

Monasticism in St. Jerome's Letters and Lives of the Hermits*

COMMUNITY MONASTICISM

COMMUNITY monasticism was probably most common in the East. To Pachomius, its real founder, Jerome makes in the Letters only a stray reference in 127.5. It was roughly of two kinds: that which tried to unite solitude with organised community life — the monks lived in cells but met at fixed hours for prayers and for meals; and that of monastics living together in community without any obligation of solitude. The former was the type current in Egypt; the latter was adopted by Jerome and Paula in their monasteries at Bethlehem.

In Egypt, at Nitria alone the monks numbered at one time about five thousand (22.33). In 22.35 we have a somewhat picturesque summary of the system as developed in Egypt. The monks were known as coenobites. They lived together divided into groups of ten and of a hundred so that each tenth had authority over nine others while the hundredth had ten of these elders under him. Each monk lived in a cell of his own, but they were all bound together by having to obey a common superior and do whatever he commanded. No monk might visit another before the ninth hour except the elders above mentioned whose office was to comfort with soothing words those who were disquieted by their thoughts. After the ninth hour they met together to sing psalms and read the Scripture. After prayers one called the father addressed them and explained a passage of the Scripture. After the sermon the meeting broke up and each company went to its own table. This they took in turn to serve each for a week at a time. Meals were taken in silence, and they generally consisted of bread, pulse and greens seasoned only with salt. Wine was only given to the old who along with the children had often a special meal served for them to repair the feebleness of age and to save the young from premature decay. When the meal was over they all arose together, and after singing a hymn returned to their dwellings, and for a while they were free to chat and talk together. At night, besides the public prayers, each one kept vigil in his own

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cell. The fathers went round the cells and put their ears at the doors carefully ascertaining what each monk was doing. If they found a monk idle they visited him more frequently and at first rather exhorted him than compelled him to pray more. Each monk had a daily task allotted to him, and when that was given to the father, it was by him taken to the steward, who, each month gave an account to the common father. The steward also saw to the food, and the personal necessities of the monks in the way of clothing and provision of the cells. If a monk fell ill he was removed to the infirmary and there nursed carefully. Sundays were spent in prayer and reading. Every day they learned a passage of the Scripture. They kept certain fasting days all the year round, fasting more strictly in Lent. In Whitsuntide they exchanged their evening meal for a mid-day one.

Jerome does not tell us in the Letters whether this ten-grouping system was followed in the monasteries of other places; but the basic occupations of monastic life were the same everywhere. A special form of self-denial which was characteristic of community life and on which Jerome puts particular stress was obedience. In 125.15 he warns Rusticus that "he would have to do what others wish, eat what is told to eat, wear what clothes are given to him, perform the task allotted to him, obey one whom he does not like; he will come to bed tired out; he will go to sleep on his feet and will be forced to rise before he has sufficient rest; he will serve his brethren and wash the guests' feet; if he suffers wrong he will bear it in silence; he will pass no judgement on those over him; his time will be taken up by the tasks allotted to him".

Monastic life was often embraced at a young age. Hilarion was barely fifteen when he joined Antony's group. In 22.35 it is suggested that there might be even children in the monasteries of Egypt, and in 107.13 Jerome advises Laeta to send her infant Paulina to be reared up by her grandmother Paula and her aunt Eustochium at the monastery of Bethlehem.

Manual-work is repeatedly mentioned (e.g. 125.11; M. 3; H. 26-28), and it included the weaving of baskets (125.11) and linen (22.33), and agriculture (125.11; H. 26-28). Copying of books was often one of the occupations of monks living in a community (cf. Palladius, ap. Butler, p. 524, and *infra* p. 723). This account given by Jerome of the coenobites' way of life

agrees with that given by other sources, especially about monks living according to the Pachomian rule (Butl. p. 524).

Sometimes monks acted as agents for public charity by collecting money to be distributed among the poor. Jerome mentions the case of one who at his death was found to have left to his children and relatives the alms which had been collected by him for distribution among the poor of his city (125.10).

In many cases, as in Egypt, the monks' manual work was enough to pay for their upkeep. But, especially when they had no land to cultivate, that was not sufficient and they had to rely on the generosity of wealthy donors. The great families with vast fortunes were often a great help in that way. Julian supported a number of monks in the islands of Dalmatia (118.5), Fabiola helped those of the Etruscan islands (77.6), Paula kept her monasteries at Bethlehem (108.30). Jerome himself spent what remained to him of his father's patrimony on his own monastery at Bethlehem.

The description of Paula's monasteries in 108.20 as well as other passages in which references are made to the nunneries of Jerome's time give us a good insight into what such female institutions were not only in Rome but also in the East. The day was an alternate round of prayer and work. The former began in the morning with the singing of the "alleluia" and included the morning congregation called the "collect", including, perhaps, the receiving of Holy Communion (108.20), the singing of psalms at fixed hours, the reading of Scriptural passages, prayers before and after meals (22.37), the observance of vigils (130.11) and, on Sundays, and presumably also on Church festivals, a service in Church (108.20).

The singing of psalms at fixed times mostly took the form of the canonical hours. Jerome mentions those recited at dawn, at the third, sixth, ninth hours and at evening, and adds that prayers including the recitation of passages from the Bible were also said twice or three times during the night (22.37). In 108.20 and 130.15 he again mentions prayers at midnight. These last might easily correspond to our Matins which include three nocturns and were originally meant to be recited at different times of the night. Each nocturn is still made of a number of psalms to be sung or recited and passages of the Bible to be read. Lauds are more or less an adjunct to Matins and may

easily be included with the prayers said during the night. The prayers at dawn would correspond to our Prime and the prayers at evening to Vespers and Compline which are really one. Compline began to be recited at a separate hour in the ninth century (cf. Duchesne, p. 449, who, however, considers Compline as not said at all before that time). Hence although the canonical hours were not completely fixed at Jerome's time, they were well on the way to be so.

In the case of nuns manual labour could hardly be expected to find a place as a means of livelihood, and although Paula's nuns made garments in idle hours these were made for home use or charitable purposes rather than as a source of income (108.20), and were principally meant to fill up the time between the various items of prayer. The maidens belonging to wealthy families generally brought with them the money which would have been set apart for their dowry if they had married and gave it for the general upkeep of the monastery (130.6). But that was hardly enough. Often indeed worldly minded parents did not care to give more than a pittance to a daughter who joined a nunnery (130.6), and, besides, many of the virgins who joined the movement were of humble origin, some even of servile condition (22.29; 108.20; 130.6), and could hardly be expected to contribute in any way. Hence in the West nunneries mostly developed around the noble ladies whose vast wealth could support the expenses they entailed (54.14; 130.6). The old system of clientship which was still a part of social life in Rome helped the movement by making it appear not altogether foreign to Roman social customs. This should go far to explain the immediate response the movement found in some of the wealthiest aristocratic ladies in the Capital like Marcella, Lea, Fabiola, Proba, Sophronia, even in the face of initial opposition. This aristocratic, and, in a way, "clientship" aspect of the Roman communities gave a special character to the management of each nunnery, making it a more or less private and personal affair of the lady who founds it. The lady presides over it and rules it very much in the same manner as she had before ruled her private household, and after her death a daughter or relative of hers steps into her place. Such was the case of Paula who was succeeded by Eustochium, her daughter, and, later, by Paulina, her niece. This is confirmed by Theodoret according to whom Melania is succeeded by Melania the younger,

her daughter, in the rule of the monastery founded by Rufinus and herself.

Although some sort of equality of treatment both for noble and low-born maidens was generally taken for granted (22.29), noble maidens seem often to have been given some preferential treatment. Sometimes they might be allowed to have a girl servant to attend to them in the monastery (108.20). Paula indeed did not allow that in her communities, but tried to reconcile the innate aristocratic pride of Roman maidens with community equality by grouping her nuns into three companies according to noble, middle-class or low standard of their birth, and having each group to live and have their meals in separate parts of the monastery (108.20).

Apart from the general monastic principles each monastery seems to have had its own discipline as set down by the lady who founded it or presided over it: in spite of the fact that the rule of St. Pachomius was by the end of the fourth century well established in Egypt and that of St. Basil in Asia Minor, general monastic legislation did not begin before the second half of the fifth century (Butl. p. 530). At this time the Western founders of monasteries often borrow stray elements from these rules but they are far from adopting these rules "in toto".

In Paula's monasteries community life was strictly enforced. Food and clothing were shared equally; all the sisters dressed alike; nothing was allowed to be owned by anyone; prayers were said in community by the three companies together in the same monastery church.

The secret of discipline was for Jerome gentleness in command. In 82.3 he writes to Theophilus: "Non quaeris monachos tibi esse subiectos et ideo magis subiectos habes; tu offers osculum, illi colla submitunt, exhibes militem et ducem impetras; quasi unus in pluribus es, ut sis unus ex pluribus, cito indignatur libertus si vi opprimitur; nemo plus imperat libero, nisi qui servire non cogit". So in Paula's monasteries discipline was tempered with gentleness and strengthened by Paula's own example. but, if need be, it was strictly enforced by disciplinary measures such as by ordering a refractory nun to have her food by herself or to say her prayers at the door of the refectory.

Every precaution was taken to forestall abuses. Seclusion was strictly enforced, and the sisters were not allowed to be approached by men — not even by eunuchs, Jerome adds quite

seriously. The very windows were built at a height which could not easily be reached. Each group was accompanied by its mother superior both in going to church and in coming home (130.19). The vigilance kept by the mother-superior can be gathered from the incident of Sabinianus whose attempt to abduct one of the nuns ended in complete failure and detection (147.6).

Over-attention to or frivolity in dress or personal culture was strictly banned. Great care was taken for restraint and propriety in personal behaviour, considering as a great crime even the petty faults which among men of the world are counted for little or nothing, especially in the way of verbosity, forwardness and quarrelsomeness. Life was rigid and food common and coarse except in illness when every indulgence was conceded.

Paula's monastic rule no doubt reflected Jerome's own ideal of coenobitic life as he had developed it in 386 after so much personal experience, and after having studied it closely at Aquileia, in Syria, in Rome and in Egypt. It is decidedly eclectic. The subdivision of nuns into companies who live separately in different parts of the same group of buildings is taken from the Pachomian system whose monks dwelt in different houses within the monastery precincts (Butl. p. 528). Other traces of the Pachomian model are: the rather definite and ordered way of life which Paula's nuns led as against the large discretion which monasteries in the Antonian system were left to follow in the employment of their time and in the practice of their asceticism; the uniformity of dress imposed upon the nuns — indeed that might have easily been a habit (108.20); the setting up within the precincts of the monastery a hostel for pilgrims (108.14). From St. Basil (Butl. p. 528) Jerome borrowed the philanthropic idea such as setting up a school where boys were educated without any view of their becoming monks (Ruf. 2.8, P.L. xxi. 592). The hospital built jointly by Pam-machius and Fabiola in Rome when they had become monastics was no doubt the result of the advice and encouragement of Jerome (66.11; 77.6). But in Jerome's ideal the superior-funder of the monastery is more or less supreme and his management of discipline is arbitrary and, it seems, irresponsible. Jerome is yet some way from the Benedictine idea of a superior governing according to a written rule to which he is himself in

conscience bound. One must of course appreciate that in 386-420 monasticism, especially with the Western peoples was still in its very infancy and it is to the credit of Jerome that he developed so early such a comprehensive if not perfect type of coenobitic life. Indeed, in many ways, it is the one which the Western world developed in the Middle Ages and which was ultimately handed down to our own times.

There seems to have been no hard and fast rule about the grouping together of various monastic establishments. Some monasteries being founded by one individual kept a common discipline and were from time to time visited by the founder. Such is the case of the monasteries founded by Hilarion in Palestine (H. 24-28). But many others were completely autonomous. In either case they had no disciplinary connection with the local bishops, which practice continued throughout the Middle Ages (Butl. p. 535).

In Jerome's time the chief modes of address were already mostly fixed. Ordinary monks were called "fratres" (105.1; 17.4; et passim); nuns "sorores" (108.20; et alibi); the elders were called "patres" (22.34-36) and "matres" (108.20). In "Malchus" 3 and 10 (written in 391) the chief monk is called "abbas". Since this word "abbas" is also used by Jerome in Gal. 4.6, written in 387, and in Matth. 23.9, written in 398, but not in his earlier works, nor by earlier writers one may suggest that this title came into being about 385, or that it may have been some special mode of address used at that time only in Syria and Palestine (10).

"HOME" MONASTICISM

Another form of monasticism which was very common in Jerome's time especially in the West is that of people who professed themselves monks and nuns but continued to live in their own homes without joining any religious community. Jerome does not give it any special name — in 118.6, he writes of Julian: "inter saeculares... monachum" — but we can obtain a clear idea of it from the many references he makes to it in the letters. Among Jerome's correspondents such a monastic life was led by Heliodorus (14.2), Rusticus and his wife Artemia (E. 122), another Rusticus (E. 125), Furia (Ep. 54), Paula

(10) Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Ethics and Religion*, s.v. "abbas". Cassian who uses the word extensively is not earlier.

and Eustochium before they left for Palestine (Epp. 22 and 39), Pammachius (Ep. 66), Paulinus (Ep. 58), Julian and his wife Faustina (Ep. 118). Malchus in the last part of his life (M. 1), and the girl in Hilarion 21 may also be quoted. Many of the Roman ladies who, later, set up or joined a monastic community must have begun by pursuing this type of monasticism.

This was especially the case with married people who made a vow of continence (e.g. Paulinus, 58.6; Rusticus and Artemia, *supra*, etc.), of maidens who for family or social reasons found it difficult to join a religious community (perhaps Pacatula of Ep. 128), or clergymen who while attracted by the monastic vocation wanted to continue in their ministerial activities. Such were Bishop John of Jerusalem (82.10), the priest Heliodorus (*supra*) etc.

The distinctive feature of this type of monasticism was the public profession of virginity. The cult of virginity was not new to the Church, and the privileged position of widows was as old as Apostolic times. As the new monastic movement was essentially based on continence virgins and widows easily became identified with it and incorporated in the monastic movement, and anybody who chose to embrace a life of virginity or continence, sought, in Jerôme's day, one form or another of monastic life. Such was the case of Malchus (M. 3), and Jerome continually calls by the name of monks and nuns those who followed such a vocation. What seems to have been needed, in Jerôme's time was some sort of public profession of the ascetic life even in the form of some distinctive habit as in the case of Pammachius (66.6) or of a public taking of the veil, as in the case of maidens (cf. *supra*).

Asceticism at home was practised very much on the same lines as in other forms of monastic life except that it was done privately and not under direction. Such monastics were expected to be free in their charities and to abstain from those crafts and trades which necessarily involved considerable profits (125.16). Otherwise it was just the ordinary life of laymen. Indeed, in Jerome's view it was this life of ordinary occupations which was to serve as an antidote to the life of idleness, frivolity and worldliness which surrounded many of the 'home' nuns of noble birth in Rome. Thus Jerome continually suggests the spinning and weaving of wool as an occupation for nuns (130.15; 107.10; etc.) and agricultural pursuits for monks (125.11).

MONASTIC DRESS

In Jerome's time monastic habits in the strict sense of the word are not yet in universal use. They were much more common in the East, through the influence of the Pachōmian rule, than in the West. Those who had a habit often wore a sack-cloth tunic to which was attached a cowl and a cloak of hair-cloth (H. 44). Woollen cloth is repeatedly suggested by Jerome for the tunic (e.g. 107.10). The monks at Bethlehem probably wore the hair-cloth cloak with a hood as Jerome sends such cloaks to Lucinius and his wife. When a girdle was worn it was made of wool (38.4). Some monks kept long beards (125.6). But those who did not live in a community often dressed themselves as they fancied. So Paul had a tunic made of palm leaves (P. 12).

We have seen that nuns living in a community might be required to dress alike, but we cannot be sure that there was at the time anything in the nature of a distinctive habit for female monastics. In any case much depended on the choice of the mother superior. But there were a few general principles which were commonly accepted and which made the dress sufficiently distinctive of the monastic vocation. The most important thing was to avoid gaudiness and finery. Hence silks and linen and bright colours were banned, and woollen garments of a sombre colour, dark-grey and brown, black and cheap shoes (38.4) and a veil for a head-dress were in common use (147.5). The important thing was to avoid attraction either by too studied neatness or by a show of slovenliness (22.28), or, worse still, by a parading of overdevotedness (ib.). In female communities, especially in those of Syria and Egypt, the custom was introduced of nuns cutting their hair, and this was designed, as Jerome explains in 147.5, to save those who took no baths and who made use of no unguents on their hair from accumulated dirt. The close-fitting cap (22.27) and the veil (38.4) were presumably worn so as not to let it appear that their hair had been cut.

WORLDLINESS OF SOME MONASTICS

Home monasticism, lacking community discipline, was fraught with dangers. The social distinction and advantages that little by little began to be attached to the movement was too much to be resisted and many embraced it who had really

no vocation for it. Indeed, the movement in little over forty years (341-385) had, certainly in Rome, by far outrun its spiritual consolidation. Others who may have looked at the vocation with genuine admiration could hardly reconcile themselves to the sacrifices it entailed. Typical is the case of Aselia's mother. She dedicates her daughter to monastic life and makes her take the veil when she is still a child of ten (24.2), but then she objects to Aselia's sombre clothes as was customary with nuns (24.3). The practice of dedicating children to a monastic vocation from infancy must have forced a monastic life on many who, when they had grown up, found out that they had no aptitude for it. Hence, especially in the case of aristocrats, there must have been many who, finding themselves for one reason or another into a vocation for which they were unfit tried to pass for monastics without sacrificing much of the brilliant life they were supposed to have foregone. And we may well believe Jerome when he laments that there were many monks and nuns who did not live up to their vocation, whose renunciation of the world consisted only in a change of clothes and a verbal profession while their real life and former habits remained unchanged (125.16), or lived a lukewarm life in complete indifference to their vows (107.11). Some, indeed, by their bad behaviour brought discredit on their profession (130.19). Others, again, while professing poverty were unable to break off from the trades and crafts they had previously practised, and although they no more called themselves dealers, they carried on the same traffic as before, seeking profits, and even with greater greediness than if they were men of the world (60.11). Often, says Jerome, they deceived the simple and under the good name of Christianity received alms, all the time, hiding gold beneath their rags (125.16; 58.2). Sometimes, indeed, fortunes worthy of Croesus were revealed at their death (125.10). Some did not blush openly to buy estates, or lead a brilliant life with swarms of servants around them and kept a table wherein "in vitro et patella fictili aurum comeditur" (125.16). Maids and servant girls who were professed virgins dressed themselves so gorgeously that when they went abroad with their mistresses it was hard to tell which was the mistress. Indeed, says Jerome, so common had that become that of two women the one less neatly dressed was as a matter of course taken to be the mistress (130.19). Others were more careful

about appearances while all the time they were gorging themselves with food (22.27), or made up for their abstinence from common food by indulging in epicurean dainties (52.12).

Many, besides, did their best to broadcast their virtues. They walked as solemnly as pageants through the streets and did nothing but snarl at everyone whom they met, shrugged their shoulders and croaked out what was best to themselves or kept their eyes fixed upon the ground and "balanced swelling words with their tongues": only a crier was needed to persuade an onlooker that it was His Excellency the Prefect who was coming along (125.16). Similarly, certain nuns deliberately "lowered their voice as though worn out with fasting, leaned on the shoulders of a friend and mimicked the tottering gait of one who was faint". As soon as they caught sight of anyone they groaned, looked down, covered their faces, all but one eye (22.27; cf. also 130.18), kept their hands and feet dirty and made sure of showing off their sombre dress, their cheap girdle and coarse sackcloth. If they cut their hair, adds Jerome, they made a show of it by putting on hoods, looking, in Jerome's words, like so many owls (22.27).

Such a parade of holiness was often not less conspicuous in monks. Some of them went about loaded with chains, with long hair like women, with beards like goatees, and with bare feet braving the cold (22.28).

Worse still, some monastics were not careful in their behaviour with the other sex. In 125.6 Jerome sadly remarks that some were inseparable from women, lived under one roof with them, dined in their company, had young girls to wait upon them, and save that they did not claim to be called husbands were as good as married (125.6). In 50.3, Jerome gives an amusing picture of a monk who liked to visit widows and virgins and with knitted brows lectured the poor women on sacred literature in the privacy of their own chambers.

Hence it is clear that the abuses of which Butler writes as having developed in the fifth and sixth centuries (p. 530) were already in a considerable measure showing themselves by the end of the fourth.

INFLUENCE OF MONKS

Apart from its ascetic significance as a spiritual force monasticism had considerable repercussions on the development of doctrine and organisation in the Church.

If the life of an ideal monk was characterised by prayer and penance, it was also comparatively free from care and activity as against the more busy life of the clergy. Hence it was the ideal life for study. This was clearly seen by Jerome who continually advises his monastic correspondents to devote themselves to the study of the Scriptures, and, who himself set the example by giving all his energy to study and writing and kept his monks fully occupied in the writing and copying of books. At one time he opened a school for the children of Bethlehem (cf. *supra*).

The extent to which the monastic communities laboured at the copying and, no doubt, editing of books is incalculable. Stray references show that some of the communities with which Jerome was in correspondence had it as a regular practice. This was the case of the monk Florentius to whom Jerome sends a list of books copies of which he desired to have made (5.2); the monk Lucinius sends his amanuenses from Spain to Bethlehem to copy on the spot Jerome's works (71.5); Paul the hermit of Concordia had an extensive theologic library (Ep. 10); Jerome suggests the practice to Rusticus of Tolosa in Gaul as one of his occupations as a monk (125.11).

That Jerome's advice about study was followed not only by those in immediate association with him, such as the circles of Marcella and Paula, but also by monks and nuns all over the West may be inferred from the number of theological and Biblical points of doctrine raised and discussed in the letters to and from Jerome's correspondents in Italy, Gaul, Spain, Africa, indeed, even in Gothic-peopled lands (106.1). It is significant that when the Origenists tried to spread their doctrines in Rome it was the nun Marcella who stood out against them and defeated their attempt (127.9). The far-reaching results of this policy of study and copying of books can only be estimated from the fact that in the Middle Ages the monasteries became practically the only centres of study and learning and kept the flame of culture burning throughout the centuries of intellectual darkness. The first symptoms of the practice of copying manuscripts which developed into full bloom during the next two centuries with Cassiodorus (480-570) and Columbanus (550-621) already begins to take definite shape in some of the monasteries established at the end of the fourth century, certainly in those of Jerome.

The study of theology was at the time mainly Scriptural. It is therefore on the Scriptures, and, in some cases, on the study of Hebrew that monks and nuns mostly concentrated. Such was the case of Biesilia (39.1), Paula (108.26), Eustochium (108.26), Fabiola (77.7). Many monks became so learned that theologians and bishops consulted them on points of doctrine. So Pope Damasus consults Jerome on the interpretation of Biblical passages during the latter's first stay in the East (Epp. 18, 19, 21, 35). Some of them were also priests and deacons (108.14), and in places where they lived in harmony and subjection to their bishops they were a great help to the Church (82.3). So Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria makes use of the monks of Nitria as envoys to Cyprus and Constantinople (Ep. 90), and when Athanasius, an earlier Patriarch of the same See, needed a theologian's help to confute the heretics he summoned the hermit Antony (68.2). Hence in many places the influence of monks was great and lasting (16.2).

But their influence was not always for good. Although their inferior dignity in respect to the clergy was everywhere acknowledged (14.8; 125.8), even to the point of having to stand in the presence of presbyters (14.8), full as they were of their theological learning they could hardly refrain from taking part in the theological controversies that tore the Church in the fourth century, especially in the East. Indeed, in view of their prestige due to holiness it was a great thing for any theologian whether orthodox or heretic to have them on his side. Hence the efforts made by heretics to enlist their support, and they were hardly ever slow to respond one way or the other. Thus a good number of monks at Nitria were at one time affected by Origenism (Epp. 88, 89, 92), and those of the Chalcidian desert of Syria where Jerome had settled in his first stay in the East were tainted with Arianism (17.2; 15.5). Ep. 17 gives a vivid description of the impudence and arrogance of these monks "who dared defy the authority of bishops and the universal authority of the Church: 'de cavernis cellularum damnatus orbem, si in sacco et cinere volutati de episcopis sententiam ferimus'" (17.2). Their importunity became so acute that Jerome had to quit the desert (Ep. 17). Pelagius was a monk; the heretic who in 385 A.D. tries to spread Montanism in Rome (Ep. 41) tries his hand on the nun Marcella, so also in 108.23-25

we are told of the Origenist who tried to convert the nun Paula to his doctrines.

This picture of theological intrigue which Jerome paints so vividly is by no means exaggerated. A little later, towards the end of the fifth century, at the time of the Euthychian heresy, it was mainly owing to the monks of Egypt that the Egyptian Church became monophysite.

Such influence was made even stronger by the comparative disciplinary independence from local bishops which monastic establishments enjoyed. Ep. 51 sent by Bishop Epiphanius to Bishop John of Jerusalem is revealing in this sense. Jerome's brother who was a monk of Jerome's community at Bethlehem in the diocese of Jerusalem had been ordained as a priest by Epiphanius when on a visit to a monastery in the diocese of Eleutheropolis which Epiphanius was at the time also visiting and which, years before, he had founded when he was monk of Hilarion's company. John protested and claimed that Epiphanius's action was an undue interference with a subject of his. Epiphanius answers that according to the disciplinary canons in force at the time monks were exempted from the jurisdiction of local bishops and could be promoted to Holy Orders by any bishop.

As is evident from this brief summary, the works of St Jerome give evidence for a few aspects of monasticism which are not usually found in other sources. They establish the relation between the quick development of the movement and the social conditions of the fourth century, especially in the West; they reveal and explain its initial aberrations and defects, its relation with the spreading of theological inquiry, and its influence on the organisation and morals of the Church. Most important of all, they show Jerome's leadership in the West, and his activity in exposing the hypocrisies of some of those who followed the movement, in correcting its aberrations and in directing it to profitable works of charity and culture.

(Concluded)

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