

# Historical Theology

## Does Monasticism Have Biblical Support?

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August 1, 2021

Justo Gonzalez states that, "For almost three hundred, the church had lived under the constant threat of persecution....Now, when the peace of the church seemed assured, many of these people saw that very assurance as a snare of Satan." (Gonzalez, 157)

"How was one to be a true Christian in such circumstances? When the church joins the powers of the world, when luxury and ostentation take hold of Christian altars, when the whole of society is intent on turning the narrow path into a wide avenue, how is one to resist the enormous temptations of the times? How is one to witness to the crucified Lord, to the one who had nowhere to lay his head, at a time when many leaders of the church live in costly homes, and when the ultimate witness of martyrdom is no longer possible? How to overcome Satan, who is constantly tempting the faithful with the new honors that society offers?" (Ibid. 157-58)

"Many found an answer in the monastic life: to flee from human society, to leave everything behind, to dominate the body and its passions, with give way to temptation. Thus at the very time when churches in large cities were flooded by thousands demanding baptism, there was a veritable exodus of other thousands who sought beatitude in solitude." (Ibid. 158)

When we talk about monasticism we must remember that there were different groups. There were those who were secluded from society and lived solitary lives as hermits

(from the Greek "eremia," the desert) or "anchorites" (known as eremitic monasticism). (Needham, 203)

Others lived together in a community of monks, known as "cenobitic" monasticism, from the Greek, "koinos bios," "common life". Ibid. 204)

"Another type of monasticism which became quite popular in the East was a sort of cross between the eremitic and the "cenobitic," called "skete" monasticism (from the Skete region of Egypt). A "skete" was a small group of up to twelve monks living together with a more experienced monk who acted as their spiritual director." (Ibid. 205)

"All monks, whether whether eremitic, cenobitic or skete-type, would renounce all worldly property and pleasures, be celibate, and consecrate themselves to prayer, fasting, and Bible study." (Ibid.)

Monasteries which were run according to Basil's rules [Basil of Caesarea, introduced by Pastor Scott last week] were not cut off from society, but educated children, nursed the sick, and gave hospitality to strangers." (Ibid. 206)

Last week, in his introduction to the rise of monasticism, Pastor Scott asked the question: **"Is monasticism, as an entire life event, a valid form of religious expression in Christianity?"**

**What are some Bible texts that people could use to support monasticism as a way of life?**

**The popularity of the monastic lifestyle in the last 30-40 years among evangelicals - Contemplative Spirituality**

**Give some examples of Bible characters that might be used to support monasticism as a way of life.**

**What are Bible texts that people could use to critique the monastic lifestyle as a legitimate lifestyle for Christians?**

Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation.* HarperCollins, 2010.

Needham, Nick. *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Vol. 1, The Age of the Early Church Fathers, 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Century,* Christian Focus Publications Ltd. 2016.