

## **Lecture 10-Opus Dei: The Beginnings of Monasticism**

*A theologian is one who prays truly; one who prays truly is a theologian.  
A patristic adage*

*If you will be perfect, go, sell all you have and give to the poor and come, follow me.  
Matthew 19:21*

### **Assigned Reading**

*The Story of Christianity—chapter 15*

### **Key Terms**

Monasticism, Anthony, Pachomius

### **Objectives**

- Critique monasticism for its strengths and weaknesses
- Identify some of the leaders in the monastic movement

### **Class Prayer**

*“O gracious and holy Father,  
Give us wisdom to perceive You,  
intelligence to understand You,  
diligence to seek You,  
patience to wait for You,  
eyes to see You,  
a heart to meditate on You,  
and a life to proclaim You,  
through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.”*

*Benedict of Nursia*

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### **I. Antony (251?-356)**

#### **A. *Life of Antony* by Athanasius**

Athanasius: “For not from writings, nor from worldly wisdom, nor through any art, was Antony renowned, but solely from his piety towards God.”

#### **B. *The Desert Fathers* by Helen Waddell**

### **II. Pachomius (286-346)**

#### **A. Cenobitism**

#### **B. Basil of Cappadocia (329-379)**

#### **C. John Cassian (360-435)—“Persevering Prayer”**

#### **D. Women monastics**

### **III. Monasticism in the East**

#### **A. Solitary monks**

#### **B. Extreme asceticism**

#### **C. Missionary thrust**

### **IV. Monasticism in the West**

#### **A. Martin of Tours (316-397)**

#### **B. Benedict of Nursia (480-550) and his rule**

“Few books have so strongly influenced Western history as *The Rule of St. Benedict*. Written in the sixth century, a time as violent and troubled as our own, by a man determined to find a life of peace and stability for himself and others, it is a brief (ninety-six pages in a recent English translation), practical, and thoughtful work on how human beings can best live in community. Its style is so succinct that it is sometimes taught in law schools as an example of how to legislate simply and well. But the true power of the book, as with the Gospel it is based on, lies in its power to change lives.”

Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* p. 5

#### V. Monasticism: Good or Bad?

- A. Prayer
- B. Learning
- C. Charity
- D. Missions
- E. Separation from the world
- F. Two levels of Christian spirituality
- G. Tendency toward salvation by works

#### Questions for Consideration

1. Did systematic theologies come out of the monastic movement?
2. Did the monastics come together with preserving the church in society?

#### For Further Study

Norris, Kathleen. *The Cloister Walk*. 1996.

A surprise best-seller by a Presbyterian who is also a Benedictine oblate. The book is the result of her “immersion into a liturgical world,” in which she tries to replicate for the reader “the rhythm of saints’ days, solemnities, and feasts” that she experienced at St. John’s monastery in Minnesota.

Read the short selection called “Persevering Prayer” by John Cassian. Note the important distinction between prayer heard and prayer answered as in the case of Daniel. Why, according to Cassian, is God’s answer to our prayers sometimes delayed? What is the major point about prayer that John Cassian makes in this selection? The Conferences from which this short reading is taken is a good source for understanding the spiritual life of the monastics as well as offering a helpful guide to modern Christians.