian experience as something to be written down, as a body of thought. His CITY OF GOD, where so to speak the mediaeval psychology is sewn. His doctrine of original sin defeated the Pelagian doctrine that man could so perfect himself as to become incapable of sin. Thus the development of a recognisably western or European Christianity, the beginning of a Christian literature and the statement of faith as dogma backed by the state came about in the same epoch.

11. St Jerome. Fierce and quarrelsome, lived in Rome and Jerusalem, from which he fled during a Barbarian attack. He finished a translation of the bible in the year of Augustine's conversion (385). Here Christian 'doctrine' forms with argumentative brilliance, and the punitive element is clear. The desire to liquidate

anyone who disagrees is strong. Here are the first mental battles of what became the horrifying catholic-protestant struggle over a thousand years later.

11. The struggle to Christianise the Barbarian. St Martin of Tours (361-397) was an imperial soldier himself. When Augustine died (430) Africa was being colonised by the Vandals. By 533 the imperial structure was based on the Byzantine rule and no longer Rome. Byzantium wrested Africa back from the Vandals. St Martin converted the Swabian king Cacaric (560). The bishop of Seville converted the Visigoths (587). The Barbarians nursed the 'heresy' of Arianism, which saw God alone as divine. The battle against Arianism by men like Augustine was the struggle to produce a composite Christian, who would be recognised as the same man in Constantinople or Britanny. The 'universal society' of the Middle Ages was here being fought for.

12. As a result of the conversion of the Barbarians Rome (controlled by them) began to seem no longer the seat of a past and dead glory but the new centre of Christian power. The distinction between priests and monks came to a head at this time. The Church was having an increasing social success. Its 'luxury' begins to be talked of.

13. In the fifth century an embryo of the future civilisation was realised in Lérins in Provence, to which novitiates came from Egypt, Italy, Africa, Spain and Greece. Provence was for this reason, I shall argue, the cradle of the humanism which first showed itself as a new clear attitude in St Francis of Assisi, the 'little Frenchman'.

John Cassianus had a monastery at Merseilles (415). His writings on the Desert Fathers seem to me the first clear example together with the work of St Augustine of the 'literalisation' of the Christian experience--- the use of the written word for persuasion, eventually (when the printed book grew out of the manuscript) for the persuasion of absent people. The book began its life here---as the source of a ferment of ideas. A certain intellectualisation of the religion sets in at this time. I show that this too was part of the vast 'social operation' undertaken by the monks because only the faculty of the intellect could cut through tribal differences. This was a major departure from the work of the Desert Fathers. 'God' begins to be a concept. Dogma and doctrine become important. The Church, with its task of creating out of the wildest tribes a settled humanity, required a dogma that could be spelled out to everyone, entailing death or torture for its denial. I will thus say that the existence of dogma at all is a sign of immaturity, implying a social more than a religious struggle. I shall also argue that the repetition of hail maries as a penance has more to do with the Barbarian need for and belief in punishment than with religion directly. I shall argue that the adoption of the doctrine

of heaven and hell was not essentially religious, and that such a doctrine cannot be religious, and that it was required by the Barbarian need for reward and revenge. We have to realise that while 'the ecstasy of the angels' converted a tiny few, a different and worldlier method was necessary for the most.

14. Fifth-century Christendom was as complicated as possible, and will require a number of chapters. The Byzantine-Rome struggle complicated the Barbarian-Rome struggle. Life in Constantinople and Rome will also give us a breathing-space from the monks, although the monks make a turbulent-enough story on their own. Constantinople was Greek learning, Rome was still Latin. They were essentially still ancient, they looked the same as in ancient times: this will give us a chance to see how new Christianity looked against the background, and how much it took from the ancient world as well. Being a Christian at this time meant being modern.

15. The top of the curve is reached in St Benedict's monastery at Cassino (529). The meditation (haesychia of the Greek 'philosophers') was here distilled into ruminatio or reading aloud. Things were repeated. That is, a schedule begins to impose itself. The day is divided into duties and thoughts. This too was a method of disciplining the rough-shod Barbarian. His mind responded to regularity, lacking strong initiating powers of its own, just as habit binds animals. There was a great development from this single factor (a development often quite wrongly called civilisation). The first concept of time as a ticking-off in fractions of equal length came about in the mediaeval monastery, as a ready transference from this by now long tradition of regularity: that is, the clock. And the concept of zero (space) was the formless outside, so to speak, of this closed-in time: that too---in the form of a nought added to numbers for the first time---came about in the ~~cumoway~~ monastery. The attempts today to pierce 'the imprisonment of mathematical time' are the efforts to release the mind from this Barbarian-based regularity, which has now fixed itself into the nervous system to the detriment of the religious faculty. The yoga disciplines (even the simplest form of Hatha or physical yoga) are ways out of this system: the Barbarian fear of the void ('infinity') falls away with the clock which tried to be a protection against it. Christianity through immaturity lacks the disciplines comparable to yoga.

16. Gregory the Great, the first pope in anything like the modern sense (590) was a Benedictine. He was in control of extensive church lands. He began to think and act independently of Constantinople. He brought about a new Christian empire based on Rome by sending out Benedictine missionaries to every part of Europe including Ireland, where the monks were the ~~most~~ predisposed to yield to Roman guidance. But the ancient Roman experience of how to handle foreign peoples reached forward into the new Christian ~~leadership~~

leadership. This rationalisation so to speak of Christianity under Rome would naturally end THE BATTLE OF THE MONKS, but another fact split Christianity into two and rendered Constantinople inaccessible--- the Islamic invasions. In the seventh century the Greek and African worlds came under Baghdad. While at one time the patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria had looked on the pope simply as another like themselves, they now had to see him as the man responsible for the entire western church, for Europe. And that was the work of the monks.

Length: about 120,000 words.

Athanasian creed won, after much violence. It was a reach schism, the first of many bitter struggles which ended in street brawls and even battles, for

EARLY CHRISTIAN MONKS

INTRODUCTION: 2. and 2. continued.

There is evidence (i the Essenes / Israel and the late Therapeutae / Alexandria) that the monastic ideal, hitherto alien to Judaism, preceded and perhaps stimulated Christ. This monastic ideal was present in ancient Egypt and Greece: both had their wandering monks, and indeed the Greek word 'philosophy' meant precisely this wandering holy man. The intellectualisation of philosophy only took place after St. Augustine. Hitherto it preferred to lived experience as it did in the East. In fact the root of the monastic ideal is, more probably eastern: we have plentiful evidence of there having been Indian sannyasi before the birth of Christ, and of Indian missionaries present in Greece and Egypt at that time. Indian philosophies and religions have been absorbed, and we have pinpointed the first stirrings in the monastic ideal of renunciation and solitude.

Then: 1.

See p. 4 "Monks & Alexandria"

which argued that a man could so perfect himself as to become incapable of sin. Thus the development of a recognisably wesetern or European Christianity, the beginning of a Christian literature (in Augustine's CITY OF GOD) and the statement of faith as dogma backed by the State came about in the same epoch. St Jerome, a fierce and quarrelsome man, lived in Rome and Jerusalem, and finished his translation of the bible in the year of Augustine's conversion (385). In his work Christian 'doctrine' forms with argumentative brilliance, and the punitive element is clear. The desire to liquidate anyone who disagrees is strong. Here was the first echo of the horrifying protestant-catholic struggle of over one thousand years later.

All this was deeply involved with the struggle to Christianise the barbarian. St Augustine believed in fighting the tribes. St Martin of Tours (361-397) began as an imperial soldier. When Augustine died (430) Africa was being colonised by the Vandals. By 533 the imperial structure was based on the Byzantine rule and no longer Rome. Byzantium wrested Africa back from the Vandals. St Martin converted the Swabian king Cacaric (560). The bishop of Seville converted the Visigoths (587). The barbarian tribes nursed the 'heresy' of Arianism, which saw God alone as divine. The battle against Arianism by men like Augustine was the struggle to produce a composite Christianity which would be recognised in Britanny as in Constantinople. While Byzantium was the centre of power there was at the same time an interesting shift towards Rome which began to seem no longer the seat of a past and dead imperial glory but a new centre of religious power. The distinction between priests and monks came to a head at this time. The Church was having an icreasingosocial success. Its 'luxury' began to be talked of.

During the fifth century an embryo of the future Christian civilisation had also been realised at the monastic settlement of Lérins in Provence, to which novitiates came from Egypt, Italy, Africa, Spain and Greece. Very much for this reason Provence became perhaps the earliest centre of humanism, and deeply influenced the 'little Frenchman' St Francis of Assisi. John Cassianus had a monastery at Marseilles (415). His writings on the desert fathers was the source of a great new ferment of ideas. The top of the curve was reached in St Benedict's monastery at Cassino (529). The meditation (haesychia of the Greek 'philosophers') was here distilled into ruminatio or reading aloud. Phrases and prayers were repeated, and a schedule began to impose itself, especiallyin the way each day was divided into duties and thoughts. This was the way the simple, above all barbarian mind learned. The first concept of time as a ticking-away of seconds came into being: the schedule was here transferred to outer reality.

Gregory the Great was a Benedictine: he was in control of extensive Church lands, and began to think and act independly of Constantinople and indeed brought about a new