

Athanasius (VITA ANTONII). This man appeared in Alexandria from time to time to denounce worldliness and later to fight for the Nicene doctrine. As a hermit he lived in near total isolation but his advice was famous and he was sought out as a holy man. Miracle tales grew about him and the public spent a lot of time looking for him if he did not look for them. People went to see him and by this means he retained something of a touch with the societal world.

The foundation of the cenobites seems to have been laid by Pachomius (d. 346) and Macarius, his contemporary. The former founded a community for persons desirous of holy life in Egypt, but persons who were not willing nor able to live as hermits. Segregation of the sexes was practiced and there were a number of communities like the original one begun by Pachomius, about ten, we think, before his death. He thought of the group as a common work force with a central common-life, self-perpetuating as others were drawn to it in holiness. The influence of Macarius was powerful on Jerome and his Bethlehem community, we are told.

By the time of Basil (d. 379) it was apparent that just being away from the world was not enough. He established a "rule" or an "order of living" for his community that tended to supervise the lives of the members. The "rule" applied to all in the community and it served to divide the day into equal parts of time for work, prayer, and Bible reading. These events were scheduled and all members of the group cooperated. Basil organized his monastics to aid the community and he discouraged extreme ascetic practices in the light of better conduct through self-control. This introduction of a "rule" would soon be part of all monastic life.

Monasticism did not develop so quickly in the west as in the east (maybe the weather held it up) but Ambrose was much in favor of it and Martin of Tours founded such an order in 362. Eusebius of Vercelli (d. 362) required all of the priests who served in his administration to live as a monastic ascetics. The monastic idea did more to further the concept of a celibate clergy than did anything else. It had greater impact in the west where the clergy took strength in monastery life than in the east where the monasteries were more for the shelter of the more holy and less like ministering places to the church.