

A STUDY OF THE Protestant Reformation

1517 - 2017

The 500th Anniversary





Introduction, Part 4

To date, we have considered Martin Luther's birth, early life, and education until the time he entered the monastery. On July 17, 1505, Martin Luther knocked on the door of the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt at the age of 21. Leaving behind his parents, friends, studies, and the world, the door closed behind him and his year of probation began. We would not be able to fully understand the Protestant Reformation without looking carefully at his life during these years and learning about the formative experiences he had in the cloister. Nor would we be able to understand what he encountered inside unless we had a broader knowledge of late medieval monasticism. And so, today, we will begin our journey into a world which is foreign to most of us.

Monastery

“The abode of a community of persons living secluded from the world, dedicated to a life of asceticism and prayer in pursuit of personal sanctification, generally united under a superior to obey a common rule by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.”

- Mary E. Rogers



Roussanou Monastery
Meteora, Greece



Definition of Terms

- **Monádzo** (Greek), *v.*, live alone, separate oneself. “I lie awake; I am like a **lonely** sparrow on the housetop” (Ps. 102:7).
- **Monachos** (Greek), *adj.*, single, solitary. As a substantive, a monk.
- **Monasterium** (Latin), *n.*, monastery.
- **Ascetic**, *adj. and n.*, “One of those who in the early church retired into solitude, to exercise themselves in meditation and prayer, and in the practice of rigorous self-discipline by celibacy, fasting, and toil” (OED). From *asketéos*, “to be practiced” and *ǎskesis*, exercise, practice, training (Liddell). “So I **strive** (practice) always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (Acts 24:16).



Definition of Terms

- **Anchorite**, *n.*, one retired. From *ana* (back) + *chorein* (draw back, retire); a hermit; a recluse; one who retires to a solitary place.
- **Hermit**, *n.*, a person who retires from society and lives in solitude, often from religious motives; an anchorite. From *eremos*, wilderness. The monks in the monastery Luther entered in Erfurt were called the Augustinian **Eremites** (Hermits) of Erfurt.
- **Cenobite**, or **Coenobite**, *n.*, a member of a religious order living in a convent or monastery. From *koinos* (common) + *bios* (life) = the common life.



Stages in the Development of Monasticism

1. **First Stage:** A person decides to live an ascetic life which is not yet organized or separated from the church.
2. **Second Stage:** Beginning in the 4th century, a person begins living as a hermit or an anchorite (one who retires to a solitary place).
3. **Third Stage:** The monastic life is shared together in convents or monasteries. “Cloister life is a regular organization of the ascetic life on a social basis” (Schaff). “An association of a number of anchorites of the same sex for mutual advancement in ascetic holiness.”
4. **Fourth Stage:** The formation of monastic orders.



The Nature of Monasticism

- It emphasizes the contemplative rather than practical life.
- It highlights the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, “reason over sense, the supernatural over the natural, after the highest grade of holiness and an undisturbed communion of the soul with God.”
- It depreciates God’s established social order, including marriage, the family, and the state (all God-ordained).
- It makes a distinction between a lower and higher view of morality.
- It focuses on abandoning the world rather than transforming it.
- It requires absolute obedience to the will of the superior.

Alfred Lord Tennyson



“Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs but to do and die.”



The Nature of Monasticism

- It demands the renunciation of sin, the world, property, & marriage.
- It requires three vows: (1) voluntary poverty; (2) absolute obedience; and (3) voluntary celibacy.
- It was intended to facilitate one's progress toward heaven.
- It promotes prayer, meditation, fasting, and castigation (correction, chastisement) of the body, sometimes through flagellation.
- It promotes spiritual disciplines, manual labor, and supporting the poor.
- For some, it produced spiritual joy and turned solitude into a paradise of freedom and communion with God and His children.



Augustinian Eremites at Erfurt

- The order was founded in Italy in the 13th century.
- There were more than 200 of these monasteries in Germany, including the one at Erfurt.
- The vicar-general at the time of Luther's entry was Johann von Staupitz, a man of piety, discipline, and kindness.
- The monastery was known for its exemplary life and for its emphasis on learning.
- Its theological seminary was connected to the University of Erfurt.
- Luther prepared for ordination here, and received the following degrees: Bachelor of Theology, Master of the Sentences (Peter Lombard, 1100-1160), and Licentiate.



Augustinian Eremites at Erfurt

- Even though the monastery bore the name of the great bishop of Hippo – Augustine – they apparently knew little of his evangelical faith and stressed the necessity of man's working out his own salvation (the good work that man does merits divine grace by itself and thus earns him salvation).
- They minimized the importance of Christ's suffering and death.
- It was through the sacraments that the clergy maintained their spiritual authority over the people.
- By the mid 15th century, the number of sacraments had been set at 7 (Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, the Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Marriage, and Ordination).
- The sacraments became an instrument for conveying spiritual grace.



Luther's Experience in the Monastery

- Luther began as a novice, which lasted for one year.
- Yale scholar Roland Bainton paints a picture of how Luther's days would have been spent: "Prayers came seven times daily. After eight hours of sleep, the monks were awakened between one and two in the morning by the ringing of the cloister bell. At the first summons they sprang up, made the sign of the cross, and pulled on the white robe and the scapular (a short monastic cloak covering the shoulders) without which the brother was never to leave his cell. At the second bell each came reverently to the church, sprinkled himself with holy water, and knelt before the high altar with a prayer of devotion to the



Luther's Experience in the Monastery

Savior of the world. Then all took their places in the choir. Matins (monastic nighttime liturgy) lasted three quarters of an hour. Each of the seven periods of the day ended with the chanting by the cantor (singer) of the *Save Regina*: 'Save, O Queen, Thou Mother of mercy, our life, our delight, and our hope. To Thee we exiled sons of Eve lift up our cry. To Thee we sigh as we languish in this vale of tears. Be Thou our advocate. Sweet Virgin Mary, pray for us, Thou holy Mother of God.' After the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster* the brothers in pairs silently filed out of the church."

- At the end of the year, Luther took his vow and became a monk.



The Catholic Distortion

- In Os Guinness' classic work *The Call*, he affirms that the monastic movement became a form of dualism that “elevates the spiritual at the expense of the secular.”
- Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, argued that “Christ gave ‘two ways of life’ to his church. Guinness summarizes his writings: “The perfect life is spiritual, dedicated to contemplation and reserved for priests, monks, and nuns; the permitted life is secular, dedicated to action and open to such tasks as soldiering, governing, farming, trading, and raising families. Whereas those following the perfect life ‘appear to die to the life of mortals, to bear with them nothing earthly but their



The Catholic Distortion

body, and in mind and spirit to have passed to heaven,' those following the 'more humble, more human' permitted life have 'a kind of secondary grade of piety.'"

- Summary: higher vs. lower, sacred vs. secular, perfect vs. permitted, contemplation vs. action.
- "Monasticism reinforced the secularization it originally set out to resist. In the end, monasteries themselves succumbed to the secularization and became a central carrier of elitism, power, arrogance, and corruption" (Guinness).



The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

- Luther: “The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone....Indeed, the menial housework of a manservant or maidservant is often more acceptable to God than all the fastings and other works of a monk or priest, because the monk or priest lacks faith.”
- Guinness: Luther recommended the abolition of all orders and abstention from all vows. Why? Because the contemplative life has no warrant in the Scriptures.

Os Guinness



Os Guinness

1941 -

“There is no higher/lower, sacred/secular, perfect/permitted, contemplative/active, or first class/second class....Calling means that everyone, everywhere, and in everything fulfills his or her (secondary) callings in response to God’s (primary) calling.”



Luther on Monasticism

“A man doesn’t have control of himself when he is downcast and alone, even if he is well equipped with a knowledge of the Scriptures. It is not for nothing that Christ gathers his church around the Word and the sacraments and is unwilling to let these be hidden in a corner. Away with monks and hermits! These are inventions of Satan because they exist apart from all the godly ordinances and arrangements of God. According to the plan of creation every man is either a domestic or a political or an ecclesiastical person. Outside of these ordinances he is not a man, unless he is miraculously exempted. Accordingly a solitary life should be avoided as much as possible.”

Table Talk, February 18, 1538

Luther on Monasticism

“God placed his church in the midst of the world, among countless external activities and callings, not in order that Christians should become monks but so that they may live in fellowship and that our works and the exercises of our faith may become known among men.”

Table Talk, August 31, 1538





A Fable About the Origin of Monasticism

“There was mention of the suspicious origin of monasticism and of the monks. It was said that it is manifest that the devil is the author of the monks; when he wished to imitate God, the author of the priests, he made the mold too large, and it turned out to be a monk.” Luther said, “That’s an appropriate fable, for a monk is useful neither for the church, nor for the state, nor for domestic life. Accordingly the devil has to make monks, who obscure the works of God. In the church they’re of no use, civil government they defame, and of marriage they think and teach callously. If the institution of marriage had stood firm, monasticism wouldn’t have amounted to anything. Thus Satan obscured the glorious ordinance of God (namely marriage) with the



A Fable About the Origin of Monasticism

glittering phantom of the monks. If there had been God-fearing and pure teaching about marriage in the church, the monks and nuns wouldn't have counted for so much."

Table Talk, Between January 12 and 15, 1539

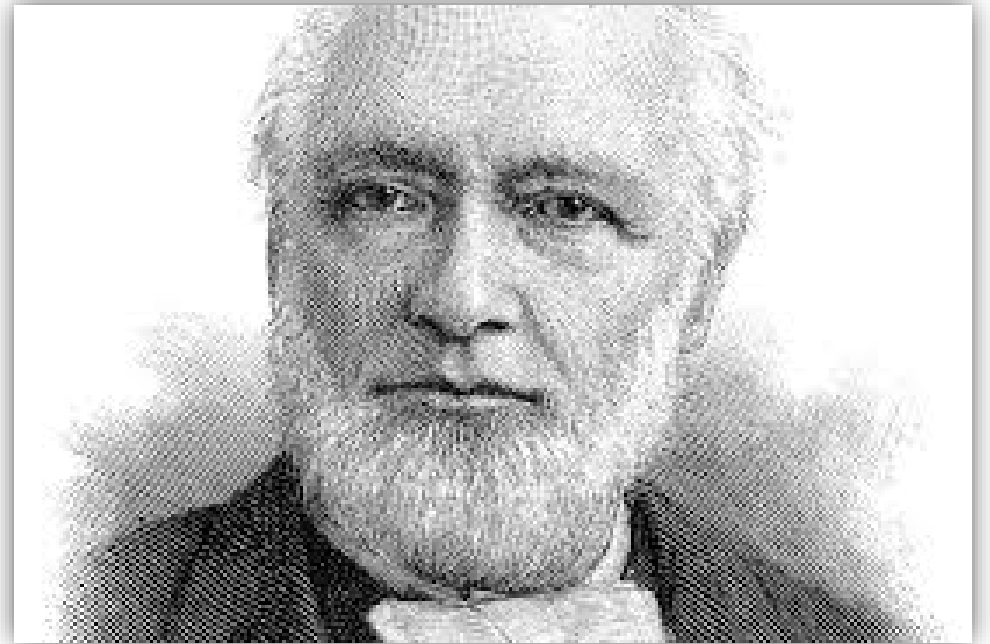
“The monks are the fleas on God Almighty’s fur coat.”

- Martin Luther



Philip Schaff, Church Historian

“Protestantism is the end of the
monastic order.”



1819-1893

J.I. Packer on the Spiritual Disciplines

“I can go on record as urging all Christians to read what Don Whitney has written (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*)....It will give you a sense of your seriousness, or lack of it, as Jesus’ disciple....The doctrine of all disciplines is really a restatement and extension of classical Protestant teaching on the means of grace (the Word of God, prayer, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper).”

