

# Characteristics of early christianity movements



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Characteristics of Early Christianity Movements It is a well-known fact that the early Church faced substantial challenges in its history as early Christians were widely persecuted and battled anti-Christian teachings. However, it was in this period that the Church, particularly through monastic movements, flourished. This paper provides an overview of the characteristics of the early Christianity movements through accounts of the lives of foremost Church fathers including St Anthony and St Benedict, and the development of eastern monasticism.

Monasticism is said to be initiated by St Anthony, who like many early Christians, practiced voluntary asceticism or voluntary poverty such that he completely renounced worldly possessions. He and his disciples lived an eremitical life, one of the primary types of monasticism. As part of living the eretical life, St Anthony and his followers vowed living in austerity far away from the world. They commit themselves in answering the needs of the soul over the body by prioritizing activities that nourish the soul instead of the physical needs. (Bacchus)

According to Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, St Anthony, who adhered to eremitical monasticism, fearlessly battled myriad temptations of the devil. In this regard, his disciples were enjoined to center their prayers on seeking the Lord's guidance through constant prayers to win over the evil one and learning the discipline of discerning spirits to recognize deceitful ways to sin. (Schaff & Wace)

Another type of monasticism that characterized the early Christian movement is the cenobitical life. This type of monasticism was revived by St Benedict, who composed a new set of rules. From these rules, it could be observed that St Benedict's viewpoint does not involve extraordinary

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asceticism and narrow mindedness. As such, these sober regulations were based on common sense with emphasis on collectivism instead of individualism. Cenobitic monasticism also emphasized family spirit and discouraged all private ventures. (Alston)

Similarly, St Pachumus and St Basil the Great adhered to cenobitical monasticism. St Pachumus taught his disciples the moderate level of observance of monasticism. The monks, in the case of St Pachumus, were organized into an industrial community that was divided into houses. They followed the standard set but they were free to go beyond the fixed minimum observance. In the same way, St Basil the Great and his followers preferred the cenobitic monasticism. This is because for him, life lived with others is more expedient since men naturally depend on each other and that the law of charity prevails in this type of monastic life. (Bacchus)

It may also be the case that a person may live on his own and lead an ascetic life outside the monasteries. Early Christians such as Origen, St. Cyprian, and Pamphilus exhibited that such was possible. The ante-Nicene ascetic may opt to live a single life, practiced long and frequent fasts, abstained from flesh and wine, and supported himself, if he were able, by some small handicraft, keeping of what he earned only so much as was absolutely necessary for his own sustenance, and giving the rest to the poor. (Bacchus)

In view of the above, it can be seen that early Church is characterized as the bastion of asceticism wherein Christians relinquished earthly wealth in favor of heavenly riches. Furthermore, in choosing to live the monastic life, early Christians either adhere to eremitical or cenobitical living. Early disciples adhere to different practices, however, they share the same purpose of

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striving to reach religious maturity to get closer to God.

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