

In a broad sense the monastic regard for man was to see the flesh as inferior although not necessarily wicked or evil. In its inferiority a key to mastering the weakness was found in abstaining from "worldly" matters that made the difficulty in the flesh more pronounced. Man was a creature of God's choice and making but needed a concentration on spiritual rather than physical things if he were to come to fulfillment.

a. The general concept

Monasticism did not begin with the church age and virtually all monasticism has root in the same ground: the desire to be free of the temptation or diversions offered in the world and which seem to be counter-productive to the spiritual life. Whether the spiritual life is one of sheer contemplation or one of self-giving for others, the essential problem is still the same: deliverance from the affairs that war against the end desired.

Christendom saw basically three types of monastic developments. These were:

-hermits (anchorites, etc.) who lived strictly solitary lives...whether in a cave in the desert as did St. Anthony, or on a pillar far above the community as did Simeon Stylites. The recluse was thought to be a virtual demonstration of deliverance from the worldly inclination and life style.

-communes, family groups living in a Christian community where only Christians were allowed to have part in the society...or were the only society.

-cenobites, persons living together in a non-family setting after the pattern of monks and nuns of later times. These are segregated on a basis of sex, certainly, and perhaps inclination also.

And while we might not think so highly of the whole thing today, all monasticism develops as a means of releasing man from a peculiar bondage as we have now noted in a highly repetitious fashion.

b. Developed Concepts

From monasticism in general the following became particular ideas in the field of anthropology:

(1) The contemplative life was superior to all other lives (life-styles) as it allowed one the full resource of the person of God.

(2) Flagellation of various forms became an honest means of purging the old life and delivering the present state from weakness.