

Monasticism and St. Pachomius

The Aim

- To increase the awareness of the teens about the monastic life and the need of the church to this type of life
- To study the spread and progress of the monastic life in the 4th century
- To have some spiritual value from the life of St. Pachomius.

References

- The paradise of the Fathers (Arabic – Bestan El-Rohban)
- Study of the history of the Egyptian monks, monasticism – Dr. Hakim (Arabic)
- Pachomius & Tadros his disciple (Fr. Tadtros Malaty – Arabic)
- The Cenobitism of St. Pachomius (Fr. Isiah Michael – Arabic)
- The Coptic Encyclopaedia (Attia Letters P,M)
- The Wisdom of the desert Fathers (Sister Benedicta – Word SLG)
- The Hermit Fathers (Fr. Samaan El-Souriany)
- The Arabic Programme Yr 8 July 4th, August 1st – Translated by St. George Sydney

Verses

- “... we have left all and followed you ...” Mt 19:27
- “... He went out to the mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God” (Lu 6:12)
- “of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains in dens and caves of the earth, and all these having obtained a good testimony through faith ..” (He 11:38,39)

Introduction

- The church in Egypt is characterised by “The Church of Martyrs”. The Egyptian Christian testify their faith in front of the rulers and emperors. Also they testify their faith through their Holy life in the world. Their testimony – after the end of the era of persecution started to be in the deserts facing the devils, and fighting the world of darkness, and carrying the life of purity and struggle.]
- Some of the Christians left their families, their possessions and the whole world and went in the deserts (lonely places) to have more time to spend with the Lord. They used to work to feed themselves. Their prayers and supplications were and still are the source of power of the Church. The Holy Spirit who inflamed them to sell everything and consecrated their lives for their Lord – in prayers, praising and deeds of mercy. There is not one style for all of them, but as the spirit guide them. Some in complete solitude other in communal (coenobitic monasticism) and other in a mid way between these two systems. Some inspired to serve the others, other refuse to meet anyone. So their lives are in general “an obedience” to their calls by the Lord.

The Lesson

1. The monk or nun is a person who devote who devote his/her life to the love of the Lord Jesus and spend all the 24 hours of the day with Him in prayer, contemplation. They practice any work to feed themselves (Ge 3:19) and the rest of the money they get, they distribute to the need” (Lu 10:42)
2. The aspects of the Monastic Life are:
 - **Isolation:** from the world and withdrawal from the human companionship (not because he hate the world or cannot cope with it but he/she find the pleasure and happiness with Jesus alone).

- **Chastity:** which is by mortifying the lusts of body helps monk / nun to attain a purer and more spiritual life (1 Co 7:7, 38; Mt 19:10-12, 22:30; IS 56:3-9).
- Obedience and readiness to comply with and submit to the guidance and commands of his / her abbot; not only when he/she still a neophyte but throughout his life (He 13:17) [Remember the obedience of ST. John The Short (John Colobos) when his mentor St. Poemen ordered him to water a dry and withered branch, the water was not easily available, but John continued to water it for 3 years till it flourished and gave fruit. St. Poemen offered the fruit to the monks saying “eat the fruits of obedience”]
- Voluntary Poverty: in fulfilment of Christ teaching “sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me”. (Mk 10:21; Mt 19:29)

3. The main three types of monastic experience are:

1. **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”.
2. **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.
3. **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 built in a central place. This style started by St. Makarius in Nitria and Scetic west of the Nile delta.

4. The Major Century of the monastic life in Egypt is the 4th Century

- **West of the Nile Delta:**
 - **Netria and Cellia:** started by St. Amon ~315. He followed the Anachoresis style of St. Anthony. When the number of ascetics increased, he went to Cellia and followed by ascetics who loved more solitude.
 - **Petra:** started by St. Makarius who started as a disciple to St. Amon in Netria and Cellia and then separated and lived in Petra ~330. Many followed his style of life as St. Ethedoros. Also some foreigners as St. Maxemos and St. Demodias. St. Moses the Black lived in this place. They follow the type of “Lavra” St. Ethodoros was the spiritual guide of Moses the Black. This is the place of the monastery of Baramos where the corpse of St. Moses, Maxemus and Domadius.
 - **Scete:** St. Makrarios departed to the south of the valley and started another group in the same basis of “Lavra”. This place is a “scete

Makarios" where St. Makarios monastery now.

- **Anba Bishoy:** Bishoy started as a disciple to St. Bimoi the disciple of St. Amon. He lived with St. John the Short for a while and formed a "Lavra" group near the place of St. Bishoy monastery ~390 AD ~ 2miles north of the place they lived together near the "tree of obedience".
- **John The Short:** John also started at Nitria and Cellia as disciple to St. Bimoi, till his teacher departed and advised him to settle near the "tree of obedience" ~357. A group gathered around him and lived in "Lavra" style of monasticism.
- **Lower Egypt:** Hermitage life, started by St. Anthony after 270 AD when he started to live in the Roman fortress.
- **Upper Egypt:**
 - Coenobitic or congregation monasticism started at Tabennesi ~320 by St. Pachomius.
 - St. Shenouda monastery near the mountain of Adribah. Hermits were living there. St. Shenouda learned monasticism life after his uncle "PJOL". In 383 AD all the monks there chose him to be the spiritual father of the group for his spiritual progress. He went with the Pope Cyril I in the council of Ephesus 431. He departed 466. There is a monastery in this place. He struggled to keep the faith of the monks by opening the door of the monastery to them. He was a national hero. He started the name of "Archimandrite" to the abbot of the monastery.

5. St. Pachomius – the father of Ceonobitism (Koinonia)

- Was born in ~ 285 AD to a pagan family at Chenoboseium
- Although he was not Christian, yet his conscience was alert, which led him to ask about the truth, to prevent him from committing big sins, as one night he refused to commit adultery with a beautiful girl.
- In 310 AD, he was recruited in the army, and in their way to the war, his legion camped in Latoplis. The Christian people of the village offered them a very good reception. And he asked the reason for this, he knew that they were Christians and following the teaching of their masters.
- He was eager to know about Jesus, so he spoke to one of the people of this village, who explained to him everything about the Lord and His love and sacrifice on the cross. So Pachomius decided to be a Christian as soon as he returns from the war.
- The Emperor denounced the war, so Pachomius returned back to the village called Chenoboscian. He went to the church and recorded his name in the list of Catechumen. When he received baptism he was very eager to learn everything about his life with Christ, lived in a temple. As he started to taste the Love of Christ in his life, he went around to serve the people, old, sick, ... One time an epedimic spread in a village named Senset and crippled the people from work, so he voluntary went out helping every family by collecting and distributing fire-wood till this plague ended. He spend 3 years.
- He was eager to love more the Lord, and he heard about as ascetic called Balamon, who lived a very hard life. So, he went to him and after many

petitions, he accepted him to live with him and to be a monk. He lived with Abba Balamon 7 years, growing in his life of prayer, fasting and ascetism. Sometimes they spent the whole night praying and praising.

- Pachomius was eager that everyone have to share in this type of life, but also he knew that it is very hard life to many. As he was thinking and praying for this matter an angel appeared to him and asked him to built a monastery in Tabennesis and gave him a bronze tablet with the rules.
- He talked to abba Balamon and asked him to come with him to build and start this new type of monastic life.
- He went with him and built a cell which was the core of the monastery. A lot of brethren gathered around him, so he built them a church, and another church in the village. As the monastery extended (included ~2,500 monk) he built another monastery at Pbow. The total number of monasteries were about 7 including about 7000 monks. For each monastery there was an abbot (supervisor) assisted by an assistance, stock keeper and a librarian Also each group from the trades had a supervisor.
- There were 2 general meeting every year for all the monasteries. One in Easter and the other in August when the name of responsible people were nominated.
- He departed on the 14 Bashanc in the age of 60 (~345 AD)
- He built a convent for nuns, his sister was the supervisor for this convent.

6. The features of the spiritual life of St. Pachomius

- **His life of prayer:** He spent days and nights praying. He loved the Lord with all his heart. He prayed in tears for everyone specially the sinner to return back.
- **His humility:** the real humility is to disappear behind the Lord, live in power and authority of the Lord, sacrificing everything, caring for everyone and loving everyone. The humility in St. Pachomius was evident in:
 - Refusal to desire the miracles
 - His service to his disciples
 - Did not favour himself in anything
 - Did not accept any rank of the priesthood
 - One time a proud monk said to two of St. Pachomius disciples if you have faith stand on a fire and pray our father who art in Heaven and when St. Pachomius heard that, he said that this monk is full of the devil. Later this monk came in tears asking St. Pachomius to pray for him because this was the tricks of the devil.
 - He was serving as any monk in the monastery and refused that anyone favour him more than the others. Once he was sick, so they put him in the house of the sick people and offered him some food which is tasty, so he put water on it to make it tasteless and eat it.
 - When Pople Athanasious passed his monatery, and some bishops asked him to ordaine St. Pachomius priest, he disappeared.
- **His obedience:** once he went to one of his monasteries and sat down to net the robes. Then one of the new monks passed by him and said to him, Father, this is not the right way to knet the robes. So St. Pachomius said to him. Tell

me son how can I do it and he taught him. He started joyfully with the new method.

- **His love and care for everyone to save him:**
 - He prayed that the Lord show him an easy way that everyone is able to consecrate his life to the Lord. So the angel showed him the "Coenobitism"
 - Built the church to the people of Tabennesis and supplied it with all the needs
 - One time he was going visiting one of the monasteries then one young monk said to him "since you left us the last time, on one cooked any hot meal, or vegetables. So he told him, do not be sad, I will organise everything". Then after church he asked the person in charge of the kitchen, why he stopped cooking for the monks? He through the food most of the times. He told him that he did mats instead. So he asked again, "how many mates you did instead of cooking" he answered 500 mats. So he ordered him to bring the 500 mats and burned them infront of all the monks. And he told him "obey the rule of the monastery and do not obey your rules, it is better to throw the food than to stumble one of the brethren.

- **His Long Suffering**
 - Once one of the supervisors refuse to give one of the monks a supervision job as he new that he is not suitable for this job. So this monk went to St. Pachomius and started to blame him and call him bad names as he thought that he was the one who gave the instructions. St. Pachomius felt that the devil was motivating this monk. He smiled and said to him "forgive me for my mistake, I instructed the supervisor to give you the job". And suddenly this monk was ashamed of himself and confessed his sins and asked for forgiveness.

7. The rules of the Coenobitism

- Let the monk eat as he wish, but give them work accordingly
- They live in a cell
- They have a uniform for the monastery and different uniform for outside
- The food offered at lunch and at dinner but not compulsory and consists of bread, cheese, vegetables, soup, fruits. But no meat or wine except in sickness. During the eating, one of the monks should read from the bible.
- The monk sleep till midnight and then wakeup to pray and praise till the morning
- The manual work is compulsory for everyone
- They pray together in the morning, noon and at evening
- Their personal prayers is according to the guidance of the spiritual father
- The holy Liturgy on Saturday and Sunday
- For the beginners there are 3 daily lessons. For the others have two spiritual weekly meetings on Wednesday and Friday.

Conclusion

- [If you think that the lesson needs more than one lesson, then split it into two lessons]
- The class must end by glorification to the saint "in the name of " St. Pachomius is the father of the community" and light a candle in front of his icon all the time of the class.
- Pick up one virtue of the Saint and apply it, let each one in the class do this, next week ask about this.