

St Bakhom & His monastic system



St Pakhom aka **Pachome** and **Pakhomius**



- ☞ Generally recognized as the founder of Christian cenobitic(communal) monasticism.
- ☞ In the Coptic church his feast day is celebrated on May 9
- ☞ Macarius had earlier created a number of proto-monasteries called "larves", or cells, where holy men would live in a community setting
- ☞ Pachomius himself was hailed as "Abba" (father) which is where we get the word Abbot from. This first cenobitic monastery was in Tabennisi, Egypt.

How the world sees him



- ✧ He is also credited with being the first Christian to use and recommend use of a prayer rope.
- ✧ He was visited once by Basil of Caesarea who took many of his ideas and implemented them in Caesarea, where Basil also made some adaptations that became the ascetic rule, or *Ascetica*, the rule still used today by the Eastern Orthodox Church, and comparable to that of the Rule of St. Benedict in the West.

How is his system different from others



- ☞ . The main three types of monastic experience are:
 - ☞ **The Hermitage Life:** every monk live in solitude as a hermit. This system started by St. Anthony the great in lower Egypt in 270 AD. Before St. Anthony a lot of ascetics lived in solitude but near the villages. But St. Anthony went to the interior desert and practiced there the *Monastic Anachoresis*. He guided everyone of his disciples and he is called the "the fathers of monasticism" .
 - ☞ **Ceonobitism or congregation or Koinonia:** St. Pachomius started in upper Egypt -315 AD where he gathered the monks in a monastery surrounded by fences and each 3 were living together in our cell and practicing their spiritual and normal life within the different houses in the monastery. They eat together at certain times and also have common prayers and meetings.
 - ☞ **Lavra or Skete or Idiohythmism:** which is a system between the other two systems the "Ceonobitic" and the "Eremitic", where the monk lived alone in a cell or a small group in a cell around their spiritual father and meet every Saturday night and Sunday for the Holy Liturgy and the teaching of the elders in a church. This style started by St. Makarius in Nitria and Scetic west of the Nile delta.

Lifestory



☞ Life:292-348 AD

- ☞ He was born in Upper Thebais to idolatrous parents. From his infancy, he was meek and modest, and had an aversion to the profane ceremonies used by the pagans in the worship of their idols. At age 20, he was forced into the emperor's troops
- ☞ The Christians of this city were moved with compassion towards the recruits, who were kept close confined, and very ill-treated. They took all possible care of them, and supplied them liberally with money and necessaries.

Our Christ-like actions can change people's lives



- Such an uncommon example of disinterested virtue made a great impression on the mind of Pachomius. He found kindled in his heart a great love of so holy a law, and an ardent desire of serving the God whom these good men adored.
- Pachomius returned home then went to Thebais, in which there was a Christian church and became a christian

Persistence in prayer



From his first acquaintance with our holy faith at Thebes, he had always made this his prayer: "O God, Creator of heaven and earth, cast on me an eye of pity: deliver me from my miseries: teach me the true way of pleasing you, and it shall be the whole employment, and most earnest study of my life to serve you, and to do your will." The perfect sacrifice of his heart to God, was the beginning of his eminent virtue.

He took steps closer to God and made sacrifices



☞ Hearing that a venerable old man named Palemon, served God in the desert in great perfection, he sought him out, and with great earnestness begged to live under his direction. The hermit having set before him the difficulties and austerities of his way of life, said "Consider, my son, that my diet is only bread and salt: I drink no wine, use no oil, watch one half of the night, spending that time in singing psalms or in meditating on the holy scriptures, and sometimes pass the whole night without sleeping."

He wasn't a saint overnight and had a hard struggle



- ✧ Pachomius was amazed at this account and readily promised to observe whatever Palemon should think fit and was admitted him into his cell, and gave him the monastic habit.
- ✧ . He was in the beginning often drowsy at the night office. Palemon used to rouse him, and say: "Labor and watch, my dear Pachomius, lest the enemy overthrow you and ruin all your endeavors." Against this weakness and temptation he enjoined him, on such occasions, to carry sand from one place to another, till his drowsiness was overcome.

Of whom the world was not worthy...



☞ One Easter-day Palemon bade the disciple prepare a dinner for that great festival. Pachomius took a little oil, and mixed it with the salt, which he pounded small, and added a few wild herbs, which they were to eat with their bread. The holy old man having made his prayer, came to table; but at the sight of the oil he struck himself on the forehead, and said, with tears: "My Saviour was crucified, and shall I indulge myself so far as to eat oil?" Nor could he be prevailed upon to taste it.

What about me?



- ❧ Are we struggling at all? Are we running towards heaven?
- ❧ He carried sand around to shake off drowsiness-at bedtime! Are we unable to shake off a few distractions in the daytime for prayer?
- ❧ He saw the truth in the actions of christians and he gave everything up to pursue that truth-do we give anything up to pursue the truth?

What about me?



- ⌘ While some of us might become monks/nuns, most of us will not...so I'm not supposed to do all that extreme stuff...a 5 min prayer is suitable for me'
- ⌘ Pachomius and Palemon-humans like us- treated worldly things like rubbish-we may not reach this level but we should be ashamed to see such zeal, such efforts, persistence and struggle and see how far we are from that lifestyle
- ⌘ Palemom felt bad about eating oil, Shouldn't we at least feel bad about gluttony?

His miracles and prayers

- ✧ He never learned the Greek or Latin but he sometimes miraculously spoke them; he cured the sick and persons possessed by devils with blessed oil. The saint was favored with a spirit of prophecy, and with great grief foretold the decay of monastic fervor in his order in succeeding ages.
- ✧ But he often told sick or distressed persons, that their sickness or affliction was an effect of the divine goodness in their behalf; and he only prayed for their temporal comfort, with this clause or condition, if it should not prove hurtful to their souls.
- ✧ His dearest disciple, St. Theodorus, who after his death lead his monasteries, was afflicted with a perpetual headache. St. Pachomius, when asked by some of the brethren to pray for his health, answered: "Though abstinence and prayer be of great merit, yet sickness, suffered with patience, is of much greater." He chiefly begged of God the spiritual health of the souls of his disciples

Famous conversion



- ❧ Sylvanus, who had been a young actor on the stage, entered the monastery of St. Pachomius, but led for some time an undisciplined life, often transgressing the rules of the house, and still fond of entertaining himself and others with buffooneries (ie class clown)
- ❧ Pakhom kept gently warning him to be more serious and one day explained the dreadful judgments which threaten those that mock God, the divine grace touched his heart
- ❧ From that moment he began to lead a life of great edification to the rest of the brethren, continually bewailing with bitterness his past actions. When others entreated him to moderate the floods of his tears, "Ah," said he, "how can I help weeping, when I consider the wretchedness of my past life, and that by my sloth I have profaned what was most sacred?"

Famous conversion



- ❧ I have reason to fear lest the earth should open under my feet, and swallow me up. Oh! suffer me to labor with ever-flowing fountains of tears, to expiate my innumerable sins. I ought, if I could, even to pour forth this wretched soul of mine in mourning; it would be all too little for my offences." In these sentiments of contrition he made so "real progress in virtue, that he became a model of humility to the rest
- ❧ After eight years spent in this penitential course, God had called him to himself by a holy death, St. Pachomius was assured by a revelation, that his soul was presented by angels to Christ.

His good example converted his brother and sister and led them to celibacy



- ❧ He converted many pagans, and zealously opposed the Arians
- ❧ Pachomius received first his own eldest brother John, so that he enlarged his house; and the number of his monks in a short time amounted to a hundred. Their clothing was of rough linen; that of St. Pachomius himself often haircloth. He passed fifteen years without ever lying down, taking his short rest sitting on a stone. He even grudged himself the least time which he allowed to necessary sleep, From the time of his conversion he never ate a full meal. By his rule, the fasts and tasks of work
- ❧ He built his sister a convent on the other side of the Nile

His miracles and love



- ❧ St Pachomius cared for the sick monks with special love. He visited them, he cheered the disheartened, he urged them to be thankful to God, and put their hope in His holy will. He relaxed the fasting rule for the sick, if this would help them recover their health.
- ❧ St Pachomius always taught the monks to rely only upon God's help and mercy. It happened that there was a shortage of grain at the monastery. The saint spent the whole night in prayer, and in the morning a large quantity of bread was sent to the monastery from the city, at no charge. The Lord granted St Pachomius the gift of wonderworking and healing the sick.
- ❧ He could never be induced by his bishop to receive the holy order of priesthood. In 333, he was favored with a visit of St. Athanasius at Tabenna, who tried to ordain him but he fled

His sweet death



- ❧ His monasteries were afflicted with a pestilence, which swept off a hundred monks. The saint himself fell sick, and during forty days suffered a painful distemper with incredible patience and cheerfulness, discovering a great interior joy at the approach of the end of his earthly pilgrimage.
- ❧ In his last moments he exhorted his monks to fervor, and having armed himself with the sign of the cross, resigned his happy soul into the hands of his Creator in the fifty-seventh year of his age. He lived to see in his different monasteries 7000 monks.

His monastic system



- ❧ As he sat in his cave an angel appeared and said: "You have successfully ordered your own life. So it is superfluous to remain sitting in your cave. Up ! go out and collect all the young monks and dwell with them, and according to the model which I now give you, so legislate for them;" and he gave him a brass tablet on which this was inscribed-
- ❧ "Thou shalt allow each man to eat and drink according to his strength; and proportionately to the strength of the eaters appoint to them their labors. And prevent no man either from fasting or eating. However, appoint the tasks that need strength to those who are stronger and eat, and to the weaker and more ascetic such as the weak can manage

The angels instructions



- ☞ Anyone wanting to join must have a three year probation and performance of the more toilsome labors before entering
- ☞ "As they eat let them cover their heads with their cowls lest one brother see another chewing. A monk is not allowed to talk at meals nor let his eye wander beyond his plate or the table."
- ☞ And he ordered them during the whole day to make twelve prayers, and twelve at the lamp-lighting, and twelve at the night-vigils, and three at the ninth hour. But when a group was about to eat he ordered a psalm to be sung before each prayer.

His great zeal



- ❧ Pachomius objected to the angel that the prayers were few!!!
- ❧ The angel said to him: " I gave this rule so as to make sure in advance that even the little ones keep the rule and are not afflicted. But the perfect have no need of legislation, for by themselves in their cells they have surrendered the whole of their life to the contemplation of God. "
- ❧ Let 3 monks dwell in each cell. Let them all go to one building for their food.
- ❧ Let them sleep not lying down full length, but let them make sloping chairs easily constructed and put their rugs on them and thus sleep in a sitting posture.

RULES & ORGANISATION



- ❧ The Pachomian monastery was a little village protected from relations with the outside by a huge wall with only one door and a porter checking arrivals: this put a distance between it and the outside world.
- ❧ Yet this little world was remarkably organised. In each house of this small village there lived about forty brothers all exercising the same craft; there was the house of bakers, the house of cooks, the house of cobblers; the house of scribes, etc. In each house the brothers lived under the authority of a housemaster, a 'superior' helped by a 'second'.
- ❧ Three or four houses formed a 'tribe'. A monastery was composed of 10 tribes; thus 30 or 40 houses each with 40 brothers adds up to more than a thousand monks in a monastery (1200-1400).

Prayer's importance



- ❧ Pachomian spirituality developed along two axes: union with God and union with the brethren.
- ❧ **1) Union with God**
- ❧ Pachomius was a man animated by the Spirit, a man of prayer; he was able to spend the whole night in prayer, even several nights, as many passages from the Lives witness. Union with God was all-important to him. To encourage it, the Rules insist above all on the Scriptures and the common Office. Asceticism was not forgotten, for Pachomius, a practical and experienced man, knew well that this encounter with God cannot come about without renouncing all that is not God: the world, one's family, and above all one's own will, the source of sin

Bible's importance



❧ A) Scripture

- ❧ Prayer and reading of the Bible go together in Pachomian spirituality. On his arrival in the monastery the novice must first learn to read in order to learn certain passages of the Bible by heart. The monk must meditate on the Word of God all the time, going to the Office, in the refectory or his cell, going to work and while at work
- ❧ 3 times a week the various superiors comment upon it, and after having listened to their explanations, **he shares with his brethren what he has remembered** before going into his cell to **meditate on it.**

Communal prayer



❧ B) The Divine Office

- ❧ There were two assemblies in the church, one in the day and one at night
- ❧ The two great offices in the church were very simple. The psalms or passages of Scripture were recited alternating with the Pater and silent prayers. They lasted a long time, but the monks were not idle, their hands were occupied in light work such as plaiting cords or making rush mats

Father of community



- ❧ 2) Union with the brothers: the Koinônia.
- ❧ A) Community of goods
- ❧ He meant not only material goods in common, but even one's own person by putting oneself at the service of others. This idea of service - even of bondage - is the basis of Pachomian cenobitism
- ❧ This bondage to one another also constituted the practical expression of a monk's imitation of Christ who became the servant of all. For Pachomius, it was this service which made cenobitism superior to anchoritism. Basil took up the idea.

Union with each other



- ❧ **This meant:** a) **The same rule of life.** The same observance for all, even superiors.
- ❧ **b) Poverty.** The poverty demanded by this ideal was characterised by dispossession, no one owned anything, it was shared
- ❧ **c) Work.** This came from the idea of service and was intended for the support of the poor. Pachomian poverty was the idea that the community's possessions really belonged to God; the community itself possessed nothing. Thus sharing with the poor is not a virtue, it is the normal thing to do.
- ❧ **d) Obedience** To break the bonds of self-love which are injurious to love of the community, Pachomius insisted on obedience so that within the community each member learned to suppress his own rights, his own desires.

To befriend Pakhom



- ❧ As lay people, we can still follow Pakhomius example and teachings
- ❧ We can put value on prayer and bible reading as the pillars of any life with God
- ❧ We can see our belongings in a different light- belonging to God and there for sharing-giving to the poor without counting our tythe..
- ❧ We can be obedient to our confession father
- ❧ We can serve those around us