

EASTERN MONASTICISM FROM ITS INCEPTION UNTIL THE 10TH CENTURY

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Abstract

In the East, monasticism took three main forms, which appeared in Egypt around 350, and are still found in the Eastern Church. From Egypt, which is considered the homeland of monasticism, these forms of monasticism spread very quickly in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Bithynia, but also in the West. The first form of monasticism is that of hermits, ascetics, who lived a contemplative life practicing the most rigorous asceticism, living isolated (in caves, huts, or in individual cells), and St. Anthony the Great (250-350) is considered the founder of the Christian monasticism. The second form of monasticism is that of community life (or chinovial), where monks live together, following the same rules, in a monastery. The most representative was St. Pachomius the Great (292-346), followed by St. Basil the Great (330-379). The third form of monasticism falls between the two, with a life of semi-isolation, a kind of "middle way", where instead of a single superior organized community, we have a group of small settlements, composed of two or six members, living together, under the guidance of an older monk. After the beginnings of monasticism, monasteries for women were soon established, and over the centuries monks and nuns have played a very important role in the history of the Church. Monasticism spread to almost all regions of the East and West, and between the 5th and 9th centuries its development reached its peak.

Key words: *Christianity, monasticism, spirituality, rules, asceticism*

Introduction

Since its inception, monasticism has played an important role in Eastern spirituality. The word monk comes from the Greek *monos/monachos*, which means one, alone or solitary. In Romanian, the word monk or nun comes from the Greek expression "kalogeron", which means "nice wise old man" (*Istoria bisericească universală*, (2021) Vol. I Ediția a II-a, revizuită. Coordonator: Ioniță, V., Benga, D., Chifăr N., Gabor, A., Leb, I. V., Pătuleanu, C., București: Basilica: 319). So, one of the simplest and most spectacular ways to leave the outside world, was to leave it for solitude, anahoresis (KAPLAN, M. (2010) *Bizanț*, București: Nemira: 225). The life of the first Christian communities in the pagan world, was separated from the public life: theater, circus and all its holidays; the limited space in which their lives took place convinces us about the "monastic" nature of early Christianity, lived in the world but was in fact separated from it. As Christianity developed and was embraced by the pagans, the decline of moral life began to appear at the end of the second century. In this situation, within the Church, there was a growing monastic tendency of those who wanted to live a life in accordance with evangelical principles, and so we have many examples of these ascetic isolations as early as the third century (Schmemmann, A. *O istorie a Bisericii de Răsărit*, București: Sophia: 145).

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For Christians, the absolute model for an ascetic life was the Savior Jesus Christ Himself, who, before beginning his preaching work, fasted in the wilderness for forty days: “*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry*” (Mt. 4, 1-2). Another model for Christians was St. John the Baptist. “*John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey*” (Mt. 3, 4). Therefore, St. John the Baptist was a model of ascetic life for Christians (*Istoria bisericească universală*: 2021: 320).

Asceticism comes from the Greek word *ascesis*, which was used for athletic training. Christian writers, especially the spiritual monks of the fourth and fifth centuries, took it from the athletic description first used by St. Paul the Apostle when describing the hard training to which competitors were subjected for ten months who participated in the Olympic Games: “*Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*” (I Cor. 9, 24-27). Therefore, the winners of these competitions were rewarded with a crown made of pine branches, which was the sacred tree of Poseidon (Dușe, C. I. (2020) *Imperiul Roman și creștinismul în timpul Sfântului Clement Romanul*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană: 413). We note that the Holy Apostle Paul urged Christians to observe strict rules such as sexual abstinence, fasting, and giving up material possessions in order to obtain an immortal crown.

The beginnings of monasticism

The ascetic movement within Christianity is already present in the books of the New Testament, which develops apocalyptic themes, contrasting the life lived in accordance with evangelical principles and not with the comfort of worldly life. This Pauline ascetic message was consistent with Hellenistic ideas about the “temperate life” of the sage (*sophrosyne*), but also for the most part with the writings of the first two Christian centuries, such as the *Didache/Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (50-70), the two *Epistles to the Corinthians* of St. Clement the Roman († 101) and *The Shepherd of Herma* (145-154). A strong impulse came from Tertullian (160-240), whose writings speak of many men and women of his time who practiced asceticism in the Church of Carthage (McGukin, J. A. (2014) *Dicționar de teologie patristică*, Iași: Doxologia: 45). Therefore, the most privileged place for asceticism became the desert. (*eremos*, in Greek language) where the word hermit comes from. The Savior Jesus Christ also retired to the wilderness, where he fasted for forty days and forty nights before beginning his preaching work (Kaplan, 2010: 225).

Monasticism is the best way to understand Eastern spirituality, because it played a key role in its formation, and from the fourth century it became an institution in the Church (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 321). Thus, the ascetic writings of Saints Pachomius the Great (290-346), Basil the Great (330-379), John Casian (360-435) and Benedict of Nursia (480-543), who were the great organizers of monasticism, transcended the boundaries of monasteries and spread among the faithful, enriching and beautifying the piety of Christian life (Sfântul Teofan Zăvorătuț, (2002) *Rânduilele vieții monahale. Sfântul*

Vasile cel Mare, Sfântul Pabomie cel Mare, Sfântul Ioan Casian, Sfântul Benedict, Ediția a II-a, București: Sophia: 5).

Thus, monasticism reminds us of brilliant names that influenced its development. Among these we must mention the name of St. Anthony the Great (250-350), who is considered the founder of Christian monasticism (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 321). Thus, through the monastic communities St. Anthony the Great is considered the forefather of the monasticism in Thebaida and at the foot of Mount Colzim/Kolizim/Qolzum, by the Red Sea. There were about six thousand of them (Telea, M., (2021) *Istoria și spiritualitatea Imperiului Bizantin Vol. 2. Civilizația, cultura și spiritualitatea Imperiului Bizantin*, Alba-Iulia, Reîntregirea: 93). Due to the fact that they lived alone, they called themselves monks, and their communities were called lavres (Voicu, C., Colda, L.D. (2015) *Patrologie II*, București, Basilica: 267). Also, St. Anthony the Great became the Lonely Monk Model (*Eremit or Anaboret*), thus he is considered to be the founder of this Christian ascetic lifestyle (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 322).

Saint Athanasius the Great (295-373), who was the disciple of Saint Anthony the Great, wrote *The Life and Order of Saint Anthony/Vita Antonii*, between 357-358. This book was widespread in both East and West, and thus it made a great propaganda for hermitism (Kaplan, 2010: 225). *The life and order of St. Anthony* has a moralizing character, it describes the life of the great Egyptian hermit, and in the *Prologue* to the book St. Athanasius the Great says that he often poured water on his hands: "I was his disciple and, like Elisha, I poured water on the hands of this new Elijah" (Voicu et al., 2015: 96). St. Jerome tells us that Saint Anthony the Great wrote to several monasteries seven epistles of great spiritual depth, but the most important is the one he wrote to the inhabitants of Arsinoe (Egypt). Due to his life full of holiness, Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337), but his sons also, respected and appreciated Holy Anthony the Great: "The monk Antony, whose life was honored by the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius in a significant volume, sent, according to the Egyptian custom, to the various monasteries seven epistles with in meaning and apostolic speech; they were translated into Greek, and the most chosen of them is sent to the Arsinoites. It was revered in the time of Constantine, but also when his sons ruled. He lived one hundred and five years" (Sfântul Ieronim, (2021) *Despre bărbații iluștri, Despre viețile Apostolilor, Despre cei doisprezece învățători*, Ediția a II-a București, Paideia: 82).

St. Pachomius the Great (292-346), who was a contemporary of St. Anthony the Great, founded in 320/325 at Thebes/Tabennisi, Schenesit (Kenoboshion, now Kasr-el Sayad) (Telea, 2021: 93), near Thebes, on an island of the Nile, in Upper Egypt, a community of monks. He taught them to live in the same place in a common, cenobitic life, in which there was a community house. Thus, its colony will be called *chinovie*, being already a monastery, thus laying its foundations, it becoming the first monastery in the history of the Church (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 323). The monasteries founded by St. Pachomius the Great were under the spiritual guidance of a teacher, a parent (*abba/avva*) in the Aramaic language, whence the term abbot, abbot or leader in Greek. He leads a life together (*koinos bios*), in Greek, and this is cenobitism (Kaplan, 2010: 225). Therefore, through the community founded by St. Pachomius the Great, the foundations of the cenobitic monasticism were laid, which was different from the hermit monasticism, founded by St. Anthony the Great, because the monks lived in the community.

St. Pachomius the Great founded these communities of monks, due to the fact that he saw how many hermits in the desert failed, because being alone, they failed to cope with the trials. Thus, St. Pachomius the Great thought that if the monks lived in communities, they would help each other. Among the very strict rules which he had laid down concerning the disobedient were the observance of the common space, the wearing of the uniform by all monks, strict discipline, and obedience to the superior. The daily program of the monks alternated prayer and manual work, and this will later be the basis of monasticism, with the formula *ora et labora* (pray and work). Meals in common were also served at fixed hours, and in the communities founded by St. Pachomius the Great, caring for the sick and the elderly took a prominent place, which impressed many people (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 323-324).

Since the monasteries were organized according to this new system, their number increased quickly, so that during the life of St. Pachomius they reached eight Voicu et al. 2015: 68, or even nine, twenty one of men and two of women (Kaplan, 2010: 225).

For those who embraced monastic life, St. Pachomius the Great wrote in 325 a collection of 194 *Monastic Rules*. Out of these, 142 are rules that have a restricted character, and 52 are additions and explanations of the fundamental rules, all of which are mandatory for those who wanted to practice the way of life established by him. According to the information of Palladium (364-431) from the *Lausian History/Lawsaicon*, during the life of Saint Pachomius the Great, seven thousand monks lived according to his Rules in Egypt (Telea 2021: 94). So, these famous teachers of experimental knowledge learned the sensitive art of living according to evangelical principles. Monasticism must be understood, first and foremost, as the most radical revolt against evil, in that it most categorically says "no" to any compromise and to any conformism. Its spiritual force necessarily requires a courageous waiver to the confusing forms of this world and the creation of a fortress of monks at the edge of this world; its angelic service, the nostalgia of the Kingdom of heaven opposed the very poor character of the Roman/Byzantine Empire (Evdokimov, P., (1996), *Ortodoxia*, București, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: 23).

The forms of Eastern monasticism

In the East, monasticism took three main forms, which appeared in Egypt around 350, and are still found in the Eastern Church. From Egypt, which is regarded as the homeland of monasticism, these forms spread very quickly to Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Bithynia, and also the West.

The first form of monasticism is that of hermits, ascetics, who led a contemplative life practicing the most rigorous asceticism, living in isolation (in caves, huts, or in individual cells). Due to the life they led, they were called *anchorites* (anchorites, anachorites, hermits). This way of life has been practiced by many Christians since the second and third centuries. Thus, the first known hermit was Paul of Thebes/Hermit (234-347) (Telea, 2021: 90). The most representative of these was St. Anthony the Great, who is considered the father of monasticism.

The second form of monasticism is that of community life (or quinvial), where monks live together, following the same rules, in a monastery. The most representative was St. Pachomius the Great, continued by St. Basil the Great (330-379).

He was attracted to monastic life from a young age, and after completing his studies in Athens he retired to the banks of the river Iris in Pontus, where he founded a monastery in 355. To better know the monastic life, St. Basil the Great visited the most famous monks in Egypt and Palestine. His ascetic writings exerted a great influence on Eastern monasticism, especially through the *Great Rules*, which were written in the form of questions and answers. They deal with the main problems of monastic life and were written between 358-362. St. Basil the Great also wrote the *Small Rules* 313, also in the form of questions and answers, in which he deals with various problems of monastic life, most of which are cases of conscience. The *Little Rules* are concrete advice, rich in teachings. They were written according to the *Great Rules* (Voicu et al. 2015), and these writings remain valid to this day (Ware, T. *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe*, (1997) București: Aldo Press: 42-43). St. Basil the Great states that the monastic exhortations and rules are not written for the accomplished ones, but for beginners (Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Regulile Mari*, (1989) scrieri partea a doua, în: col. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, vol. 18, București: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: 243). Thus, he was a follower of the cenobitic monastic life, and through his writings he contributed decisively to the organization of Eastern monasticism, emphasizing its ecclesial and community character (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 324). The rules of St. Basil the Great were the basis for the organization of Eastern monasticism and were, at the same time, a source of inspiration for the *Rules (Settlements)* of St. John Casian (369-435) and the *Rules* of St. Benedict of Nursia (480-543) (Telea, 2021: 102).

Monasticism began as a secular movement, because neither Saints Anthony the Great nor Pachomius the Great had a hierarchical rank; they considered the monastic life to be incompatible with the priesthood and, moreover, with the episcopate. Over time, monasticism became an official and even higher calling of the Church, so that in Byzantium, only monks could become bishops (Schmemmann, 141). The two forms of monastic life (hermit and cenobitic) coexisted until XII, and their representatives were Saints Anthony the Great and Pachomius the Great (Telea, 2021: 91).

The third form of monasticism falls between the two, with a life of semi-isolation, a kind of "*middle way*", where instead of a single superior organized community, we have a group of small settlements, composed of two or six members who lived together under the guidance of an elder. The great centers that practiced this monastic form in Egypt were: Nitria and Schetis who, at the end of the 4th century, gave illustrious monks, such as: Amon, the founder of Nitria, Macarius The Egyptian/Great (295-392), Macarius of Alexandria/the Younger (300-395), Evagrius of Pontus (345-399) and Arsenius the Great (354-449) (Ware, 1997: 43), but also other monks who influenced monastic life. In *The History of the Monks of Egypt*, the author tells us that: "*He saw an endless crowd of monks, men and women of all ages in the wilderness and in the country, in such a large number that no earthly emperor could gather such an army*" (Festigière, J. (1961-1965), *Les moines d'Orient*, vol. IV/1, Paris: 8). Egyptian monasticism left to Eastern spirituality the *Patericum* or the *Apophthegms of the Desert Fathers*, which: "*is a compendium of Christian politeness, kindness and civility; it is at the same time a textbook for revealing insignificant things, trifles, dry dogmatism, which envelop the soul and make the air around us unbreathable*" (*Patericul sau Apoftegele Părinților din pustiu*, (2007) Iași: Polirom: 22).

After the first beginnings of monasticism, monasteries for women were soon established. At first, they did not lead a hermit life, but later we find cases of this, like that of Mary of Egypt (344-421) (Rămureanu, I., Șesan, M., Bodogae, T., (1997) *Istoria Bisericească Universală* Vol. I (1- 1054), București: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: 448). and others who followed her example. Due to its monasteries, fourth-century Egypt was considered a second Holy Land, and those traveling to Jerusalem felt that their pilgrimage would be incomplete if they did not visit ascetics on the banks of the Nile. Therefore, monks and nuns played a very important role in the history of the Church (Špidlík, T., (2000) *Spiritualitatea răsăritului creștin. III. Monahismul*, Sibiu: Deisis: 7).

For those who did not enter monasticism, but wanted to practice monastic life and were married, St. John Chrysostom addresses the following exhortation: “*Please seek the eternal and immortal goodness, seek the life that does not ever age. You can live in the city and live the life that the monks lead in the wilderness, put their philosophy into practice, you can have a wife, you can live in the house and in the world, but pray the holy ones, be with a broken heart. Those at the beginning, who were taught the Christian doctrine by the Apostles, lived in cities, but they had the same godliness as those who lived in the wilderness, others had workshops, like Priscilla and Aquila, all the prophets had wives and houses, like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Moses; and this has not harmed their virtue in any way. Let us also imitate them, let us continually thank God, let us live in purity of soul and body, and let us take care of the other virtues; to bring to the cities the philosophy of the wilderness, that we may be pleasing to God and valued by men, and have the good things of the life to come*” (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, (1995), *Omilii la Matei*, LV, 6, Scrieri partea a treia, în: col. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, vol. 25, București: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: 643-644).

The influence of Eastern monasticism on that of the West

Eastern monasticism was spread in the West by St. Athanasius the Great through his writing *The Life and Order of St. Anthony/Vita Antonii*, but also personally during his years of exile in the West. Also, the two Holy Fathers from Scythia Minor (today's Dobrogea), Ioan Casian (360-455) and Dionysius Exiguus/Dionysius the Humble (470-544) also contributed to the organization of Western monasticism. He was the creator of the Christian chronology (the system of counting the years since the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ) (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 326).

Saint John Cassian was one of the most important representatives of Western monasticism. He was born in 360 in Scythia Minor and was attracted to monasticism from a young age. Thus, together with his sister and his friend Gherman, they went to Palestine, in order to better understand the secrets of the cenobitic life. His sister will remain permanently in the convent of nuns in Bethlehem, and the two friends will enter a convent, which was close to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. After a stay of a few years, St. John Casian and his friend Gehrman will go to Egypt, where they will become acquainted with the monastic and cenobitic monastic traditions. They will reach the desert of Scetis, where they will live for seven years near the great spiritual parents Moses and Paphnutius. After a short stay in Alexandria, due to the Origenist controversies, the two will leave the city and head to Constantinople, attracted by the

great personality of St. John Chrysostom. He will ordain St. John Cassian as a deacon and thus they participated in the missionary actions on the Danube.

After St. John Chrysostom was sent into exile in 404, St. John Cassian was sent to Rome in 405, along with other believers, carrying a letter from the clergy of Constantinople asking for the pope's support. Innocent I (401-417) (Sfântul Teofan Zăvorâțul, 2002: 339). In Rome, St. John Cassian will meet the future Pope Leo I the Great (440-461). After being ordained as a priest by Pope Innocent I in 410/411, St. John Cassian will leave for Marseilles where in 415, he founded a convent for monks and a convent for nuns. These monasteries were organized having the Eastern model, with the necessary adaptations, specific to the area. They were thus the first monasteries with monastic rules in the West. Therefore, through the establishment of these monasteries, St. John Casian was a connecting factor between Eastern and Western patristic theology.

In 426, St. John Cassian wrote a book for monks entitled: “*On the Settlements of the Cenobes and the Remedies of the Eight Capital Sins*”. The first four books describe the organization of the Chinovial monasteries in Palestine and Egypt (the novitiate, the rules of life, the dress of the monks, the hours of prayer during the day and night). In the next eight books, St. John Cassian goes on to describe the sins that endanger the lives of monks: Thus, he speaks of: greed, fornication, love of money, anger, sadness, laziness, vanity, and pride. St. John Cassian also writes about the remedies of these sins, which are: fear of God, heartbreak, renunciation, humiliation, mortification of passions, renunciation of vices, purification of the heart, and Christian love.

St. John Cassian wrote in 429 a book entitled *Conversations with Parents*. It contains twenty-four books, which record the conversations that St. John Cassian and his friend Germain had with the famous monks of Egypt, about the internal life of the monks, but also about the means by which perfection can be achieved. These are: contemplation, asceticism and mysticism, prayer, virginity, the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, about the purpose of life, the distinction of spirits, about mortification and repentance (Voicu et al. 2015: 441-443. Theological work of Saint John Cassian promotes dialogue between East and West (Brezeanu, S., (2007) *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin*, București: Meronia: 53). According to St. John Cassian for the Westerners, these rules of Eastern origin were composed in the sixth century by St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547). He founded twelve monasteries for monks, in which he placed twelve monks each (Sfântul Teofan Zăvorâțul, 2002: 382). In 530, St. Benedict of Nursia founded the monastery on Mount Cassino on the site of a temple of Apollo. For his monastic community, St. Benedict of Nursia wrote the *Rule Monachorum (Regula Monachorum)* in 540, also known as the *Rule of Benedict (Regula Benedicti)*. These rules for monks had a Prologue and seventy-three chapters (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 327). In writing this, St. Benedict of Nursia used the *Rules* of Saint Basil the Great, which were translated into Latin by Rufinus (345-410), the writings of St. John Cassian, St. Pachomius the Great, and *the Letter CCXI* of St. Augustine (354-430) (Voicu et al. 2015, 63). Soon there will be two monastic orders in the West: the strict order of the Basilian monks, who obeyed the old rules of the east, and the order of the Benedictine monks, who used the lighter rules given by St. Benedict of Nursia (Rămureanu, Șesan, Bodogae, 1997: 447).

Eastern monasticism in the 5th-7th centuries

After spreading to almost all regions of the East and West, the development of monasticism reached its peak between the 5th and 7th centuries. From Egypt, monasticism spread rapidly in the Byzantine Empire, reaching Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine (Kaplan, 2010: 226). St. Ephrem the Syrian (306-373) was the most representative figure of Syrian monasticism. He was attracted to monasticism from a young age and was the disciple of Bishop Jacob of Nisibi † 338, who appointed him head of the local catechetical school. After the city of Nisibi was ceded to the Persians in 363, St. Ephrem the Syrian retired to Edessa, where he lived the latter part of his life, being considered one of the founders of the famous Catechetical School in this locality, also called the Persian School. In 370, St. Ephraim the Syrian visited St. Basil the Great at Caesarea in Cappadocia (Telea, 2021: 94-95).

In the 5th-6th centuries, the supremacy of the monastic movement was taken over by Palestine, thus being the "centuries of Palestinian monasticism" par excellence. In Palestine there were two important monastic centers: one in the desert of the Jordan; Gaza Tradition considers Saints Chariton (275-345) and Hilarion the Great (291-371) to be the founders of Palestinian monasticism, and great personalities of Western Christianity came and founded monasteries around Jerusalem. Thus, the Elder Melania (342-410) and her niece Melania the Younger (383-439) supported the monastic centers around Jerusalem, and Melania the Younger and her husband Pinian founded two monasteries on the Mount of Olives, and St. Jerome (347-420) lived the last years of his life as a monk in a small cave next to the Nativity in Bethlehem (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 544).

St. Euthymius the Great (377-473) and his disciple St. Sava the Great (439-532), two Cappadocians, also gave a new impetus to monasticism (Ducellier, A., (1997) *Bizantinii*, București: Teora: 43). The monastery founded by St. Sava in the Jordan Valley still exists today and this is the community that gave the great theologian St. John of Damascus (675-749). John Moshu (550/570-634) living in the Faran Lavra gathered in his writing *Leimonarium/Linonariul (Spiritual Orchard)* the lives and teachings of the monks of Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Sinai. Unlike Syrian and Egyptian monasticism, Palestinian monasticism was more aristocratic. This is because a large part of the monks came from the cities, from the direct relations they had with the patriarch of Jerusalem, but also from the fact that the monasteries in which they were forced were near the localities of Jerusalem, Caesarea of Palestine, Scythopolis and Gaza, where an intense intellectual life took place. In the following centuries, the great liturgical synthesis will appear here, the *Typicon/Typical* of Saint Sava, which has remained valid until today in the Eastern Church. It was the basis on which the Constantinople tradition would later develop the liturgical ordinances. Also, monks such as St. Andrew the Cretan/of Crete (660-740), St. John of Damascus (675 749) and St. Cosmas of Maiuma (706-760/787), who were of Savait origin, developed the hymnography and Christian poetry, and later they were constituted in the *Octoechos*, the *Triodion*, and the *Pentecostarion*, books which are in use to this day in the Eastern Church (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 545-546.)

Monasticism also spread to the cities, so that from the year 350, there will be many monks in Constantinople, of whom only a few led a cenobitic life, most of them being wanderers. They lived in the homes of those who were willing to listen to them,

or at worst, on the streets among the needy. In this situation, they were not subject to any authority, and they created a real network, which tried to show its influence, sometimes intervening in dogmatic debates. Over time, they will become an unbearable factor of disorder in Constantinople, which was already a difficult city to govern (Kaplan, 2021: 226-227). So it was in 449 at the Council of Ephesus, when the Egyptian monks, who were summoned by Bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria were very violent, and Pope Leo I the Great (440-461) called it the "Council of Thieves" (*Ephesinius non iudicium, sed latrocinium*) (Chifăr, N., (2007) *Istoria creștinismului I*, Sibiu: 187).

Therefore, in order to prevent such disorders, the Council of IV Ecumenical of Chalcedon in 451, several canons were given, concerning monastic discipline. Constantinople monasticism was Chinovitic and Basilitic, being very active in the social field, carrying out many charitable works. The monasteries of Constantinople were located between Chalcedon and Chrysopolis, and their monks played an important role in formulating the dogmas of the Ecumenical Councils, but also in the liturgical creations (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 547).

After groups of extremist monks were expelled from Constantinople, it became possible again to establish monasteries in the capital. Thus in 460, the consul Studios built in an almost deserted area near the Golden Gate, a cenobitic monastery dedicated to St. John the Baptist. In three centuries, Studion Monastery will become the most famous and the most powerful in Constantinople, with several hundred monks (Kaplan, 2010: 227). Emperor Justinian (527-565) is the one who founded the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai between 548-565, exactly where it is believed that Moses saw the Burning Bush (Retrieved 14. 05. 2022, from https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C4%83n%C4%83stirea_Sf%C3%A2nta_Ecaterina_din_Muntele_Sinai).

This monastery became a powerful monastic center, which exists today (Ware, 1997: 43). To this day, many monks have lived here, leaving a chosen life. St. Catherine's Monastery has stood the test of time for centuries, being a veritable monastic island in the midst of the Muslim world, as it is today the oldest monastery in the world with uninterrupted liturgical life. The monastery is dedicated to the Mother of God, although it is called Saint Catherine, this being the second patron saint. Soon, many Christians who wanted to retire came to the monastery from several regions: Armenia, Georgia, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Egypt, Constantinople, and Rome. The popes of Rome were constantly sending aid to build a hospital here. Thus, Pope John III (561-574) sent a large sum of money between 561-568 to build this hospital. Also, Pope Gregory I the Great (590-604) became closely interested in the Sinai settlements and corresponded with the abbot John and the priest Palladium. Saints Nile the Ascetic/Sinai † 430 and John of the Ladder (579-649) were the most important representatives of Sinaitic monasticism (TELEA, 2021: 97). In this monastery, the tradition of ancient Egyptian monasticism was perfected in the synthesis made by St. John of Sinai/of the Ladder/Klimacus (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 544).

He lived a rigorous ascetic life for forty years in the wilderness, after which he was elected by vote as the abbot of St. Catherine of Sinai Monastery. St. John of the Ladder wrote a work called *Ladder*, at the request of the abbot John of Raithu Monastery, who asked him to give the monks a written rule, based on which they would

live and thus be able to ascend to heaven as a ladder similar to the one which Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream.

In this writing, which has thirty *Words*, St. John of the Ladder describes the ascent to heaven as thirty steps, thinking of the thirty years that the Savior Jesus Christ lived before the beginning of the public preaching activity. Thus, the Ladder is a series of thirty virtues and their opposite sins, by which the monk ascends to perfection as on the steps of a ladder (Voicu et al. 2015: 130).

Therefore, *the Ladder* summarizes the whole patristic spirituality up to it, placing it under the sign of a very suggestive symbol, that of the ladder and the steps which, if anyone ascends step by step, may attain to perfection and union with God (Ioan Scărarul, *Scara Raiului*, (1994) Precedată de *Viața pe scurt a lui Ioan Scolasticul și urmată de Cuvântul către Păstor*, Timișoara: Amarcord: 10).

In *Novella* 133, Emperor Justinian shows that monastic life and contemplation are a holy thing, which is useful to all citizens because of their purity and intercession or prayers made by monks for the common good. Due to this importance, but also to the influence that the monks had, over time they sometimes faced certain opponents and thus, they needed defenders. Saint John Chrysostom (354-407) was one of them. Thus, in 378, he wrote a three-book treatise entitled *Against the Opponents of Monastic Life* and another entitled *Comparison between a King and a Monk*. They are pleadings for monastic life, and in the second one, he makes a comparison between the two lives, concluding that the life of a monk is far superior to that of a king (Voicu et al. 2015: 270). St. John Chrysostom says that the title of "king" fits better for the monk, because he is at war with the real enemies, thus freeing the world from their power. The monk controls his passions and does not have loose women in his service, but heavenly angels (Špidlík, 2000: 8).

Eastern monasticism in the 8th--9th centuries

After Palestine and Sinai fell into the hands of the Persians and Arabs, and the great lavra in the East were destroyed by them, and the escaped monks took refuge in the safer areas. Thus, the monastic supremacy of the Byzantine Empire was taken over in the VIII-IX centuries by the monasteries of Constantinople and its environs. The monks of these monasteries, such as Saints Maximus the Confessor (580-662) and Germanicus of Constantinople (634,730), played an important role in clarifying the dogmas of the Church and the liturgical creation (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 547).

During this period, monasticism on Mount Olympus in Bithynia, Asia Minor, developed. Several monasteries from the 5th century were founded here: Triglia, Chenolaccos, Sakudion, St. Michael Maleinos and others. In these monasteries famous monks lived, among whom are worth mentioning: Saint Hilarion the Younger (775-845), Plato (753-813), uncle of St. Theodore the Studite), St. Theodore the Studite (759-826), St. Joanichie the Great (752-846), Saint Euthymius the New (823-898), Saint Luke the Stilith (879-979), Saints Cyril (826-869) and Methodius (815-885), the future apostles of the Slavs or Saint Athanasius the Athonite (920/925-1001/1003). They were on Mount Olympus in the ninth century, with over forty monasteries that needed several thousand monks and nuns. They practiced all public life, as well as having the anchorite life, in the center of their life in search of inner peace (*isibia*) (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 662).

During the iconoclastic period, the monks from Studion Monastery, the fact that they defended the cult of icons, were persecuted and expelled from the monastery, so it was abandoned. After the death of Emperor Constantine V Copronymus (741-775), the monastery gradually began to repopulate, and its abbot, Sava, participated and signed the acts of the VII Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787. In the 9th century, the Studion Monastery in Constantinople began to play an important role in Eastern monasticism. It became famous after its leadership was taken over by St. Theodore the Studite, under the auspices of Empress Irina (797-802) (Kaplan, 2010: 227). Thus, because of the rapid advancement of the Turks of Selgiucid in Asia Minor, Empress Irina decided, in 797, the transfer of the monks, from the Sakkudion Monastery in Mount Olimp-Bithynia, headed by the Platon and his nephew, Theodore, in Constantinople, in the monastery Studion. Along with them came other monks and thus, the monastery became the most important monastic center in Constantinople, remaining so until the end of the Byzantine Empire.

During the period when St. Theodore the Studite led the Studion Monastery, he wanted to remove the Church from the influence of political power, protesting the emperor's interference in matters of dogma. He wanted to make the Studion Monastery a strong center for the defense of morality, but also of the true faith. Thus, St. Theodore the Studite gave the monastery a new, thorough organization, which was known as the studied reform. This was a return to the conception of the great Fathers and organizers of monastic cenobitic life, as it was ordained by Saints Pachomius the Great and Basil the Great. Thus, the powerful monastic community of Studion proved to be innovative in the way it managed to combine manual labor and prayer with care for the intellectual development of the monks, thus exemplifying the monastic ideal in the cenobitic setting.

After taking over the leadership of the monastery, Saint Theodore the Studite managed to gather in a short time over a thousand monks, whom he organized in groups, each group having a leader. At Studion Monastery, the rule was that the monks should be placed alternately in one of three groups: the prayers, the workers, and those who were resting. In addition, the monks studied theology, copying manuscripts, calligraphy, and painting icons (making an important contribution to the reconstitution of icons after their destruction during iconoclasm, and to the establishment of pictorial ermine). He also had a music school at the Studion Monastery, where several hymnographers and melodists were active, whose productions were included in the service books of the Triodion and the Pentecostarion. The organizational and reforming foundations, which were laid by St. Theodore, have been preserved throughout the history of the studied community, and they remain inscribed in a place of honor in the *Settlement* of this monastery (Telea, 2021: 105-106).

In this regard, he wrote several ascetic works in which he gave more guidance to the monks. Among these the most important are the following: The *Small Catechesis*, consisting of one hundred and thirty-four chapters, in which are recounted the conversations that St. Theodore the Studite gave to the monks three times a week. In this writing he talks about the duties of monks, giving them parental advice about the ideal of Christian accomplishment. Another writing is the *Great Catechesis*, which at first consisted of three parts and of which only seventy-seven catechesis have been preserved, but we do not know to which part they belong. In the *Great Catechesis*, St.

Theodore the Studite continues the advice he gave in the *Little Catechesis*, with the difference that some have a more developed content. *The Typicon of Studion Monastery* has not been preserved in its entirety, and its present form is a later processing. In this writing are given the typical rules, which St. Theodore the Studite gave regarding services, fasts and clothing. St. Theodore the Studite also wrote the following works for monks: *On fasting times*; *The Order of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy*; *Questions and answers about canonical problems*; *Punishments given to monks for non-fulfillment of duties*; *Commentary on the work of Saint Basil*; *Ascetic ordinances*; *About food delight and restraint*; *The Will*, in which, after making a confession of faith, he gives certain commandments for the abbot and for the monks (Voicu, et al. 2015: 213).

Saint Theodore the Studite is in the depths of his soul, an official with a good talent for organizing, who knows how to evaluate the relations of political power. Thus, he points out that the misfortunes that the monks suffered are due to their inability to defend the right faith, poor organization, anarchist tendencies of the anchoritic ideal, but also insufficient socio-economic roots. Saint Theodore the Studite will defend the priority of the cenobitic life, looking for the social power, which will confer an economic independence based on a sufficient and privileged endowment. He insisted that a learned monk fulfill three important qualities. First, he emphasizes chastity, because contacts with women, which the monk cannot completely avoid in the aristocratic context, will be strictly controlled. Second, St. Theodore the Studite emphasizes stability, as wandering monks were one of the great endemic evils of monasticism. The third quality that the monks had to fulfill was poverty, and in this sense, a monk had to have nothing that belonged to him, not even the slightest material object, and every week the clothes were redistributed regardless of the condition or their size. At the Studion Monastery, the minimum age for admission to monasticism was between sixteen and seventeen (Kaplan, 2010: 228-229).

The studite, as the monks of this monastery were called, dealt not only with the rigorous monastic life, but also with the very diligent study of theology (Rămureanu, Șesan, Bodogae, 1997: 448). Because of this, they soon became highly respected and played an important role in the church life of Constantinople. The monks came to represent an important religious and political force, being convinced that they had been entrusted with the mission of maintaining, without any compromise, the independence of the faith and of the Church. Having this belief, they did not hesitate, after 858, to join the papacy, against the patriarch Photius (858-867), appointed by Emperor Michael III the Drunkard (855-867), replacing Ignatius (847-858), who was one of theirs (Ducellier, 1997: 44).

Therefore, we could see that after the first iconoclastic period ended, in Eastern monasticism there is a revival of monastic life, due to the reforms initiated in the ninth century by the monks of the Studion monastery. The role of the monks in the triumph of Orthodoxy over iconoclasm demonstrates their traditional involvement in the theological disputes in Byzantium, from the earliest Christian centuries. Thus, Eastern monasticism appears not only as a school of spiritual accomplishment, but also as a body that feels responsible for the teaching of the faith, but also for the fate of the Church in general (Telea, 2021: 107).

Conclusions

The emergence of monasticism in the history of the Christian Church marked a moment of major importance not only for the Christian life in general, but also for the concrete way of living, implementing and transmitting the evangelical message. Through this new form of life, Christianity has found not only a new form of externalizing of its purpose, that of personal salvation, but also a concrete way of identifying and reporting the believers to the Church, to the community of origin and obviously to society, with all its forms of manifestation. Starting with the third century, but especially in the fourth century, monasticism was established as an institution in line with the natural evolution of the ascetic forms existing, since the establishment of the Church. Thus, over the centuries, monasticism has managed to gain a large number of practitioners, with moral authority and influence in the Church. If at first the monks were not part of the clergy, over time they exerted an increasing influence on the Church and the life of the Byzantine state. Gaining great popularity among the faithful, the monks came to lead the entire Christian Church (Telea, 2021: 907).

Monasticism must be understood, first and foremost, as the most radical revolt against evil, in that it most categorically says "no" to any compromise and to any conformism. This spiritual force necessarily requires a courageous waiver to the confusing forms of this world and the creation of a city of monks at the edge of this world; the angelic service, the nostalgia of the kingdom of heaven opposed the too deformed character of the Roman/Byzantine Empire (Evdokimov, 1996: 23). Over time, the monks managed to enjoy the faithful of a special prestige, which was based on the belief that they were the most intermediaries fit for salvation. Compared to the ordinary believer, who was considered an amateur, the monk was considered a professional, who spends his whole life in the faith. The popularity of the monks among the faithful made its members make their presence felt in other areas of life. Thus, in some areas monasteries have come to play a decisive role in economic life (especially in agriculture), but also in intellectual and social life (Telea, 2021: 108).

In addition, Eastern monasticism made an important contribution to the spread and affirmation of the spiritual life, to the development of the culture of the peoples, by translating, multiplying and spreading religious texts in the languages of the peoples in which it carried out its activity (*Istoria bisericească universală*, 2021: 328). Also, over the centuries, monks have played an important role in the development, defense, and clarification of Christian dogmas in the seven Ecumenical Councils.

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